

**UNIVERSITY OF TARTU
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES**

**FIRST LANGUAGE INFLUENCE ON ESTONIAN EFL
LEARNERS' PRODUCTION OF ENGLISH
COLLOCATIONS**

BA thesis

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ABSTRACT

Collocations are an important aspect of second language vocabulary learning. Second language learners struggle with learning collocations since there are no exact rules why some words go together, and some do not. This BA thesis investigates the influence of Estonian on the production of English collocations by advanced Estonian EFL learners. The thesis was written as there was little to no research on Estonian influence on second language collocation production. The BA thesis aims to answer the research question: How influential is Estonian EFL learners' L1 in producing English collocations? To achieve this, a translation task was conducted, in which EFL learners had to translate collocations from Estonian to English.

The thesis begins with an introduction, which gives an overview of the motivation behind this paper as well as a summary of the two main sections. The literature review section gives an overview of collocations and its definition, discusses the notion of congruence and previous empirical studies about L1 influence on L2 collocations. The empirical study section describes the methodology of the study that was conducted, analyses and discusses the results acquired. The thesis ends with a conclusion.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AN	adjective + noun
EFL	English as a foreign language
ESL	English as a second language
L1	first language
L2	second language
VN	verb + noun

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is one of the most important parts of learning a new language, next to grammar and pronunciation. However, knowing every word in the vocabulary of a language does not guarantee fluency in speaking it as one must know also which words fit together and which do not. One must be aware of collocations and know how to produce them to truly be fluent in a foreign language. The *Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English* (2003: 7) defines collocations as “the way words combine in a language to produce natural-sounding speech and writing.” For example, one can say *handsome man* and *pretty woman*, but it would not be normal to say *pretty man* or *handsome woman*. According to Lee and Lin (2013: 534), “Collocation learning is one of the important building blocks for the development of language competence.” However, learning collocations is problematic for foreign language learners (Nesselhauf 2003: 223). One of the reasons why collocations may cause problems is that there are no exact rules why some words fit together, and some do not. It is just the way it is said (Carter, McCarthy, O’Keefe 2007: 59).

The influence of the learner’s first language (L1) is another reason why collocations may cause problems in second language (L2) production. The influence of L1 on L2 collocation production can be investigated through the notion of congruence, which is the presence or absence of a literal first language translation equivalent. Most collocational errors are due to the interference of L1, where the learner simply translates a native language collocation word-by-word into L2 (Maurer-Stroh 2004: 47). A congruent collocation, as described by Nesselhauf (2005: 221), is a word combination that can be given a word-for-word translation in L1, whereas an incongruent collocation does not have an exact translation equivalent in L1.

It is clear that L1 has some degree of influence on the production of L2 collocations. However, most of the empirical studies on this matter are limited to the native language in

question, the type of collocation in question and to researchers' different criteria of what is considered as a collocation and what is considered as a(n) (in)congruent collocation, so no concrete assumptions can be made when discussing the influence of Estonian on the production of English collocations. Very little research has been done on L1 influence on English collocations in the context of Estonian EFL learners, but it can be assumed that Estonian has a definite influence on the production of English collocations. This thesis aims to investigate the influence of L1 on Estonian EFL learners' production of English collocations by using congruence and to answer the research question: How influential is Estonian EFL learners' L1 in producing English collocations? The thesis also aims to find out whether EFL learners prefer congruent rather than incongruent collocations when both options are available. In order to achieve these aims, this thesis will conduct an empirical study on Estonian EFL learners by doing a translation task designed to assess English collocation production. The collocations that will be analysed in this study are verb + noun (VN) and adjective + noun (AN) collocations as they are the most common types in other collocation studies.

The thesis is divided into two main parts: the literature review and the empirical study. The literature review provides an overview of collocations and its definition, discusses the notion of congruence and previous empirical studies about L1 influence on L2 collocations. The empirical study describes the methodology of the translation task, analyses and discusses the results.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review of this thesis will give an overview of the types of collocations there are, the differences between collocations and other phraseological combinations, and the different definitions of collocations. The section will also discuss the notion of congruence and concludes with a synopsis of multiple empirical studies that have researched L1 influence on L2 collocations.

1.1 Collocations

Collocations are an important aspect in vocabulary acquisition. Collocational competence is important for language production and reception as it enables L2 learners, as well as L1 users, to come across as native-like and process language fluently under real-time conditions. It enables learners to disambiguate meaning of polysemous words, for example, the verb *commit* in *commit a crime*, *commit oneself*, *commit to memory*. Also, collocational competence helps in understanding connotational meaning, such as the verb *cause*, which is often associated with negative connotations as in *cause an accident*. (Henriksen 2013: 33–34).

Collocations can be divided into two types: grammatical and lexical. Grammatical collocations are combinations of a content word (e.g., nouns, verbs, adjectives) and a function word (e.g., prepositions). They are divided into eight main types: 1) noun + preposition, 2) noun + *to* infinitive, 3) noun + *that* clause, 4) preposition + noun, 5) adjective + preposition, 6) predicative adjective + *to* infinitive, 7) adjective + *that* clause, 8) 19 English verb patterns (Benson, Benson, Ilson 2009: 13, 19–23). For example, *pleased with* is a grammatical collocation which follows the structure: adjective + preposition.

