

STUDENT'S ABILITY IN USING LEXICAL COLLOCATIONS IN DESCRIPTIVE WRITING AT THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT OF PADANG STATE POLYTECHNIC

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Abstract: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menemukan jenis kolokasileksikal yang digunakan oleh mahasiswa dalam tulisan deskriptif, dan yang banyak salah dalam penggunaannya sertamen jelaskan penyebab kesalahan tersebut. Jenis penelitian ini adalah deskriptif kualitatif. Subjek penelitian adalah mahasiswa semester genap tahun akademik 2011/2012 sebanyak 22 mahasiswa yang dipilih menggunakan random sampling technic. Data diperoleh dari tulisan deskriptif mahasiswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ketujuh jenis kolokasileksikal yang adaseperti; Verb [creation and or activation] + Noun (L1), Verb [eradictionand or nullification] + Noun (L2), Adjective + Noun (L3), Noun + Verb (L4), N1 + of + N2 (L5), Adverb + Adjective (L6), and Verb + Adverb (L7) dapat ditemui dalam tulisan mahasiswa tersebut. Jenis kolokasi yang banyak salah adalah (L3), (L1), dan (L4), sedangkan (L5), (L7), dan (L2) lebih sedikit, selanjutnya (L6) paling sedikit ditemui. Penyebab terjadinya kesalahan tersebut adalah: intervensi bahasa kedua, perbendaharaan kata, terjemahan per kata, terjemahan langsung, tidak memperhatikan aturan, serta kurangnya pengetahuan siswa tentang kolokasi itu sendiri.

Key words: *Lexical collocation, descriptive writing.*

INTRODUCTION

In the process of teaching and learning English, there are two indispensable aspects that must be closely paid attention by both teachers and students. The first is English vocabulary and the second one is grammar. However, the second aspect of the teaching English in Indonesia has been customarily a focus for most English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. They emphasize on grammar more than on vocabulary. As a result, most students have good understanding to the grammar than to the vocabulary.

The role of English vocabulary has long been taken too lightly in the EFL teaching because the EFL teachers assume that the students'

success in learning English is only seen from the students' ability in grammatical mastery. The EFL teachers' assumption is evidently true as they give emphasis to the teaching of the forms and functions of English grammar. Their attention to the forms and the functions of the grammar are more serious than to the teaching of English vocabulary. This is caused by the EFL teachers are worryabout having their students' spoken and written text impede the readers' understanding toward the incorrect uses of grammatical forms and functions. Therefore, the Indonesian teachers and students' paradigm to the teaching of English subject matter is no more than the teaching of English grammar.

The teaching of English vocabulary is very important to enhance the students' English writing or speaking proficiencies. In learning vocabulary, Thornbury (2002:3-12) explains that there are at least 6 types of vocabulary. The types are word classes, word families, word formation, multi-word units, collocations and homonyms. These six types must be learnt and mastered by the EFL students in order to improve as well as to increase their English vocabulary mastery in both written and spoken communication.

In relation to the mastery of English collocation, the students whose language are not English should prioritize to learn it as it is a main part of the type of vocabulary. The aim of understanding English collocation is to increase learners' speaking and writing proficiencies well. Therefore, the EFL learners are expected to pay close attention to the mastery of the collocation along with the mastery of vocabulary. In addition, collocation is already fixed or very strong to present the meaning of the expression used by the speakers, for instance, *take a picture/photo* where no word other than *take* which collocates with *picture/photo*. Furthermore, collocation provides a similar meaning to another word such as, *keep to* similar with *stick to*. The ability to pair a group of words into the right position makes someone's language different from the native speakers'.

