

The Role of Collocations and Sociolinguistic Factors in Reading Comprehension Skills of L2 Turkish Primary School Students*

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Abstract. This study examines the relative role of collocations and sociolinguistic factors on the reading comprehension skills of fourth grade primary school students learning Turkish as a second language (L2). The participants included both native speakers of Turkish (L1) and L2 students from socioeconomically different districts of Istanbul. The researchers collected data using the Language and Social Background Questionnaire (LSBQ) and a Reading Comprehension Test. The data was analyzed using statistical methods including the independent samples t-test and the independent samples one-way variance analysis (ANOVA) in the SPSS 22.0 package program. The results of this study showed that L1 students outperformed L2 students on the reading comprehension test with collocations. Additionally, L2 students had better results on restricted collocations compared to other types of collocations. There are several sociolinguistic factors that can effect the reading comprehension skills of L2 students, including gender and the language they use while watching TV/video. However, other factors like the number of siblings a student has, their socioeconomic level, their access to technological devices like tablets and computers, and whether or not they regularly read do not seem to effect comprehension scores. This study has the potential to make a significant contribution to researchers, teachers, and policy-makers who work with immigrant L2 students.

Keywords: Collocations, reading comprehension, second language (L2), native language (L1)

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1. INTRODUCTION

Collocation refers to the way certain words tend to be use together within a language (Vardar, 2002; İmer et al., 2011;). These pairs of words may be linked syntactically or semantically and are not always used randomly but instead are commonly found in close proximity to one another (Halliday, 1966; Almakary, 2017; Çubukçu and Turan, 2019).

There are two main approaches to studying collocations: the frequency-based approach and the significance-oriented approach (Nesselhauf 2005). The frequency-based approach looks at how often certain words are used together (Halliday, 2004; Nesselhauf, 2005; Doğan, 2015), while the significance-oriented approach considers factors such as whether words can be modified (e.g., çay içmek "to drink tea", kahve içmek "to drink coffee"), whether they can be divided into parts (e.g. gözleri yaşarmak "filling with tears"), whether they contribute to figurative meanings (e.g., küplere binmek "fly off the handle/become very angry"), and whether they function as part of a sentence (Cowie 1988). According to Cowie (1981, 1998, 2012), the significance-oriented approach can be divided into four categories: free collocations, restricted collocations, figurative idioms, and pure idioms. Free collocations are combination of words that follow grammatical rules, and can be modified to some extent. Restricted collocations are combination of words that are semantically partially transparent, and can only be modified to a limited extent or not at all. The more changeable a restricted collocation is, the closer it is to a free collocation; the less changeable it is, the closer it is to an idiom. Figurative idioms have both literal and metaphorical meanings, and the meaning of each element is metaphorical. For example, in Turkish, the combination of words in the phrase "hapı yutmak" means "to be in a terrible situation, to suffer damage" but its literal meaning, "to use medication when sick," can also be understood from the combination's elements (Yakasız, 2019). Finally, pure idioms are routine expressions that cannot be modified and function as a single word, with no semantic transparency and no possibility of preserving their literal meanings (Doğan, 2015).



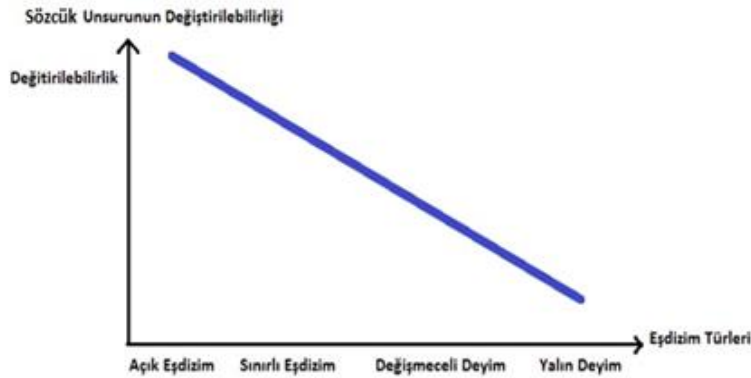


Figure 1. The Meaning and Phrase Changeability Across Collocation Types

Collocations can be helpful for language learners because they allow students to learn words in context and make connections between words. This can improve reading comprehension and make it easier to predict the meanings of phrases (Taylor, 1983). Collocations can also improve speaking and writing fluency by helping students focus on phrases rather than individual words (Nattinger, 1988). Teaching collocations can also help students develop a deeper understanding of the language and improve their ability to communicate effectively in a variety of contexts.