Lexical collocations, however, consist of two or more content words. They can follow these structures: 1) Verb + noun, 2) adjective + noun, 3) noun + verb, 4) noun + noun,

5) adverb + adjective, 6) adverb + verb (Benson, Benson, Ilson 2009: 13). For example, *black coffee* is a lexical collocation which follows the structure: adjective + noun. Lexical collocations, particularly adjective + noun (AN) and verb + noun (VN) collocations, are the sole focus of this study and grammatical collocations will not be discussed further.

In order to get a better understanding of what a (lexical) collocation is in this thesis, a distinction has to be made between other main phraseological combinations – idioms and free combinations. Collocations are loosely fixed and semantically transparent combinations that belong somewhere between idioms and free combinations (Mustapic and Malenica 2013: 209). Many linguists state that semantic transparency is the only criterion that differentiates idioms and collocations. However, Koya (2005: 9–10) argues that collocational restriction (the ability to combine with other words) also plays an important role in distinguishing between the three combinations. By means of collocational restriction, Aisenstadt (1979, 1981 as cited in Koya 2005: 10) categorises all English word combinations into idioms and non-idiomatic phrases, with the latter being the huge majority which can be further divided into free combinations and collocations. Through these characteristics, collocations can be separated from idioms and free combinations.

Collocations and idioms differ in that their constituents are either semantically transparent or not. For example, *face the music* is an idiom, which means ‘to expose oneself to a serious position where one will be criticised for something one has done’, while *face the problem* is a collocation. The general meaning of each constituent of the idiom does not reflect the whole meaning at all, while the meaning of each constituent of the collocation is clear. Collocations and free combinations differ in collocational restriction by usage. For example, *carry a bag* is a free combination as *carry* can have the main meaning of ‘supporting the weight of something’ or ‘taking something from one place to another’ and therefore it can collocate freely with any noun related to those meanings. However, when

the word *carry* has the meaning ‘convincing something as in carry conviction’, it is a constituent of a collocation as *carry* in this sense is connected with hardly any possible variations of nouns (Koya 2005: 11).

The definition of collocation differs from one scholar to another. Palmer (1933 as cited in Men 2015: 14) defines collocation as “a succession of two or more words that must be learnt an integral whole and not pieced together from its component parts”. Though, as Men states (2015: 14), Palmer’s definition of collocation is used as an umbrella term and refers to all ‘comings-together-of-words’. A more modern definition of collocation is that of Moon’s (1998: 26), who defines it as “two or more words that co-occur repeatedly or statistically significantly and which may or may not have special semantic bonds between them.” Moon (1998: 26) describes collocations as “the surface, lexical evidence that words do not combine randomly but follow rules, principles, and real-world motivations.”

Moon also (1998: 26–27) mentions that there are different kinds of collocations that reflect qualitatively different kinds of phenomenon. Firstly, there is the simplest kind where the basis of the collocation lies in semantics. Words that belong to the same semantic field co-occur just like the referents do in the real world. For example, the word *jam* co-occurs frequently with other words from the lexical set ‘food’, such as *tart*, *doughnut* and *strawberry*. Secondly, there are collocations in which a word requires being associated with a word that is semantically linked as well as constrained lexicogrammatically (e.g., *rancid butter/fat*). Collocations in which a word only has a particular meaning when it is in collocation with certain other words (*face the truth/problem*) also belong to this group. And thirdly, there are collocations that are syntactic and formed by verbs, adjectives, etc., which require complementation with a specified particle (e.g., *one of, thank you*). Vuorinen (2013: 16) explains that these collocations are formed according to grammatical rules and are

frequently used, but do not really share the independent and holistic nature connected to collocations.

There are two main approaches when defining the term ‘collocation’: the frequency-based approach and the phraseological approach. The frequency-based approach, sometimes also referred to as the Firthian tradition due to the pioneering work of J.R. Firth, is connected to frequency and statistics, which are aspects that scholars working within the fields of corpus and computational linguistics cover (Gyllstad 2007: 6–7). This approach, as cited by Vuorinen (2013: 15), “sees collocations as a realisation of co-occurrence of words on the basis of frequency alone”. The phraseological approach, in contrast with the frequency-based approach, treats collocations as word combinations, which display various degrees of fixedness (Gyllstad 2007: 11), or semantic restriction in other words. Collocations in this approach can be identified in terms of semantic transparency, semantic specialisation of one element in the combination and substitutability of one of the elements (Men 2015: 22). Gyllstad (2007: 17) concluded that there is a fair degree of overlap between these approaches and that many researchers use criteria from both traditions when defining collocations. Collocation is a complex concept and there is no clear definition of it. This study follows Moon’s (1998:26) definition of collocations and uses both the phraseological and frequency-based approach, with a slight inclination towards the former.

1.2 Congruence

Men (2015: 52) claims that the semantics and syntax of an L2 are most likely influenced by learner’s L1. Collocations are word combinations that represent syntactic and semantic relationships between lexical items and therefore they are highly susceptible to L1 influence (Men 2015: 52). This might explain why L2 learners struggle with learning collocations.

Translation equivalence, or congruence, refers to the correspondence of forms or constructions between L1 and L2 (Johansson, 2007: 23, as cited in Men 2015: 140). If the word elements in a collocation in one language have a direct word-for-word translational equivalence in another language, the collocation is considered congruent. If the collocation does not have direct word-for-word translational equivalence, it is considered incongruent. L1 congruence may facilitate the acquisition and production of L2 collocations and non-congruence may hinder it (Men 2015: 48, 140). An example of a congruent collocation from English to Estonian would be *do homework* because a word-for-word Estonian translation of this would be ‘kodutööd tegema’. An example of an incongruent collocation from English to Estonian would be *weak coffee* as its word-for-word Estonian translation would be ‘nõrk kohv’, which does not sound right for a native Estonian speaker. The correct equivalent for *weak coffee* in Estonian would be ‘lahja kohv’. However, there is no clear method to determine whether a collocation is congruent or incongruent between two languages other than using human judgement, which can be inconsistent sometimes (Lee and Lin 2013: 534).

