The Use of Podcast Application Episodes in Learning Synonyms and Collocations

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ABSTRACT

Collocation and synonym learning constitute an important part of second language learning. Collocation and synonym provide the learners with agreat amount of vocabulary which they can add to their vocabulary repertoire.

The current paper argues that podcast radio episodes have a great influence in learning synonyms and collocations. The study aims to show whether podcast radio episodes can be used as a tool to increase students awareness of synonyms and collocations or not. It is hypothesized that podcast radio episodses can be used in learning synonyms and collocations.

An experiment is conducted on a group of students at Iraqi Secondary school for girls.The students are given test papers which contain synonym and collocation multiple choice questions to check if they have listen to a selected episode carefully. The outcome of the test reveal that podcast radio episodes can indeed be used to increase students repertoire of synonyms and collocations.

1.INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a great interest in studies on collocation in second language learning. The reson for this sudden increase is that native speakers use collocations a lot in everyday life which in turn motivates second language learners to learn collocations, too. The use of collocation dates back to Firthian tradition of looking for the meanings of words by the syntagmatic relations between words (Firth, 1957).

On the other hand, Synonyms are words that are very close in meaning or have related meanings. Synonyms are used to avoid repetition. The origin of the word is from the ancient Greek (syn= with) (Martins, 2014). In English, many synonyms appeared in the Middle Ages after the Norman Conquest of England (Palmer, 1983, p.67).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW: SYNONYMS AND COLLOCATIONS

Generally speaking, collocation is a way in which some words are often used together and sound natural together. Exposure to collocation is a perfect way for learning of a second language and for L2 collocations as well. Durrant and Schmitt (2010) say that the frequent input helps the learning of collocation.

On the other hand, a synonym is a word or phrase that is interchangeable in certain contexts for another word or phrase. Lyons (1968, p.146) states that "synonymy is a linguistic term that refers to lexical items that share the same, or similar meanings". It means that a synonym falls within the scope of semantic study and that the definitions and clarifications provided by semanticists are similar in one way or another.

2.1 The Notion of Collocation

According to McCarthy and O'dell (2007, p.6): " A collocation is a pair or group of words that are often used

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together. These combinations sound natural to native speakers, but students of English have to make a special effort to learn them because they are difficult to guess".

It means that some combinations may sound wrong, so, in order to know these combinations, we must have background knowledge, for example: it is correct to say *fast food* but it is incorrect to say *quick food*.

2.1.1 Types of Collocations

There are different types of collocations:

1. Verbs that collocate with nouns:

Obviously, some nouns go with certain verbs. In order to avoid mistakes, learners must be able to know these combinations, for example: instead of saying <u>*do a bath,*</u> it is more accurate to say <u>*take a bath*</u>.

2. Adverbs that collocate with adjectives:

Almost 'very' and 'extremely' can be replaced by a number of intensifying adverbs such as:

- <u>Highly controversial</u> = (very controversial)
- <u>Deeply offended</u> = (very offended)
- <u>Bitterly disappointed</u> = (very disappointed)

It is often difficult to guess which adverb will be used with a certain adjective. Some adverbs occur before some adjectives, for example: perfectly normal (same as very normal) and grossly misleading (same as very misleading).

3. Adjectives that collocate with nouns:

There are a range of adjectives that are used to describe nouns, for example: <u>strong, real or distinct possibility</u> can be used when something is possible otherwise <u>a remote or faint possibility</u> can be used when something is not very likely.

(www.ryerson.ca)

4. Noun + Noun collocations:

There are a lot of collocations with the pattern a …… of ……, for example: As Sam read the lies about him, he felt <u>a surge of anger</u>.

5. Verbs that collocate with adverbs.

Some verbs have certain adverbs which regularly collocate with them, for example: *she <u>pulled steadily</u> on the rope*.

6. Verbs and expressions with prepositions:

Some verbs collocate with certain prepositional expressions, for example: *Jack <u>went on</u> stage to receive his gold medal for the judo competition*, (McCarthy and O'Dell, 2007 :12).

2.1.2 Learning Collocation

Basically, learning collocation is an important part of learning the lexis of any language. Collocations can be divided into two types: fixed or strong collocations, for example: *travel abroad*, since there is not any word other than *'travel'* collocates with 'abroad' and giving similar meaning, (ibid,6). The second type is more open in which several different words can be used to give a similar meaning, for example: *keep to/ stick to* the rules.

