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TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC NGOẠI NGỮ HÀ NỘI

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GRADUATION PAPER

IMPORTANCE OF COLLOCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

IN LANGUAGE USE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1 - Introduction	1
1. 1 Background to the Paper	1
1. 1. 1 Rationale.....	1
1. 1. 2 Aims and Scope of the Paper	2
1. 1. 3 Research Methods	3
1. 2 Structure of the Paper	4
 Chapter 2 - Theoretical Background of Collocation	6
2. 1 Collocation in English.....	6
2. 1. 1. Definition.....	6
2. 1. 2. Classifications.....	10
2. 2 Collocation in Vietnamese	12
2. 2. 1 Definition.....	12
2. 2. 2. Classifications.....	12
2. 3 Significance of Collocational Knowledge in Language Use	14
 Chapter 3 - Methods and Procedures	18
3. 1 Subjects of the Survey.....	18
3. 2 Intrumentation	18

3. 3 Procedures	19
3. 4 Limitation of the Study	19
 Chapter 4 - Findings and Discussion	20
4. 1 Analysis and Discussion of the Survey Results	20
4. 2 Typical Collocation Mistakes made by HUFS Students.....	25
 Chapter 5 - Suggestions and Conclusion	31
5.1 Suggestions.....	31
5.2 Conclusion.....	32
 References	34
 Appendices	36

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1. 1 Background to the Paper

1. 1. 1 Rationale

Why do native English speakers say ‘make a mistake’ but not ‘do a mistake’ for ‘phạm lỗi, mắc lỗi’; ‘a serious illness’ and not ‘a heavy illness’ for ‘bệnh nặng’; ‘heavy rain’ which is ‘mưa nặng’, but not ‘big rain’ for ‘mưa to’; ‘blond hair’ instead of ‘yellow hair’ which is ‘tóc vàng’ in Vietnamese?

These kinds of questions have surely come across our mind at least once ever since we started learning English. Lexical errors like wrong word choice and wrong collocations have been a constant trouble not only to English majoring students at Hanoi University of Foreign Studies, but also to millions other students worldwide who have been learning English as a second or foreign language. Such concern is quite usual, because it is widely known that the mastery of typical collocations like *make a mistake*, *a serious illness*, *heavy rain*, etc. will give learners power to achieve language proficiency. Not only will they avoid making mistakes when they communicate in English, but they will also sound native-like for fluent and appropriate language use entails collocational knowledge (Nation, 2001, p.318). This is because learning collocations means learning typical expressions of a language. J. R. Firth, author of ‘Papers in Linguistics’ (1957), places heavy emphasis on

collocations while asserting, “you know a word by the company it keeps” (as cited in Taiwo).

In order to have a good command of a foreign language, English for instance, we need to learn the grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation of the language. Apparently, among other things, building a vast stock of vocabulary is a vital process in developing students’ ability of speaking and writing. But most people often think of vocabulary as lists of words. However, vocabulary does not only consist of single words, but also numerous *multi-word items* or *units*. Consequently, learners need to understand that these multi-word units are indispensable if natural communication is to happen. As Sonaiya (1988) has revealed, native speakers see lexical errors such as that of multi-word units as being the most disruptive because “it is in the choice of words that effective communication is hindered most” (as quoted by Taiwo).

Being aware that collocational knowledge plays a substantial role in language use, the author of this paper wish to share her ideas and knowledge about collocations with those who are also interested in the subject and who are striving for natural and proficient language use.

1. 1. 2 Aims and Scope of the Paper

This paper is written with the following *objectives*:

- Make a preliminary study of collocations in English and Vietnamese
- Point out the significance of collocational knowledge in appropriate and fluent language use

- Find out common collocation mistakes made by students of English at the Hanoi University of Foreign Studies and sensitizing them with the use of collocational knowledge to improve their overall performance in the classroom
- Offers some suggestions on how to enhance one's collocational knowledge

The paper is designed to serve students of all levels at the Hanoi University of Foreign Studies who learn English as a foreign language and wish to obtain an overall understanding of English as well as Vietnamese collocations.

This paper can be particularly helpful to learners aiming for high proficiency in English. The suggestions put forward in the last chapter can be taken as a starting point for further research on the subject.

1. 1. 3 Research Methods

To achieve the above mentioned objectives, a small survey was conducted, a collection of writings were analyzed, observations were made and the results have been recorded. Listed below are the tasks that have been carried out while this paper is being written:

- Conducting the questionnaire survey with English majoring students at the Hanoi University of Foreign Studies
- Tabulating the results of the survey
- Collecting essays of first and second year students at the Hanoi University of Foreign Studies
- Analyzing students' typical collocational errors

Besides, the author of this paper has consulted numerous reading materials such as reference books, different kinds of dictionaries, articles from linguistic periodicals and the Internet, etc.

1. 2 Structure of the Paper

This Graduation Paper has the following *structure*:

Chapter 1 introduces the background and organization of the study.

Chapter 2 presents some theoretic background information about collocations in English and Vietnamese. The definition, the classifications and the importance of collocational knowledge in language use are identified in this section.

Chapter 3 demonstrates the methods and procedures of the study. A questionnaire survey is carried out to test the collocational knowledge of English-majoring students at the Hanoi University of Foreign Studies. Simultaneously, an attempt is made to pinpoint possible difficulties regarding the use of collocations facing English students at the HUFS. This section makes known of the subjects, the instrumentation, procedures and limitations of the survey.

Chapter 4 reports the findings and discussion of the survey. At the same time, common collocation mistakes HUFS students encounter in writing are also identified.

Chapter 5 offers some recommendations by suggesting some ways to minimize collocational errors. Eventually, the conclusion gives final ideas that have been reached after the fulfilment.

References result in a list of books and other materials consulted during the study.

Appendices contain a glossary of linguistic terms used in the paper, the questionnaire form and some useful websites.

CHAPTER 2 – THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF COLLOCATION

A lot of emphasis in linguistic study is being put on grammar and phonology, while vocabulary has not been given due consideration. Often, vocabulary was treated separately from grammar and pronunciation, but its role in language acquisition has received growing recognition. Since Lewis proposed the Lexical Approach to language learning in 1993, an increasing number of linguists turn to see lexical items or vocabulary as the essence of language knowledge and they prefer to view language as “grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalized grammar” (as cited in Islam, & Timmis). On this account, it is vital that students should spend plenty of time developing their stock of phrases including collocations.