Based on a brief explanation of making uses of collocation above either in spoken or in written communication, the researcher is triggered up and motivated to conduct a study on students' collocation

because of those facts found when correcting students' English writings in campus. This study is very important to conduct because collocations have been considered as high frequency word combinations for native speakers which will determine the nature of English used by non-native speakers. Their importance for teaching and learning has been increasingly recognized. In addition, collocations have not yet been generally integrated into the teaching materials or as one of the topics of discussion in English syllabus at school or at campus, as a result they have not been given serious consideration in the English teaching and learning processes yet. Collocations can be integrated into the four skills of English especially within the area of vocabulary teaching.

This research is aimed at finding out the types of lexical collocations, the types of the lexical collocation which were incorrectly made, and the causes of collocational problems found in the odd semester English Department students' descriptive writings at Padang State Polytechnic.

METHOD

This research used descriptive qualitative method. Descriptive study determines and reports the way things are. It involves collecting data in order to answer question or to test hypothesis concerning with the status of the object of the study. It can also measure what already exists within our daily life (Gay, 2000:275 and 2009: 112). In addition, Arikunto (1997:310) says descriptive research is not aimed at testing hypothesis but only to describe about the variable, phenomena, or situation.

The data were collected through observation after assigning the odd semester students 2011/2012 at English Department Padang State Polytechnic to write English descriptive tasks. The data were analyzed based on the descriptive analysis. To check data trustworthiness, the researcher lengthened the time to accomplish students' writing and then discussed the topics of writing given with another writing lecturer and researcher's advisors. The conclusion taken based on the description of the data.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The Types of Lexical Collocations found in English Department Students' Descriptive Writing.

Based on the analysis of the data, the researcher revealed out that the students used the seven types of lexical collocations in their descriptive writing or all types were used by the students. They are (L1 = Verb (*creation and or activation*) + noun, L2 = Verb (*eradication and or nullification*) + noun, L3 = Adjective + N, L4 = Noun + verb, L5 = Noun1 + of + Noun2, L6 = Adverb + adjective, and L7 = Verb + adverb. However, even though they have paired the words, the students were still unable to make the correct or fixed lexical collocations. The incorrect lexical collocations made by the students could be observed in the subsequent details based on their respective classifications.

The first students' problem related to the correct use of the seven types of lexical collocations was Verb

+ Noun (L1) collocation. In this type, the students' understanding of verb + noun lexical collocation was rather problematic. It was problematic because the students often over looked to function the parts of speech such as nouns or verbs or vice versa correctly so that it contributes to the formation of the correct lexical collocations..

As it is known, verb syntactically denotes an action (*take, read, cook, drive, etc*), state an occurrence (*happen*), state of being (*be, exist*). In syntagmatic levels, verbs are inflected to encode tense, modal auxiliary verbs, aspect (grammatical category), mood (speaker's intention of statement, fact, desire, or command) and voice (active or passive). Whereas, noun linguistically is a member of a large, open lexical category whose member can occur as the main word in the subject of a clause, the object of a verb or the object of a preposition. As a result, the students' incomprehension of verb and noun caused them poorly present and collocate the correct verb and noun lexical collocations.

The followings are the explanations of incorrect uses of lexical collocation Verb (creation or activation) + Noun (L1) made by the students in their descriptive writing.

*He could **handle this country and nation** very good.*

In this sentence, the student was unable to collocate the word 'this country' to its preceding verb of 'handle'. To collocate 'this country' with the right lexical collocation, the student should pair it with 'manage' as in 'He could **manage this country and nation** very good'.

*We will **think about** ..., **natural and refreshing**.*

‘Think about’ is a reflection or recalling upon somebody or something. In order to collocate correctly, ‘think about’ should be paired with noun not with adjectives ‘natural’. Therefore, the right collocation is ‘We will **think about** ..., **nature** and **refreshment**’.

*In this location, there were three torrent **waterfalls** that **down to** one big natural pond.*

‘Waterfalls never **down to** one big natural pond’. A waterfall is a place where water flows over the edge of a steep, high cliff in hills or mountains, and falls into a pool below. Therefore to collocate ‘waterfall’ correctly to ‘one big natural pond’, it must occur with ‘fall into’ or ‘flow into’ as in this sentence, ‘there were three torrent **waterfalls** that **fall/flow into** one big natural pond’.

