



Grammatical Collocation: Investigating the Competence of Engineering and Management students

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“English is the gift that we got in an accident”

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan

ABSTRACT: Francis Bacon has rightly said, “Knowledge is power”. But In my opinion this knowledge if a remains unused goes in vain if not communicated properly. This communication is done verbally and non-verbally depending upon the conditions and requirement. In today’s era, Communication is a bridge between two individuals. Proper Communication is the need of hour in today’s Era. The researches prove that there can be many reasons behind the inappropriate usage of English language. First, cross-disciplinary collocations differ in their type from the collocations on which most researchers have traditionally focused. Second, most of the words which are found in academic collocations are not found on Academic Word List. Third, the vocabulary needs of students in the arts and humanities are characteristically different from those of students in other disciplines. Researchers and teachers therefore need to deal with these learners separately. Fourth, there is an Indianism of most of the words and sentences used by the students of engineering and management students and most of the people in our country. Finally the slang, superfluous and redundant use of words is also one of such reasons. It goes needless to say that knowledge of Grammar plays a significant role in the appropriation of any knowledge especially while learning a foreign language. English Language has become the Lingua-Franca of this world. Out of the two versions of English Language, American and British English, British English is more widely used and is accepted. Especially in India British English is usage. In no field today, can we imagine success without having English Language Proficiency. Lack of grammar competence is one of the crucial barriers especially for non-native speakers. Developing language profiles of graduates for higher levels of speaking skills to serve the need of workplace in Asian Economic Communities becomes a high concern in many countries including India. This study investigated and identified levels of English oral communication competency of students from different engineering and management institutes. According to the BEC (Business English Certificate) course of the Cambridge University and its ESOL course (English for the Speakers of Other Languages) there are many reasons behind the wrong and defective usage of English language because of Indianism of English excessive usage of Superfluous, Slang and redundancy in colloquial English and thereby other remaining usages of language and communication. Many finding revealed that the participants were ranged at the average level and their significant English oral competency deficiencies fall on grammatical errors and pronunciation and the use of Language to communicate. The present paper finishes by making a number of recommendations for future developments in this area.

Keywords: English Oral Communication Competency, Grammatical collocations, Crucial Barrier, Performance Assessment, Communicative competence, Indianism

I. INTRODUCTION

Let me start this paper with the statement of our ex-President Dr. S. Radhakrishnan “*English is the gift that we got in an accident.*” How truly said he? Perhaps he had forecast the stand of this language that it has gained in the international level today. What else, if not its beauty and significance, that today it has becomes the need of an hour around the world.

Being the Lingua-Franca of the entire world today, English has been accepted as an international language used throughout the world for various reasons, including academic and professional purposes. Today’s job market reinforces the importance of communication competency in English for new graduates especially engineering and management students.

Today, in engineering and management sectors, English communication has important roles into almost all aspects of the profession. But it is regretted to say that in spite of realizing its importance, English oral communication has been the crucial problems for students especially those engineering and pharmacy students who are from Hindi medium backgrounds. To the extend I realised is that it is shyness and typical characters which significantly affected to the competence of English communication as well as other factors such as language environment, psychological barriers, vocabulary, and poor listening abilities to determine the competence of engineering and management students. We should find primarily a proper definition of engineering and management as professions. According to the Australian National Competency Standards of Professional Engineers, "Engineering as a profession directed towards the application and advancement of skills based upon a body of distinctive knowledge in mathematics, science and technology, integrated with business and management and acquired through education and professional formation in an engineering discipline. Engineering as a professional and socially significant activity is determined by a set of its essential characteristics closely related to the competencies, acquired by graduates. So far as Management is concerned, it can be defined as 'An art of getting the works done through others. 'Theoretical and operational knowledge should be integrated on the base of certain key values. Now the educators are coming to realize the importance of developing graduates' creative flexible ways of thinking and acting in a professional field. Hence the traditional model of engineering and management education system with its inherent orientation on fixed study subjects (courses) is to be modified.

II. LITARURE REVIEW

The word 'Collocation' has been derived from earlier term *colloquy* (a conversation), from *Latin colloquium* (conference, conversation), from *con-* (together) + *loqui* (speak). The verb 'colloqui' "to talk together", based on *com-* "(together) with" + *loqui* "to talk". 'Loqui' apparently started out in *Proto-Indo-European* as *tolk-* "speak", probably at the root of English *talk* and certainly behind Russian *tolkovat'* "interpret, explain". Different literates proposed different definitions of the term collocation. Firth (1957, p. 183) defined the term 'collocation' as "the company that words keep". Later, this framework was adapted by Halliday (1966) and Sinclair (1991). The third and final approach which is the semantic approach transcends observation and tries to determine the specific shape collocations. Later, McCarthy (1990, p. 12) added that collocation as "a marriage contract between words, and some words are

more firmly married to each other than others". Moreover, Nation (2001, p. 317) added that collocation is used to refer to a group of words that come together, either because they commonly occur together like take a chance, or because the meaning of the group is not obvious from the meaning of the parts. According to the Oxford Collocation Dictionary (2002), 'collocation' is a means of combining words in a language to produce natural-sounding speech and writing. Incorrect combinations such as 'speak a lie' or 'tell the truth' do not sound natural in English. The following list will be helpful to understand more combinations of some more words like this and their multiple uses (Fig 1) Semantic analysis adopts componential analysis on the basis of semantic opposition or dimensions of contrast.

