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Indonesian Students' Level of Understanding of Japanese collocations with

Structured Nouns and Verbs

Ulfah Sutivarti¹, Djodjok Soepardjo², Roni³

¹Doctoral Program (S-3) Language and Literature Education, State University of Surabaya

¹Study Program Japanese Language Education, Faculty of Cultural Studies,

University of Brawijaya

^{2,3}Doctoral Program (S-3) Language and Literature Education, State University of

Surabaya

email: ulfah.2007@mhs.unesa.ac.id1, ulfah_s@ub.ac.id, djodjoksoepardjo@unesa.ac.id2,

roni@unesa.ac.id3

Abstract

This study aims to identify the level of Japanese language learners' comprehension of collocation. The data was

obtained from the collocation test given to 72 Japanese language learners who use Indonesian language as first

language and have taken approximately 600 hours of Japanese language learning. The results of this study are: 1)

the level of Japanese learners' understanding of collocations is still very low, approximately at the level of 50%;

2) There is a tendency that learners more easily understand collocations that can be translated directly or

collocations that can be traced down to each word that forms them. Direct translation into first language is

something second language (L2) learners often encounter in the early to intermediate stages of learning Goi

'vocabulary'; 3) Collocations that are close to idiomatic expressions which in this study are called collocations for

Japanese learners are difficult to understand. It is proved by the very low percentage of correct answers with only

13%.

Keywords: vocabulary, free combination, collocation, idiom

A. Introduction

The purpose of learning a foreign language is to be able to communicate with the community of the target language.

The reason of the motivation to communicate with them is the interest of foreign language learners in something

belongs to that community. But, it turns out that learning Japanese language is not as easy as one might think.

There are several reasons why Japanese language learners find it difficult to communicate naturally. Every

language has different rules and regulations. Not only general rules and norms, but also there are specific rules

and norms that can distinguish one language from other languages. For a second/ foreign language learner, such

differences sometimes create difficulties, due to the difference of linguistic rules and norms between the learner's

mother tongue and the second/ foreign language he/she is learning. Being proficient in using a language properly

and acceptably is the goal of language learning, which includes foreign languages. Proper and acceptable language

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use means that the use of language is based on linguistic rules, while the acceptability of language use is determined by the provisions that apply to the communities who speak the language.

The dissimilarity of linguistic rules can confuse language learners and can ultimately lead to errors or inaccuracy, or even unfamiliarity in the use of (foreign) language. One of the difference of linguistic rules that needs to be observed in foreign language learning is the use of collocations. The inappropriate use of collocations in a sentence may be caused by the different structure between the collocation structure of the learner's mother tongue (L1) and the collocation structure of the language being learned (L2). Collocation is a linguistic fact found in all languages. There are several theories in expressing this collocation.

According to Cowie (1998), Masahiro (2009) and Im (2006), there are 3 categories of collocations based on the closeness of the relationship and clarity of meaning between words. These three categories of collocation are free combination, collocation, and idiom. The following are examples of each category.

- 1. The example of free combination such as *Gohan o taberu* 'eat rice'. Each word in this collocation category can be replaced by another word freely such as *gohan o taku* 'cook rice' and *ringo o taberu* 'eat apple'.
- 2. The examples of collocation such as *kaze o hiku* which means catching a cold/flu and *yotei o tateru* which means making a plan. If the Japanese learners don't understand the meaning of the words *kaze*, *hiku*, *yotei*, *tateru* and the particle *o*, they will encounter difficulties in understanding this type of collocation. For example, when saying catching a cold and making a plan, Japanese learners who speak Indonesian as their mother tongue might say *kaze o hairu*, because the direct translation of catching a cold to Indonesian is 'to enter wind' and *hairu* equals to the word 'to enter' in Indonesian. As for *yotei o tateru*, they might say *keikaku o tsukuru*, which sounds unnatural in Japanese language.
- 3. The example of idiom such as *saba o yomu* which means giving information in secret. In this category, the meaning of the whole expression 'giving information in secret' can't be traced from the meaning of each words *saba* 'mackerel' and *yomu* 'read' in any sense. This type of collocation refers more to the ideology of the native community.

