

COLLOCATION FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION: THE IGBO EXAMPLE

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Abstract

Collocation is the tendency for words to occur together repeatedly. Certain lexical items exhibit the tendency to co-occur. Lack of the knowledge of collocation patterns of lexical items makes speakers of a language to be prone to all sorts of collocational errors which can be more disruptive in communication than grammatical errors. This paper examines the concept of collocation using Igbo examples. The work identified, classified and analysed major types of collocations in Igbo language. The work observes that correct use of strong collocations shows an excellent command of the language and can help impress native speakers of one's ability to speak the language well. The knowledge of collocation in a given language will make one's use of language more natural and easily understood. Also learning about words that commonly go together gives the speaker alternative and richer ways of expressing himself. Moreover the knowledge of collocation is of immense importance in semantics as one cannot achieve mastery of a language without the knowledge of words that go together. In addition, as languages are continuously developing, it is important that various aspects of Igbo language should be studied for the advancement of knowledge.

Introduction

The basis of interaction in any given society is the language of the people. It is a means of communication which endows each person with the facility for greater self expression and improved relations with others in the same language community.

According to Harris (1980:1-3) “The more people understand the language they use, the less problem they have”. Part of knowing a language is knowing not only what words mean but, what their typical collocations are. Collocation is the habitual juxtaposition of a particular word with another word or words with a frequency of greater than chance. It is a familiar grouping of words especially words that habitually appear together and thereby convey meaning by association. Certain lexical items exhibit the natural tendency to co-occur. Lexical items which have the tendency to co-occur are called collocates of each other.

Crystal, (1997:105) says “Collocation is used to refer to the habitual co-occurrence of individual lexical items”. It is a kind of syntagmatic lexical relation on a horizontal axis.

One way speakers of a language organize their knowledge of words is simply in terms of collocation or frequently occurring together. Knowledge of appropriate collocation is part of the native speakers’ competence. A native language speaker intuitively makes the correct collocation based on a lifetime experience of hearing and reading the word in set combinations. The non-native speaker has a more limited experience and may frequently collocate words in a way that sounds odd to the native speaker. For example, in English language, we talk of ‘hot and cold running water’ rather than ‘cold and hot running water’; ‘husband and wife’ rather than ‘wife and husband’. In Igbo language, we talk of ‘di na nwunye’ rather than ‘nwunye na di’ and say ‘egwu na amụ’ rather than ‘amụ na egwu’. These collocations can undergo a fossilization process until they become fixed expressions.

Why Learn Collocation

The study of collocation is of immense important in semantics as one cannot achieve the mastery of a language without the knowledge of the co-occurrence of words in the language.

An important step to improving ones vocabulary is not only to learn the appropriate terms but to learn the words that commonly go together with those terms. The knowledge of

collocation in a given language will make one's use of language more natural and easily understood (Kenneth, nd). It is vital for the competent use of a language: grammatically correct sentence will stand out as 'awkward' if collocational preference is violated. Learning about words that commonly go together gives the speaker alternative and richer ways of expressing himself. This makes collocation an interesting area of language study/teaching.

Collocation in Igbo Language

Igbo Language is indigenous to the Igbo people. It is a language rich in idioms, adages, proverbs, witty expressions and figures of speech which make messages and information clear and concise. This qualifies it as an essential medium for effective communication Ikekeonwu, (1995).

Collocations are common in natural languages and can be met in technical and non-technical axis. In the formation of utterances, a number of linguistic units are joined in structural bond according to the rules of utterance formation in the language.

In Igbo Language, collocation could be seen as a combination of words (or phrases) which are frequently used together in a way that sound correctly.

Types of Collocation in Igbo Language

There are several different types of collocation made from combination of verb, noun and adjective etc. Some of the most common types include; noun + noun, noun + verb, verb + noun, verb + preposition, verb + adverb, noun + adjective and adjective + adjective collocations.

I. Noun + Noun Collocations:

In this type of collocation, a noun collocates with another noun, joined together with the conjunction 'na' (and). Below are some examples:

	Noun + Noun Collocates	Gloss
1	Nne na nna	Mother and father
2	Isi na anya	Head and eyes
3	Imi na ọnụ	Nose and mouth
4	Aka na ụkwụ	Hands and legs
5	Elu na ala	Up and down
6	Ewu na ọkụkọ	Goat and fowl
7	Nne na ụmụ	Mother and children
8	Anụ na azụ	Meat and fish
9	Ekpere na abụ	Prayer and hymn
10	Nnu na mmanụ	Salt and oil
11	Ji na ede	Yam and cocoyam
12	Ọgụ na mma	Hoe and machete
13	Ihe na ọchịchiri	Light and darkness
14	Akụ na ụta	Bow and arrow
15	Isi na ọdụ	Head and tail
16	Egbe na ọkụkọ	Kite and fowl
17	Ọhịa na ụzọ	Forest and pathway
18	Eku na ọkụ	Traditional spoon and pot
19	Nwanne na nwanne	Brother and sister
20	Egwu na amụ	Play and joke

II Noun + Verb Collocations:

Here, noun collocates with a verb in a syntagmatic relationship. For example:

21. Nwa na-ebe akwa

Nwa na- e be akwa

Noun aux part vrt noun

The baby is crying.

