

# **A Study on “Delexical Verb+Noun” Collocation Errors of Thai EFL Intermediate and Advanced Learners**

***Sathinee Sanguannam***

Faculty of Liberal Arts, Thammasat University

## **Abstract**

This study investigates delexical verb+noun collocation errors of Thai EFL learners. An ability to understand and use collocations is crucial for EFL learners because the learners will be able to convey meaning more effectively and more precisely in communication and achieve native-like usage of the language. While many studies to date reveal that collocation is a problematic area for EFL learners and learners produce typical errors in collocation, especially delexical verb+noun, those studies yield conflicting results in two respects: i) whether collocational performance corresponds to increasing proficiency levels, and ii) how the learner's L1 (Thai) affects collocational performance. Therefore, this study examines the performance of delexical verb+noun collocation (i.e., collocations whose forms and meanings are congruent in L1 and L2 and non-congruent items) of Thai learners from two different proficiency levels: intermediate and advanced learners of English. Forty Thai EFL learners were asked to complete two tests: a multiple-choice and a semi-controlled sentence construction test, which included congruent and non-congruent delexical verb+noun collocations focusing on high-frequency delexical verbs (do, make, take, get, give, and have). The overall results revealed that advanced learners could perform significantly better than intermediate learners in the multiple-choice test, but not in the semi-controlled task. Both groups of learners made errors significantly more on non-congruent than on congruent items in both tasks. The research findings are discussed descriptively and contribute towards pedagogical development in the delexical verb+noun collocation as a challenging part in English learning for Thai EFL learners with both levels of proficiency.

**Keywords:** Collocation errors, Delexical verb+noun collocation, Proficiency levels, Congruent and non-congruent items

## การศึกษาข้อผิดพลาดในการใช้คำปรากฏร่วมที่ประกอบด้วย คำกริยากับคำนาม ของนักศึกษาชาวไทยที่มีความสามารถ ในการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศในระดับกลางและระดับสูง

สาธิตี สงวนนาม

คณะศิลปศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยธรรมศาสตร์

### บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้ได้วิเคราะห์ข้อผิดพลาดในการใช้คำปรากฏร่วมที่ประกอบด้วยคำกริยากับคำนามของนักศึกษาชาวไทยที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ การใช้คำปรากฏร่วมที่ถูกต้องมีความสำคัญในการที่ผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษจะสามารถสื่อสารความหมายได้อย่างกระชับและใช้ภาษาระดับมาตรฐาน หรือใกล้เคียงกับเจ้าของภาษา งานวิจัยในปัจจุบันได้พบว่าคำปรากฏร่วมเป็นปัญหาสำหรับผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษ โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งข้อผิดพลาดที่พบในคำปรากฏร่วมที่ประกอบด้วยคำกริยากับคำนาม งานวิจัยเหล่านี้พบผลวิจัยที่ขัดแย้งกันในสองลักษณะ คือ สมรรถนะในการใช้คำปรากฏร่วมจะพัฒนาขึ้นตามระดับสมรรถนะทางภาษาของผู้เรียนหรือไม่ และอิทธิพลของภาษาแม่ของผู้เรียนมีผลต่อสมรรถนะในการใช้คำปรากฏร่วมของผู้เรียนอย่างไร การวิจัยนี้ได้ทำการศึกษานักศึกษาชาวไทยที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ จำนวน 40 คน โดยแบ่งกลุ่มผู้เรียนเป็นสองกลุ่มตามสมรรถนะทางภาษาอังกฤษ กล่าวคือกลุ่มผู้ที่มีสมรรถนะทางภาษาอังกฤษในระดับกลางและระดับสูง ผู้เรียนทำแบบทดสอบทั้งสี่ข้อชุด ได้แก่ แบบเลือกตอบและแบบจับคู่คำกริยากับคำนาม แล้วนำไปแต่งประโยค ซึ่งแบบทดสอบดังกล่าวประกอบด้วยคำปรากฏร่วม ทั้งที่ความหมายสอดคล้องกับภาษาไทยและไม่สอดคล้องกับภาษาไทย โดยเลือกเฉพาะคำปรากฏร่วมระหว่างคำกริยาประเภท *delexical* (*do, make, take, get, give, and have*) กับคำนาม ผลการวิจัยพบว่ากลุ่มผู้เรียนที่มีความรู้ทางภาษาอังกฤษระดับสูงสามารถทำแบบทดสอบคำปรากฏร่วมได้ดีกว่ากลุ่มผู้เรียนที่มีความรู้ทางภาษาอังกฤษระดับกลางในแบบทดสอบประเภทเลือกตอบ ส่วนแบบทดสอบประเภทจับคู่กริยากับคำนามนั้น ไม่มีความแตกต่างระหว่างสองกลุ่ม จากผลการวิจัยยังพบอีกว่าภาษาแม่มีอิทธิพลต่อผู้เรียน เพราะทั้งสองกลุ่มสามารถทำคะแนนประเภทคำปรากฏร่วมที่สอดคล้องกับภาษาไทยได้ดีกว่าประเภทที่ไม่สอดคล้องกับภาษาไทยอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทั้งสองแบบทดสอบ จากผลการวิจัยครั้งนี้จะนำมาวิเคราะห์เพื่อเป็นประโยชน์ในการพัฒนาการสอนคำปรากฏร่วมที่มีประสิทธิภาพยิ่งขึ้น โดยเฉพาะคำปรากฏร่วมของคำกริยากับคำนามที่เป็นปัญหาสำหรับผู้เรียนชาวไทยที่มีความสามารถในการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศในระดับกลางและระดับสูง

**คำสำคัญ:** ข้อผิดพลาดในการใช้คำปรากฏร่วม คำปรากฏร่วมของคำกริยากับคำนาม ระดับสมรรถนะทางภาษาอังกฤษ ความหมายสอดคล้อง และความหมายไม่สอดคล้อง (ระหว่างภาษาอังกฤษกับภาษาไทย)

## 1. Introduction

The possession of comprehensive knowledge of formulaic sequences including collocations is important for second language learners. Much attention has been increasingly received from scholars in area of vocabulary teaching and learning, as using right collocations can help learners produce the second language more fluently and idiomatically, enabling an effective communication (Henriksen, 2013). Collocation is a central principle in the acquisition of vocabulary, as described by McCarthy (1990:12) that “it is a marriage contract between words, and some words are more firmly married to each other than others”. McCarthy concluded that “it (collocation) is an important organizing principle in the vocabulary of any language”.