Based on the closeness of the relationship and clarity of meaning between words, there are different opinions among experts. As mentioned above, Cowie (1998), Masahiro (2009) and Im (2006) divide collocations into 3 categories. In line with this, Akimoto (1992, 2002), Nesselhauf (2003, 2005), Laufer & Waldman (2011), Fukada (2008) also divide collocation into 3 categories namely free combination, collocation and idiom. However, Ii (2014) argues that there are only 2 (two) collocations, namely collocation and idiom, by eliminating the category of free combination. Meanwhile, Yamada (2007) argues that there is only 1 (one) category, collocation. This study will use the theories of Cowie (1998), Masahiro (2009) and Im (2006) and use the term collocation for all word combinations consisting of free combinations, collocations and idioms.

Although there are differences in terms as stated above, it does not hinder the enthusiasm of language researchers to research collocations, especially those related to foreign languages, because collocations play an important role

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easily and accurately (Wahab, 2014).

in foreign language learning, as stated by Grimm (2010). Meanwhile Nation (2000) and Hill (2000) argue that collocation proficiency is a marker of a foreign language learner's ability to understand the language. Foreign language learners can be said to be proficient if they have good collocation knowledge. Therefore, in order to obtain a natural and acceptable foreign language proficiency, various efforts are made. Adjustment of strategies, methods and activities in learning adapted to the stages of learners will help learners in mastering the language

For native speakers, collocational expressions are understood and internalized without difficulty (taken for granted), in other words, native speakers can use collocations appropriately without experiencing difficulties. For example, Indonesian native speakers always use the term ibu pertiwi instead of bunda pertiwi, and will also use the term dasar negara instead of dasar negeri, although in principle the words negara and negeri as well as ibu and bunda have the same meaning. The dissimilarity of collocation construction between mother tongue and target language is one of the difficulties of foreign language learners in the learning process. Foreign language learners tend to bring L1 concepts into L2. Speaking proficiency by using correct and acceptable collocations is one of the key factors in determining a learner's capability of using a second/foreign language.

Schmitt (2000) states that foreign language learners will encounter difficulties in speaking if they don't understand that every language has rules regarding collocations that cannot be replaced with other words even though they have the same meaning. Unfortunately, the importance of collocation learning is lacking understanding among foreign language teachers. For example in China, according to Wang (2007), foreign language textbooks in China still do not include collocations in their discussions. The vocabulary list contained in foreign language learning books contains only single word meaning. This is similar to Japanese language learning textbooks used in Indonesia, the vocabulary list in Japanese language learning textbooks only consists of vocabulary with a single meaning. The lack of understanding of the term collocation among Japanese language learners has also been proven after researchers at the East Java Japanese Language Teachers MGMP meeting, tried to ask questions about the term collocation to 50 Japanese language teachers, but nobody recognized it.

Based on the above background, this study aims to identify the level of comprehension of Japanese learners related to collocations, with the future goal of finding suitable learning methods for word learning and also the creation of a Japanese-Indonesian collocation book.

B. Research Method

This study uses qualitative research by using data and data sources of test results related to collocations given to 72 Japanese language learners who speak Indonesian as L1. These learners have taken approximately 600 hours of Japanese language learning at the Japanese Language Education Program, Faculty of Cultural Studies, University of Brawijaya, Malang, Indonesia. They are currently using Minna no Nihongo Shokyu 1-2 2nd edition and Minna no Nihongo Chukyu 1-2 textbooks which still use a list of words with single meaning as in other general Japanese language learning textbooks.

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Data collection begins with making a test of noun-verb constructed collocations. The test questions refer to the practice questions used to prepare for the Japanese language competency test, namely the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) level N2. Furthermore, the test must meet the requirements of a good measuring instrument, which are valid and reliable. The test questions that have been declared valid and reliable are then tested on the respondents of this study. The test was conducted in a regular class. Japanese language learners who took this test were not allowed to use any dictionary to check the meaning of the words. In addition, they were not informed about the actual purpose of the test, but only given information that this test would measure the level of collocation comprehension. After completing all the tests, the answer sheets were given to the research respondents as they had to know the results.

