

CHAPTER 10

COLLOCATIONAL VARIATION

In the Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary(2000), 'collocation' is defined as 'the way in which particular words occur or belong together. For example it says one can say: 'Meals will be served outside on the terrace, **weather permitting.**'

However, it says one cannot say:

'Meals will be served outside on the terrace, **weather allowing.**'

While both these sentences seem to mean the same thing, namely: 'They'll bring us our meals outside if the weather is good enough', and 'allowing' and 'permitting' seem to be synonyms, only 'permitting' collocates with 'weather' while 'allowing' does not. Here the point being made is that just because 'allowing' and 'permitting' are synonyms, one cannot assume that they can collocate with the same words.

By the same token, ME users have a tendency to use native words with non-native collocations. Anthony Samy(1997) used the term 'Transfer of Meaning from Context' to describe a word which, in native English, habitually occurs in the company of certain words or associates with some referents, but in non-native English such as Malaysian English, contracts new relations with other referents.

In this study the term 'Collocational Variation' has been used for this non-native feature of ME and a total of 162 examples have been analyzed and described. As this is a rather large corpus, the researcher will present a quantitative analysis of the data based on a qualitative description of all the

examples of Collocational Variation. The entire qualitative analysis can be found in Appendix A.

In the earlier draft of this thesis, this category was given the heading 'Synonym Substitution', which was later changed as it was observed that not all the non-native words can be substituted with native synonyms. In addition, the unique feature of Collocational Variation is that unlike the other lexico-semantic categories, the non-native variation was at the level of syntax, and not merely at a lexical level.

Basically, Collocational Variation involves the mismatch between different parts of speech, such as adjectives and abstract nouns, verbs and abstract nouns, and so on. The entire corpus of 162 examples of Collocational Variation has been sub-divided into six types of Collocational Variation and one type of Connotational Variation, namely:

- Collocational Variation involving Adjective and Abstract Noun
- Collocational Variation involving Adjective and Concrete Noun
- Collocational Variation involving Verb and Abstract Noun
- Collocational Variation involving Verb and Concrete Noun
- Collocational Variation involving Verb and Adverb
- Collocational Variation involving Adverb and Adjective and
- Connotational Variation in Metaphor Usage

10.1 Types of Collocational Variation

In the following section is a more detailed description of all the above types of 'Collocational Variation'.

10.1.1 Collocational Variation involving Adjective and Abstract Noun

Five examples of Collocational Variation involving adjectives and abstract nouns are shown in bold in the following sentences:

- (a) 'Their **English proficiency** was at the **beginning level**.'
- (b) 'The **gap** between college and university is too **long**.'

- (c) 'The **first effectiveness** is....'
- (d) '...**hilarious ideas**
- (e) 'This indicates the **high importance** of the nominal group to convey meaning and expression.'

In example (a), a native speaker would use the collocation 'elementary level' rather than 'beginning level'. In example (b), 'gap' is non-native as in native usage it is more suitable for describing space, while in this case, the speaker is talking about a lapse of time between college and university.

In example (c) a native speaker would have used the word 'advantage' rather than 'effectiveness', as the latter does not collocate with Numeral Adjectives such as 'first' or 'second'. In example (d) a native speaker would collocate 'hilarious' with words such as 'jokes' or 'comments' and not 'ideas'. In example (e) the abstract noun 'importance' does not collocate with the adjective 'high', but with 'great'.

10.1.2 Collocational Variation involving Adjective and Concrete Noun

The following are five examples of Collocational Variation involving adjectives and concrete nouns:

- (a) '...so that we can have clear and **healthy water**.'
- (b) '... we can pump water in **high buildings**.'
- (c) 'It will also flood **third country markets**.'
- (d) 'An artist is not regarded as an **unrecognizable job**.'
- (e) 'His **five-year-old class** consists of twelve girls and eight boys.'

In example (a) the adjective 'clear' collocates with 'water' but not the adjective 'healthy'. People can be described as 'healthy' especially if they drink a lot of water but water itself cannot be described as 'healthy'!

In example (b) native speakers would use 'tall' rather than 'high' for buildings. While the compound adjective 'high-rise' is associated with tall buildings, 'high'

by itself does not collocate with 'building'. In fact, 'high' may be also regarded as an example of Semantic Transfer from Mother tongue as in the Malaysian languages such as BM the same lexical items are used for 'tall' from 'high', namely 'tinggi'. This was pointed out in 9.1.8 in the chapter on Semantic Transfer from Mother tongue.

In example (c), a native speaker would talk about 'third markets' and not 'third country markets'. The non-native usage of 'third country' reflects a literal translation of the idea of the grouping of countries according to their economic and political status, rather than the native concept of dividing one world into more worlds!

In example (d) the speaker must have intended to say 'a recognized job' and not 'an unrecognizable job'. In native usage a double negative is a positive.

In example (e) the compound adjective 'five-year-old' does not refer to the age of the class but the age of the pupils in the class! Hence in native usage, 'five-year-old' would not collocate with 'class' and would be used as follows: **class of five-year-olds** consists of twelve girls and eight boys.'