Nesselhauf’s study (2005: 222) distinguishes two types of non-congruence: lexical and non-lexical. Collocations are considered lexically incongruent if one of the content words (or both) in question does not have a translation equivalent between L1 and L2. For example, the English translation of the collocation ‘tugev vihm’ is *heavy rain*. The content word ‘tugev’ can be translated directly as *strong* and is not equivalent with the English content word *heavy*. Thus, making it a lexically incongruent collocation. Collocations are considered non-lexically incongruent if a grammatical word (such as a preposition) does not have a translation equivalent. For example, the English collocation *believe in* can be translated as ‘tro pä’. The content words *believe* and “tro” are congruent, however, the collocations are non-lexically incongruent because the direct English translation of the

Swedish grammatical word 'på' is *on*. The present study will measure non-congruence only in the lexical sense.

1.3 Previous empirical studies on L1 influence on L2 collocations

Several studies show that L1 affects the production and acquisition of L2 collocations (Gyllstad and Wolter 2011; Laufer and Waldman 2011; Lee 2016; Men 2015; Nesselhauf 2003; Peters 2016; Yamashita and Jiang 2010). The studies by Lee (2016) and Yamashita and Jiang (2010) utilised a phrase-acceptability judgement task to investigate the influence of L1 on L2 collocations. Yamashita and Jiang, who researched the influence of Japanese, and Lee, who researched the influence of Korean, examined lexical VN and AN collocations and had native speakers of English and EFL learners as the participants. Each study contained about 20 congruent, 20 incongruent collocations and around 40 implausible word combinations. The biggest difference between the studies is that Yamashita and Jiang had ESL learners as participants of the task, while Lee had EFL learners that were grouped as advanced and intermediate learners. For the sake of comparison, only the Japanese EFL learners and the intermediate Korean EFL learners are discussed in this section as their proficiency of English is similar and the number of participants is around the same (23 and 24 respectively). The studies showed matching results. The error rate on incongruent collocations for the Korean EFL learners was 40.60% and 38.80% for the Japanese EFL learners, while the error rate on congruent collocations was significantly lower in both cases, 9.77% for Korean EFL learners and 14.31% for Japanese EFL learners. The biggest discrepancy between the learners was the reaction time of incongruent collocations. The participants in both studies were tested individually in a room. The test items were presented one at a time on a computer screen and the participants were instructed to decide whether a test item was an acceptable English expression or not by pressing one of two keys

representing either 'yes' or 'no'. They were asked to respond as quickly as possible. The Japanese EFL learners' reaction time was significantly faster with 1597 milliseconds compared to the Korean EFL learners' reaction time of 2327 milliseconds. For congruent collocations it was 1542 and 1824 milliseconds respectively. For comparison, the error rate and reaction time of both congruent and incongruent collocations for native speakers from both studies was under 10% and around 1000 milliseconds. Overall, the results suggest that L1 congruence can influence the acquisition and production of L2 collocations significantly and that EFL learners are dependent on L1 intralexical knowledge in L2 collocation production (at least at lower levels of proficiency). The matching results between the studies can be attributed to the two languages having some similarities between them.

Gyllstad and Wolter (2011) conducted a similar study where they examined the influence of L1 intralexical knowledge on the formation of L2 collocations by administering a primed lexical decision task to 31 advanced learners of English (Swedish as their L1) and 37 English native speakers serving as a control group. The reaction time of the participants was measured. The task assessed VN collocations in three conditions: congruent collocations, incongruent collocations and unrelated items for baseline data. The results showed that the advanced learners responded slower to incongruent than congruent collocations, and that the difference between the native speakers' and advanced learners' reaction time regarding incongruent collocations was quite significant. These results suggest that L1 may have considerable influence on L2 learners' development of L2 collocations.

Compared to the three previously mentioned studies, Nesselhauf's study (2003) researched the use of VN collocations by German EFL learners at an advanced level through a learner corpus, which contained 32 argumentative and non-technical essays written by the learners. With a strict criterion of what constitutes as a collocation, Nesselhauf identified 213 verb-object-noun combinations as collocations in the essays and 59 of those collocations

were regarded as wrong or not quite acceptable by native speakers. She found that 33 of those 59 incorrect collocations (56%) were influenced by L1. Nesselhauf also investigated the effect of congruence on the 1072 verb-object-noun combinations. Only 10.9% of the 625 congruent combinations were considered as wrong in comparison to the 41.8% of the incongruent combinations. These results strengthen the claim that L1 influence is quite strong on the production of L2 collocations and word combinations, and that congruent collocations are easier than incongruent for L2 learners. However, Men (2015: 53) argued that these figures should be treated with caution as Nesselhauf measured congruence not only on the level of content words, but also grammatical words. Including grammatical items in defining congruence leads to more incongruent collocations since “items in closed grammatical classes normally behave differently across languages” (Salkie 2002: 56, as cited in Men 2015: 53). Men claimed that if congruence would be only measured on content-word-level, more incongruent collocation would be classified as congruent in Nesselhauf’s study.