C. Results and Discussion

Based on the corpus of data from the collocation comprehension test given to the respondents of this study, the following data were obtained.

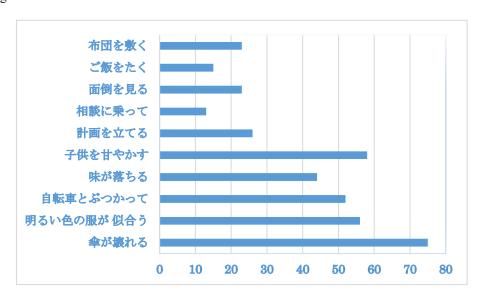


Chart 1 Comprehension Level of Collocations

Based on the data above, it is known that most of the respondents, about 75%, answered correctly to the collocations: kasa ga kowaremasu (傘が壊れます) 'the umbrella is broken'. The next most correctly answered were fuku ga niau (服が似合う) 'the clothes fit', kuruma to butsukaru (自転車とぶつかる) 'collided with the car', kodomo o amayakasu (子供を甘やかす) 'spoiled the child'. Each of these was answered correctly by half of the respondents.

However, the collocations $futon\ o\ shiku\ (布団を敷く)$, $gohan\ o\ taku\ (ご飯を炊く)$, $mendou\ o\ miru\ (面倒を見る)$, $soudan\ ni\ noru\ (相談に乗る)$ and $keikaku\ o\ tateru\ (計画を立てる)$, respondents who answered correctly were only about max 26% of the total respondents.

The following is an example of the analysis that has been carried out by researcher on the question items.

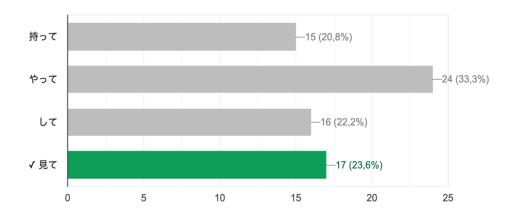
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Analysis of question 1:

姉が忙しい時は、私が妹の面倒を____いる

Ane ga isogashii toki wa, watashi ga imouto no mendou o ___iru



Based on the data above, it is known that in answering the question, the respondents' answers were spread across 4 (four) alternative answers. The 1st answer alternative with *mendou o motsu* was used by 15 respondents or around 20%, *mendou o yaru* (面倒をやる) used by 24 respondents or around 33.3%, *mendou o suru* (面倒をする) used by 16 respondents or around 22.2%, and the last one *mendou o miru* (面倒を見る) used by around 17 respondents or 23.6%.

The following are the meanings of each verb: *motsu* 'bring', *yaru* 'do', *suru* 'do' and *miru* 'see'. Of the 4 (four) alternative answers, the most appropriate is the collocation *mendou o miru* (面倒を見る). *Mendou o miru* 'to take care of (面倒を見る) (国語大辞典言泉: 2239) is a collocation. This is based on the fact that the verb in this collocation, miru, is not the first meaning in the dictionary and the noun it is paired with is not free to be substituted. If it is substituted, it will change the meaning of the whole collocation. On the other words, it has made a fixed pair of words. If we see the percentage of correct answers which is 17 respondents or 23.6% of all respondents, it can be concluded that respondents do not understand the meaning of the collocation *mendou o miru* 'take care of (面倒を見る). This error can also be caused by the fact that this collocation has a concept that is different from the L1 concept, if interpreted word by word in Indonesian, *mendou* means 'difficulty' and the verb *miru* means 'to see', so, if put together it translates as 'to see the difficulty', but this collocation as a whole in Japanese means 'to take care of', this is very different from the L1 concept. Therefore, if the learner does not memorize this collocation as a word pair, it will be difficult to trace down the meaning word by word.

The reason why respondents chose *yaru* and *suru* to be paired with the noun *mendou* was because they did not understand this collocation and chose it because they assumed that the noun *mendou* fell into the category of *suru doushi* and some respondents also reasoned that they did not memorize the collocation in question.

