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The significance of teaching English collocation in the interpretation classes from students' perception at Nam Can Tho University

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ABSTRACT

From the viewpoint of the students, this study investigates the importance of teaching English collocations in interpretation classes. The purpose of this study is to determine the difficulties students encounter and how they perceive the current teaching approaches, given the critical role collocations hold in attaining fluency and correctness in interpretation. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques, a mixed-methods strategy was used. In-depth interviews with 14 participants shed more light on their experiences and difficulties, while 212 English major students were given a questionnaire to gauge their opinions of collocation usage in interpretation. The results showed that although students recognize the advantages of collocations in improving naturalness and interpretation accuracy, many find it difficult to use them because they have not had enough exposure or systematic training. Collocation lessons were not given enough attention in interpretation classes, which was another major problem. Collocation-focused exercises need to be more structured, according to participants, who also recommended including technology-assisted learning resources and contextualized practice into collocation lessons. These findings lead to recommendations for curriculum designers and teachers to use more effective techniques when teaching collocations for interpretation classes.

TÓM TẮT

Từ góc nhìn của người học, nghiên cứu này khảo sát tầm quan trọng của việc dạy cụm từ cố định tiếng Anh (collocations) trong các lớp phiên dịch. Mục đích của nghiên cứu là xác định những khó khăn

sinh viên gặp phải và cách họ đánh giá về phương pháp giảng dạy hiện tại, bởi collocations đóng vai trò then chốt trong việc đạt được sự trôi chảy và chính xác khi phiên dịch. Nghiên cứu sử dụng phương pháp kết hợp (mixed-methods), kết hợp kỹ thuật thu thập dữ liệu định lượng và định tính nhằm đa dạng hóa góc độ phân tích. Bảng khảo sát được phát cho 212 sinh viên chuyên ngành tiếng Anh để đánh giá nhận thức của họ về việc sử dụng collocations trong phiên dịch, đồng thời 14 người tham gia được phỏng vấn sâu để làm rõ trải nghiệm và khó khăn cụ thể. Kết quả cho thấy, dù sinh viên nhận thức rõ lợi ích của collocations trong việc nâng tính tự nhiên và độ chính xác khi dịch, nhiều người vẫn gặp khó khăn do thiếu tiếp xúc thực tế hoặc chưa được đào tạo bài bản. Một vấn đề khác là collocations chưa được chú trọng đúng mức trong chương trình giảng dạy. Nhiều ý kiến cho rằng, các bài tập về cụm từ cố định (collocations) cần được thiết kế bài bản hơn. Bên cạnh đó, sinh viên cũng đề xuất bổ sung tài liệu học tập số (như app, phần mềm) và tăng cường thực hành trong ngữ cảnh thực tế để ghi nhớ collocations hiệu quả. Từ những kết quả này, nghiên cứu đề xuất các nhà biên soạn giáo trình và giáo viên nên áp dụng những phương pháp hiệu quả hơn khi dạy cụm từ cố định (collocations) trong lớp phiên dịch."

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

The need for cross-border communication and negotiation has been growing in the modern integrated world. There are many various settings for cross-cultural backgrounds, such as business, conferences, lectures, the media, etc. Interpretation has become a crucial skill in business, journalism, international relations, and diplomacy as globalization promotes cross-cultural contact (Gile, 2009) [10]. According to Pöchhacker (2016) [23], interpretation is the process of translating spoken or signed language in real time while maintaining intent, tone, and meaning. Interpretation is a cognitively taxing endeavor since it necessitates instantaneous

comprehension and output, in contrast to translation, which utilizes written materials. Qualified interpreters ensure successful communication between speakers of various languages by serving as linguistic and cultural mediators. Through their work, high-stakes encounters are facilitated in international conferences, multinational corporations, and the United Nations.