22. Obi nyere Ngozi ihe
Obi nyere Ngozi ihe
Noun vrt+past noun noun
Obi gave Ngozi something.
23. Egbe buuru okuko ya.
Egbe buuru okuko ya
Noun verb+past noun 3sg pro
The kite carried his chick.
24. Nkita gbọrọ ya ụja.
Nkita gbọrọ ya ụja
Noun vrt+past pro noun
The dog barked at him.
25. Ụmụ akwụkwọ na-agụ akwụkwọ .
Ụmụ akwụkwọ na- a gụ akwụkwọ
Noun aux part vrt book
The students are reading.

III. Verb + Noun Collocations:

In this case a verb is followed by a noun in syntactic environment. Below are some examples:

26. Ọ gbara bọlụ.
Ọ gbara bọlụ
3sg pro verb+past noun
He kicked the ball

27. Ndi uwe ojii gbagburu Eze

Ndi uwe ojii gbagburu Eze

3plu noun verb+past noun

The Policemen killed Eze

28. Biko nye m nri

Biko nye m nri

Noun verb 1sg noun

Please give me food.

29. Obi nyere Ada akwukwo.

Obi nyere Ada akwukwo

Noun verb+past noun noun.

Obi gave Ada a book.

30. Ndi ori gbajiri ya ukwu.

Ndi ori gbajiri ya ukwu

3plu pro noun verb+past 3sg noun

The robbers broke his leg.

IV. Verb +Preposition Collocation:

In this type of collocation, verbs co-occur with prepositions in a syntactic relation.

31. O no n'uche

O no n'uche

3sg pro verb prep noun

He is sitting on a chair.

32. Anyi tuncyeere ya votu

Anyị tūnye re re ya votu

1plu pro verb rv-pst –ve prep 3sg pro noun

We voted for him.

33. Ngozi chiri ya ochi.

Ngozi chiri ya ochi

Noun vrt+past 3sg pro noun

Ngozi laughed at him.

34. Mmadu nile nọ n'ime ụlọ.

Mmadu niile nọ [na ime ụlọ]

Noun quantifier verb [prep [NP]]

Everybody is inside the house.

35. O debere akpa ya n'okpuru oche

O debere akpa ya [na okpuru oche]

3sg pro verb+pst noun 3sg [prep [NP]]

He kept his bag under the chair.

In example 31, the verb '*nọ*' (*be*) collocates with the preposition *n'*(on). The verb '*tūnye*' in 32 collocates with the reduplicated '*re*' which is a prepositional suffix (Mbah 1999:173). The *–rv* is a leaning preposition since it cannot exist independently.

The verb '*nọ*' (*be*) in 34 collocates with the preposition *n'ime* (*inside*). In 35, the verb '*debere*' (*kept*) collocates with the preposition '*n'okpuru*' (*under*).

V. Verb + Adverbs Collocation:

This is a situation where a verb co-occurs with an adverb in a syntagmatic relationship. Below are some examples:

36. Ha siri nri ọsọ ọsọ

Ha siri nri ọsọ ọsọ

3plu pro verb+pst noun adv

They cooked the food very fast.

37. Ofe ya gwurū kpam kpam

Ofe ya gwurū kpam kpam

Noun 3sg pro verb+pst adv

Her soup finished completely.

38. Obi rurū ọrū ya ọfuma

Obi rurū ọrū ya ọfuma

Noun verb+past noun 3sg pro adv

Obi did his work well.

39. Ụmụ akwukwọ na-aga akwukwọ ugbua.

Ụmụ akwukwọ na-aga akwukwọ ugbua

Noun aux past+verb noun adv

The students are going to school now.

40. O kwuru okwu nwayọọ.

O kwuru okwu nwayọọ

3sg pro verb+past noun adv

He spoke softly.

In example, 36 the verb ‘siri’ (cooked) collocates with the adverb ‘ọsọ ọsọ (very fast)’. In 37, the verb ‘gwurū’ (finished) co-occurs with the adverbs ‘kpam kpam’ (completely). The verb ‘rurū’(did) in 38 co-occurs with the adverb ‘ọfuma’(well). Likewise the verbs ‘na-aga’ (are going) in 39 collocates with the adverbs ‘ugbua’ (now). In 40, the verb ‘kwuru’(spoke) co-occurs with the adverb ‘nwayọọ’ softly.