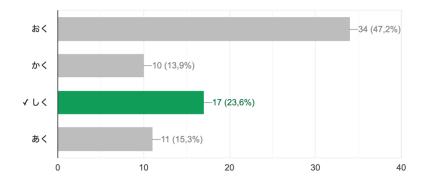
Analysis of question 2:

この旅館ではお客さんが自分で布団を_____ことになっている

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Kono ryokan de wa okyakusan ga jibun de futon o koto ni natte iru



Based on the data above, it is known that in answering the question, the respondents' answers were spread across 4 (four) alternative answers. The most answered verb was *oku* with 34 persons or around 47.2%. The other verbs *kaku* with 10 respondents or around 13.9%, *shiku* with 17 respondents or around 23.6%, and *aku* with 11 respondents or around 15.3%.

The meanings of each verb that became an alternative answer are: oku has a definition of 'To keep a person or object in a certain position or place.' Hito ya mono o aru ichi basho ni todomeru (人や物をある位置・場所にとどめる). The verb shiku has the meaning 'To lay out something so that object can be placed on it' Ue ni mono o noseru yō ni taira ni hirogeru. Shiku mono ni suru (上に物をのせるように平らに広げる。敷く物にする). The verb aku means 'to open something' Shimatteita mono ga hiraku (しまっていたものがひらく).

Based on the meaning of each verbs stated above, it can be concluded that the most appropriate answer to the question above is the collocation $futon\ o\ shiku$ 'roll out (stretch) one's own futon' (布団をしく). This is a collocation categorized as a free combination collocation because the verb in this collocation is the 1st meaning in the dictionary. Since it is a free combination, the noun can be replaced freely without changing the collocation. For example, with the following examples $zabuton\ o\ shiku$ 'roll out (stretch) zabuton' (座布団を敷く), $hankachi\ o\ shiku$ 'roll out (stretch) handkerchief' ((N > D) + E) (国語大辞典言泉: 1104)

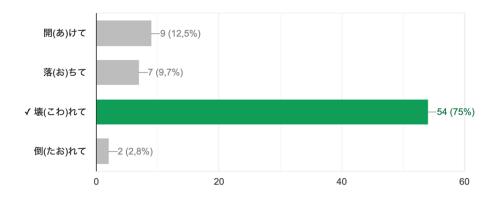
From the percentage of correct answers with 17 respondents or 23% of the total respondents, it can be concluded that respondents do not understand the meaning of the collocation $futon\ o\ shiku$ 'roll out' (布団をしく). In this question, the verbs oku and aku were also chosen by the respondents. This error is due to the respondent making a wrong concept of L1 to L2 between oku, aku and shiku. The respondent assumed that by using oku, the overall meaning of the sentence above is 'hotel guests can pick up and put the futon on the floor themselves as a bed', by using aku the respondent assumed 'hotel guests can open the futon themselves to make a bed'. The verbs oku and aku are the choices of the respondents who will guess the answer because these verbs have a high occurrence rate in the Japanese textbooks that respondents use for learning Japanese. Therefore, because they have often heard and read the verbs, they already understand the meaning they use to answer, even though they already know that it is not correct.

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Analysis of question 3:

昨日の台風で、傘が____しまった。



Based on the data above, it is known that in answering the question, the respondents' answers were spread across 4 (four) alternative answers. The alternative verb *akeru* was answered by 9 persons or around 12.5%, *ochiru* was used by 7 persons or around 9.7%, *kowareru* was used by 54 persons or around 75%, *taoreru* was used by 2 respondents or around 2.8%.

The meanings of each choice are as follows. Akeru means 'to open', Hedate ya shikiri ni natte iru mono o torinozoku. Tojite ita mono o hiraku (隔てや仕切りになっているものを取り除く。閉じていたものを開く). Ochiru means 'to move suddenly and spontaneously from top to bottom', Ue kara shita e shizen ni, mata, kyū ni idō suru. (上から下へ自然に、また、急に移動する). Kowareru means 'to be broken. An object is shattered or torn. Destroyed.', Chikara ga kuwaerarete mono no moto no katachi ga yugandari ushinawaretari suru. Mono ga kudaketari, yaburetari suru. Hakai sareru (力が加えられて物のもとの形がゆがんだり失われたりする。物が砕けたり、破れたりする。破壊される).

