

AN ADVANTAGE OF TEACHING MILITARY COLLOCATIONS IN MILITARY CLASSES

Megi Sabanashvili

PhD Student, International Black Sea University,
English language Teacher, Language Training School
Training and Military Education Command

Abstract

Since the early 1960s English for specific purposes (ESP) has rapidly developed and has taken a major part in English language instruction and research. It refers to the teaching and learning of English where the learners' aim is to use English in a specific domain. The purpose of ESP in a military context is to help students become communicatively competent in a military environment. The present study demonstrates an empirical research of explicit corpus-aided military collocation instruction and raises their importance in English language acquisition for military specialty students.

A 20 - week intensive instruction of collocations was given to the military students learning English at the language training school in the Training and Military Education Command in Georgia. The pre-, mid-, and post-tests on collocation competency as well as the questionnaire were administered to the participants during the experiment. The data were collected and analyzed with qualitative and quantitative research methods. The results from the tests and questionnaire collaboratively prove that the corpus-based collocation instruction is more effective for pre- intermediate / intermediate level military students. The findings have pedagogical implications for EFL teachers and students. The study recommends the teachers play a more active role in raising their students' military collocation awareness through appropriate guidance.

Keywords:

ESP, military collocations, collocation awareness, communicative competence

INTRODUCTION

The primary goals of language learners for learning ESP English are to communicate a set of professional skills and to accomplish specific job-related tasks. Today military specialty students study English not only to understand everyday language, but also to use the language in a specific context for job opportunities. As a result, the objectives of the language training should be based on the needs of military personnel and their future language use in accordance with their national defence interests and international relations. These category students require teaching methods and resources that focus on the development of specific vocabulary.

The present study aims to raise awareness of the role of military collocations in ESP instruction. It also aims to give emphasis to the military collocations and design proper collocation teaching methodology (strategies /activities) that the instructor can incorporate in the teaching process. In order to help military students develop their communicative competence in English language, the instruction needs to be focused on regular teaching of military collocations in ESP context.

Due to limited research and the lack of emphasis on collocations in teaching and learning in English for the military specialty students in Georgia, this study will help encourage the prominence of learning collocations among military students as well as increase awareness among Georgian military instructors to focus more attention on teaching collocations. These two key objectives of the study will promote mastering military collocations and consequently develop their communicative competence in English language.

1. English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

Since the 1960s, there has been an increase in the need for English for Specific Purposes (ESP), particularly in EFL countries where English is used for instrumental purposes. As Javid states ESP puts the emphasis on “Specific English” related to any particular discipline, occupation or activity. To realize your students’ need in ESP you need to be familiar with their targets (the writing and speech that learners are expected to produce and comprehend in specific contexts)¹.

The students who receive ESP instruction already speak and understand English at an intermediate level. Military English uses a specific linguistic corpus and emphasizes particular types of communication in a military context. In order to communicate with their international partners during a variety of trainings, joint military exercises and multinational missions, the professional soldiers, the officers, non-commissioned officers should master the military terminology used in their branch specialty: land, air or naval force. What words and phrases should be learned to boost their lexical knowledge is given a close attention. The speaking and writing skills are of utmost importance for ESP students.

2. What is collocation?

The word “collocation” is derived from the Latin verb “collocare. The British linguist Firth was the first who initially used this term to describe the habitual co-occurrence of lexical items². According to McCarthy “in vocabulary teaching there is a high importance of collocations”, as well as “the relationship of collocation is fundamental in the study of vocabulary, and collocation is an important organizing principle in the vocabulary of any language.”³.

Thornbury (2002) also declares that idioms, phrasal verbs and collocations and are some of the most important chunks of language. It’s crucial to consider the context in which a collocation is used. Native speakers instinctively predict what is going to be said by using of phrases. It will be simpler for native speakers to guess what a non-native speaker is saying if they make use of collocations.⁴ As maintained by some of the most well-known linguists (Benson et al. 1986, Hausmann 1989, Hill 2000)⁵ collocations can be divided into seven different syntactic types:

1 Javid, Choudary. Z. “English for Specific Purposes: Its Definition, Characteristics, Scope and Purpose” *European Journal of Scientific Research*, 112(1) (2013): 131

2 Firth, J. R. *Papers in Linguistics*. London: Oxford, 1957:196

3 McCarthy, M. *Vocabulary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (1990) :12

4 Thornbury, S. *How to teach vocabulary*. Harlow: Longman, 2002.

5 Benson, M., Benson, E. and Ilson, R. *The BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1986.

Hausmann, F.J. ‘Le dictionnaire de collocations’, in *Wörterbucher: ein Internationales Handbuch zur Lexikographie*, de Gruyter, (1989): 1010–1019.