Laufer and Waldman (2011) adopted a similar approach to Nesselhauf and investigated a learner corpus consisting of argumentative and descriptive essays written by Hebrew EFL learners at three levels of proficiency. They examined the use of VN collocations in the writings of the learners. Laufer and Waldman found that L1 influence appeared in about half of the erroneous L2 collocations at all levels of proficiency and that it did not decrease over time. Laufer and Waldman (2011: 665) theorised that L2 learners construct messages from individual words rather than from prefabricated patterns due to their reliance on L1 transfer and tendency to disregard restrictions on word combinations.

Vuorinen’s (2013: 58) study on Finnish EFL learners’ use of English collocations examined the influence of Finnish in the production of erroneous VN combinations. 28% of the erroneous combinations produced by beginner Finnish EFL learners and 10% by intermediate learners were attributed to L1 influence, while advanced learners had no

negative L1 influence at all. The results support the claim that the role of L1 diminishes as L2 proficiency increases and that learners of L2 tend to rely on their L1 at the beginning of their language learning process.

Some of the previously discussed studies show that L2 learners struggle more with incongruent collocations than with congruent, at least regarding VN collocations. However, Men's (2015) corpus-based study on Chinese EFL learners' production of collocations contrasts with these studies. Men found that both Chinese EFL learners at the basic and advanced proficiency level have more difficulties with congruent VN collocations than incongruent. Men (2015: 145) explained that the contrast in their and previous studies can be due to the language background of the targeted L2 learner. Men gave Nesselhauf's study as an example and explains that German, which is the L1 of Nesselhauf's study, together with English belong to Indo-European languages, whilst Chinese is a Sino-Tibetan language and has more differences with English compared to German. Because of this, Chinese EFL learners may encounter more difficulties in producing congruent collocations than German EFL learners. Men (2015: 146–148) explained that a large proportion of the errors in erroneous congruent collocation were a result of 'partial congruence' between the languages, where "one-to-many or many-to-one correspondences occur in the native and target languages and only one equivalent of several expressions that can be used in one language is acceptable in another". Men (2015: 154) reported that over 50% of the VN collocations produced by Chinese learners may be traced to L1 influence.

Even though several studies have been conducted on L1 influence on English collocations all over the world, there are very few studies in Estonia that investigate the influence of Estonian on the production or acquisition of English collocations. In 2016, Tammiste defended her MA thesis on the topic of adjective-noun, verb-noun and phrasal-verb-noun collocations in English. She (2016: 22) researched the use of AN, VN and phrasal-

verb-noun collocations by Estonian EFL learners through a learner corpus, which contained 127 essays written at the entrance examination to English Language and Literature BA programme at the University of Tartu in 2014. One of Tammiste's research questions investigated how collocations were distributed based on collocates-node relationship and congruence. The study revealed that 91% of all word combinations were congruent and 9% incongruent, which supports the claim that language learners tend to use congruent collocations rather than incongruent (Tammiste 2016: 40).

Since Estonian is a Uralic language and does not belong to the same language family with English, it is possible that Estonian EFL learners might make more mistakes influenced by L1 when producing English collocations compared to the Germanic EFL learners that were targeted in Nesselhauf's (2003) and Gyllstad and Wolter's study (2011). It is also plausible that Estonian EFL learners might have similar results with that of Vuorinen's (2013) as Estonian and Finnish are from the same language family. Overall, it is hard to tell what influence L1 has on Estonian EFL learners' production of English collocations as there are not really any studies that touch upon this particular topic nor are there really any studies that are comparable to Estonian.

2. EMPIRICAL STUDY

This section will discuss the methodology and results of the study that was conducted in order to discover the influence of Estonian on EFL learners' production of English collocations. The study consists of a background questionnaire followed by a translation task. The following subsections give information about the participants and the translation task, followed by how the target collocations were selected. The section ends with the analysis and discussion of the results.

2.1 Participants

The study consists of two parts. The first part includes a questionnaire that asked some background information about the participants. The second part includes the translation task (See Appendix 1).

The participants were 29 1st year students of English Language and Literature at the University of Tartu. 27 of the 29 participants had Estonian as their native language and their results will be analysed. The remaining two had Russian as their native language and were left out of the analysis since the target L1 of the study is Estonian.

The study was conducted in the classroom under the supervision of the lecturer during the seminars of the course FLGR.01.158 Text Analysis 2. Three of the participants were absent from the seminar and completed the task digitally. They were instructed not to use any helping material. The participants' proficiency level of English can be considered advanced, with the proficiency level ranging from B2 to potentially even C2 in some cases. The average age of the participants was 20.74 ranging from 19 to 29. The average duration of studying English of the participants was about 12.59 years. Three of the participants have lived in an English-speaking country stretching from two months to three years. However, their results will not be analysed separately from the other participants as there were no

significant differences between them, and the number of participants is too low to draw any major conclusions.

There are several reasons as to why the target group was selected for the research. Firstly, the target group was more accessible for the study since the target group studied in the same higher education institution as the writer of the thesis. Secondly, the target group had the highest number of potential participants compared to other options, such as 2nd and 3rd year English Language and Literature students. Thirdly, the study was designed for students whose proficiency level of English is advanced. Estonian primary and secondary school EFL students would have likely found the translation task too difficult, thus producing unsatisfactory and unrepresentative results. Hence 1st year university students of English were selected. Also, 1st year university students of English were selected as the target group due to the fact that the study could be supervised by a teacher in a classroom.

