

## Indonesian EFL Learners' Recognition and Production of The English Grammatical Collocation

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**Abstract:** *One of the most challenging aspects in foreign language learning is collocation. Both EFL learners and teachers are not aware of the importance of the English collocations and thus leave them aside. They assume that as long as the words in a sentence are meaningful, understandable, and similar in meaning, the words can co-occur. The grammatical collocation of interest in, for example, cannot be simply replaced by \*interest with, since words occur together to make collocational patterns, as proposed by Hanks (1987). For this reason, this research is aimed to find out the students' errors in both the recognition and production of grammatical collocation, specifically "noun + preposition" combinations. The participants involved in this study are 22 third semester students who have taken English Grammar 1 and 2 subjects. The data were taken from multiple choice questions and fill-in-the-blank test. The result shows that L1 interference most of the time played its significant role both in the recognition and the production of the English grammatical collocations. Nevertheless, in some occasions, the students "make" their own collocations, due to the flexibility of Indonesian collocations, difficulty to translate the prepositions, and their difference from Indonesian grammatical collocations.*

**Keywords:** *grammatical collocations mistakes, recognition, production*

**Abstrak:** Salah satu aspek yang paling menantang dalam pembelajaran bahasa asing adalah kolokasi. Baik peserta didik dan guru yang mempelajari bahasa asing tidak menyadari pentingnya kolokasi bahasa Inggris dan oleh karenanya mengabaikannya. Mereka berasumsi bahwa selama kata-kata dalam kalimat itu bermakna, dapat dimengerti, dan memiliki arti yang serupa, kata-kata itu dapat digunakan bersamaan (kolokasi). Kolokasi gramatikal pada kata ketertarikan, misalnya, tidak bisa hanya digantikan oleh \*ketertarikan dengan, karena kata-kata muncul bersamaan untuk membuat pola kolokasi, seperti yang diusulkan oleh Hanks (1987). Untuk alasan ini, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui kesalahan siswa dalam mengenali dan menggunakan kolokasi gramatikal, khususnya kombinasi "kata benda + preposisi". Peserta yang terlibat dalam penelitian ini adalah 22 siswa semester tiga yang telah mengambil mata pelajaran English Grammar 1 dan 2. Data diambil dari pertanyaan pilihan ganda dan isian. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pengaruh L1 (bahasa pertama) banyak memainkan perannya dalam mengenali dan menggunakan kolokasi gramatikal bahasa Inggris. Namun demikian, dalam beberapa kesempatan, para siswa "membuat" kolokasi mereka sendiri, karena kolokasi Indonesia yang fleksible, sulitnya menerjemahkan preposisi bahasa Inggris, dan perbedaan kolokasi gramatikal bahasa Indonesia dan Inggris.

**Kata kunci:** kesalahan kolokasi gramatikal, mengenali, menggunakan

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Collocation is one of the most challenging aspects in foreign language learning. However, many learners as well as teachers are not concerned about its importance. Collocations, as a part of vocabulary, are chunks that are significant for learners as well as teachers in the process of language learning (Thornbury, 2002). Hanks (1987) stated that words appear together to form collocational patterns. Nevertheless, many nonnative speakers reckon that as long as the message is understandable, there is no point using the language as naturally as

native speakers use the language. As a result, EFL learners, as he wishes, combine words in a nonnative-like manner, or pick words that are synonymous and just substitute them with others without paying attention to naturalness of the language.

Farghal & Obiedat(1995) affirms that collocations are quite annoying for EFL learners. They also mentioned that the main reasons for errors are related to paraphrasing, overgeneralization, L1 interference, interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer, and lack of collocational knowledge in English.

According to Tanihardjo (2015), nonnative speakers of a language often use collocations that come from their mother tongue. His findings showed that L1 interference or interlingual transfer played a significant role in the production of lexical collocation in writing; for example, \*use clothes, \*do sacrifices, \*use time, \*give impact.

Tanihardjo (2017) further conducted research on different category of collocation, more specifically grammatical one. He also discovered that the majority of the students' mistakes came from literal translation of the Indonesian prepositions to the English ones (e.g. \*amazed with/by, \*guilty for, \*respectful to/with, \*married with, \*similar with, etc.

