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Difficulties Encountered by English Department Students in Using Noun-Noun Collocations

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Abstract

The current study explores noun-noun collocations in English. The main problem which the study attempts to tackle is the difficulty encountered by undergraduate, English department students in predicting noun-noun collocations in English. The hypothesis on which the study is based is the existence of hundreds of noun-noun collocations in English, be they noun and/or noun (binomial phrases), e.g. fish and chips, friend or foe; or noun + of-phrase combinations, e.g. sheet of paper, cup of tea. As regards the study approach adopted, the paper advocates Biber et al. (1999) (see sections 6 and 7). This approach is within 'lexical collocations', which is in contrast to 'grammatical collocations' in which a preposition is used with a noun, a verb or an adjective, e.g. by accident, account for, amazed at. The aim of the study is to define and explain different types and combinations of binomial phrases and noun + of-phrases. The results of the two tests administered to measure fourth year, English department students' mastery of different categories of lexical collocations (100 participants who sat a 40-item twofold tests) show that students face great obstacles in mastering collocations. Noun + noun sequences

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Available online	like water supplies, chess board, exam papers, speech impediment, and press release, are out of the scope of this study. .

الصعوبات التي يواجهها طلبة اقسام اللغة الإنكليزية
في استخدام متلازمات الاسم + الاسم

أ.م. فلاح صلاح الدين مصطفى
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الخلاصة: ان البحث الحالي يتحرى موضوع المتلازمات المكونة من الاسم + الاسم في اللغة الانكليزية. ان المشكلة الرئيسية التي يعالجها البحث هي الصعوبات التي يواجهها طلبة اقسام اللغة الانكليزية / الدراسات الاولية في تخمين المتلازمات المكونه من (الاسم + الاسم). ان الفرضية التي يستند اليها البحث هي وجود المئات من هذه المتلازمات في اللغة الانكليزية، سواء كانت متكونة من (الاسم +/او الاسم (العبارات ثنائية التسمية)، مثلا سمك وبطاطا مقلية، صديق أو عدو، او تركيب (الاسم + من– العبارات الممزوجة، مثلا صحيفة من ورق، كوب من الشاي. وفيما يتعلق بمنهجية الدراسة المتبعة، فالبحث يتبنى دراسة باير واخرون) (١٩٩٩)انظر المبحثين ٦ و ٧). ان هذه المنهجية هي ضمن"المتلازمات المفرداتية" والتي هي بالضد من "المتلازمات النحوية" والتي يستخدم فيها حرف الجر مع الاسم او الفعل او الصفة، مثلا بالصدفة، يعزو الى، مندهش لـ . ان الهدف من الدراسة هو تعريف وتوضيح الانواع المختلفة والخليط المختلف من العبارات ثنائية التسمية وتركيب (الاسم + من – العبارة). ان نتائج الاختبارين الذين تم اجراءهما لقياس مدى معرفة طلبة المرحلة الرابعة للتصنيفات المختلفة للمتلازمات المفرداتية (تم اجراء اختبارين من (٤٠) فقرة لمائة مشارك) بينت بان الطلبة يلاقون صعوبات جمة في موضوع المتلازمات. ان المتلازمات من مثل: تزويدات الماء، لوحه الشطرنج،

| الاوراق الامتحانية، اعاقة الكلام، والتصـريح الصـحفي هي خارج نطاق هذه الدراسة. | |

1- Introduction

One way of imposing order on the numerous lexemes which the English vocabulary is made up of is to group them into different semantic fields. But how can these fields be structured? And how can the different lexemes in one field relate to each other? The answer is particular lexemes actually belong together (Crystal, 2003a:160)*.

Lexemes are related along two intercrossing dimensions: syntagmatic and paradigmatic. In the former (horizontal) dimension, the relationships between lexemes are sensed in a sequence. So, in the sentence: *It writhed on the ground in excruciating pain*, we can judge by our linguistic intuition that *excruciating* tends to be used with *pain* or *agony*, but not with *joy, ignorance.* 'Horizontal' likelihoods of this kind are called '*collocations'* (ibid.). Whereas the paradigmatic relationship is between a word and a group of words which can substitute it (Martyńska: 2004:4) :

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It writhed on the floor   in   agonizing pain

         bed   burning

         pavement   stabbing

                Paradigm 1   Paradigm 2

Crystal (2003b:82, 83) maintains that 'collocation' is a term used in Lexicology of **lexical items**. For example, *auspicious* collocates with *occasion, event, sign*. This relationship is distinct from **sense associations** in which idiosyncratic connections can be witnessed (e.g. *mother-in-law* associates with *hippopotamus*). Some words have no definite collocational restrictions (e.g. like grammatical words) like *the, of, after, in*. Conversely, many completely predictable restrictions can be found, like *spick+span*. Such combinations are termed as *IDIOMS, CLICHÉS*, and the like. One significant feature of collocates is their being *FORMAL* (not *SEMANTIC*) statements of co-occurrence; for instance, *green* collocates with *jealousy* notwithstanding there is no *REFERENTIAL* basis for the link. Collocated lexical items are *collocates* of each other. The potentiality of lexical items to collocate is known as *collocability* or *collocational range.*

Palmer (1981:77) had earlier affirmed that in particular collocations, some words can have specific, peculiar meanings. Thus, *abnormal* or *exceptional* weather is commonplace when there is a heat wave in November, but an *exceptional* child is said of a child who has greater ability than usual. Palmer (ibid.: 78) adds that some (or

sequences) of words cannot collocate with certain groups of words. So, for example, it is customary to say *The Rhododendrom died*, but not *The rhododendrom passed away*.

Crystal (2006:195) argues that all lexemes have collocations, but at varying degrees. *Blond*, for instance, collocates with *hair*; *flock* with *sheep*; *neigh* with *horse*. Some collocations are highly predictable, e.g. *addled* with *brains* or *eggs*. Other collocations are less predictable, e.g. *letter* with *alphabet* and *spelling*, and in a different sense with *box, post*, and *write*. However, lexemes like *have* and *get* have no expected lexemes, since these two are extensively used.

Strikingly enough, Crystal (ibid.) observes that languages exhibit collocations differently. The English, for example, 'face' problems and 'interpret' dreams; while, in Hebrew, they 'stand in front of' problems and 'solve' dreams.