2. 1 Collocation in English

2. 1. 1 Definition

The term *collocation* originates from two Latin words, the word *cum* meaning ‘with’ and the word *locus* indicating ‘place’. Put it another way, “words which form collocations are repeatedly ‘*placed with*’ each other; that is to say, they often co-occur within a short distance of each other in speech and in written texts” (Singleton, 2000, p.47). Accordingly, two words are *collocates* if they occur together with greater than chance frequency, such that, when we

come across a particular word, we may predict that the other is very likely to turn up next, either before or after the first word. The potential of items to collocate is known as their *collocability* or *collocational range*.

Collocation, according to Thornbury (2002, p.7), is less fixed in terms of structure than compounds or other kinds of multi-word units. He also indicates that two collocates may not even be found next to each other, i.e. one or two more other words can come between them, and they can also collocate in quite dissimilar respects. He cites the examples: “He *set* the junior *record* in 1990”, “Just to *set* the *record* straight...”.

Chalker and Weiner (1994, p.70), on the other hand, define a collocation as “the habitual juxtaposition of a particular word with other particular words” and regard collocation as a type of syntagmatic relationship between words. They identify *two forms*: *grammatical* and *lexical collocations*. To be more specific, grammatical collocation is a type of structure where a particular preposition must come after a certain verb, a certain adjective, or a particular form of the verb must follow a noun. Examples are *account for*, *afraid of*, *the foresight to do it* (not ‘of doing it’). Lexical collocation, on the contrary, is a type of structure where particular nouns, adjectives, verbs or adverbs form anticipated junctions with each other. For instance, *cancel an engagement* or *break off an engagement*, not normally ‘withdraw’, ‘revoke’ or ‘discontinue an engagement’. Meanwhile, special cases of collocation like *come a cropper*, *kith and kin*, in which one of the individual parts is foreseeable from another, converge into the criteria of idiom or fixed phrase.

In the previous chapter, the term *multi-word unit* has also been mentioned to describe collocations. *Multi-word unit* can be interchangeably used with another term - *lexical chunk* to denote vocabulary items that are made up of two or more words and behave as if they were a single meaningful unit. An overview of the most important types of chunks is given below, which has been introduced by Thornbury in his book “How to teach vocabulary” (2002, p. 115). As can be seen from the list, collocation ranks first, showing its eminent role in language teaching and learning.

Table 1 – Types of lexical chunks

- | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collocations – such as <i>widely traveled, rich and famous, make do with,, set the table</i>• Phrasal verbs – such as <i>get up, log on, run out of, go on about</i>• Idioms, catchphrases and sayings – such as <i>hell for leather, get cold feet, as old as the hills, mind your own business, takes one to know one</i>• Sentence frames – such as <i>would you mind if...?, the thing is..., I'd... if I were you, what really gets me is...</i>• Discourse markers – such as <i>frankly speaking, on the other hand, I take your point, once upon a time, to cut a long story short...</i> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

In this paper, however, the author refers to collocations as *sets of lexical content words commonly found together*. Following this definition, we can make a distinction between lexical chunks that are and are not collocations:

Lexical chunks that are <i>not</i> collocations:	Lexical chunks that <i>are</i> collocations:
by the way	widely accepted
up to now	daunting challenge
upside down	financial fraud
if I were you	sense of humor
a long way off	notices immediately
out of my mind	brings good luck
give up	heavy smoker
get over	inherit a large fortune

Indeed, the former type consists of a lexical content word and a *grammar function word* (or grammatical collocations), while the latter category is a combination of two or more *lexical content words* (lexical collocations).

Similarly, although collocations and idioms may look alike, they differ greatly from each other, since “an idiom is a string of words which taken together has a different meaning than the individual component words” (Schmidt, 2000, p. 1). By way of illustration, the expressions *bite the dust*, *kick the bucket*, *give up the ghost* all mean ‘to die’ but have nothing to do with dust biting, bucket kicking or ghosts. The meaning of collocations, on the other hand, can be easily deducted from its constituent parts. Also, according to a recent study, idioms, which usually represent very long chunks, are considered as less useful vocabulary items than collocations (Koprowski, 2005). In this

connection, more emphasis should be placed on guiding students towards acquiring as much useful lexical phrases like collocations as possible.

2. 1. 2 Classification

The amount of research done on English collocations is not small. However, since researchers have dissimilar interests and points of view, different aspects of collocations have been investigated resulting in different characterizations. The way in which collocation is classified is a typical example. Collocations differ substantially from each other in terms of the number of words involved in the combination, the proximity of collocates (*set a junior record*), and collocability (*reach with an agreement, a compromise, a conclusion...*). Consequently, collocations can be categorized in many ways. For instance, a collocation can be a combination of two or more words and containing elements such as verb, noun, adjective and adverb. Below are the *five most important types of lexical collocations* introduced by Hill and Lewis (1997, p. 6).

Table 2 – Types of Lexical Collocations

No	Types	Examples
1	<i>Adjective + Noun</i>	a huge profit; heavy rain; mild cigarettes; sour milk; a serious illness
2	<i>Verb + Noun</i>	learn a language; take a break; ride a bike; have a bath; shoot a scene
3	<i>Noun + Verb</i>	the gap widened, a fight broke out, consumption increased
4	<i>Verb + Adverb</i>	live dangerously; drive carelessly; know unconsciously; stop abruptly
5	<i>Adverb + Adjective</i>	completely soaked; extremely important; totally mad; easily confused

Besides, Lewis (1997) also mentioned the collocability, i.e. collocational range of words, and used it as a criterion to categorize collocations.

1) *Strong collocations*: A large number of collocations are strong or very strong. For example, we most commonly talk of *rancid butter*, but that does not mean that other things cannot be *rancid*. Among these, some rare collocations are very strong and often express quite unusual ideas, but when we do write about one of these ideas, the particular collocation is almost the only natural way of doing it: 'He's been found guilty of *serious professional misconduct*.'

2) *Weak collocations* are words which co-occur with a greater than random frequency and very common in spoken English.