Learning collocation is a brilliant idea because:

a. They can provide a natural way to say something, for example: 'Smoking is strictly forbidden' is more reasonable than 'smoking is strongly forbidden'.

b. They can offer substitutional ways of saying something which may be more expressive, for example: It is more likely to say, *'it was bitterly cold and pitch dark'*, instead of saying, *'it was very old and very dark'*.

c. They can contribute in improving a style of writing, for example: It is better to say, 'poverty breeds crime' than to say, 'poverty causes crime', (ibid)

Learning collocation can be differentiated from learning vocabularies. The main steps are:

- To refine what the learners want to learn.
- To apply what the learners have learnt in contexts.
- To acquire collocations in groups helping the learners to fix them in memory, (ibid)

Learners can learn collocations by using the following techniques:

1. It is better for learners to read newspapers, magazines, or even stories in English to learn collocations.
2. Through reading, they can connect the keywords and match them.
3. The learners may use different highlighters for every type of collocations.
4. The learners, then, write down the examples which they have found from the articles onto their note books.
5. Finally, the learners arrange the collocations into pairs, (www.nanikastutik91.blogspot.com).

2.1.3 Misuse, Overuse and Underuse of Collocations

Definitely, overuse and underuse is the high specified problem in collocation. Through comparisons of collocational performance between L2 learners and native speakers show that L2 learners use fewer collocations than their native speaker counterparts, (Granger, 2002:11f).

Deficiency in various uses of collocations is framed by the overuse and underuse of certain collocations. De cock et al. (1998) and Foster (2001) find that in the spoken productions by Non Native Speakers an overuse and underuse of some obscurity tags, for example: (*and so on*). Even in written performance, Yorio (1989) discovers that in Non Native Speakers' writings there are less collocations.

According to Lorenz (1999), learners underuse more restricted collocations and overuse collocations which are less restricted. The important reason for the overuse and underuse phenomena is that learners' tendency to "cling on to certain fixed phrases and expressions which they feel confident in using", (Granger, 1998a:156). Actually, learners' dependency on common collocations leads to overuse and avoidance of other collocation of which they are unsure in using leads to underuse.

Generally, collocations pose learning difficulties even for proficient L2 learners. Most researchers agree that this difficulty involves the arbitrary restrictions in word combinations. Herniksen(2013:49) states that "collocations are more low frequent than the words that make up the collocations and learners therefore mostly lack sufficient exposure to collocations".

Unfortunately, L2 learners do not pay attention to the relationship between words (collocational relationship) (Wray, 2002). There is a difference between native speakers and non-native speakers in learning collocations, Non Native Speakers are affected by their first language.

2.2 Synonymy

Saeed (2016, p.61) defines synonyms as "different phonological words that have the same or very similar meanings".

This definition implies that there are not true or exact synonyms in English. Saeed (ibid. p.62) adds that synonyms often have distinctive distributions a long a number of parameters. Synonyms may have originated from various dialects and then become synonyms for speakers who know these dialects. For example, Irish English *press* is a synonym of British English *cupboard*. Moreover, synonyms may be originated from different languages for example cloth (from old English) and fabric (from Latin).

2.2.1 Types of Synonyms

There are four basic types of synonyms: cognitive, contextual-cognitive, plesionymy (near-synonymy), and absolute synonymy (Cruse, 1986, p.268).

1. **Cognitive Synonymy**

Cognitive synonymy is a kind of synonymy in which synonyms are so similar in meaning that they cannot be differentiated either denotatively (by sign) or connotatively (by implication). It is a more precise technical definition of synonymy especially for theoretical (linguistic and philosophical purposes). A word is cognitively synonymous with another word if and only if the instances of both words express the same exact thing, and the referents are identical (it means that if the two items interchanged with each other, it will not effect the context (Shunnaq, 1992, p.24).

For example, from (Quine, 1951, p.20):

All bachelors are unmarried men.

All unmarried men are not married.

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2. Contextual-cognitive Synonymy

Lyons (1968, p.452) states that there is another type of synonymy which is called contextual-cognitive synonymy. This type of synonymy refers to lexical items which are cognitive synonyms in certain contexts, but are not in most contexts. For example, I will go to the shop and get/buy some bread.

The words 'get' and 'buy' are used interchangeably in this context, for this reason, they are cognitive synonyms only in this context. This means that 'get' and 'buy' are not interchangeable in all contexts.

According to Lyons (1981, p.149), "Context-restricted synonymy may be relatively rare, but it certainly exists". For instance, 'broad' and 'wide' are not exact synonymous because there are some contexts in which only one of them is used and the substitution of one for the other might effect or even change the meaning. For instance, 'wide' and 'broad' are not interchangeable in a sentence like ***The door was three feet wide*** or in a sentence like ***He has broad shoulders***.