Even though interpretation is crucial, there are many challenges. According to Moser-Mercer (2005) [20], interpreters must analyze and convey messages quickly while preserving correctness, fluency, and contextual appropriateness. They frequently struggle with cultural quirks, complicated vocabularies, and differences in

speech rates. Furthermore, their capacity to communicate effectively and naturally may be hampered by a lack of appropriate linguistic resources, such as collocations (Baker, 2018) [2].

In addition to teaching linguistic competency, educators are supposed to look into the challenges faced by English majors and offer helpful solutions in order to prepare them for the abilities they will need for interpreting in the future. Research that examines the particular issues associated with collocation features is essential given the significant influence that collocations have on English learning and the difficulties that EFL students have in this domain. The study's findings could help teachers create better teaching methods and materials for collocations, which could result in more successful pedagogical practices. Therefore, it is possible to improve the EFL students' learning experience and help them become proficient in collocations. More specifically, this study will figure out and clarify how Nam Can Tho University English majors perceive the value of teaching collocations in interpretation. In order to accomplish the goals of the study, the following research questions must be addressed:

- To what extent do EFL students perceive the importance of collocations in interpretation?

- What difficulties do they encounter in using collocations in interpretation?

- What are students' perceptions about teaching collocations in interpretation class?

1.2 Literature review

1.2.1 Collocation

To improve learners' English competence, a lot of researchers in the field of applied linguistics have focused on defining collocations. The term

collocation, for instance, was defined by Lewis (2000) [15] as the regular pairing of words that commonly occur together in a language. A collocation is sometimes referred to using words that go together. Collocations include, for instance, "make tea" and "do homework." "Make" often refers to creations, whereas "do" alludes to tasks. Accordingly, a verb plus (+) noun combination that always goes together is regarded as a collocation (James, 1998) [14]. Collocation is a common word combination, according to Shammas (2013) [25]. For instance, native English speakers naturally say "make a decision" rather than "do a decision." Channel (1981) [5] posits that collocation (the habitual co-occurrence of words) is fundamental to achieving native-like fluency. Unlike isolated word memorization, collocations reflect how words actually combine in natural discourse.

To summarize, despite the difference in approaching and defining collocations, there is a common agreement among all scholars that collocations are two or more words combined together continuously.

1.2.2 The Role of Collocation in Interpretation

Since wrong word pairings can produce awkward or inaccurate expressions, fluency requires mastery of collocations. Collocation competency has been found to be crucial for learning a second language (Wray, 2002; Lewis, 2008; Nation, 2013) [29],[16],[21]. Collocations have a big impact on how well something is interpreted. By producing more idiomatic and fluid speech, translators who possess a solid grasp of collocation patterns might reduce hesitancy and cognitive strain during real-time processing (Chen, 2021) [6]. Hence, interpreters may

struggle with awkward phrasing if they lack sufficient collocation knowledge, which could cause misunderstandings or damage their credibility in professional situations (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2005; Schmitt, 2010) [19],[24]. In contrast, interpreters with a solid command of collocations exhibit greater accuracy and fluency in simultaneous interpreting (Liu, 2000) [17]. However, not many EFL learners who are being trained to probably become potential interpreters are able to use collocations correctly because of different reasons.

1.2.3 Learners' problems of using collocation in interpretation

It has been recognized by researchers that source language (SL) interferences, a lack of collocation knowledge, intralingual and interlingual transfers, overgeneralization, paraphrasing, and analogies are the main causes of collocation errors. For instance, Bahns and Eldaw (1993) [1] reported that many collocational errors made by EFL learners are caused by SL interference. Likewise, it was mentioned that a student who is unfamiliar with a certain collocation uses synonyms, avoidance, transference, and paraphrase unnaturally (Farghal and Obiedat, 1995) [9]. The avoidance technique is a major obstacle since students frequently substitute simpler expressions for unfamiliar collocations, which lowers the correctness of their interpretation