Many things can be *long* or *short*, *cheap* or *expensive*, *good* or *bad*, a *big* house, *very* different, *give* a *quick* report, *rather* strong. However, some things are more predictable, which could be called collocations such as *white wine* or *red wine*.

3) *Medium strength collocations* are words that go together with a greater frequency than weak collocations. Such collocations are particularly preferred when we write or prepare something to say, and therefore, we use language more precisely and choose our words and combinations more carefully.

Examples are: *chair a meeting*, *carry out a study*, and *conduct a test*.

What have been mentioned above are the different definitions and ways of classifying collocations in English. To provide readers with a comprehensive view of the subject, an introduction of Vietnamese collocations is presented in the section hereafter.

2. 2 Collocation in Vietnamese

2. 2. 1 Definition

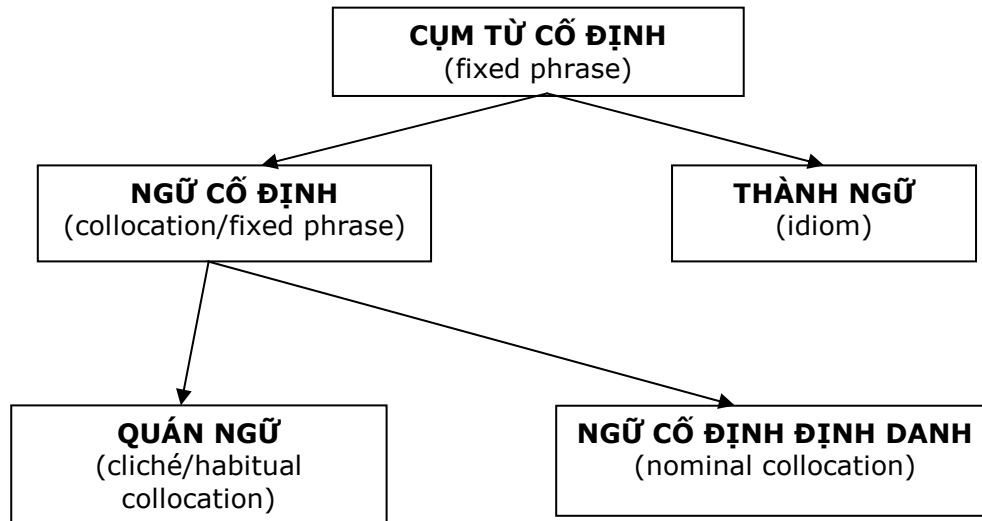
Does the Vietnamese language have collocations as well? The answer is surely yes. As a matter of fact, collocations exist in every language, but they may be defined and classified in slightly different ways. ‘Kết ngôn’ and ‘ngữ cố định’ are used in the “*English-Vietnamese, Vietnamese-English Contrastive Dictionary of Linguistic Terms*” (Từ điển Thuật ngữ Ngôn ngữ học Đối chiếu Anh Việt – Việt Anh) to denote collocations in Vietnamese (Cao, Hoàng, 2005). But does *kết ngôn* or *ngữ cố định* means the same thing as *collocation*? Looking at some of the ways *ngữ cố định* is categorized in Vietnamese will provide readers with a better understanding of the issue.

2. 2. 2 Classifications

Not much of linguistic research has been done and books written purely on “kết ngôn” in the Vietnamese language. As a result, it was quite difficult for the author of this paper to look deeply into this subject matter and compare it with English collocations. Yet, in the book “Vietnamese and the basic of linguistics” (Cơ sở Ngôn ngữ học và Tiếng Việt), a whole chapter has been dedicated to *ngữ cố định*, i.e. fixed phrases (see Table 1).

Accordingly, *thành ngữ* or idioms are defined as fixed phrases that are complete in structure and meaning such as *ba cọc ba đồng*, *chó cắn áo rách*, *đứng đĩnh như chĩnh trôi sông*... Next, *quán ngữ* or clichés refer to phrases that are repeatedly used in different types of discourse, the main function of which is to emphasize or connect ideas in discourse. Examples are *của đáng tội*, *nói bỏ ngoài tai*, *nói tóm lại*, *kết cục là*, *nói cách khác*... No definition is given to the general term *ngữ cố định*, only to *ngữ cố định định danh* or ‘*nominal collocation*’, which is a much more stable lexical unit in terms of structure and meaning than clichés, but not as onomatopoetic as an idiom. For instance, *anh hùng rơm*, *kỷ luật sắt*, *tuần trăng mật*, *tóc rẽ tre*, *má bánh đúc*... In brief, nominal collocations are fixed phrases whose function is to name objects and phenomena.

Table 3 - Categorization of Fixed Phrases



(The definitions in brackets have been literally translated by the author of this paper.)

Compare these notions with the list of English lexical chunks given by Thornbury, we can see that *quán ngữ* in Vietnamese is somewhat similar to *discourse markers* in English, and thus, does not fit into the criteria of collocations.

In another book, “Vietnamese lexicology” (Từ vựng học Tiếng Việt, 1998), Nguyen Thien Giap defines nominal collocation as phrases denominating objects, phenomena or concepts in reality. They include compound nouns such as *xe đạp, cá vàng, cà chua, áo dài...* and the so-called fixed phrases like *đường đồng mức, phương nằm ngang, máy hơi nước...*

To summarize, although the notion ‘collocation’ can be found in both English and Vietnamese, there is noticeable distinction between *collocation* and *ngữ cố định*. The notion of ‘ngữ cố định’ in Vietnamese seems to be tantamount to ‘fixed phrase’ in English, which is ‘a phrase of which few if any variants are acceptable’ (Chalker & Weiner, 1994, p. 153). For example, *knife and fork, heir apparent, from bad to worse, for the time being*, etc. Yet, despite the clear disparity in the concept of collocation in different cultures, its role in language study is undeniably significant.

2. 3 Significance of Collocational Knowledge in Language Use

It is widely accepted that vocabulary plays a significant role in language knowledge and students should have a vast stock of words. Usually, when learners first come up with new words, they often look up in the dictionary to inquire about the meaning, the pronunciation and the grammatical function of

words. But is that enough to know a word? What does it mean by knowing a word? Most linguists agree that knowing a word implies knowing both its *form* and *meaning*. By ‘form’ it is suggested that the grammatical function needs to be taken into account. In other words, students need to know whether a word is a verb or a noun or both. By meaning it is implied that, among its meaning(s) and connotations, we also need to be aware of the way words combine with others, i.e. its collocations. Indeed, words are rarely used alone, and we shall “know a word by the company it keeps” (Firth, 1957).