2.2 Translation task

The translation task consists of 30 sentences in Estonian (See Appendix 1). 24 of the 30 sentences have a collocation in them and the remaining six sentences have word combinations unrelated to the study. The participants were asked to translate only the word combinations from Estonian to English according to the context of the sentence that the word combination was in. Making the participants translate the whole sentence would have been too tedious and time-consuming for the participants and could have also potentially hindered the translation of the target collocations. The sentences were taken from various websites on the Internet and were translated from English to Estonian with the help of English-Estonian dictionaries and translation tools.

Several pilot studies were conducted in order to eliminate unnoticed mistakes, improve the task and set a time frame. As a result of the pilot studies, several sentences and

collocations were altered, and a time frame of 15 minutes was set. All the participants were easily able to complete the translation task within the set time frame.

2.3 Choice of target collocations

24 target collocations were selected for this study, of which 12 were VN collocations and 12 AN collocations. Each target collocation was confirmed as an acceptable collocation by checking if the target collocation was mentioned either in the *Oxford collocations dictionary for students of English* (2003) or *The BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English* (Benson, Benson and Ilson 2009). These two dictionaries define collocations in the phraseological sense, which means that collocations are lexical combinations characterised by restricted co-occurrence of items (Peters 2016: 118). The *Macmillan Dictionary* (2022) was also used to confirm a collocation as acceptable. Each target collocation was also confirmed as a collocation in Estonian with the help of the *Estonian Collocations Dictionary*. Only Estonian AN collocations were picked that corresponded to English AN collocations since some English AN collocations can also be compounds in Estonian (e.g. *rubber duck* – ‘kummipart’). The target collocations were collected from several different websites related to language learning, previous studies (Gyllstad and Wolter 2011; Lee 2016; Yamashita and Jiang 2010), Hone’s booklet (1973) and personal experience. The target collocations were taken both from English and Estonian and are presented in English in Table 1 at the end of this subsection.

The 24 target collocations were divided into 16 incongruent, 4 congruent, and 4 collocations that were both congruent and incongruent. An example of the latter would be the VN collocation *nägu tegema* which can be translated word-for-word as *make a face* and as incongruent with *pull a face*. Nesselhauf’s definition of congruence was used to determine the congruence of the target collocations. A collocation is congruent if the collocation can

be translated literally into the L2. L2 words are considered literal if the word in question can – out of context – be translated into the target word in question. Incongruent collocations, however, cannot be translated literally (Nesselhauf 2005: 221). That is why collocations with the verb *pidama* are considered incongruent in this study, as it is difficult to translate out of context due its ambiguity. Human judgement, which can be inconsistent sometimes, was used to determine whether a collocation is congruent or incongruent. Therefore, some collocations might be considered congruent by others or vice versa. More incongruent collocations were picked as they tend to cause more problems for EFL learners.

Table 1. Target collocations in English.

	Verb-noun collocations	Adjective-noun collocations
Incongruent	<i>give/make a speech</i>	<i>weak tea</i>
	<i>give/provide an example</i>	<i>serious/severe illness</i>
	<i>keep/raise/farm sheep</i>	<i>strong coffee</i>
	<i>speak a language</i>	<i>mild/warm winter</i>
	<i>hold/have a meeting</i>	<i>heavy rain</i>
	<i>play/blast music</i>	<i>striking/perfect/good example</i>
	<i>take care</i>	<i>stray cat</i>
	<i>make a decision</i>	<i>heavy/busy/bad traffic</i>
Congruent	<i>make a mistake</i>	<i>light sleeper</i>
	<i>do homework</i>	<i>heavy bag</i>
Incongruent and congruent	<i>make/pull a face</i>	<i>bad/sore loser</i>
	<i>raise/put up a hand</i>	<i>serious/straight face</i>

2.4 Analysis of the results

This subsection presents the results of the study. It begins by looking at the overall results of the study, after which it moves on to examine the choices the students made when translating collocations that can be both congruent and incongruent. The subsection also goes through the most frequent VN and AN collocation mistakes that can be attributed to the influence of L1. Translated collocations with spelling or grammatical mistakes are not considered as erroneous as they are not relevant to the study. The translated collocations are only considered erroneous in the lexical sense.

2.4.1 Overall results

The translation task consisted of 24 collocations and was done by 27 participants whose proficiency level of English is advanced. The total number of collocations produced was 648 (27 participants multiplied by 24 items). All participants provided an English word combination for each Estonian collocation and no gaps were left, which indicates that the participants did not have problems with not knowing the Estonian word in English. Out of the 648 collocations that were produced, 514 were accurate translations (79.32%) and 134 were considered erroneous (20.68%). The percentage of erroneous collocations produced is quite high for advanced EFL learners due to 2/3 of collocations being incongruent, which causes more problems when producing collocations (Gyllstad and Wolter 2011; Lee 2016; Nesselhauf 2003; Yamashita and Jiang 2010) compared to congruent collocations which only accounted for 1/6 of all target collocations.

Table 2. Correct and erroneous collocations divided by congruence.

	Correct	Erroneous	Total
Congruent	105	3	108
Incongruent	305	127	432
Both	104	4	108
Total	514	134	648

Out of the 108 congruent collocations, only 3 were considered erroneous (2.78%). This supports the claim that advanced Estonian EFL learners have no difficulties with producing congruent collocations. It is highly likely that Estonian EFL learners with lower levels of proficiency make more mistakes compared to advanced EFL learners when producing congruent English collocations; however, there is no research yet to justify this claim.

