

A STUDY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COLLOCAITONS AND ENGLISH WRITING

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Introduction

In recent years, the English writing abilities of the senior high school students have been one of the major concerns. Since 1983, the English composition has merged into the English test of the Joint College Entrance Examination (Chiang, 1993). Besides, with the development of the educational reform, the authorities concerned have been programming an independent test to assess the students' abilities of English writing. That is not only because English writing is one of the vital language skills for communication, but because it is a crucial indicator of students' productive ability.

In order to enhance students' writing competence, English teachers have been making lots of efforts in the English writing class. First of all, they have been carefully searching all over the bookstores for the teaching materials appropriate for teaching English writing. In addition, they have been spending lots of time devoting themselves to correcting students' writings, trying to find out the difficult areas in students' English compositions, and expecting students not to make the same mistake but to have more successful communication in their next composition. On the other hand, English teachers have referred to much research on the analysis and the explanation of the language errors either from the hypothesis of contrastive analysis or from the viewpoint of error analysis.

However, it seems that things do not turn out as expected--the same errors keep happening and the English teachers' sense of frustration in the English writing class does not decrease in spite of their great efforts. No matter how hard the teachers devote themselves to teaching vocabulary by means of giving example sentences and explaining

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the usage of the words in the context, students still often use words incorrectly when moving from receptive to productive language. Misuse of words in the written productive language happens either in the Chinese-to-English translation or in students' English compositions, which has been complained about by many EFL English teachers. In fact, this has troubled not only the teachers but the students. No matter how many drafts the students have been writing, they just cannot convey their thoughts successfully and correctly.

Inspired by some studies related to students' writing, the researcher came up with an idea that the teachers should look at the problem from another aspect, which involves the arrangement of both grammatical and lexical uses, that is, collocation. To begin with, in the article by Bahns (1993), it is noticed that most EFL learners often made mistakes in producing the combinations of two or more words. The given typical examples of wrong combinations are like **feeble tea*, **climb a horse*, **commit treachery*, **hold a burial*, etc. Such errors, Bahns claimed, showed a lack of collocational competence. Besides, Chang (1997) pointed out that collocation was the most problematic lexical cohesion when checking on grammatical and lexical cohesive devices used in students' writing. What's more, Conzett (2000), in the process of struggling to remedy what was not working in the class, found that the key to make students improve their writing was in the notion of collocation. He tried to change his approach to teaching vocabulary by instilling students with the concept of collocation in his writing classes, and achieved great success in eliciting more accurate language production from the students. Moreover, in Chang's (1997) study on the various types of grammatical and lexical collocations employed in college freshman English compositions, he found that the English compositions written by the less proficient students contained errors of numerous kinds--grammatical as well as lexical, and local as well as global, while the more proficient students showed significantly fewer instances of errors in their compositions. Furthermore, in Wang's (2001) investigation on the competence of English lexical collocations of English majors in Taiwan, she found that "the English department students' lexical collocations do not exhibit a series of developmental stages"

(p. ii).

To sum up, collocation knowledge plays a very important role in writing. According to the aforementioned studies on collocations, the collocational errors in students' English compositions are concerned either with the students' English proficiency or with their awareness of collocation. In order to understand whether the occurrence of errors in students' compositions results from their lack of the collocational knowledge, the researcher of this study is motivated to conduct this study.

Literature Review

The following gives a general review of the literature related to English collocations. First of all, the notion of collocation that was introduced by different scholars is reviewed. Besides, the importance of English collocations in English teaching and learning proclaimed in the related studies is discussed. In addition, the scholars' viewpoints about the differences between collocation and other word combinations were reviewed, too. After that, the types of collocations classified by different researchers are investigated. Last, but not least, the studies on English collocations in students' written production are reviewed and discussed.

Notion of Collocation

Collocation, originated from the field of lexicon studies, is a term defined and understood in many different ways (Bahns, 1993). Generally, there were two different sides of assertions about this term. One of them argued that collocation was related to meaning; the other argued that collocation was not a semantic relation between words. The literature reviews related to the two assertions were arranged in this section.

On the one hand, for the assertion that collocation was concerning meaning, J. R. Firth has been regarded as the one responsible for bringing the term into prominence in the field of lexicon study (Carter & McCarthy, 1988; Hill, 2000). In Firth's view, the meaning of a word should be known by the company it keeps (Hill, 2000). In other

words, collocation was about the meaning of a word and about its relationship with other words (Hill, 2000). Such a notion about collocation is often applied to the subsequent research related to collocation.