Even though one word can possibly be synonymous with one another, improper combination of words may lead to inappropriateness. As what Tanihardjo had found in his studies, we can conclude that the possible reasons for the learners to make unacceptable collocations are interlingual transfer and L1 interference, where EFL learners use L1 knowledge when using L2.

In this study, the researcher would like to find out how the students performed in both the recognition and production parts, and how the mistakes possibly took place. The focus of the grammatical collocations is solely Noun + Preposition.

## 2. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. *Definition of Collocation*

McCarthy (1990) defined a collocation as "a marriage contract between words and some words are more firmly married to each other than others." Conzett (2000) also stated that a collocation is "two or more words that tend to occur together (collocate). From those two definitions above, it can be concluded that the combination, in which one word and another co-occur is already somewhat fixed.

### 2.2. *Classification of Grammatical Collocations*

Benson, Benson, & Ilson(1997) divided collocation into 2 major groups: grammatical collocations, and lexical collocations. They differentiated between lexical collocations such as do research, pack of dogs, deeply absorbed and grammatical collocations such as interested in, look into, discussion about, suggest that.

Benson, Benson, & Ilson (1997) further defined a grammatical collocation as "a phrase consisting of a dominant word followed by a grammatical word (noun, adjective, and verb) and a preposition; for example, believe in, look into, interested in, suggest that, etc. Sinclair, Jones, & Daley (2003) further mentioned that lexical items are words that belong to open classes (noun, verbs, adjectives). Lexical collocations combine two equal lexical components (open class words), but grammatical collocations mix a lexical word (noun, verb or adjective) and a grammatical word, resulting in the combination of one open class word and one closed class word.

**Table 1.** Types of Grammatical Collocations

No.	Types of Grammatical Collocations	Examples
1.	Noun + preposition	The blockade of enemy ports by our navy
2.	Noun + to-infinitive	It was a pleasure to do it; they had an obligation to do it; he was a fool to believe it
3.	Nouns + that clause	He took an oath that he would do his duty
4.	Preposition + noun	In advance; by accident; in agony
5.	Adjective + preposition	They were angry at everyone; she is afraid of dogs
6.	Adjective + to-infinitive	It was necessary to work; the girl is ready to go; the machine was designed to operate at high altitudes
7.	Adjective + that clause	She was afraid that she would fail the examination; it was nice that she was able to come home for holidays
8.	19 English verb patterns	Please excuse my waking you so early; he sent him the book / he sent the book to him; etc

### 3. DATA SOURCE

Since the researcher do not know which nouns the students are familiar with, he first did a pilot study. The researcher made a list of collocation that had 40 collocations of "Noun + Preposition" and had the students choose 20 most common nouns to them.

Next, to measure the students' knowledge of grammatical collocations, the writer utilized a test comprising two parts, namely recognition and production parts. The number of test items in each part is 10, making them 20 in total. The focus of the test is all about noun + preposition. In the recognition part, like a multiple choice, the questions each provide a noun and three options regarding the prepositions. On the other hand, in the production part, like a fill-in-the-blank test, the students were provided with the noun, and they had to decide themselves what preposition to co-occur with.

The participants involved in this study were students from the English Department in Bunda Mulia University. All those 22 students had taken English Grammar 1 and 2 subjects.

### 4. RESEARCH METHOD

First of all, in the recognition part, the writer listed down all the students' answers: the correct and incorrect ones, and counted all their answers in the form of a table. Similarly, in the production part, the writer also noted down all possible answers the made, tallied them, and showed the occurrence of the collocation in percentage.

Next, in both parts, the writer presented only the first and second most mistaken answers. He then looked up in the Oxford collocations dictionary to see what prepositions to go with the noun in the English collocations. He also utilized online dictionary from KBBI and online Indonesian corpus to see the acceptable Indonesian collocations.

Finally, the researcher explained the collocations in English uses and Indonesian ones. In addition, he would like to give a justification for the mistakes to happen from the perspective of L1 grammatical collocations which might have influenced the students' answers.