VI. Noun + Adjective Collocations:

This is where a noun collocates with adjective in a syntactic relation. In English Language the head of a syntactic phrase is to the right of the complement (right branching) while in Igbo the head is to the left of the complement (left branching) (Mbah, 1999 & 2006). For example, in English, we have these noun + adjective collation; ‘good man’ (oma nwoke), ‘black goat’ (ojii ewu), ‘white house’ (ọcha ụlọ) etc. For Igbo, the head (noun) comes before the complement (adjective). For instance:

41. Ụlọ ọma - good house
42. Omume ojọọ - bad behavior
43. Ewu ọcha - white goat
44. Nwanyị ojii - black woman
45. Ihe ọma - good thing

VII. Adjective + Adjective Collocations

In this type of collation, an adjective collates with another adjective in a syntagmatic relation. Here are some examples.

46. Nwoke ojii ahụ zụtara ụgbọala ọcha
 Nwoke ojii ahụ zụtara ụgbọala ọcha
 Noun adj det verb+past noun adj
 The black man bought a white car.
47. Nwaanyị ọcha ahụ lụlara di ojọọ
 Nwaanyị ọcha ahụ lụlara di ojọọ
 Noun adj det verb+past noun adj
 The white woman married a bad husband.
48. Agwa ọma butere aha ọma

Noun adj verb+past noun adj

Good behavior brought a good name.

In example 46, the adjective ‘ojii’ (black) co-occurs with ‘ocha’ (white), which is another adjective. The adjective ‘ocha’ in 47 collocates with ‘ojoo’ while ‘oma’ collocates with ‘oma’ in 48.

Collocation, Fixed Expression and Idiom

Some words are most commonly found paired with other words to create a semantic unit or lexeme. When words become grouped in almost predictable ways, they are fixed expressions. Some fixed expressions in English include: ‘desirable residence’, ‘I put it to you’, ‘it is a matter of choice’, as a matter of fact ‘it is okay by me’, ‘it is alright’ etc. There are quite a number of fixed expressions in Igbo language that have been used over time. Here are some examples;

49. N’otu ntabi anya - in a twinkle of an eye
50. Ka o sina di - as a matter of fact
51. Wee diri gaba - etc (and so on)
52. Bido n’isi rue n’odu - from A ----Z (as a whole)
53. Ebe a no - the in thing (the thing in vogue)
54. Ka o ha m otu a - let me stop here.
55. Ole na ole - very few.

Sometimes, the group of words is so well rooted in the language that the meaning of the component words are ignored or metaphorical meanings are not visualized. Such a group has a meaning that is not to be found in the analysis of its parts – such expressions are idioms – Saeed, (2003:60) defines “idioms” as words collocated that became affixed to each other until metamorphosing into a fossilized term”. This collocation-words commonly used in a group – redefines each component word in the word group and becomes an idiomatic expression.

Moreover, an idiom is an expression, words, or a phrase whose sense means something different from what the words literally imply. The idiom “beating about the bush” in English means to hint or to discuss obliquely, nobody is literally beating any person or thing, and the bush is a metaphor. When a speaker uses an idiom, the listener might mistake its actual meaning, if he or she has not heard that figure of speech before. Idioms usually do not translate well in some cases, when an idiom is translated into another language, either its meaning is changed or it is meaningless. With idioms, the meaning is completely non-compositional whereas collocations are mostly compositional. In English expressions like “kith and kin” or “spick and span”, not many English speakers would be able to assign a meaning here to kith or span. The following are some Igbo idioms and their collocative meanings (the meaning which a lexical item conveys depending on the company it keeps of the environment in which it is found).

	Igbo idioms	Collocative meaning	Actual meaning in Igbo
57	Aka abụọ	Two hands	Izu ohi
58	Obi mmiri	Heart water	Obi ebere
59	Ire abụọ	Tongue two	Isi asi
60	Chi ọma	God good	Iru ọma
61	Egbe na ọkụkọ	Kite and fowl	Ndị iro abụọ

Conclusion

The relationship of collocation according to McCarthy (1995) is fundamental in the study of vocabulary. A word is known by the company it keeps (Firth 1957).

Correct use of strong collocations shows an excellent command of the language and can help impress native speakers of your ability to speak the language well. For example, in English we say ‘I made a cup of tea’ not ‘I did a cup of tea’, ‘Strong Tea’ not ‘powerful tea’, in Igbo we say ‘Nne m nọ n’ụlọ’ not ‘Nne m dị n’ụlọ’, ‘Onye ọ bụla’ not ‘Onye niile’, ‘Mụ na gị’ not ‘Gị na mụ’, ‘Gị na ya’ not ‘Ya na gị’,

Learning collocations is learning typical expressions in a language. Proper acquisition of collation makes learners competent socially at the level of personal and technical communications. Lack of the knowledge of collocation patterns of lexical items makes speakers of a language to be prone to all sorts of collocation than grammatical errors.

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