This paper stresses the necessity of collocational knowledge in language competence because of its three main benefits:

1. Collocational knowledge enables us to make the **appropriate word choice**.

For instance, what would you say?

in *great* detail or in *big* detail

rush hour or *high* hour

light wind or *weak/soft* wind

mild cigarettes or *light* cigarettes

a *faint* smell or a *weak/soft* smell

Knowing the common collocations usually associated with certain words will help us make the right word choice. As a result, our English sounds more *natural*, more *native-like*, and help us scores higher marks in exams.

2. Collocations **enrich our vocabulary**.

Look at the examples below:

This is a good book and contains a lot of interesting details.

Or

This is a fascinating book and contains a wealth of historical details.

(Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English, 2002)

As we can see, both sentences are grammatically and semantically correct. But with the right combinations of words we can reveal much more. The use of collocations is particularly helpful in writing, for they can help us express our ideas in a much more persuasive way.

3. The acquisition and production of common word combinations are vital if **effective communication** is to succeed. To illustrate, if a non-native speaker uses collocations in his/her speech or writing, native speakers will have less difficulty in guessing what the non-native speakers want to say in spite of other errors like pronunciation or grammar. This is because native speakers unconsciously predict what is going to be said based on the use of common set expressions (Deveci, 2004).

Collocation deserves to be a central part of vocabulary learning, particularly to advanced level students. Lewis is often quoted having said, "Fluency is based on the acquisition of a large store of fixed or semi-fixed prefabricated items, which are available as the foundation for any linguistic novelty or creativity" (as cited in Williams). Yet, the study of collocations has not received

adequate attention. Hence, in the next chapter, a preliminary survey has been carried out to test the knowledge of collocational patterns of English majoring students at Hanoi University of Foreign Studies. In addition, common collocation errors they encounter in writing have also been analyzed and taken as examples for illustration.

CHAPTER 3 – METHODS AND PROCEDURES

In an attempt to provide readers with the most useful and appropriate recommendations, a survey is carried out to identify possible mistakes made by HUFS students of English when they speak and write English. In addition, essays from several first and second year students are collected, their collocation errors then detected and examined. Based on the results of the survey and the analysis of collocation errors they encounter in writing, the author of this paper will offer some suggestions on how to develop one's collocational knowledge.

3. 1 Subjects of the Survey

92 university students, mostly female, took part in this survey. All of them are native speakers of Vietnamese and are majoring in English at the Hanoi University of Foreign Studies. They include full-time, in-service and gifted students from the first up to the fourth year; therefore, their level of proficiency ranges from pre-intermediate to advanced.

3. 2 Instrumentation

The instrument used in this paper was a *questionnaire* to conduct a *quantitative survey*. The questionnaire, which consists of 6 multiple choice questions, is intended to investigate how students have been learning

vocabulary in general, and to test their knowledge of some common collocations in particular. The questionnaire form is attached in the appendix of this paper.

3. 3 Procedures

After the author has selected relevant questions and drafted the questionnaire, 92 questionnaire sheets were distributed among HUFS students of English of different levels. Then, participants were asked to spend 15 minutes to fill in the forms. Finally, all the sheets were recollected, the data thoroughly analyzed and the results reported in the next chapter.

3. 4 Limitation of the Study

Due to restriction in terms of time and scope, the survey stresses the difficulties facing those students concerning the use of common verb-noun collocations with *make*, *do*, *have*, and *take*.

In connection with the investigation on possible collocation mistakes, 20 essays are gathered from 20 first and second year students at the English Department of the HUFS only, because it is in these two years that HUFS students of English do their writing practice with high frequency and intensity. Hence, it is easier for the author of this paper to collect their writings.

CHAPTER 4 - FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the first half of this chapter, the findings of the questionnaire survey are highlighted and their implications discussed. In the second half of the chapter, an attempt is made to identify possible collocation difficulties that HUFS students of English may confront in their language study.

4.1 Analysis and Discussion of the Survey Results

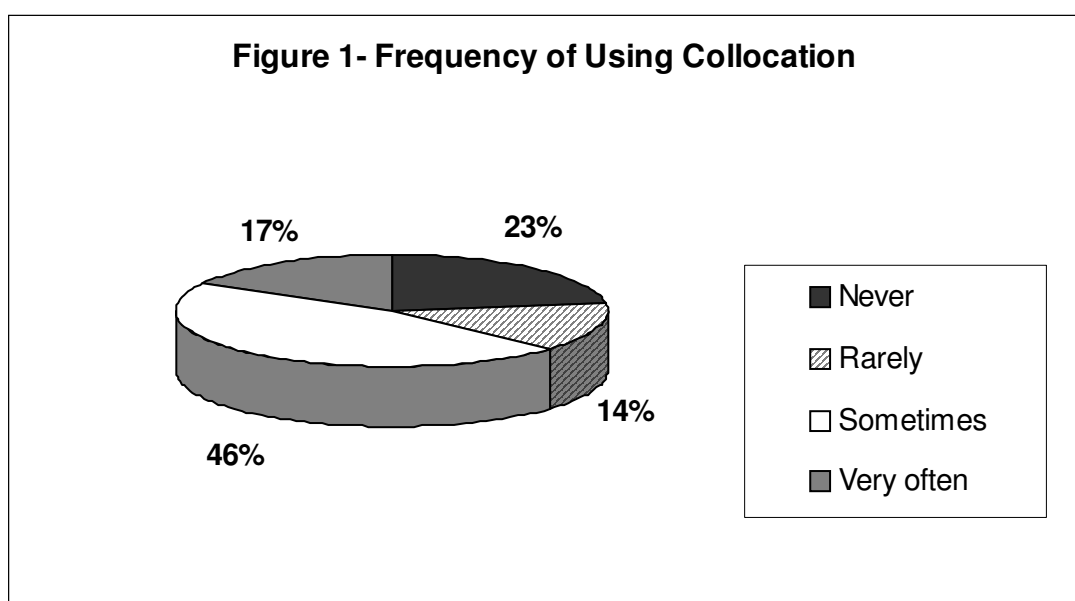
Below, the data collected from the survey will be discussed in succession.