There are two main factors that can impact an individual's ability to comprehend written material, including language skills and sociolinguistic experiences (Uyanık, 2011). Initially, linguistically, the presence of too many unfamiliar words can impede reading comprehension (Göğüş, 1978). Collocations, which are complex word combinations, also have a significant influence on comprehension. Murphy's (2018) study indicated that L2 students tend to treat collocations as a single unit and have difficulty understanding texts that contain collocations. The study also found that these students are unaware that their poor performance in comprehension is due to their lack of knowledge of collocations. Similarly, Kan and Murphy (2020) found that L2 students struggle to understand texts containing collocations and are unaware of their limitations in comprehension. Other studies in the field have also found that adult English learners have a harder time understanding texts with a higher number of collocations, even if the texts use the same words, compared to texts with fewer collocations (Martinez and Murphy, 2011). Özoflu's (2012) study also found that L2 students have more difficulty understanding texts with a higher number of collocations. Another factor to consider, sociolinguistically, children from financially secure families with higher levels of education tend to have better reading comprehension skills, while those who are malnourished or lack supportive home environments may struggle in this area (Sancı, 2002; Üstün et al. 2004; İnan, 2005; Sert, 2010; Kayhan, 2010; Köseoğlu, 2011; Ağaçkiran, 2016; Güleçol 2017). In terms of gender, studies found that female students and students with strong academic records tend to have stronger reading

comprehension skills (Sallabaş, 2008; Kutlu vd. 2011; Deniz, 2013, Tumkar 2015). Given this prior research, it is crucial to understand the role of collocations in reading comprehension in order to effectively assess bilingual students, as collocations are an important aspect of language to consider. It is important to disentangle the impact of collocations from the impact of sociocultural factors and understand the relative role of each factor in reading comprehension.

This study aims to investigate the effect of collocations, on the reading comprehension skills of students learning Turkish as a second language. The specific subproblems of this study are as follows:

- 1) How do L2 and L1 students differ in their reading comprehension skills based on their knowledge of collocations?
- 2) How does the difficulty level of collocations affect reading comprehension skills in L2 students?
- 3) If there are significant differences in students' reading comprehension skills across groups (L1 and L2) and collocation types (from free collocations to pure idioms), what sociolinguistic factors contribute to these differences?

2. METHOD

This study employed the correlational survey model, a type of quantitative research paradigm. This model examines the relationship between two or more variables. It allows researchers to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between the variables (Karasar, 2011).

2.1. Participants

The participants consist of 130 fourth-grade students from public schools in Istanbul, including 65 monolingual L1 students and 65 second language Turkish learners (L2). The L2 group is composed of 33 female (50.8%) and 32 male (49.2%) students, while the L1 group consists of 37 female (56.9%) and 28 male (43.1%) students. The ages of the students range from 9 to 11 years old. Ethics committee approval for this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of İstanbul Medeniyet University with the decision dated 04.10.2021 and numbered 2021/10-10.

2.2. Data Collection and Data Collection Tools

The study uses a Reading Comprehension Test and an adapted Language and Social Background Questionnaire (LSBQ) to collect data. The Reading Comprehension Test was developed to evaluate the students' reading comprehension skills based on their knowledge of collocations. The test was administered in an empty classroom designated by the school administration. The students took the test during a class session (40 minutes). The Language and Social Background Questionnaire was used to collect information about the students' age, sex, year of birth, place of birth, date of arrival in Turkey, the languages spoken with family members, the languages spoken by family

members, the languages used in daily life such as when reading, listening to music, or using social media, the family's socioeconomic level, the parents' educational level and profession, and other relevant details. This information was gathered through interviews with each student after the reading comprehension test.