McIntosh (1961) took Firth's viewpoint into further discussion. He added the notion of ranges, which meant, as Palmer (1976) defined, that a word might be used with a whole set of words that had some semantic features in common. An example of a range was the list of nouns, such as *metal*, *iron*, and *lava*, which might be qualified by the adjective *molten*. In McIntosh's opinion, words had only a certain tolerance of compatibility. Such knowledge of ranges helped to distinguish the acceptable collocations from unacceptable ones.

Similar to McIntosh (1961) and Palmer (1976), Bolinger and Sears (1981) also mentioned that the ranges and variety of collocations were enormous. They regarded collocation as a kind of habitual association of words and asserted that collocations resulted from native speakers' experiences of the expressions repeated again and again in certain given circumstances. Therefore, depending on the context, the collocations, like *good chance*, *high probability*, and *strong likelihood*, might be considered acceptable, but the collocations like *strong chance*, *good probability*, and *high likelihood*, unacceptable.

Sinclair (1966), in a volume of papers in memory of J. R. Firth, showed an interest in generating lexical sets by the use of collocation. For Sinclair, grammar and lexis were two different aspects. Grammar could be described by structures (syntagms) and systems (paradigms), while lexis was about lexical items collocating with one another--collocations and sets respectively. According to Sinclair, collocation was referred to as the co-occurrence of two words, but this co-occurrence was not indicative of two words occurring as a small fixed grammatical set. Instead, it had two important features. First, there might be several or many words between the two relevant items or the two relevant items might even occur over sentence boundaries. Second, collocation was independent of grammatical types. In other words, collocation was not analyzed by grammatical structures. The examples "he argued strongly," "the strength of his argument," "his argument was strengthened" (Carter & McCarthy, 1988, p. 35) to

illustrate a constant relationship between the two words.

On the other hand, however, some researchers held different views from the above scholars' opinions. For example, McCarthy (1991) argued that the notion of collocation was made use of as a kind of cohesive device. He claimed that "collocation refers to the probability that lexical items will co-occur, and is not a semantic relation between words." (p. 65). Such opinion suggested that collocation served other function besides meaning in sentences. Another instance was Aghbar's (1990) proclamation. He proposed that the notion of collocation was not raised creatively for the first time; in fact, people had a memory of having heard or seen these constructions before and used them as such. The above two examples gave a broader definition of collocation.

The Importance of Collocation in Language Teaching

English collocation is important from the pedagogical point of view. According to Cowie (1992), English collocation was important in receptive as well as productive language competence. Similar assertion was made by Carter and McCarthy (1988). In their opinion, English collocations were useful not only for English comprehension but for English production. They claimed that by memorizing collocational groups, students would have the idea about certain lexical restrictions. Most importantly, "collocations teach students expectations about which sorts of language can follow from what has preceded. Students will not have to go about reconstructing the language each time they want to say something but instead can use these collocations as pre-packaged building blocks" (p. 75).

Moreover, according to Woolard (2000), "collocation has emerged as an important category of lexical patterning and it is fast becoming an established unit of description in language teaching courses and materials" (p. 28). Liu (2000a) also stated that the more often English collocations students were taught, the more correctly students could make use of collocations. Such declaration was supported by Lin (2002). When investigating the effects of collocation instruction on students' English vocabulary developments, Lin (2002) found that students made progress in productive collocation

competence after receiving collocation instruction.

Furthermore, laying more emphasis on the significance of English collocation in detail, Hill (2000) mentioned that there were nine reasons to teach English collocations. The nine reasons are summarized as follows:

1. The lexicon is not arbitrary. The lexicon is not randomly produced. In other words, language is not spoken or written as if language were one huge substitution table with vocabulary items which merely fill slots in grammatical structures.
2. The patterns of collocation are predictable. To a certain extent vocabulary choice is predictable. Here are some examples given by Hill (2000).

When a speaker thinks of drinking, he may use a common verb such as *have*. The listener's expectations predict a large number of possibilities: *tea, coffee, milk, mineral water, orange juice, even tequila sunrise*, but there would be no expectations of *engine oil, shampoo, sulphuric acid*. The latter liquids are drunk by accident, but linguistically they are not 'probable' in the way that the former are. Another example is the verb *enhance*. The choice of its objects is limited to a relatively small number of nouns or noun patterns, e.g. *his reputation, the standing of the company*. If the verb is *do*, the choice is far greater, but still limited, e.g. *his best, the honourable thing*, but not *a mistake* (p. 53).

