

## The Importance of Teaching Collocations in the Development of Kuwaiti ESL/EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension

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### Abstract:

Collocation refers to a group of two or more words that often go together or located in a certain manner in speech and writing. In other words we may describe collocation as a group of two or more words that like to hang out together. This research was intended to observe the importance of teaching collocations in the development of Kuwaiti ESL/ EFL learners' reading comprehension.

The setting of this pragmatic study was English Language Unit (ELU), Kuwait University. Keeping in view the objective of study, 80 Arabic-speaking English learners (Kuwaiti ESL/EFL learners), both male and female, at intermediate level were selected from English Language Unit (ELU), of Kuwait University. The participants' age ranged 22-25 years. The level of these participants' English was determined on the basis of their scores on Nelson Proficiency Test which was administered at the same time in four different classes i.e., two classes as the experimental group while the other two classes as the control group for the purpose of recent research. Some participants, however, were disqualified from the data analysis due to some reasons. For instance, a few of them didn't show up in the pre-experimental test, while others missed some of the sessions in the experimental stage, or failed to answer the questionnaire. Due to these reasons, the participants in the experimental group and the control group were not equal. Finally, there were 32 students in

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the experimental group and 35 students in the respective control group. Therefore, the final total number of the sample was 67 subjects.

The statistics for this study were collected from 67 participants. The paired-sample t-test showed very interesting results. The participants in the experimental group performed better than the participants in the control group in reading comprehending test. This research verified that teaching collocations, before the test is administered, could play an important role in the development of Kuwaiti ESL/ EFL learners' reading comprehension. The study concludes with pedagogical implications, limitations, and suggestions and recommendations for future research.

**Keywords:**

Collocations, Conscious-Raising (C-R), reading comprehension, Nelson Proficiency Test, t-test, ANOVA

## I. Introduction

'Collocations' are generally described as "Sequences of lexical items which habitually co-occur (i.e. occur together)" (Cruse, 1980: 40). For instance, 'sour milk', 'thick eyebrows', 'to collect stamps', 'to commit suicide', 'to reject a proposal', etc.

The term collocation was first introduced by Firth, who considered that meaning by collocation is lexical meaning "at the syntagmatic level" (Firth 1957:196). The syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations of lexical items can be represented by two axes: a horizontal and a vertical one. The paradigmatic axis is the vertical axis and comprises sets of words that belong to the same class and can be substituted for one another in a specific grammatical and lexical context. The horizontal axis of language is the syntagmatic axis and refers to a word's ability to combine with other words. Thus, in the sentence 'Khalid ate the apple' the word 'apple' stands in paradigmatic relation with 'orange', 'sandwich', 'steak', 'chocolate', 'cake', etc., and in syntagmatic relation with the word 'ate' and 'Khalid'. Collocations represent lexical relations along the syntagmatic axis. However, structural linguists have widely used syntagmatic relations between sentence constituents. For example, 'Khalid ate the apple' is a 'Subject-Verb-Object' construction' but not in the study of lexical meaning as Firth considered.

"Up till now, studies on collocation have been insufficient in defining the concept of collocation in a more rigorous way" (Cowan 1989:1). Since the term 'collocation' was introduced by Firth to describe meaning at the syntagmatic level, subsequent linguists and researchers have not often attempted to define 'collocation' in a more thorough and methodical way. Collocation is still defined as the tendency of a lexical item to co-occur with one or more other words (Halliday, McIntosh & Stevens 1964:33; Ridout & Waldo-Clarke 1970; Backlund 1973, 1976; Seaton 1982; Crystal 1985:55; Cruse 1986:40; Zhang 1993:1).

Applied linguists realized that vocabulary skills involve more than the ability to define a word. Suggestions were made for a new approach to vocabulary teaching that would avoid the previous emphasis on words in isolation and on word definitions. "The new approach would include an examination of the syntagmatic relations of collocation between lexical items, a skill that is evident in the adult native speakers of a language" (McCarthy 1984:14-16; Carter 1987:38; Sinclair 1991).

'Collocation' as a term describing lexical relations is not well-defined, and unfortunately joining words that are in principle semantically compatible does not always produce acceptable collocations, e.g. 'many thanks' is an acceptable collocation in English but 'several thanks' is not, in the same way that 'strong tea' is well-formed but 'powerful tea' is not.

The past study has been burning midnight oil to research on different aspects, namely theoretical and pedagogical perspectives, of collocations. “The theoretical studies of collocations can be viewed from three perspectives: lexical, syntactic, and semantic. Linguists studying collocations at the lexical level ‘regard collocations as the linear and syntagmatic co-occurrence of lexical items’ (Mitchell, 1971; Sinclair, 1966). “Collocations are also discussed in terms of their syntactic restrictions” (Nation, 2001)

‘and semantic restrictions’ (Howarth, 1998; Lewis, 1997; Nation, 2001).

On the pedagogical level, ‘linguists and language educators have conducted empirical studies on measuring collocational knowledge’ (Aghbar, 1990; Hsu, 2002; Zhang, 1993), detecting development of collocational knowledge at different levels (Gitsaki, 1999), ‘and discovering the common collocational errors that the second language learners make’ (Farghal & Obiedat, 1995; Howarth, 1998). Language educators also provide methods of teaching collocations in classrooms (Lewis, 2000; Woolard, 2000).

Most of the researchers performed their experiments to research on the use of collocations on productive language, especially in writing, but a few empirical studies discuss collocations with respect to receptive skills (reading and listening) and nobody discussed how collocation teaching is, particularly, important in the Development of ESL / EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension. Nevertheless, having an adequate knowledge of collocations may benefit reading / listening comprehension since collocations may help readers or listeners process language in chunks instead of individual words. Due to the lack of empirical studies on collocational knowledge in relation to reading comprehension, this study will investigate the importance of collocation instruction on reading comprehension.

### **1.1 Objectives of the Study**

There have been a number of studies in L2 acquisition research that investigated how the knowledge and use of collocations by students at different levels of proficiency affect their communicative competence and language performance, and so established the importance of collocations in L2 learning. “ELT literature has experienced different trends towards L2 teaching. An overview of the recorded history of language teaching shows a move from completely explicit to exclusively implicit language teaching” (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Nunan, 2001). “These trends were based on the field participant’s conception of how an L2 is acquired. Besides, in each approach, one of the linguistic items received special attention. However, all the trends failed to develop completely proficient speakers” (Nassaji & Fotos, 2007). “Further, according to Nassaji & Fotos (2007),

consciousness-raising (C-R) is one of the responses to the plea for compensating the limited achievements of the previous approaches”.

According to Moritoshi, (2000); Willis & Willis, (1996), “Traits such as developing autonomous learners, making learning a life-long process, and taking learners’ individual differences into account has made C-R a sensible alternate for teaching different aspects of L2”. In the meantime, collocation, which has been ignored till recently, has been recognized very important in language learning and teaching. Many researchers in the field suggest teaching this phenomenon in ESL/EFL language classes. The way suggested for teaching this linguistic item was C-R activities.

In this study, the researcher tried to investigate the importance and effectiveness of this highly recommended technique for teaching collocation, consciousness-raising, in learning this linguistic item. After devising some C-R activities, based on R. Ellis’s weak interface theory, and practicing them in two English language classes, the researchers attempted to answer the question by examining the importance and effect of such activities on learning collocations through comparing the results. In conclusion, the research tried to find the answer to the following question:

### **1.2 Research Question & Hypothesis**

Is teaching collocations, based on consciousness-raising activities; has any importance in the development of ESL / EFL learners’ reading comprehension of intermediate students at Kuwait University? Taking into account the research question, one null hypothesis could be examined:

Collocations instruction, based on consciousness-raising activities, has no importance in the development of ESL / EFL learners’ reading comprehension of intermediate students at Kuwait University.

## **II. Literature Review**

Firstly, this section gives a brief historical significance of vocabulary in language learning and the term ‘word’ and what does it mean to ‘know a word’. Secondly, it introduces the core subject, ‘collocations’. Particularly, it discusses the theoretical studies of collocations from three perspectives trends: lexical composition trend, syntactic trend, semantic trend, and structural trend. Next, various contemporary definitions of collocations proposed by linguistic studies have been given. It is followed by a brief description of the salient features and differences between collocations, idioms and word combinations. This section also discusses the traditional classification of collocations, the importance of collocations, and collocations in the field of first and second language acquisition. Finally, it concludes with a review of selected empirical studies on the Importance of teaching collocations in the development of Kuwaiti ESL/EFL Learners’ Reading Comprehension.

## 2.1 Historical Significance of Vocabulary in Language Learning

Up to the present day, vocabulary has been undervalued throughout its different stages, despite its crucial importance to language learners (Zimmerman, 1997). Unlike issues such as grammatical competence, contrastive analysis, reading, or writing, which received great attention and interest from scholars and teachers, the teaching and learning of vocabulary was overlooked in research and methodology (Richards 1976). This evident neglect could be attributed to the idea that second language (L2) vocabulary acquisition would take care of itself or be absorbed naturally like the native language (L1) vocabulary (Schmitt 2000). Besides, linguists at that time prioritized syntax and phonology as “more central to linguistics theory and more critical to language pedagogy” (Zimmerman 1997:5). According to (Zughoul & Abdul-Fattah (2003), “Such a restricted view of vocabulary has resulted in a lexical deficiency for learners and, hence, inability to construct natural speech and writing”.

The historical trends in vocabulary instruction can be explained by keeping in view various teaching approaches that were prevailing in the nineteenth and twentieth century. The Grammar Translation Method was the main language-teaching methodology at the beginning of the nineteenth century. According to Zimmerman 1997, “It placed a heavy emphasis on explicit grammar and accuracy as the method became controlled in nature, while little attention was given to vocabulary. Reading and translating literary materials was the focus of the content”. Vocabulary choice was based solely on the reading texts, and the necessary vocabulary was provided to students in the form of bilingual word lists Schmitt (2000). Because the Grammar Translation Method’s focus on analyzing the target language (rather than gaining the ability to use it) was seen as a shortcoming, the Direct Method emerged by the end of the nineteenth century. This method emphasized oral exposure to the target language with listening as the main skill, then speaking. It was thought that through interaction during the classes, students would acquire vocabulary naturally. Simple and familiar everyday vocabulary and sentences were taught either through demonstration or by association of ideas (Zimmerman 1997).

Schmitt (2000) maintains that Vocabulary was seen, for the first time, as one of the most important aspects of second-language learning when the Reading Method emerged. In this method, emphasis was placed on developing criteria for selecting vocabulary content. The Reading Method aimed primarily at facilitating reading skills by improving vocabulary knowledge. Intensive oral drills were seen as a means of reinforcing the learning of a target language, rather than analyzing it. This method later came to be known as “Audiolingualism”. In 1972, Hymes introduced the concept of communicative competence which underscored the sociolinguistic and pragmatic aspects. This helped

to shift the focus from language “accuracy” into “appropriateness”. “In other words, the emphasis on using the language for meaningful communication rather than grammatical accuracy gave birth to the Communicative Language Teaching approach (CLT). Though it was a meaning-based approach, vocabulary was given a “secondary status” that served as a support for issues of “functional language,” such as how to make a request. Similar to the previous approaches, few instructions were given about how to handle vocabulary in CLT under the assumption that L2 vocabulary would take care of itself, like L1 vocabulary Schmitt (2000). Similar to the Communicative Language Teaching and other communicative approaches being developed, the Natural Approach appeared in 1977. It placed an emphasis on exposure, or comprehensible input, without reference to grammatical analysis, or resorting to the native language Richards & Rodgers (2001). Since vocabulary is the source of meaning, it was deemed by the approach to be central to the language learning process Zimmerman (1997).