In collocating verb + noun lexical collocation, the students got the difficulty to write the correct one. The difficulty was seen from the sentences they wrote in which they cannot form the verb + noun lexical collocation based on its types. As a result, the verb + noun lexical collocations were incorrectly written as shown above.

Furthermore, the second type of lexical collocation seemed precisely similar to previous one whereas they are actually dissimilar that is Verb + Noun (L2). The difference between them is laid on the function of the verb itself. On the first type, the Verb functions as to *create/activate* a noun, for example: *make an agreement*. This example described that someone

‘creates’ an agreement with another. Whereas, on the second type, it used to eradicate or nullify (*eradication/nullification*) a noun, for instance; *turn off water*. This indicates that someone ‘nullifies’ the flow of water from the tap (stop the water tap). The differences between the first and the second patterns brought about the failure of correct collocation of verb and noun (L2). The followings are the list of incorrect uses of lexical collocation of Verb (*eradication/nullification*) + Noun (L2) by the students.

The type of verb + noun lexical collocation is the students’ difficulty to pair it correctly. As a consequence, they produced the incorrect verb + noun lexical collocation. Here are the elaborations of them.

*Soekarno **disconnected tie** with Malaysia country...*

The right lexical collocation used to stop the tie between two or more countries is ‘cut off’ which means to separate the countries from things that they are normally connected with and collocates with ‘tie’. Therefore, the sentence should be ‘Soekarno **cut off the tie** with Malaysia country’ instead of ‘Soekarno **disconnected tie** with Malaysia country’.

*He brave **to war the colonial** from Dutch*

When one is going to express ‘his/her struggle to oppose colonialism’, the right lexical collocation used is to ‘go to war’ or ‘fight against for’ as in ‘He was brave **to fight against for the** Dutch colonialism instead of ‘**to war the colonial**’. The next one is

*...when I am doing anything which
candamagingmyself*

Using 'damaging' for myself is incorrect. 'Damaging' is physically acceptable for an object which means to break. To collocate with 'myself', it should be paired with 'endanger or harm' as in '...when I am doing anything which can **endanger/harmmyself**'.

Thirdly, Adjective + Noun (L3), this type describes the use of adjective and noun in the lexical collocations. Generally, adjectives were words used to syntactically describe or specify a noun or noun phrase or give more information about the object explained. Adjectives are traditionally eight English parts of speech. Whereas, noun is linguistically a member of a large, open lexical category whose member can occur as the main word in the subject of a clause, the object of a verb or the object of a preposition. Consequently, the use of this type, adjective + noun, is the third formula made by the students inaccurately. The incorrect type of adjective + noun can be observed as follows. Most of the following bold typed and italicized sentences are incorrect because the students used nouns to modify adjectives. These automatically violate the Pattern. Here are the explanations;

***Society Indonesians** also
remember him as BungKarno or
PakKarno*

In using the correct modifier, the students should not transfer the thought of word for word translation literally, because it will produce unacceptable lexical collocation. As a result, **Society Indonesians** is

collocatively incorrect. The correct one is 'Indonesian society'. 'Society' is modified by 'Indonesian' to specify what kind/type of society is.

*He also success to build
relationship international with
another countries in the world*

As in the previous example, It is clear that adjective modifies a noun. It comes before the noun not in vise verse. Thus, the right lexical collocation for the above datum is 'International relationship'.

*Badoray 1 is **the big one**, ...*

This is the degree of comparison of superlative case. Superlative is the form of an adjective / adverb that ends in -est or that begins -most. To collocatively correct, Badoray 1 is **the biggestone**, ...

The students' knowledge of pairing Adjective + Noun lexical collocation is still troubling. The data above indicate that the students still have problem to produce the fixed expression of adjective + noun lexical collocation.