Hill, J. “Revisiting priorities: From grammatical failure to collocational success”. In M. Lewis (Ed.), *Teaching collocation: Further development in the lexical approach*. London: Commercial Colour Press Plc., (2000): 47-69.

verb + noun / noun + verb: accumulate knowledge, break a law, a bomb explodes

verb + adjective: sound strange, feel excited, stay awake

verb + adverb / adverb + verb: act accordingly, happen spontaneously, hardly expect

verb + prepositional phrase: take into consideration, bear in mind, be under investigation

adjective + noun: bright idea, heavy rain, outdoor game

noun + of + noun: bar of chocolate, twist of fate, sense of humor

adverb + adjective: blissfully ignorant, fully aware, perfectly healthy

3. The significance of military collocations in ESP

In the modern era of communication, English language has emerged as the lingua franca for communicating the fundamental ideas in a variety of fields, including the military. As a result, it is essential to motivate military students to achieve English communicative competence. Teaching professional vocabulary in ESP setting needs to be a main aspect of English language instruction. Coxhead provides two explanations for the significance of vocabulary acquisition in ESP: firstly, both teachers and students must be aware that valuable classroom time is completely related to their language needs. They ought to be reading texts that include the vocabulary and key concepts of their field and writing applying those concepts and vocabulary. [...] Secondly, these students' knowledge and use of this vocabulary for special purposes illustrates that they are part of a particular group.⁶

The vocabulary needs of ESP students and courses affect the tasks that they do in their professional field, their aims in doing these tasks, and their level of specialized knowledge. In accordance with the scholars in applied linguistics, the mastery of collocations in both oral and written forms is an important element of natural fluency in English. For example, Lewis asserts: "fluency is based on the acquisition of a large store of fixed or semi-fixed pre-fabricated items, which are available as the foundation for any linguistic novelty or creativity."⁷ From this point of view, it is important for military students to identify and acquire military collocations. They need to be aware of military collocations in order to improve their receptive skills, which will enable them to speak and write more fluently, naturally and correctly in their professional field. To sum up, teaching military collocations have a great importance for each language skill of English language proficiency:

Reading: to understand a variety of military authentic texts, correspondence and newspaper articles.

Listening: to understand relevant conversations, military news, reports, briefings.

Speaking: to communicate effectively with native speakers in job interviews as well as in military environment; giving presentations.

Writing : to write resumes, informal / formal letters and e-mails, military reports and orders.

However, military students in Georgia often encounter collocation problems for a variety of reasons. The Studies have shown that collocations typically present a challenge for non-native speakers due to the interference of their native language. The most common is a direct translation from their native tongue. They struggle to understand the figurative meanings of word combinations and frequently do not know how each word goes properly in context.

In addition, military students are particularly concerned about expanding their vocabulary. Many students waste hours on memorizing thousands of words in isolation simply from the dictionary. Unfortunately, they forget the fact that language fluency depends less on isolated words and more on having a quick availability to a store of lexical chunks, among which collocation is the most important type of lexical unit. Lewis (2000) claims that the main reason why so many students are not making any apparent progress is that they haven't been taught to recognize which words go together. They may know quite a lot of individual words, which they fail to use along with their grammatical knowledge, but they do not have the skills to use those words in a variety of collocations, which give more meaning into what they say or write.⁸

6 Coxhead, A. "Vocabulary and ESP" in Paltridge B. and Starfield S. (eds.) *The Handbook of English for Specific Purposes*, Wiley-Blackwell, (2013) : 116

7 Lewis, M. *Implementing the lexical approach: Putting theory into practice*. Hove: Language Teaching Publications, 1997:15

8 Lewis, M. **Teaching Collocation**. Hove: Language Teaching Publications, 2000.

While teaching and learning collocations in English as a foreign language has gained a lot of interesting the last decade, it would be inappropriate for Georgian military specialty students to take the English language course without progressing in mastering English military collocations. Their ability to communicate effectively in the military field will be definitely increased by a deeper understanding of military collocations. If military students adequately learn them, they will be able to apply them accurately both in their daily lives and at work. The awareness of English military collocations will be beneficial for their future career and promotion as well. For example, Nizonkiza investigated how teaching collocations affected the growth of academic vocabulary and, consequently, improvement of academic writing skills. The study found that purposeful teaching collocations to university students enhanced students' productive use of collocations in both cued recall and essay writing⁹. Lee and Kim (2021) defined military students' collocational knowledge to what extent they understand recurring but arbitrary combinations of words like 'friendly fire' and 'surgical strike'. There were 1,637 participants in the study. The students in the experimental group received corpus-based instruction, which was discovered to be more effective than traditional vocabulary instruction.¹⁰.