Based on the meaning of each of the verbs stated above, it can be concluded that the most appropriate answer to the question above is the collocation *kowarete shimatta* 'broken' (傘が壊れてしまった).

Kowarete shimatta 'broken' (傘が壊れてしまった) is a free combination collocation. This is because the verb kowaremasu in this collocation is the 1st meaning, so the accompanying noun is free to be replaced with other nouns without changing the overall meaning. For example, by replacing the noun kasa 'umbrella' with hako ga kowaremasu 'the box is broken' (箱が壊れます), taifu de ie ga kowaremasu 'The houses are damaged by typhoon' (台風で家が壊れます) (国語大辞典言泉: 882).

Judging from the percentage of correct answers with 54 respondents or 75% of the total respondents, it can be concluded that most respondents have understood the meaning of the collocation *kasa ga kowarete shimatta*(傘 が壊れてしまった). The high occurrence rate in the textbook used in learning makes the respondents remember this verb *kowaremasu* 'broken' well.

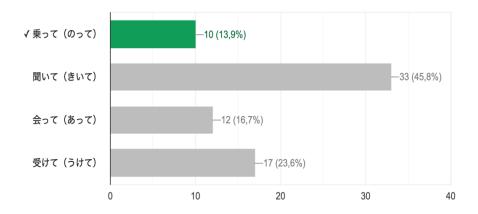
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Analysis of question 4:

上司に相談に___もらった

Joshi ni soudan ni moratta



Based on the data above, it is known that in answering the question, the respondents' answers were spread across 4 (four) alternative answers. The verb *notte* was answered by 10 persons or around 13.9%, *kiite* was used by 33 persons or around 45.8%, *atte* was used by 12 persons or around 16.7%, and the last one *ukete* was used by 17 respondents or around 23.6%.

The meaning of each verb as follows; the verb *notte* means 'to be friends or opponents in responding to problems. This is related to consultation and schemes', *sasoi ni ōjite nakama ya aite ni naru. Sōdan ya takurami-goto ni kankei suru* (誘いに応じて仲間や相手になる。相談やたくらみごとに関係する). The verb *kiite* means 'to hear', *oto-goe o mimi ni ukeru, mimi ni kanjitoru* (音・声を耳に受ける。耳に感じ取る). The verb *atte* means 'to meet', *tagai ni kao o mukaiawaseru. Basho o kimete taimen suru* (お互いに顔を向かい合わせる。場所を決めて対面する。). Lastly, the verb *ukete* means 'to take what is offered', *sashidasareta mono o jibun no kata ni toriireru. Te ni osame ireru. Morau* (差し出されたものを自分の方に取り入れる。手に収め入れる。もらう).

Based on the meaning of each of the verbs stated above, it can be concluded that the most appropriate answer to the question above is the collocation *Joshi ni soudan ni notte* 'I consulted with my boss' (上司に相談に乗って).

The collocation *Joshi ni soudan ni notte* 'I consulted with my boss' (上司に相談に乗って) is a collocation which fall into the category of collocation. The reason is because the verb *noru* in this collocation is not the first meaning in the dictionary, and the noun it is paired with is not free to be substituted. The above question can only be answered with knowledge of the relationship between the meanings that make up the collocation. Most errors were caused by the respondent trying to apply the concept of L1 to L2 by setting up the noun *soudan* 'consultation' with the verb kiku 'hearing' which at first glance are pairs of words that fall into the same field of meaning. The respondents' preference to set up the verb kiku to the noun soudan is because in L1 (Indonesian) this collocation

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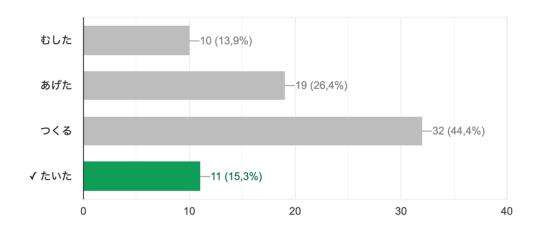
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can be understood to mean 'to hear complaints', but this concept of thinking is unacceptable in Japanese language. A native Japanese speaker will use the collocation 'soudan ni noru' to express 'to consult/ to listen to complaints'. From the percentage of correct answers with only 10 respondents or 13.9% of the total respondents, it can be concluded that the respondents don't understand the meaning of the collocation Joshi ni soudan ni notte 'I consulted with my boss' (上司に相談に乗って).