However, collocation has caused problems for L2 learners because the nature of collocation is arbitrary. For example, replacing one of the words in a collocation with a synonym may result in an unacceptable expression. Thus, a collocation such as *make a decision* is acceptable, but *make a determination* is not; similarly, *make a mistake*, *take a view*, *get an impression*, and *have an advantage* are all acceptable, but *do a mistake*, *take a perspective*, *get an intuition*, and *have a gain* are not.

Several studies have suggested that a learner’s level of proficiency is a significant factor influencing collocational performance (e.g. Al-Zahrani, 1998; Hsu, 2002; Liao, 2010; Miyakoshi, 2009). A number of previous research studies have compared different proficiency levels of L2 learners in their collocational performance (e.g. Gitsaki, 1996; Liao, 2010; Miyakoshi, 2009; Phoocharoensil, 2011). Most found that a higher proficiency level of learners produced more correct collocations in various tasks, i.e. comprehension and production tasks. For example, Liao (2010) revealed that advanced learners who achieved high scores on a multiple-choice test consistently achieved significantly high scores on a grammaticality judgement test.

By contrast, some studies (Laufer and Waldman, 2011; Nesselhauf, 2003; Nizonkiza, 2012) showed that despite good performance in comprehension tasks, advanced levels of EFL learners still found difficulties in producing collocations. Laufer (1998) explained such a discrepancy that although the active (productive) knowledge develops along with the passive (comprehensive) knowledge when the proficiency level of learners increases, the active (productive) knowledge does not develop significantly

when learners reach the advanced level. The progress of active (productive) knowledge tends to reach a plateau at the advanced level; therefore, the gap between the passive (comprehensive) and active (productive) knowledge tends to be wider at a more advanced proficiency level. It can be hypothesized then that comparing the two task types, learners may perform better in the comprehension but found more difficulties in production/semi-production tasks. The question that needs further exploration is whether the proficiency level could predict the learners' performance in every task type.

The other factor that needs to be addressed is the influence of L1. There is also research evidence (Yamashita and Jiang, 2010) suggesting that L1 influence factor also plays a role on learners' collocational performance, but there is a negative correlation between L1 influence and L2 proficiency. To illustrate, Kroll and Stewart (1994) proposed the Revised Hierarchical Model which argued for an asymmetry between L1 and L2 lexicon and concept; the links between L1 lexicon and concept seem to be stronger than L2 lexicon and concept, because of the larger amount of L1 knowledge. Yamashita and Jiang (2010) extended the model to explain the case of collocation. Learners can use their existing L1 knowledge to determine the meaning of an L2 collocation directly, especially in case of congruent collocations which have similarities in their meaning. For congruent items, learners can usually translate literally between L1 and L2 whereas for non-congruent items learners cannot directly translate between L1 and L2. Yamashita and Jiang (2010) found that EFL learners took longer time and made more errors on the non-congruent than congruent collocations. The researchers claimed that the L2 learners' knowledge of non-congruent collocations mostly lag behind their knowledge of congruent collocations. However, once learners can understand and use those L2 collocations, they do not need to depend on existing L1 knowledge and can directly form a link to the concept of L2, especially in case of non-congruent collocations.

Of all various types of collocation, collocation with delexicalised verbs is the type that causes the most difficulty for L2 learners when compared with other types of collocation; i.e., adjective+noun, adverb+adjective, noun+noun collocations (e.g., Chi et al., 1994; Liao, 2010; Miyakoshi, 2009; Wang, 2013). Because the meanings of the delexical verbs (or 'light verbs' which contain very weak meanings) by themselves do not

contribute to the whole meaning of the collocation, it is difficult to guess which is the correct verb to use. Even frequently used collocations delexicalised verbs are difficult for learners – as attested in previous works mentioned earlier, which found that the most common errors on verb+noun collocation fall on high-frequency delexical verbs (do, make, take, get, give, have). Moreover, the restriction of components in a collocation seems to be difficult for learners in terms of selecting an appropriate verb, as well as selecting an appropriate noun to complete a verb+noun collocation. For instance, the verb *make* in *make a mistake* cannot be replaced with *do a mistake*, even though *make* and *do* are synonyms.

In light of the earlier discussion, there are aspects related to the factor of proficiency levels of learners. Learner's L1 (Thai) which affects collocational performance might be taken into account, to determine whether it can be the reliable indicator of delexical verb+noun collocational performance. Accordingly, the present study included two tasks to test different types of knowledge. In this case, a multiple-choice test measured the learners' comprehension while a semi-controlled sentence construction task explored the learners' production of collocation, especially in the case of delexical verb+noun collocation by comparing the performance of learners with different proficiency levels; i.e. intermediate and advanced levels, on both various task types which consisted of congruent and non-congruent delexical verb+noun collocations in order to examine the role of L1 that affects the collocation errors. The delexical verb+noun collocations were chosen from the native corpus based on high-frequency delexical verbs (do, make, take, get, give, have), assuming in that these L2 collocations were better known for learners.

## **2. Research Questions**

1. Does the Thai EFL learners' level of proficiency affect the delexical verb+noun collocational performance?
2. Does the learners' first language (Thai) affect the delexical verb+noun collocational performance of learners of two different proficiency levels?