Schmitt (2000) asserts that the aforementioned language teaching methodologies have shown that teaching practices have moved between “language analysis” and “language use.” Similarly, vocabulary has had varied positions. Yet, most approaches did not know how to deal with vocabulary and their reliance was on either word lists or the assumption that vocabulary would be acquired naturally. “Over time, language instruction has improved as linguists have started to recognize the complexity of the language learning processes. Techniques have been developed, as teachers and practitioners have obtained knowledge of what would expedite language acquisition. However, the most remarkable and significant change at the end of the twentieth century was the shift of focus from grammar, as the central role of language teaching, to vocabulary” (Ma 2009). This change was summarized by David Wilkins (1972:111) as follows: “Without grammar very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed.”

Decarrico (2001) regards vocabulary a central pivot in language learning as he emphasizes, “In the last two decades, vocabulary has become an essential aspect of language learning and its importance has been imposed on all parties (learners, teachers, language specialists, and program designers). Similarly, language specialists have emphasized the need for curriculum designers, teachers and learners to create a systematic and principled approach to vocabulary. This increased interest in vocabulary has produced an expanding body of experimental studies, pedagogical materials and computer-aided research, most of which addresses questions of crucial importance for both teachers and learners, such as, what does it mean to know a word?”.

## 2.2 Classification of Word Knowledge

Nation (2001) claims that words cannot be regarded as out-of-the-way components of language rather they are parts of many joint systems and level. As he says, "Words are not isolated components of any given language, but are parts of many joint systems and levels. Consequently, there are many aspects and degrees of word knowledge required for learners to be able to use words properly and effectively".

Therefore, it must be explicit that word knowledge can be classified into two categories; firstly, receptive or passive knowledge and secondly, productive or active knowledge. Receptive knowledge refers to words that can be identified when heard or read (listening and reading skills), whereas, productive knowledge is the ability to use and have access to words in speech and writing (speaking and writing skills). Since it is, to a certain degree, a useful convention, some educational institutions and material designers have adapted this aspect of word knowledge into word lists that are divided into words that can be learned passively and words that can be learned actively. On the other hand, this division of words as passive and active may not be clearly or sharply defined in the mind, "since good passive skills often require the reader or listener to actively anticipate the words that will occur" Milton (2009:13).

Anderson and Freebody (1981, cited in Milton 2009) proposed another convention that vocabulary learning researchers find helpful. This is the differentiation between breadth of knowledge and depth of knowledge. Breadth of knowledge is defined as the number of words a person knows, while depth of knowledge refers to a learner's knowledge of various aspects of a given word. The concept of depth of vocabulary knowledge may refer to the links between words, and it involves knowledge of word association, collocation, or colligation.

The intricacy and sophistication of word knowledge cannot be really understood by simple two-fold divisions such as receptive and productive, or breadth and depth. A more complete and balanced outline and framework of word knowledge is recommended by Nation (2001). Nation classifies word knowledge into three main categories: knowledge of form, knowledge of meaning, and knowledge of use. Each category, with both productive and receptive aspects, is further subdivided. Knowledge of form involves the spoken and written forms as well as word parts. Knowledge of meaning is divided into form and meaning, concepts and referents, and associations. Knowledge of use includes grammatical functions, collocations, and constraints on use.

Another linguist Hodne (2009) asserts,

"The aforementioned aspects of word knowledge are of great importance to



foreign language acquisition and pedagogy. Unfortunately, some of these facets of knowledge, such as form and meaning, are given more value in the classroom, while other contextualized aspects, such as collocation, are rarely mentioned”.

The current research attempts to explore an important aspect of word knowledge: collocation. The forthcoming section explores various theoretical perspectives of collocations.

### **2.3 Theoretical Perspectives of Collocations**

It is well known that vocabulary knowledge is the most essential element in learning a foreign/second language. However, it is not sufficient to understand a set of isolated words or to understand their basic meaning. Within the realm of lexis, the area of collocation is of prime importance to second language learning in general and word knowledge in particular. Kim (2009:1) comments, “Truly knowing a word means not only knowing the meaning of the word but also knowing the words with which it frequently co-occurs.” Bahumaid (2006) says,

“The term collocation has been generally used to refer to a phenomenon in which certain words have the tendency to co-occur regularly within a language. Hence, the word ‘lean’ can exclusively collocate with ‘meat’, while the word ‘heavy’ has ‘rain’, ‘meal’, ‘traffic’, and ‘smoker’ as possible collocates”.

In the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century, a large number of researchers attempted to describe and investigate the English collocation trends. For instance, McIntosh 1961; Halliday 1966; Sinclair 1966; Fodor 1963; Cruse 1986; Mitchell 1971; and Greenbaum 1970, focused on three unique trends of collocations: the lexical composition trend, the semantic trend, and the structural pattern trend. The lexical composition trend views collocation as a means of describing word meanings at different levels. The semantic trend relies on semantic features to predict lexical item collocates. The structural pattern trend uses grammatical patterns to examine collocations (Gitsaki 1999). We can discuss these three trends in more detail as follows:

#### **2.3.1 The Lexical Composition Trend**

This trend is based on the idea that words obtain their meanings from the words with which they co-occur. For instance, the collocations ‘in addition’ and ‘make a mistake’ frequently appear in texts and cannot be substituted by their synonyms. We cannot say ‘in totaling’ and ‘do a mistake’. Firth (1957:192) is known as both the father of this trend, and was the first scholar to introduce the term ‘collocation’ into lexical studies. He looks at collocation as a component separated from grammar. Collocation, according to Firth, is a “mode of meaning.” He maintains that the lexical meaning should be analyzed on four levels: the orthographic level, the phonological level, the grammatical level, and

the collocational level. The word 'peer' is used by Firth as an example to illustrate this; at the orthographic level, its meaning is distinguished from the 'group of pier'. Next, at the phonological level, the pronunciation of 'peer' is stated; then, at the grammatical level, the word 'peer' can be used either as a noun or a verb, thus adding a further component of meaning. Finally, at the collocational level, another meaning of the word 'peer' can be obtained when it collocates with the word 'group', (as in peer group) (Gitsaki 1999).

Furthermore, Firth's theory of lexical meaning views word associations as paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations of lexical units. These lexical units are depicted by two axes: a horizontal (syntagmatic) and a vertical (paradigmatic) one. The paradigmatic axis consists of lexical items that belong to the same class and can be replaced with one another in a particular context. The syntagmatic axis refers to the words' ability to collocate with one another. For instance, water in Tom drank some water stands in paradigmatic relation with juice, beer, or wine and in a syntagmatic relation with the words Tom and drank. The novelty of Firth's theory comes from the fact that he looked at the meanings of lexical relations from the syntagmatic relations, rather than from the paradigmatic relations, e.g., synonyms and antonyms (Gitsaki 1999).

Afterward, Firth's concept of lexical meaning has been adopted and developed by his followers, known as the Neo-Firthians; the most prominent of these are McIntosh (1961), Halliday (1966), and Sinclair (1966). McIntosh (1961) viewed collocational patterns as independent of grammatical considerations, and as equally important as grammatical patterns. He took Firth's theory into further discussion and added the novel concept of range (which refers to the particular lexical items that frequently co-occur with other collocates) and range-extension (for instance, when a word is combined to another partner). For example, 'putrid' and 'rancid': though they are synonyms, they have various ranges; 'putrid' collocates with 'fish' while 'rancid' collocates with 'butter' (Lien 2003).

In addition, some lexical items have range-extension tendencies. To provide an instance for that, McIntosh (1961:336) explained that some people use the word smashing in a strange way as in, 'we had a smashing time yesterday evening'. He comments:

"This implies that we are aware of having begun to hear the word smashing in environments (situational as well as linguistic) which hitherto we should certainly have considered inappropriate not only because of their being out of our previous experience but also because of being beyond what our range-sense would regard as even marginally tolerable." McIntosh (1961:336)

Halliday (1966, cited in Al-Zahrani 1998) regarded lexical patterns as a complementary component to grammatical theory. He introduced the notion of set as another dimension to the collocability of words, one which he differentiated from collocations. A collocation, to Halliday, is a linear co-occurrence relationship among lexical units which collocate interchangeably, while the set is “the grounding of members with like privilege of co-occurrence in collocation” (1966:153). For example, the words bright, hot, shine, light, and come out are all members of the same lexical set, as they are frequent collocates of the word sun. Additionally, Halliday (1966) argued that the criterion for a lexical unit to be a member of a certain lexical set is its syntagmatic relation to a particular lexical unit rather than its paradigmatic relation to that lexical unit. For instance, the words strong and powerful belong to the same lexical set since they collocate with the lexical item argument. However, when there are collocates such as, car and tea, the lexical items strong and powerful will enter different lexical sets, for example, strong tea and powerful car. Halliday was also concerned with the collocational patterns that the lexical items belong to. For example, a strong argument has the same collocational patterns as the strength of his argument and he argued strongly. The reason is that strong, strength, and strongly are all parts of the same collocational pattern and therefore regarded as word-forms of the same lexical unit (Gitsaki 1999).

To summarize, the supporters of the lexical composition trend consider collocations as a separated and independent entity from grammar. They propose that collocation patterns are best examined and analyzed through lexical analysis that is concentrated on the syntagmatic co-occurrence of lexical units. However, they do admit that assistance from grammar is still required.

### **2.3.2 The Semantic Trend**

The history of research on collocations, can be traced back as early as 300 B. C. Greek Stoic philosophers, as Robins (1967:21) maintained, had acknowledged collocations in the studies of lexical semantics. They opposed the notion of “one word, one meaning,” and highlighted the significant aspect of the study of the semantic structure of language: “word meanings do not exist in isolation, and they may differ according to the collocation in which they are used.” According to Lehrer (1974),

“In parallel to the lexical composition trend, the semantic trend explores collocations from the semantic point of view separately from the grammatical. The approach is an attempt to describe why words are combined with certain other words”.

Lehrer (1974) further says that the supporters of the semantic trend described the Neo-Firthians' approach to the study of collocations as inadequate as it failed to justify the arbitrariness of collocability. In other words, the lexical composition trend categorizes lexical units into sets based on their collocations; however, there is no justification as to why some lexical words collocate only with certain other lexical words. For instance, it is correct to say 'blond hair' but not 'blond car'. Decrarrico (2001), like other semanticists, regards the semantic properties of the lexical word as the key. As he says,

“The semanticists regard the semantic properties of the lexical word as the key or basis for deciding what words are combined with other words. For example, 'rancid' collocates with butter, lard, oil, and salad dressing since they all have the same semantic feature of 'oily' in common”.

On the other hand, some semanticists have different point of view. As Shehata (2008) criticizes,

“Nevertheless, this interpretation of the semantic approach (the view that lexical items collocate due to their semantic properties) created criticism for the semanticists since there are a number of collocations that are arbitrarily restricted. For instance, there is nothing in the meaning of drinker to explain why it collocates with heavy but not with strong or powerful”.

Katz and Fodor (1963), just like the Neo-Firthians, introduced a semantic theory that is also different from, but complementary to, grammar. The theory provides organized and generalized facts about the knowledge of meaning. As mentioned by Katz and Fodor (1963:173),

“Semantics takes over the explanation of the speaker's ability to produce and understand new sentences at the point where grammar leaves off.”

