

Patani Malay & Southern Thai Speakers' Language Learning Strategies in Acquiring English Collocations

RUNGROJ CHORBWHAN*

Department of English Language and Linguistics, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Gadong, Brunei Darussalam

JAMES McLELLAN

Department of English Language and Linguistics, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Gadong, Brunei Darussalam

DEBBIE G.E. HO

Department of English Language and Linguistics, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Gadong, Brunei Darussalam

*Corresponding author e-mail: chorbwhan2527@gmail.com

This study aims to investigate (i) the Patani Malay (PM) and Southern Thai (ST) learners' knowledge of English collocations, (ii) the learning strategies employed by the two groups with different levels of English proficiency and (iii) the impact of their learning strategies on their test performance. Thirty-nine student participants from each group participated in the study. All were English major students in the international program at Fatoni University in Pattani, Thailand. Four types of research instruments were used to collect data: World English language placement test, collocation test, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning or SILL questionnaire of language learning strategies (Oxford, 1990) and individual interviews with 12 informants. The analysis is based on both quantitative and qualitative methods. The findings show no significant difference for both groups in the use of learning strategies. Both groups show a preference for metacognitive learning strategies in the acquisition of English collocations. Despite there being no significant difference between the two groups in terms of learning strategies, the overall collocation test results show ST learners performing better than their PM counterparts. And although results from the SILL indicate that learning strategies may not play a significant role in the participants' acquisition of English collocation, this indication is not reflected in subsequent findings from the interview data and a sociocultural analysis of the context under study.

Keywords *language learning strategies, English collocations, English proficiency*

INTRODUCTION

Lexical proficiency plays a major role in English language learning in all the four skill areas, listening, speaking, reading and writing. Unfortunately, it is also "one of the major challenges that foreign language learners face during the process of learning a language" (Ghazal, 2010, p. 84). Thai learners are required to study English for approximately sixteen years: six years at primary school, six years at secondary school and four years at university. However, most of them are not able to communicate in English or to use it fluently. Chorbwhan's (2013) study found that although Thais learners have relatively little difficulty with acquiring single word meanings, they do exhibit considerable problems when it comes to the acquisition of chunks of words that co-occur. In particular, these learners exhibit difficulty in the acquisition of collocations in English.

This study examines the proficiency levels of English collocations between two groups of Thai learners in southern Thailand who speak two unrelated first languages (L1): Patani Malay (henceforth PM) and Southern Thai (henceforth ST). Furthermore, it puts forward the argument that



the learning strategies employed by these learners may play a significant role in the successful acquisition of English collocations.

English collocations, learning strategies and the relationship between the two

So, what exactly is English collocation? It is defined as a group or chunk of words which co-occur and have syntagmatic relations (Lewis, 1997, p. 8). Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992, p. 178) describe it as a fixed and restricted meaning between free word combinations and idioms. Collocation consists of a node which refers to a head word and a collocate which occurs with the node (Shin & Nation, 2008 p. 341), for instance, 'commit a crime', 'make a mistake', and 'strong coffee'. This paper excludes the free combinations of words since the node can be free with any collocate, for example, 'drink coffee' can be 'drink water', 'drink tea' or 'drink orange juice'. It also does not include idioms because the meaning is too fixed and cannot be guessed from the literal meaning of the individual words, for example, 'blow the gaff' which means 'spread the secret to others' and 'kick the bucket' which means 'pass away'. This paper focuses on two categories of collocations based on Benson, Benson and Ilson (1986).

Previous studies have shown that collocation is a crucial factor in helping to enhance learners' language proficiency (Lewis, 1997; Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992). These and other studies have also shown that collocation is one of the most problematic areas for learners who have English as either their second language (henceforth ESL) or as a foreign language (henceforth EFL) (Bueraheng, 2014; Nesselhauf, 2003; Phoocharoensil, 2013), and Thailand is a case in point. Chorbwhan and McLellan's (2016) study found that acquisition of English collocations has been a problem in southern Thailand irrespective of the learners' first language. This is because English is an additional and foreign language in Thailand. Also, it is not used as a medium of instruction in schools. As a result, Thai learners are not much exposed to the English language. Furthermore, English collocations are not focused and prioritized in class. So, when students go to university, they exhibit problems with collocations. From the first-named author's observations while working in southern Thailand, Thai learners tend to rely on learning strategies such as using the L1 equivalent to acquire English collocations. They attempt to find an equivalent of an English collocation, and produce expressions such as *'powerful coffee' instead of 'strong coffee', *'strong rain' instead of 'heavy rain' and *'heavy wind' instead of 'strong wind'. Therefore, their use of collocations deviates quite considerably from that of Standard English. But is the search for an L1 equivalent the only strategy students use in acquiring English collocations? What about other kinds of learning strategies such as memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies? And how influential are they in helping students to successfully acquire English collocations? This paper attempts to address these questions and thus provide further insights into the impact of learning strategies in the acquisition of an additional language.