Please refer to the questionnaire enclosed in the appendix (p. 39).

- 1) The first question in the questionnaire is '*Do you know what a collocation is?*' Out of 92 students being asked, slightly more than a half of them, or 53% answered yes; whereas 22% was not sure what the term 'collocation' means and 25% did not have any idea about collocation. Although the majority of the students being asked indicates that the term 'collocation' is not unfamiliar to them, it does not mean that all of them know what a collocation actually is.
- 2) In response to the second question '*Have you learned about collocation at school/university?*' approximately 56% of the students said yes, while the other 44% said no. This number, to a certain extent, indicates

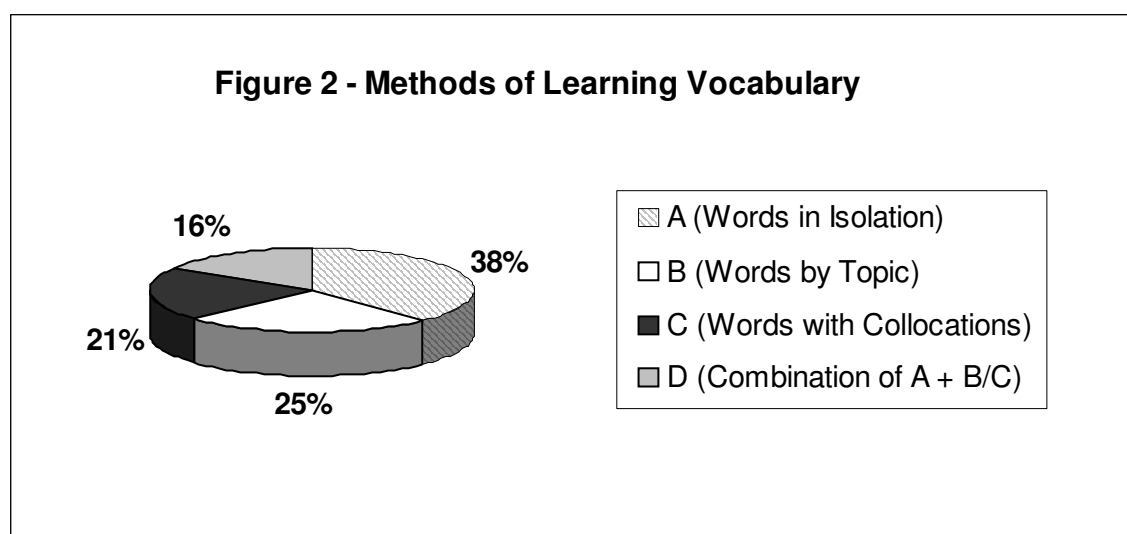
that collocations have not been taught extensively, not to mention intensively, both at school and university.

- 3) Regarding the *frequency of using collocation in speech and writing*, 23% of the students circled 'Never', 14% circled 'Rarely', 46% circled 'Sometimes', and just 17% out of 92 students confessed that they use collocations with a relatively high frequency ('Very often').



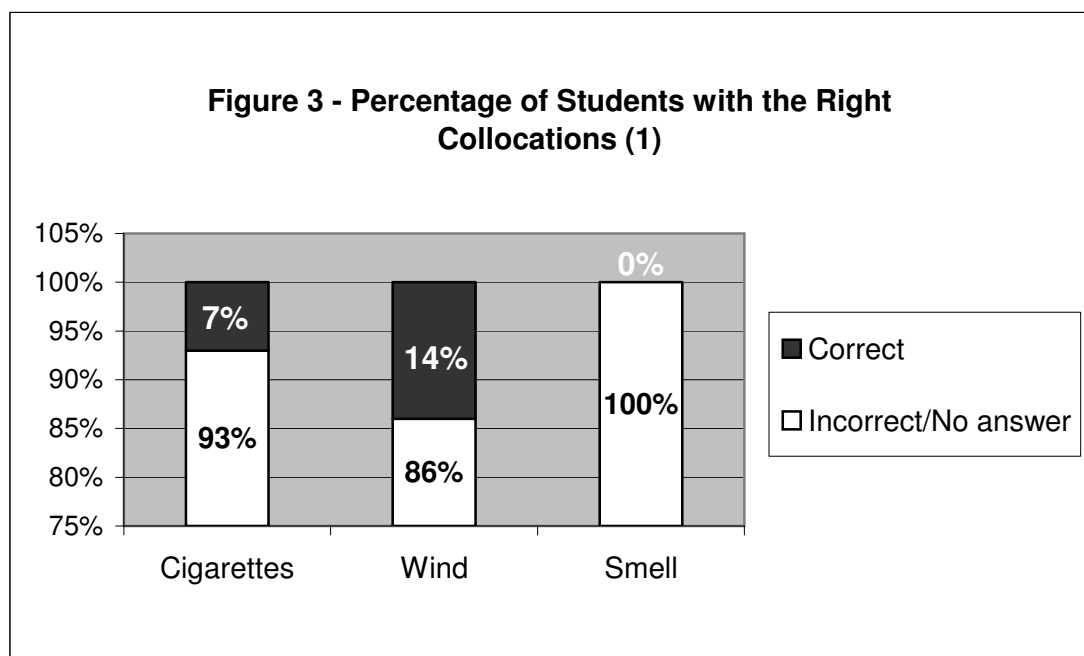
Comparing Figure 1 with the statistics mentioned above, it can be inferred that although most of them may have heard and learnt about collocation at schools and/or university, the number of students who frequently put collocations into use is fairly small. Thus, it can be concluded that the majority of students are not yet fully aware of the role collocations play in language use.

- 4) In relation to the *methods of learning new vocabulary*, the number of students who ‘memorize lists of words with their meaning and translation’ (method A) is 38%, while this figure is 25% for those ‘learning words by topics’ (method B). On the contrary, only 21% of them ‘pick up new words in connection with their common collocations’ (method C), and just 16% ‘combines two or three of the methods mentioned above’ (method D) as a way of vocabulary acquisition.