They acknowledge that a dictionary is one component of a semantic theory of a natural language. Using an English dictionary as a model, they present the semantic markers of some lexical entries. Each entry of a word, based on the theory, has to meet with a condition, referred to by the authors as

“selection restriction, “to allow the collocation with other words. For example, one ‘selection restriction’ of the lexical item ‘kill’ would require an object of the semantic feature ‘animate’ (Kim 2009).

However, there is one limitation of the semantic theory that it does not explain arbitrary collocations. To deal with this limitation, Cruse (1986) offered “collocation restrictions. “Three types of collocational restrictions (systematic, semi-systematic, and idiosyncratic) were described and distinguished based on whether, and to what extent, the semantic properties of a certain word predict a particular collocant. The lexical items ‘grill’ and ‘toast’ exemplify the systematic collocational restrictions. From the perspective of the agent, both verbs signify the same actions, yet, they are different. As ‘grill’ is used for raw items whereas ‘toast’ is normally reserved for cooked items. Semi-systematic collocational restrictions refer to a lexical item’s collocants that show certain semantic properties to predict a particular type of collocant, yet there are “exceptions to the general tendency” (Cruse 1989:281). For example, the word ‘customer’ means that you receive something material in exchange for money, while ‘client’ indicates that you obtain a technical service. Thus, bakers and newsagents have customers, but solicitors and advertising agencies, on the other hand, have clients. On the other hand, banks call the people using their services customers, not clients. Finally, idiosyncratic collocational restrictions denote the collocational ranges of some words that can only be described by listing their allowed collocants. For example, one can say ‘flawless/immaculate performance’ but not ‘unblemished or spotless performance’ (Cruse 1989). Despite Cruse’s effort to provide an explanation for the collocational restrictions, there are a great number of idiosyncratic collocations that are arbitrarily restricted. Such arbitrarily restricted collocations have created problems to semanticists as many have been left marginal or unexplained (Gitsaki 1999).

Gitsaki (1999) concludes his discussion with the following comments,

“To sum up, semanticists argue that the syntagmatic lexical relations should be examined under the area of semantics; nevertheless, they did not progress in the study of collocations, nor have they made the concept of collocation any more explicit”.

### **2.3.3 The Structural Trend**

We can refer to Hsu (2002) who believes that collocation is influenced by structure. That is what he says,

“The structural trend consists of studies that are centered on the belief that collocation is affected by structure and hence collocational knowledge should be examined by taking into account their syntactic features”. Hsu (2002)

Mitchell (1971:43), one of the advocates and the leading figure in this approach, criticized the Neo-Firthians for their separation of lexical study from grammar. In his claim for the "oneness of grammar, lexis and meaning," he contended that in order to determine the nature of collocation, linguists should consider grammar and lexis as one entity. Therefore, he proposed the notion of root to the study of collocations. According to Mitchell, the abstraction of a word form is called root, while word is the attachment of inflectional markings to the root. He claimed that collocations are of roots rather than of words and “are to be studied within grammatical matrices” (p. 65). For instance, Mitchell (1971) considered ‘drink’ as the root of the word ‘drinker’ and the conjunction of the roots ‘heav- and drink’ in the example ‘heavy drinker’ or ‘drink heavily’ as collocations. However, Gitsaki (1999) disagrees with Mitchell and argues,

“Nonetheless, Mitchell’s argument that collocations are roots rather than made of words can’t be generalized on every co-occurrence of roots. For instance, the collocation of the roots ‘faint’ and ‘praise’ is acceptable in ‘she was damned by faint praise’ but not in ‘he praised her faintly’.” Gitsaki (1999)

Greenbaum (1970:11) also emphasized the influence of structural patterns on collocation, as some examples of collocations demand grammatical information. He maintained that “a serious disadvantage of a purely item-oriented approach to the study of collocations is that it obscures syntactic restrictions on collocations.” To exemplify this, he used the word ‘much’, which collocates with the word ‘like’ in a negative sentence (e.g., I don’t like him much), but not in an affirmative sentence (e.g., I like him much). Greenbaum (1974) believes that without tying collocation to syntax, any two lexical items can collocate at a certain arbitrary distance. Thus, we can say: ‘his sincerity frightens us’, but not that ‘we frighten his sincerity’. This is because the acceptability of the collocation of the lexical items ‘sincerity’ and ‘frighten’ can only be determined by syntax. (Gitsaki 1999) remarks,

“Subsequently, the main achievement of the structural trend is the compiling of the BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English (Benson, Benson and Ilson 1986a), which is regarded as the first attempt to organize English collocations. The dictionary includes both lexical collocations (e.g., verb-noun, adjective-noun) and grammatical collocations (e.g., lexical item + preposition)” (Gitsaki 1999).

To sum up, we can say that the structural trend underlines the significance of both lexis and grammar in the examination of collocations

### **2.3.4 Recent Views on the Definition of Collocation**

Firth (1957) is known as the first scholar to introduce the term “collocation.” According to Firth (1968), “collocations of a given word are statements of habitual or customary places of that word” (p.181). He proposes that words obtain their meaning from their co-occurrence in texts. The subsequent research attempts to define and explain collocations more clearly and specifically. Cruse (1986) proposes that collocations are a “sequence of lexical items which habitually co-occur” (p.40). Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) point out that a collocation unit includes a “node” that co-occurs with a “span” of words on either side. They define collocations as “strings of specific lexical items, such as ‘rancid butter’ and ‘curry favor’ that co-occur with a mutual expectancy greater than chance” (p. 36). They regard lexical phrases, such as ‘how are you’, as collocations with pragmatic functions

### **Two Major Views about Collocations**

According to many linguists, there are two major views or approaches about collocations. In one view, collocation is defined as the combination of lexical items at a certain distance that differentiate between frequent and non-frequent collocations. This view is referred to as the “statistically oriented approach” or “frequency-based approach” (e.g., Sinclair 1991; Stubbs 1995; Moon 1998). In the other view, collocation is considered as a kind of word combination that is fixed to a certain degree, but not entirely. This view is called the “significance-oriented approach” or the “phraseological approach” (e.g., Cowie 1993; Hausmann 1989). The advocates of the first view (frequency-based approach), are often concerned with the “computational analysis of syntagmatic relations” (Nesselhauf 2005:12). However, researchers of the second view, usually work in the areas of lexicography or pedagogy.

## The BBI Dictionary of English Word Combinations

In The BBI Dictionary of English Word Combinations, Benson *et al.* (1997) gives the following explanation:

“In English, as in other languages, there are many fixed, identifiable, non-idiomatic phrases and constructions. Such groups of words are called recurrent combinations, fixed combinations or collocations”.

Benson *et al.* (1997) (p. ix)

**Collocations are combinations of words with a syntactic function as constituents of sentences, such as prepositional phrases (Howarth, 1998). Furthermore, Lewis (1993, 1997, & 2000) indicates collocations are the lexical items that co-occur naturally with deliberate frequency and usually are prefabricated.** Carter (1998) claims that a collocation is a group of words that recurrently appear in a language and “these patterns of co-occurrence can be grammatical in that they result primarily from syntactic dependencies or they can be lexical in that, although syntactic relationships are involved” (p. 51). Nation (2001), moreover, declares that collocations are “closely structured groups whose parts frequently or uniquely occur together. We would also expect collocations to contain some element of grammatical or lexical unpredictability or inflexibility” (p. 324).

## Nation's Ten Scales Classification of Collocations

The researchers are facing problems in the study of collocations as what should be classified as a collocation. In his research, Nation (2001) proposes ten scales for classifying ranges of collocability. Collocations are expected to be in the higher range in at least several of the scales. The ten scales include frequency of co-occurrence, adjacency, collocational specialization, grammatically connected, grammatically structured, grammatical uniqueness, grammatical fossilization, lexical fossilization, semantic opaqueness, and uniqueness of meaning. Nation's ten scales are related to three main linguistic areas: lexical, grammatical, and semantic aspects.

In the lexical perspective, the most obvious scale, as Nation claims, is “frequency of co-occurrence.” That is, collocations should appear recurrently in a corpus and the range of the scale is from “frequently occurring together” to “infrequently occurring together.” This is usually measured by computer-based frequency study. The second scale is “adjacency” which is when the individual words in collocations occur next to each other, such as ‘best regards’, or separated by variable words, such as



'little did x realize'. "Collocational specialization" indicates collocability of collocations. The range of the scale is from "always mutually co-occurring" to "all occurring in a range of collocations" with "one bound item" in the middle (p. 331).

In the grammatical aspect, "Grammatically connected" means that there is a grammatical connection between collocates. The scale ranges from "grammatically connected" to "grammatically unconnected." "Grammatically structured" indicates collocations which are grammatically restricted sequences of words with syntactic nature. The scale ranges from "well structured" to "loosely related." "Grammatical fossilization" is when collocates do not allow any change in word, or allow only very small changes. The range is from "no grammatical variation" to "changes in part of speech," with "inflectional change" in the middle.

In semantic perspective, "Lexical fossilization" means the degree of fixedness of the lexical units. The range of the scale is from "unchangeable" to "allowing substitution in all parts" with "allowing substitution in one part" in the middle. "Semantic opaqueness" is when the meaning of collocations cannot be predicted from the meaning of the parts. The scale ranges from "semantically opaque" to "semantically transparent." "Uniqueness of meaning" means some collocations have only one meaning while some may have more than one meaning. The scale ranges from "only one meaning" to "several meanings" with "related meanings" as the mid-point.

### **Benson's Classification of Collocations**

The lexicographer, Benson (1985), classifies collocations into two main types: lexical collocations and grammatical collocations. A grammatical collocation is a recurrent combination of a dominant word (verb, noun, adjective) and a grammatical word (preposition), such as 'attach to' (verb and preposition), 'anxious about' (adjective and preposition), and a 'choice between' (noun and preposition).

However, in spite of the confusion and inconsistency in defining the concept of collocation, a general consensus exists among scholars of the main characteristics of collocations; that is, the strong tendency of two or more lexical items to co-occur in a particular context (Zhang 1993; Gitsaki 1999; Hsu 2002; Sung 2003).

Nevertheless, the above definition of collocations does not provide a reliable criterion of what constitutes a collocation. For instance, it most likely includes idioms as a part of collocations. Consequently, the issue of whether collocations should be separated from idioms has been argued among researchers. Thus, in an attempt to provide a clear picture on the definition of collocation, I

believe it is necessary to shed more light on the distinction between collocations, idioms, and free word combinations.

## **2.4 Collocations, Idioms, and Free Word Combinations**

Various views of linguists are presented in this section. If word combinations can form a continuum with idioms at one end and free word combinations at the other end, collocations are most likely to be placed in the middle (Gitsaki 1999; Hsu 2002). Idioms are described as relatively frozen expressions; they are fixed in structure, their meanings cannot be derived compositionally or retained from the meaning of their component words, and the lexical components cannot be substituted with synonyms (Bentivogli & Pianta 2003). For example, one can say 'kick the bucket' (to die) but not 'kick the pail' or 'boot the bucket'. Also, in the previous example, there is no actual bucket to kick. Free word combinations, on the other hand, are a combination of lexical items that abide by the general rules of syntax, and the lexical components are not bound to each other; they can be freely replaced with other words (Benson et al. 1986). The verb 'write', for instance, can freely collocate with a letter, a book, an essay, and so on.

Hsu (2002) says that collocations appear somewhere in the middle between the two boundaries because they "combine together the syntagmatic restrictions of idioms and the semantic transparency of free combinations" (Hsu 2002:18). Collocations are a sequence of lexical items that habitually combine with one another and whose meanings can be built compositionally. They usually allow a limited degree of substitution of their lexical components (e.g., 'do your best' and 'try your best' but 'not perform your best') (Bentivogli & Pianta 2003). The view of placing collocations in the middle part of the scale has been largely accepted by many scholars of lexical units (Nattinger and DeCarrio 1992; Howarth 1996; Gitsaki 1999; Lewis 2000). Nattinger and DeCarrio (1992), for instance, view the development of collocations akin to a lifecycle: a collocation starts as a free combination and once it is used habitually, it becomes more fixed until it is called an idiom.