Oxford (1996) claims that success in the acquisition of English collocations correlates positively to the use of the language learning strategies set out in Oxford's (1990) taxonomy called the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). Language learning strategies based on the taxonomy are categorized into two types: direct strategies and indirect strategies. The former consists of three types: memory, cognitive and compensation strategies and the latter includes metacognitive, affective and social strategies. First, memory strategies are used for storing and retrieving new information. Second, cognitive strategies enable learners to connect new information with their

existing knowledge in order to understand a new language through practicing, receiving and sending messages, analyzing and reasoning, and creating a structure for input and output. Third, compensation strategies help students compensate for their missing knowledge when they do not know the words or grammar. Fourth, metacognitive strategies are used as “techniques for organizing, focusing and evaluating one’s own learning”. They are related to the manipulation and evaluation of their own learning process. The strategies are essential for successful language learning because they contribute to learners arranging effective language learning. Fifth, affective strategies are used to adjust emotions, motivations, and attitudes. These strategies contain lowering anxiety, encouraging oneself, and taking one’s emotional temperature. Lastly, social strategies help learners learn through interaction with others. They cover asking questions, cooperating with others, and also emphasizing with others (Oxford, 1990). Oxford’s taxonomy has been employed as a research instrument in a number of studies related to language and learning strategies. Tabatabaei and Hoseini (2014), for example, used it in a case study to explore the learning of EFL and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) of Iranian learners’ collocation knowledge in reading passages and found that the two groups utilized different strategies in acquiring English collocations.

Studies on the relationship between learning strategies and English collocations in ESL and EFL contexts have been quite well documented in research on second language acquisition (SLA). However, there are few studies that look at language learning strategies in the acquisition of English collocations between learners with different and unrelated first languages within a particular community. This paper focuses on the language learning strategies of Patani Malay (PM) and Southern Thai (ST) speakers in Thailand and the impact of these learning strategies on the acquisition of English collocations. The study is based on two hypotheses. The first is that there will be a difference in the use of learning strategies between the two groups and the second hypothesis is that learners with low levels of proficiency in English collocations will use learning strategies that are different from learners at the higher proficiency levels. Moreover, the researchers try to understand the learners with different cross-cultural backgrounds - Southern Thai and Patani Malay contexts might yield different knowledge of English collocations.

Context of study

There are four provinces in southern Thailand where PM is widely spoken as an L1 including Narathiwat, Yala, Pattani and four districts of Songkhla. These areas are quite volatile in the sense that they are hotbeds of social unrest. The conflicting and unstable situation there means that they do not attract tourists, so opportunities for interaction between locals and foreign tourists are limited. Thus the support for English is negligible there compared to other parts of Thailand. Everywhere else in southern Thailand, people mostly have ST as their L1. These are areas where there is frequent interaction between the local people and English speakers. Places such as Phuket, Krabi and Phangnga, for example, are well-known tourist destinations for foreigners, especially Europeans. Moreover, there are a bigger number of schools in the ST areas employing foreign teachers or native English speaking teachers when compared to the PM areas.

ST and PM are vernaculars derived from different language families. PM is from the Austronesian language family, and ST is from the Tai-Kadai family. The former is related to standard Malay which is used as the national language of Malaysia in terms of lexis and structures, and the latter is very similar to standard Thai in terms of consonants and vowels with the exception of tone. Standard Thai



is the formal language in Thailand and is understood by all Thais. Both PM and ST speakers have standard Thai as a lingua franca among themselves and English is used as an additional language in schools. The university students in this study operate under an identical educational system and similar learning conditions. Lecturers are mainly non-native English speakers.

PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Is there a significant difference between PM and ST learners in their acquisition of English collocation?
2. Is there a significant difference between learners of different levels of proficiency in English collocation across and within the two groups of speakers?
3. Is there a significant difference in the learning strategies of learners at different levels of proficiency in English collocation for both groups?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants of the study were thirty-nine ST and thirty-nine PM speaking students in a local university who were pursuing an English major degree. All were between years one and four during the period of this study. All of them had either PM or ST as their first language. They had all sat for the World English placement test developed by Chase (2012) for general proficiency in English and were selected from the high ability (H, N=13), middle ability (M, N=13) and low ability (L, N=13) groups, according to the results they obtained in this test.