### 3. Literature Review

Firth (1957) first introduced the term “collocation” as “You shall know a word by the company it keeps” (1957: 179). A group of linguists, known as Neo-Firthians (e.g. Halliday, 1966; Sinclair, 1966), have tried to define collocation from the Firthian sense. Halliday (1966) defined “collocation” as “a linear co-occurrence relationship among lexical items which co-occur together”, and the lexical set is defined as “the grounding of members with like privilege of co-occurrence in collocation” (1966: 153). For example, the words *hot, cold, fresh, supply, warm, deep, contaminated, and pour* are the same lexical set because they all frequently collocate with the word *water* (cited in Shehata, 2008). Sinclair (1966: 415) defined “collocation” as the occurrence of words within an environment (or 'span'). He also introduced a short space, or '*span*', which is the lexical items to the right and left of the word being investigated, which is called '*node*', and all of the lexical items that are within the '*span*' are its *collocates*. Examples include *He went back to the house. When he opened the door, the dog barked.* From these sentences, the words *went, back, to, the, when, he, open, the,* (which are called '*span*') are considered '*collocates*' to the word *house* (which is called '*node*') (cited in Nesselhauf, 2005).

However, collocations can be categorized due to their occurrences at the syntagmatic level by some other linguists (Benson et al., 1997; Howarth, 1996; Nesselhauf, 2005). There are two main approaches in the study of collocations; i.e., the “statistically oriented approach” or “frequency-based approach” and the “significance-oriented approach” or “phraseological approach” (Nesselhauf, 2005). Collocation, in the frequency-based approach, is defined as a combination of two words at a certain distance that can separate between the frequent and non-frequent collocations (Sinclair, 1991). In the other view, collocation, in the phraseological approach, is defined as a compound of two words, which are semantically and/or syntactically related from most to least fixed category of collocation in relation to arbitrary restriction (Cowie, 1994). The first view, the frequency-based approach, is mostly used in the “computational analysis of syntagmatic relations”, while the second view, the phraseological approach, is mostly used in the “lexicography or pedagogy” (Alsakran, 2011; Nesselhauf, 2005). In this study, collocations

are categorized into two types based on phraseological approach: syntactic and semantic (Nesselhauf, 2005: 21).

In the syntactic categorization, collocations are categorized according to their components in accordance with its syntactic functions. Benson et al. (1997) divided collocations into two groups: grammatical collocations and lexical collocations. First, grammatical collocations consist of a content word and a function word, which is usually a preposition. Examples of grammatical collocations are as follows: noun+preposition (a change of), verb+preposition (face with), adjective+preposition (ready for), and preposition+noun (on demand). Second, lexical collocations consist of two or more content words; i.e., nouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjectives. Examples of lexical collocations are as follows: adjective+noun (instant coffee), verb+noun (do homework), noun+verb (time flies), adverb+adjective (totally different), verb+adverb (run quickly) or adverb+verb (hardly doubt). The verb+noun collocation, based on Benson et al.'s (1997) classification of collocation, is a type of lexical collocation.

With regards to the semantic categorization, verbs can be categorized into three groups; 'figurative', 'technical', and 'delexical' meanings. The present study aims at investigating 'delexical' verb+noun collocations in which the verb is a delexical verb based on Cowie's (1991) classification of verb. Delexical verbs are difficult for learners because they "have little or no meaning in its own right" according to the Oxford Dictionary (version 2.2.1). Sinclair and Fox (1990: 147) explained that "they (delexical verbs) are used with nouns as their object to indicate simply that someone performs an action, not that someone affects or creates something" (cited in Liao, 2010). Nesselhauf (2005: 20) also explained a function of delexical verb+noun collocations: "the noun is eventive and carries the bulk of the meaning, while the verb contributes comparatively little to the lexical meaning of the combination and can therefore be called 'a light verb'". For example, *have* in *have effect*, *do* in *do count*, *give* in *give name*, *make* in *make decision*, *get* in *get impression*, and *take* in *take lead*, carry very little meaning in the verbs themselves, and the meaning of the collocations is carried by the nouns. This research paper focuses on delexical verb+noun collocations because learners tend to make more 'errors' with this than with other types of collocations mentioned in the first part.

The combination of verb+noun in delexical structure also creates a unique meaning that is different from an individual word. Allan (1998) explained the difference between the usage of *look* as a simple verbal form and *have a look* as a delexical verb+noun collocation structure; in this case *have* served as a delexical verb, and *look* as a deverbal noun. The different perception of meaning between the terms *look* and *have a look* was observed as follows:

When a speaker uses a simple verbal form such as *look*, the focus is on the action; whereas when using the nominal form of the same verb in a delexical structure such as *have a look*, the speaker is naming an event and in so doing, delimiting an activity or state which in its verbal form lacks temporal boundaries or a sense of completeness (Allan, 1998: 1).

As previously mentioned, even delexical structure weakens the meaning of verb, in this case of a verb+noun collocation; however, they are rather semantically and syntactically significant. Allan (1998) added that “the nominalized processes are not only repeatable; they can be interrupted, resumed or terminated at any point” (Allan, 1998, p. 1-2). Kittigosin (2013: 14) also claimed that “although the semantic focus of these verbs is weakened, their uses are not interchangeable” For example, *take advice* and *give advice* are opposite in meaning to each other. Akimoto (1989) suggested that “synonymous verbs such as *produce*, or *create* cannot be substituted for the verb in the phrase *make an appointment*” (as cited in Kittigosin, 2013: 14). It can be assumed that learning of L2 collocations, especially in the case of delexical verb+noun collocation, can cause difficulties for L2 learners because they cannot make the direct link between the L2 collocation with L1 meaning and concept. Even when delexical verb+noun collocation is congruent, the learners cannot translate literally word-for-word between L2 and L1. For example, *do homework* is a congruent collocation; when the learners got two choices between *do* and *make*, sometimes it can be confusing to choose the correct choice because both *do* and *make* overlap in meaning of ‘perform’ (an action) in the Thai language.

