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Collocational Perspectives: A Theoretical Framework for EFL Learners and Teachers

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Abstract: Collocations focus on how words co-occur within a specific context and how they help EFL and ESL learners use words and vocabulary effectively. In this way, they are endowed with the power of conveying and transferring what they have in mind correctly leading to establishing a proper communicative competence. The present paper is an attempt to show the theoretical foundation of learning and teaching collocations in EFL and ESL classrooms. It also tried to illustrate how lack of knowledge of collocations can eventuate in various types of collocational errors leading to a distorted communicative competence. A wide range of scholars' theories were also introduced to lay a strong theoretical foundation regarding the collocational perspective of English language learning.
Keywords: Collocations, Communicative Competence, Contextualized Vocabulary Learning, Interlingual Errors, Intralingual Errors.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of vocabulary learning and teaching in the process of language learning is beyond dispute. Learning vocabulary could also be considered as the most important aspect of learning a language (Atay & Ozbulagan, 2007). Quite a large number of studies have endeavoured to demonstrate the importance of vocabulary as well as its high correlation with the learner's language proficiency emphasizing the importance of teaching and learning vocabulary (Qian, 2002; Webb, 2005; & Golkar & Yamini, 2007).

Schmitt (2000:32-39) explains the role of vocabulary in the history of language teaching. Vocabulary and vocabulary teaching has been taken into consideration in different teaching methods through the history of language teaching. In some phases and methods, it has become more prominent whereas in others it is replaced by the more prominent role of grammar. In methods and phases where grammar was of higher emphasis, it was clear that a purely syntactic description of language was considered. Recently, vocabulary has been regarded as an important constituent and aspect of language learning. Scholars have affirmed the great importance of studying the lexicon and have considered it a central part of language learning (Qian, 2002; Webb, 2005; & Golkar & Yamini, 2007). Some scholars have even pointed out that grammatical knowledge and skill will be of no use if there are no words in communication to convey meaning (McCarthy, 1990; & Lewis, 1993). In other words, meaning cannot be conveyed without the lexicon, showing the great importance of the lexicon.

However, one of the important aspects of vocabulary learning is how to learn and how to use it. In other words, the approach employed to learn and teach vocabulary must be of high consideration. The strategies, methods and approaches learners and teachers apply in learning and teaching vocabulary may not be effective. In other words, the students may possess good knowledge of vocabulary, but they still have problem with applying and using vocabulary in their productions. Contextualized and uncontextualized vocabulary learning are the two approaches that can lead learners to effective or ineffective vocabulary learning. In the former, context is considered, whereas context is ignored in the latter.

According to Firth's (1957:11) contextual theory of meaning, "a word is characterized by the company it keeps". Surrounding words acting as the company of a word characterize a word and determine its meaning. Thus, learning a vocabulary item along with its surrounding words in context leads to considering Firth's (1957) contextual theory of meaning. Surrounding words are important, since they determine the choice of a word and its meaning in context. In this way, the focus will be on chunks of words rather than individual words. Hence, learning words in context

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emphasizes learning chunks of words such as collocations.

On the other hand, memorizing a list of individual words is the strategy which ignores contextualized vocabulary learning. Nation (2001) mentions that one of the popular vocabulary learning strategies among learners is studying and memorizing a list of individual vocabulary items. If a learner only focuses on memorizing a list of individual words, he/she is learning the vocabulary out of context and without considering the surrounding words. Thus, he/she will not be able to determine choice of a word in context due to the absence of knowledge of the surrounding words for that specific word. As a result, the individually memorized vocabulary items will most probably be of no use since the learner may not know how to use them in context and they may not know how words co-occur. It is important for learners to know how words co-occur to avoid some problems such as collocational errors since collocation is defined as "the way in which words co-occur in natural text in statistically significant ways" (Lewis, 2000:132) or "the co-occurrence of two items in a text within a specified environment" (Sinclair *et al.,* 2004:12). In other words, if learners do not know how words co-occur, they will encounter collocational problems, leading to collocational errors.

Lack of knowledge of collocations or the way in which words co-occur is also widespread among EFL learners. The studies conducted by Liu (1999); Chen (2002); Tang (2004); & Li (2005) showed Taiwanese EFL learners' collocational errors of various categories and subcategories in writing. They also illustrated sources of the participants' collocational errors. Poocharoensil (2011) also studied Thai EFL learners' collocational errors in writing.