## 5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 5.1. Recognition Part

Among ten collocations tested in the recognition part, there were collocations that were quite problematic to some students. It appears that 5 out of 10 collocations took more than half of the total number of the students (>50%), which are 22 students.

**Table 2.** Students' Answers in the Recognition Part

No	Question Number	Noun	expected preposition	Multiple Choices			Total of wrong answer (in percentage (%))
				Correct answer (in percentage (%))	1st most wrong answer (in percentage (%))	2nd most wrong answer (in percentage (%))	
1.	Q1	Hope	of	of (13.64)	for (72.73)	about (13.63)	86.36
2.	Q2	Cost	of	of (40.91)	for (59.09)	with (0)	59.09
3.	Q3	Increase	in	in (68.18)	on (31.82)	with (0)	31.82
4.	Q4	Faith	in	in (50)	with (27.27)	on (22.73)	50
5.	Q5	Way	of	of (72.73)	for (27.27)	with (0)	27.27
6.	Q6	Rise	in	in (40.91)	on (54.55)	with (4.54)	59.09
7.	Q7	Addiction	to	to (45.45)	with (50)	about (4.54)	54.54
8.	Q8	Respect	for	for (77.27)	with (22.73)	at (0)	22.73
9.	Q9	Control	over	over (54.55)	about (27.27)	for (18.18)	45.45
10.	Q10	Search	for	for (86.36)	at (13.64)	with (0)	13.64

#### 1. Question 1

1<sup>st</sup> most mistakes: \*We had little hope for success; nonetheless, we decided to perform the operation

2<sup>nd</sup> most mistakes: \*We had little hope about success; nonetheless, we decided to perform the operation

English Collocations: We had little hope of success; nonetheless, we decided to perform the operation

Indonesian: Kami mempunyai harapan kecil untuk berhasil; walau demikian kami memutuskan untuk melakukan operasi

In the findings, the noun *hope* took the most mistakes among all nouns, as 19 students (86.36%) chose wrong collocations: *for* (72.73%) and *about* (13.63%).

The English collocation *hope* in fact can co-occur with both *for* and *of*. However, they serve different functions. In general, the collocation *hope for* is followed by a noun, and *hope of* is followed by gerund. Nevertheless, the English dictionary also suggests that *hope of* can also be followed by a noun. Moreover, *hope for* is generally to indicate desire, and

*hope of* is to indicate ability. In this situation, *hope of* is more suitable, because it talks about a potential to attain success.

In Indonesian collocation, *harapan* (noun) more naturally co-occurs with *untuk* (*for*), as in *harapan untuk berhasil* than *akan* (noun), as in *harapan untuk keberhasilan*. This result leads us to the fact that the students may have translated the preposition *untuk* (*for*) from their mother tongue, Indonesian. Surprisingly, there were some students having answered *about* to go with the noun *hope*. This shows that the students did not use Indonesian collocation, but only use their hunch.

## 2. Question 2

1<sup>st</sup> most mistakes: \*In many cities the cost *for* living is pretty high

2<sup>nd</sup> most mistakes: ---

English Collocations: In many cities the cost *of* living is pretty high

Indonesian: Dibanyak kota, biaya hidup cukup tinggi

The result shows that this collocation happened to be the second most mistakes taking place. 13 out of 22 students (59.09%) opted for the preposition *for* to go with the noun *cost*.

In Indonesian use, the collocation *biaya hidup* is more common than *biaya untuk hidup*. Even so, the noun *biaya* can still co-occur with the preposition *untuk*, making the students eventually went with the preposition *for*. However, the English dictionary suggests that the noun *cost* does not collocate with the preposition *for* (*untuk*), but with the preposition *of* (*akan*). The writer discerns that the mistake resulted from literal translation of their mother tongue.