Cowie and Howarth give a clear illustration for the continuum of word combinations, Cowie and Howarth (1995, cited in Schmitt 2000) propose a four-level scale of collocational complexity. At level one, idioms (e.g., 'bite the dust' or 'shoot the breeze') are considered as frozen collocations allowing no variation or insertion of words, and hence, are the least complex. As the scale moves down, variation and complexity increase. For example, invariable collocations such as 'break a journey' or from head to foot are at level two while collocations with limited choice at one point (e.g., give/allow/permit access to) and collocations with limited choice at two point (e.g., dark/black as night/coal/ink) are at level three and four respectively. Overall, many researchers have pointed out that

it is not a simple matter to differentiate between idioms and collocations as they overlap with each other. In spite of this, they agreed that separating idioms from collocations produce less useful results (Hsu 2002).

#### 2.4.1 Lexical and Grammatical Collocations

Benson, Benson, and Ilson (1986) categorized English collocations into two classes: lexical collocations and grammatical collocations (with 7 and 8 types respectively). Lexical collocations consist of merely content words such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs with an inclusion of prepositions, infinitives, or clauses (**Table 1**). While Grammatical collocations (**Table 2**), on the other hand, comprise of the main word: a noun, an adjective, or a verb plus a preposition (e.g., reason for, pick on, afraid of, so on).

**Table 1: Types of Lexical Collocations**

| Pattern            | Example(s)                           |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Verb + noun        | compose music/dispel fear            |
| Adjective + noun   | reckless abandon/warmest regards     |
| Verb + adverb      | appreciate sincerely/affect deeply   |
| Noun + verb        | alarms go off/blood circulates       |
| Noun + noun        | a herd of buffalo/an act of violence |
| Adverb + adjective | strictly accurate /keenly aware      |

A table of grammatical collocations (alongside 37 patterns) categorized based on their study follows:

**Table 2: Types of Grammatical Collocations**

| Pattern                           | Example(s)                        |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| V + N/P (or prepositional phrase) | Compose music; set an alarm       |
| V + N                             | Walk heavily; argue heatedly      |
| V + N                             | Make a decision; take place/part  |
| Adj + V                           | Strong/weak tea                   |
| N + V                             | Bombs explode; alarms go off      |
| N1 + of + N2                      | A pride of lions; a bunch of keys |
| Adv + Adj                         | Quite safe; deeply absorbed       |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| N + Prep  | Ability in/at; kind of; changes in  |
| N + to + Inf  | An attempt to do it; years to come  |
| N + that-clause   | He took an oath that he would do his duty.<br>We reach an agreement that ...; fact that |
| Prep + N  | On purpose; in fact   |
| Adj + Prep  | tired of; bored with; angry with/at   |
| Adj + to + Inf  | ready to go; easy to learn; likely to be  |
| Adj + that-clause   | She was afraid that she would fail the exam;<br>he was delighted that ...               |
| V + Prep  | I believe in ...  |
| V + direct O + to<br>indirect O = V +<br>indirect O + direct O    | She sent the book to him. = She sent him the<br>book.                                   |
| V + direct O + to +<br>indirect O (no<br>movement for dative)     | They mentioned the book to her.   |
| V + direct O + for +<br>indirect O = V +<br>indirect O + direct O | She bought a shirt for her husband. =She<br>bought her husband a shirt.                 |
| V + Prep + O  | They came by train;   |
| V + O + Prep + O  | We invited them to the meeting.   |
| V + to Inf  | She continued to write.   |
| V + bare inf  | Mary had better go.   |
| V + V-ing   | They enjoy watching TV.   |
| V + O + to inf  | We forced them to leave.  |
| V + O + bare Inf  | She heard them leave.   |
| V + O + V-ing   | He felt his heart beating.  |
| V + a possessive and<br>V-ing                                     | I cannot imagine their stealing apples.   |
| V + that clause (rather<br>uncommon)                              | The doctor suggests me that I take vitamins.  |

|                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| V + O + to be + C                | We consider her to be well-trained.  |
| V + O + C                        | She dyed her hair red.   |
| V (+ O1) + O2                    | The teachers asked (the students) questions.<br>It took/cost (us) ten minutes/cents. |
| V + O + Adverbial                | You carry yourself well [/like a soldier].   |
| V (+O) + wh-<br>clause/wh-phrase | She asked (us) why we had come.  |
| It + V + O + to Inf              | It surprised me to learn of her decision.  |
| It + V + O + that-clause         | It surprised me that our offer was rejected.   |
| V + C (Adj or N)                 | He was a teacher.  |
| V + C (Adj)                      | The food tastes good.  |

(N.B:- Based on the categorization provided by Benson, Benson, and Ilson (1986))

## 2.5 The Role of Collocations in L1 and L2 Acquisition

The role of collocations in L1 and L2 acquisition has been acknowledged by a large number of linguists. According to Bloom (1973, cited in Miyakoshi 2009), young children acquiring their first language produce unanalyzed chunks that an adult would recognize as multi-morphemic, such as ‘lemme-see’, ‘I-wanna- do-it’. This phenomenon questions the validity of the general assumption that most children start producing only one word at a time.

Wray (2002) highlighted the role of collocations in the process of first-language acquisition. He describes several essential roles of collocation in learning a first language. By using collocations, young children supplement gestures and other nonlinguistic behaviors when conveying salient messages prior to the development of their rule-governed language. Thus, children store and use complex strings before developing their grammatical knowledge. For example, a child may produce the string ‘what’s-that?’ before knowing the internal makeup of wh-questions. Another role that their use of collocations can play is to “reduce the child’s processing load once novel construction is possible” (p. 128). This allows the child to maintain fluency while obtaining control of processing.

Peters (1983) also underlined important role of collocations in the acquisition and use of a first language. In her study, Peters reveals that young children adopt both a gestalt (holistic) and an analytic (inferential) approach to acquiring a language. Children begin by extracting speech formulas from adults and then store and later reuse them creatively as both analyzed or segmented units and unanalyzed or whole chunks. In the field of second language acquisition, children seem to have many

advantages over adults with regard to the acquisition of collocations. Leaving aside the biological factor, children interact with other children who are very lenient to incomprehension. Additionally, an adult, unlike a child, avoids the shock of being a non-speaker of the new language by choosing not to communicate with other peers (Wray 2002). Such advantages facilitate the second language acquisition process in general, and assist children to sound native and idiomatic in their use of formulaic expressions in particular.

In order to uphold the above-mentioned view, Fillmore (1979, cited in Al-Zahrani 1998), for example, examined the acquisition of formulaic speech of five Spanish-speaking learners of English paired with their counterparts (English-speaking children) for one year. The findings of her study reveal striking similarities in the use of formulaic sequences between the two groups. She explains that her subjects began by learning the formulaic expressions as unanalyzed or whole chunks, and later, after gaining confidence in their use, they start segmenting them into individual units. She comments:

“Once in the learner’s speech repertory, they become familiar, and therefore could be compared with other utterances in the repertory as well as those produced by the speaker. Their function in language learning process, is not only social, but cognitive too, since they provide the data on which the children were to perform their analytical activities in figuring out the structure of the language.”

On the other hand, Post-childhood L2 acquisition is viewed from a different point of view. According to Wray (2002), adult second language learners reveal themselves by not knowing the grammatically possible ways of conveying a message that sounds idiomatic for native speakers. The reason, he says, is that an adult language learner starts with individual units and then builds them up, whereas a first language learner begins with large and complex units and never segments them unless it is necessary. As he comments,

“Phrases and clauses may be what learners encounter in their input material, but what they notice and deal with are words and how they can be glued together” (p. 206).

As a result, a classroom learner aims for individual words and disregards what other words they may be combined with. For instance, when native speakers encounter the collocation ‘major catastrophe’ it would be stored as a sequence without the need to analyze or segment its units. Thus, native speakers would know that the right way to express a big or terrible disaster is to say major catastrophe. On the other hand, adult second-language learners would segment the string ‘major catastrophe’ into two words meaning ‘big’ and ‘disaster’ and then store them individually, without realizing that this combination goes together. Therefore, when the time comes to talk about the same idea again, they will start looking for any pairing that conveys the same meaning as major (e.g., big, large, important) and catastrophe (e.g., disaster, calamity, mishap), which may or may not sound like native speech (Wray 2002).

On the other hand, formulaic language still plays a fundamental role in the field of L2 acquisition. Ellis (1984c, cited in Al-Zahrani 1998) indicates that wholes or chunks can form an entire script of L2 performance such as with the greeting sequences. In his study, Ellis points out that three ESL learners employed some sort of formula as a communication strategy (e.g., ‘how do you do?’ ‘I wanna’, ‘I can’t speak English’). He determined that formulas are common in both classroom and naturalistic settings and are utilized by L2 learners to decrease the learning burden, while increasing the communicative demands. Although collocations were not the focus of this study, but rather were included under the umbrella of formulas, this does not undervalue the importance of collocations. We can wrap up discussion by saying that results in the area of L1 and L2 acquisition have drew attention to the role of collocations in language acquisition.

## **2.6 The Benefits of Learning Collocations for ESL/EFL Learners**

The benefits and value of learning collocations for the development of L2 vocabulary and communicative competence has been emphasized by a number researchers. For instance, improving language performance (Brown 1974; Nattinger 1980; 1988); the development of L2 vocabulary (Laufer 1988, Aghbar 1990); improving communicative competence (Yorio 1980; Channell 1981; Cowie 1988; Lewis 2000); and developing language fluency towards the level of a native speaker (Fillmore 1979; Howarth 1998; Nation 2001).

In an early study, Brown (1974) supported the importance of collocations in L2 learning and their incorporation in the ESL/EFL classroom. He underscored that increasing students’ knowledge of collocation helps improve oral proficiency, listening comprehension, and reading speed and that teaching collocations enables learners to be aware of language chunks used by native speakers in their speech and writing. According to Brown,

“Collocations, along with context and concept, should be incorporated when introducing new words to advanced learners because of their vital importance in language learning.”

Nattinger (1980) believes that language production comprises,

“piercing together the ready-made units appropriate for particular situations and that comprehension relies on knowing which of these patterns to predict in these situations” (p. 341).

In addition, Nattinger (1988) asserts that collocations are helpful in improving comprehension for the word combinations that aid learners in committing words to memory, as well as allowing learners to predict what kind of lexical items could occur together. Collocations are also useful for teaching language production because ESL/EFL learners will subconsciously notice certain lexical restrictions while memorizing collocations.

Alexander (1984) asserts that the learning process may benefit from the three C's of vocabulary learning: collocation, context and connotation. Collocations and context have a strong connection and both are important in developing reading comprehension, for “every useful collocation is another step towards understanding the concept of a word”.

Regarding the development of L2 vocabulary, Laufer (1988) comments that the evident “rulelessness” of collocations is one issue that obstructs L2 vocabulary learning. She asserts that collocations play a key role in the vocabulary knowledge of learners. Although L2 learners face difficulties in the use of word combinations, collocations, as suggested by Laufer, can aid in many levels of vocabulary development. Collocations can also aid the development of self-learning strategies, such as guessing. For instance, when hearing the word ‘intense’, speakers are aware that it is combined with either pressure, heat, light, or feeling. They are also aware that the word ‘convenient’ is not usually combined with people. Thus, a sentence like ‘I’m not feeling convenient today’ is considered unacceptable.