COLLOCATION

The term 'collocation' has been defined in different words and different angles by many scholars of the field. By analytically looking at definitions, some common points of view can be extracted that three of them are discussed in the following definitions and the extensive discussion is fulfilled in Chapter Two.

- "A collocation is an expression consisting of two or more words that correspond to some conventional way of saying things". (Manning & Schütze, 2003)**.**
- "strings of specific lexical items that co-occur with a mutual expectancy greater than chance, such as *rancid butter* and *curry favor*" (Nattinger & Decarrico, 1992:36).
- "the co-occurrence of two items in a text within a specified environment" (Sinclair *et al.,* 2004:12).

Thus, collocations are directly involved in conventionality and co-occurrence or mutual expectancy. When two words are combined to form a collocation, they frequently co-occur and this combination is the conventional way through which the two words absorb each other. If this conventionality is not observed, the listeners of language may not understand the exact meaning, since the combination is not conventional or natural to them.

Lexical and Grammatical Collocations

According to Benson *et al.* (1997), grammatical collocations consist of a main word such as a noun, an adjective, a verb or an adverb plus a preposition or 'to + infinitive' or 'that-clause' (e.g. *exception to, it was a pleasure to do it*, *it is necessary to work*, and *angry at*).

Lexical collocations do not include prepositions, infinitives or 'that-clauses' but consist of only main words such as nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs (e.g. *set a record*, *strong tea*, *a colony of bees*, and *affect deeply*).

English Education in Iran has some weaknesses. Some aspects are highly focused whereas some other aspects are totally ignored. In line with this study and according to Jahangard (2007:438), students' aural and oral skills are not emphasized in Iranian prescribed EFL textbooks. They are not tested in the university entrance examination as well as in the final exams during the three years of Secondary school education (senior high school education) and one year of pre-university education. Teachers place much less emphasis, if any, on oral drills, pronunciation, listening and speaking abilities than on reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary. The main focus is to make students pass tests and exams, and because aural and oral abilities of students are not tested, most teachers then skip the oral drills in the prescribed books. Even though vocabulary is focused on in Iran's English Education, the notion of collocation is not highlighted and individual memorization of vocabulary is practiced which is again due to the lack of emphasis on aural and oral skills.

The majority of Iranian EFL learners have good knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary; however, they seem to have serious problems with the production of collocational patterns. Koosha & Jafarpour (2006) also affirmed Iranian EFL learners' problem with collocational patterns despite their good knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary. They mentioned that this may to some extent result from the lack of collocational knowledge among Iranian EFL students. To a large extent, it may result from the inadequate emphasis on collocational patterns in their textbooks and the type of instruction they receive. Moreover, prefabricated chunks and collocational

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patterns have not been given high emphasis in teaching and research in Iran.

Shei & Helen (2000) contend that collocations have been neglected to a large extent by researchers, course designers and EFL instructors. To date, there are hardly any studies on collocational problems of Iranian EFL learners. In this regard, some of the studies conducted on the collocational errors of EFL learners focused on either lexical collocations (Hsu and Chiu, 2008) or grammatical collocations (Koosha & Jafarpour, 2006). Some studies considered both lexical and grammatical collocations, but they focused only on some of their subcategories (Namavar *et al.,* 2012; Poocharoencil, 2011; & Sadeghi, 2009). On the other hand, the present study considers both lexical and grammatical collocations as well as all their subcategories based on Benson et al. (1997) in the analysis of collocational errors of Iranian EFL learners in speaking. The second gap in research on EFL learners' collocational problems is that most of the studies focused on written discourse. In other words, majority of studies focused on the analysis of EFL learners' collocational problems in writings (Chen, 2002; Li, 2005; Fan, 2009; Kuo, 2009; & Namvar *et al.,* 2012).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Achieving proficiency in oral communication (i.e. speaking) is considered the main objective, concern and incentive for a large portion of students to attend language classes (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Furthermore, students of second/foreign language courses are thought to be successful if they can demonstrate effective oral communication in the language (Riggenbach & Lazaraton, 1991).