Meanwhile, Ellis (1994) suggested that “where the two were identical, learning could take place easily through *positive transfer* of the native-language pattern, but where

they were different, learning difficulty arose and errors resulting from *negative transfer* were likely to occur” (p. 300). Similarly, when an L2 collocation can be word-for-word translated into L1 meaning, or a congruent collocation, learners could rely on the existing knowledge of L1 and their similarities can facilitate the acquisition of L2 as ‘positive transfer’, whereas when L2 collocation cannot be word-for-word translated into L1 meaning, or a non-congruent collocation, the existing knowledge of L1 seems not be helpful and their differences can hinder the acquisition of L2 as ‘negative transfer’. In this regard, Yumanee and Phoocharoensil (2013) revealed evidence of L1-Thai influence on L2 verb+noun collocation errors. For example, learners produced *\*build an impression* instead of *make an impression* that probably caused from their direct translation between English-Thai languages. Another example is when learners produced *\*find/look for money* instead of *make/earn money* because they could not find equivalent collocation, so they produced the L2 collocation based on their first language.

There is some research investigating the learning strategies and the use of delexical verbs of Thai students (e.g. Kittigosin and Phoocharoensil, 2015); however little information is available on whether individual factors such as proficiency levels and L1 influence will affect the delexical verb+noun collocational performance. Therefore, this study aims to address the specific gaps in the knowledge surrounding the use of different variables by selecting the high-frequency delexical verb+noun collocations from a native speaker corpus called the British National Corpus to investigate performance of students with different proficiency levels using various test patterns; i.e., comprehension and production tasks, in order to investigate the factors that can affect performance of learners, in this case, of delexical verb+noun collocations. The methodology will be presented below.

#### **4. Research Methodology**

##### **4.1 Participants**

Forty participants chosen for this study were students from the Faculty of Liberal Arts at Thammasat University whose first language is Thai. A quick placement test of the Oxford University Press was given randomly to 60 third-year students who enrolled to study in the general English course in the second semester in 2015-2016.

To identify the different proficiency levels of students (Advanced vs. Intermediate), this study adopted the cut-off quick placement score ranges as shown in the table below. Only advanced and intermediate levels of proficiency are chosen for the present study because there is no consensus among researchers whether collocational performance corresponds to the increasing proficiency levels. That is to say, the knowledge of collocation seems to reach a plateau at a higher proficiency level. Alternatively, one may argue that even students of higher proficiency levels e.g. advanced and/or intermediate levels might find difficulties when dealing with collocations, especially in the case of delexical verb+noun collocation. Therefore, it is worth investigating how differently these advanced and intermediate groups use the delexical verb+noun collocations. Due to unfavorable (and obvious) collocational performance of beginners, thus the present study includes only the advanced and the intermediate levels in the analysis. As shown in Table 1 below, the scores can be divided into two groups, those of the intermediate learners (20) and those of the advanced learners (20). This study adopts the cut-off quick placement score which ranges as follows:

**Table 1** Cut-off quick placement score ranges

<b>Learners' proficiency levels</b>	<b>Oxford placement score range</b>
Advanced	46-60
Intermediate	31-45

#### **4.2 Instruments**

The instruments in this study consisted of a multiple-choice test (Task 1), comprising of thirty delexical verb+noun collocations, and a semi-controlled sentence construction task with delexical verb+noun combinations (Task 2), comprising of six delexical verbs, each of which students can use twice, and twelve nouns in order to combine both verbs and nouns to construct twelve sentences including the combination of a verb and a noun in each sentence. Both tasks included the delexical verb+noun collocations that can be divided equally into congruent and non-congruent collocations.

- Selection of Collocation

The collocations were selected from the British National Corpus (BNC), focusing on verb+noun collocations in which the verb is delexical. The BNC represents the native language speakers. This study used delexical verb+noun collocations from the native corpus instead of learners' corpus because it represents language commonly used by native speakers.

In this study, six high-frequency delexical verbs were included (do, make, take, get, give, and have) because delexical verbs seem to confuse ESL/EFL learners, compared to lexical verbs (e.g., Chi et al., 1994; Liao, 2010; Miyakoshi, 2009). The collocations included L1-L2 congruency and non-congruency items. The L1-L2 congruency means the combination of delexical verb and noun that can be literally translated from English to Thai. On the other hand, the L1-L2 non-congruency means that the combination of delexical verb+noun collocation cannot be translated word-to-word from English to Thai. The delexical verb+noun collocations were selected with the frequency criterion by setting in the pattern of *[verb]+[determiner]+[noun]*. Then, the top five high-frequency of each group of different delexical verb+noun collocations were collected to design the multiple-choice test (Task 1) as shown in Table 2 and the semi-controlled sentence construction with delexical verb+noun combination task (Task 2) as shown in Table 3:

**Table 2** Delexical verb+noun collocations in multiple-choice test (Task 1)

Delexical verb+noun collocations	Congruence	Non-Congruence
1. have right มีสิทธิ์	✓	
2. have opportunity มีโอกาส	✓	
3. have power มีอำนาจ	✓	
4. have effect มีผลกระทบ	✓	
5. have advantage ความสะดวกสบาย	✓	
6. do job ทำงาน	✓	

Delexical verb+noun collocations	Congruence	Non-Congruence
7. do work ทำงาน	✓	
8. do trick ประสบผลสำเร็จ		✓
9. do honor ให้เกียรติ		✓
10. do count นับ		✓
11. give impression ให้ความรู้สึก	✓	
12. give chance ให้โอกาส	✓	
13. give illusion หลอกตา		✓
14. give appearance ทำให้ดูว่า		✓
15. give name ตั้งชื่อ		✓
16. make point ชี้ให้เห็น		✓
17. make decision ตัดสินใจ		✓
18. make effort พยายาม		✓
19. make mistake ทำผิด	✓	
20. make difference สร้างความเปลี่ยนแปลง	✓	
21. get chance ได้โอกาส	✓	
22. get money ได้เงิน	✓	
23. get job ได้งาน	✓	
24. get message เข้าใจ(ความหมาย)		✓
25. get impression รู้สึก		✓