10.1.3 Collocational Variation involving Verb and Abstract Noun

There were several examples of 'Collocational Variation involving Verb and Abstract Noun' in the data so this could be considered the most common sub-category. Five examples are shown below:

- (a) '**discourage** the students about **the urge to have sex.**'
- (b) '**adopt the negative influence.**'
- (c) '**The major agreements** that have been **committed.**'
- (d) 'Adventure became part of us and it helped us to **build** positive characteristics within ourselves.'
- (e) 'As you know, everyone is **searching for health.**'

In example (a), a native speaker would not collocate the word 'discourage' with an expression such as 'the urge to have sex'. An urge cannot be discouraged but the students themselves can be discouraged from having sex! In native usage, the verb which collocates with 'urge' would be 'suppress' rather than 'discourage'.

In example (b) the verb 'adopt' has a positive connotation and would probably collocate with positive nouns such as 'a positive outlook'. In this context it has a negative connotation as it collocates with 'negative influence'. A native speaker would not collocate 'adopt' with 'negative influence' but would probably talk about someone being **subjected to** the negative influence.

In example (c) the commitment is on the part of the people or parties who sign the agreements and not on the part of the agreement itself. A native speaker would use the verbs 'made' or 'signed' for 'agreement' rather than 'committed'.

Example (d) indicates that non-native speakers often collocate the verb 'build' with abstract rather than concrete nouns. In example(e) the collocation of 'searching for' with 'health' is non-native. Everyone does not search for health but everyone wants to be healthy.

10.1.4 Collocational Variation involving Verb and Concrete Noun

Five examples of 'Collocational Variation involving Verb and Concrete Noun' are shown in the following contexts

- (a) '**attending a phone call**
- (b) '**build our people** effectively'
- (c) 'Her intention was to **prevent** the child from food that is an allergen to her child.'
- (d) 'I **sprained** my spine.'
- (e) 'Last time we ourselves **were grown up** by them.'

In example (a) there is a mismatch between 'attending' and 'phone call' as the native collocation for 'phone call' is 'answering' and not 'attending'. One attends to a problem or to something more abstract than a phone call.

In example (b) the verb 'build' has been used for human beings, while in native usage it is usually used for inanimate things such as bones: for example 'to build strong bones in growing children'. In native usage it does not collocate with 'people'.

In example (c) the ME user must have meant 'protect' and not 'prevent' due to the use of the preposition 'from'. In native usage the verb 'prevent' has to be followed by the object such as a person. One cannot prevent anyone 'from food'. However, one can prevent someone 'from eating something' that is potentially dangerous, such as food containing an allergen which might trigger an allergic reaction.

Example (d) is non-native as in native usage one cannot sprain one's spine. The word 'sprain' involves the sudden twisting of a joint causing great pain. One can sprain one's ankle, wrist or knee or other limb joints(OALD,2000). In native usage, one can only hurt or injure one's back.

For example (e) the speaker was referring to the fact that parents play a big role in bringing up children so when they grow old their children have a duty to look after them. Hence the expression meant here is 'brought up' and not 'grown up'. 'Grown up' does not collocate with the rest of the sentence and in native usage it is a compound noun and not a verb.

10.1.5 Collocational Variation involving Verb and Adverb

Another type of Collocational Variation involves verb and adverb, as shown by the following examples in the data:

- (a) 'The meeting is **moving** at a very **serious tone**.'
- (b) 'The children will be **focussed straight** to their exams.'
- (c) 'I enjoin all VPRs to **timely submit** their club activities and events to me.'

In example (a) the meeting can go at a fast or slow pace but not 'in a serious tone'. It is not the movement which was serious but it was the mood of the members at the meeting that was serious. A native speaker would have said: 'The meeting was conducted in a serious tone.'

In example (b) the expression 'focussed straight to' does not collocate with 'exams'. A native speaker would have used the expression: '...focussed mainly on their exams.'

A native speaker would have expressed the non-native expression (c) in the following way: 'I enjoin all club VPRs to submit all their club activities and events to me on time. The collocation of 'timely' with 'submit' is not only non-native, but also lacks adequate emphasis.

10.1.6 Collocational Variation Involving Adverb and Adjective

The following are examples of Collocational Variation involving adverb and adjective:

- (a) 'Winning can be **shockingly easy**.'
- (b) 'Health is the **main important** due to this haze.'
- (c) '...haunted with lots of work to be accomplished before midnight strikes the **whole seven** days.'

Example (a) was heard in a radio advertisement for a competition. The adverb 'shockingly' gives a negative connotation of something that is not right. As such, it does not collocate with 'easy' in the above context. In example (b), the speaker must have meant 'very important' when she used the non-native collocation 'the main important'. In example (c) the use of 'whole' before

`seven' appears to be redundant, though the user must have used it to for emphasis.

10.1.7 Connotational Shift in Metaphor Usage

The seventh type of Collocational Variation involves a connotational shift in the native usage of metaphor. This means that a metaphor which has a negative sense in native usage either acquires a neutral sense or a positive sense in non-native usage and vice versa.