A large number of studies have attempted to demonstrate a high correlation between the learner's knowledge of vocabulary and language proficiency, illustrating the importance of teaching and learning vocabulary (Qian, 2002; Webb, 2005; & Golkar & Yamini, 2007). Learning vocabulary could also be considered as the most important aspect of learning a language (Atay & Ozbulagan, 2007). However, one of the important aspects of vocabulary learning is how to learn and use it. In other words, the students may possess good knowledge of vocabulary, but they still have problem with applying and using vocabulary in their productions. What may the reason be? Nation (2001) mentions that one of the popular vocabulary learning strategies among learners is studying and memorizing a list of individual words. Zarei (2010) contends that learning the meaning of words individually regardless of the relations those words form with other words, may be one of the reasons that puts the students in trouble when they want to use the words in their productions. Zarei (2010) conducted a study to investigate patterns of Iranian advanced learners' problems with English collocations. In this

study, his implication for teachers was to get students to gain efficient learning of vocabulary by teaching and presenting words in collocations and preventing Iranian EFL learners from learning individual meanings of words in isolation.

Firth (1957:11) pointed out that "a word is characterized by the company it keeps". According to Firth's (1957) contextual theory of meaning, surrounding words and the relation of words can affect learners' word choices significantly? It indicates that words do not have independent meanings. Every word gets some layers of its meaning from "the set of other words in the same phrase or sentence" (Yule, 1988:98). Therefore, one can claim complete mastery over a word if the person knows at least the relations that word forms with others. Most EFL learners memorize a list of individual words without considering the relations that word forms with others (Nation, 2001). That is why, after some years of developing semantic and syntactic competences, they feel disappointed as they are unable to achieve the level of an effective participant in L2 oral communication.

In line with Firth (1957), Hoey (2007) introduced the theory of 'lexical priming'. According to Hoey (2007), a word is primed to collocate with its own primings or typical collocations. For example, the word *winter* is primed to collocate with the preposition *in* or the noun *majority* is primed to collocate with the adjective *vast*. In this regard, Sinclair's (1991) 'idiom principle' or 'phraseological tendency' also focuses on semi-preconstructed phrases such as collocations and the co-selection of words. According to Sinclair (1991:110), "A language user has available to him or her a large number of semi-preconstructed phrases that constitute single choices, even though they might appear to be analysable into segments". In this way, a language user focuses on patterns of co-selection, collocations, and how words are properly combined to convey meaning.

Due to EFL learners' focus on individual words and out-of-context memorization of words, learners have problems with the fact of how words can be combined with other words to form a meaningful and correct collocation. Here, the word *context* refers to the third aspect of Firth's (1957) categorization of context mentioned by Manning & Schütze (2003:147) which focuses on the context of surrounding words. By learning words out of context and without paying attention to the syntagmatic relation of words, learners are highly likely to produce collocational errors. Using the wrong collocations prevents the listener from understanding the correct meaning. This case is challenging for the majority of EFL learners and in this regard, even advanced learners encounter various problems in their oral or written productions (Taiwo, 2004). This is in spite of the fact that they seem to have sufficient lexical or grammatical knowledge. Erroneous

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utterances like food strike, money washing *and* heavy tea are not due to poor lexical or grammatical knowledge. These problems result partly from the lack of knowledge about the words that a word can collocate with for producing correct collocations. Wolter (2006:746) claims that "learners will often make collocational errors even when they are familiar with the words that comprise the proper collocation".

Collocations are crucial in learning a language because words are learned and used in context, and without knowing the relation of words and the appropriate context with which a word can be used, that word has not been mastered. You know a word when you know how and where to use it (Phythian-Sence & Wagner, 2007) and without successfully choosing and selecting its companions, out-of-context learning of individual words will be ineffective for achieving communicative competence which is aimed as the final target of all language learning and teaching programs (Canale & Swain, 1980).

It has long been established that structural differences between first and second languages will result in the production of interference problems for L2 learners, and the similarities between them will probably (but not always) pave the way for learning (Corder, 1981). Ellis (1994) remarks that second language acquisition (SLA) is strongly influenced by the learners' native language, and the foreign accent in the second language learners' speech can support this claim. Towel & Hawkins (1994:7) suggest that "transfer seems to affect all linguistic levels: pronunciation, syntax, morphology, lexicon and discourse". Odlin (1989) also affirms that transfer has been agreed to occur at all the levels of linguistic analysis such as phonology, syntax, lexis, and grammar. In addition, Gabrys-Biskup (1992); & Fan (2009) contend that lexical and collocational transfer seems to be the major cause of poor proficiency. In this case, learners transfer their first language collocational patterns into L2 settings. Koosha & Jafarpour (2006); Fan (2009); & Sadeghi (2009), Poocharoensil (2011); & Namvar *et al.* (2012) also revealed the effect of L1 transfer on collocational productions of EFL learners. In addition to interlingual transfer or L1 interference, Liu (1999) introduced the ways in which intralingual transfer or L2 interference can influence collocational productions.