In subsequent research, Aghbar (1990:5) points out in his study that the reason ESL/EFL learners perform poorly in the test of formulaic expressions is not due to a lack of vocabulary knowledge, but rather to insufficient learning of language chunks. According to psychological studies, over learning is important to successful retention of material and execution of tasks. Aghbar also believes the role of



over learning as an important aspect in the acquisition and learning of formulaic expressions, in which he includes idioms, proverbs, sayings, and collocations. He remarks,

“Although the construction of such chunks by and large follows the lexical and grammatical rules of English, we recognize them as formulaic only because we have a previous memory of them.” (p.5)

A large number of researchers and language instructors have supported the importance of collocations in language development and teaching. Yorio (1980) claims that conventionalized language forms, including collocations, “make communication more orderly because they are regulatory in nature” (p.438). Similarly, Channell (1981) asserts that increasing learners’ awareness and knowledge of collocations is a very effective way of heightening their communicative competence. Besides, Cowie (1988) maintains that lexical phrases and collocations serve communicative needs and allow learners to reuse and produce the institutionalized units. Cowie (1992) found that a large number of familiar and stable collocations appear in newspaper writing and emphasized essential receptive as well as productive language competence. Moreover Lewis (2000) affirms that learning chunks or strings of words aid language learners in improving their communicative competencies better than merely learning words in isolation.

So far as enhancing language fluency is concerned, Fillmore (1979) considers fluency as a generic term that includes all characteristics of a speaker’s competence and performance in a language. As maintained by Fillmore, one main constituent of fluency is the knowledge of fixed expressions of which collocations are part. Also, Howarth (1998) suggests that collocations play an essential role in the learning of L2 and assist ESL/EFL learners towards speaking more like native speakers. Similarly, Nation (2001) asserts that collocational knowledge is significant in enhancing fluency: “all fluent and appropriate language use requires collocational knowledge” (p. 318).

In the book ‘Teaching Collocation: Further Developments in the Lexical Approach’, language teachers (Conzett, 2000; Hill, 2000; Lewis, 2000; Woolard, 2000) state the value of collocations and provide practical and useful ways of teaching collocations. As Ellis (2001) argues, ‘collocational knowledge is the essence of language knowledge’. ESL/EFL educators also suggest teaching collocations through reading. Ooi and Kim-Seoh (1996), in their research, pointed out that students have inadequate knowledge of correct collocations, and suggest that teachers can teach collocations through reading to complement insufficiency of lexical competence. Conzett (2000) asserts her

frustration about the fact that students in her reading and writing classes often use their new vocabulary in the wrong way when they move from receptive to productive language. She asserts that teaching collocations can complement the deficiency of vocabulary instruction in reading and writing. Training students to observe and note collocations in reading will gradually shift students' focus away from individual words to chunks of language.

As it is evident from the above-mentioned studies, researchers emphasized the benefits of collocation instruction in improving not only learners' lexical competence but also their grammatical proficiency. Hunston and Francis (1998) specifies that syntax and lexis are completely interdependent and "pattern and meaning are strongly associated" (p.11). Single item vocabulary instruction will only focus on the development of lexical knowledge, but collocational instruction will involve the growth of syntactic knowledge. Syntactic knowledge and lexical knowledge cannot be separated; rather learners acquire syntactic information through the lexicon (Gass, 1999; Paribakht & Wesche, 1999). Taylor (1983) also proposes various reasons for studying words in collocations. He claims that words naturally associated in text are learned more easily than those not so associated, and that vocabulary is best learned in context. Furthermore, he declares that context alone is insufficient without deliberate association, and that vocabulary is a distinct feature of language which needs to be developed alongside a developing grammatical competence.

To summarize, collocations are important and unique, and indeed not only improve learners' language competence (both perception and production) but also help learners approach native fluency.

## **2.7 Review of Empirical Studies on Collocations**

Review of empirical studies on collocations can be discussed in two sections:

1. Review of Empirical Studies on Collocations in General
2. Review of Empirical Studies on Arabic-speaking Learners of English

### **1. Review of Empirical Studies on Collocations in General**

Even though research on collocations and their role in the development of L1 and L2 acquisition has long been acknowledged, it is only in recent years that empirical research on ESL/EFL learners' collocational knowledge has been specifically conducted. Empirical studies on collocations have basically focused on four aspects: measuring collocational knowledge, development of collocational knowledge, pedagogical aspects on collocations, and types of collocational errors.

In their research article, Prof Hassan El-Banna and Dr. Mohamed A Al-Khayri have cited the following 'Table 2' which represents an overview of some empirical studies that examined the previous features.

**Table 2: Summary of Empirical Studies in Terms of Collocational Knowledge**

| Source                   | Participants   | Instrument  | Results   |
|--------------------------|--|---|---|
| Channell (1981)          | 8 EFL students   | Collocational grid  | EFL learners have insufficient knowledge of collocations.   |
| Elkhatib (1984)          | 4 undergraduate Egyptian ESL learners  | Writing samples   | Unfamiliarity with collocations is one of the major lexical errors.   |
| Aghbar (1990)            | 27 faculty members teaching college-level English courses, 44 native undergraduates and 97 advanced ESL students | Cloze test  | ESL students performed poorly on the collocational test, while the faculty members produced the most appropriate responses.   |
| Hussein (1990)           | 200 third- and fourth-year undergraduates majoring in English  | Multiple choice test  | Participants' level of performance on the receptive test was unsatisfactory.  |
| Biskup (1992)            | 28 German and 34 Polish speaking advanced learners of English  | Translation task from English into German and Polish respectively | Polish students relied on accuracy rather than guessing. German students used different strategies to surmise the meaning of the target collocations. L1 transfer has a strong influence on the two groups' production of collocations. |
| Farghal & Obiedat (1995) | 57 Jordanian advanced EFL students   | Fill in the blank test and an Arabic-English                      | Participants were deficient in producing acceptable collocations during the two tests. Four strategies of lexical simplification translation task were adopted: synonyms,   |

|                   |   |  |  |
|-------------------|---|--|--|
|                   |   |  | avoidance, transfer, and paraphrasing.   |
| Gitsaki<br>(1996) | 275 Greek learners<br>of ESL (junior high<br>school students)   | Cloze test,<br>essay writing<br>task, and a<br>Greek/English<br>translation test                                 | A significant difference was found in<br>the production of collocations<br>between and within the three groups.<br>Grammatical collocations are easier<br>to acquire than lexical collocations.<br>Verb-noun collocations (creation)<br>were the most difficult for all<br>subjects.                 |
| Howarth<br>(1998) | 10 non-native<br>graduate students  | Writing samples  | The production of collocations in an<br>overlapping cluster was the most<br>common type of collocational error<br>among participants.  |
| Hsu (2002)        | 9 Taiwanese<br>participants<br>majoring in English<br>(7) and Banking &<br>Finance (2)                      | Writing<br>samples, the<br>teacher's class<br>notes, pre-test<br>and post-test,<br>and videotapes                | Direct emphasis on lexical<br>collocations helped students learn<br>new collocations. Slightly positive<br>relationship between learners' use of<br>lexical collocations and their overall<br>language proficiency.  |
| Al-Amro<br>(2006) | 51 Saudi advanced<br>English students   | A cloze test, a<br>multiple choice<br>test, and an<br>essay writing<br>task                                      | There was a lack of collocational<br>knowledge among participants. There<br>is a relationship between EFL<br>learners' receptive and productive<br>knowledge of collocations. There is<br>no significant correlation between the<br>subjects' overall knowledge of<br>collocations and actual usage. |
| Shehata<br>(2008) | 35 ESL Arabic-<br>speaking learners of<br>English and 62<br>Egyptian<br>participants<br>majoring in English | a self-report<br>questionnaire,<br>two blank-<br>filling tests, an<br>appropriateness<br>judgment test,<br>and a | Significant differences between the<br>ESL and the EFL participants on both<br>their productive and receptive<br>collocational knowledge. L1<br>interference had a strong effect on the<br>participants' collocational<br>knowledge. Participants did better in                                      |

|  |  |                                |  |
|--|--|--------------------------------|--|
|  |  | vocabulary<br>recognition test | the verb-noun test than in the<br>adjective-noun test. |
|--|--|--------------------------------|--|

Among the earliest researchers, Channell (1981) was the first to study on overall knowledge of collocations by using “collocational grid”. In Channell’s study, a group of eight EFL learners with advanced-level proficiency were asked to fill in a collocational grid. The grid consisted of four adjectives as its vertical axis and fifteen nouns as its horizontal axis. The findings revealed the learners’ inability to produce a significant number of acceptable collocations: only 111 (40%) out of 272 collocations were marked as acceptable. Channell comments,

“It is essential to present a good number of typical collocations at the moment a word is first acquired. This is particularly true for students who have little access to native speakers with whom they can ‘try out’ the collocational possibilities of new words they learn” (p. 120).

She concludes that a collocational grid, which can be a useful aid in strengthening vocabulary knowledge, is of vital importance to encourage learners.

After Channell, Aghbar (1990) conducted an experiment to test participants’ command of collocations, by using a “cloze test”. The test consisted of 50 sentences in which a verb was missing in each sentence, and a noun was supplied. The study compared the performance of three groups (27 faculty members teaching college-level English courses, 44 native undergraduate students, and 97 advanced ESL learners at Indiana University of Pennsylvania) in accurately combining the target verb-noun pairs in formal contexts. The results showed that native speakers with higher English proficiency (faculty members) produced more appropriate answers than native speakers with lower English proficiency and nonnative speakers. Furthermore, ESL learners produced the lowest number of expected word combinations. Aghbar found that ESL learners tried to use “get” in place of other desirable verbs. For instance, ‘get independence’ rather than ‘gain/achieve independence’. He reached the conclusion that

“ESL learners’ poor performance on the test was not due to their insufficient vocabulary acquisition but rather to the “lack of acquisition of those language chunks that make discourse fluent and idiomatic” (p. 6).

So far as the research on 'pedagogical aspects of collocations' is concerned, some researchers have tried to give ESL/EFL teachers pragmatic advice. Cowie (1992) was one of them. He conducted a comparative study to investigate verb-noun collocations learning in a single news item and an editorial written on the same subject. He knew that news items often use well-established collocations while editorials may use many unexpected word associations. Cowie recommends that the teaching of ready-made units at a basic level of communication is as important as lexical innovation, which many scholars may tend to recommend too early.

Biskup (1992) conducted an empirical study to examine the types of collocational errors that are most common, or may occur frequently among learners. In order to know whether L1 has an impact on L2 learners' comprehension and production of collocations, he conducted a comparative study, in which he examined 28 German- and 34 Polish-speaking advanced learners of English. Participants were asked to translate English lexical collocations (verb-noun) into German and Polish respectively. The results revealed that Polish students relied on accuracy rather than guessing. German students used different strategies to guess the meaning of the target collocations. In other words, they translated only the target collocations they were sure of. On the other hand, the German group used different strategies to guess the meaning of the target collocations. The researcher explained that this result can be attributed to the influence of the educational systems in Poland and Germany. The Polish educational system insists on accuracy, while the German educational system emphasizes fluency and communication. Biskup concluded that L1 transfer has a strong influence on the two groups' production of collocations.