Categories (types or classifications) of Collocations

Concerning the types of collocation, there are open collocations and restricted collocations. In the former, words can combine with a wide range of words, whereas in restricted collocations, they are limited, as is the case with idioms. Word combinations as well can be categorized as grammatical and lexical collocations. The former are combinations where a preposition is used with a noun, a verb, or an adjective (e.g. by accident, agree with, amazed at). Lexical Collocations, on the other hand, comprise:

1) Verb + Noun (e.g. *break a code*)

2) Verb + Adverb (e.g. *appreciate sincerely*)

3) Noun + Verb (e.g. *water freezes*)

4) Adjective + Noun (e.g. *strong tea*)

5) Adverb + Adjective (e.g. *deeply absorbed*)

(Mahmoud, 2005:119)

Larson (1984, cited in Sarikas, 2006:34), commenting on ' combinations' of words, gives an account of 'fixed combinations', which he believes occur in a certain order or they always occur together, e.g. *to and fro, now and then, neat and tidy*. Idioms, according to Larson (ibid.) are also grouped under fixed combinations. They are words having more or less firmly fixed and mostly there is little or no leeway for changing them (Ayto, 2009:vii). And under the generic heading 'Varieties of English Collocations', Newmark (1978, cited in Sarikas, 2006:35) the following divisions of collocations in English (which could be subsumed under 'lexical collocations') are listed:

1- Verb + verbal noun (e.g. *run a meeting*)

2) Determiner + adjective + noun (e.g. *a handsome boy*)

3) Adverb + adjective (e.g. *immensely important*)

4) Verb + adverb or adjective (e.g. *feel well*, *smell sweet*)

5) Subject + verb (e.g. *The door creaks*)

6. Count noun + mass noun (e.g. *a loaf of bread*)

7. Collective noun + count noun (e.g. *a bunch of keys*)

8. Idiom (e.g. *kick the bucket*)

Based on Palmer's analysis (1933), Durrant (2008:28) illustrates the most characteristic types of collocation as follows:

1. Heterosemes: one of the component words presumes a new meaning due to collocation with another component, e.g. *to fall out* (= to quarrel)

2. Verb x object collocations: habitual pairings that a learner needs to memorize, e.g. *do a favour* (not perform a favour).

3. Verb x preposition collocations: these are regular pairings that are to be learnt, e.g. *agree with*.

4. Absence of article: e.g. *to go to bed*.

5. Coined collocations: spontaneously created by an individual or association, e.g. *Chamber of Commerce*.

6. Collocations without a break: compounds written as a single word, e.g. *lighthouse*.

7. Construction-patterns: these include examples of grammatical rules specific to certain items of lexis, e.g. *to be difficult for somebody to do something.* This represents the generative pattern: *be* (*get, grow, etc.*) X *ADJ* (x *for* x *INDIRECT OBJECT*) X *to* X *INFINITIVE* (X *OBJECT*)

Collocation: History, meaning and restrictions

The term 'collocation' is somehow new contribution to the lexicon of English. Historically, the term 'collocation' has its origin in the Latin verb 'collocare' which means 'to set in order/ to arrange (Martyńska, 2004:2). The word collocation first appeared in the writing of Jesperson (1924) and Palmer (1925) and formally set forth in the realm of linguistics by Firth (1957) (Hyland 2008, cited by Sadeghi , 2009:102). It was further advanced and promulgated by Halliday and Sinclair during the 1960s (Krishnamurthy et al.,2004,cited in Sadeghi,2009:102). The term 'collocation' has been defined differently by scholars, as Gairns and Redman (1986) noted that there were diverse opinions as to what an acceptable collocation was (cited in Sadeghi, 2009:102). Cruse (1986, cited in Sadeghi, ibid.) defined collocation as "sequences of lexical items which habitually co-occur, but are nonetheless fully transparent in the sense that each

lexical constituent is also a semantic constituent". Likewise, Carter (1998:51) maintains that 'collocation' referred to "a group of words which occur repeatedly in a language, with the patterns of co-occurrence being either lexical (where co-occurrence patterns are probabilistic) or grammatical (where patterns are more fixed) with categorical overlaps in numerous instances" (cited in Sadeghi, ibid.: 103). For Carter (1998, cited in Sadeghi, ibid.), all lexical items can keep company with each other, and only those with a high probability of co-occurrence make a collocation. Carter classified collocations into four types ranging from looser to more determined; 1) unrestricted, 2) semirestricted 3) familiar, and 4) restricted. Krishnamurthy et al. (2004) and Lewis (2000) thought that for a collocation to be labelled so, one main condition should be met: the co-occurrence of words should be statistically significant. This statistical view was basically advanced by Firth (1957), and is primarily quantitative and has been endorsed by many corpus linguists. (cited in Sadeghi, 2009:103) .

In Gairns and Redman's (1986:37) opinion, the purpose behind the existence of a collocation is twofold: 1) Items may co-occur simply because the combination reflects a common real world state of affairs.", e.g. the words *pass* and *salt* in *pass the salt please*! 2) Due to "an added element of linguistic convention", e.g. *Lions roaring* instead of *bellowing* (cited in Sadeghi, 2009:103).

Regarding conditions or restrictions imposed on words to function as collocates, there are usually some prerequisites for words to be recognized as collocations. Wray and Bloomer (2006:66) put it ,"words often have quite restricted usages, dictated by words with which they collocate (co-occur)". For example, we say that *humans eat food*, while *animals eat feed*; one *melts cheese and metal*, but they *smelt* ore; one *pinpoints* a *distant building*, but they *sight* a *distant animal*. Collocations may occasionally create some peculiarities. For instance, we say *Merry/Happy Christmas*, or *Happy New year*, but not *Merry New Year* (ibid.).

Corpus research (cited in ibid.: 198) has brought to light the veracity of J.R. Firth's remark that ' you shall know a word by the company it keeps (Firth, 1968: 179). This famous dictum shows that the meaning of a word is to a degree decided by the words that it occurs with. Cited in (ibid), Stubbs (1995) found that the word *little* occurred only two-thirds as often with boy (s) as with girl(s); and when *little* collocated with *man*, there were other irreverent words associated with the pairing, like *ridiculous*. Both cases verify the notion that *little* has connotations far beyond its basic description of size.