Delexical verb+noun collocations	Congruence	Non-Congruence
26. take form ใช้รูปแบบ		✓
27. take view มีทัศนคติต่อ		✓
28. take opportunity ถือโอกาส	✓	
29. take lead นำ, เป็นผู้นำ		✓
30. take risk เสี่ยง		✓
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>

**Table 3** Delexical verbs and nouns in semi-controlled sentence construction with delexical verb+noun combination task (Task 2)

Delexical verbs	Nouns	Congruence (C)/ Non-Congruence (NC)
do	job	C
	trick	NC
make	mistake	C
	point	NC
take	opportunity	C
	form	NC
get	chance	C
	message	NC
give	chance	C
	appearance	NC

Delexical verbs	Nouns	Congruence (C)/ Non-Congruence (NC)
have	right	C
	advantage	C

*Multiple-choice task (Task 1)*

Thirty delexical verb+noun collocations were categorized into two groups, consisting of fifteen congruent items and fifteen non-congruent items, in order to examine learners' cross-linguistic influence on collocation errors and its relationship to learners' language proficiency levels. An English sentence was shown with a blank space on one correct delexical verb and three distractors of incorrect delexical verbs. Examples of test items are shown as follows:

Examples of each delexical verb in a sentence (Task 1)

**(1) Delexical verb - Do**

Item no. 14. At first my brother did not want to help out, but a phone call from my wife \_\_\_\_\_ the trick and he showed up the next morning.  
 a. made                      b. got                      c. gave                      d. did

**(2) Delexical verb - Make**

Item no. 7. Please don't \_\_\_\_\_ a point of Jane's comment. It wasn't that important.  
 a. do                      b. get                      c. give                      d. make

**(3) Delexical verb - Take**

Item no. 8. I would like to \_\_\_\_\_ this opportunity to thank them for their support.  
 a. get                      b. do                      c. give                      d. take

**(4) Delexical verb - Get**

Item no. 27. I \_\_\_\_\_ the impression that you disliked her.  
 a. got                      b. did                      c. made                      d. took

**(5) Delexical verb - Give**

Item no. 21. He \_\_\_\_\_ the appearance of being interested in the project.  
 a. did                      b. gave                      c. got                      d. took

**(6) Delexical verb - Have**

Item no. 17. Progesterone \_\_\_\_\_ the effect of increasing the body temperature.

- a. gets                      b. has                      c. does                      d. gives

*Semi-controlled sentence construction with delexical verb+noun combination task*

*(Task 2)*

Twelve delexical verb+noun collocations were used again in the semi-controlled sentence construction with delexical verb+noun combinations task. The delexical verb+noun collocations were selected by choosing the top two high-frequency of each delexical verb+noun collocation with one congruent and the other non-congruent (*do a job, do the trick, make a mistake, make a point, take an opportunity, take the form, get a chance, get the message, give a chance, give the impression, have a right, have the advantage*). The twelve delexical verb+noun collocations were collected from the multiple-choice task and then divided between six delexical verbs and twelve nouns. The participants were asked to make sentences choosing one noun to use with each of the six delexical verbs (do, make, take, get, give, and have). This task, like the multiple-choice task, aimed to: 1) examine cross-linguistic influence on collocation errors focusing on delexical verbs and the relationship with learners' language proficiency, and 2) test the learners' performance in both comprehension and production tasks.

**5. Results and Discussion**

To examine the effect of proficiency level on learners' collocational performance, learners with two different proficiency levels (advanced and intermediate) were asked to do two tasks: the multiple-choice test (Task 1), the semi-controlled sentence construction with delexical verb+noun combination (Task 2). Each task was specifically designed to tap different kinds of knowledge: the first task measured the learners' comprehension while the second task explored learners' production of collocation.

**Table 4** Descriptive statistics for delexical verb+noun collocation scores in multiple-choice test (Task 1) and semi-controlled sentence construction with delexical verb+noun combination task (Task 2)

Group	n	Task 1		Task 2	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Advanced	20	25.55 (85.17%)	2.52	9.85 (82.08%)	1.35
Intermediate	20	22.00 (73.33%)	2.08	9.55 (79.58%)	1.31
Average scores for both groups of students		23.78 (79.25%)		9.70 (80.83%)	

Findings show two important roles of proficiency level on learners' performance on collocation. First, the higher the proficiency level of a language learner, the better performance in collocation tests they will have. In this case, the advanced group could perform better than the intermediate group across all tasks as shown in Table 4. In the multiple-choice test, the mean scores of the advanced and intermediate are 85.17% and 73.33% respectively, which shows significant difference. Similarly, in the semi-controlled tasks, the advanced outperformed the intermediate; the mean score of the advanced reached 82.08% and the intermediate 79.58% respectively. Based on the data, one may make a hasty conclusion that proficiency level might serve as a good indicator for learners' performance in collocation. In this case, if the advanced learners had obtained better collocation knowledge than the intermediate group, they would have performed better in both tasks. However, the results from this study showed that the advanced group performed better in the multiple choice task but not in the semi-controlled production task, which may imply that collocational performance may not necessarily correlate with the learners' proficiency level. It could also suggest that there might be some other factors determining the learner's collocational performance (see section below).

Given the statistical differences, only the between-group scores in multiple-choice task showed statistical differences ( $t(38) = 4.858, p < .001$ , two tailed), whereas, no statistical difference could be observed (in semi-controlled sentence construction task  $t(38) = .476, p = .637$ , two tailed). Then, it may not be possible to claim that the advanced had better collocation knowledge than the intermediate group because each task taps a different type of knowledge. In this case, the multiple choice task taps the comprehension knowledge of delexical verb+noun collocations, while the semi-controlled sentence construction task taps the production knowledge of the delexical verb+noun collocations. In this case, it is plausible that the advanced and intermediate learners may not differ significantly in terms of collocation knowledge because, given the results from the semi-controlled sentence construction task, their performance is more or less the same.