Analysis of question 5:

炊飯器がなかったので、鍋でご飯を____

Suihanki ga nakatta node, nabe de gohan o _____



Based on the data above, it is known that in answering the question, the respondents' answers were spread across 4 (four) alternative answers. The verb *mushita* was answered by 10 persons or around 13.9%, *ageta* was used by 19 persons or around 26.4%, *tsukuru* was used by 32 persons or around 44.4%, and the last one *taita* was used by 11 respondents or around 15.3%.

The meaning of each verb as follows; the verb *mushita* means 'to close and vaporize, to steam', *yuge o atete netsu o tōsu* (湯気を当てて熱を通す). The verb *ageta* means 'to fry', *abura de nite chouri suru* (油で煮て調理する). The verb *tsukuru* means 'to make, to use or modify materials, raw materials, ingredients, etc., to create something cohesive or meaningful', *Zairyō genryō sozai nado o mochiitari, sore ni te o kuwaetari shite, matomari no aru mono ya imi no aru mono ni shiageru (材料・原料・素材などを用いたり、それに手を加えたりして、まとまりのあるものや意味のあるものに仕上げる). The verb <i>taita* means 'to cook (grains)', *kome nado no kokumotsu o nite taberareru yō ni suru* (米などの穀物を煮て食べられるようにする).

Based on the meaning of each of the verbs stated above, it can be concluded that the most appropriate answer to the question above is the collocation *Gohan o taku* 'to cook rice' (ご飯をたく).

Gohan o taku 'to cook rice' (ご飯をたく) is a collocation falls into the category of free combination. The reason is because the verb taku 'to cook' たく is the first meaning in the dictionary, and the pairing noun can be replaced

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by another noun which is similar to rice, such as *kayu o taku* 'to cook porridge' (かゆをたく), *sekihan o taku* 'to cook brown rice' (赤飯をたく) (国語大辞典言泉: 1426).

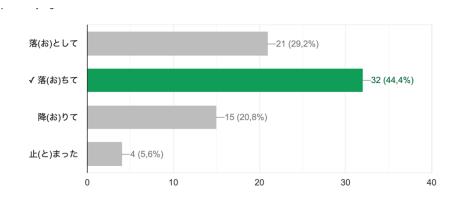
Most of the respondents' errors in answering the question above were due to the respondents trying to apply the concept of L1 to L2 by pairing the noun *gohan* 'rice' with *tsukuru* 'to make'. The reason is because in L1, the concept of 'making rice' is acceptable, but this concept of thinking is not acceptable in Japanese language. Native Japanese speakers would use the collocation 'gohan o taku' to express 'to cook rice'.

From the percentage of correct answers with only 11 respondents or 15.3% of the total respondents, it can be concluded that respondents don't understand the meaning of the collocation \tilde{c} \tilde{w} \tilde{c} \tilde{c}

Analysis of question 6:

この店は、以前と比べてたら、味が____しまった。

Kono mise wa, izen to kurabetara, aji ga ___shimatta.



Based on the data above, it is known that in answering the question, the respondents' answers were spread across 4 (four) alternative answers. The verb *otoshite* was answered by 21 persons or around 29.2%, *ochite* was used by 32 persons or around 44.4%, *orite* was used by 15 persons or around 20.8%, and the last one *tomatta* was used by 4 respondents or around 5.6%.