3. Plesionymy (Near-Synonymy)

Cruse (1986: 285) says that Plesionyms are distinguished from cognitive synonyms by the fact that they yield sentences with different truth conditions. Unlike cognitive synonyms which have the same truth conditions. Near-synonyms are different from cognitive synonyms by the fact that they give sentences with different propositional content.
Farghal (1998: 118) mentions that the members of the synonymous pair *foggy*/ *misty* are near-synonyms rather than cognitive synonyms in that we can deny one while affirming the other.
The sentence below illustrates this:
It wasn't *foggy* yesterday; it was just *misty*.
Clearly, *mistiness* is a lower degree of *fogginess*.

4. Absolute Synonymy

Absolute synonymy is also described by some words like *perfect*, *total*, *complete*, *genuine*, *actual*, *real* or *full* synonymy. Most semanticists agree that real synonymy is a non-existence: that no two words have exactly the same meaning. Absolute synonymy is "two lexical units which would be absolute synonyms. This means that they would have identical meanings if and only if all

their contextual relations were identical" (Cruse, 1986, p.268).

The degree of synonymity changes from time to time. For example, the words ***sofa*** and ***settee*** are synonyms; *sofa* was considered more elegant than *settee*, but nowadays *settee* is considered more elegant than *sofa*, so these terms could be considered as absolute synonyms by some people(Ibid.).

Moreover, absolute synonymy indicates that the words in question have the same denotation, distribution and complete interchangeability in all environments; of course, this is difficult to be proved as Farghal (1998: 116) points out that "absolute synonyms are hard to find in English".

2.2.2 Learning Synonymy
Synonyms are two words that carry the same meaning or very close meaning. It is generally useful to learn the synonyms of each word. Enhancing vocabulary skill is very significant to express ideas and thoughts. For this reason, students should learn the synonyms of, at least, some common words. However, there are some techniques that can be used in order to learn synonyms:
1. Learners learn a new word on each day along with the synonyms. It is a good idea to learn a new word everyday along with its synonyms. Moreover, understanding the synonyms of each word gives a clear idea about that word.
2. Experiment with the words: once the learners understand the meaning of a word, they should use this word in a sentence. Consequently, they should put the synonyms of that word in other sentences. Thus, learners can easily increase their vocabulary skill as well as their writing skill.
   www.//medium.com

2.2.3Misuses of Synonyms
Palmer (1976, pp.89-91) states that "some synonyms overlap because their meanings are very similar. It means that there is a loose sense of synonymy". Such synonymy can be exploited by the dictionary maker. For instance, for the word 'govern', the dictionary suggests 'direct, control, determine and require'. As a result of this, most of these words has a further set for each getting further away from the original meaning. In

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addition, dictionaries, unfortunately, do not give us the exact links and differences between words and their synonyms. For example, in phonetics, the words 'spirants' and 'fricatives' can be used interchangeably.

2.3 The Difference between Synonyms and Collocations

Generally, acquiring **synonyms** is an amazing way to enhance learners' vocabulary. In addition, it is very significant to learn collocation, too**,** as it has been mentioned above that **collocation** means words that 'go together'. Some words go together with other words, but their synonyms might not.

For instance, there are many synonyms for unhappy: sad, miserable, low, blue, downcast, down in the dumps. If A asks B "how are you feeling?" B could answer with any of those words or expressions and the meaning would be clear. The important relationship between synonyms and collocations is that some synonyms such as **unhappy** collocates or 'goes together with' other words and phrases. For instance:

*He had **an unhappy childhood**.* The word 'unhappy' is the best collocation for **childhood**. Words such as **a sad childhood** or **a miserable childhood** can collocate with each other, but they don't sound quite as natural. The other synonyms of unhappy **do not go together** with childhood at all. www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/course/intermediate/unit23/session-1/activity-3

Synonym and collocation can be differentiated in that synonym is (Semantics with respect to given word or phrase) a word or phrase with the same meaning, or with very close meaning to another word or phrase, while collocation is the grouping or juxtaposition, particularly of things or sounds.
https://wikidiff.com/synonyms/collocation

3.PRACTICAL PROCEDURES

3.1 Participants

The study is applied to a group of students of forty five, fifth stage at Iraqi Secondary School for girls. All the participants are female and their ages range from (15-17) years old.

3.2 Data

The students listen to an episode from podcast application (https://www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/grammar/blond-or-blonde) in the class. The episode contains a number of different types of synonyms and collocations.

3.3 Procedures

At the beginning, the teacher gives the predetermined material to the students from their curriculum according to her daily plan. During the last ten minutes of the lesson, the teacher prepares the student for listening. She explains the task for them, that they should listen carefully to the selected episode from podcast application and elicit the synonyms and collocations they have heard and demands them to listen to the episode more than once at home.