Thus, the use of collocations can be predicted. Such a feature can help learners learn English more easily in the classroom. In a similar way, the patterns of collocations can also do a big favor in learning.

3. The size of the phrasal mental lexicon is large. The field of predictability of collocation is enormous. It is usually two-word or more-than-two-word collocations that constitute major proportion of the whole naturally-occurring text, spoken or written. Rather surprisingly, it is possible "that up to 70% of everything we say, hear, read or write is to be found in some form of fixed expression." (Hill, 2000, p.

53)

4. The role of memory is important. Collocation is recognized because they has been met before and imprinted in the memory. They can be retrieved from the mental lexicon just as a telephone number or address is pulled from memory.
5. Collocation makes English fluent. Collocation is helpful for language users to think more quickly and to communicate more efficiently. Native speakers can only speak at the speed they did because they are calling on a vast repertoire of ready-made language, immediately available from their mental lexicons. Similarly, they can listen at the speed of speech and read quickly because they are constantly recognizing multi-word units rather than processing everything word by word. One of the main reasons the learner finds listening or reading difficult is not because of density of new words, but because of the density of unrecognized collocations. The main difference between native and non-native speakers is that the former had met far more English so that they can recognize and produce these ready-made chunks at a much faster rate.
6. Complex ideas are related more to lexicon than to grammar. Simple language is ideal for the expression of simple ideas, while complex ideas are difficult to express in complex language and even more difficult to express in simple language. Sometimes, the complexity does not necessarily result from convoluted grammar, but usually from lexical-complex noun phrases, which are frequently made of several supposedly “easy” words. Not until students have to have a memory of these noun phrases are they aware of the meanings of the phrases. The more students are exposed to good quality input and the more awareness they develop of lexical nature of language, the more they will recognize and will eventually produce long chunks themselves.
7. Collocation makes thinking easier. Since ideas can be named quickly by means of using collocations, the ideas can be manipulated without taking efforts to focus on the form of words. Thus, people who are good at using collocations can convey their ideas more fluently and faster.

8. Collocation makes pronunciation integral. At times, speakers will not pronounce every word clearly in free speaking because the focus is on meaning. As mentioned above, collocations are stored in chunks in memory and they will flow quickly; as a result, the sounds of each word may not be produced clearly. Therefore, if the listeners happen to know the collocations, they will understand the message easily.
9. Recognizing chunks is essential for acquisition. Students understood the texts that teachers read aloud in class if they can hear the text correctly chunked. From time to time, students found the unseen reading difficult to understand because they did not recognize the chunks--they read every word as if it were separate from every other word; as a result, during silent reading students may be chunking totally wrongly. Moreover, mis-chunking matters in comprehension. Correctly understood and stored, lexical items should be available for immediate use. If students did not identify the items correctly, they could not store items correctly in their mental lexicon. Incorrectly chunked, the input would either not be stored at all or would be wrongly stored. In either case, it could not be available for retrieval and use.

Collocation and Other Combination of Words

Words can be combined in numerous ways to form meaningful thought groups if those words are not restricted. That is what makes it hard to clarify the notion of collocation. Among these possible combinations of words, some are fixed and others are more loose. In order to attain a clearer understanding of collocation, it is necessary to draw a distinction among collocations, idioms, and other kinds of word combinations (Bahns, 1993; Wang, 2001; Wu, 1996), though these combinations are quite similar to one another, even, in a sense, belonging to the category of collocations. Wood (1981) adopted both semantic and syntactic criteria for distinguishing collocations from idioms, colligations, and free combinations. In Wood's point of view, an idiom was fully non-compositional and non-productive, while a free combination was fully compositional

and productive. However, Wood's interpretation about collocation and colligation are still rather vague. On the other hand, a collocation, as Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) suggested, with its meaning in a restricted sense, was less frozen than an idiom, and a colligation was compositional and permitted only limited lexical variation. Lewis (2000) had far more explanation to differentiate collocation from colligation.