The meaning of each verb as follows; the verb *otoshita* means 'to drop. To move object vigorously and abruptly from top to bottom', *ue kara shita e ikioi yoku, mata kyū ni idō saseru* (上から下へ勢いよく、また急に移動きせる). The verb *ochite* means 'to decrease, a reduction in the position, degree, value, etc. of a thing; a reduction in status, dignity, etc.', *Monogoto no ichi, teido, kachi nado ga hikuku naru, chi'i, hinkaku nado ga sagaru* (物事の位置、程度、価値などが低くなる、地位、品格などが下がる). The verb *orite* means 'to come down, to move from higher to lower position to reach a certain position or location. Move from the top to the bottom', *takai tokoro kara hikui kata e to utsutte, aru ichi basho ni tsuku. Ue kara shita e idō suru* (高い所から低い方へと移って、ある位置・場所に着く。上から下へ移動する). The verb *tomatta* means 'to stop. A moving object stops moving. It is in a state of quitting movement', *ugoiteita mono ga ugokanaku naru. Ugoki o soko de yameta jōtai*

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ni naru. Teishi suru (動いていたものが動かなくなる。動きをそこで辞めた状態になる。停止する).

Based on the meaning the verbs mentioned above, it can be concluded that the most appropriate answer to the question above is the collocation *aji ga ochite* 'the taste of the food is declining' (味が落ちて). It is a collocation in the category of free combination, because the noun *aji* 'taste' (味) can be replaced by other nouns related to quality, value or position, such as in the following collocations: *hinsei ga hikuku naru* 'the quality declines' (品性 が低くなる) and *Dōgi kokoro mo ochita mono da* 'the moral declined' (道義心もおちたものだ). (国語大辞典言泉: 319)

From the percentage of correct answers which is 32 respondents or 44.4% of the total respondents, it can be concluded that the respondents don't quite understand the meaning of the collocation *aji ga ochite* 'the taste (of the dish) is declining/falling' (味が落ちて). The verb *otoshite* and *orite* were also chosen by the respondents to answer this question. This error is due to the respondent's misconception of L1 to L2 between *otoshite*, *orite* and *ochite*. Respondents assumed that by using *otoshite* and *orite*, they could answer correctly because there are similarities in meaning in L1 with *ochite*. All those three verbs are related to things/nouns that 'fall' or 'decline'. Although having the same field of meaning, the three verbs have very different functions in the sentence. From the type of verb, *otosu* and *oriru* fall into the *tadoushi* category which requires the particle 'o', but *ochiru* belongs to *jidoushi* category which requires the particle 'ga'. Therefore, the correct answer can already be concluded, but sometimes respondents forget the important points that are actually clearly displayed in the question sentence.

From some examples of errors in answering collocation-related questions, it can be concluded that:

- 1. There is a tendency for learners to understand collocations that can be translated directly/collocations that can be traced down to each words that make them up more easily. Direct translation into L1 is often encountered by L2 learners at the beginning to intermediate stages of learning *Goi* (語彙) 'vocabulary' in L2. This is in line with the opinion stated by Kellerman (1979) also cited by Taeko Koya (2003) that learners have a tendency to predict answers by directly transferring into L2.
- 2. Collocations that are close to idiomatic expressions which in this study are called collocations are difficult for Japanese language learners to understand. It is proved by the very low percentage of correct answers which is only 13% with the collocation *Soudan ni noru* 'asking for advice' (相談に乗る).
- 3. Respondents tend to guess collocations that they don't know clearly. However, this is still considered a reasonable strategy for L2 language learners (Deignan, Knowles, Sinclair and Willis, 1998).

D. Conclusion

In this study, it is also known that the level of Japanese language learners' comprehension of collocations with noun-verb construction is below 50%. Hence, it can be concluded that the comprehension level of collocations among Japanese language learners is very low.

From the explanation of the research results above, we can conclude that collocation is a difficult linguistic phenomenon for Japanese language learners. Collocation is also a multifaceted phenomenon related to the culture

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of the native speakers of the target language. Therefore, it is not always enough to understand the lexical meaning to understand a sentence or conversation in Japanese. When words are combined to create new expressions, there is a slight difference of nuances from the original meaning of the word. For this reason, it is very important for Japanese learners to learn the use of words in collocations rather than memorizing words separately.

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