Alternatively, one may argue that the advanced learners are more skillful in test-taking especially in multiple-choice test (Ghafournia, 2013; Kim and Chon, 2014; Lee, 2011; Phakiti, 2003). In the Thai educational context, most students have been trained to do multiple-choice tests and become familiar with test-taking strategies. Based on research studies (Phakiti, 2003; 2006) conducted on teaching and learning English in the Thai context, most Thai students are trained to do multiple-choice test for more than a decade. Also, it is found that both local and national tests, i.e. school-level test, university entrance exam, TOEIC, are all multiple-choice tests.

To illustrate, generally, test-taking process involves three components for the test-takers: (1) background knowledge, (2) test-management strategies, and (3) test-wiseness strategies. Background knowledge can be defined as “the ways that respondents operationalise their basic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, as well as the related skills of vocabulary learning, grammar, and translation” (Cohen, 2006: 308, cited in Kim and Chon, 2014), in this case it includes collocational knowledge and other related English skills to decode the meaning from the sentence in order to choose the correct answer. They can be considered as a type of cognitive strategies. For test-management strategies, they can be considered as a type of metacognitive strategies. Learners use these strategies in planning, monitoring, and evaluating a particular text to find the accurate answer meaningfully (Phakiti, 2006: 53). The last type, test-wiseness

strategies refer to “the ability to respond advantageously to multiple-choice items containing extraneous clues and, therefore, to obtain credit without knowledge of the subject matter being tested” (Evans, 1984: 141). In this study, the only difference is shown in the multiple choice task. It is then highly likely that the advanced learners possess better test-wiseness strategies—knowing how to tackle multiple choice tests better than the intermediate group. This phenomenon might be explained by the evidence that the test-taking strategies significantly develop according to the increasing proficiency levels, while it was not found as significant increase in the production knowledge. The findings of this study may suggest that the increasing proficiency levels of learners cannot be a reliable predictor of the collocational performance, especially in the case of production knowledge of collocations. It can be said that both background knowledge (i.e. collocational knowledge) and test-wiseness strategies (which was used to tackle multiple-choice test) helped advanced learners to performed significantly better than the intermediate group in the multiple choice task, while the advanced group obtained only slightly higher scores in semi-controlled task. This suggests that the two groups had more or less the same levels of collocational knowledge, but the factor that led to such a difference is the advanced group’s ability to use test-wiseness strategies. This phenomenon is in line with the finding of Kim and Chon (2014), who argued that advanced learners used background knowledge and test-wiseness strategies more frequently than the low-level learners, whereas middle- and low-level learners prefer to use test-management strategies as a metacognitive strategies because they lack the background knowledge (or reading strategies in this case). They concluded that high-level learners can use test-taking strategies more efficiently than low-level learners.

The result from this study is in line with previous studies (Ghafournia, 2013; Kim and Chon, 2014; Lee, 2011; Phakiti, 2006) on test-taking strategies. Ghafournia (2013) examined the use of different types of test-taking strategies by three groups of learners with different proficiency levels. The results show that the highly proficient group used the overall test-taking strategies, especially avoidance strategies, more frequently than the other low-proficiency groups, while the intermediate showed the highest use of guessing strategies. Because the lower proficiency learners have insufficient knowledge, they tend to use guessing strategies to find the correct answers.

The multiple-choice test consists of four choices and there is only one correct answer; therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the guessing strategies without enough background knowledge can lead to the more possibility of incorrect answers. Interestingly, Phakiti (2003, 2006) asserted that there is positive correlation of cognitive and metacognitive strategies used with proficiency; high-proficient learners significantly use more metacognitive strategies than low-proficient learners that can lead to a successful test performance. Overall, it is generally agreed that the advanced use test-taking strategies more frequently and more efficiently than the lower-proficient ones. This may explain why the advanced group performed better than the intermediate group, especially in multiple-choice test.

Several research studies implied that collocational knowledge could be an indicator of general language proficiency levels of learners. As of the general perspective of collocational knowledge, most found that learners with higher proficiency levels would perform better in the collocational tests both production and comprehension tasks. The result revealed that the collocational performance between the groups did not differ significantly across tasks. Previous research (Ghafournia, 2013; Kim and Chon, 2014; Phakiti, 2006) suggested that multiple-choice test-taking strategies enable learners to get satisfactory test scores. Moreover, the strategic development in dealing with the test seems to be improved once students attain higher proficiency levels. As advanced learners were able to use test-taking strategies more efficiently, they could perform significantly better in the multiple-choice test. As earlier mentioned, Thai learners are quite familiar with the multiple-choice test, especially advanced learners seem to be more proficient in applying test-taking strategies to do the tests, so it could definitely be helpful at taking the tests. It might be said that the better collocational knowledge of advanced level, even not significantly more than intermediate level, as well as their ability to use the test-taking strategies can lead to successful multiple-choice test performance. In relation to the collocational performance in this study, it can be seen that intermediate learners could not comprehend or produce the collocations which they are not familiar with and even advanced learners still have relatively limited exposure to collocations, especially in the case of the performance of collocational production task. As a result, it could be claimed that the high level of linguistic

proficiency of learners could not be a representation of a good command of collocational knowledge, there might be other factors that also affect collocational performance; e.g., L1 effect which will be discussed next.