For Matthews (2007:63), collocation occurs when words specifically or habitually go together: e.g. *blond* collocates with *hair* in *blond hair*. Matthews (ibid.: 63,359) further distinguishes between *collocational restriction* and *selectional restriction*. In Matthews' view, *collocational restriction* is "any restriction on the collocability of one individual word with another". While *selectional restriction* is "a restriction on the choice of individual lexical units in construction with other lexical units". For example, *breathe* 'selects' an animate subject (*The girl was still breathing, fish breathe through gills*), not an abstract or an inanimate (*Theories must breathe*)

Palmer (1981:79) had earlier propounded three kinds of collocational restrictions. Firstly, those based entirely on the meaning of the item as in the irrational *green cows*. Secondly, others based on range, as when a word is used with a whole set of words that have some semantic features in common, e.g. the unlikelihood of *The rhododendron passed away*. Thirdly, those restrictions that are collocational in the strictest sense, comprising neither meaning nor range, as *addled* with *eggs* and *brains*.

4. Order of Conjoins in Word and Phrase Coordination

Except for semantic factors such as chronological sequence, the order of conjoins (i.e., combinations or linked units) is approximately free. The order of conjoined words can, however, be determined by an inclination of the longer word to come second (may be a variant of the endweight principle). This is remarkable in so-called *BINOMIALS* (which is our main concern in this study), which are relatively fixed conjoint phrases having two members; e.g. *big and ugly, cup and saucer*. One principle operative here seems to be a principle of rhythmic regularity: e.g. the dactylic rhythm of *ladies and gentlemen*, and the trochaic rhythm of *men and women*, are preferable to the less balanced rhythm of **gentlemen and ladies* and **women and men* (Quirk et al., 1985:971)

It has also been contended that semantic factors play an important role - other things being equal, the first position is habitually given to the semantically prominent or socially authoritative member. For example, *father and son, gold and silver, lords and ladies, this and that, heaven and hell, birth and death, masculine and feminine, ups and downs*. (ibid.).

Phonological restrictions have also been proposed: low vowels come after high ones; back vowels come after front ones, etc. (e.g. *fields and orchards/ cats and dogs*). Based on the preceding limitations, hackneyed coordinations are found where the conjoins are nearly in an invariable order, e.g. *odds and ends, bread and butter, law and order, by hook or by crook, through thick and thin; knife, fork and spoon* (ibid.).

Finally, Quirk et al. (ibid.) concludes their exposition by showing that 'cultural dominance could possibly be augmented to encompass the traditional bias to put male terms before female ones, e.g. *men and women, boys and girls*. The cultural dominance may perform in the opposite direction, e.g. *ladies and gentlemen* (induced by the deference convention of 'ladies first')

A final note, regarding the afore-mentioned proposition put forward by Quirk et al. (ibid.) that in two conjoined words, back vowels come after front ones, we might state that there are instances in which two front vowels may follow each other: e.g. *east or west, heaven and hell, smash and grab, pins and needles*. And there are some cases in which two back vowels follow each other, e.g. *stops and starts*; or even back vowels coming before front ones, e.g. *chalk and cheese*.

5. Approaches to Collocation

To get the meaning of the term 'collocation', Martyńska (2004:2) puts forward the following approaches:

i) The Lexical Approach

Firth is generally considered the father of collocation and the developer of a lexical and the most traditional approach to this phenomenon. According to this approach, the meaning of a word is determined by the co-occurring words. Hence, Lexis is considered to be independent and separable from grammar. So, a part of the meaning of a word is determined by its collocation with another word. One of Firth's original concepts is observing lexical relations as syntagmatic rather than paradigmatic ones (ibid.).

Halliday (1966, cited in Martyńska, 2004:2), a follower of Firth, shows that collocation intersects with grammar boundaries. For example, *He argued strongly* and *the strength of his argument* are grammatical transformations of the initial collocation *strong argument*.

Sinclair (1966, quoted in Martyńska,2004:2), another follower of Firth, popularized the following terminology: "an item whose collocations are studied is designated a 'node'; the number of related lexical items of each side of a node is defined as a 'span', and those items which are found within the span are called 'collocates'.

Sinclair later slightly changed his attitude forming an 'integrated approach' and bypassed the perception that lexis is rigorously separated from grammar. Hence, according to Sinclair (1991, cited in Martyńska, 2004:2), collocations can be divided into two categories: the 'upward' and 'downward' collocations. The first group consists of words which customarily collocate with words that are more frequently used in English than they are themselves. For example, *back* collocates with *at, down, from, into, on,* all of these are more frequent than *back*. While the 'downward' collocations are the words that usually collocate with words that are less frequent than they are; so, words like *arrive* and *bring* are less frequently occurring collocates of *back*. According to Sinclair, (1991), the elements of the 'upward' collocation that mainly include prepositions, adverbs, conjunctions and pronouns, tend to form grammatical frames. The elements of the 'downward' collocation that mostly include nouns and verbs give a semantic analysis of a word.

ii) The Semantic Approach

This approach tries to examine collocations from the semantic point of view, irrespective of grammar. It endeavours to find out why words collocate with certain other words, e.g. *blonde hair* but not *blonde car* (Martyńska, 2004:3).

iii) The Structural Approach

According to this approach, collocation is settled by structure and occurs in patterns. So, collocation should be studied via grammar (Gitsaki, 1996, cited in Martyńska, 2004:3), in contrast to the lexical and semantic approaches mentioned earlier. In this approach, lexis and grammar cannot be separated and, therefore, two categories must be defined: lexical and grammatical collocations, which mark two differing but connected aspects of one phenomenon. Grammatical collocations customarily consist of a noun, an adjective, or a verb plus a preposition, or any grammatical structure like *to+infinitive* or *that-clause*, e.g. *a need to do, to be afraid that*. Lexical collocations, by contrast, do not contain grammatical elements; they are merely combinations of nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs (Bahns, 1993, cited in Martyńska, 2004:3).