Gitsaki's study (1996) claims that there seems to be a developmental process that L2 learners follow in the acquisition of collocations, which can be analyzed. She examined 275 Greek learners of ESL (junior high school students) at three different proficiency levels (post-beginner, intermediate, and post-intermediate), using three measurements: essay writing, a Greek-English translation test, and a cloze test. Thirty-seven collocation types, in the BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English, were adopted. The essay-writing task, in which participants were asked to write approximately 200 words on a given topic, was designed to elicit free production of collocations, whereas the translation task (consisting of 10 sentences in Greek for each of the three groups) and the cloze test were intended to measure the cued production of collocations. Gitsaki pointed out that the target collocations used in both the translation and the cloze tests were chosen from students' textbooks and are nonequivalent to their mother tongue. She found an important difference in the production of collocations between and within the three groups. Grammatical collocations were easier to acquire than lexical collocations.

Verb-noun collocations (creation) were the most difficult for all subjects. Gitsaki explains that this is due to the arbitrariness and unpredictability of such collocations that makes it difficult for L2 learners to cope with them. Finally, Gitsaki concluded that as language proficiency develops, collocational knowledge expands steadily.

Howarth (1998) studied written academic performance in English. He analyzed a set of 10 essays written by 10 non-native graduate students as coursework for an MA in applied linguistics in the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom. He pointed out that the majority of non-native speakers' (NNS) errors were the production of collocations in an "overlapping cluster," a cluster of collocations that could be "predicted by analogy, but are arbitrarily blocked by usage" (p. 37). For example, non-native speakers are more likely to say 'adopt a policy' but not 'take a policy', 'make an attempt' but not 'do an attempt'. Furthermore, Howarth noted that although such collocational errors are recognizable to many EFL teachers, it still provides them with the hardest task in terms of description and explanation. Howarth writes:

"While they are not fully lexicalized, they are quite institutionalized, and therefore form part of the stock of complexes that help to mark a piece of writing as natural and proficient. It appears that the ability to manipulate such clusters is a sign of true native speaker competence and is a useful indicator for the establishment of degrees of proficiency across the boundary between non-native and native competence." (p. 38)

Hsu (2002) was one of the latest researchers who carried out a qualitative study which examined whether the teaching of lexical collocations would improve the development of Taiwanese EFL learners' collocational proficiency in a one-month, intensive, business English workshop. The data were collected from nine Taiwanese participants majoring in English (7) and banking and finance (2). The qualitative research methods used in the study include subjects' writings, the teacher's class notes, a pre-test and post-test, and videotaping of subjects' interviews, presentations, and classroom activities. The results showed that direct emphasis on lexical collocations, in both spoken and written discourses, could help students learn new collocations. Moreover, Hsu found that there are some possible factors affecting students' ability to learn collocations. These factors include frequency of collocations, degree of idiomaticity, differences of L1/L2, teacher's instruction, and language experience acquired outside

the classroom. He concluded that it is necessary to include the teaching of collocations in the ESL/EFL classroom because it helps learners develop collocational competence.

To sum up, this review of empirical studies shows that collocations play a crucial role in the development of ESL/EFL learners' language perception and production as they have confirmed the poor and deficient knowledge of the collocations of L2 learners at different levels of proficiency. Hence, ESL/EFL language instructors and curriculum designers should pay heed to collocations to facilitate language learning and also to bring about fruitful results of teaching.

## **2. Review of Empirical Studies on Arabic-speaking Learners of English**

A large number of researchers have conducted their research on Arab learners studying English in ESL/EFL settings (e.g., Elkhatib 1984, Hussein 1990; Farghal & Obiedant 1995; Al-Zahrani 1998; Zughoul & Abdul-Fattah 2003; Mahmoud 2005; Al-Amro 2006, and Shehata 2008). An appraisal of some of these researchers' studies is given below:

Elkhatib (1984) investigated the lexical errors of Arab ESL learners. He analyzed the writing samples of four undergraduate Egyptian ESL students with the objective of classifying lexical problems, identifying the causes of the problems, and verifying whether learners were used to the material of the language. The analysis showed eight major lexical errors, including an unfamiliarity of collocations. Elkhatib concluded that despite knowing the basic meaning of words, the students could not produce acceptable collocations. This lack of collocational knowledge caused the students to compose incorrect collocations such as 'shooting stones', 'the aircrafts can remove us to many countries', 'beautiful noise', and 'do progress'. Elkhatib recommended that in order to help overcome collocational problems, students should be given new words along with their most typical collocations in the form of collocational grids.

Hussein (1990), in his research, administered a 40-item multiple-choice test to evaluate the students' receptive collocational knowledge. The sample consisted of 200 third and fourth-year undergraduate students majoring in English at Yarmouk University in Jordan. Each item in the test included four choices. The majority of the collocations used in the test were verb-noun, adjective-noun, and noun-noun. The result showed that the students' overall level of performance on the receptive test were unsatisfactory. Only (48.4%) of the collocations were answered correctly, which was far below the initial set rate (60%). Hussein suggested that the students' low achievement on the test was due to some general factors. For example, negligence of the lexicon, including collocations, in the teaching of English as a foreign language, insufficient reading habits, and reduction and simplification, which seem to be characteristics of the teaching components of a foreign language. Other factors related



directly to the test are: L1 negative transfer (e.g., 'death number' in place of 'death toll'), overgeneralization (i.e. the use of generic terms rather than specific, e.g., 'pipe water' in place of 'tap water'), and the unfamiliarity with idiom structure (e.g., 'primary voyage' in place of 'maiden voyage').

Farghal and Obiedant (1995) explored the issue of collocations as a neglected variable in EFL classroom. In their study, they examined the lexical collocational knowledge of 57 Jordanian advanced EFL learners. Two test instruments were used in the study: a fill-in-the-blank test and an Arabic-English translation task. A total of 22 common English collocations (adjective-noun collocations) related to topics such as clothes, weather, and food were used in both tests. The blank-filling test included 11 sentences testing collocation pairs. Moreover, the translation task, which is an Arabic version of the blank-filling test, consisted of translating the given collocations from Arabic to English. The blank-filling test was administered to 34 English majors at Yarmouk University, and the translation task was administered to 23 English majors at the Higher College for the Certification of Teachers. They found that both groups were unaware of the fundamental existence of collocations as multi-word units because they are taught vocabulary as single-word units. They concluded that the participants were deficient in producing acceptable collocations during the two tests. The students adopted the following four strategies of lexical simplification: synonyms, avoidance, transfer, and paraphrasing. These researchers suggested the following implications:

First, the open choice principle or word-for-word combinations should be presented early, alongside the pre-constructed multi-word combinations or the idiom principle in EFL classrooms. Second, not only should the inclusion of collocations in the foreign language curricula be singled out, but pedagogic dictionaries of collocations should be compiled as well. Lastly, foreign language instructors should be qualified in teaching prefabricated speech in general and collocations in particular.

Al-Amro (2006) assessed the lexical and grammatical collocations of Saudi learners as well as their receptive and productive collocational knowledge. The data was drawn from 51 Saudi advanced English learners at the Institute of Public Administration in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The subjects' collocational knowledge was measured by a C-test, a multiple choice test, and an essay writing task. The C-test consisted of 34 productive items (verb-noun and verb-preposition collocations) in which the initial letter of the target collocations is provided to reduce the possibility of guessing, whereas the multiple choice test included 16 receptive items (figurative-use of verb phrases) where the subjects had to select from four alternatives for the underlined verb that sounds strange or miscollocated.

He found that there was a lack of collocational knowledge among the subjects as manifested by their poor performance on the collocational test. The data also revealed that there is a relationship between the learners' receptive and productive knowledge of collocations. Al-Amro concluded that the collocational knowledge from the collocational test did not correlate to the use of collocations in the essay writing task. He emphasized that the EFL learners' lack of collocational use is the direct result of the neglect of the lexical approach in the foreign language teaching and learning environment.

Shehata (2008) observed the L1 influence on the productive and receptive knowledge of collocations by advanced Arabic-speaking English students. The researcher recruited 97 participants who were divided into two groups, ESL and EFL. The participants in the ESL group included 35 Arabic-speaking English students at Ohio University who had TOEFL scores ranging from 567 to 620; whereas, the EFL group consisted of 62 Egyptian participants majoring in English at an Egyptian university whose English proficiency levels were advanced. The search of the study consisted of five instruments: a self-report questionnaire, two fill-in-the-blank productive tests, an appropriateness judgment receptive test, and a vocabulary recognition test. The receptive test consisted of 50 items that included the 32 target collocations in the productive tests plus 18 mismatched collocations that served as distracters. The participants' familiarity with collocational components was checked using the vocabulary recognition test which consisted of individual words.

She found important differences between the ESL and the EFL participants on both their productive and receptive collocational knowledge. The results also showed that L1 interference had a strong effect on the participants' collocational knowledge. On the whole, Arabic-speaking male learners have poor knowledge of collocations. This can be attributed to the influence of the learning environment. Moreover, language instructors should pay more attention to the teaching of collocations that do not have a translation equivalent in L1. She concluded that English textbooks should include a bilingual glossary of collocations to help learners to become more familiar with the similarities and differences between L1 and L2.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

Summing up, this section, "Literature Review", provided a debate on vocabulary learning, word knowledge, and the core subject collocations. Above all, it reviewed the various definitions of collocations anticipated by linguists and recommended a practical definition with the purpose of distinguishing collocations from other multi-word units. Moreover, this section appraised the acquisition of collocations in L1 and L2 as well as the significance of collocations in L2 learning and teaching. It also concluded with an investigation of some empirical research on the knowledge of

collocations relevant to the research study that is “The Importance of Teaching Collocations in the Development of Kuwaiti ESL/EFL Learners’ Reading Comprehension”.

### **III. Research Methodology**

This section presents an explanation of the settings in which the study took place, the subjects who participated in the study, the instruments used, the method, the data scoring procedures, the research question and hypothesis, and finally results of the research.

#### **3.1 Setting**

The setting of this pragmatic research was English Language Unit (ELU) Kuwait University. Kuwait University (KU) was established in October, 1966 under Act N. 29/1966. The university was officially inaugurated on 27<sup>th</sup> November, 1966 to include the College of Science, the College of Arts, the College of Education, and the College for Women. The university is the state’s first public institution of higher education and research. It comprises 17 colleges offering 76 undergraduate, 71 graduate programs. The university has seen its enrollment growth from about 418 to 40,000 students, faculty from 31 to 1,565, colleges from 4 to 17, and administrative and academic support personnel from 200 to more than 5,000. Kuwait University has more than 100,000 alumni serving the country and the region and some have attained prominent positions. Kuwait University follows the Credit Hour System (approved hours), with teaching arranged on semester basis, except in the Faculty of Law, which follows the yearly system of continuous teaching, and the Health Sciences Center’s faculties.

Admission requirements may require students to take an aptitude test prior to being accepted to a faculty; in such instances, admission is determined using the equivalent average system (combining the student’s high school grade point average (GPA) with the results of the aptitude test) as a prerequisite for admission to the College of Engineering and Petroleum, Allied Health Sciences, Administrative Sciences, Health Science Center, Life Sciences, and Computing Science and Engineering, or through personalized interviews, as determined by the College of Law, and the College of Education.

The major task of English Language Unit (ELU) is to train the Kuwaiti youth to meet modern requirements in the job market. Upon entering into Kuwait University, students must successfully pass a one-year intensive English program in order to major in business administration, banking, office management, or similar subjects. Students in the English Language Unit are required to pass English courses 141 and 142. Each course lasts for eight weeks, during which students are taught five components: reading, writing, speaking, listening, and grammar. The Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL) program is also used. Classrooms are equipped with modern technology, such as

overhead projectors and computers with Internet access. They have a capacity for more than thirty students.