## 3. Question 4

1<sup>st</sup> most mistakes: \*I have no faith with her capabilities

2<sup>nd</sup> most mistakes: \*I have no faith on her capabilities

English Collocations: I have no faith in her capabilities

Indonesian: Saya mempunyai keyakinan dengan / pada / dalam kemampuannya

The findings show that the noun *faith* also posed a problem for EFL learners. 11 students (50%) made wrong prepositions: *with* (*dengan*) and *on* (*pada*) to go with the noun *faith* (*keyakinan*).

The English dictionary only suggests that the noun *faith* only collocates with *in* (*dalam*). However, in Indonesian collocations, there are some prepositions (*e.g. with, on, in*) that can co-occur with *faith*. It appears that those prepositions may be interchangeable, and thus making them confused with the preposition to go with.

## 4. Question 6

1<sup>st</sup> most mistakes: \*There has been a huge rise on food prices recently

2<sup>nd</sup> most mistakes: \*There has been a huge rise with food prices recently English

Collocations: There has been a huge rise in food prices recently

Indonesian: Ada kenaikan pada harga makanan baru-baru ini

From the findings, it is shown that the majority of students (12 students) picked out the preposition *on* (54.55%) and 1 student went for *with* (4.54%), making 59.09% in total. However, there were only 9 students (40.91%) chose the preposition *in*.

The noun *rise* is equivalent to *increase*. However, the students were not aware of the preposition to go with it. In fact, *rise* (*kenaikan*), as suggested by the English dictionary, should also collocate with the preposition *in* (*dalam*). The probable cause for the students to make such mistake was that they may have translated into Indonesian, as it may sound odd to say *rise in food prices* (*kenaikan dalam harga makanan*). As a result, many students selected *on* (*pada*) to go with the noun *rise*.

Surprisingly, there were few students going with the preposition *with*, although it is not a collocation in Indonesian use.

#### 5. Question 7

1 <sup>st</sup> most mistakes:	*I think I have an addiction with chocolate
2 <sup>nd</sup> most mistakes:	*I think I have an addiction about chocolate
English Collocations:	I think I have an addiction to chocolate
Indonesian:	Saya sepertinya kecanduan (terhadap) coklat

The discovery displays that 12 students (50%) singled out the preposition *with* (*dengan*) and 1 student (4.54) took *about* (*mengenai*). Only 9 students picked out *to* (*pada*).

The noun *addiction* has two meanings: *kecanduan* and *ketagihan*., In Indonesian dictionary, the noun *addiction* does not necessarily need a preposition. Despite its acceptability to use *addiction to* (*kecanduan pada / terhadap*) in Indonesian, it is more common to leave out the preposition.

However, it is so unexpected to find that half of the students selected *with* (*dengan*), which in fact does not collocate. This shows that they did not really translate their Indonesian collocation into the English ones.

#### 5.2. Production Part

Similar to the recognition part, the production part also has 10 questions. However, the difference lies in that the students had to provide the preposition themselves using their knowledge. It shows that out of 10 questions, 7 collocations were problematic, and those wrong collocations took more than 60% of the students.

**Table 3.** Students' Answers in the Production Part

No	Question Number	Noun	expected preposition	Correct answer (in percentage (%))	1 <sup>st</sup> most wrong answer (in percentage (%))	2 <sup>nd</sup> most wrong answer (in percentage (%))	3 <sup>rd</sup> most wrong answer (in percentage (%))	4 <sup>th</sup> most wrong answer (in percentage (%))	5 <sup>th</sup> most wrong answer (in percentage (%))	6 <sup>th</sup> most wrong answer (in percentage (%))	Total of wrong answer (in percentage (%))
1	Q1	Difficulty	With / in	With / in (63.64)	On (31.82)	At (4.54)	---	---	---	---	36.36
2	Q2	Advantage	Of	Of (54.55)	On (22.73)	From (9.10)	At (4.54)	In (4.54)	With (4.54)	---	45.45
3	Q3	Answer	To	To (27.27)	For (59.09)	On (9.10)	About (4.54)	---	---	---	72.73
4	Q4	Solution	To	To (31.82)	For (50)	On (9.10)	With (4.54)	Over (4.54)	---	---	68.18
5	Q5	Excitement	About	About (36.37)	For (40.91)	With (13.64)	Of (4.54)	On (4.54)	---	---	63.63
6	Q6	Reason	For	For (31.82)	Of (36.36)	With (13.64)	About (9.10)	On (4.54)	To (4.54)	---	68.18
7	Q7	Reaction	To	To (63.64)	For (9.10)	In (9.10)	On (4.54)	About (4.54)	With (4.54)	At (4.54)	36.36
8	Q8	Knowledge	Of	Of (18.18)	About (27.27)	On (27.27)	For (9.10)	With (9.10)	At (4.54)	To (4.54)	81.82
9	Q9	Interest	In	In (31.81)	On (22.73)	With (13.64)	At (13.64)	About (9.10)	For (4.54)	To (4.54)	68.19
10	Q10	Effect	On	On (36.36)	For (31.82)	With (18.18)	Of (9.10)	To (4.54)	---	---	63.64