**Table 5** Descriptive statistics for delexical verb+noun collocation scores (congruence and non-congruence) in multiple choice test (Task 1) and semi-controlled sentence construction with delexical verb+noun combination (Task 2)

Group	n	Task 1				Task 2			
		Congruence		Non-congruence		Congruence		Non-congruence	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Advanced	20	13.85 (92.33%)	0.93	11.70 (78.00%)	1.84	5.45 (90.83%)	1.15	4.40 (73.33%)	0.83
Intermediate	20	13.25 (88.33%)	1.25	8.75 (58.33%)	1.78	5.20 (86.67%)	1.10	4.35 (72.5%)	0.95

Table 5 presents the congruence and non-congruence of delexical verb+noun collocations performance in order to investigate L1 transfer effect. Based on the findings, L1 transfer is the source of collocational errors for both advanced and intermediate groups of learners. As shown in Table 5, both advanced and intermediate participants cannot perform well in non-congruence group of collocations; they scored less than 85% on the non-congruent delexical verb+noun collocations in both comprehension and production tasks. This seems that the difference of L1-L2 collocations causes learners problems, as this study found that they too heavily rely on their mother tongue in acquiring L2 collocations. The difference between congruence and non-congruence was statically significant in both tasks; in multiple-choice task ( $t(19) = 6.582, p < .001$ , two tailed for advanced group, and  $t(19) = 8.907, p < .001$ , two tailed for intermediate group), and in semi-controlled sentence construction with delexical verb+noun combination ( $t(19) = 3.053, p < .001$ , two tailed for advanced group, and  $t(19) = 2.319, p < .001$ , two tailed for intermediate group).

Also, given the statistical differences, only the between-group scores of non-congruent collocations in multiple-choice test showed statistical differences ( $t(38) = 5.165, p < .001$ , two tailed) while no statistical differences between-group scores of congruent collocations were observed in both comprehension and production tasks. This findings may be explained by the claim of Yamashita and Jiang (2010) that the process of acquiring non-congruent collocations seems to take more time than the congruent collocations, as “the congruent collocations can be accepted on the basis of their L1 counterparts” (p. 663). It might be said that the congruent collocations can be understood and produced by learners with their L1 encounter; as a result, both learners of high and low proficiency levels can perform very well across tasks of congruent items, as no statistical differences between groups were observed. As mentioned earlier, even if the learners can comprehend that L2 collocation, they might not know how to produce it correctly as the productive knowledge always lags behind the comprehensive knowledge, especially for the non-congruent collocations. It can be seen that advanced learners got significantly better scores of non-congruent collocations than intermediate learners in the comprehension, but not significantly better in the production tasks, as given statistical differences between groups only in the multiple-choice task performance was observed. The findings of this study may suggest that L1 affects the acquisition of collocations for both advanced and intermediate levels of learners in two ways; the L1-L2 similarities will facilitate the acquisition of L2 collocations in across tasks for both high- and low- proficiency levels of learners, whereas the L1-L2 differences will hinder the acquisition of L2 collocations. It can be seen that advanced learners might perform significantly better in the non-congruent collocations than intermediate learners in the comprehension task; however, even the advanced group found difficulties in the non-congruent items as they could not reach the scores of 85%, especially in the production task.

## **6. Pedagogical Recommendations**

The finding of this study can shed some light on whether the proficiency levels of students play a role on the collocational performance; i.e., verb+noun collocation. The finding is contrary to the widely-held view that advanced learners will perform

better than intermediate learners across tasks. This study shows that advanced learners could not perform significantly better than intermediate learners across tasks, especially in the case of production task that taps the production knowledge of delexical verb+noun collocations. It can be concluded that Thai EFL learners have difficulties when dealing with delexical verb+noun collocations; even advanced learners have collocational knowledge deficits especially in producing the collocations. Moreover, both groups of learners seem to rely on the first language in dealing with the L2 collocations which leads to another factor for collocational errors. As said, the non-congruent collocations are problematic for non-native learners, in this case, Thai students. It might be interpreted that learners have deficient knowledge of collocations or limited exposure to the L2 collocations in real contexts. This can be clearly seen in this study when learners need to use non-congruent delexical verb+noun collocations in a different context through the semi-controlled production task of collocations. Even the performance of advanced learners did not differ significantly from intermediate learners. These results can help English teachers in Thailand think about how to develop their teaching of collocations, which are problematic for Thai EFL learners. Moreover, this study suggests the different teaching methods for collocation to be used with each level of learners.

In regards to the teaching of collocation (Lewis, 2000), this study thus suggests a need for teaching on collocations focusing on the commonly used instead of rare words to improve their collocational competence in daily life for both intermediate and advanced levels of learners. To improve the learners' collocational knowledge in a plateau, teachers can develop task that can encourage the more advanced knowledge, teacher might say e.g. *She will help you to make a tough decision faster* instead of saying *She will help you to make a decision*. Moreover, teachers should enable learners to become aware of the similarities and the differences between their first language and the target language, especially for the intermediate learners. Teachers should highlight the collocations that can confuse the learners; e.g., *make mistake*, vs *\*do mistake*, and *give appearance* vs. *\*receive appearance*. It is recommended that some of the collocations should be memorized in sets; this requires teachers to encourage learners' repeated exposure to collocations within meaningful contexts. The native speakers' corpus could be used to enable learners to familiarize themselves with collocations with various

examples that are used in the real world's context. Teachers can use activities and exercises to promote learners' comprehensive and productive collocation skills, such as raising topics for students to tell or retell stories to highlight the use of collocations. In terms of further research, regarding teaching and learning L2 collocations, firstly a broader context in which to gain insights into factors that may affect the collocational errors, such as learning environment (ESL vs. EFL), proficiency levels, task types, and the frequency and familiarity on collocations, should be included. Also, collocation tests should include both lexical and grammatical collocations; thus, future research could integrate the design of this study to examine the collocational errors according to the academic settings. Lastly, future studies should include think-aloud protocol to examine strategies and thinking during the test-taking process of advanced and intermediate learners. Such studies would not only be theoretically significant, but would also be useful in practice.