Benson, Benson and Ilson (1997, cited in Martyńska, 2004, 3) define collocation as specified, identifiable, non-idiomatic, recurrent combinations. They divide combinations into two groups: grammatical and lexical collocations. The first group (or category) is made up of the main word (a noun, an adjective, a verb) plus a preposition or 'to+infinitive' or 'that-clause' and is delineated by eight basic types of combinations:

G1=noun + preposition, e.g. *blockade against*

G2= noun + to-infinitive, e.g. *He was <u>a fool to do it</u>.*

G3 = noun + that-clause, e.g. *He took <u>an oath that</u> he would do his duty.*

G4= preposition + noun, e.g. *by*

accident

G5= adjective + preposition, e.g. *<u>fond</u>*

<u>of</u> children

G6= adjective + to-infinitive, e.g. *It's <u>nice to be</u> here.*

G7= adjective + that-clause, e.g. *it was <u>imperative that</u> I be here.*

G8= 19 different verb patterns in English: verb + to-infinitive, e.g. *They began to speak*; verb + bare infinitive, e.g. *we must work.*

Lexical collocations are void of prepositions, infinitives or relative clauses but have nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs. They include the following 7 types:

L1= verb (meaning creation / action) + noun / pronoun / prepositional phrase, e.g. *launch a missile, come to an end.*

L2= verb (meaning eradication / cancellation) + noun, e.g. *reject an appeal, crush resistance*

L3= [adjective + noun] or [noun used in an attributive way + noun], e.g. *strong tea, land reform* L4= noun + verb naming the activity which is performed by a designate of this noun, e.g. *bombs explode, bees sting*

L5= quantifier + noun, e.g. *a swarm of bees, a piece of advice*

L6= adverb + adjective, e.g. *hopelessly addicted, sound asleep*

L7= verb + adverb, e.g. *argue heatedly, apologize humbly*

6. Coordinated Binomial Phrases: Noun and / or Noun

Exposition and examples in this section draw heavily on Biber et al. (1999, 1030-34), which is the model of the current study. Binomial phrases comprise two words from the same grammatical category, coordinated by *and* or *or*. Although the most common kind of binomial phrases is made up of two coordinated nouns (e.g. *fish and chips, mum and dad*), words from all four major grammatical categories can be combined.

Noun and noun binomial phrases are to a large extent most common in academic prose and to a lesser extent in news. Many nouns are considerably productive in combining with a large number of other nouns to form binomial phrases. There are a number of frequent noun and noun binomial phrases in news and academic prose: *aims and objectives, east and west, family and friends, gas and coal, goods and services, individuals and groups, input and output, justice and fairness, law and order, north and south, oil and gas, rights and duties, science and technology, size and shape, space and time, speech and writing, strengths and weaknesses, stress and strain, theory and practice, time and place, time and effort, trial and error.*

In contrast, noun and noun binomial phrases are generally rare in conversation and in fiction compared to written exposition. However, binomial phrases in conversation and fiction fall into a few semantic categories:

a) Relational expressions: *ladies and gentlemen*

b) Food combinations: *salt and vinegar*

c) Time expressions: *years and years*

d) Others: *flesh and blood*

Only a few recurrent expressions connect binomial nouns *with or*. In written exposition, these expressions usually combine referents with opposite meaning, suggesting that the contention is true under all circumstances: *increase or decrease, presence or absence.*

7. Noun + of- phrase combinations

This type of combination comprises collective, unit, and quantifying nouns.

7.1 Collective Nouns

These refer to groups of single entities. Examples include: *army, audience, board, committee, crew, family, jury, staff, team.* Though these nouns behave like ordinary countable nouns, they vary in number and definiteness. For example: *The constitution and composition of this committee vary from school to school/ specifically the committees have the following functions.* Regarding collocations of quantifying collectives, there are wide differences in collocational patterns between individual collective nouns. Collective nouns differ in their productivity in combining with collocates, both in terms of the number of collocates and in terms of the range of entities making up the group (Biber et al. 1999:247-50).

Collective noun	Selected collocates
batch of	cakes, cards, blood tests, pigs
bunch of	amateurs, daffodils, grapes, roses.
clump of	azalea, dandelions, trees, elms
crowd of	fans, spectators, shoppers, demonstrators
flock of	birds, goats, geese, doves, sheep, children, reporters
gang of	bandits, hecklers, thieves, thugs, youths
group of	friends, animals, insects, chemicals, diseases, things
herd of	goats, cows, pigs, deer, elephants, zebras, buffalo(es)
host of	advisors, stars, possibilities, angels
pack of	dogs, wolves, rogues, lies, cards, thieves
series of	accidents, assertions, tests
set of	conditions, drawers, friends, glasses
shoal of	fish, mackerel, piranhas, herring
swarm of	bees, hornets, possibilities, wasps
troop of	British Tommies, inspectors, baboons

Notes:

i) It is noted that the majority of collective nouns correlate closely with a particular type of entity: people (e.g. *crowd* and *gang*), animals (e.g. *flock*, *herd*, *shoal* and *swarm*), plants (e.g. *bouquet* and *clump*), or inanimate objects or entities (e.g. *batch* and *set*).

ii) Some most productive collective nouns like (*bunch*, *group*, and *set*) are quite flexible regarding the type of entity they refer to.

iii) Collective nouns are generally used for neutral descriptions, but some like *bunch, gang*, and *pack* usually have negative connotation; *host* has positive connotations. The collective noun *series* refers to things or events occurring in sequence. The choice of collocation will suggest how a group of entities may be viewed. Each of the following collective nouns has different connotations: *a group of young men, a bunch of drunken men, a swarm of panicked men*. Such examples of metaphoric use are remarkably commonplace in fiction (Biber et al,1999:249-50)

iv) Some other collective nouns with their collocates may be added to the list above: *a litter of puppies/ kittens, a colony of ants, a school of whales, a cloud of flies, a company of actors, a constellation of stars, a deck of cards* (AmE)*, a fleet of cars (*or *ships), a flight of starlings, steps, aeroplanes, a pride of lions*. (These final additional examples are from some modern dictionaries listed in the references list.)

7.2 Unit Nouns

They are in a way the opposite of collective nouns: instead of providing a collective reference for separate entities, they isolate a similar mass and refer to different instances of a phenomenon. Collective nouns refer to countables and unit nouns to uncountables. Unit nouns are followed by an of-phrase designating the type of matter or phenomenon referred to (Biber et al., 1999:250).