Out of the 432 incongruent collocations, 305 were translated correctly (70.60%) and 127 incongruent collocations were considered erroneous (29.40%). These results strengthen the claim that Estonian EFL learners struggle more with producing incongruent English collocations than congruent collocations. Out of the 134 erroneous collocations, 78 can be said to have been influenced by L1 (58.21%). An erroneous collocation was considered to have been influenced by L1 if the collocation was translated word-for-word (e.g., *näidet tooma – bring an example*), the collocate was synonymous with the L1 equivalent (e.g. *pehme talv – gentle winter*), and if the collocate did not have a literal word-for-word equivalent and its meaning depended on the word it collocated with (*kõnet pidama – hold a speech*). The findings of this study are like that of Nesselhauf's (2003). She found that 41.80% of incongruent combinations were wrong and that 56% of erroneous collocations were influenced by L1. Out of all the 648 collocations that were produced in this study, 12.15% of them were translated incorrectly due to the influence of L1.

The 648 collocations can also be divided by the type of collocation. 324 collocations were VN collocations and 324 were AN collocations. 243 of 324 AN collocations were translated correctly (75%) and 271 out of 324 for VN collocations (83.64%). Out of the 216 incongruent AN collocations, 76 were erroneous (35.19%). 46 out of the 76 erroneous collocations were influenced by L1 (60.53%). For incongruent VN collocations, 51 out of 216 were erroneous (23.61%) and out of the 51, 32 were influenced by L1 (62.75%). There

are no significant differences between the types of collocations. The results show that EFL learners produce slightly more erroneous AN collocations than VN collocations. However, the influence of L1 is very close in both types of collocations.

Table 3. Erroneous and L1 influenced collocations divided by type of collocation

	AN collocations	VN collocations	Total
Erroneous	76	51	127
L1 influence	46	32	78
Percentage	60.53%	62.75%	61.42%

2.4.2 Incongruent vs. congruent

There were four target collocations in Estonian that had both incongruent and congruent collocations in English. Of the 108 English collocations that were produced, 68 were congruent (62.96%) and 36 were incongruent (33.33%). 4 of the 108 (3.70%) were erroneous collocations. The AN collocations *halb kaotaja* and *tõsine nägu* can be translated as *bad/sore loser* and *serious/straight face* respectively. The participants preferred to translate the AN collocations that had both options as incongruent rather congruent. 61.11% of the participants translated them as *sore loser* and *straight face*, whereas 33.33% translated them as *bad loser* and *serious face*. The VN collocations *nägu tegema* and *kätt tõstma*, in contrast to the AN collocations, were translated more as congruent rather than incongruent. 92.59% of the collocations were translated as the congruent *make a face* and *raise a hand*. Only 5.56% were translated as the incongruent *pull a face* and *put up a hand*. 1.85% of the VN collocations were erroneous.

It seems that EFL learners preferred to produce congruent rather than incongruent collocations when both options were available. It is plausible that EFL learners preferred to translate from L1 to L2 directly rather than think of an option that might not have been word-for-word. It is also feasible that they just did not know the incongruent English collocation

and opted for the direct translation. However, there is also the possibility that the sentences in which the collocations occurred might have influenced the choice of either one of the two options or that one of the collocations is more frequently used than the other. It appears that congruent collocations are preferred more than incongruent when both options are available. However, more in-depth research is needed on this subject to confirm this observation.

2.4.3 Most common mistakes

One of the most common VN collocation mistakes was the translation of the incongruent collocation *näidet tooma*. Only 48.15% of students translated the collocation correctly as *give/provide an example*. The other 51.85% produced an erroneous collocation. 40.74 % of students translated it as *bring an example*. The verb *bring* is a direct translation of the Estonian verb ‘tooma’, which is an example of L1 influence. The remaining 11.11% produced *make an example*, which in the context of the sentence is not an accurate collocation.

One of the most common AN collocation mistakes was the translation of the incongruent collocation *pehme talv*. Only 33.33% of participants translated it correctly as *mild/warm winter*. 33.33% translated it directly from Estonian to English as *soft winter* and can be attributed to L1 influence. However, there is also the possibility that some of the participants did not know the correct translation equivalent of the collocation and decided to translate it directly rather than not translate it at all and leave a gap. The remaining 33.33% translated the collocation with collocates such as *light, mellow, gentle* and *easy*. The first three collocates are synonymous with the word *soft* and therefore it can be said that these erroneous translations were also influenced by L1.

Another common AN collocation mistake was the translation of the incongruent collocation *lahja tee*. As the word *lahja* has no direct word-for-word translation equivalent

in English (the closest being *lean*) and its meaning depends on the word it collocates with, most erroneous translations were considered to have been influenced by L1. 29.63% of the collocations were translated correctly as *weak tea*. 55.56% of the collocations were translated incorrectly with L1 having an influence. These collocations used adjectives such as *lean, light, mild, watery* and *mellow*. The remaining 14.81% were just considered erroneous translations (e.g., *tasteless tea*).