Instruments for data collection

Four types of research instruments were employed in this study: the productive and receptive English collocation tests, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning or SILL questionnaire (Oxford, 1990), individual interviews and a sociocultural framework to investigate participants' language learning strategies (LLS).

1. *English collocation tests*

The target collocations in both tests were taken from two categories of English collocations. The first one is lexical collocations: Verb + Noun such as 'take part' and Adjective + Noun such as 'strong coffee'. The other one is grammatical collocations: Noun + Preposition such as 'confidence in' and Verb + Preposition such as 'depend on'. The reason for focusing on these four types of collocations is because they are the most common collocations found in everyday English communication (Nesselhauf, 2003) and they are also considered to be more challenging types of collocations for Thai learners (Phoocharoensil, 2013). It is noted that all eighty items for each test were extracted from a larger pool of collocations from previous studies, checked against the British National Corpus (BNC, 2007) and validated by a native speaker of English and four English as a Foreign Language (EFL) experts in southern Thailand.

The collocation tests consist of a productive and a receptive test (80 items each). All thirty-nine

learners from each group of speakers sat for the collocation tests at the Liberal Arts and Social Sciences Faculty meeting room at Fatoni University. The productive test was administered first taking an hour followed by the 30-minute receptive test.

Productive Test

This was adapted from Szudarski's (2000) gap filling test and consisted of eighty items. Each item consists of a translation of the collocation in the students' first language: Patani Malay or Southern Thai. The translation in the L1 is in parentheses comprising only the node and its collocate. The rest of the sentence was in English since the participants of both groups were studying English as their major and used English as a medium of learning. Therefore, it was assumed that they could understand the context.

Receptive Test

For the receptive test, eighty items were constructed with the same target collocations adapted from Gyllstad (2007, p. 308ff) with a Yes-No check for each item. The participants chose the 'Yes' box if the collocation provided was correct and the 'No' box if it was incorrect. There were altogether forty correct and forty incorrect items in the test.

2. Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this study was adapted from the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning or SILL (Oxford, 1990). It consisted of two parts. The first part sought to elicit demographic information of the participants and the second part sought to identify learners' language learning strategies. This section was divided into 6 parts with 50 items relating to the types of strategies examined in this paper, namely the memory strategies (items 1-9), cognitive strategies (items 10-23), compensation strategies (items 24 - 29), metacognitive strategies (items 30 - 38), affective strategies (items 39 - 44) and social strategies (items 45 - 50). All learners had to take the questionnaire after the receptive test, and it took approximately 15 minutes. However, the questionnaire used in this study is considered to be one of the limitations since it seems ambiguous among the test items themselves.

3. Interview

Following from the questionnaire, twelve participant learners took part in individual interviews. Six were from the ST group and the other six from the PM group. These were learners at different levels of proficiency in English collocation, based on their performance in the productive and receptive collocation tests. Each interview lasted between thirty and forty-five minutes. Interview questions revolved around the learning strategies these interviewees used in their test performance. It was a semi-structured interview where the participants were asked to give elaborated answers to questions posed.

Sociocultural framework in language learning strategy (LLS)

In addition to the above-mentioned methods of data collection, a sociocultural framework that seeks to provide a "sociocultural standpoint" (Gao, 2010, p.580) was employed to further support the findings and results in this study. This framework places a learner's individuality as dynamic and contextually situated. The framework constitutes three components: discursive or learning resources, material resources and social resources (Donato & McCormick, 1994). Discursive



resources refer to the dominant values, attitudes and opinions of learning English in southern Thailand. Material resources or artifacts and material conditions refer to the cultural practices or the learning conditions under which English is acquired. In some contexts, teachers would, for example, require students to memorise phrasal verbs or word chunks to pass exams, while in other contexts the learning of English would be via extensive reading or learning games and interactive activities. And the social resources refer to teachers or educators relevant to learners' learning process in particular contexts and can be regarded as supportive to learners including parents, family members, teachers and academics in the area.

Data analysis

Mixed methods, both quantitative and qualitative, were used in the study. SPSS version 23, independent t-test, mean score and standard deviation were used to investigate whether there were statistically significant differences between test scores of collocations from productive and receptive tests as well as frequency scores of learning strategies obtained from the questionnaire. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), which measures the difference in two or more vectors of means, was also utilized to compare the learners' scores with three independent variables: H, M and L subgroups. Moreover, the thematic approach of Creswell and Clark (2007) was also employed as a qualitative measure to analyze the interviews and sociocultural perspectives to make research findings more feasible and reliable.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The productive and receptive collocation tests

All thirty-nine learners from each speaker group sat for the productive and receptive English collocation tests in an attempt to address the first two research questions.