Regarding collocations of unit nouns, they tend to have marked collocational patterns; *'bit of'* and *'piece of'* are the most productive. Consider the following table for some unit nouns and their collocates: (ibid.: 250-51)

Unit noun	Selected collocates
act of	aggression, folly, kindness
article of	clothing, furniture
bit of	cheese, sugar; paper, grass; conversation, luck
chip of	glass, ice, paint, stone
chunk of	meat, gold; data, time
fragment of	glass, metal, pottery, stone
game of	cards, chess, golf
grain of	corn, dust, salt; doubt, sense
item of	clothing, equipment; information, news
loaf of	bread

lump of	clay, coal, soil; butter, fat, meat
piece of	cake, toast; cloth, clothing; chalk, land; advice, evidence
pair of	clippers, glasses, tweezers
rasher of	bacon
scrap of	material, paper; hope, information
sheet of	cardboard, iron, paper, plastic; flame, water
slice of	bread, ham, pie
sliver of	cheese, glass, light
speck of	dirt, dust, paint; trouble
sprinkling of	fresh mint, pepper, sugar, sunshine, young women
strip of	bacon, cloth, land, tissue
trace of	blood, lipstick, poison; anxiety, remorse, vanity
whit of	concern, sense

Note: *cloth* is fabric made by weaving or knitting cotton, wool, silk, and used for making garment, coverings, etc. *Clothing* means a particular type of clothes, such as a dress or shirt (Oxford Learner's Thesaurus:111, 271).

Biber et al. (1999:251-52) illustrate the following findings regarding the unit nouns and their potential collocates:

a) Some unit nouns have a definite meaning and a very limited field of use (e.g. *loaf, rasher, sliver, whit*), while others are more general in meaning and combine with an extensive variety of nouns (particularly *bit* and *piece*). A few unit nouns are often or exclusively used in negative contexts: *not a speck of, no trace of, not a whit of.*

b) A multitude of uncountable nouns can combine with a miscellany of unit nouns. *Paper*, for example, can combine with any of the following unit nouns: *ball, bit, flake, fragment, heap, length, mound, pad, piece, pile, reel, roll, scrap, sheaf, sheet, slip, sliver, square, strip, twist, wad.*

c) By the selection of unit noun, it is probable to produce different features of the entity (size, shape, etc.)

d) Modifiers can be inserted either before the unit noun or as part of the following noun phrase. Compare the following: *a valuable piece of advice / a piece of legal advice.*

7.3 Quantifying Nouns: Collocations of Types of Quantifying Nouns

These are used to refer to quantities of both masses and entities, which are particularized in a following of-phrase by uncountable nouns and plural countables (ibid.: 252).

There is a large-scale range of quantifying nouns in English. Below are the major categories (A-F) (different tables and annotations are from Biber et al. (1999:252-54) unless otherwise indicated).

A) Nouns denoting type of container

Noun	Selected collocates
barrel of	apples, fish, powder, beer, wine
basket of	eggs, bread, toiletries, flowers, fruit
box of	Books, chocolates, cigars, matches, soap, tissues
crate of	champagne, explosives, fruit
cup of	coffee, soup, tea
keg of	beer, stout
pack of	cards, cigarettes, notes, peanuts
packet of	biscuits, candles, chips, cocaine, envelopes
sack of	coal, grain, mail, potatoes, rice, rubbish

Notes:

i) 'A barrel of laughs' is an idiom which can be used ironically meaning ' very amusing', 'a lot of fun': *life hasn't exactly been a barrel of laughs lately* (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary:87).

ii) Some of these nouns can be used more generally and metaphorically as quantifying nouns: *a basket of pension plans; He is a sack of scum* (i.e. a very unpleasant person who does dishonest or immoral things); *packets of data.*

iii) According to (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English:383), *cup* is a unit used in the US for measuring food or liquid in cooking, e.g. *Mix the butter with 1 cup of powdered sugar until light and fluffy.*

iv) According to (Oxford Learner's Thesaurus: A dictionary of synonyms:535), *packet* in BrE is a small paper or cardboard container in which goods are packed or wrapped for selling: *a packet of biscuits/ cigarettes/ crisps*. In AmE this is called *a pack* or *package*. In AmE *a packet* is a closed paper or plastic container, like a small envelope, that contains a small amount of liquid or powder: *a packet of ketchup*. In BrE this is called a *sachet*.

B) Nouns Denoting Shape

Noun	selected collocates
heap of	ashes, blankets, bones, clothes, leaves, rubbish, rubble
pile of	bills, bodies, bricks, cushions, rocks, rubbish, wood.

stick of	celery, driftwood, incense
wedge of	bronze, ice

Notes:

i) According to (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary:597), *heap* is an untidy pile of things, e.g. *a heap of rubble / clothes / tyres / leaves. Pile* is a number of things that have been placed on top of each other: *a pile of books/ bricks/ clothes*.

ii) *Heap* and *pile* can also be used more generally expressing exaggeration or a large amount: *heaps of common sense, piles of gusto*(Biber et al.,1999:253).

C) Standardized Measure Terms

Noun	**Selected collocates**
pint, gallon, quart, litre	of beer , blood, gas , gin, milk, oil, petrol, water, whisky , wine
foot, inch, yard, metre	of cloth, concrete, earth, fabric, material, sediment, wire.
ounce, pound, gram, kilo (gram)	of butter, cheese, cocaine, flour, gold, heroin, margarine, meat, opium, potatoes, sugar.
ton, tonne	of aluminium, bricks, explosives, ore, sewage

Note:

It is noted that various measures can be applied to distinct products or types of material. Some measure terms can be used more generally and metaphorically like *ounce* and *ton: If he's got an ounce of common sense, he'll realize that this project is bound to fail/ We've got tons of food left over from the party* (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary:1007). Combinations of this sort habitually express exaggeration, showing a very small amount (*ounce*) or large amount (*ton*) (Biber et al.,1999:253).