The following are some examples of these in the data:

- (a) `It is **when we are in the same boat** that we are so happy.'
- (b) `My principle is to save myself for my **official husband** only'.
- (c) `This (theft of panties) was a **memorable thing** that ever happened in my life.'

The native idiom `to be in the same boat' means `to have the same dangers to face'(OALD,2000). As such, it has a very negative connotation. However, in example (a) this idiom has been used non-natively to convey a positive sense: `that we are so happy'.

In example (b) the expression `official husband' appears to be non-native as the writer was referring to her `future husband' and not her `official husband'. The writer who is an undergraduate, was writing about the lack of fidelity among some of her married course-mates who were apparently flirting with members of the opposite sex while on campus. She believed strongly that intimacy should only be confined within the bonds of marriage. The expression `official husband' appears to be non-native in the above context, as `official' implies there can also be an `unofficial' husband.

In native usage, something which is `memorable' is pleasant. The native meaning of `memorable' is `special, good or unusual and therefore worth

remembering'(OALD,2000).

However in example (c) the connotation is negative:

'This (theft of panties) was a **memorable thing** that ever happened in my life.'

The writer was referring to an incident in which a group of Malaysian female students lost all their panties in a 'panty raid' in a foreign university. It could not have been a pleasant memory as there must have been feelings of embarrassment and shock after the incident. A native speaker would use the adjective 'unforgettable' in this context.

10.2 Difference between Connotative Semantic Shift and Connotational Shift in Metaphor Usage

In all the examples of Connotational Shift in Metaphor Usage (under Chapter 8, namely 'Semantic Shift'), a metaphor which has a negative sense in native usage loses its negative sense to either acquire a neutral sense or a positive sense in non-native usage. Connotational Shift in Metaphor Usage is similar to Connotative Semantic Shift as can be seen below:

Connotative Semantic Shift

- (a) **pride** as a young woman
Native Meaning: a snobbish attitude
Non-native Meaning: self-respect/honour
- (b) **eyes**
Native Meaning: looks at someone carefully or suspiciously
Non-native Meaning: sets a target to achieve a goal
- (c) **siphon**
Native Meaning: embezzle or misappropriate (funds)
Non-native meaning: organize (different types of concepts)

Connotational Shift in Metaphor Usage

- (a) 'It is **when we are in the same boat** that we are so happy.'
Native meaning: to be in the same difficult situation
Non-native meaning: to be in the same happy situation
- (b) 'My principle is to save myself for my **official husband** only'.
Native meaning: legal marriage partner (implying that there may be some women having 'unofficial' husbands)
Non-native Meaning: future husband
- (c) 'This (theft of panties) was a **memorable thing** that ever happened in my life.'
Native Meaning: 'special, good or unusual and therefore worth remembering'
Non-native Meaning: unforgettable in a negative way

The difference between Connotative Semantic Shift and Connotational Shift in Metaphor Usage, is that in the case of the former, the connotational shift involves individual lexical items, while in the latter it involves entire expressions at the level of syntactic usage.

10.3 Quantitative Analysis of Collocational Variation

Table 10.1 below shows the breakdown of data under the types of Collocational Variation in percentages and numbers.

Table 10.1

Types of Collocational Variation

Types of Collocational Variation	Numbers	%
Colloc. V. Involving Adjective and Abstract Noun	23	14.1%
Colloc. V involving Adjective and Concrete Noun	16	9.9%
Colloc. V involving Verb and Abstract Noun	75	46.3%
Colloc. V. involving Verb and Concrete Noun	33	20.3%
Colloc. V. Involving Verb and Adverb	6	3.7%
Colloc. V. Involving Adverb and Adjective	5	3.2%
Connotational Variation in Metaphor Usage	4	2.5%
Total No. of Non-Native Lexis	<u>162</u>	<u>100.0%</u>

Table 10.1 indicates that the most common type of Collocational Variation involves verb and abstract noun' as it comprises 46.3% of all the 162 examples of Collocational Variation. The second most common type of Collocational Variation involves verb and concrete noun', which makes up 20.3% of all the examples. The large difference between these two percentages (26.0%) indicates clearly that ME users often use verbs which collocate with concrete nouns, for more abstract nouns.

In addition, if one were to combine these two types, one could deduce that Collocational Variation involving verb and noun, whether abstract or concrete, comprise a total of 66.6% of all the data categorized under Collocational Variation. This is a substantial percentage for Collocational Variation itself comprises the largest category of non-native lexis in this study. Hence, this data reveals that the most common types of Collocational Variation involves nouns and verbs.

The second most common type are 'Collocational Variation involving adjective and abstract noun', which comprises 14.1% of the data, and 'Collocational Variation involving adjective and concrete noun' which is 9.9% of the data. The rest of the types of Collocational Variation comprise smaller percentages such as to 2.5% for 'Connotational Variation in Metaphor Usage'.

10.4 Possible Reasons for Collocational Variation

Perhaps the main reason for the use of non-native lexical usage under Collocational Variation is the lack of familiarity with the native collocational relationships of words at the syntactic level. Whatever the reason, this category is certainly worth further study by other researchers as 162 examples of non-native lexical usage have been categorized.