Similarly, the pressure of instantaneous interpretation causes cognitive overload in real-time language processing, which results in collocation errors because of inadequate processing time (Chen & Baker, 2010) [7]. Additionally, the difference between spoken and written forms makes learning more difficult because students may be able to identify specific collocations in texts but not have the ability to apply them in conversation (Boers et al., 2006) [3]. Lack of awareness of collocations in spoken discourse is a major problem since people often concentrate on single vocabulary words rather than natural word combinations (Lewis, 2000) [15]. Collocations are particularly difficult to use in specialized professions since students are frequently not familiar with specialized word combinations in fields like law, medicine, or economics (Granger, 1998) [11]. Meanwhile, the impact of collocational knowledge on simultaneous interpreting performance is empirically examined by Liu (2017) [18], who contends that automatic retrieval of word partnerships (such as "submit a report" versus "present a report" in legal contexts) is a component of lexical competence that goes beyond single-word mastery.

In order to improve accuracy and naturalness in collocation usage, these difficulties underscore the importance of teaching collocations in interpretation class. Hence, teaching collocation is an extremely important mission, especially in the interpretation classes.

1.2.4 The significance of teaching collocations

Boers & Lindstromberg (2009) [4] are among the researchers who have advocated for the explicit teaching of collocations. For example, Farghal and Obiedat (1995) [9] point out that "it is just as important to highlight the collocation aspects of lexical items as it is to teach them explicitly." We think this is the only method to encourage active language use and assist foreign learners in creating grammatically and lexically

sound sentences. Collocation should also be a major feature of our instruction from lesson one, according to Hill (2000) [12]. Fan (2009) [8] emphasizes the significance of teaching collocations by stating that "because collocational use is not regulated by rules and is, for the most part, arbitrary and idiosyncratic", it is important for teachers to raise the awareness of L2 learners to this problematic aspect of language".

1.2.5 Related studies

Several studies have investigated the role of linguistic proficiency in interpretation, emphasizing the importance of collocation, which is an important component of lexical competence. Many studies have examined the challenges learners encounter when learning and applying collocations appropriately. Because their first and target languages have different lexical combinations, non-native speakers frequently have trouble with collocational competence (Nesselhauf, 2005) [22]. He examined the use of collocations by non-native English speakers and found that incorrect collocations often result from direct translations from the speaker's native language. This highlights the importance of understanding collocational patterns in both the source and target languages. According to Baker (2018) [2], collocations are especially challenging in professional interpretation due to their culturally specific nature and lack of direct linguistic equivalency. He discussed how idiomatic expressions and culturally specific collocations pose significant challenges for interpreters, as they often lack direct equivalents in the target language. This requires interpreters to employ

creative strategies, such as paraphrasing or using culturally appropriate alternatives. Additionally, the process of acquiring collocations is made more difficult due to the seemingly arbitrary nature of how words combine. Woolard (2000) [28] emphasizes that collocations frequently do not adhere to predictable grammatical patterns, which adds to the complexity of mastering them. This observation is reinforced by Farghal and Obiedat (1995) [9], who note that learners face challenges with both lexical and grammatical collocations. A common issue is that learners tend to overgeneralize the patterns they have previously learned, leading to errors in usage. In other words, because collocations do not always follow logical or consistent rules, learners often apply familiar structures inappropriately, resulting in mistakes. Research conducted by Webb and Kagimoto (2011) [27] shows that learners are more successful in acquiring collocations when they encounter them repeatedly in meaningful and contextualized settings. However, collocations that are rare or infrequently used in written or spoken language continue to pose significant challenges for learners. This highlights the importance of exposure to high-frequency collocations in authentic contexts for effective learning while underscoring the difficulties learners face with less common or irregular word combinations. In another case, Wang (2020) [26] found that students with higher collocational awareness produced more natural and fluid interpretations. Similarly, Hoang (2019) [13] demonstrated that collocation-based training significantly improved students' accuracy in consecutive and simultaneous interpreting tasks.