D) Plural Numerals

Numerals are used either as determiners or as heads of noun phrases. Plural forms of round numbers (e.g. 10, 100, 1000, etc.) can be used with a following of-phrase and a plural countable noun to represent close numbers: *tens of thousands, hundreds of applicants, thousands of accidents, billions of dollars,* and the like. Other nouns can be used to express approximate numbers (like *dozen* and *score*):

Nouns	**Selected collocates**
dozens, scores	of animals, books, drivers, people, women

Notes:

i) Expressions with plural numerals can be used very freely as dubious expressions for large numbers*: Oh goodness, darling, you've seen it <u>hundreds of times</u>.*

ii) *Dozen* is a group of twelve of the same thing, e.g. *two dozen eggs; score* is a set or group of
20 or approximately 20. (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary:379,1143)

E) Nouns Denoting Large Quantities

Noun	selected collocates
a load of	cars, fuel, money, stuff; garbage, nonsense, rubbish
loads of	books, friends, money, work,
a mass of	blood, bodies, detail, flames, material, stuff
masses of	abstentions, homework, money, neurons, people

 Notes:
i) *Load* and *mass* have quite different distributions across the registers: *load / loads* is much more common in conversation than in the written registers; *mass* is mainly used in the written registers.
ii) In familiar spoken English, we find a wide range of quantifiers roughly synonymous with *lots of*, one of these is *loads of,* e.g. *she's got loads of money* (Quirk et al., 1985: 264).

F) Nouns ending in –ful

The suffix *–ful* can be added to nearly any noun signifying some kind of container to produce a quantifying noun, generating nouns such as: *basketful, bellyful, bowlful, earful, forkful, pocketful, tankful, teaspoonful, thimbleful*. Many of these have marked collocational patterns. The following are some of the common nouns ending in *-ful* with their collocates:

Noun	Selected collocates
armful of	straw, magazines, pots and pans, red roses.
fistful of	cash, dollars, matches, money
handful of	gravel, salt; boys, enthusiasts, people; cases, occasions, sites
mouthful of	coffee, cereal, dirt, teeth
spoonful of	broth, sprouts, stuffing, sugar

Notes:

i) Besides being the most common form of this type, *handful* manifests itself by recurring in the larger part of cases where the reference is to a small amount instead of to what precisely can be contained in a hand.

ii) Besides being added to nouns denoting 'container', the suffix *-ful* can also be added to abstract nouns: *doubtful* "uncertain"; *fearful* "frightened or worried about something"; *respectful* "showing or feeling respect"; *rightful* "morally or legally correct" *wrongful* "not fair, not morally right or legal".

8. The Test: Quantity and Analysis

Fifty male and fifty female, fourth-year, English department / College of Education for Humanities/University of Kirkuk/students participated in the test. The students were randomly chosen, which would represent a broader sample of students. The test consisted of two sections (I, II) (see Appendix). A pretest questionnaire preceded the two-section test. The questionnaire sought testees' main source of exposure to the English language. Regarding the questionnaire, the following table shows testees' responses with percentages.

Table (I)

Testees' Main Sources of Exposure to the English Language with Percentages

(1)   Newspapers and Magazines

Male		Female		
No. of responses	Percentage	No. of Responses	Percentage	Total Response
7	14%	1	2%	8

(2) Watching Films and Serials

Male		Female		
No. of responses	Percentage	No. of Responses	Percentage	Total Response
12	24%	14	28%	16

(3) Social Media

Male		Female		

_____

No. of responses	Percentage	No. of Responses	Percentage	Total Response
13	26%	16	32%	29

(4) Inside Classes

Male		Female		
No. of responses	Percentage	No. of Responses	Percentage	Total Response
8	16%	10	20%	18

(5) Others

Male		Female		
No. of responses	Percentage	No. of Responses	Percentage	Total Response
2	4%	0	%	02

(6) All of the Above

Male		Female		
No. of responses	Percentage	No. of Responses	Percentage	Total Response
8	16%	9	18%	17

Results and Discussion

According to the testees' responses to the questionnaire, the highest percentage (58%) of the testees responded that "Social Media" like "YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter" is their main source of exposure to English; while the lowest percentage (4%) of the testees responded that "Others" (= other sources) are their main source of exposure to English.

Test (I):

In this test, students are given (20) sentences. In each sentence, one of four options is the normal collocation for an underlined word in the main sentence. Testees' responses with percentages are given in (Table 2) below (the correct choice is given at the beginning of each entry in the table).

Table (2) Number and Percentage of Correct Noun-noun Collocation in Test (I)

No.	The Normal Collocation	Male Students			Female Students			
		Number of Responses	Correct Choice	Percentage of Correct Choice	Number of Responses	Correct Choice	Percentage of Correct Choice	Total correct choice
1	a flock of birds	50	29	58%	50	22	44%	51
2	a course of pills	48	23	47.916%	49	13	26.530%	36
3	chain of events	46	8	17.391%	49	6	12.244%	14
4	a pack of dogs	48	29	60.416%	49	34	69.387%	63
5	a speck of dirt	49	19	38.775%	48	20	41.666%	39
6	the size of fleet	46	25	54.347%	48	16	33.333%	41
7	circle of friends	48	28	58.333%	47	36	76.595%	64
8	gangs of youth	46	32	69.565%	49	35	71.428%	67
9	a bunch of flowers	49	36	73.469%	49	43	87.755%	79
10	the pace of life	48	8	16.666%	50	13	26%	21
11	a stroke of luck	48	15	31.25%	47	18	38.297%	33
12	a series of attacks	47	27	57.446%	48	28	58.333%	55

13	an act of kindness	49	18	36.734%	47	18	38.297%	36
14	shoals of fish	46	25	54.347%	49	26	53.061%	51
15	grains of sugar	49	23	46.938%	50	28	56%	51
16	a heap of rubble	46	26	56.521%	50	11	22%	37
17	a pack of cards	49	16	32.653%	50	14	28%	30
18	a thimbleful of beer	48	9	18.75%	49	17	34.693%	26
19	a herd of cows	46	17	36.956%	49	29	59.183%	46
20	swarms of flies	49	22	44.897%	50	32	64%	54
						Average of correct choice		44.77%

Results and Discussion

By analyzing the number and percentage of the correct choice in Test(I) (Table 2), it is noted that the highest percentage of the correct choice for male and female students is item number (9) (73.469%) and 87.755% respectively (a bunch of flowers). While the lowest percentage of the correct choice for male students is item (10) (the pace of life, 16.666%), and the lowest percentage of the correct choice for female students is item (3) (=chain of events, 12.244%). The highest total correct choice is (a bunch of flowers) (item 9) (79), and the lowest total correct choice is (chain of events) (item 3) (14).