### **Information Source:**

Kuwait University Official Websites: <http://www.kuniv.edu> , <http://ku.edu.kw>

### **3.2 Participants**

Approval to conduct the study on all participants was sought through the Vice Dean “College of Social Sciences” where the English Language Unit (ELU) is located. Keeping in view the participants’ availability and research purpose, 4 intact classes with 80 Arabic-speaking English intermediate learners, both male and female, were selected from English Language Unit (ELU), Kuwait University. The participants’ age ranged 22-25. The level of these participants’ English was determined on the basis of their scores on Nelson Proficiency Test. Out of 4 classes, 2 intact classes were randomly selected as the experimental group while the remaining 2 classes were selected as the control group for the purpose of this research. Some participants, however, were disqualified from the data analysis due to some reasons. For instance, a few of them didn’t show up in the pre-experimental test, while others missed some of the sessions in the experimental stage, or failed to answer the questionnaire. Due to these reasons, the participants in the experimental group and the control group were not equal. Finally, there were 32 students in the experimental group and 35 students in the respective control group. Thus, the final total number of the sample was 67 subjects.

### **3.3 Instrumentation**

This part of the research can be divided into four sub parts which are discussed below in detail.

#### **3.3.1 Types of Reading Assessment Techniques**

There is a variety of reading assessment techniques that can be used for measuring development in reading skills. For instance, reading assessment that tests ‘Reading Comprehension’, ‘Language Comprehension’ assessment, reading assessment that tests ‘Decoding’, reading assessment that tests students’ ‘Relevant Background Knowledge, reading assessment that test ‘Linguistic Knowledge’, reading assessment that tests ‘Phonology’, reading assessment that is used to check students’ ‘Semantic Knowledge’, reading assessment to assess ‘Syntactic Knowledge’, reading assessment to evaluate students’ ‘Cipher Knowledge’, reading assessment that examines students’ ‘Lexical Knowledge’ (reading irregular words), reading assessment that test students’ ‘Phonological / Phoneme Awareness’, reading assessment that tests ‘Knowledge of Alphabetic Principle’, reading assessment that tests child’s ‘Letter Knowledge’, and reading assessment that checks ‘Concepts About Print’. In

this research the researchers have used reading assessment technique to test participants' reading comprehension.

### **3.3.2 Application of 'Reading Comprehension Assessment' Technique**

This assessment involves asking a student to read a passage of text that is leveled appropriately for the student, and then asking some explicit, detailed questions about the content of the text (often these are called IRIs). There are some variations on reading comprehension assessments, however. For example, instead of explicit questions about facts directly presented in the text, the student could be asked to answer inferential questions about information which was implied by the text, or the student's comprehension might be tested by his or her ability to retell the story in the student's own words or to summarize the main idea or the moral of the story. Another common reading comprehension assessment is called a "cloze" task - words are omitted from the passage, and the student is asked to fill in the blanks with appropriate words.

Reading comprehension should not be confused with reading accuracy, another very common form of reading assessment. In a reading accuracy assessment, a student is asked to read a passage of text clearly, without making any mistakes. The mistakes that the student does make are analyzed to find clues about students' decoding strategies (not comprehension strategies). Very often, an assessment combines these two different assessments into one assessment - the student reads a passage out loud while the teacher makes note of errors the student makes (sometimes called a "running record"), and then the student is asked some comprehension questions about the passage. However, it is worth noting that a beginning reader's comprehension usually suffers when he or she is asked to read a passage of text out loud. When students read orally, they usually concentrate on reading accurately, and do not pay as much attention to comprehension of the content. Oral reading accuracy does give insights into decoding skills and strategies, but that is a separate test. A reading comprehension test is most accurate if the student is not reading for an audience.

### **3.3.3 Criteria for the Selection of Reading Passages for Current Research**

Three reading comprehension passages were used for the purpose of this study. Participants were supposed to read the selected reading comprehension texts and then answer the questions related to the articles. Three reading passages were obtained from magazines and newspapers as reading materials. The following criteria were applied for the selection of these reading texts in order to test the level of participants' reading comprehension: Firstly, the length of the article. The texts should neither be too long nor too short and these should be according to the level of participants. Due to this reason, some parts which were hard to understand or had a lot of difficult words were modified or deleted. Secondly,

the articles had to include a certain number of collocations for the purpose of this research. The three selected reading passages had about 90 collocations, 30 collocations in each text. In addition to the above-mentioned criteria, the topic chosen for this research were interesting and motivating for the participants. Therefore, these topics were examined very carefully before selection.

### **3.3.4 Reading Comprehension Pretest and Posttest**

Keeping in view the level of difficulty of the above-mentioned three reading passages, some questions were created to check the reading comprehension of the students. According to Nuttall (1982), a test can strike at least four types of meaning separately or simultaneously including grammatical meaning, informational meaning, discourse meaning, and the meaning conveyed by the writer's tone. However, questions on writer's tone were included because assessing the meaning conveyed by the writer's tone is most appropriate for testing advanced reading skills. Because the students might answer multiple-choice tests by chance, the test questions included for the purpose of this study focused only on checking informational meaning and discourse meaning.

Hence, the four said written recall tests were designed to recognize the level of participants' comprehension of the main ideas and the supporting details since the researchers wanted to focus only on testing the participants' reading comprehension. Each test included ten questions that gave away some of the details of the article and its vocabulary. Those questions were not easy to answer for the students if they were not able to fully comprehend the texts. Totally, 30 questions were selected as the pretest of this study.

Moreover, internal consistency reliability for the instrument was estimated by computing Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients. The overall test's Cronbach's alpha was 0.72. This implies that the test has sufficient internal consistency reliability. In order to determine the validity of the instruments utilized in the study, the researchers discussed it with some of their colleagues to give their opinion about the validity of the given material for the research. Furthermore, the language instructors of the selected intact classes for the present study were asked in both perspectives to express their comments. After taking their comments into account, some modifications were made to the questions before the study was formally conducted.

So far as the posttest of this study is concerned, the researchers applied the same pretest as posttest however some believe in memory effects for the short period experiment of 4 weeks. According to Hughes (1989), "subjects are likely to recall items [...and] make same responses, [which results in] the reliability spuriously high (p. 39)".

## **3.4 Method**

Keeping in view the participants' availability and research purpose, 4 intact classes with 80 Arabic-speaking English intermediate learners, both male and female, were randomly selected from English Language Unit (ELU), Kuwait University. After taking permission from the Head of English Language Unit (ELU) and the Vice Dean, College of Social Sciences, one of the faculty members from ELU was requested to administer the instruments on the researchers' behalf. All details and procedures regarding the test administration were explained. The participants were given the Nelson proficiency test. In order to rule out the possibility of guessing, participants were told not to use dictionaries and to leave blank any item they were unconfident of. Then, out of 4 classes, 2 intact classes were randomly selected as the experimental group while the remaining 2 classes were selected as the control group for the purpose of this research. In order to see whether there is any major difference between the two groups or not before intervention program, the scores obtained from this test were analyzed.

Subsequently, the experimental group was given collocation treatment while there was no treatment for control group. In other words, collocations used in the reading pretest were taught to the participants of this group. In order to teach these collocations, they were selected from the text that they read in the pretest before without any access to reading texts themselves. There were about 30 collocations selected from each reading text and there were a total of three teaching lists of collocations. The procedure of collocation instruction included teaching and recognizing collocations, giving examples, and practicing activities, all of which were designed to develop the participants' comprehension of collocations.

After teaching the collocation used in the reading texts, students were asked to read the reading texts again and answer the comprehension tests at the end of each text. It should be pointed out again that there was no difference between pretest and posttest in this study but there was one and half month time between pretest and posttest. So far as the control group was concerned, the participants received no instruction related to the text before they read the text again in the posttest stage. In other words, they had to comprehend the provided text without any help and finish the reading comprehension posttest.

### **3.5 Data Scoring Procedure**

During data analysis it was presumed whether there is any significant difference between subjects in control group and experimental group before any intervention program takes place. Table 1 and 2 indicate the results of data analysis. As it is clear from table 2, no significant difference was found between the control and experimental groups before collocation intervention program for experimental group ( $F=.887$ ;  $P=.350$ ). Therefore, we can conclude that if there is any significant difference between

these two groups after teaching collocation used in reading texts for experimental group, we can relate these results to the effect of the intervention program in this study.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Pretest in Control and experimental Group**

| Group        | Number | Mean  | Standard Deviation | Standard Error Mean | Minimum | Maximum |
|--------------|--------|-------|--------------------|---------------------|---------|---------|
| Control      | 35     | 16.20 | 2.772              | 0.4686              | 10      | 20      |
| Experimental | 32     | 16.82 | 2.195              | 0.388               | 11      | 20      |
| Total        | 58     | 16.50 | 2.508              | 0.329               | 10      | 20      |

**Table 2. Results of ANOVA for Mean Pretest Scores of Samples in Control and Experimental Group in Kuwaiti ESL/EFL Context**

| Sum of Squares           | df | Mean of Square | F     | Sig. (P Value) |
|--------------------------|----|----------------|-------|----------------|
| Between Groups<br>5.593  | 1  | 5.5930         | 0.887 | 0.350          |
| Within Groups<br>352.907 | 56 | 6.3020         |       |                |
| Total<br>398.500         | 57 |                |       |                |

**Table 3. Paired Sample Test for Pre and Posttest in Control and Experimental Group**

| Group        | Pair             | Mean   | Std. Deviation SD | Std. Error Mean | T      | df | Sig (2-tailed) |
|--------------|------------------|--------|-------------------|-----------------|--------|----|----------------|
| Control      | Pre-and Posttest | -.2670 | 1.4370            | 0.2621          | -1.017 | 29 | 0.318          |
| Experimental | Pre-and Posttest | 1.643  | 1.0620            | 0.2011          | 8.189  | 27 | 0.000          |

**Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Control and Experimental Group in Kuwait**

| Group   | Test    | Number | Mean  | Standard Deviation | Standard Error Mean |
|---------|---------|--------|-------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Control | Pretest | 35     | 16.20 | 2.772              | 0.4686              |



|              |          |    |       |       |        |
|--------------|----------|----|-------|-------|--------|
|              | Posttest | 35 | 16.47 | 2.193 | 0.3707 |
| Experimental | Pretest  | 28 | 16.82 | 2.195 | 0.4148 |
|              | Posttest | 28 | 18.46 | 1.551 | 0.2931 |

### 3.6. Research Question and Null Hypothesis

After devising some C-R activities, based on R. Ellis's weak interface theory, and practicing them in two English language classes, the researchers tried to answer the question by examining the importance of such activities on learning collocations through comparing the results. To sum up, the current research tried to find the answer to the following research question:

Does teaching collocations, based on consciousness-raising (C-R) activities have any importance in the development of Kuwaiti ESL/EFL learners' reading comprehension at intermediate level?

Keeping this question in view, the following null hypothesis should be investigated:

Collocation instruction, based on consciousness-raising (C-R) activities, has no importance in the development Kuwaiti ESL/EFL learners' reading comprehension at intermediate level.

### 3.7. Results of the Research

Consequently, in order to answer the research question, data were analyzed in both control and experimental group according to table 3 and 4. As it is evident from Table 3, there is no significant difference between pre- and posttest in control group ( $t=-1.017$ ;  $P= 0.318$ ) while with regard to the importance of teaching collocations used during reading texts for the development of ESL/EFL learners' reading comprehension, results of data analysis (t-test) in table 3 above indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between participants' performance in reading comprehension in pretest and posttest ( $t= -8.189$ ;  $P= 0.000$ ).