Collocation is the way one word co-occurs with another word, colligation is the way one word regularly co-occurs with a particular (grammar) pattern, so, for example some verbs typically occur with a particular tense, or a noun might typically appear preceded by a personal pronoun, rather than an article (*pass my/your driving test, It's my/your/our responsibility to..., but I'll take the responsibility for...*). (p. 137)

Besides, Benson, Benson, and Ilson (1986b) and Benson (1989) distinguished collocations from other combinations of words--compounds, idioms, transitional combinations (transitional collocations), and free combinations. The following are the summaries of the five types of word combinations, which are listed from the most fixed combination to the freest one proposed by Benson (1989) and Benson et al. (1986b).

1. **Compounds**, the most fixed word combination, are completely frozen, and no variations at all were possible. The instances of nominal compounds are like *floppy disk* and *aptitude test*, and an illustration of compound verb (or phrasal verb) is *break through*.
2. **Idioms** referred to relatively frozen expressions whose meanings did not reflect the meanings of their component parts. The illustrations of idioms were *to kill two birds with one stone*, *to kick the bucket*, *to spill the beans*, and so on.
3. **Transitional combinations** (transitional collocations), whose meanings were close to their component parts, were regarded as more frozen and less variable than collocations. Instances of such were *for old time's sake*, *the facts of life*, *to be in a tight spot*, and the like.

4. **Collocations** were loosely fixed, arbitrary recurrent word combinations and the meaning of the whole did reflect the meaning of the parts. *Pure chance, to commit murder, close attention, and keen competition* shared the features of this category.

5. **Free combinations** were taken as the least cohesive of all combinations. Their components were the freest in regard to being combined with other lexical items. The typical combinations of this sort were *to recall an adventure (an event, an accident)* and *to analyze (report, investigate) a murder*.

Echoing what Benson et al. (1986b) attested, Bahns (1993) also admitted that, different from idioms, the main characteristics of collocations were that their meanings reflected the meaning of their constituent parts, and that, in comparison with free combination, they were used frequently, sprang to mind readily, and were psychologically salient. In other words, there are "transitional areas" (Cruse, 1986, p. 41) between free combinations and collocations, and between collocations and idioms.

The Classification of Collocations

When it comes to the classification of collocation, Benson et al.'s (1986a) has been second to none so far (Liu, 1999a, Tsai, 1996). Much collocation research (Bahns, 1993; Chang, 1997; Liu, 1999a, 1999b, 2000a; Wang, 2001) was conducted by using what Benson et al. advocated about collocation. According to Benson et al., collocation could be sorted systematically into two major groups--lexical collocations and grammatical collocations. A lexical collocation could be made up of nouns, adjectives, verbs, or adverbs, like *warmest regards, file an affidavit, strictly accurate*, etc. There were seven types of lexical collocations, labeled from L1 to L7, whose structures and examples were given in Table 1.

Table 1 Lexical Collocations Adapted from Benson et al. (1986a)

Type	Structures	Examples
L1	verb (donating <i>creation</i> or <i>activation</i>)+ noun (pronoun or prep. phrase)	compose music; make an impression; draw up a will
L2	verb (meaning <i>eradication</i> or <i>nullification</i>)+ noun	revoke a license; demolish a house

L3	adjective + noun	strong tea; a rough estimate
L4	noun + verb	bees buzz; bombs explode
L5	noun₁ of noun₂	a pack of dogs; a herd of buffalo
L6	adjective + adverb adverb + adjective	sound asleep; hopelessly addicted
L7	verb + adverb	anchor firmly; argue heatedly

On the other hand, a grammatical collocation was made up of a dominant word, such as a noun, an adjective, or a verb, and a preposition or grammatical structure like an infinitive or a clause. Benson et al. (1986a) further categorized the grammatical collocations into eight small groups, marked as G1 to G8, among which, G8 collocations contained nineteen English verb patterns. To make the types clear, the researcher of the present study has the structures and examples of grammatical collocations listed in Table 2.