However, limited research has examined students' perspectives on the teaching of English collocations in interpretation classes. This study seeks toaddress this gap by exploring how learners perceive the significance of teaching collocations and their impact on interpretation performance.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

2.1 Research design

This current research was developed as a descriptive study employing a mixed method approach by mixing qualitative and quantitative data to address the research questions. The quantitative questionnaire was designed to evaluate students' perceptions about the importance of collocations and their challenges in using collocations as well as their perceptions about teaching collocations in interpretation classes. The qualitative data were gathered via semi-structured interviews with 14 students chosen at random from the group to acquire more insightful information.

2.2 Participants

2.2.1 Participants for the questionnaire

The English Studies students at Nam Can Tho University were requested to complete the questionnaire to assess their perceptions about the learning and teaching of collocations in interpretation. English Studies majors with at least three years of college experience, 82 men and 130 women, completed the questionnaires. The information of the participants who partook in the survey is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptions of participants for the questionnaire (N=212)

		Frequency	Ratio (%)
Gender	Male	82	38,7
	Female	130	61,3
Course	Sophomore	65	30,7
	Junior	75	35,4
	Senior	72	33,9
Academic performance classification	Excellent	25	11,8
	Very good	27	12,7
	Good	47	22,1
	Fair	53	25,0
	Marginal	60	28,4

2.2.2 Participants for the interview

To investigate and gain deep insights into students' perspectives of the research issue, the interviews were conducted with 2 groups of 7 students divided based on their mean scores through the results of the questionnaire. The first group with 7 students had the fewest difficulties in learning collocation (M<2). In contrast, the second group consisted of 7 students with the most difficulties in learning collocation (M>4).

2.3 Research instruments

2.3.1 Questionnaire

The data collection approach lasted eight weeks and consisted of a 20-statement

questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire was divided into four groups. Four questions concerning the students' personal histories make up Cluster 1. Five statements make up Cluster 2, which examines how students understand the value of collocations in interpretation. Five statements in Cluster 3 explore how students perceive their typical challenges with collocations in interpretation sessions. Six comments about how students feel about the collocation instruction in interpretation classes make up Cluster 4.

This tool is an effective and quick way to obtain a huge amount of information, especially from a large number of respondents in a short time. Moreover, if the questionnaire is well conducted, the data can be easily collected and analyzed. The questionnaire was designed using a 5-point Likert scale with options ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Furthermore, the items in the questionnaire were designed based on the results of previous studies presented in the literature review.

2.3.2 Interview

In addition, to delve deeper into the participants' perceptions, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interviews served as a valuable tool to cross-verify the results obtained from the questionnaire. The interviews were translated into Vietnamese so that participants could comprehend the questions and provide meaningful responses. There were eight interview questions, as follows:

- What do you think about the benefits of collocation in interpreting?

- Can you describe a situation where the lack of collocation knowledge affected your interpretation performance?

- In your experience, what are the most challenging aspects of using collocations in interpretation?

- How did you solve the situation.

- In your opinion, what is the most effective way to learn English collocations for interpretation?

- Do you think that your interpretation classes provide enough training on collocations? Why or why not?

- Would you like more emphasis on collocations in your interpretation class?

- How do you think teachers can provide collocation teaching more effectively into interpretation classes?

2.4 Data analysis

The data collected from the questionnaire was processed using SPSS software version 20.0 to validate the reliability of the instrument. The findings revealed 212 valid cases from the collected data, and the reliability coefficient of the pilot questionnaire was relatively high (α= 0,89). First, a Reliability Analysis was conducted to check the reliability of the questionnaire. Cronbach's Alpha showed that the reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was high (α = 0,91). Next, Descriptive Statistics were performed to calculate the mean score, maximum, minimum, and standard deviation.