It can be concluded that EFL learner such as Iranians, can gain good vocabulary knowledge. However, what is important is to also learn the relationship each word has with other words. In other words, learners are required to also learn which other words a word can accompany to make a correct collocation. For example, the Intermediate Iranian EFL learners have learned the two words *strong* and *tea*. However, many of them may not know yet the

collocation *strong tea*. So, the problem is not mainly vocabulary knowledge but knowledge of collocations.

In summary, learning individual words or learning words out of context is a widespread problem among EFL learners. In this way, they do not learn the relations or patterns of words, collocations, leading to incorrect lexical and grammatical collocational productions.With poor knowledge of lexical and grammatical collocations, EFL learners will be more influenced by L1 and L2 interference resulting in the production of incorrect lexical and grammatical collocation.

TRANSFER

Brown (1984:90) defines transfer as "the carryover of previous performance or knowledge to subsequent learning". According to him, there are two types of transfer categorized as *positive* and *negative transfer*. In positive transfer, the prior knowledge facilitates the learning task and benefits it whereas in negative transfer, the prior knowledge or previous performance turns to be disruptive to the learning or second task. Interference results from negative transfer in which the leaner's prior knowledge interferes with the coming input. To illustrate, a previously learned item disrupts proper learning of the new item because of the inappropriate and incorrect transfer or incorrect association of the previous item with the new item.

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ERROR

According to James (1998), error can be defined as "an unsuccessful bit of language". Errors result from a lack of competence and reflect how competent a learner is in the process of language production (Brown, 1984). Errors are regarded as deviations from established rules of language resulting from not knowing a system. Errors can "provide to the researcher evidence of how language is learned or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in the discovery of the language" (Corder, 1967:167).

Lennon (1991:182) also defined error as "a linguistic form or combination of forms which, in the same context and under similar conditions of production, would, in all likelihood, not be produced by the speaker's native speaker counterparts". In this regard, this study identifies learners' erroneous or incorrect collocational forms or utterances with reference to a dictionary of collocations, two corpora

which consist of native speakers' utterances, and a native speaker.

In this study, the collocational errors of the participants are called *incorrect* collocations and the collocations that are not erroneous are called *correct* collocations. However, it is worth mentioning that James (1998) makes distinction between *correctness* and *acceptability*. According to James (1998:74), correctness is used for errors at the level of pragmatics and correctness of an utterance is decided based on conformity with the linguistic prescriptions of the language in question. James (1998:67) refers to acceptability as producing an utterance in appropriate context. In this regard, the word *context* is the key word since acceptability or unacceptability of an utterance is decided in context.

Interlingual and Intralingual Transfer

Transfer or the effect of prior knowledge on coming input or the subsequent material can originate both from first language and second language. Based on this, Brown (1984-214) categorizes transfer as interlingual and intralingual transfer. According to Brown (1984), negative interlingual and intralingual transfer are sources of errors. If transfer of the item which disrupts learning a new item originates from L1, it is a negative interlingual transfer which results in interlingual errors and if transfer of the item which disrupts learning a new item originates from L2, it is a negative intralingual transfer which results in intralingual errors.

In this regard, collocational errors can also originate from both L1 and L2. In other words, collocational errors can be both interlingual and intralingual. Liu (1999); Chen (2002); & Li (2005) investigated EFL learners' collocational errors and the results of their studies revealed that both L1 and L2 interference resulted in collocational errors. Liu (1999) showed that *ignorance of rule restrictions*, *the use of synonyms*, and *overgeneralization* resulted in intralingual collocational errors to a large extent. Li (2005) pointed out that word for word translation resulted in interlingual collocational errors.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Collocations are defined as the ways in which words co-occur in a specified context (Lewis, 2000; Schmitt, 2000; Sinclair *et al.,* 2004; & Nattinger & Decarrico, 1992). Thus, achieving mastery over how words co-occur is essential for learners in addition to learning words and lexical items. In other words, learning collocations, or how words co-occur is necessary for L2 learners. Thus, it can be inferred that lexical and grammatical collocational errors are produced because learners may not know how words co-occur in a specific context. On the other hand, the production of correct collocations results from the mastery of how to use words and lexical items together in a specific context. Therefore, effective vocabulary learning is yielded when learners know how to use the words together in a specific context. Based on this, if learning and teaching vocabulary in the process of second language acquisition does not lead to mastery over how to use the words in a specific context, it is inferred that effective vocabulary learning and teaching has not taken place.