4. Methodology

Research goals

Considering the importance of collocations in the acquisition of foreign languages and the challenges that students face in learning them, the current study aimed to gather and analyze data regarding collocations teaching to military students at language training school in the training and military education command to find out whether they are aware of military collocations and if they precisely use these collocations in English language communicative competence. The experiment's secondary goal was to reveal whether or not participants' language proficiency would be impacted positively or negatively by an intensive teaching of military collocations. The study determined the further steps and recommendations in order to promote military collocation instruction in English language groups.

Research questions

The purpose of this study is to respond to the following research question:

- Do the military students have difficulties understanding the context even if they are familiar with the meaning of the individual words?
- Are collocations actively taught to military students while mastering English?
- Does the teaching of military collocations help military students in EFL classes to develop their Communicative Competence?
- Do the efficient language teachers put more emphasis on military collocations?

Methods

In recent years there has been a certain shift from rote learning and monotonous grammar rules to a more holistic approach. The goals of language learners, i.e. acquiring languages to communicate, have changed in response to changes in society. Given the significance of this issue, linguists and teachers have conducted a lot of research on foreign language teaching in order to discover and establish more realistic and effective language teaching methods and approaches to help teachers in perform their job effectively.

In the current study, collocations were taught using the communicative method. As Mustafa considers the Communicative Approach, the Task-based approach, even the outdated Audio-lingualism and its successor PPP (Presentation, Practice, and Production) help in vocabulary acquisition, even though it is not a planned activity, but rather results as a byproduct of other activities that focus on task solving, skill development and others, or is "incidental".¹¹

The research employed a mixed-method technique to assess students' collocational understanding. Pre-test,

9 Nizonkiza, D. "Improving academic literacy by teaching collocations. Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics". 47(2017): 153-179. <https://doi.org/10.5774/47-0-267>

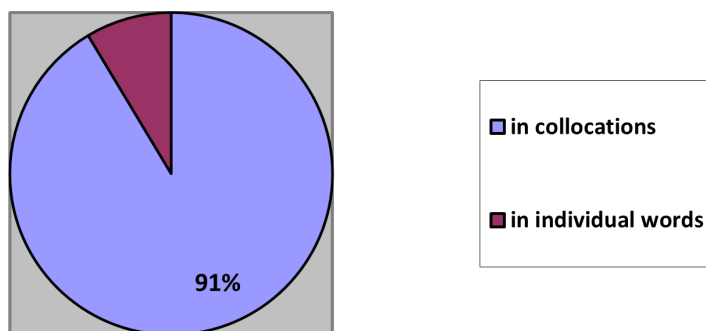
10 Lee, H. and Kim, J. Improving military English education based on the analysis of collocational knowledge: A meta-analysis". Korean Journal of Military Art and Science, 77(2) (2021): 152-170.

11 Mustafaa, H.R., N. Sain and N.Z.A. Razakc. "Using Internet for Learning Vocabulary among Second Language Learners in a Suburban School", Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 66 (2012) : 425.

mid-test, post-test tests with the same format, as well as a questionnaire, were used as two qualitative research tools. Data from the pre-, mid-, and post-test results were examined to find out the students' level of knowledge and the effectiveness of vocabulary learning strategies. The data were analyzed by the SPSS software. The research was conducted during the academic year 2021-2022, at language training school of the training and military education command in order to gather the relevant findings. The total number of the participants was 40 intermediate English language learners from six groups and they were randomly divided into experimental and control groups. The experimental group underwent corpus based instruction which involved five 50-minute English classes per day for military specialty students and on average, 10 to 15 minutes per day for teaching military collocations. The students in the experimental group were provided both 8-10 military collocations and a variety of collocation exercises. Sex was not a variable in the study by reason of the limited number of female students. The research participants were predominantly male military specialty students between the ages of 25 and 40. At the end of the experiment Likert-scale questionnaire (composed in English) was administered to the experimental group to measure participants' general attitude to the teaching of collocations. To learn more about military students' attitudes toward collocation training, the survey data were evaluated and the results were interpreted.