Collocations starting with the verb 'do'
Does someone a favour
Do the cooking
Do the housework
Do the shopping
Do the washing up
Do your best
Do your hair
Collocations with the verb 'have'
Have a good time
Have a bath
Have a drink
Have a haircut
Have a holiday
Have a problem
Have a relationship
Have lunch
Have sympathy

Fig. 1.

Another approach, which is the concern of this study, is a structural one. This approach takes collocation to be determined by its structural patterns. This grammatical perspective contrasts somewhat with the previous approaches in that its concentration is chiefly grammatical and lexical. Lexis cannot be separated from grammar, because the two are distinctive but are related aspects of one phenomenon.

With respect to grammar and lexis, Kjellmer (1990) in establishing the extent to which an individual word class is collocational or non-collocational, shows that articles, prepositions, singular and mass nouns, as well as the base form of verbs are collocational in nature. In contrast, adjectives, singular proper nouns, and adverbs are not. Let's have a look on Lexical and Grammatical Collocations.

Lexical Collocations. Lexical collocations do not contain grammatical elements, but are combinations of nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs (Bahns, 1993).

Benson has described lexical collocations as usually consisting of two equal lexical components. It consists of various combinations of content words; it does not contain prepositions, infinitives, and relative clauses.

Grammatical Collocations. Grammatical collocations consist of a noun, or an adjective or a verb, plus a particle (a preposition, an adverb or a grammatical structure such as an infinitive, a gerund, or clause) (Bahns, 1993:57, as cited in Shokouhi, 2010). The followings are the examples: *at night, extend to, good at, fall for, to be afraid that*. These examples are grammatical collocations which are lexicalized as single units whose meanings are formulaic and whose co-occurrence are highly likely. They are sometimes idiomatic, because their meanings do not reflect the meanings of the elements, such as *run out of* (to reach an end of stock, supplies) or *put up with* (tolerate). However, there are similar grammatical combinations which do not have such a strong sense of belonging together.

Types of Grammatical Collocations. Students especially those who are from Hindi medium backgrounds face a lot of problems in using grammar and grammatical structures resulting into errors. According to Benson, Benson and Ilson (1986), English grammatical collocations fall into the following combinations: noun+preposition, noun+ to- infinitive, noun + that-clause, adjective +that-clause, noun+ preposition and adjective+ preposition, preposition + noun, adjective+ preposition, predicate adjective+ to-infinitive. It seems that language interference plays a crucial role in students' erroneous responses, especially those which contain a preposition. For instance, the majority of noun+ preposition, adjective+ preposition and preposition + noun are used incorrectly throughout the essays. Finally, lack of knowledge of grammatical collocations is another possible reason behind such error. Educational leaders, curriculum designers and teachers need to shed light on these types.

Meaning of Competence. Competence is the ability of an individual to do a job properly. A competency is a set of defined behaviors that provide a structured guide enabling the identification, evaluation and development of the behaviors in individual employees. The term "competence" first appeared in an article authored by R.W. White in 1959 as a concept for performance motivation. Later, in 1970, Craig C. Lundberg defined the concept in "Planning the Executive Development Program". The term gained traction when in 1973, David McClelland, Ph.D. wrote a seminal paper entitled, "Testing for Competence Rather Than for Intelligence". It has since been popularized by one-time fellow McBer & Company (Currently the "Hay Group") colleague Richard Boyatzis and many others, such as T.F. Gilbert (1978) who used the concept in relationship to performance improvement.

Its use varies widely, which leads to considerable misunderstanding.

Communicative Competence in Foreign Language.

