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ENHANCING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE:
THE ROLE OF COLLOCATIONS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

The role of collocations in advancing communicative competence among language faculty students is crucial for effective second language learning. Vocabulary acquisition, specifically through collocations, plays an essential role in language proficiency, expanding students' expressive capabilities, increasing fluency, and ensuring more precise communication. While trad?-tional language teaching is often focused on grammatical competence, recent theories emphasize the importance of vocabulary, parti-?ularly collocations and lexical chunks, in

mastering a foreign language. Numerous scholars highlight the significance of collocations in developing communicative competence, arguing that language is best understood as a "gramm-?ticalized vocabulary". Such expressions allow learners to better understand language patterns and function as key components of fluency.

This article explores how collocations may contribute to lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic competence of language learners. It examines methods and strategies for teaching such word combinations, including contextual learning, interactive tasks, and comparative analysis, which help students acquire more natural and effective communication skills.

The study underscores the need for modern language instruction methodologies to integrate the teaching of combinations, as they enhance students' overall communicative competence and linguistic performance.

Keywords: collocations; communicative competence; English language; language teaching; fluency; methodology.

Introduction. The significance of collocations in enhancing communicative competence among students of the Faculty of Languages constitutes a fundamental aspect of second language acquisition and contemporary pedagogical practice. Collocations – defined as predictable and contextually appropriate combinations of words that frequently co-occur – play a critical role in fostering fluency, accuracy, and naturalness in language production. Their acquisition is not merely an advanced lexical feature but an essential dimension of functional language use that underpins the ability to convey meaning appropriately and idiomatically in real-life contexts. As such, a student's capacity to understand and produce collocations with ease reflects a deeper level of lexical and pragmatic awareness, marking a transition from mechanical language reproduction to dynamic communicative engagement.

In this light, mastery of vocabulary emerges as an indispensable prerequisite for effective language learning. It is widely recognized as one of the most pivotal components in the language acquisition process. Without a robust and contextually nuanced lexical repertoire, learners struggle to articulate thoughts, participate in conversations, or interpret meaning with precision and clarity. Henry G. Widdowson (1989) affirms this view by asserting that vocabulary constitutes a core and irreplaceable element for successful communication. He argues that vocabulary is not merely a passive inventory of words but an active tool that enables learners to navigate varied communicative situations, construct meaning, and engage with both spoken and written discourse.

Nevertheless, this understanding has not always been reflected in the instructional priorities of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programs. Osman Ali and Ahmed Hassan (2020) observe that vocabulary instruction has historically been marginalized within EFL pedagogy. Educators, particularly in traditional grammar-translation or structurally focused approaches, have tended to privilege grammatical competence over lexical development. This longstanding emphasis on grammar has led to a teaching paradigm in which vocabulary is perceived as secondary-merely illustrative of grammatical rules rather than a core component of communicative competence in its own right.

This conventional perspective has given rise to what some scholars refer to as the "lexical grammar" model of language instruction. Within this framework, grammar is predominantly construed as a system of structural rules governing syntax and morphology, while vocabulary is relegated to a subordinate status. Its function is viewed primarily in terms of supporting the semantic and functional realization of grammatical structures rather than being appreciated for its intrinsic communicative value. As Ali and Hassan (2020) note, such an approach limits the learner's ability to use language flexibly and idiomatically, as it overlooks the rich interplay between lexis and grammar that characterizes authentic language use. The marginalization of vocabulary – and by extension, collocations – thus impedes the holistic development of communicative competence, which encompasses not only grammatical accuracy but also sociolinguistic appropriateness, discourse management, and strategic language use (Ali, & Hassan, 2020).

In this context, it becomes increasingly imperative for language educators and curriculum designers to re-evaluate the role of collocations in language instruction. By integrating collocational competence into the broader framework of language teaching, educators can better equip students with the tools needed to achieve fluency and communicative effectiveness. Doing so would represent a shift from a reductive, rule-based approach to a more integrative and functional model of language acquisition – one that recognizes vocabulary, and particularly collocations, as central to the mastery of a second language.