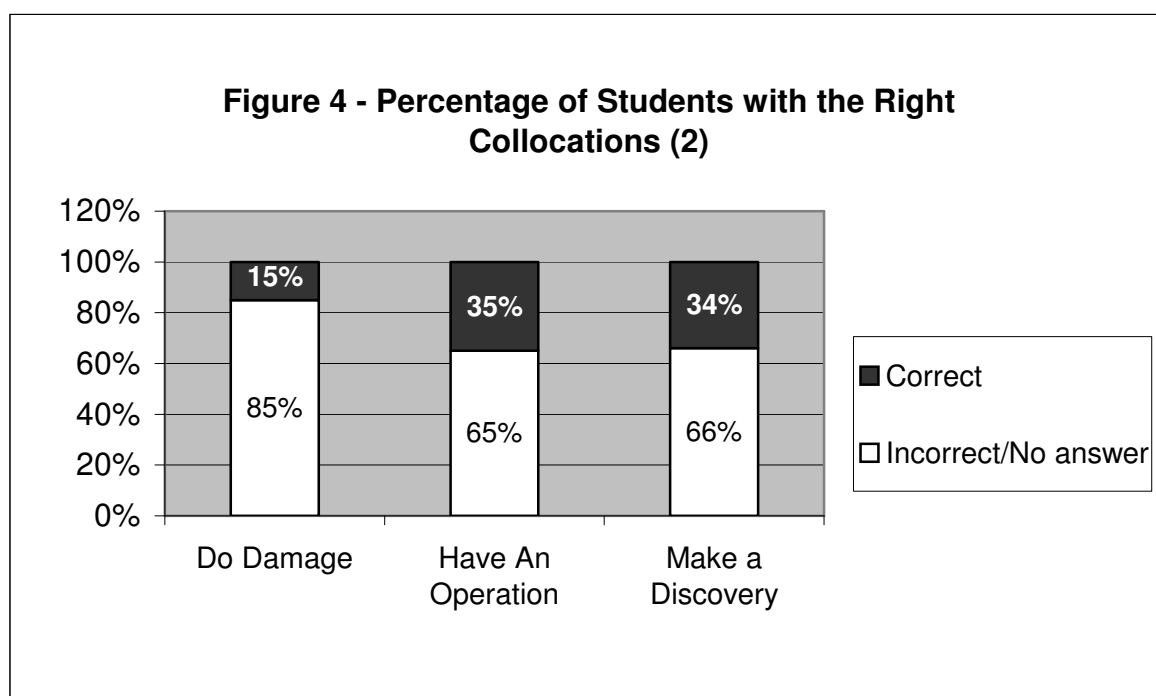
Again, I want to emphasize that words rarely stands alone. Therefore, when students learn words through definitions or in isolation (as in method A), there is much less likelihood that they can use collocations or remember words in an appropriate and productive way. As a result, they may fail to comprehend spoken and written texts since they do not see collocations as meaningful multi-word items (Deveci, 2004).

- 5) The number of students having the right answers to the question *What are the opposite of strong cigarettes; a strong wind; a strong smell?* is surprisingly small (see Figure 3).



Only 7% has the correct answer ‘mild cigarettes’ which is the opposite of ‘strong cigarettes’. Just 14% of them choose ‘a light wind’ indicating the opposite of ‘a strong wind’, while none of them manages to make the correct match of ‘a strong smell’, which is ‘a faint smell’. The variants most of them came up with for the three word combinations were: ‘light’ instead of “mild” for cigarettes, both ‘weak’ and ‘soft’ for wind and smell. Some of them even came up with words such as ‘breeze’ implying ‘a light wind’.

- 6) Figure 4 shows the percentage of students having the right and wrong answers concerning some verb-noun collocations with the verbs *make*, *do*, *have*, *take*, and the nouns *damage*, *an operation*, *a discovery*.



As can be seen from the diagram, the number of students making the wrong word choice is considerable large. For example, a modest 35% in contrast with the prevailing 65% of the students have the correct answer relating to the collocation “to have an operation”. Likewise, only 34% of the students chose “make a discovery”, while 66% of them didn’t. Among them, a remarkable 35% confused *make* with *have*, and chose ‘have a discovery’ instead of ‘make a discovery’. Most surprisingly, only 15% had the right answer concerning the word combination “do damage”. In contrast, an incredible 85% made the

wrong choice, of which 40% of the students chose “make” instead of “do” to go with “damage”. These very few examples have already revealed that many students still face a confusion regarding the use of some of the most common verbs such as *make*, *do*, *have* and *take*.

To a certain degree, the above-mentioned findings themselves indicate that the study of collocational patterns has been largely neglected by most of the students being surveyed. Their lack of collocational knowledge does not depend on their level of proficiency, because a number of students at advanced level made equally many mistakes as pre-intermediate ones.

4. 2 Typical Collocation Mistakes made by HUFS Students

Along with the survey, 20 essays from 20 first and second year students at the HUFS were gathered and their collocation errors detected and examined in order to further point out typical difficulties facing learners regarding the use of collocations in language use.

Results of the survey and analysis of writings have showed that a large number of students at the Hanoi University of Foreign Studies still have difficulty dealing with collocations. Given below are typical collocation-related mistakes made by HUFS students of English, which have been selected and examined by the author of this paper in the most objective manner possible. However, limitations are unavoidable since the scope and duration of the study as well as the author’s language competence are restricted.

- ❑ Learners may transfer a certain notion or term word-by-word directly from their mother tongue, yet it might be incorrect and sound unnatural to native speakers' ears. For example, Vietnamese students might say 'mưa to' which is 'big rain' instead of 'heavy rain'; 'he is very high' for 'he is very tall' meaning 'anh ấy rất cao'.