1.1 Is there a significant difference between PM and ST learners in the acquisition of English collocation?

The test scores on both the productive and receptive collocation tests for both groups were subjected to statistical analysis and the results are shown in Table 1. There were eighty collocation items in each of the two tests.

Table 1
Overall scores of English collocations of ST and PM speakers

Participants	Mean	S.D	T	Df	P
Southern Thai (N=39)	76.33	12.40	2.25	76	.027
Patani Malay (N=39)	70.28	11.33			

Based on the total score of 80 in the receptive test and 80 in the productive test, a significant difference was found at the .05 level in the overall score for the two groups ($t = 2.25$, $df = 76$, $p = .027$, two-tailed, independent samples). Based on this finding, it appears that the ST learners performed better overall compared to the PM learners. In a sense, this indicates that the ST learners

demonstrated greater knowledge of and therefore higher proficiency in English collocation compared to the PM speakers.

1.2 Is there a significant difference between the different ability groups of ST and PM learners in the acquisition of the English collocation?

To divide learners based on their proficiency in English collocation (N= 160), four subcategories of score range were constructed: 0-69 was categorized as the low ability group, 70-100 as the lower middle ability group, 101-130 as the upper middle ability group and 131-160 as the high ability group. However, although the findings showed the ST learners performing better than their PM counterparts, no one in both groups obtained scores in the upper middle and high ability score ranges. As a result, learners were divided into just two subgroups of ability, the lower middle ability (LM) and the low ability (L) groups: LMST=29, LST=10 and LMPM=19, LPM=20.

Table 2

Collocation scores between the lower middle and low ability groups of ST and PM learners

Test type	LMST		LMPM	LST		LPM
	M (SD)	M (SD)	Sig.	M (SD)	M (SD)	Sig.
Collocation scores	81.45 (7.18)	76.95 (4.44)	.019	61.50 (7.25)	61.80 (4.29)	.887

* $p < 0.05$

Table 2 shows the collocation scores of ST and PM learners at two levels of ability in English collocation – the lower middle ability and low ability learners. As can be seen from the table, there was a statistically significant difference between LMST and LMPM at the significance level .019, whereas LST and LPM did not show any significant difference ($t = 2.438$, $df = 46$, $p = .019$ for LM, $t = -143$, $df = 28$, $p = .887$ for L). What this suggests is that LMST learners are more knowledgeable in the acquisition of English collocations compared to the LMPM learners.

Furthermore, when these learners were compared within their own language groups (ST and PM), the findings show that, statistically, there is a significant difference between the two groups at the level of .000 ($t = 7.556$, $df = 37$, $p < .001$ for ST, $t = 10.838$, $df = 37$, $p < .001$ for PM) as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Collocation scores of learners with different levels of proficiency in English collocation within their own speaker groups

Test	LMST		LST	LMPM		LPM
	M (SD)	M (SD)	Sig.	M (SD)	M (SD)	Sig.
Collocation scores	81.45 (7.18)	61.50 (7.25)	.000	76.95 (4.44)	61.80 (4.29)	.000

* $p < 0.05$



Statistically, there is a significant difference in the knowledge of English collocation between the lower middle ability and the low ability learners in both the ST and PM speaker groups. This brings into play the role of learning strategies employed by the ST and PM learners in the acquisition of the English collocation.

2. The SILL learning strategies questionnaire (1990)

To find out the influence of learning strategies on their acquisition of English collocation, all thirty-nine learners from the ST and PM groups responded to the SILL questionnaire (1990) following the collocation tests. The questionnaire consisted of six categories of learning strategies set out according to a five-point Likert Scale format. Learners responded by putting a tick in the appropriate box.