Analysis of recent research and publications. From the standpoint of the Structuralist theory, language acquisition has traditionally been conceptualized as a process grounded in the systematic mastery

of grammatical structures. Learners have been expected to construct syntactically correct sentences through the comprehensive internalization and application of gramm-?tical rules. This perspective, deeply rooted in behaviorist learning theories and structural linguistics, emphasizes form over function and promotes repetition, drills, and pattern practice as primary instructional techniques. Language is thus viewed as a mechanical system of rules and structures, with correctness in syntax often taking precedence over meaning or communicative effec-tiveness. Within this framework, vocabulary is often treated as a secondary concern – simply the filler to be inserted into grammatically correct templates.

However, beginning in the late 1970s and gaining momentum throughout the 1980s, a significant paradigm shift began to reshape the field of second language acquisition. This shift marked a move away from the rigid, form-centric methodologies of Structuralism toward more meaning-oriented and communicative models of language learning.

Scholars and practitioners increasingly recognized that the ability to use language effectively in real-world contexts required more than syntactic accuracy; it required lexical fluency, pragmatic appropriateness, and the ability to produce idiomatic and contextually suitable expressions. Central to this evolving understanding was the recognition of collocations – the habitual and statistically significant co-occurrence of words – as being essential to developing communicative competence, particularly among advanced language learners and university students engaged in deep linguistic study.

During this transformative period, several prominent linguists began to challenge the marginalization of vocabulary in language pedagogy and advocate for its reintegration as a core component of communicative proficiency. Such scholars as Michael Lewis (2002), Paul Nation (1990), Desmond MacCarthy (1979), Joan Channell (1981), and John Nattinger, Jeanette DeCarrico (1992) played a pivotal role in reconfiguring theoretical and pedagogical understandings of vocabulary's place in second language acquisition.

Their works collectively emphasized that lexical knowledge is not simply a matter of knowing individual words in isolation; rather, it entails a nuanced understanding of how words function in combination – how they collocate to form natural, fluent, and meaningful discourse.

In particular, Michael Lewis (2002) introduced the Lexical approach, a landmark contribution that fundamentally challenged the traditional dichotomy of language as a mere amalgamation of grammar and vocabulary. In Lewis's view, this binary division fails to capture the way language is actually used and learned. He posited instead that language is more accurately described as a grammaticalized lexis, suggesting that lexis (vocabulary) should be regarded as the primary organizing principle of language, with grammar serving a secondary, supportive role. This reconceptualization places collocations, chunks, and fixed expressions at the heart of language instruction. According to Lewis, mastery of these lexical patterns is essential not only for fluency but also for comprehensibility and naturalness in communication.

This lexical perspective aligns closely with the empirical findings of Paul Nation, who emphasized the necessity of exposing learners to high-frequency vocabulary and collocations through extensive reading and listening. Similarly, Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992), building on earlier insights from Nattinger (1980), explored the pedagogical potential of lexical phrases or prefabricated speech units – structured combinations of words that function as single semantic units. Their work underscored how such expre-ssions, including collocations, idioms, and discourse markers, facilitate faster language processing, enhance coherence, and improve oral fluency. Joan Channell (1981), through his exploration of lexical constraints, further contributed to the understanding of how predictable word pairings shape idiomatic usage and affect both receptive and productive language skills.

On balance, the transition from a structurally dominated view of language learning to a lexically informed, commu-nicative paradigm reflects a broader evolution in applied linguistics and language pedagogy. It highlights the inadequacy of purely grammatical instruction and elevates the role of collocations as indispensable building blocks of communicative competence. This shift has had profound implications for curriculum design, materials development, and classroom practice, especially within Faculties of Languages, where students must attain a high level of linguistic sophistication to function effectively in academic and professional contexts. By prioritizing lexical competence – particularly through the study and application of collocations – educators can foster a more authentic, fluent, and context-sensitive command of the target language (Lewis, 2002, p. 6).