Examples:

Mistakes	Suggested correction
<i>Loving experience</i> is one of the three main reasons explaining why most people prefer to wait until they are older to marry...	<i>experience in love issues; an experienced love life</i>
In terms of culture, the <i>relations</i> of villages <i>are broaden</i> .	The villagers' <i>social circles are widened</i> .
They could <i>create</i> comfortable life <u>to</u> their partners.	<i>lead, enjoy</i> a comfortable life <u>with</u> their partners
That is one of the major reasons that lead to <i>the broken of family</i> .	the <i>breakdown</i> of the family; their <i>happiness was shattered/ fell to pieces</i>
To <i>widen</i> your <i>understanding</i> about the <i>outdoor life</i>	To <i>enrich</i> your understanding (or knowledge) of the <i>outside world</i>
Government should allow the farmers to <i>borrow loans</i> .	To <i>lend loans</i>

<i>Dull</i> water	<i>Polluted, contaminated, dirty</i> water
You'll <i>receive</i> your <i>salary</i> .	You'll <i>earn/make</i> some <i>money</i> . Or You'll <i>get paid</i> .

- Due to restraints in vocabulary use and word choice, students tend to beat about the bush and express their ideas in a longer and wordier way, which increases their chance of making further mistakes. As a result, "Students with good ideas often lose marks because they don't know the four or five most important collocations of a key word that is central to what they are writing about." (as cited in Williams).

Examples:

Mistakes	Suggested correction
Products for washing the toilet	toilet/bathroom cleaner or cleansing products
The <i>home for single elderly people</i>	Retirement/nursing home
To <i>have a considerable concern</i>	There has been a public concern
The <i>hurt for people</i>	People's <i>sorrows/sadness</i>
<p><i>His ability continues until he dies.</i> => He has a permanent ability. (Thornbury, 2002)</p>	

<p>They <i>have sex the wrong way</i>.</p> <p>=> Sex abuse (Taiwo, 2004)</p>
<p>People have <i>the ability to say what they need</i>.</p> <p>=> Freedom of speech (Taiwo, 2004)</p>
<p>The situation whereby <i>people vote for their rulers to rule them</i>.</p> <p>=> Democratic rule (Taiwo, 2004)</p>

- Learners may look for general rules for collocations that do not work for all collocations. As a result, they might overgeneralize rules of collocation, for example, the use of prepositions in phrasal verbs. They could think that *put off your coat* is the opposite of *put on your coat*.

Examples:

Mistakes	Suggested correction
to <i>get over</i> stress; <i>take away</i> stress	to <i>reduce, relieve, handle, manage</i> stress
To <i>grow</i> the <i>economy</i>	to <i>develop</i> the economy
<i>take</i> some headache	to <i>have, get, develop, suffer from</i> a headache
To <i>lessen</i> the <i>loss</i>	To <i>reduce</i> the loss
I will now <i>abolish</i> my <i>speech</i> . (Taiwo, 2004)	I will now <i>end</i> my speech.
If possible <i>post</i> me a <i>mail</i> . (Taiwo, 2004)	<i>Send</i> a mail

The <i>bus</i> cross the road and <i>fell down</i> . (Taiwo, 2004)	The <i>bus</i> was <i>upturned</i> . or The bus <i>toppled/tripped over</i> .
To <i>remain</i> his <i>life</i> (he's a patient)	To <i>keep</i> him <i>alive</i> . or To <i>prolong</i> his life

- If students memorize words and phrases through definitions or in isolation (i.e. rote learning), there is less likelihood that they use correct collocations or memorize words properly. Consequently, when they do exercises on reading comprehension, they may not see collocations as meaningful phrases, resulting in the limitation of understanding written texts.

Examples are:

Mistakes	Suggested correction
<i>narrow</i> advertisement	lack of <i>extensive, outstretched, outspread</i> advertisement
a <i>low</i> economy	a/an <i>ailing, flagging, stagnant, weak</i> economy
The TV advertisements have <i>wonderful pictures</i> .	<i>Beautiful images</i>
The advertisement <i>brings a lot of conveniences</i> for the customers.	The advertisement <i>brings about</i> a lot of <i>benefits for</i> or <i>is of great convenience to</i> the customers

play <i>pleasantly</i>	play <i>happily</i> , play <i>with fun/joy</i>
Vietnam has <i>developed at a relative high density</i> .	Vietnam's <i>economy</i> /The <i>country</i> has <i>developed at a relatively fast pace</i> .
Throw garbage <i>on the way</i>	On the <i>streets</i>
They were <i>pressed down</i> in the collapsed houses.	They were <i>buried/crushed</i> under the collapsed houses.

The suggestions are given after being consulted from the Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English (2002), the Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners (2002), and the Collins Paperback Thesaurus (2001). The examples taken are examined and corrected with the aim of illustrating how the use of collocations can affect our way of expressing ideas and how we can make our writings as well as our speeches stand out.

Even though the errors are taken from students' compositions only, their chance of being found in speaking and writing is not little. This is because the four fundamental skills of every language, namely reading – writing – listening and speaking, are closely connected, and through which our thinking will be reflected. Thus, the above-mentioned mistakes may occur both in spoken as well as written form of language use.

CHAPTER 5 – SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

5. 1 Suggestions

As can be seen in the preceding chapter, the findings of the survey support the claim that Vietnamese-speaking students at the HUFV in particular, non-native English learners in general, commit errors when producing collocations in English. As it is the case with errors in grammar and spelling, there is no magic formula for correction of collocation mistakes. Therefore, raising learners' awareness of collocation is vital to proper and productive language acquisition. The following are some suggestions on how students can reduce collocational errors:

- Vocabulary acquisition should go beyond course books since students usually have limited exposure to the English language outside class. Instead, learners should be encouraged to engage in extensive reading of literature written in English. In this respect, they will have opportunities to access a massive amount of vocabulary, whereby they can discover and acquire useful lexical items.
- Different types of dictionaries are of great help in teaching and learning English. Language teachers often recommend students to use dictionaries such as the Collins COBUILD English Dictionary, the Oxford Advanced

Learners Dictionary, the Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners, the Oxford Collocations for Students of English, the Longman Language Activator, and the Dictionary of Selected Collocations.

- Attention should be focused on some common collocations, which will bring about correct and native-like language production and effective communication. In addition, differences in the collocational patterns of the mother tongue and the target language should be highlighted. Indeed, recent studies of collocational errors have revealed that collocations in the mother tongue are often translated directly into English. Otherwise, non-native speakers will resort to the most general items because they are unfamiliar with the specific collocates relating to a certain topic.