For qualitative analysis, first, upon the completion of the interviews, the data were transcribed. Also, the researcher read the transcripts multiple times to fully comprehend the interviewees' perspectives. The interview

transcripts were then returned to the interviewees for clarification and verification. Following this, interview data were examined for common themes and topics under analysis.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

Table 2 presents the students' perceptions of the importance of collocation, their challenges in using collocation appropriately, and the teaching of collocation in class measured by a Descriptive Statistics Test. Table 2 presents the result one by one:

Table 2. Students' perceptions of English collocation

	Min	Max	Mean	SD
The importance of collocation	1.32	4.82	3.53	0.83
Difficulties in using collocation	1.14	4.85	4.52	0.91
The teaching of collocation	3.05	4.71	3.56	0.85

The mean score indicated students' perceptions regarding collocation. In particular, the mean score of the importance of collocation was 3.53, indicating that English-major students at Nam Can Tho University perceived a high level of the significance of English collocation in interpretation. In addition, the study revealed that the mean score of difficulties faced by students in using collocation was 4.52, presenting that the majority of English majors experienced difficulties in using collocation for interpreting. The analysis also revealed that some students face a high level of difficulty, as shown by the maximum score of 4,85, suggesting there is a need for improvement in their collocation learning. However, it's also worth noting that some students find it much less challenging, as reflected by the minimum score of 1,14.

Regarding the perception of teaching collocation, for English-majored students at Nam Can Tho University, the mean score for this cluster was 3.56, indicating a high level of satisfaction of students with the teaching practice.

3.2 Results from the interview

In addition, a qualitative analysis of data was also used to gain a better understanding of the quantitative findings. Fourteen students were recruited for semi-structured interviews to get insights for each cluster in the questionnaire. The results from the thematic analysis were presented as follows.

3.2.1 Students' perception of the importance of collocation

All participants unanimously acknowledged the significance of English collocations in interpretation, emphasizing their role in enhancing fluency, accuracy, and naturalness. Many stated that proper collocation use makes their speech more professional and credible. For instance, Participant 1 noted,

…"Collocations help make interpretations sound more natural and professional."

Similarly, Participant 10 highlighted that

…"Collocations help make messages clear and effective."

These findings align with previous research emphasizing the importance of collocations in second-language acquisition and professional

communication (Wray, 2002; Lewis, 2008) [29],[16]

3.2.2 Challenges in Using Collocations during Interpretation Class

Participants identified three primary challenges related to collocation use in interpretation, namely difficulties under time constraints, literal translation from native language, and the unpredictability of collocation combinations. One of the most frequently mentioned difficulties was the challenge of instant recall during live interpretation. Participant 3 expressed that

…"Remembering the right collocations under pressure is difficult."

This was echoed by Participant 6, who reported,

…"Finding the right collocation in real time is tough."

Several participants described instances where they had mistakenly translated phrases word-for-word from their first language, leading to incorrect collocations. Participant 2 recounted,

…"I once struggled with 'take a risk' because I translated it literally."

Similarly, Participant 9 shared,

…"I translated 'commit a crime' as 'do a crime,' which sounded unnatural."

A few participants mentioned that some collocations seem arbitrary and difficult to predict, making them hard to memorize. Participant 5 stated,

…"Some words don't collocate as expected, and I often hesitate."

This challenge has been widely recognized in linguistic studies, which emphasize that collocations do not always follow logical rules and require extensive exposure to natural language use (Nation, 2013) [21].

3.2.3 Strategies for Overcoming Collocation Challenges

Participants reported various strategies for improving their collocation use, including active note-taking and review, listening to native speakers, and using collocation dictionaries. Many students, such as Participant 4, mentioned creating personalized collocation lists:

…"I started keeping a collocation notebook and reviewing it regularly."

Several participants highlighted the importance of exposure to authentic spoken English. Participant 12 shared:

…"Watching interviews and speeches really helps me learn collocations naturally."

Participant 6 found that

…"Practicing with a collocation dictionary allows me to check common phrases before I use them."

These strategies reflect best practices in second-language learning, as noted in studies by McCarthy & O'Dell (2005); Schmitt (2010) [19],[24].

3.2.4 Perceptions of Collocation Teaching in Interpretation Classes

A few of participants felt that their interpretation courses did not provide adequate training on collocations. Participant 8 stated,

"No, we mostly focus on general interpretation skills, but collocations are rarely emphasized."

Participant 11 echoed this concern, reporting,

"We learn them only indirectly, and they're never a main focus."