Fourthly, the ability of pairing the forms of Noun + Verb (L4) depends on how well the students' comprehension to this part of speech. Noun, as it has been explained previously, linguistically is a member of a large, open lexical category whose member can occur as the main word in the subject of a clause, the object of a verb or the object of a preposition. Whereas, verb describes or asserts something about the subject of the sentence and express actions, events or state of being. In this pattern, the students poorly paired noun and verb

collocation. Consequently, in the student's descriptive writings, the researcher find that some students were unable to pair the word based on the pattern of lexical collocation. The incorrect collocation of noun + verb can be observed as follows:

To visit Sungai pua willtakes around 15 minutes from Bukittinggi.

In this sentence, the student assumption to 'to visit Sungai Pua' as a noun phrase is incorrect. This assumption caused the subject is missed. To clarify it as a subject, the student should form 'to visit' becomes 'visiting' as in visiting Sungai Pua takes about 15 minutes from Bukittinggi'.

Our walk together to eliminate boredom...

As in the previous example, it should be 'we walk...'

Fifthly, Noun + of + Noun (L5), as it has been explained previously that noun is to denote a person, a thing, an animal or abstract thing. When it denotes a person or a thing with other nouns, noun should have to collocate with other noun. On the contrary, in this type, the students were unable to form and function noun correctly, for example: *the process of cook*. This pairing is incorrect since the word *cook* does not represent the function of noun, yet it is more to its function as a verb. To produce the right collocation, the students ought to form it as in '*the process of cooking*'. The word *process* does collocate with *cooking* instead of *cook*. Consequently, most of them made mistake to pair correct collocation. The incorrect lexical

collocation of Noun + of + Noun made by the students in their descriptive writing can be seen as follows:

The older spelling Soekarno, based on Dutch orthography.

In the students' descriptive writings, some of the students were found to violate the lexical collocations of noun of noun. The sentence, 'The older **spelling Soekarno**, based on Dutch orthography', is incorrect collocatively. It missed 'of' between 'spelling' and 'Soekarno'. It should be '...spelling of Soekarno...'

He became the presidentIndonesia for many years...

As in the previous one, It should be '...the President of Indonesia...'

Sixth, the pattern of Adverb + Adjective (L6) is another part of lexical collocation rule which is used incorrectly by the students. Adverb provides information about the manner, place, time, frequency, etc. Its main function in a sentence is to modify verb. Adjective on the other hand describes or specifies noun. When these two words are collocated, the adverb should have to collocate with adjectives. On the contrary, in the student's writings, *adjective* is frequently taken on the first position and then proceeded by *adverb*. As a result, the frequent use of this pattern is of the student's common mistakes in writing. The followings are the incorrect form of the use of this pattern:

The waterfall has water that is very clearly and cold.

'Very' and 'clearly' are both adverbs whose functions are to modify verb and adverb. However, the student did not mean to modify either verb or adverb. S/he intended to emphasize on adjective 'clear' and 'cold' instead of 'clearly'. Therefore, to avoid it from incorrect collocation, the lexical collocation should be 'The waterfall has water that is very clear and cold'.

*This location is **easy accessible** by public transportation*

'easy' and 'accessible' are adjectives. Both of them cannot be paired directly as they have the same function to modify noun. In this sentence, the right collocation is 'This location is easily accessible by public transportation'.

The last one is the pairing of verb + adverb (L7). This type is the last student's weak point. They tended to put adverb before verb, for instance, 'We directly go home after our class is over...' instead of 'We go home directly after our class is over...'. This mistake makes lexical collocations do not meet its basic rule. The followings are the list of the improper use of lexical collocations made by students in their writing task.