Outline of the main material of the study. The lexical approach posits that a key facet of language acquisition is the ability to comprehend and produce multi-word expressions, commonly referred to as lexical chunks. These chunks are processed holistically rather than through analytical decomposition, thereby serving as the core material from which language patterns – traditionally associated with grammatical structures – are internalized (Lewis, 2002, p. 95). Collocations, in particular, play a crucial role in this reconceptualization of vocabulary, shifting the view from a static collection of isolated words toward a dynamic lexical system comprising individual words and recurrent word combinations stored in the mental lexicon.

Among the various lexical phenomena, collocations – first systematically conce-?tualized by Firth (1964) – represent a critical category of collocations. Collocations refer to the habitual co-occurrence of specific words in natural discourse, forming predictable and conventionalized expressions. Lewis (2002) further clarifies that collocational patterns are not dictated by logical association or mere frequency of usage but are governed by linguistic conventions unique to each language (Lewis, 2002, p. 29). Within this spectrum, some collocations exhibit a high degree of fixity, while others allow for syntactic and lexical flexibility.

Lewis (2002) cautions against the simplistic assumption that any arbitrary co-occurrence of words constitutes a collocation. He advocates for a pedagogical shift away from dissecting vocabulary into discrete units toward an approach that presents collo-?ations as integral lexical units, thereby facilitating deeper lexical competence. Lewis (2002) also encourages language instructors to enhance learners' awareness of collo-cations and to empirically evaluate the pedagogical outcomes of integrating collocation-focused methodologies in the classroom (Farroth, 2012, p. 56).

In line with this emphasis, George Woolard (2000) highlights the increasing prominence of collocations within lexical pattern research and their growing inclusion in language teaching curricula and materials. Charles J. Bolinger (1976) notably stressed that the human cognitive apparatus tends to encode words not as isolated items but as cohesive, chunked expressions, underscoring the cognitive salience of collocations in lexical acquisition and retrieval (Bolinger, 1976).

A consensus among linguists and language educators advocates for the systematic teaching of collocations in second language pedagogy. Empirical evidence demonstrates that learners who acquire proficiency in collocations attain higher levels of fluency and accuracy in both spoken and written production. Michael H. Hill (2001) further asserts that approximately 80% of text in written discourse comprises collo-?ations, underscoring their fundamental role in the natural language usage of native speakers. The acquisition of collocational knowledge enables learners to transform passive vocabulary into active language use, thereby internalizing a more creative and functional linguistic system (Hill, 2001).

Moreover, in accordance with J. Forquara (2006), the memorization of such combi-?ations enhances cognitive retention and expands the mental lexicon. María Moreno Jaén (2007) points out that fluency and precision in both spoken and written modalities necessitate extensive knowledge of collocations, a factor that distinctly diffe-rentiates native speakers from non-native learners (16).

Within contemporary linguistics, the exploration of collocations and their influence on communicative competence remains a salient research domain. Since the mid-20th century, the syntactic-lexical interface has garnered significant scholarly attention (Woolard, 2000, p. 36). Studies reveal that words operate less as independent semantic entities and more as components of stable combinatory units during actual language production (Ter-Minasova, 2000, p. 535).

In the context of communicative competence development, the role of collocations is particularly pronounced. For students of language faculties, the strategic deployment of such combinations not only consolidates linguistic command but also facilitates the emergence of speech that is fluid and natural (Wray, 2002, p. 47). Pedagogical approaches that emphasize speech patterns anchored in collocations, as opposed to arbitrary structural constructs, have been demonstrated to enhance learners' communicative efficacy (Howarth, 1996, p. 78).

Furthermore, collocations are chara-?terized by their syntactic flexibility and dynamic nature, which afford learners a spectrum of expressive possibilities and enable the generation of diverse sentence structures (Cowie, 1998, p. 93). Conse-quently, instruction centered on these combinations broadens students' expressive capacity and refines their pragmatic skills.

Functionally, collocations serve as pervasive elements within discourse. Voluminous empirical research highlights the equilibrium between collocations and fixed expressions as a determinant of speech

productivity and intelligibility (Ter-Minasova, 2000, p. 537).

From a pedagogical perspective, mastery of collocations correlates with marked improvements in the clarity and coherence of both written and oral output among language faculty students. Detailed examination of the grammatical and semantic subtleties inherent in collocations fosters enhanced linguistic awareness and enriches learners' communicative competence (Nattinger, DeCarrico, 1992, p. 101).