Table 2 Grammatical Collocations Adapted from Benson et al. (1986a)

Types	Structures	Examples
G1	noun + preposition	apathy toward
G2	noun + to inf.	He was a fool to do it.
G3	noun + that clause	He took an oath that he would do his duty.
G4	preposition + noun	in advance; at anchor
G5	adjective + preposition	They are afraid of him.
G6	predicate adjective +to inf.	It was stupid for them to go.
G7	adjective + that clause	She was afraid that she would fail the exam.
G8	svo to o (or) svoo svo to o svo for o (or) svoo sv prep. o (or) svo prep. O sv to inf. sv inf. svv-ing svo to inf.	He sent a book to his brother. He sent his brother a book. They described the book to her. She bought a shirt for her husband. She bought her husband a shirt. He came by train. We invited them to the meeting. They began to speak. He had better go. They enjoy watching television. She asks me to come.

svo inf.	She heard them leave.
svov-ing	I caught them stealing apples.
sv possessive v-ing	Please excuse my waking you so early.
sv(o) that-clause	They admitted that they were wrong.
svo to be c	We consider her to be very capable.
svoc	She dyed her hair red.
svoo	We bet her ten pounds.
sv(o)a	He carried himself well.
sv(o) wh-word	He wants what I want.
s(it) vo to inf. (or) s(it) vo that-clause	It surprised me to learn of her decision. It surprised me that our offer was rejected.
svc (adjective or noun)	She was enthusiastic (a good girl).
svc (adjective)	The flowers smell nice.

Sinclair (1991) divided collocation into two kinds--downward collocation and upward collocation. Different from Benson et al., Sinclair made use of two terms to classify collocations. One was the term "node," which was employed to stand for the word studied; the other was the term "collocate," used to represent any word occurring in the specified environment of a node. Based on Sinclair's assortment, when A was "node" and B was "collocate"--collocation of A with a less frequent word B, it was called downward collocation, which contributed to a semantic analysis of a word. The examples of this type were *advantage over*, *afraid of*, *attitude toward*, etc. In contrast, when B was "node" and A was "collocate," it was called upward collocation. The examples of this type were *on purpose*, *by accident*, *with caution*, etc. In this kind of collocation, "the words tended to be elements of grammatical frames, or superordinates." (p. 116)

Similar to Benson et al. (1986a), Lewis (2000) listed different types of collocations that were found regularly together if collocation was defined as the way words occurred together. More types beyond Benson et al.'s classification were seen in his list. The researcher of the current study has rearranged them from the collocations related to nouns (from 1 to 8) to other types of collocations.

1. adjective + noun: *a difficult decision*
2. verb + noun: *submit a report*

3. noun + noun: *radio station*
4. verb + adjective + noun: *revise the original plan*
5. compound noun: *fire escape*
6. binomial: *backwards and forwards*
7. trinomial: *hook, line and sinker*
8. noun + verb: *the fog closed in*
9. verb + adverb: *examine thoroughly*
10. adverb + adjective: *extremely inconvenient*
11. discourse marker: *To put it another way*
12. multi-word prepositional phrase *a few years ago*
13. phrasal verb: *turn in*
14. adjective + preposition: *aware of*
15. fixed phrase: *On the other hand*
16. incomplete fixed phrase: *A sort of*
17. fixed expression: *Not half!*
18. semi-fixed expression: *See you later/tomorrow/on Monday.*
19. part of a proverb: *Too many cooks*
20. part of a quotation: *To be or not to be* (pp. 133-134)

Collocation in Production

Numerous scholars examining students' English writings found that collocation had everything to do with the quality of students' writings. For example, Bahns and Eldaw (1993) found that, for advanced students, collocations presented a major problem in the production of English. Sonomura (1997) also mentioned that “writing in English for academic purpose demands access to an infinite store of common collocations, combined in ways that have become stabilized and are the familiar expected, and recognized ways of saying things in written English” (p. 6). Therefore, in the following sections, some studies on the relationship between learners’ English proficiency and the collocational errors they committed, and on the causes of making collocational errors were reviewed.