*The spelling "Sukarno" is **used frequent** in English.*

Some students violated the rules of lexical collocations of verb + adverb. They assumed that adjectives were identical with adverbs as adverbs derived from adjectives. The assumption is incorrect because the students did not understand how to form the correct adverbs. In '...The spelling "Sukarno" is used frequent in English...' is in correct. The correct

one is 'The spelling "Sukarno" is used frequently in English'.

*...exchange experiences that **commonly occurred** in campus.*

Based on grammatical rules the phrase, 'commonly occurred' is correct. However, in lexical collocation pattern the context of the sentence make it inappropriate to be pair that way. The correct one should be '...exchange experiences that occurred commonly in campus.'

The above elaborations reveal out that the seven types or patterns of lexical collocation are found in English Department students' descriptive writing at Padang State Polytechnic. However, the number of the usage is not similar one to another.

Types of lexical collocations which were commonly used incorrectly by the English Department students in descriptive writings.

The followings are the elaboration of types of lexical collocations which were commonly used incorrectly by the students in their descriptive writing.

First of all Adjective + Noun lexical collocation. Typical lexical collocations consist of nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs. As it is known that the adjective is a modifier that has the grammatical property of comparison. It is often identified by special derivational endings or by special adverbial modifiers that precede it. It specifies noun into a certain color, shape, weigh, length, form, and so forth.

Secondly, it was followed by verb + noun. In collocating the words, the students used *ing* form (*to training*

students...) instead of the base form (to **train**students) of verb in pairing the words up so that many time students mistook noun as verb or as adjective. Consequently, these problems contribute to misuse the correct collocation.

Thirdly, it was Noun + Verb. The pairing of Noun + Verb depended on how well the students' comprehension to this part of speech. Basically, if the students understood that noun as it has been explained previously, the object of a verb or the object of a preposition would not brought mistakes in producing the accepted collocation. As a consequently, in their writings, the students were unable to pair the word based on the pattern of lexical collocation

Fourthly, it was Noun + of + Noun. The students were found to poorly form and function noun correctly, for example: *the process of cook*. This pairing is incorrect since the word *cook* does not represent the function of noun, yet it is more to its function as a verb. To produce the right collocation, the students ought to form it as in *the process of cooking*. The word *process* does collocate with *cooking* instead of *cook*. Consequently, most of them made mistake to pair correct collocation.

Whereas, in the uses of the lexical collocations of Verb + Adverb, Adverb + Adjective and Verb + Noun, students did few mistakes because these four patterns were rarely found in their writing task, so that the number of the mistake done is few. If the students often used these four patterns, there would possibly be numerous mistakes came up. In fact, these four patterns

were rarely used in expressing their ideas as native speakers do.

The causes of lexical collocation difficulties made by students in their descriptive writing.

The followings are the causes of lexical collocation difficulties found in the students' English descriptive writings. The first problem is the inability to collocate words based on the English Standard lexical collocation. This happened due to the intervention of students' Indonesian language collocations, for example, *He also success to build **relationship international** with another countries in the world*, instead of *He also success to build **international relationship** with another countries in the world*.

It was obviously incorrect because the adjective is used to modify noun. Whereas in Indonesian language, the adjective comes after noun. This process of collocating words in writing has been frequently adopted by the students.

The second problem of using incorrectly lexical collocations is vocabulary. One of the most important factors of learning English language is the learning of the targeted vocabularies and how to use them appropriately. Vocabulary in general and collocation in particular are important to language learning. If collocational associations were not properly taught and learned, the resulting irregularities would occur in the students' writing. Students whose language is not English need to know which words go with which other words, how words go together normally, and how we can manipulate

these arrangements to make new meanings for ourselves. The increase of knowledge of collocations can result in better performance in the students' writing skill and even in oral skill. This is a sentence extracted from students' writing task. **Large the museum is 80x80 m** instead of **The size of the museum is 80x80 m**.

The above datum shows that it is the students' lack of vocabulary that make them write or use vocabulary that way in writing. If only the students have sufficient vocabulary they would be able to use the correct noun instead of adjective.