Test II

In this test, students are given (20) items. Each item consists of a noun and/or noun combination in which the second part is missing. Testees have to fill in each space with a suitable noun that normally collocates with the first part. Testees'

responses with percentages are given in (Table 3) below (the correct choice is given at the beginning of each entry in the table).

Table (3) Number and Percentage of Noun and/or Noun Combinations in Test (II)[1]

No.	The Normal Collocation	Male Students			Female Students			Total Text Direction
		Number of Responses	Correct Choice	Percentage of Correct Choice	Number of Responses	Correct Choice	Percentage of Correct Choice	
1	sports and games	43	12	27.91%	45	14	31.12%	26
2	arts and crafts[2]	48	09	18.75%	47	7	14.90%	16
3	skating and skiing	46	08	17.40%	48	22	45.84%	30
4	hunger and thirst	47	37	78.73%	49	42	85.72%	79
5	religions and beliefs[3]	45	22	48.89%	46	24	52.18%	46
6	science and technology[4]	44	07	15.91%	47	12	25.54%	19
7	lords and ladies[5]	47	04	8.51%	48	06	12.50%	10
8	Democrats and Republicans	48	23	47.92%	49	27	55.11%	50
9	snakes and ladders	47	33	70.22%	49	39	79.60%	72
10	chalk and cheese[6]	47	04	8.51%	48	09	18.75%	13

_____

11	law and order[7]	44	14	31.82%	45	06	13.34%	20
12	bachelor and spinster	46	17	36.96%	44	20	45.46%	37
13	bombing and shelling	48	08	16.67%	47	05	10.64%	13
14	thunder and lightning	46	34	73.92%	45	23	51.12%	57
15	deaf and dumb	43	09	20.93%	44	13	29.55%	22
16	the haves and the have nots[8]	46	09	19.95%	44	16	36.37%	25
17	bows and arrows	48	27	56.25%	47	31	65.96%	58
18	pots and pans[9]	44	07	15.91%	45	14	31.12%	21
19	friend or foe	49	08	16.33%	48	5	10.42%	13
20	duke or duchess[10]	44	27	61.37%	47	29	61.71%	56
							Average of correct choice	34.15%

Results and Discussion

By analyzing the number and percentage of the correct choice in Test (II) (Table 3), it is noted that the highest percentage of the correct choice for male and female students is item number (4) (hunger and thirst) (78.73% and 85.72% respectively). While the lowest percentage of the correct choice for male students is item (7) (lords and ladies, 8.51%), and item (10) (chalk and cheese,8.51%). The lowest percentage of the correct choice for female students is item (19) (friend or foe, 10.42%). The highest total correct choice is (item 4) (hunger and thirst)(79); and the lowest total correct choice is (item 7) (lords and ladies)(10).

Notes to Test II

1) Some of the paired collocations found in the test are quite commonplace in English. These include, for example, "sports and games", "science and technology", "snakes and ladders", "law and order", "deaf and dumb", "pots and pans", "friend or foe". Some others are found in some modern conventional dictionaries (listed in the references), or in some reference books like *Longman Lexicon of Contemporary English* (1981) by Tom McArthur.

2) According to Macmillan English Dictionary, (2007: 65), *arts* are "paintings, drawings, and SCULPTURES that are created to be beautiful or to express ideas", while *crafts* represent "a traditional skill of making things by hand, for example furniture or jewellery as in "the promotion of traditional Egyptian arts and crafts", (ibid.:324).

3) The term *religion* is "belief in the existence of a god or gods, and the activities that are connected with the worship of them" (*Oxford Learner's Thesaurus*, 2008: 635). *Belief* is something that you believe, especially as part of your religion" (ibid.:831). The word *faith* does not collocate with *religion*, as *faith* has a similar meaning to *religion*. For (ibid.:635) 'faith' is "strong religious belief; a particular religion".

4) *Science* is "(the study of) knowledge which can be made into a system and which usually depends on seeing and testing facts and stating general laws". While *'technology'* is ("the science of) the practical uses of the discoveries of science, especially in industry and in making machines" (*Longman Lexicon of Contemporary English*, 1981:444).

5) *Lord* is "a man who has a high rank in the British ARISTOCRACY (=highest social class). A woman of the same rank is called a lady" (*Macmillan English Dictionary,* 2007: 795, 847).

6) *Chalk and cheese* (especially BrE) means (=completely different from each other), e.g. The two brothers are as different as chalk and cheese. (*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English,*2003*:* 242).

7) *Law and order* is "a situation in which people respect the law, and crime is controlled by the police, the prison system, etc.''(ibid.: 909).

8) *The haves and (the) have-nots* are "the people in a society who have a lot of money and property, and those who do not have much money or property (*Macmillan English Dictionary*, 2007: 656-57).

9) *Pots and pans* is used in the proverb "If 'ifs' and 'ands' were pots and pans, there'd be no work for tinkers' hands" which means "wishing for things is useless". (*NTC's Dictionary of Proverbs and Cliches*, 1993: 115).

10) Duke is "a man with a very high position, just below that of a prince, or someone who is the ruler of a small independent country". Duchess is "a woman who has the same social position as a duke, or who is married to a duke". (*Macmillan English Dictionary,* 2007: 431; *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 2008: 436-37).

Discussion and Implications

Analyzing students' responses in tests (I and II), it is found that the collocations posed in the tests proved problematic for the testees (average correct choice of test (I) is (44.7%) and of test (II) only (34.15%). This can be attributed to the fact that EFL learners' knowledge of and exposure to collocational patterns available in English is much less than general vocabulary. And, as Cook (2003:73) asserts that:

A far greater proportion of language use is composed of collocations than was previously imagined. There are countless combinations of words which are grammatically possible but do not occur, or occur only rarely, but there are collocations with very similar meanings which occur with great frequency.