Vocabulary and vocabulary teaching play a key role in the process of SLA. This is because meaning is conveyed through words in communication (McCarthy, 1990). Milton (2009:3) also affirms that vocabulary is not an optional or unimportant component in the language acquisition process and points out that "words are the building blocks of language and without them there is no language". It is also worth mentioning that mastery over how to use words must be emphasized in SLA. If learners do not learn how to use words in a specific context, the meaning that is supposed to be transferred through the words is disrupted and effective communication does not occur. Furthermore, the lack of mastery over collocations or how to use words in a specific context lowers communicative competence since according to Brown (1984), communicative competence also involves conveying and negotiating meaning in specific contexts. Thus, the meaning that is transferred through vocabulary and context are also primary notions in communicative competence. In other words, teaching vocabulary in SLA must be conducted in the way that meaning is not disrupted and communicative competence is enhanced.

The theory of communicative competence was put forward by Hymes (1971). Hymes (1971) coined the term "communicative competence" and defined it as mastery over both grammatical rules and rules of language use in a specific context. Based on Hymes (1971), rules of appropriate language use take priority over grammatical rules. Since communication basically involves conveying meaning, communicative competence can also be defined as the ability to convey meaning in a specific context. Based on Hymes (1971), SLA must aim at enabling the learners to use language in communicative situations. Communicative competence was the basis of the communicative language teaching (CLT) method (Richards, 2006) which focused on the learners' ability to use the second language in real life situations. CLT classes aimed to focus on teaching communicative competence. It was earlier mentioned that meaning is conveyed through vocabulary and effective vocabulary learning is achieved when learners can appropriately use the vocabulary in a specific context to convey the intended meanings. If the vocabulary items cannot be used appropriately in a given context, the meaning is distorted, leading to low communicative competence.

Firth (1957:11) pointed out that "a word is characterized by the company it keeps". This notion that characteristic of a word is determined by its company is noticeable in collocations. In line with Firth (1957), Schmitt (2000:76) defines collocation as "tendency of two or more words to co-occur in discourse". These two definitions and also most of other definitions as mentioned in Chapter Two have unanimously emphasized the co-occurrence and the attraction existing between two words. In other words, existence of one word leads to forceful absorption of its conventional company or collocate. Therefore, the surrounding words or the context play an important role in the selection of the other word. This notion has been illustrated in Firth's contextual theory of meaning. Manning & Schütze (2003) mentioned that Firth's (1957:193-196) contextual theory of meaning is in contrast with structural linguistics of Saussure and Chomsky who ignored the important area of collocations and focused on out-of-context characteristics of phrases and sentences. According to Firth (1957: 193-196), a contextual theory of meaning is based on high consideration of context: "the context of social setting" that focuses on a real life speaker in a real environment, "the context of spoken and textual discourse" that is opposed to out-of-context sentences and "the context of surrounding words" which is important for the case of collocations and is based on the Firth's (1957:11) famous sentence that " a word is characterized by the company it keeps".

Since this study focuses on collocations, the third definition of context by Firth (1957) is considered in the present study. Firth (1968:181) also mentioned that "collocations of a given word are statements of the habitual or customary places of that word". Halliday (1966:150) also pointed out the fact that the surrounding word affects the choice of the other word. The contextual theory of meaning is based on syntactic or syntagmatic approach that considers the meaning of a sign is a function of its relation to other signs in the context (Noth, 1997:100).

By focusing on a 'contextual theory of meaning', mastery over how words co-occur and how to use words in a specific context are achieved. Stubbs (1996) highlights the fact that Firth's contextual theory of meaning has influenced linguistics since the 1960s and has paved the way to bringing about interest in analyzing natural production of language in the study of communication. Regarding the contextual theory of meaning, learning the surrounding words of a word will lead to mastery over a word. Without knowledge of surrounding words or collocations, a learner has failed to learn a word completely since he/she does not know how to use a word and what the accompanying words are. If vocabulary learning is conducted based on contextual theory of meaning, effective vocabulary learning has happened, correct lexical and grammatical collocations are produced, and communication and conveying of meaning are successfully conducted, leading to high communicative competence.