The learners' responses were subjected to statistical analysis to obtain the mean score, standard deviation and significance score. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Learning strategies of ST and PM speakers' in the acquisition of the English collocation (N=78)

Strategy categories	ST (N=39)		PM (N=39)		
	M	SD	M	SD	Sig.
Memory Strategies	3.63	0.55	3.32	0.51	*.013
Cognitive Strategies	3.48	0.62	3.23	0.59	.070
Compensation Strategies	3.85	0.64	3.68	0.64	.219
Metacognitive Strategies	3.96	0.69	3.72	0.63	.108
Affective Strategies	3.56	0.61	3.41	0.69	.329
Social Strategies	3.68	0.73	3.50	0.61	.242
Total	3.69	0.64	3.48	0.61	.164

* $p < 0.05$

Statistically, there does not appear to be a significant difference between the two groups in their learning strategies in the acquisition of collocations (the significance score was greater than $p < 0.05$) with the exception of the memory strategies. However, based on the mean score, ST speakers showed a tendency to use all six strategy categories more frequently than PM speakers (3.69: 3.48). The learning strategy with the highest frequency of occurrence for both groups was in the metacognitive strategies category with a mean score of 3.96 for ST learners and 3.72 for the PM learners. It can therefore be said that both groups employed the same type of strategy in the acquisition of the English collocation.

Arguably, this supports the findings in another study (Kittawee, 2013) which concludes that most Thai learners prefer to use metacognitive strategies in learning English. However, the results here are not consistent with the study carried out among EFL learners in Iran where preference was for the use of social strategies when it comes to learning collocations in reading passages (Tabatabaei & Hoseini, 2014). Similarly, in Kaotsombut (2003), it was found that compensation strategies were the most frequently used strategy among Microbiology and Biology students in a university in Thailand. It would seem that the use of learning strategies may also depend upon contextual and learning

content factors. Thus, EFL learners in a different cultural context such as Iran may employ different types of learning strategies from those in Thailand. Also, the learning strategies employed may also depend upon the subject of study. It was assumed that in Kaotsombut’s (2003) study, because the participants were science students with content heavy modules, a different set of learning strategies would be employed by students to acquire the scientific content. On the other hand, participants in this study were English major students who were required to arrange, plan and evaluate their English for the purpose of communication, and therefore the preference for metacognitive strategies.

2.1 Is there a significant difference in the learning strategies of learners at different levels of proficiency in English collocation for both groups?

When it comes to examining the learning strategies of learners at different ability levels in both groups, because none of the learners were found to be in the high ability score range in the collocation tests, the mean score, standard deviation and significant level of difference were only calculated for the lower middle ability (LM) and the low ability (L) learners for both the ST and PM groups (LMST=29, LST=10) and (LMPM=19, LPM=20). The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Comparing the learning strategies of learners with different proficiency in English collocation between the ST and PM groups

Strategy categories	LMST LMPM			LST LPM		
	M (SD)	M (SD)	Sig.	M (SD)	M (SD)	Sig.
Memory Strategies	3.57 (0.57)	3.26 (0.52)	.064	3.80 (0.48)	3.38 (0.51)	*.039
Cognitive Strategies	3.44 (0.61)	3.09 (0.62)	.060	3.59 (0.65)	3.36 (0.54)	.313
Compensation Strategies	3.90 (0.67)	3.62 (0.50)	.133	3.73 (0.57)	3.73 (0.75)	.976
Metacognitive Strategies	3.97 (0.70)	3.58 (0.68)	.064	3.94 (0.69)	3.85 (0.56)	.689
Affective Strategies	3.45 (0.58)	3.28 (0.64)	.352	3.88 (0.62)	3.54 (0.73)	.215
Social Strategies	3.65 (0.69)	3.59 (0.60)	.752	3.78 (0.87)	3.43 (0.62)	.204
Total	3.66 (0.64)	3.40 (0.59)	.238	3.79 (0.65)	3.55 (0.62)	0.41

* $p < 0.05$.

Three subgroups, namely the LMST, LST and LPM learners, preferred to use metacognitive strategies with the exception of the LMPM learners who tended to rely on compensation strategies. However, while there was no statistically significant difference between learners in both groups in five out of the six types of learning strategies listed in the table, there was a significant level between the LST and LPM learners for memory strategies (at .039 level of significance) in that LST learners tended to use memory strategies much more than their LPM learners.



Furthermore, when the learning strategies of different ability learners within their own speaker group are compared, there did not appear to be a significant difference in their use of learning strategies.

Table 6
Learning Strategies of learners with different ability in English collocations within each speaker group

Strategy categories	LMST LST			LMPM LPM		
	M (SD)	M (SD)	Sig.	M (SD)	M (SD)	Sig.
Memory Strategies	3.57 (0.57)	3.80 (0.48)	.263	3.26 (0.52)	3.38 (0.51)	.492
Cognitive Strategies	3.44 (0.61)	3.59 (0.65)	.530	3.09 (0.62)	3.36 (0.54)	.158
Compensation Strategies	3.90 (0.67)	3.73 (0.57)	.495	3.62 (0.50)	3.73 (0.75)	.623
Metacognitive Strategies	3.97 (0.70)	3.94 (0.69)	.935	3.58 (0.68)	3.85 (0.56)	.179
Affective Strategies	3.45 (0.58)	3.88 (0.62)	.051	3.28 (0.64)	3.54 (0.73)	.244
Social Strategies	3.65 (0.69)	3.78 (0.87)	.623	3.59 (0.60)	3.43 (0.62)	.412
Total	3.66 (0.64)	3.79 (0.65)	.483	3.40 (0.59)	3.55 (0.62)	0.351

* $p < 0.05$.