All 14 participants expressed a strong interest in incorporating more collocation-based training into their interpretation classes. Participant 7 stated,

"Yes, I believe collocations should be explicitly taught and reinforced with practice."

3.2.5 Students' Suggested Improvements in Teaching Methods

Participants provided several recommendations for enhancing collocation instruction in interpretation courses, including context-based learning, interactive exercises, and error correction and feedback on collocation. In particular, participants 9 and 14 suggested that teachers should use real-world texts and speeches to teach collocations in context; additionally, more role-playing and real-time interpretation drills could help integrate collocations naturally."

In another case, participant 13 proposed,

…"Teachers should highlight common collocation errors and provide corrective feedback during class."

These suggestions align with pedagogical research advocating for task based and contextualized approaches to teaching collocations (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2009) [4].

3.3 Discussion

The findings of this study reveal significant insights into the perceptions of English-majored students at Nam Can Tho University regarding the importance of collocations in interpretation, their challenges in using collocations, and the effectiveness of current teaching methods. The quantitative results indicated that students recognize the importance of collocations in interpretation, with a mean score of 3.53, confirming previous research that highlights

collocation as a crucial component of fluency and accuracy (Lewis, 2008; Wray, 2002) [16],[29]. However, the study also identified substantial difficulties students face in applying collocations during interpretation, reflected by a mean difficulty score of 4.52. This finding suggested that while students understand the significance of collocations, they struggle to utilize them effectively in real-time interpretation, which is consistent with prior studies emphasizing the cognitive challenges involved in collocation use (Baker, 2018; Liu, 2017) [2],[17].

The qualitative findings provide further depth to these observations. Students reported facing three main challenges: time constraints, direct translation errors, and the unpredictable nature of collocations. These findings align with existing research, which suggests that non-native speakers frequently make errors due to first-language interference and a lack of explicit instruction in collocations (Nesselhauf, 2005; Webb & Kagimoto, 2011) [22],[27]. Additionally, students expressed concerns about the adequacy of collocation instruction in their interpretation courses, with several participants stating that collocations are not explicitly emphasized in their learning process.

Despite these challenges, students demonstrated an interest in improving their collocation competence and proposed several strategies, including active note-taking, exposure to authentic spoken English, and the use of collocation dictionaries. These strategies align with best practices in second-language acquisition, reinforcing the need for explicit collocation instruction in interpretation courses (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2005; Schmitt, 2010)

[19],[24]. Furthermore, students recommended pedagogical improvements, such as integrating real-world texts, role-playing activities, and targeted error correction, which have been previously suggested as effective methods for improving collocation acquisition (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2009) [4].

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The current study emphasizes the difficulties students encounter in learning collocations and their crucial significance in interpretation. Due to time limits, impacts from first languages, and the arbitrary nature of collocational patterns, the results indicate that although students recognize the value of collocations, they have difficulty applying them. Additionally, the study shows that current interpretation courses underemphasize collocation training, which leaves students unprepared for tasks involving real-time interpretation. Incorporating explicit collocation instruction into interpretation courses is crucial to addressing these issues. This can be done by implementing a few crucial suggestions. First, students can gain firsthand experience using collocations in authentic contexts by utilizing real-world dialogues, speeches, and interviews. Second, through active practice, students can internalize collocations through role-playing exercises and real-time interpretation drills. Third, to promote accurate usage, teachers should point out common mistakes, give corrective feedback and clearly teach collocations. Fourth, students can systematically expand their collocation repertoire by being encouraged to use note-taking techniques and collocation dictionaries. Lastly, frequent and intense practice classes that concentrate on collocations can help

with application and remember in interpretation assignments. Future studies need to examine the efficiency of these teaching techniques in improving students' interpretational collocation competency. Moreover, follow-up studies might look at how explicit collocation instruction affects students' interpretation skills over time in work environments. By filling these gaps, teachers may create more efficient teaching methods that give students the language skills they need to succeed in interpretation job opportunities.

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