The translation of Estonian collocations with the verb *pidama* was also a slight problem for the participants. The verb *pidama* has many different meanings in Estonian and therefore might cause problems for Estonian EFL learners when translating a collocation containing the previously mentioned verb. There were three Estonian collocations with the verb *pidama* in the task: *koosolekut pidama, kõnet pidama* and *lambaid pidama*. The former being the least problematic and the latter the most problematic. 96.30% of students translated *koosolekut pidama* correctly as *hold/have a meeting* and 55.56% translated *lambaid pidama* correctly as *keep/raise/farm sheep*. 22.22% translated the collocation *lambaid pidama* incorrectly as *have sheep*, which can be said to have been influenced by L1. The remaining 22.22% translated the collocation incorrectly with verbs such as *grow, manage* and *cattle*. Some also translated it as *herd sheep*, which is an adequate collocation, but it is considered erroneous as it has a different meaning compared to the target collocation. L1 influence can also be seen in the collocation *kõnet pidama* with 22.22% of the participants translating it as *hold a speech*. 77.78% translated it correctly as *give/make a speech*. Overall, 23.46% of the translated collocations with the verb *pidama* were erroneous and 63.16% of the erroneous collocations are influenced by L1.

The translation of the Estonian collocation *ere näide* was the most varied of all target collocations. There were ten different adjectives that accompanied the noun *example* and seven of them were considered suitable options. 62.96% of the collocations were translated

correctly with the most common combination being *good example*, followed by *perfect example*, *great example* and *shining example*. 37.03% were not considered to be acceptable collocations. 50% of these erroneous collocations were translated word-for-word from Estonian as *bright example* and can be attributed to L1 influence.

Another instance where L1 influence can be seen is the translation of the AN collocation *tugev vihm*. Most participants translated it correctly into *heavy rain* (74.07%). However, there were some participants (18.52%) who translated it as *strong rain*, which is a direct translation of the Estonian collocation. The remaining 7.4% translated the collocation as *downpour*, which is a correct translation of the collocation. However, these were the only two instances where one word was given, and a word combination was not produced. For the sake of the analysis, these translations were considered as erroneous collocations because the number of instances, where a word combination was not produced, is quite insignificant and would not make any difference to the analysis.

There were also collocations such as *viga tegema*, *kodutöid tegema*, *kätt tõstma*, *heavy bag*, that all participants translated correctly. They were all translated correctly since they have a word-for-word equivalent in English. The collocations *otsust langetama*, *muusikat laskma*, *koosolekut pidama* and *hulkuv kass* were the most correctly translated incongruent collocations. All four had only one instance where the translation was considered incorrect (3.70%). *Lahja tee* was the collocation that the participants made most mistakes with (70.37%), followed by *pehme talv* (66.67%), *näidet tooma* (51.85%), *keeli valdama* (48.5%) and *lambaid pidama* (44.44%).

2.4.4 Discussion of the results

The results of the translation task show that L1 has a definite influence on Estonian EFL learners when producing or translating English collocations. Even advanced EFL

learners made collocation mistakes influenced by L1, although the percentage of mistakes is not very high. It is likely that Estonian EFL learners with a lower level of English are influenced more by L1 when producing collocations. However, there is no data yet to support this claim. The results also display that EFL learners struggle and make more mistakes with incongruent rather than congruent collocations. There are also certain collocations that EFL learners have more trouble with than others. For example, the collocation *näidet tooma* was translated by many participants as *bring an example* instead of *give an example*. Although Chinese, Estonian, and German are all from different language families, the findings of this study regarding L1 influence are similar to that of Men's (2015), who studied the influence of Chinese, and Nesselhauf's (2003), who studied the influence of German. All three studies had advanced EFL learners as participants. The present study discovered that 58.21% of all erroneous collocations and 62.75% of erroneous VN collocations can be traced to L1 influence. Men's and Nesselhauf's studies both found that over 50% of VN collocations were influenced by L1. The present study also uncovered that EFL learners preferred to use congruent rather than incongruent collocations when both options are available. This finding is somewhat supported by Tammiste's study (2016), where she discovered that 91% of all word combinations produced were congruent and only 9% incongruent.

CONCLUSION

The thesis aimed to investigate the influence of Estonian on EFL learners' production of English collocations and to answer the research question: How influential is Estonian EFL learners' L1 in producing English collocations? The motivation for writing this thesis was due to there being little research on the influence of Estonian on English collocation production. The literature review section showed that there are different types of collocations and that there is no clear definition of what a collocation is and differs from scholar to scholar. Congruence is also defined as the literal translation equivalence between two languages. The first section ended with an overview of empirical studies that showed that L1 influences the production of English collocations. The empirical study section introduced the translation task that was conducted in order to achieve the aims of the thesis. The translation task consisted of 24 Estonian collocations that 27 advanced Estonian EFL learners translated to English. The section ends with an analysis and discussion of the results obtained from the translation task.

Several studies have shown that L1 influences the production of English collocations (Gyllstad and Wolter 2011; Laufer and Waldman 2011; Lee 2016; Men 2015; Nesselhauf 2003; Peters 2016; Yamashita and Jiang 2010). Just like these previous studies, the present study has also shown that Estonian influences EFL learners' production of English collocations. It was discovered that 58.21% of incorrectly translated collocations were influenced by the present study's L1 – Estonian. The study also found that advanced Estonian EFL learners make more mistakes with incongruent rather than congruent collocations and that they prefer to produce congruent rather than incongruent collocations when an Estonian collocation can be translated in both ways. It was also discovered that Estonian EFL learners struggle especially with the incongruent collocations *lahja tee*, *pehme*

talv, näidet tooma, keeli valdama and *lambaid pidama*. Most translation mistakes with these incongruent collocations can be attributed to the influence of Estonian.

