THE ROLE OF COLLOCATIONS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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Abstract. This thesis discusses the role of collocations in English language acquisition and explains why learning individual words is not always enough for effective communication. Collocations are combinations of words that are commonly used together, such as “make a decision,” “heavy rain,” and “strong argument.” Knowing these combinations helps learners use English more naturally and understand spoken and written language more easily. The paper focuses on the importance of collocations in vocabulary development, fluency, accuracy, and communicative competence. It also considers some difficulties that English learners may face when learning collocations and suggests practical ways of learning them. The study shows that regular exposure to collocations and their use in meaningful contexts can make the process of English language acquisition more effective.

Key words: collocation, English language acquisition, vocabulary, language learning, fluency, communication, vocabulary development, lexical competence

Learning a foreign language is not only about memorizing grammar rules and individual words. Learners also need to understand how words are normally combined in real communication. One important part of vocabulary knowledge is collocation. A collocation is a combination of words that frequently occur together and sound natural to native speakers. For example, English speakers usually say “make a decision” rather than “do a decision,” and “heavy rain” rather than “strong rain.” These combinations may seem simple, but they can be difficult for learners because the correct combination is not always predictable from the meaning of individual words.

Collocations are an important part of the English lexical system. According to Lewis, vocabulary learning should not be limited to separate words because language is largely made up of meaningful word combinations. This idea is especially important for foreign language learners because knowing the meaning of a word does not necessarily mean knowing how to use it correctly. For example, a learner may know the word “attention,” but

may not immediately know that the common expression is “pay attention.” Therefore, learning words together with their typical combinations can improve the learner’s ability to produce natural English.

The importance of collocations can also be seen in vocabulary acquisition. When learners meet a new word in combination with other words, they receive more information about its real use. For instance, learning the word “strong” together with expressions such as “strong coffee,” “strong influence,” and “strong argument” gives learners a better understanding of how the word functions in different contexts. In this way, collocations help learners develop deeper vocabulary knowledge rather than simply memorizing translations.

Another important role of collocations is improving fluency. Fluent speakers usually do not create every sentence by selecting and combining individual words separately. They often use familiar groups of words automatically. Collocations can work in a similar way for language learners. When expressions such as “take a break,” “have a look,” “make progress,” or “keep in touch” become familiar, learners can use them more quickly during communication. As a result, they do not need to spend as much time thinking about every individual word.

Collocations are also closely connected with accuracy. A sentence may be grammatically correct but still sound unnatural if the wrong word combination is used. For example, “I did a mistake” can be understood by an English speaker, but the natural expression is “I made a mistake.” Such examples show that grammatical knowledge alone cannot guarantee natural communication. Learners need both grammatical competence and lexical knowledge, including knowledge of common collocations.

For many English learners, collocations can be challenging because their first language may influence the way they combine English words. Uzbek learners, for example, may sometimes translate expressions directly from Uzbek into English. Direct translation can lead to combinations that are understandable but not normally used by English speakers. This problem can be reduced when learners pay attention to authentic English examples and learn words in context.

Another difficulty is the large number of possible collocations in English. A single word

can occur with many different words depending on its meaning and context. The verb “take,” for example, appears in numerous common combinations such as “take responsibility,” “take a chance,” “take part,” and “take a break.” Memorizing all of these expressions at once is not effective. It is better for learners to meet and practice them gradually in meaningful situations.

The use of dictionaries and language-learning resources can be helpful in this process. Collocation dictionaries provide information about words that commonly occur together. Modern learners can also use English corpora and online dictionaries to see how particular expressions are used in authentic contexts. According to Nation, vocabulary learning becomes more effective when learners have repeated opportunities to meet and use new vocabulary. The same principle can be applied to collocations.

Teachers can also play an important role in helping students learn collocations. Instead of teaching vocabulary only through lists of separate words, teachers can introduce common word combinations through reading texts, dialogues, writing tasks, and speaking activities. For example, when teaching the word “decision,” students can learn related expressions such as “make a decision,” “reach a decision,” and “a difficult decision.” Students can then create their own sentences using these combinations.

Reading is another useful way to develop collocational knowledge. When learners read English texts regularly, they naturally encounter words in their usual contexts. Newspapers, short stories, textbooks, websites, and other authentic materials can expose learners to a wide range of collocations. Keeping a vocabulary notebook with complete expressions rather than individual words can also be useful. For example, instead of writing only “progress = rivojlanish,” a learner can write “make progress” and create a sentence with it.

Speaking practice is equally important. Learners should have opportunities to use newly learned collocations in conversations and classroom activities. Pair work, discussions, role plays, and short presentations can encourage students to use expressions actively. Repeated use helps move collocations from passive vocabulary into active vocabulary.

Writing activities can also strengthen collocational knowledge. Students can write short paragraphs using a group of target collocations. For example, if the topic is education,

students may use expressions such as “gain knowledge,” “develop skills,” “take an exam,” and “make progress.” This type of practice helps learners understand not only the meaning of collocations but also their grammatical and contextual features.

It is important to remember that collocations should not be learned only through mechanical memorization. Context plays an important role in understanding how and when a particular combination is used. Learners should notice the meaning, grammatical structure, register, and situation in which the collocation appears. This approach makes vocabulary learning more meaningful and helps learners use expressions appropriately.

Collocations have an important role in English language acquisition. They contribute to vocabulary development, fluency, accuracy, and effective communication. Learners who know common word combinations can express their ideas more naturally and understand English texts and conversations more easily. Although collocations can be difficult because of differences between languages and the large number of possible combinations, regular practice can make them easier to learn. Therefore, collocations should be included as an important part of English vocabulary teaching and learning.

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