3. Findings and discussion of the individual interviews for ST and PM learners

Following the collocation tests and learning strategies questionnaire, individual interviews were carried out with six participant learners from each of the two speaker groups, three were LM ability learners and the other three were L ability learners. Specifically, each interviewee was asked one question: “How do you acquire or improve your chunks of words?” The interviews were audio taped, transcribed and subjected to a thematic analysis. The findings show that learners from both the ST and PM speaker groups show a preference for metacognitive learning strategies when it comes to acquiring the English collocation, either through interaction via social media such as the Internet, Facebook and YouTube: “I think from internet, facebook and especially youtube since I like to listen to Muslim scholars in English” (LMPM1); “I think I have acquired them from fellow friends in my major and also on internet.” (LMST2). From the interview data, all the lower middle ability learners from the ST and PM groups mainly employed the metacognitive learning strategies. Furthermore, it appears that this type of learning strategy has a positive influence in their acquisition of the English collocation based on their test results in the collocation tests shown in Table 2 where the mean score for the LMST and LMPM (M= 81.45 for LMST and 76.95 for LMPM) was significantly higher than the low ability learners for both groups (M= 61.50 for LST and 61.80 for LPM). Perhaps their ability to plan, arrange and evaluate their learning has resulted in more successful

acquisition of English collocation. The low ability learners, on the other hand, showed a preference either for memory or compensation learning strategies. This indicates that the type of learning strategy employed may have a bearing on learner performance, and hence acquisition of the language.

Findings from the interview data, however, do not seem to match the results from the SILL questionnaire of language learning strategies (Oxford, 1990). This may be due to the ambiguity of the test items themselves as mentioned in Section 5.2.2. The items were not easily distinguished from one another and thus there was an overlap between the categories of learning strategies. In other words, many of the items could be classified under more than one category item of the taxonomy. And thus, it was difficult to categorize what interviewees said under any one category. For example, LMST1 stated during the interview, “I watch a lot of movies with English subtitles and try to imitate the native speakers in terms of pronunciation and vocabulary.” This could be categorized under both the metacognitive and cognitive learning strategies. Another example is found in interviewee LMPM1: “I think from internet, facebook and especially youtube since I like to listen to Muslim scholars in English.” This could be cognitive, metacognitive and even memory learning strategies where learners try to memorize or imitate the language of Muslim scholars. This vagueness and ambiguity of the questionnaire is reflected in Wray and Hajar’s (2015) criticism about the effectiveness of SILL (Oxford, 1990), particularly from a cognitive psychological perspective. The questionnaire tended to minimize the impact of contextual variations on learners’ strategy use. The items could also be confusing to learners, particularly with the use of the word ‘someone’ in some of the statements and thus leading them to question who that ‘someone’ is. Also, the questionnaire focuses on frequency of use and not on learners’ attitudes and efficiency or on opinions about particular learning contexts. Moreover, the overall purpose based on their criticisms is of finding out preferences of learning strategies of learners rather than the nature of their strategy use.

Hence, an analysis of the sociocultural context of learning for both the ST and PM group of speakers was carried out to provide further insights into the role(s) played by learning strategies in their acquisition of the English collocation. The learners whose first language is ST graduated from high school where Standard Thai is used as the medium of instruction and where English is but one of the subjects in the curriculum. Thus, English is mainly a foreign language for these learners. Moreover, learners have little exposure to English outside the school classroom and teachers generally use Thai as a medium of instruction. This context was also largely true for PM speakers except that here, PM is the dominant language used in all aspects of everyday life. Thus, it could be said that the impact and role of English are quite similar for both contexts. At the local university, English is used as a medium of instruction and as the language of communication between lecturers and students. Outside the classroom, however, students tend to use English less frequently because they speak to each other in their first languages or Standard Thai with other Thais.