3.4 Data Analysis

During the first five minutes of the next lesson, the teacher hands the students test papers that contain a list of multiple choice questions in order to make sure that the students have listened to the episode at home more than once. (The test sample is in the appendix)

3.5 Results

The analysis reveals that the some of the students have answered eight questions out of ten, others have answered five out of ten, while some of them have not answered the questions at all.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the test imply that the students who have answered all the questions have listened attentively to the selected episode from podcast and aslo indicate that they have listened to the episode more than once, whereas those who have not answered all the questions have not listened carefully and those who have not answered at all since they have not listened to the episode.

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Appendix
Test

Q: Fill in the blanks with suitable words or preposition:

1. Feminine = _____ (fame, female, fine).

2. Alumna = _____ (female graduated, ill, anemia)

3. Fortune = _____ (future, make money,

4. Blond = _____ (fair haired male, blood, bind)

5. Kid = _____ (kind, child, knife)

6. Pairs of _____ (work, words, wake)

7. The blonde get _____ line (in, out, off)

8. Check _____ a book. (Out, off, in)

9. It is an _____ car. (Old, red, French)

10. well _____ (done, did, do).

Script
Blond or Blonde?
'Blond' Versus 'Blonde'
[The word originally came into English from Old French](), where it has masculine and feminine forms. As an English noun, it kept those two forms; thus, a blond is a fair-haired male, and a blonde is a fair-haired female.
When you're using the word as an adjective, "blond" is the more common spelling and can be used for men or women, especially in the United States; however, "blonde" can also be used to describe a woman with fair hair, as in "Go ask the blonde woman at table 2 if she wants pepper on her salad."
A blond is a fair-haired male, and a blonde is a fair-haired female.
Is 'Blonde' Sexist?
Some people think it is sexist to use "blonde" to refer to women, but the AP stylebook currently says to maintain the distinction between the two gendered forms of the word if you use it, and The Chicago Manual of Style also seems to uphold the difference. It doesn't say so explicitly, but [it uses the E-form for women in some example sentences]().
Still, it may be perceived as especially sexist when you refer to a woman simply as "a blonde" or "the blonde," as in "The blonde got in line to check out a book." Garner's Modern English Usage says that for this reason, it's usually best to avoid using "blonde" (and "blond") as a stand-alone noun.
Inanimate Objects
Most of the time, inanimate objects are treated as male. For example, if you have a blond wooden dresser, "blond" is spelled without the E. A recent exception though is that Starbucks uses the feminine form for its [blonde roast coffee](). Maybe the marketing people believe we'll love it more if we think of it [as a woman or as female]().
How to Use 'Blond' and 'Blonde'
1. Avoid using "blond" as a stand-alone noun for men or women if you can easily rewrite your sentence or you think it may offend your readers.
2. If you do use the words as nouns, maintain the gender difference and use "blonde" for a woman and "blond" for a man.
3. Inanimate objects usually get the masculine form of the word.

4. When you're using "blond" as an adjective, use the masculine spelling, without the E, especially if you're in the United States.

'Blond' and 'Blonde' Examples

Here are four examples of how the different spellings are commonly used:

- The **blonde** was delighted when Squiggly presented her with a dictionary. (feminine noun, sometimes considered sexist)
- The **blond** wondered if he should use hair gel. (masculine noun, sometimes considered sexist)
- The **blond** man looked horrible in the orange sweater. (masculine adjective)
- Turn right at the **blond** brick pathway. (inanimate object, masculine adjective)

Other Gendered English Nouns

Although it's rare to have gendered nouns in English, "blond" (and "blonde") isn't the only one.

Two that you may have seen before also come from French: "confidant" (and "confidante") and "fiance" (and "fiancee"). The AP Stylebook says to uphold the gender difference for both words, unless you need a gender-neutral option for "fiancee," and in that case, it recommends describing couples as engaged or planning to marry. The Chicago Manual of Style doesn't address "fiancee" and notes the feminine form of "confidante" but says it's fading from the English language.

You may also be familiar with this pair from Latin: "alumnus" and "alumna." An "alumnus" is a male graduate, and an "alumna" is a female graduate. (Read more about "alumni.")

And of course, English has many pairs of words we use to describe similar men and women, some of which are still in use, such as "king" and "queen," and other pairs where one has fallen out of use, such as "editor" and "editrix." (Read more about when to use gendered nouns.)

Note: Karen Conlin, @GramrgednAngel on Twitter, pointed out that "brunette" and "brunet" are another pair like "blonde" and "blond."

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