However, Table 4 indicates that the participants scored higher in posttest ( $M=18.46$ ,  $SD= 1.551$ ), as compared to their pretest score (without teaching collocations) that was ( $M=16.82$ ,  $SD= 2.195$ ). After analyzing these results, the null hypothesis (Teaching collocations have no importance in the development of Kuwaiti ESL/EFL learners' reading comprehension at intermediate level) is rejected. In other words, teaching collocations could play an important role in the development of Kuwaiti ESL/EFL learners' reading comprehension at intermediate level.

## IV. Discussion and Conclusions

This section provides a discussion of the results of the study given in the previous section. It begins with interpretations of the research question of the study. Then, some reasons for incapability of Arabic-speaking learners will be provided, followed by a comparison to previous studies. Moreover, the section presents a discussion of the theoretical and pedagogical implications and continues with the

limitations of this study. Finally, it concludes by offering suggestions and recommendations for further research.

#### **4.1 Interpretation of the Research Question**

On the whole, purpose of the current study was to evaluate the performance of Arabic-speaking learners of English as a second/foreign language on tests evaluating their use of English collocational knowledge. Keeping in view the findings of the study, we may say that the research question (Is teaching collocations, based on consciousness-raising tasks, has any importance in the development of ESL / EFL learners' reading comprehension of undergraduate students at Kuwait University?) was approved and it could be concluded that teaching collocations could play a significant role in the development of Kuwaiti ESL/EFL learners' reading comprehension at intermediate level.

#### **4.2 Reasons for Incapability of Arabic-speaking Learners in English**

In 'Literature Review' section, it has been discussed in detail that learning vocabulary can play a significant role in reading, listening, speaking as well as writing. So far as Arabic-speaking ESL/EFL learners are concerned, I believe the lack of essential vocabulary can be considered as one of the most common reasons why the Arabic-speaking students are not capable to express themselves fluently in speech and writing. Another problem is that Arabic-speaking students cannot use English outside the classroom in real life situations in spite of studying English for years. Furthermore, they have a lot of problems in finding suitable collocates of words. Some of the students cannot understand a reading comprehension text mostly because they are not well-familiarized with collocations. These students have been observed to translate English vocabulary words into Arabic during their class tests. I believe that the result of this study may be helpful for English language instructors and students in terms of becoming familiarized with a comparatively new technique which will be helpful in their vocabulary development.

According to Nist and Simpson (1993), knowing the definition of a word is important and may be sufficient in many situations, but it is just a beginning point. They also emphasized that a memorized definition is often the tip of the iceberg, the part mistakenly believed to be the total iceberg because it is so visible and obvious. Beneath the surface of the water is a much larger mass of ice which is far more important. Keeping in view this, we can come to the conclusion that learners' explanation about knowing the definition of a word which we think one of the classical vocabulary teaching techniques supports our assumption that classical vocabulary teaching techniques do not contribute to the development and retention of new vocabulary items. Moreover, Maghsodi (2010) confirms the above-mentioned idea by stating that even though memorizing terms with their respective translations is quick

and preferred by learners, it is superficial and does not let students use the needed vocabulary correctly in context. We can also quote Hsu (2010) in order to support our idea. Hsu investigated the effects of direct collocation instruction on Taiwanese college English majors' reading comprehension and vocabulary learning. He concluded that direct collocation instruction improved the subjects' vocabulary learning and improved retention. Finally, he suggested that collocation instruction could be useful to explore as a teaching option.

On the other hand, the result of current study was against the study done by Altinok (2000). He concluded that teaching words in collocations did not result in better learning for the collocation group in study. Although teaching words in collocations did not produce any statistically significant difference in learning new vocabulary items, she still suggests the idea that collocates of words should be taught when presenting new vocabulary. On the whole, our findings maintain the previous studies on collocations such as Maghsodi (2010), Hsu (2010), Nist, and Simpson (1993) whose results call attention to their positive effect on foreign language learning in many aspects.

To sum up, the results of the current research has supported our hypothesis that teaching collocations and consequently learning vocabulary is an effective strategy which positively contributes to the development of reading comprehension of ESL/EFL learners.

### **4.3 Theoretical and Pedagogical Implications**

This study used quantitative methods in seeking to determine the importance of teaching collocations in the development of Kuwaiti ESL/EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension. In this way, it is a unique trend in research on collocations. However, this can be regarded as a starting point, and further research in this area definitely will be very crucial. Several suggestions are provided here for future research:

First, while this research was performed with ESL/EFL learners studying English in English Language Unit (ELU) at Kuwait University, it would be interesting to repeat this study with other groups of learners and different nationalities. On the other hand, this study focused on intermediate students. It would be valuable to study the relationship between knowledge of collocations and reading comprehension at different proficiency levels, especially at the beginning level, to see how the beginners comprehend texts although they have been equipped with limited knowledge of collocations.

Second, to compare the collocation test and reading comprehension test when students are taught with methods of instruction. The collocation test should be given to different proficiency levels with a great number of subjects to study the relationship between knowledge of collocations and reading comprehension.

Third, to conduct a similar study but using qualitative methods to observe ESL/EFL learners' slight progress and their reactions to collocations and collocation instruction while they engage in collocation instruction. By detecting ESL/EFL learners' improvement in the process of learning collocations and their reactions to learning collocations, researchers have the chance to study how ESL/EFL learners digest their learning of collocations, internalize them, and turn that knowledge into their capability of comprehending texts. In fact, it is satisfying to investigate how EFL learners acquire collocational knowledge and turn their input into output, which enables EFL learners to comprehend texts more easily.

Regarding pedagogical implications, the current study demonstrated a consensus in L2 learners' lack of collocational knowledge. The results make apparent a need for more attention to the teaching of collocations. Thus, the following suggested pedagogical implications can serve as a framework for teaching collocation:

Firstly, since the educational language environment plays an important role in learning collocations, as shown in this study, it may be useful to employ authentic texts in the teaching of collocations in Arabic-speaking learners' context. Such texts seem to offer a richer environment for exposure to collocations than in typical textbooks where the input is modified.

“When students see words in authentic contexts, they learn how the words function and what their typical collocations are” (Burger & Gallina 2008:7).

Secondly, the insufficient ability in the production of collocations calls for a more constructive, instructional focus on collocations. A mixture of approaches, such as ‘explicit and implicit’, is essential to generate a productive learning environment. There are various kinds of activities and exercises that can enhance and develop ESL/EFL learners' productivity skills, such as telling or writing stories of their own past and then highlighting the collocations used.

Thirdly, teachers can use “collocational grids” or “brainstorming” in which students are provided with words and then asked to list all the acceptable collocates present. It is also very useful to focus on collocations that have no equivalent in the students' first language.

Fourthly, more attention should be given to the teaching of adjective-noun and verb-preposition collocations. These have proven to be challenging to the students. For example, this can be accomplished by training students to observe and note the specific types of collocations found during reading and then integrate them in sentences.

Keeping the above-mentioned discussion in view, we can maintain that this study helped prove the necessity of incorporating the teaching of collocations into the curriculum for developing students' English proficiency. ESL/EFL language instructors ought to introduce collocations to raise ESL/EFL learners' awareness of the significance of this fact. Instructors should explain the characteristic nature of collocations as well as the distinctions among them. For instance, when a student questions the difference between 'wound' and 'injury', teachers usually try to provide definitions to such pairs. Anyway, this is not a complete explanation of the terms and can lead to problems. Therefore, it is best to use the collocational fields of the two words to reveal differences in usage. For example, English speakers say 'stab wound' rather than 'stab injury' and 'internal injuries' rather than 'internal wounds' (Lewis 2000). Moreover, the need to develop strategies for the acquisition of collocations is very important. Students can be taught to observe collocations and practice using them in either spoken or written forms outside of the classroom. Moreover, one way to improve students' knowledge of collocations is to encourage them to use English collocation dictionaries whenever they are uncertain about the usage of a particular word.

#### **4.5 Limitations of the Study**

Although the study effectively addressed the research question of this thesis, there might be a number of limitations:

This study was restricted to **30 collocations** selected from each reading text and there were a total of three teaching lists of collocations and a population sample of 68 participants. Thus, this study was not practical to evaluate the participants' overall knowledge of collocations. Examining more types and considering other aspects of collocations, such as high/low frequency, and a larger population would make it more feasible to generalize the findings.

In conclusion, I anticipate that these limitations will motivate researchers to improve this study or develop better measurements in the future. Furthermore, this research may offer direction in this promising field. Suggestions for future research are given as follows:

#### **4.6 Suggestions for Future Research**

This fact has been acknowledged earlier that collocations play an important role in many aspects of language acquisition, comprehension and use. Yet the field of collocations is still in its babyhood, and much remains to be learned about the nature of collocations, such as L1 interference, collocational strategies, the effect of explicit and implicit approaches on the learning of collocations, and the development of collocational proficiency. Therefore, further research on collocations is undoubtedly required. The current study has given forth some interesting results; however, they are not final. In order to create more generalized theories about collocations, researchers should continue conducting their research on university students rather than intermediate students whose English proficiency is more advanced. This could be achieved through a variety of different proficiency tests such as TOFEL, IELTS, or the English language admission proficiency test.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

To recapitulate, the results of this study showed that teaching collocations is very important in the development of Kuwaiti ESL/EFL learners' reading comprehension. Therefore, collocations need more attention from L2 curriculum designers and language instructors.

## المستخلص

### أهمية تدريس المفردات المتلازمة في تطوير مهارة الاستيعاب المقروء في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في الكويت

عباس هبر الشمري

يطلق مصطلح "الارتصاف" على الكلمات التي عادة ما تترافق مع بعضها البعض في سياق الحديث أو الكتابة. تركز الدراسة على أهمية تدريس الارتصاف في تطور مهارة القراءة الاستيعابية للطلاب الكويتيين.

قامت الدراسة في وحدة اللغة الانجليزية في جامعة الكويت. تم اختيار ثمانين طالب و طالبة من متحدثي اللغة العربية في جامعة الكويت. مستوى الطلاب متوسط. تراوحت اعمار الطلاب من 22 الى 25 سنة. تم تحديد المستوى اللغوي للطلاب بناءً على نتائج اختبار نيلسون للكفاءة اللغوية و الذي تم اخضاع الطلاب لهذا الاختبار في نفس اليوم في اربع شعب دراسية مختلفة. شعبتان تعتبران مجموعة الطلاب تحت الدراسة و مجموعتان تعتبران المجموعة الضابطة. تم استبعاد نتائج بعض الطلاب من عملية تحليل النتائج لعدة اسباب. على سبيل المثال، بعض الطلاب لم يحضروا الاختبار التجريبي بينما اخرون لم يحضروا بعض الجلسات في المرحلة التجريبية او لم يجابوا على الاستبيان. لذلك و لهذه الاسباب فاه عدد الطلاب في المجموعة التجريبية و المجموعة الضابطة ليس متساوي فقد كان العدد النهائي للمجموعة التجريبية 32 و العدد النهائي للمجموعة الضابطة هو 35 طالب و طالبة. و بذلك فقد بلغ العدد الفعلي للطلاب و الطالبات 67.

تم تجميع الاحصائيات من 67 مشارك. اظهرت نتائج اختبار "t" نتائج مثيرة جداً. فقد اظهرت النتائج ان طلاب المجموعة التجريبية افضل من نتائج طلاب المجموعة الضابطة في اختبار القراءة الاستيعابية. اظهرت الدراسة ان تدريس الارتصاف قبل الاختبار قد رفع من مستوى الطلاب في مهارة القراءة الاستيعابية. و تختتم الدراسة بمجموعة دلالات بيداغوجية، و اقتراحات و توصيات.

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