A study of the three components of the discursive resources, material resources and social resources advocated in Gao (2010, p.580) provided a clear overall picture of why ST speakers may differ significantly from PM speakers in their use of learning strategies. Most of



them live in areas where encounters and interaction with native speakers of English are frequent because many of these areas such as Phuket, Krabi and Phangna provinces are well-known tourist destinations, particularly for European travelers. Also, there are a number of primary and secondary schools in southern Thailand where native English teachers are employed as full-time or part-time English teachers. PM speakers, on the other hand, graduated from schools in Pattani, Yala and Narathiat. These are areas of unrest and conflict with very few native English speakers both in the cities and the schools. Thus, in terms of contact with native English speakers, ST speakers have a lot more exposure to English compared to their PM counterparts.

In terms of the material resources, the observation made by one of the researchers who has worked and lived in southern Thailand for over seven years was that PM speakers generally tend to use memory learning strategies as this was how they have been traditionally taught to recite and memorise religious material in their religious classes. So, because they were exposed largely to this type of learning strategy, they tend to use the same strategy for learning all other subjects, including English. Interviewee LPM2, for example, thought that “memorizing 10 vocabularies a day that I always do is effective.” ST speakers, however, tend to base their learning strategies on their secular subjects rather than the religious subjects and, as such, tend to employ learning strategies that are seen to be more successful in language learning. Their preference for the metacognitive learning strategies in the acquisition of the English collocation and their better test performance compared to the PM learners is an indication, at least, of learning strategies as one factor in the successful acquisition of the English collocation.

As for the social resources, social agents such as family members, peers and teachers could also play a role in the successful acquisition of English. Generally, ST speakers tend to have more positive attitudes towards the English language compared to PM speakers. The social agents in the PM context may not be powerful and stable supporters in learning, due mainly to conditions of unrest, conflict and volatility apparent in the southernmost provinces of Thailand. This is also not discounting the observation that there is limited availability of native English speakers in these areas. All these factors combine to make PM learners less successful in acquiring English and thus English collocation.

Moreover, it was found that both groups of learners showed inter- and intra-lingual influence in their acquisition of English collocations. The intra-lingual influence can be seen in the learners' use of, for example, 'foreign countries' replaced with '*abroad country', 'do damage' as '*make damage', 'make mistake' as '*do mistake', and the inter-lingual influence in both PM and ST such as 'happen to' replaced as '*happen with', 'classical music', replaced as '*classic music', 'make beds' replaced as '*set beds' and 'wait for' replaced as '*wait'. The chunk of words 'heavy rain' in ST is replaced as '*strong rain' whereas '*hard rain' was used in PM. Apart from the negative L1 transfer of the examples above, both groups also relied heavily on positive transfer in acquiring collocations. Examples are 'do damage', 'special offer', 'arrival at' and 'agree with'. It can be concluded that intra-lingual influence used by the learners comes from overgeneralization of words in English and inter-lingual influence from both positive transfer and negative transfer. This supports findings found in Poocharoensil (2013). Between the

two types of influence, it appears that students rely more heavily on first language transfer when it comes to the acquisition of English collocations.

CONCLUSION

According to the two hypotheses of this study, the first one is that there is a difference in the use of learning strategies between the ST and PM groups of learners. The second hypothesis claims that different learning strategies are employed by learners at different levels of proficiency in English collocations. The findings show that while there was a significant difference in the collocation test scores between the two groups, there did not appear to be any significant difference in types of strategies used. This disproves the first hypothesis. When it came to the second hypothesis, however, the picture was less clear. Although results from the SILL questionnaire showed no significant difference in the use of learning strategies between learners at different levels of English ability, this was not supported in the data from the individual interviews and from a sociocultural perspective analysis of the context under study which showed consistent and frequent use of the metacognitive learning strategies among the higher ability learners compared to the low ability learners. These supporting analyses indicated that learning strategies do play a role in the acquisition of the English collocation. It has to be noted that due to certain limitations such as the reliability of the SILL construct in measuring learning strategies, this study may not be as representative as it should be. Nevertheless, it does add to the current pool of studies in the area of English language collocation acquisition.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study can be beneficial for both PM and ST learners to be aware of learning strategies in acquiring English collocations, and curriculum developers should prioritize the lexical focus in designing learning activities. Based on the interview findings, the learners from both groups have a tendency or preference regarding informal activities or external classroom activities to improve their acquisition of English collocations, for instance, watching English movies, listening to English songs and listening to Muslim scholars discussing religious issues. As a result, lecturers as well as family members should encourage, support and facilitate them to employ effective and efficient language learning strategies beyond the confines of the classroom. Moreover, it can be applicable for intra- and international contexts investigating learning strategies in the acquisition of English collocations based on different focuses and future studies regarding awareness of English varieties; for instance, World Englishes (WE) theory and pedagogy should be taken into consideration.