Figure 1: Number of students giving their opinion about learning vocabulary with individual words and collocations

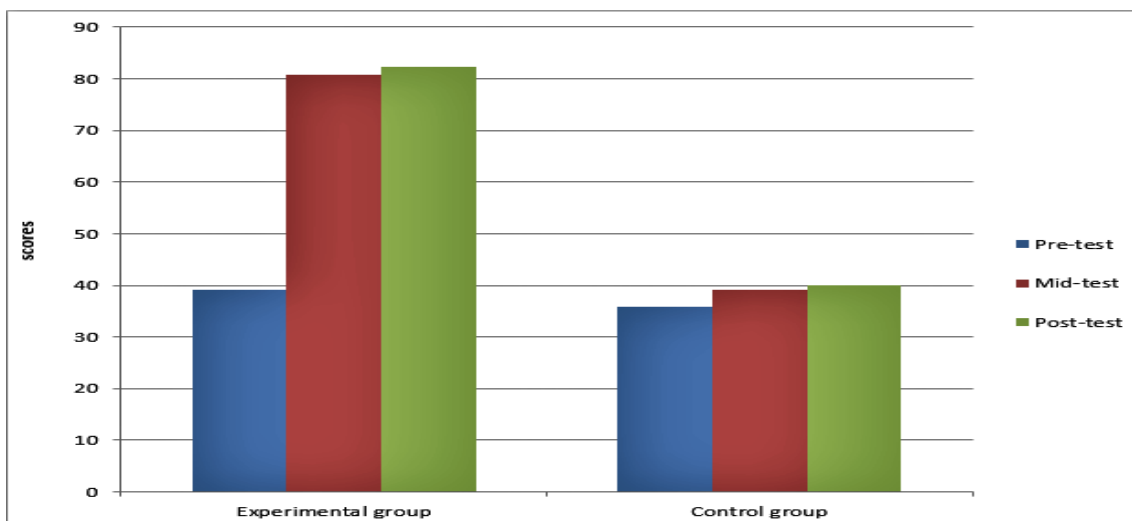
What is a better method, learning English in collocations (1) or individual words (2)?



Based on the following survey question, 91.4 % of the students strongly preferred learning vocabulary in collocations rather than as individual words.

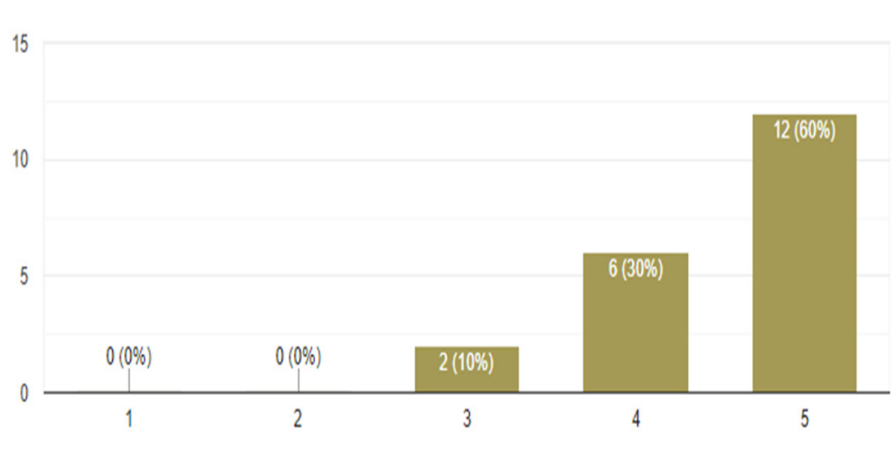
Figure 2: Number of students reviewing teaching military collocations

To what extent are the military collocations helpful in your professional field?



A total of 90 % of the survey respondents declare that military collocations are helpful or very helpful in their professional field as they acknowledge the importance of military collocations in their future career and promotion.

Figure 3: The test result showed a significant improvement in collocation knowledge



Intensive teaching of military collocations evidently changed the test outcomes in the experimental group from the pre-test to the post-test. The students in the experimental group showed a double improvement in collocation knowledge in both the mid-test and post-test.