Hence, students' awareness of collocational patterns should be raised. This can be done by making students "aware of the fact that words are best learned together with their collocates to help students become, far more communicatively competent". (Hill, 2000: 62, quoted in Mutlu and Kaşlioğlu, 2016:95).

Another reason for students' inability to recognize collocations is the differences in collocational patterns between L1 and L2, which definitely pose problems of production for L2 learners. Moreover, students are unaware of 'collocation' as a concept and haven't been exhaustively exposed to the concept in their textbooks, so English language syllabus designers and materials producers must take this into account. Finally, Harrison (1996:6) may be quoted who stresses that "in order to sound natural and achieve fluency in English, the non-native speaker must be familiar with collocations".

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The following are some of the main points arrived at in the current study:

1) The English language abounds with numerous noun-noun collocations, which are a source of difficulty for students.
2) Noun-noun collocations exist in English as noun and /or noun combinations, or as noun+ of phrase combinations.
3) Regarding categories of collocations, they are of two types: open and restricted.
4) The term "collocation" first appeared in the early 1990's and formally set forth in linguistics by Firth (1957).
5) Collocations exist either because the combination reflects a common state of affair, or due to an added element of linguistic convention.

6) The meanings of words are mainly determined by the words they occur with.

7) Some phonological restrictions like rhythmic regularity, some semantic factors, and cultural dominance play a role in the order of conjoined words.

8) There are three main approaches to collocation: lexical, semantic, and structural.

9) Binomial phrases (=noun and/or noun) comprise two words from the same grammatical category.

10) Noun + of -phrase combinations include collective, unit, and quantifying nouns.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the tests carried out in the study, the following recommendations may be put forward :

1) Since collocations are exhibited differently in different languages, the difficulties encountered by specific learners should be addressed according to the type of their errors.

2) Devoting chapters or sections within chapters in textbooks for main collocational patterns in English, which can improve students' knowledge of them.

3) It is suggested by Hill (2000:62) that "learning of individual words may be prioritized for students to expand their lexicon, yet students must learn words together with their collocates" (cited in Mutlu and Kaşlioğlu, 2016:95). Hence, "collocations should be integrated with all core language skills" (ibid.:92).

*Note

As regards documentation convention followed in the study, run-in direct quotations and paraphrases will be adopted throughout the study. In cases where the researchers didn't have access to the original source of an idea or quote, they had to adopt the convention of citing or giving a secondary quote (via 'cited in' or 'quoted in'). In the reference list, only the original sources that we had access to are included, as Wray and Bloomer (2006:223) affirm that "you must include in your reference list the source that you used.... [M]any lecturers dislike seeing secondary sources (words you referred to without having seen) listed in the reference list, because it makes it hard to tell what you have in fact read."

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Appendix

The Test

_____

Dear student: the researchers are conducting a study entitled, " Difficulties Encountered by English Department Students in Using Noun-Noun Collocations". And in order to verify the hypothesis put forward by the researches, they constructed a test in two sections (I , II). The test investigates your ability to recognize noun-noun collocations in English. Your participation and careful answering will be highly appreciated.

Thank you

The Researches

Gender (male) [ ]   (female) [ ]

Q\ What is your main source of exposure to the English language?

1) Newspapers and magazines [ ]
2) Watching films and serials [ ]
3) Social media [ ]
4) Inside classes [ ]
5) Others (mention if any) [ ]
6) All of the above [ ]

(I) Choose one of the words below each sentence to fill the gaps. In each case only one of them is the normal collocation for the underlined word.

1) A <u>flock</u> of .... passed overhead.

a) locusts   b) birds   c) cows   d) zebras

2) She's on a .... of little pink <u>pills</u>

a) series   b) group   c) course   d) collection

3) We witnessed a remarkable .... of <u>events</u> in eastern Europe in 1989.

a) chain   b) line   c) sequence   d) succession

4) A <u>pack</u> of wild .... chased the man.

a) falcons   b) dogs   c) eagles   d) vultures

5) There is not a .... of <u>dirt</u> in their house.

a) slice   b) trace   c) speck   d) bit

6) The airline is doubling the <u>size</u> of its ....

a) convoy   b) procession   c) parade   d) fleet

7) She is not one of my close <u>circle</u> of ....

a) acquaintances   b) friends   c) fellows   d) relatives

8) <u>Gangs</u> of .... roamed the streets.

a) geese   b) ghosts   c) youths   d) angels

9) I'll send her a <u>bunch</u> of -----------

a) books   b) pens   c) pencils   d) flowers

10) I don't like the --------- of modern <u>life</u>.

a) pace   b) speed   c) rate   d) velocity

11) By a ------ of <u>luck</u>, someone else was walking along the path and heard any shouts for help.

a) stroke   b) bang   c) blow   d) beat

12) The police are investigating a ---------- of <u>attacks</u> in the area.

a) battles   b) series   c) troops   d) crowds

13) If you did that it would be an--------- of great <u>kindness</u>.

a) amendment   b) act   c) action   d) behaviour

14) We could see <u>shoals</u> of tiny --------- darting about.

a) wasps   b) rabbits   c) fish   d) mosquitoes

15) There were <u>grains</u> of ------- on the table.

a) sugar   b) cake   c) bread   d) chocolate

16) The bomb had reduced the building to a -------- of <u>rubble</u>.

a) pile   b) stick   c) wedge   d) heap

17) Do you have a ------------- of <u>cards</u>?

a) pack   b) packet   c) box   d) crate

18) He poured a ---------- of <u>beer</u> into the glass.

a) armful   b) handful   c) thimbleful   d) fistful

19) He looks after a <u>herd</u> of fifty-----------.

a) geese   b) bees   c) swans   d) cows

20) The dead sheep was covered with the <u>swarms</u> of ----------

a) flies   b) foxes   c) wolves   d) rabbits

II) Filling the spaces, show what the given words normally collocate with:

1- sports and---------

2- arts and ---------

3- skating and ---------

4- hunger and ---------

5- religions and ---------

6- science and ---------

7- lords and ---------

8- Democrats and ---------

9- snakes and ---------

10- chalk and ---------

11- law and ---------

12- bachelor and ---------

13- bombing and --------

14- thunder and ---------

15- deaf and ---------

16- the haves and -------

17- bows and ----------

18- pots and ---------

19- friend or ---------

20- duke or --------

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