The third weakness of using correct lexical collocation is the application of literal or word for word translation: Students were likely to transfer the thought word-for-word from L1 to L2 when they were not succeeding in finding out the correct collocations. They take the strategy of their native (Indonesian language) literal translation to produce either acceptable or unacceptable collocations. It can be seen in the following student's sentence such as; ...because **people Indonesia love him** instead of ...because **Indonesian people love him**.

This case was frequently brought to their daily classroom-writing task that lead to their lexical collocation problems.

The next one is the use of direct translation: Some students remembered only the Indonesian translation of the word. Therefore, they relied on direct translation to produce collocations. For example, **The purpose is to training students** instead of **The purpose is to**

train students.

The word *training* has been adopted into Indonesian language or it has been becoming a daily used vocabulary to the Indonesian society. Consequently, when students talk or write in English, they tend to use the word *training* directly into their utterance or sentence without considering the root of the word as it is seen in the above mentioned sentence. Another example is seen in the following sentence;

Fifth, there is an ignorance of rule restrictions: Some students did not know that some collocational restrictions are completely based on the meaning of the word and range; others did not take the eight parts of speech (*noun, verb, adverb, adjective, preposition, pronoun, conjunction, interjection*), into consideration. As a result, they produced unacceptable lexical collocations in their descriptive writing, for example; **Pariaman also has 6 little islands** instead of **Pariaman also has 6 small islands**.

The last one is the lack of knowledge of collocational properties: Many students did not understand the potential collocational properties of the words they knew. Take the word *good* for example. It could be assumed that most students knew the collocation *a good boy*, but few students generated the collocation *a good knowledge*. It can be observed in the sentence like ...**he always good take care of cat**, instead of ... **he always takes a good care of cat**.

The lack of collocational properties caused by poorly having communication strategies, are

attributable to inaccuracy in pairing words in writing.

CONCLUSION

The types of lexical collocations which are found in English Department students' descriptive writing are (1) Verb (*creation and or activation*) + Noun lexical collocation, (2) Verb (*eradication and or nullification*) + Noun lexical collocation, (3) Adjective + Noun lexical collocation, (4) Noun + Verb lexical collocation, (5) Noun1 + of + Noun2 lexical collocation, (6) Adverb + Adjective lexical collocation and (7) Verb + Adverb lexical collocation. These all types were used by the students or found in their English descriptive writing.

The types of lexical collocations which were commonly used incorrectly by the students in their English descriptive writings are; Adjective + Noun (L3) lexical collocation, Verb + Noun (L1) lexical collocation and the last one is Noun + Verb (L4). These types of lexical collocation affected the students' ideas or thought to the object, person and place being described. Meanwhile, the other four lexical collocation of Verb + Noun (L2), Noun1 + of + Noun2 (L5), Adverb + Adjective (L6) and Verb + Adverb (L7), were less common and slightly influenced by the students' thought in explaining or describing the object, person or place.

The causes of lexical collocation difficulties found are based on the following reasons; lack of collocational concept, direct translation, word per word, the collocational errors resulted from word coinage, retrieval (the students' ability to recall collocations from their memory) and the last one is the

students' lack of knowledge of collocational properties. The students did not understand the potential collocational properties of the words they knew.

SUGGESTION

Therefore, the following actions should be done by EFL teachers; introduce and teach vocabulary along with the way how they are paired together (the lexical collocation), train students to observe and note collocations in studying, and encourage students to collect their collocation. Show contrastive types of lexical collocation and provide collocation instruction to the students. Next, explain the benefits of understanding collocations, and the last one is remind students to use the seventh types of lexical collocation correctly in their writing.

Note: This article is written based on the writer's thesis in Graduate Program of State University of Padang. The Advisors of the thesis are Prof. Dr. Jufrizal, M.Hum and Dr. Hamzah, M.A., M.M.

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