Recommendations

Based on this study, it is essential that ESP instructors in Georgia to select and provide vocabulary in accordance with the needs and level of their military students. The class size and students' personalities should be taken into account while choosing the materials. Military students should be encouraged to learn vocabulary in phrases and set expressions rather than in isolated ones. First, the context helps them easily remember the meaning and makes it easier for them to apply the vocabulary naturally. Second, it is easier for human brain to remember and use language in chunks rather than as single words. For example, Nattinger believes it is relatively easier to remember a new word in a group of associations that means that language chunks help learners to accumulate information.¹² Besides, when words are combined in a chunk, they have the power to predict each other's occurrence. It shows that collocation competence can influence EFL learners' native-like performance. Thus, teachers should encourage military students to be more aware of military collocations in language reception skills and successfully use them in language production skills.

CONCLUSION

The current study investigated the effectiveness of military collocation teaching in ESP context in Georgia by measuring progress the students undergo after 20 weeks of intensive training. It also compared the English proficiency between an experimental group and a control group after receiving various teaching strategies. According to the research findings, the intensive instruction of military collocations obviously changed the test results in the experimental group from the pre-test to the post-test.

The outcomes from the mid test and posttest revealed that the learners in the experimental group did better than control group in vocabulary knowledge. The participants with intermediate English proficiency achieved a double improvement in their performance of military collocation tests. The various collocation activities significantly expanded participants' vocabulary knowledge. The questionnaire showed that 91.4 % of the survey respondents declared they preferred learning English vocabulary in collocations as opposed to as individual terms. 90% of them acknowledge the importance of military collocations in their future career and advancement and believe that they are beneficial or very beneficial for their professional field. The results obtained by this experimental study demonstrates that teaching military collocations improves vocabulary acquisition strategies. It also indicates that corpus-based English pedagogy is more successful for military specialty students in an ESP setting.

12 Nattinger, J.R. "A lexical phrase grammar for ESL. TESOL Quarterly". 14(3) (1988): 337-344.

REFERENCES:

1. Benson, M., Benson, E. and Ilson, R. The BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1986.
2. Coxhead, A. "Vocabulary and ESP" in Paltridge B. and Starfield S. (eds.) The Handbook of English for Specific Purposes, Wiley-Blackwell, (2013) : 115-132 .
3. Firth, J. R. Papers in Linguistics 1934-1951. London: Oxford, 1957.
4. Hausmann, F.J. 'Le dictionnaire de collocations', in Wörterbücher: ein Internationales Handbuch zur Lexikographie, (1989): 1010-1019, de Gruyter, Berlin.
5. Hill, J. "Revisiting priorities: From grammatical failure to collocational success". In M. Lewis (Ed.), Teaching collocation: Further development in the lexical approach. (2000): 47-69. London: Commercial Colour Press Plc.
6. Javid, Choudary. Z. "English for Specific Purposes: Its Definition, Characteristics, Scope and Purpose" European Journal of Scientific Research, 112(1) (2013): 138-151.
7. Lee, H. and Kim, J. Improving military English education based on the analysis of collocational knowledge: A meta-analysis". Korean Journal of Military Art and Science, 77(2) (2021): 152-170.
8. Lewis, M. Implementing the lexical approach: Putting theory into practice. Hove: Language Teaching Publications, 1997.
9. Lewis, M. Teaching Collocation. Hove: Language Teaching Publications, 2000.
10. Lewis, M. "Towards a Lexical View of Language – A Challenge for Teachers", *Babylonia*,
11. 3(2005): 7-10
12. McCarthy, M. Vocabulary. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.
13. McIntosh, Colin, Francis, B., & Poole, R. Oxford collocations dictionary for students of English (OCD). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
14. Mustafaa, H.R., N. Sain and N.Z.A. Razak. "Using Internet for Learning Vocabulary among Second Language Learners in a Suburban School", *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 66 (2012) :425 – 431.
15. Nattinger, J.R. "A lexical phrase grammar for ESL. *TESOL Quarterly*". 14(3) (1980): 337-344.
16. Nizonkiza, D. "Improving academic literacy by teaching collocations. *Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics*". 47(2017): 153-179. [https:// doi: 10.5774/47-0-267](https://doi.org/10.5774/47-0-267)
17. Suleman, N., Deepa, S., Othman, H., Ahmed, A., Abbas, M.Z., Nawaz, M.Z., Nazar, U., & Shaheen, H. "A study on use of collocation in business class learners ". *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal*, 22(2) (2020):183-193. <https://doi.org/10.14483/22487085.16023>
18. Thornbury, S. How to teach vocabulary. Harlow: Longman, 2002.