Collocation Errors and English Proficiency

Concerned about EFL students' problems in collocation in their writings, some researchers analyzed the students' English compositions and found that there was a relationship between students' English proficiency and their collocational errors in writings. For instance, Zhang (1993) pointed out a correlation between knowledge and use of English collocations and the quality of college freshmen's writing. In addition, Chang (1997) pointed out that English collocation had been and remained one of the crucial criteria for estimating students' language proficiency in English. Also, Al-Zahrani (1998) discovered that the students' knowledge of collocations had everything to do with their overall language proficiency and that the writing test was good as a predictor of students' knowledge of collocations. As Liu (2000a) suggested, "good writing may contain a greater number of acceptable collocations" (p. 166). Therefore, it is interesting and necessary to explore the relationship between learners' English proficiency and collocational errors in their written production in the following sections. The findings of some empirical studies suggested a relationship between students' English proficiency and the collocational errors in their writing. Take Chang's (1997) investigation for example. He examined the various types of grammatical and lexical collocations employed in college freshman English compositions. He pointed out that less proficient students made more errors than more proficient ones. Besides, he found that among three groups of different English proficiency, the students of the LOW group and the MID group had problems using proper prepositions, adjectives, and verbs in combination with other words. The errors also occurred in the writing of the HI group, but they were significantly fewer in number. Furthermore, he discovered that the lexical collocational errors which involved the structure *Adj + N* showed the highest frequency, followed by those concerning the structure *V + N*; on the other hand, the grammatical collocation errors which involved the construction *Prep + N* had the highest frequency, followed by those concerning the construction *V + Prep*.

Interestingly, a small-scale research conducted by Howarth (1993) presented a different result. His study was focused on the deviant collocations in the written

production of EFL students from a variety of language backgrounds, studying at postgraduate level at British universities. He suggested that the less proficient learners made fewer collocational errors than the more proficient ones did; that was because the less proficient learners did not have enough confidence in experimenting and in taking risks with combinations.

However, in a large-scale study conducted in 1998 by the same researcher, this observation did not apply and collocational dysfunction appeared as a highly individual variable. According to Howarth (1998), individual learners were different systematically in their collocational performance, revealing underlying levels of competence, but he noted that there was weak correlation between the number of deviant collocations, either grammatical or lexical, and levels of English proficiency. He also pointed out that it was difficult to see any pattern connecting collocational use with other factors, such as linguistic proficiency, the final academic grade, and whether English was spoken as a second or a foreign language.

Furthermore, Wang (2001) made conclusions similar to Howarth (1998). She conducted a study on the competence of English lexical collocations of English majors in Taiwan. The students with four academic levels at Fu-Jen University in Taiwan were tested on lexical collocation production. The result of her study showed that "the English department students' lexical collocations do not exhibit a series of developmental stages" (p. ii). In other words, the English training that the English majors received had no significant effect on their collocations. That is, the lexical collocations were not acquired along students' academic level.

Causes of Producing Collocational Errors

There has been a great concern among researchers about the reasons why EFL students frequently make collocational errors in their writings and the researchers discovered that the causes of collocational errors resulted from analogy, overgeneralization, paraphrase, the L1 interference, interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer, and shortage of collocational knowledge (Bahns & Eldaw, 1993; Channel, 1981;

Ellis, 1985; Farghal & Obiedat, 1995; Liu, 1999a, 1999b, 2000b). For instance, Bahns and Eldaw (1993) proclaimed that many EFL students' collocation errors were caused by their L1 interference. Similar conclusion was made by Farghal and Obiedat (1995). They noted that the students who did not know a specific collocation tended to resort to such strategies as synonym, paraphrasing, avoidance, and transfer.

In addition, a series of studies conducted by Liu (1999a, 1999b, 2000b) revealed the strategies that EFL students might use in producing collocations, either acceptable or unacceptable, in their writings. To begin with, in the study of Chinese college freshmen's collocational competence, Liu (1999b) found that the EFL students had difficulties in producing acceptable collocation. He further concluded that the causes of producing unacceptable English collocations were mostly attributed to the lack of the concept of collocation and interlingual transfer. The results of the study were summarized as follows:

1. Lack of collocational concept: Some students only understood the basic meaning of the word but did not know which word it would go with. Thus, they were not competent to produce any collocation.
2. Direct translation: Some students remembered only the Chinese translation of the word. Therefore, they relied on direct translation to produce collocations (e.g. **learn knowledge* instead of *gain knowledge* or *absorb knowledge*).
3. Ignorance of rule restrictions: Some students did not know that some collocational restrictions were based wholly on the meaning of the word and range; others did not take grammar into consideration. As a result, they produced grammatically unacceptable collocations (e.g. **few knowledge* instead of *little knowledge*).
4. Lack of knowledge of collocational properties: Many students did not understand the potential collocational properties of the words they knew. Take the word *good* for example. It could be assumed that most students knew the collocation *a good boy*, but few students generated the collocation *a good knowledge*.