By considering the effect of surrounding words and regarding the relation of words in English, L2 learner becomes aware of the L2 lexical patterns. Hunston & Francis (2000:37) defined the patterns of a word as all the words and structures which have regular association with the word and which contribute to its meaning. In line with Firth (1957), Hunston & Francis's (2000) 'pattern grammar' focused on patterns of words and the typical context in which words are used. Hunston & Francis (2000:271) contended that "learning strings rather than individual words enable the learner to compose lengthy utterances with the minimum of effort". Hoey's (2007) theory of 'lexical priming' also focuses on the relation of words and how they are primed to be co-selected with their appropriate collocates. According to Hoey (2007), a word is primed to collocate with its own primings or typical collocations. For example, the word *winter* is primed to collocate with the preposition *in* or the noun *majority* is primed to collocate with the adjective *vast*. With reference to Firth (1957); Hunston & Francis (2000); & Hoey (2007), it can be concluded that memorizing individual words is not recommended and words must be learned in context and with their surrounding words or their patterns.

In the process of second language acquisition, learners encounter two different linguistic systems (Brown (1984). Due to differences between the two languages, the learners' production may be influenced by negative transfer of L1 or L1 interference. This interference may also happen in vocabulary learning. L1 interference will make the learner not to be able to use the appropriate vocabulary in a specific context. It is worth mentioning that L2 interference may also exert influence as much as L1 interference.

If teachers and learners focus on the context of surrounding words, the learners will find the mastery over how to use vocabulary in a specific context to convey the meaning successfully. For example, if the learner learns that the adjective *hard* is one of the surrounding words of the noun *exam*, then lexical collocational errors such as *heavy exam* will not happen and the meaning is not distorted and communication is conducted successfully. Since the words *heavy* and *hard* have the same meaning in Farsi, if the learner does not know which one is used with the noun *exam*, a lexical collocational error is produced and the meaning is distorted due to L1 interference. The adjectives *small* and *brief* have also the same meaning in Farsi. If the learner does not know which of the two adjectives collocates with the noun *introduction*, he/she may produce the collocational error *small introduction*. As another example, if the learner learns that the following verb of the verb *make* must be *bare infinitive*, the learner will find mastery over how to use the verb *make*

in the context and correct grammatical collocation is produced.

Nation (2001) mentions that one of the popular vocabulary learning strategies among learners is studying and memorizing a list of individual vocabulary items. This strategy is also applied by Iranian EFL learners. In this case, learners usually focus on learning meaning of individual words regardless of the relations those words make with other words. This is the case where context and surrounding words are disregarded. As a result, ESL/EFL learners face problems of how to use a word in their productions. Zarei (2010) contends that learning the meaning of words individually regardless of the relations that words form with each other, may be one of the reasons that puts the students in trouble when they want to use the words in their productions. Consequently, and since they do not know the correct lexical patterns of L2, they resort to translation and use lexical patterns of L1.

Gabrys-Biskup (1992) contends that lexical transfer occurs in the learners' use of collocations and one of the areas of SLA that is highly influenced by L1 is the transfer of collocational patterns. Transfer of L1 lexical patterns may result in semantically and grammatically erroneous collocations among Iranian EFL learners. *Interest about* instead of *interest in, make someone to say* instead of *make someone say*, and *in this age* instead of *at this age* are examples of Iranian EFL learners' grammatically erroneous collocations and *sweet water* instead of *fresh water, make an advice* instead of *give an advice, heavy fog* instead of *dense/thick fog* and *small introduction* instead of *brief introduction* are among semantically and lexically erroneous collocations that result from transfer of L1 lexical patterns and word for word translation (Fan, 2009). For example, since *fresh* and *sweet* have the same meaning in Persian, and since the learner does not know which of them collocates with and accompanies the word *water* in context, he/she might make semantically wrong phrases and collocations, leading to distorting the meaning and lowering the communicative competence.

In addition to L1 transfer, L2 transfer can also result in incorrect lexical and grammatical collocations. The collocational errors that are the result of L2 transfer are called intralingual errors. Using the incorrect collocations *to extend trade* and *to expand railroad* instead of the correct collocations *to develop trade* and to *extend railroad* are among the incorrect collocations that result from L2 transfer and the use of synonyms. Brown (1984) also pointed out both L1 and L2 interference or negative transfer as the sources of errors resulting in interlingual and intralingual errors respectively. According to Brown (1984), negative interlingual and intralingual transfer are the sources of errors. If transfer of the item which disrupts learning a new item originates from L1, it is a negative interlingual transfer which results in interlingual errors and if transfer of the item which disrupts learning a new item originates from L2, it is a negative intralingual transfer which results in intralingual errors.