## 1. Question 3

- 1<sup>st</sup> most mistakes: \*My answer for your question has to be a simple 'No'!  
 2<sup>nd</sup> most mistakes: \*My answer on your question has to be a simple 'No'!  
 English Collocations: My answer to your question has to be a simple 'No'!  
 Indonesian: Jawaban saya untuk pertanyaan anda hanya sederhana 'Tidak'!

Based on the findings, *answer to (jawaban atas)* is the second most problematic collocation. 16 students (72.73%) went for the collocations *for (untuk)* and *on (pada / atas)*.

English dictionary suggests that the noun *answer* should only go with the preposition *to (terhadap)*. However, In Indonesian use, such noun can flexibly go with such prepositions as *about, to, on* and *for* without having any significant difference. Such flexibility in Indonesian collocation, as well as the literal translation from Indonesian seemed to have been the cause of the mistake.

## 2. Question 4

- 1<sup>st</sup> most mistakes: \*I'm afraid they had no solution for our problem  
 2<sup>nd</sup> most mistakes: \*I'm afraid they had no solution on our problem  
 English Collocations: I'm afraid they had no solution to our problem  
 Indonesian: Sepertinya mereka tidak punya solusi untuk masalah kami

The findings display that only 7 students (31.82%) succeeded in choosing the right collocation *solution to (solusi terhadap)*. The rest of the students had different prepositions to go with, for example, *for, on, with, and over*.

Having similar meaning to the noun *answer*, the noun *solution* also has the same collocation. However, In Indonesian use, such noun can usually collocate with prepositions, such as *about, to, on* and *for*. It appears that some of the students did not really translate the prepositions from their L1.

## 3. Question 5

- 1<sup>st</sup> most mistakes: \*So what was all the excitement for then?  
 2<sup>nd</sup> most mistakes: \*So what was all the excitement with then?  
 English Collocations: So, what was all the excitement about then?  
 Indonesian: Jadi, kalian bersemangat untuk apa?

The result shows that only 8 students (36.37%) got the collocation right. 16 students (63.63%) picked out *for (untuk)*, *with (dengan)*, *of (akan)*, and *on (pada)*.

In fact, the expression of *what was all the excitement about then (ini semangat tentang apa?)* sounds really odd to Indonesian speakers. However, according to Indonesia corpus, the noun *excitement* collocates with *for*. This explains why they ended up using the preposition *for*, instead of *about*.

## 4. Question 6

- 1<sup>st</sup> most mistakes: \*The reason of the accident is still to be established  
 2<sup>nd</sup> most mistakes: \*The reason with the accident is still to be established  
 English Collocations: The reason for the accident is still to be established  
 Indonesian: Penyebab (akan) kecelakaan masih perlu dibuktikan



According to the result, 15 students (68.18%) had various collocations (*e.g. of, with, about, on, and to*), and only 7 students (31.82%) went with the preposition *for*.

Although the learners are Indonesian, they showed various prepositions, which in fact does not collocate, to go with the noun *reason*. According to Indonesian dictionary, *reason* has multiple meanings, two of which are: (1) a cause, and (2) an excuse. When its meanings relate to an excuse, the noun collocates with the preposition *to* (*untuk*), as in the *reason to come late was there was an accident*. However, when its meaning has something to do with an excuse, the noun *reason* co-occurs with *of* (*akan*).