Moreover, in Liu's (1999a) another analysis of collocational errors in EFL writings, with fourteen types of lexical and grammatical collocational errors studied in the students'

compositions and examination papers, there were six sources of errors found. Among them, a small number of errors resulting from word coinage and approximation belonged to communication strategies, while the majority of the errors attributable to negative interlingual transfer and four kinds of intralingual transfer--overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, false concepts hypothesized, and the use of synonyms--belonged to cognitive strategies. The strategies concluded in Liu's (1999a) study were further accounted for as follows:

1. Negative interlingual transfer: Some collocational errors were caused by direct translation. Although phrases, like "**listen his advice*" and "**wait your phone call*," are understandable when they were translated back into Chinese, they were not acceptable English collocations. Being intransitive verbs, *listen* and *wait* could not be directly followed by a noun. The rule did not exist in Chinese, however.
2. Ignorance of rule restrictions: Analogy and failure to observe the restrictions of existing structures were at times the reasons why students produced unacceptable collocations. For example, "*to *make Joyce surprise*" was a false analogy of the construction verb + object + infinitive (e.g. "*make Joyce surprised*").
3. False concept hypothesized: Students had misconceptions about such verbs as *make*, *do*, and *take*. Some students maybe thought that these words were de-lexicalized verbs, thus they could be substituted for one another freely. For instance, students would use "**do plans*" instead of "*make plans*."
4. Overgeneralization: Students used overgeneralization when the items did not carry any obvious contrast to them. It was the creation of one deviant structure in place of two regular structures on the basis of students' experience of the target language. For example, instead of using "*am used to taking*," students would use the collocation "**am used to take*," which was a combination of "*am used to something*" and "*used to take*."
5. Use of synonyms: Students might use "**receive other people's opinion*" instead of "*accept other people's opinions*." It was taken as a straightforward application of the open choice principle.

6. Word coinage and approximation: Word coinage was a type of paraphrase employed to make up a new word in order to communicate the desired concept. The instance of the collocational errors resulted from word coinage was "*to *see sun-up*" (instead of "*to see the sunrise*"). On the other hand, approximation was another type of paraphrase. It was the use of an incorrect vocabulary item or structure, which shares enough semantic features in common with the desired item to satisfy the speakers. For example, the word *middle* in "**middle exam*" was used to mean mid-term in "*midterm exam*."

Furthermore, in another study on students' strategy use in producing lexical collocations, Liu (2000b) mentioned seven types of strategies that EFL students might make use of in their writing, inclusive of observable actions and unobservable mental process. The following were the seven types of strategies.

1. Retrieval: It meant students' ability to recall collocations from their memory. Without understanding the notion that language did not consist of words but of chunks, many students had no intention to store collocations in their memory. Consequently, they often failed in searching for the proper collocations they needed when they communicated in either speaking or writing.
2. Literal translation: Students tended to transfer the thought word-for-word from L1 to L2 when not succeeding in finding stored collocations. They took the strategy of literal translation to produce either acceptable or unacceptable collocations.
3. Approximate translation: Approximate translation was a process of paraphrasing the thought from L1 to L2. Sometimes students relied on their intuition to create collocations of their own and chose approximate translation as another strategy other than literal translation.
4. Use of de-lexicalised verbs: Students were inclined to use de-lexicalised words (e.g. *do, take, make, and keep*) carelessly and substitute one for another casually in their writing. Owing to linguistic deficiencies, intermediate EFL students often thought de-lexicalised verbs as words that had little or no meaning outside the context of particular use.

5. Use of synonyms: It was by using synonyms that students solved L2 lexical problems when they encountered the collocations that the students were not able to bring out. Nevertheless, more often than not, they produced erroneous collocations as a result of the insufficient collocational information of the synonyms they used.
6. Appeal to authority: Unable to find the right collocation to use, students would like to ask a native speaker or consult a dictionary for the answer. However, if their problems would be solved depended on what kind of dictionary they usually used and whether they could find the answer in a dictionary.
7. Appeal for assistance: Learners had a tendency to depend on others for guidance and instruction. Chances were that most of the time the poor writers were the ones sought advice from.

To conclude the above research, EFL students make collocational errors in their English writings mostly on account of the interference of their mother tongue, lack of the concept of collocation, and the interlingual or intralingual transfer. Besides, the students' production of deviant collocations may be because they take strategies such as avoidance, paraphrasing, and literal translation in English writing tasks. These can be the possible reasons for explaining why EFL students frequently produce unacceptable collocations in their English writings.

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