Figure 1.1 shows the theoretical framework of the present study and the importance of learning words with their company to produce correct lexical and grammatical collocations and avoid semantically wrong phrases and transfer of L1 patterns. According to the theoretical framework, words must be learned in the context of surrounding words and in relation with the other words they normally keep company with. Learning words in the context of surrounding words is important since surrounding words affect choice of the other word (Halliday, 1966:50). In this regard, memorizing a list individual words and learning words out of context must be avoided. In this way, the effect of L1 and L2 interference on lexical and grammatical collocational productions will decrease. As a result, correct lexical and grammatical collocations are produced and the intended meaning is successfully conveyed. When the intended meaning is successfully conveyed, it shows that a high communicative competence has been achieved. Therefore, learning collocations is essential for meaningful and comprehensible productions.
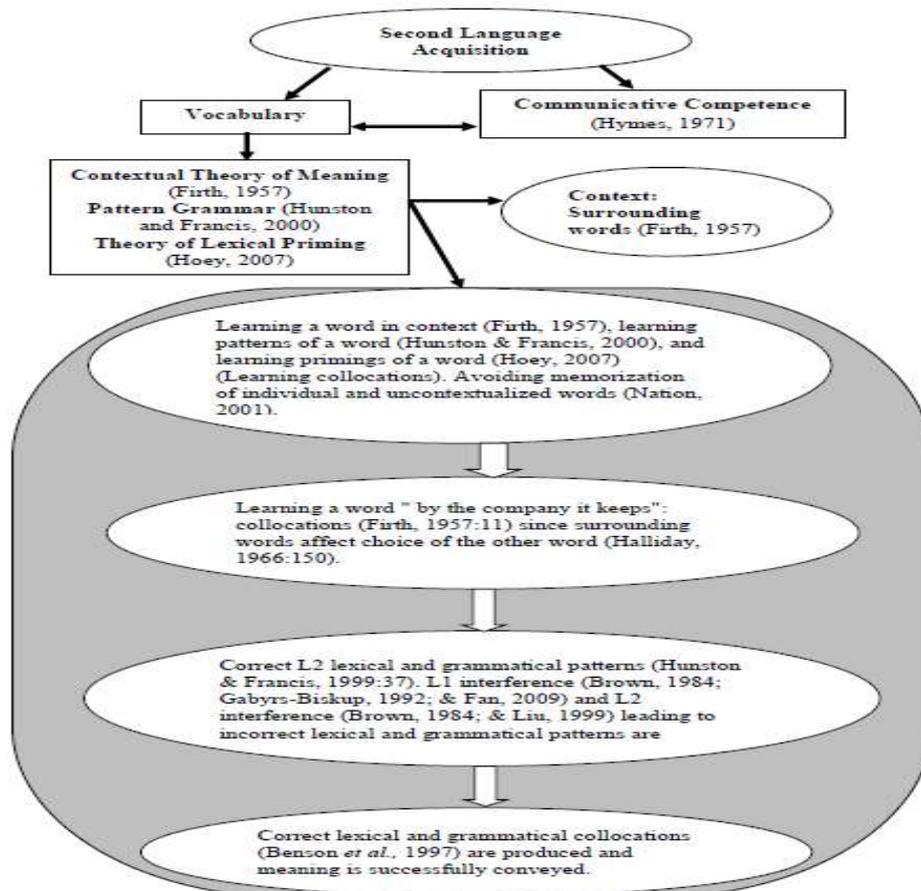
Figure 1. Diagram of the theoretical framework

According to Figure 1, SLA involves vocabulary learning which is essential for communicative competence. Vocabulary learning must be done based on the contextual theory of meaning for a successful communication and high communicative competence. In other words, a word must be learned in context or with the company it keeps. To learn a word effectively, the typical primings or collocations (Hoey, 2007) as well as the patterns of that word or the typical context in which it is used (Hunston & Francis, 2000) should also be focused. Learning words regardless of their appropriate collocates and their relation with other words leads to the production of semantically and grammatically wrong phrases and collocations due to L1 and L2 interference. For example, the words *decayed*, *rotten*, *rancid* and *corrupt* have the same out-of-context meaning in Persian. If an Iranian EFL leaner does not know the exact company or collocate of each of these words, he/she will produce semantically incorrect collocations. *Decayed tooth*, *rotten apple*, *rancid oil* and *corrupt person* are correct collocations and result from appropriate selection of a proper collocate for each of the above-mentioned four words and any interchange of the collocates would result in wrong and incomprehensible collocations, leading to disrupting communicative competence.