THE AUTHORS

***Rungroj Chorbwhan** is a PhD candidate in Applied Linguistics, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Universiti Brunei Darussalam (supervisors: Dr. James McLellan and Dr. Debbie Guan Eng Ho). His research areas are Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Collocations, and Language Learning Strategies.
chorbwhan2527@gmail.com



Dr. James McLellan is a senior lecturer of English Language and Linguistics Department, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Universiti Brunei Darussalam. His research areas are Language Alternation (Malay-English code switching; Bahasa campuran; 'Bahasa rojak'), Multilingual Education in Borneo, and in Timor-Leste: policies and classroom practices, Southeast Asian Englishes: Asian lingua franca English, especially idiomatic expressions, and Borneo Indigenous languages, especially varieties of Bidayuh. james.mclellan@ubd.edu.bn

Dr. Debbie Guan Eng Ho is a senior assistant professor of English Language and Linguistics Department, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Universiti Brunei Darussalam. Her research interests are Systemic Functional Grammar, Cross-cultural Pragmatics, Language & Discourse, and World Englishes. debbie.guan@fass.ubd.edu.bn

REFERENCES

- Benson, M., Benson, E., & Ilson, R. (1986). *The BBI combinatory dictionary of English*. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- BNC (2007). *The British National Corpus*. Retrieved 8 February, 2015, from <<http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/>>.
- Bueraheng, N. (2014). Does learners' degree of exposure to the English language influence their collocational knowledge? *International Journal of English literature*, 4(3), 1–10.
- Chorbwhan, R. (2013). A comparison of learning achievement in English of Pratomsuksa 5 students participating in mind mapping learning activities versus traditional learning activities, *Journal of Teachers' Professional Development*, 113 (1), 56-57.
- Chorbwhan, R., & McLellan, J. (2016). First language transfer and the acquisition of English collocations by Thai learners. *South East Asia: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 16, 16–27.
- Creswell, J. W., & Clark, V. L. P. (2007). *Designing and conducting mixed-methods research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Donato, R. & McCormick, D. (1994). A sociocultural perspective on language learning strategies: The role of mediation. *The Modern Language Journal*, 78(4), 453-464.
- Gao, X. (2010). Autonomous language learning against all odds. *System*, 38(4), 580-590.
- Ghazal, L. (2010). Learning vocabulary in EFL contexts through vocabulary learning strategies. *Novitas Royal*, 1(2), 84-91.
- Gyllstad, H. (2007). *Testing English collocations: Developing receptive tests for use with advanced Swedish learners*. Lund, Sweden: Lund University.
- Kaotsombut, N. (2003). *A study of language learning strategies of graduate science students at Mahidol University*. (Master's thesis), Mahidol University, Bangkok, Thailand.
- Kittawee, P. (2013). *The relationship between the use of language learning strategies, the levels of language anxiety and English ability of MBA students*. (Master's thesis), Mahidol University, Bangkok, Thailand.
- Lewis, M. (1997). Pedagogical implications of the lexical approach. In J. Coady & T. Huckin (eds.), *Second language vocabulary acquisition*, (pp. 255-270). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Nattinger, J. R., & DeCarrico, J. S. (1992). *Lexical phrases and language teaching*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Nesselhauf, N. (2003). The use of collocations by advanced learners of English and some implications for teaching. *Applied Linguistics*, 24(2), 223–242.
- Oxford, R.L. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. New York, NY: Newbury House Publishers.
- Oxford, R. L. (1996). *Language learning strategies around the world: Cross-cultural perspectives*. Manoa, HI: University of Hawaii Press.
- Phoocharoensil, S. (2013). Cross-linguistic influence: Its impact on L2 English collocation production. *English Language Teaching*, 6(1), 1-10.
- Shin, D., & Nation, P. (2008). Beyond single words: the most frequent collocations in spoken English.



- ELT Journal, 62(4), 339–348.
- Szudarski, P. (2000). Effects of meaning-and form-focused instruction on the acquisition of verb-noun collocations in L2 English. *Journal of Second Language Teaching & Research*, 1(2), 3–37.
- Tabatabaei, O., & Hoseini, H. S. (2014). EFL and ESP learners' use of language learning strategies: A study of collocations. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 5(1), 112-120.
- Wray, D., & Hajar, A. (2015). A critical review of language learning strategy research. *The Asian Journal of English Language & Pedagogy*, 3, 1-19.