Given these findings, it is imperative that contemporary language teaching metho-?ologies integrate the systematic instruction of collocations as a core component for the cultivation of communicative competence. Such integration supports the development of naturalistic speech patterns and equips learners with practical linguistic tools for authentic interaction (Ellis, 2008, p. 62).

The overarching objective of foreign language education in the modern era is to cultivate communicative competence that enables learners to engage effectively across diverse communicative contexts. Collocations play an instrumental role in this endeavor by broadening learners' expressive potential, enhancing speech fluency, and facilitating the accurate articulation of ideas.

Collocations are syntactically governed expressions composed of word pairings or groups that regularly co-occur in natural language and are bound by both grammatical rules and lexical conventions. These fixed or semi-fixed expressions – such as "hold a meting", "write an article", or "ask questions" – are flexible enough to be adapted according to varying contextual and communicative demands, yet stable enough to be immed-?ately recognizable to native and proficient speakers. Their importance in language learning stems not merely from frequency, but from their role in encoding meaning, pragmatics, and syntactic behavior in ways that single words cannot fully capture. As such, they reflect the patterns of authentic language use and serve as essential tools for learners striving to achieve fluency and native-like proficiency.

The pedagogical value of collocations lies in their capacity to simultaneously enhance learners' lexical acquisition and syntactic development. When students engage with collocations, they do not merely memorize vocabulary items in isolation; rather, they internalize combinations that model how language is actually structured and used by proficient speakers.

This dual benefit fosters more natural language production and supports learners in moving beyond formulaic or repetitive speech. Instead of relying on generic or overused verbs such as "do" or "make", students learn more precise and contextually appropriate alternatives such as "conduct an interview", "make an appointment", or "raise a question". Consequently, collocational knowledge significantly contributes to both language variety and expressiveness.

Within the broader framework of communicative competence – as conceptualized by Michael Canale and Merrill Swain (Canale, Swain, 1980) – collocations play an integral role. Canale and Swain's model delineates communicative competence into four interrelated components: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Collocations intersect with all these components but are especially salient in the integration of grammatical and lexical competence, as well as in pragmatic and discourse abilities. By incorporating collocations into their language repertoire, learners can produce speech and writing that is not only grammatically accurate but also idiomatic, fluent, and socially appropriate. This enhances not just the quantity of language produced, but more importantly, the quality and authenticity of that output.

Besides, the mastery of collocations contributes directly to the development of speech fluency. By internalizing frequently used lexical combinations, learners reduce the cognitive load associated with real-time language production. This process – known as lexical chunking or formulaic language use – allows for quicker retrieval of linguistic material, thereby enabling more spontaneous and uninterrupted speech. It also expands both passive (receptive) and active (productive) vocabulary, supporting comp?-?hension and expression across a variety of registers and discourse contexts.

Collocations further enhance syntactic flexibility. Learners who are proficient in using collocations are better equipped to manipulate grammatical structures and construct more complex, varied, and accurate sentences. For example, knowing the collocation "give a presentation" allows a learner to generate a wide range of sentence types around it: "She gave an excellent presentation", "Had he given his presentation earlier, the panel might have responded differently", or "Giving a presentation in English was a major milestone for him". In this way, collocations serve as a scaffold for syntactic development and fluency.

Pragmatic competence is also significantly bolstered through the appropriate use of collocations. Pragmatic competence involves the ability to use language in socially and culturally appropriate ways, taking into account factors such as politeness, register, and context. Collocations often carry

nuanced pragmatic meanings that are not easily inferred from their individual components. For instance, the expressions "make a complaint" versus "file a complaint" may appear similar semantically, but differ in terms of formality and situational appropriateness. By mastering such distinctions, learners become more adept at interpreting and producing language that aligns with the expectations of specific social contexts, thus avoiding pragmatic failure.