#### References

- Akimoto, M. (1989). *A study of verbo-nominal structures in English*. Tokyo: Shinozaki Shorin.
- Al-Zahrani, M. S. (1998). *Knowledge of English lexical collocations among male Saudi college students majoring in English at a Saudi university*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania.
- Allan, Q. (1998). Delexical verbs and degrees of desemantization. *Word*, 49, 1-17.
- Alsakran, R. A. (2011). *The productive and receptive knowledge of collocations by advanced Arabic-Speaking ESL/EFL learners*. Unpublished master's thesis, Colorado State University, USA.
- Benson, M., Benson, E. & Ilson, R. (1997). *The BBI dictionary of English word combinations*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Chi, A. M., Wong, K. P. & Wong, M. C. (1994). Collocational problems amongst ESL learners: a corpus-based study. In L. Flowerdew and A. K. K. Tong (Eds.), *Entering Text* (pp. 157-165). Hong Kong: University of Science and Technology.

- Cowie, A. P. (1991). Multiword units in newspaper language. In Sylviane Granger (Ed.), *Perspective on the English Lexicon. A Tribute to Jacque van Roey* (pp. 101-116). Louvain-la-Neuve: Cahiers de l'Institut de Linguistique de Louvain.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1994). Phraseology. In Asher, R.E. (Ed.), *The encyclopaedia of language and linguistics* (pp. 3168-3171). Oxford: Pergamon.
- Ellis, R. (1994). *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Evans, W. (1984). Test wiseness: An examination of cue-using strategies. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 52(3) Spr 1984, 141-144.
- Firth, J. R. (1957). *Papers in linguistics: 1934-1951*. London - New York - Toronto: Oxford University Press. xii, 233 pp.
- Ghafournia, N. (2013) .The relationship between using multiple-choice test-taking strategies and general language proficiency levels. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 70, 90-94.
- Gitsaki, C. (1996). *The development of ESL collocational knowledge*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Queensland, St. Lucia, Queensland, Australia.
- Halliday, M.A.K. (1966). Lexis as a linguistic Level. In C.E. Bazell et al (Eds.), *In Memory of J.R. Firth*. London: Longman, 150-161.
- Henriksen, B. (2013). Research on L2 learners' collocational competence and development -- a progress report [Monograph]. EUROSLA Monograph Series, 2, 29-56.
- Howarth, P. (1996). *Phraseology in English academic writing: Some implications for language learning and dictionary making*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag.
- Hsu, J. (2002). *Development in collocational proficiency in a workshop on English for general business purposes for Taiwanese college students*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania.
- Kim, S. H. & Chon, Y. V. (2014). Test-taking strategies of L2 adolescent learners: Three multiple-choice items and L2 proficiency. *English Teaching*, 69(1), 61-90.

- Kittigosin, R. (2013). *Analysis of English delexical verbs in Thai EFL learners' interlanguage*. Unpublished master's thesis, Thammasat University.
- Kittigosin, R. & Phoocharoensil, S. (2015). Investigation into learning strategies and delexical verbs used by Thai EFL learners. 3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature. *The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 21(2), 63-72.
- Kroll, J.F. & Stewart (1994). Category interference in translation and picture naming: Evidence for asymmetric connections between bilingual memory representations. *Journal of Memory and Language*, 33, 149-174.
- Laufer, B. (1998). The development of passive and active vocabulary in a second language: Same or different?. *Applied Linguistics*, 19, 255-271.
- Laufer, B., & Waldman, T. (2011). Verb-noun collocations in second-language writing: A corpus analysis of learners' English. *Language Learning*, 61(2), 647-672.
- Lee, J-Y. (2011). English Learning Styles of Students from East Asian Countries: A Focus on Reading Strategies. *International Education Studies*, 4(2), 75-81.
- Lewis, M. (2000). *Teaching collocation: Further development in the lexical approach*. London: Commercial Colour Press Plc.
- Liao, E. H. (2010). *An investigation of crosslinguistic transfer in EFL learners' phraseology*. Alliant International University, San Diego.
- McCarthy, M. (1990). *Vocabulary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Miyakoshi, T. (2009). *Investigating ESL learners' lexical collocations: the acquisition of verb+noun collocations by Japanese learners of English*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Hawai'i at Manoa, Honolulu, Hawai'i.
- Nesselhauf, N. (2003). The use of collocations by advanced learners of English and some implications for teaching. *Applied Linguistics*, 24(2), 223-242.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2005). *Collocations in a Learner Corpus*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Nizonkiza, D. (2012). *The relationship between lexical competence, collocational competence, and second language proficiency*. Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Antwerp.

- Phakiti, A. (2003). A closer look at the relationship of cognitive and metacognitive strategy use to EFL reading comprehension test performance. *Language Testing, 20*, 26-56.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2006). Theoretical and pedagogical issues in ESL/EFL teaching of strategic reading. *University of Sydney Papers in TESOL, 1*, 19-50.
- Phoocharoensil, S. (2011). Collocation errors in EFL learners' interlanguage. *Journal of Education and Practice, 2*(3), 103-120.
- Shehata, A. (2008). *L1 Influence on the reception and production of collocations by advanced ESL/EFL Arabic Learners of English*. Unpublished master's thesis, Ohio University.
- Sinclair, J. M. (1966). Beginning the study of lexis. In Bazell, C.E., Catford, J.C., Halliday, M.A.K., and Robins, R.H. (Eds.), *In memory of J.R. Firth* (pp. 410-430). London: Longman.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1991). *Corpus, Concordance, Collocation*. Oxford: OUP.
- Sinclair, J. M. & Fox, G. (1990). *Collins COBUILD English grammar*. London: Collins.
- Wang, Y. 2013. *Delexical verb + noun collocations in Swedish and Chinese learner English*. Doctoral dissertation, Uppsala University.
- Yamashita, J. & Jiang, N. (2010). L1 influence on the acquisition of L2 collocations: Japanese ESL users and EFL learners acquiring English collocations. *TESOL Quarterly, 44*, 647-668.
- Yumane, C. & Phoocharoensil, S. (2013). Analysis of collocational errors of Thai EFL students. *Language Education and Acquisition Research Network, 1*(1), 90-100.