The thesis investigated the influence of Estonian on English collocation production and answered the research question. The results of the study revealed that Estonian has a clear influence on EFL learners' production of English collocations. However, this can only be said about AN and VN collocations as the study did not cover any other type of collocation. Also, the study only examined the influence of Estonian on 24 collocations, which suggests that a similar study with different collocations might have differing and contrasting results. Furthermore, the number of participants was quite low and only advanced EFL learners were examined. A study with higher number of participants with lower proficiency levels of English might yield different results. In conclusion, a more thorough and extensive study is needed to truly discover the influence of Estonian on English collocations.

Overall, it is clear that Estonian has an influence on English collocation production and that learning collocations is problematic for EFL learners, even at advanced levels of proficiency. The results of the study suggest that incongruent collocations should have a bigger focus when teaching vocabulary.

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Appendix 1. Questionnaire and translation task

Dear students,

My name is Leo Artur Skott and I am a 3rd year student of English Language and Literature at the University of Tartu. I am writing my BA thesis and I am currently dealing with the empirical part of the thesis. In order to complete the empirical part, I need to collect data. So I am asking you to answer the following questionnaire and complete the translation task. The questionnaire and task will take you about 15 minutes to complete. The questionnaire is anonymous.

Thank you in advance and good luck!

1. Questionnaire

1. How old are you?
2. How long have you been studying English?
3. What are you studying at the University of Tartu?
4. What is your native language?
5. Have you ever lived in an English-speaking country? If so, where and for how long?

2. Translation task

Translate the word combinations in bold from Estonian to English according to the context of the sentence that the word combination is in.

1. See tee on liiga lahja.

lahja tee -

2. Me kõik teeme elus viga.

viga tegema -

3. President pidas iseseisvuspäeval kõnet.

kõnet pidama -

4. Ta on kerge unega ja ärkab iga heli peale

kerge unega -

5. Õpetaja tõi õpilastele näite.

näidet tooma -

6. Ta nägu muutus kahvatuks.

kahvatuks muutuma -

7. Ta põeb rasket haigust.

raske haigus -

8. Ta on äärmiselt võistlushimuline ja halb kaotaja.

halb kaotaja -

9. Sportlane jooksis kiiresti.

kiiresti jooksmas -

10. Ma ei suuda seda isegi tõsise näoga öelda.

tõsine nägu -

11. Talumees pidas lambaid.

lambaid pidama -

12. Polüglott on inimene, kes valdab paljusid keeli.

keeli valdama -

13. Mu isa joob kanget kohvi.

kange kohv -

14. Koosolekuid on võimalik pidada nüüd elektrooniliselt.

koosolekut pidama -

15. Ema asetas oma lapse õrnalt võrevoodi.

õrnalt asetama -

16. Ilmatargad ennustavad: tuleb pigem pehme talv.

pehme talv -

17. Laps läks koolist koju ja hakkas kodutöid tegema.

kodutöid tegema -

18. Teismelised lasid kõlaritest muusikat.

muusikat laskma -

19. Ma ei saa oma selja tõttu raskeid kotte kanda.

raske kott -

20. Me ei saanud tugeva vihma tõttu parki minna.

tugev vihm -

21. Sõin eile tüki seepi ära.

tükk seepi -

22. Mees kandis hoolt oma haige naise eest.

hoolt kandma -

23. Nokia tõus ja langus on ere näide ühekülgsest innovatsioonist.

ere näide -

24. Koer haukus postiljoni peale.

koer haugub -

25. Tom andis hulkuvale kassile vett ja süüa.

hulkuv kass -

26. Õpilane tõstis käe, et vastata küsimusele

kätt tõstma -

27. Tallinnas on tihe liiklus täna.

tihe liiklus -

28. Ei pea võimatuina näivaid otsuseid langetama.

otsust langetama -

29. Ta teeb alati nägusid kui teda pildistad

nägu tegema -

30. Mees ei olnud täiesti teadlik olukorrast.

täiesti teadlik -

RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Leo Artur Skott

First Language Influence on Estonian EFL Learners Production of English Collocations

Eesti Inglise Keelt Võõrkeelena (EFL) Õppijate Emakeele Mõju Inglisekeelsete Kollokatsioonide Loomisel

Bakalaureusetöö

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Lehekülgede arv: 38

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Töö jaguneb kahte peatükki: kirjanduse ülevaade ning empiiriline uuring. Kirjanduse ülevaates kirjeldatakse, milliseid kollokatsioone on olemas, millised on kollokatsioonide ja muude fraseoloogiliste kombinatsioonide erinevused ning millised on kollokatsioonide erinevad definitsioonid. Samuti arutatakse selles osas kongruentsuse mõistet ja antakse ülevaade varasematest uuringutest sellel teemal. Empiirilises uuringus tutvustatakse töös kasutatavat metoodikat ning analüüsitakse tõlkeülesande tulemusi. Empiiriline uuring lõpeb tulemuste aruteluga.

Tõlkeülesandest võttis osa 27 väga hea tasemel Eesti EFL õppijat, kes pidid 15 minuti jooksul tõlkima 24 kollokatsiooni. Enam kui pooled tõlkeülesandes toodetud ekslikest kollokatsioonidest olid mõjutatud emakeelest. Kõige sagedasemad valesti tõlgitud kollokatsioonid olid mittekongruentsed 'lahja tee', 'pehme talv', 'näidet tooma', 'keeli valdama' ja 'lambaid pidama'.

Märksõnad:

Inglise keel ja keeleteadus, kollokatsioonid, kongruentsus, emakeel

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