Another important contribution of collocations to communicative competence is the facilitation of automatization – the ability to use language effortlessly and fluently without conscious processing. Automatization of linguistic routines is a cornerstone of fluency, and collocations, as ready-made chunks, are central to this process. They allow learners to bypass word-by-word construction of utterances and instead, retrieve larger, pre-assembled units of meaning. This enables smoother transitions between ideas and more cohesive, natural-sounding discourse, particularly in oral communication.

In terms of pedagogy, effective approaches to teaching collocations must go beyond rote memorization and involve meaningful, context-rich interaction. One such approach is contextual learning, in which collocations are introduced and practiced within authentic communicative scenarios, such as dialogues, narratives, and task-based activities. This method not only reinforces the semantic and pragmatic aspects of collocations but also embeds them in memory through repeated exposure and use in relevant contexts.

Interactive techniques – such as role-plays, information gap tasks, and language games – can further enhance learner engagement and internalization of collo-?ations. These activities create opportunities for active language production and coope-?ative learning, fostering a sense of immersion and practical application. Furthermore, explicit instruction – such as drawing comparisons between collocations and other multi-word expressions like idioms, phrasal verbs, and compound nouns – can sharpen learners' lexical awareness. Through guided analysis and classification, students come to understand the subtle distinctions between different types of word combinations, which in turn supports more accurate and sophisticated language use.

In conclusion, the integration of collocation-focused instruction into language curricula is not merely beneficial but also essential for developing comprehensive communicative competence. By supporting lexical diversity, syntactic agility, pragmatic appropriateness, and fluency, collocations serve as foundational elements of proficient language use. Educators should thereby place greater emphasis on collocational awareness, ensuring that learners are equipped with the tools necessary to navigate both the structural and social dimensions of authentic communication in a second language.

Conclusion. To summarize, the acquisition and effective use of collocations constitute a pivotal factor in advancing communicative competence among students of language faculties. Their mastery enhances speech fluency, promotes naturalness and precision in expression, and ultimately supports the development of robust communication skills. Accordingly, modern language teaching methodologies must duly recognize the centrality of collocations and foster instructional environments that enable learners to assimilate and apply these linguistic units with confidence and proficiency.

Collocations are indispensable for communicative competence, especially in language schools where proficiency in both spoken and written language is a primary objective. They contribute to fluency, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary depth, and cultural understanding. By teaching and reinforcing these combinations, language educators enable students to communicate more naturally, effectively, and confidently, both inside and outside of academic environments.

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ФОРМУВАННЯ КОМУНІКАТИВНОЇ КОМПЕТЕНЦІЇ: РОЛЬ СЛОВОПОЄДНАНЬ У МОВНИХ ПРОГРАМАХ

Анотація. Роль словосполучень у формуванні комунікативної компетенції серед студентів мовних факультетів має вирішальне значення для ефективного вивчення другої мови.

Опанування словниковим запасом, особливо за допомогою словосполучень (слово поєднань), відіграє істотну роль у формуванні мовної компетенції, розширюючи можливості висловлювань студентів, збільшуючи побіглість їхньої промови і забезпечуючи точнішу комунікацію. У той час, як традиційне навчання мови часто фокусується на граматичній компетенції, останні теорії наголошують на важливості словникового запасу, особливо словосполучень та лексичних фрагментів, у освоєнні іноземної мови. Вчені наголошують на значущості словосполучень у розвитку комунікативної компетенції, стверджуючи, що мову найкраще розуміти, як «граматикалізований словник». Ці вирази дозволяють учням краще зрозуміти мовні моделі і функціонують як ключові компоненти мови.

У цій статті розглядається, як словосполучення (словопоєднання) сприяють лексичній, синтаксичній та прагматичній компетенції. Зокрема, розглядаються методи навчання вербальним комбінаціям, включаючи контекстне навчання, інтерактивні завдання та порівняльний аналіз, які допомагають студентам розвивати більш природні та ефективні вміння спілкування.

Представлене дослідження наголошує на необхідності інтеграції навчання лексичним словосполученням у сучасні методики викладання мови, оскільки вони підвищують загальну комунікативну компетенцію та лінгвістичну здатність студентів.

Ключові слова: *словосполучення; комунікативна компетенція; англійська мова; навчання мов; побіжність мови; методика.*