This should be accepted that the education provides the best opportunities in determining the purposes and content of vocational education provided it is based on competencies. The phenomenon of competence and expertise in various aspects of vocational education has been widely studied by different authors. N. Chomsky, R. White, J. Raven, N. Kuzmina, V. Shadrikov A. Khutorskoi, I. A. Markova, N. Chomsky, A. Verbitskii, are some of them. In this paper we are concerned with two kinds of competencies: foreign language communicative competence and professional competence. Generally speaking, we must admit that the communicative competence (or some part of it) should be closely connected with the professional competence, since no effective professional activity is possible without the acts of written and oral communication. The recent significant changes in the types of professional engineering and management activities deeply affected the discussions on modern vocational education. The recent decades shows a growing number of key professional competencies of an engineer and management personnel. It has been noted by the researchers that so far as the concept of key professional competencies of "engineer of 21 century" is concerned, it is common for different countries and different sectors of the economy. This is explained by the fact that all engineering companies and management concerns face similar competitive challenges in the global economy thus, papers in the field consider the communicative competence (including the mastering in a foreign language) as a part of a professional competence. The understanding comes to educators that despite the fact that the knowledge and skills in technical disciplines is core content of competence, the non-technical subjects, are no less important. Here the grammatical competence can be treated as an ability of ideal native speaker through which he generates an unlimited number of correct grammar competences, while implementing language (performance) in a particular situation. D. Hayms in 1972 introduced the concept of communicative competence. According to it, the ability to select the correct grammatical means in different communicative situations the communicative competence, i.e. the specific socio-linguistic aspects of the language appeared in the methods of communicative language teaching. In 1980 further the concept of communicative competence was revised by M. Kenel and M. Swain in the context of teaching/learning a foreign language. They proposed three components of foreign language communicative competence: grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic. Soon the sociolinguistic or pragmatic been allocated discursive component (M. Kenel, 1983).

Such a structure has proved practically and remains a basic framework for educational applications. In the course of the development of the competence model some researchers introduce a strategic competence, which provides a speaker with the skills and freedom to use a variety of techniques, tactics and strategies of verbal and nonverbal communication depending on the communicative situation and corresponding to the socio-cultural norms. In my opinion, the fluent use of such formal chunks of language is an important element not only of the formulaic competence, but of the strategic competence of engineer. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the correct use of formula structures and their positive assessment of the interlocutor creates a situation of success, confidence, which reduces the psychological barrier and produce a positive effect on the quality of communication. Secondly, time and brain resources are released for the coming portion of speech. The above competences (linguistic, socio-cultural, pragmatic, and strategic) can be classified as of general type, not relevant specific engineering activity. In the literature one can find different ideas to complement the classical approach described above to form foreign language communicative competence. It should, however note the relatively small number of works that address the specificity of engineering.

Foreign Language Communicative Competence of Engineering and Management Students

When we talk about the foreign language communicative competence of engineering and management graduates we feel that it is necessary for an individual that he should take into account the labor market requirements for a graduate qualification, as well as the facilities of modern Russian technical universities. That is, the components of such competence must be practically oriented and realizable. Taking these as criteria we introduce foreign language communicative competence of engineering students making the synthesis of social and professional relevant options. That is different that the management students are more capable of presenting themselves more comfortably than engineering students if we talk about presenting themselves comfortably. The *general unit* is represented by the four traditional competencies: linguistic, socio-cultural, pragmatic and strategic ones, interpreted as above. These competencies are specified for the goals of language use in situations of social communication, understood broadly. Linguistic competence of a student may be partially formed in the courses of business foreign language delivered by the relevant university departments. Components of the foreign language special unit are:

Components of the foreign language special unit are:

(i) **Cognitive competence:** It includes the following:

(a) Foreign-language knowledge in general engineering and mathematical sciences.

(b) Foreign- language knowledge of specialized disciplines.

(c) Knowledge of systems of measurement units, symbols, terminology, standards, specifications, codes of the target language.

(d) Foreign language skills in the organization and interpretation of graphical information.

(e) Knowledge of the organization of engineering activities in the target language.

(i) **Operational competence:** This is the ability to implement written and oral communication in a foreign language within the professional standards. It includes,

(a) Ability to cooperate in the development, interpretation and presentation of foreign language information.

(b) Independent search of professionally important information in a foreign language.

(c) Proper understanding of instructions and the delivering accurate and clear instructions in a foreign language.

(d) Situational choice of appropriate methods of a foreign language communication, including extra linguistic means.

(e) Ability to prepare texts for publication in world-wide professional engineering journals.

(f) Ways of effective communication of engineering (technical) information to workers, as well as to other destinations in a foreign language and finally,

(g) Preparation, understanding and use of a foreign language engineering documentation.

Thus, cognitive competence provides a set of skills and knowledge, while the operational competence shows a way of its implementation. Both competencies are some kind of "customers" in relation to the competence of the first (linguistic) block within the special unit. Motives and values (the interest in professional foreign language training, awareness of its importance, the need for self-learning and self-development throughout professional life) make a great effect on both blocks of the special unit and controls the process of formation of the competence in question.

III. CONCLUSION

Language is dress to the thoughts and so far as communication is concerned, it is an art of transplanting our ideas in other's mind but without any surgery. See how wonderful art is it. But when we see our engineering and management students, we find that their competency in colloquial language and usage of grammatical construction are very pathetic and very miserable. But by putting some efforts and learning from the theories of some intellectuals and grammarians and literates, a long distance in this regard can be covered by putting some efforts and pave the successful path towards progress and self uplift for our engineering and management students.

It is also suggested that some effective efforts are to be made in order to enhance the competence of our engineering and management students in grammatical collocations.

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