- When students learn new vocabulary items, single words should be presented and practiced along with its collocations. In other words, learners should make an effort to recognize the words or types of words that commonly occur with the given word. Only by doing this can they reproduce set expressions correctly and fluently. By way of illustration, when learning the verb *to lose*, we need to also remember the nouns it collocates with: *to lose your way*, *to lose your temper*, *to lose your purse*, *to lose your mind*, and so on.

4. 2 Conclusion

Writing this paper for me has been the most comprehensive and difficult task in the last four years. I had to make use of all the knowledge that I have

accumulated during my study at the HUFs and beyond. all of which have been difficult and have required enormous efforts. Though the results may not yet be fully satisfactory, the author is quite content for she has been able to learn a great deal from having to read and take notes, analyze and compare, write and re-write. In brief, the author wishes to point out the following ideas in the form of conclusions:

- Collocation is of its own right an area that has to be taught and learned extensively and intensively if students want to really achieve native-like proficiency in English. Furthermore, sound knowledge of typical collocations of a language is crucial if effective communication is to happen.
- The notion of collocation in English differs greatly from that in the Vietnamese language. Thus, a comparison between the two is a difficult task requiring further research.
- A large number of Vietnamese students of English at the Hanoi University of Foreign Studies, many of whom do not make a wide and productive use of collocation in their foreign language communication, need to be made aware of the importance of collocations in language study, especially in English lessons. Or as Thornbury has put it, “**No noticing, no acquisition**”.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Glossary of Linguistic Terms

(with adaptation from Koprowski, 2005)

- ❖ **Binomial.** A fixed pair of words linked by a conjunction such as ‘and’: ‘go and get’, ‘fish and chips’, ‘black and white’, ‘bed and breakfast’ (Gillard et al., 2003).

- ❖ **Collocation.** A word or phrase which is frequently used with another word or phrase, in a way that sounds correct to people who have spoken the language all their lives, but might not be expected from the meaning: in the phrase ‘a hard frost’, ‘hard’ is a collocation of ‘frost’ and ‘strong’ would not sound natural: ‘make money’, ‘splitting headache’, ‘have a shower’, ‘get into trouble’ (Gillard et al., 2003).

- ❖ **Collocate.** Two words are *collocates* if they occur together with greater than chance frequency, such that, when we come across a particular word, we may predict that the other is very likely to turn up next, either before or after the first word. The potential of items to collocate is known as their *collocability* or *collocational range* (Thornbury, 2002, p.7).

- ❖ **Compound.** In grammar, a word which combines two or sometimes more different words. Often, the meaning of the compound cannot be discovered by knowing the meaning of the different words that form it.

Compounds can be written either as one word or as separate words: ‘bodyguard’, ‘floppy disk’, ‘shopping mall’, ‘phone box’ (Gillard et al., 2003).

- ❖ **Fixed expression/phrase.** A word or group of words used in a particular situation or by particular people: ‘I suppose’, ‘there’s no point’, ‘I just felt like it’, ‘you’re welcome’ (Gillard et al., 2003).
- ❖ **Lexical chunk/phrase.** “Native speakers tend to use a great deal of language that is formulaic in nature. These formulaic expressions are so common that they become memorized. Then they act as prefabricated language units that can be used as wholes, rather than being composed through vocabulary + syntax.” (Schmitt, 2000). Such formulaic expressions are called lexical chunks or phrases.
- ❖ **Multi-word unit or lexeme.** Words that take on aspects of a single entity are called multi-word units. In other words, a multi-word unit is a string of words that acts as a single lexeme with a single meaning. For instance, ‘by and large’, ‘I thought you would never ask’, ‘bottoms up’, ‘light-years ago’, etc. There are different types of multi-word units, such as compound words, phrasal verbs, fixed phrases, idioms, proverbs, and lexical phrases (Schmitt, 2000).
- ❖ **Idiom.** A group of words in a fixed order that have a particular meaning that is different from the meaning of each word understood on its own:

‘lend someone a hand’, ‘go through the roof’, ‘no matter how you slice it’ (Gillard et al., 2003).

- ❖ **Phrasal verb.** A phrase, which consists of a verb in combination with a preposition or adverb or both, the meaning of which is different from the meaning of its separate parts: ‘look after’, ‘work out’, ‘make up for’, ‘take off ’ (Gillard et al., 2003).
- ❖ **Semi-fixed expression.** An item with one or more variable slots which can be filled by an item chosen from a relatively small group of items which share particular language characteristics: ‘It’s _____ than I thought’, ‘Could you pass the _____ please?’, ‘Would you mind _____?’ (Lewis, 1997, p. 219).

Appendix 2 - Websites related to English Language Study

- <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/>
- <http://iteslj.org/f>
- <http://exchanges.state.gov/>
- <http://www.tesol.org/>
- <http://www.manythings.org/>
- <http://www.englishclub.com/>
- <http://www.englishforum.com/00/>
- <http://www.hltmag.co.uk/>
- <http://www.etprofessional.com/>
- <http://www.onestopenglish.com/index.htm>

Appendix 3 - Questionnaire Survey

I am a final-year student of English at the Hanoi University of Foreign Studies. This survey is forming part of my thesis on the Importance of Collocational Knowledge in Language Use. The questions in this survey are supposed to find out your experiences in vocabulary acquisition and to test your knowledge of some common collocations. I would appreciate it if you could take a few minutes to complete this questionnaire. For each response, please circle or specify the choice that best corresponds to your view.

▪ Specify your education status:

- a. Full time b. In service c. College d. Gifted class
e. Second degree f. Other: _____
-

1. Do you know what a collocation is?

Yes No Not sure

2. Have you learned about collocations in schools/ at university?

Yes No

3. How often do you use collocations in speaking and writing English?

Very often Sometimes Rarely Never

4. How do you learn new vocabulary?

A - By memorizing lists of words with their meaning and translation

B - By memorizing words by topics (e.g. body parts, kitchen tools, sports...)

C - By memorizing groups of words that often go together

D - Other: _____

5. The opposite of strong tea is weak tea. What is the opposite of the following phrases?

strong cigarettes ><

a strong wind ><

a strong smell ><

6. Tick the correct nouns that go with the verbs below:

	Make	Do	Have	Take
Preparations				
Damage				
A bath				
Research				
Lessons				
An exam				
An operation				
A decision				
A discovery				
A phone call				

Thank you for your cooperation!