CONCLUSION

In summary, achieving mastery of how words co-occur is essential for L2 and EFL learners. In other words, learning collocations or how words co-occur in context is necessary for L2 learners' meaningful productions. Lexical and grammatical collocational errors are produced because learners may not know how words co-occur in a specific context. Lexical collocational errors are produced since L2 learners do not know some collocations or lexical relations between words. In other words, they ignore that a word has its own primings or typical collocations (Hoey, 2007). If learners become familiar with L2 lexical patterning, collocational errors will be less probable to occur. In this regard, grammatical collocational errors are produced since L2 learners do not know some colligations or the grammatical relations between words. In other words, they ignore that a word has its own grammatical patterning or colligation (Hoey, 2000). If learners become familiar with L2 grammatical patterning, grammatical collocational errors will be less probable to occur.

Effective vocabulary learning is yielded when the learners know how to use the words together in a specific context. Based on this, learning and teaching vocabulary in the process of second language acquisition must be based on the notion that language

does not consist of words but of chunks. Learners must avoid learning and memorizing a list of individual words since in this way, they do not become familiar with typical collocations or context of surrounding words.

Firth (1957) focused on learning collocations and context of surrounding words in his contextual theory of meaning. Firth (1968:181) mentioned that "collocations of a given word are statements of the habitual or customary places of that word". Halliday (1966:150) also pointed out the fact that the surrounding word affects the choice of the other word. Without knowledge of surrounding words or collocations, a learner has failed to learn a word completely since he/she does not know how to use a word and what the accompanying words are. By focusing on context of surrounding words, effective vocabulary learning happens, correct lexical and grammatical collocations are produced, and communication or conveying of meaning is successfully conducted, leading to high communicative competence.

By considering the effect of surrounding words and regarding the relation of words in English, L2 learner becomes aware of the L2 lexical patterns. Hunston & Francis (2000:37) defined the patterns of a word as all the words and structures which have regular association with the word and which contribute to its meaning. In line with Firth (1957), Hunston & Francis's (2000) 'pattern grammar' focused on patterns of words and the typical context in which words are used. Hoey's (2007) theory of 'lexical priming' also focuses on the relation of words and how they are primed to be co-selected with their appropriate collocates. According to Hoey (2007), a word is primed to collocate with its own primings or typical collocations. For example, the word *winter* is primed to collocate with the preposition *in* or the noun *majority* is primed to collocate with the adjective *vast*. With reference to Firth (1957); Hunston & Francis (2000); & Hoey (2007), it is concluded that memorizing individual words is not recommended and EFL learners are required to learn words in the context of surrounding words.

In addition, EFL learners should focus on Sinclair's (1991) 'idiom principle'. It means that EFL learners should avoid recalling isolated or individual words and collocates from their memory without understanding the notion that language does not consist of words but of chunks. In this regard, learners should avoid using words interchangeably without considering the combinations they produce. EFL learners should consider that they cannot substitute a word for another since they have the same meaning in L1, *split*, or L2, *synonym*, without considering the context and the surrounding words. Otherwise, they fail to use the proper collocations they need when they communicate in either speaking or writing, and meaning may not be conveyed successfully. EFL learners should also be consciously aware that using words interchangeably can also result from phonological proximity of words, leading to *mispronunciation* collocational errors as discussed earlier. Therefore, they should avoid interchangeably using the words which have phonological proximity.

In conclusion, EFL teachers are required to raise EFL learners' awareness of collocations and how words co-occur. In this regard, EFL learners should be prevented from memorizing a list of individual words and learning vocabulary out of context. Instead, they should be reminded to learn words in the context of their surrounding words. EFL learners should learn vocabulary with reference to theories such as Sinclair's (1999) 'idiom principle' and Hunston & Francis' (2000) 'pattern grammar'. Furthermore, EFL teachers should prevent EFL learners from interchangeably using the words that have the same meaning in their first language or are synonumous in English.

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