While there are some collocations related to the noun *reason*, English only seems to suggest one collocation, which is *reason for*.

#### 5. Question 8

1 <sup>st</sup> most mistakes:	*He has extensive knowledge about the subject
2 <sup>nd</sup> most mistakes:	*He has extensive knowledge on the subject
English Collocations:	He has extensive knowledge of the subject
Indonesian:	Dia mempunyai pengetahuan yang luas tentang topic tersebut

The data show that the noun *knowledge* has the highest mistake. More than 80% (18 students) made up their own collocations, which do not collocate in their L1 grammatical collocation.

In academic field, this is one of the nouns that take place really frequently. At the same time, most Indonesian learners mostly use *about* to go with *knowledge*. It is so unexpected to find out that the students had 6 different prepositions to go with such noun, like *about, on, for, with, at, and to*. Another surprising fact is that despite the fact *knowledge about* is the Indonesian collocation, they still had various prepositions to go with *knowledge*.

#### 6. Question 9

1 <sup>st</sup> most mistakes:	*He has absolutely no interest on bird watching
2 <sup>nd</sup> most mistakes:	*He has absolutely no interest with bird watching
English Collocations:	He has absolutely no interest in bird watching
Indonesian:	Dia sama sekali tidak tertarik (untuk) mengamati burung

The findings exhibit that 15 students (68.19%) used collocations, like *On, with, at, about, for, and to* to go with the noun *interest*.

Indonesian dictionary suggests that the noun *interest* can co-occur with preposition *on, with, and to*. This is actually in line with the majority of the students' answers. However, it appears that not everyone really translates the Indonesian prepositions to the English ones, since there are collocations that do not exist in Indonesian.

On the other hand, English one suggests that the noun can go together with the preposition *in*, which is not an Indonesian collocation.

#### 7. Question 10

1 <sup>st</sup> most mistakes:	*The hot weather has had a considerable effect for ice-cream sales
2 <sup>nd</sup> most mistakes:	*The hot weather has had a considerable effect with ice-cream sales
English Collocations:	The hot weather has had a considerable effect on ice-cream sales
Indonesian:	Cuaca panas memberikan dampak pada penjualan es krim

The results show that the collocation *effect on* is quite problematic to EFL learners. 14 students (63.64%) were quite affected by their L1 grammatical collocation. Indonesian corpus suggests that the noun *effect* co-occurs with the prepositions *on* (*pada/atas*), *of* (*akan*), and *to* (*terhadap*). On the other hand, the English dictionary only suggests the preposition *on*. It appears that the students' collocations came from their mother tongue, and the students transferred them to English.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings on the students' mistakes in the collocations of "Noun+preposition", the writer can conclude that EFL learners were somehow affected by their L1 grammatical collocations. This is shown by the result where the English collocations are somewhat similar to the Indonesian ones.

Tanihardjo (2015) and (2017) stated that L1 transfer plays a significant role in both grammatical and lexical collocations. This study also displays comparable results, since most of their mistakes were similar to the L1 grammatical collocations. However, the writer also found that EFL learners did not always attempt to transfer their L1 grammatical collocations to the English ones, since there are still collocations that should not co-occur in Indonesian. There are possible reasons for this to happen. First, Indonesian collocations are more flexible. In many instances, various prepositions can go with nouns without having any significant difference in meaning; the noun *interest*, for example, can possibly co-occur with some prepositions, such as *on*, *with*, and *to*. Furthermore, prepositions are somehow difficult to translate, as there were unacceptable collocations appearing in the students' answers. Prepositions in fact have meanings in Indonesian. However, when it comes to collocations, prepositions cannot easily be translatable from Indonesian. Finally, English grammatical collocations are just different from Indonesian. In some instances, Indonesian nouns do not need to have a preposition, e.g. *reason*, *addiction*. As a result, they just attempted to "make" a preposition that they thought possible. In English, however, the nouns do need a preposition to make a collocation (e.g. *reason for*, *addiction to*).

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