2.3. Data Analysis

Before analyzing the data, a normality analysis was conducted on the reading comprehension test to determine whether the scores were normally distributed. The analysis revealed that the test was not normally distributed, however, the values of kurtosis and skewness coefficients met the normality hypothesis. These values ranged from -.844 to .586. In the social sciences, it is generally accepted that data are normally distributed when the values of the kurtosis and skewness coefficients fall between +1.5 and -1.5 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). Therefore, it can be concluded that the scores in this study are normally distributed. Given that the data were normally distributed, parametric statistical tests such as the Independent Samples T-Test and the Independent Samples One-Way Variance Analysis (ANOVA) were used to analyze the data using the SPSS 22.0 software package.

3. FINDINGS

In this study, the data from the Reading Comprehension Test given to L1 and L2 students was analyzed to compare the students' test results and evaluate their success. The reading comprehension skills of L2 students were also compared based on different types of collocations (free collocations, restricted collocations, figurative idioms, and pure idioms). The later analyses of the study aimed to determine the influence of sociolinguistic factors on reading comprehension skills.

Table 1

The t-test on the reading comprehension scores of L1 and L2 students

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	Sd	p
L2	65	55.15	20.935	2.597			
L1	65	75.08	15.700	1.947	-6.138	128	.000

Table 1 shows the mean scores of L1 and L2 students. The mean scores indicate that L1 students had better reading comprehension skills compared to L2 students ($X_{(migrant)} = 55.15$; $X_{(Turkish)} = 75.8$). The significant difference in these mean scores suggests that L1 students performed better than L2 students ($t = -6.138$; $p < 0.05$).

Table 2

L2 students' reading comprehension skills based on gender

Variable	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Male	49.53	32	20.295
Female	60.61	33	20.378
Total	55.15	65	20.935

Table 2 shows that female L2 students had reading comprehension scores above the mean ($X_{\text{female}}=60.61$), while male L2 students had reading comprehension scores below the mean ($X_{\text{male}}=49.53$).

Table 3

ANOVA test results across the collocation types in L2 students' reading comprehension test

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Significance
Intergroup	33.253	3	11.084	6.646	.000	2-1 2-3
Intragroup	406.940	244	1.668			2-4
Total	440.194	247				

Table 3 shows the results of the L2 students' total scores according to the different collocation types. The Table reveals that there are significant differences between collocation types in favor of restricted collocations ($F=6.646$; $p<.000$). Specifically, there are significant differences in favor of restricted collocations compared to free collocations ($X_{\text{(restricted collocation)}} = 3.4355$, $X_{\text{(free collocation)}}=2.500$; $p<.000$), pure idioms ($X_{\text{(restricted collocation)}} = 3.4355$, $X_{\text{(pure idiom)}}=2.7619$; $p<.000$); and figurative idioms ($X_{\text{(restricted collocation)}} = 3.4355$, $X_{\text{(figurative idiom)}}=2.5873$; $p<.000$). These results suggest that L2 students are more successful in answering questions involving restricted collocations.

Table 4

The t-Test results of the L2 students' scores according to gender in reading comprehension

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	sd	p
Female	33	60.61	20.378	3.547	2.195	63	,032
Male	32	49.53	20.295	3.588			

Table 4 reveals that there is a significant difference between the scores of L2 students in reading comprehension according to their gender ($x_{(female)} = 60.61$; $x_{(male)} = 49.53$), with female students performing better ($t=2.195$; $p < .005$). This indicates that gender has a significant impact on L2 students' reading comprehension skills. The female students' mean success scores ($X_{female}=60.61$) are higher than those of the male students ($X_{male}=49.53$), indicating that females are more successful than males.

Table 5

ANOVA Test on the L2 students' number of siblings

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Intergroup	2826.190	3	942.063	2.278	,088
Intragroup	25222.271	61	413.480		
Total	28048.462	64			

Table 5 shows that the number of siblings does not have a significant effect on the reading comprehension skills of L2 students ($F= 2.278$; $p= .088$). These results indicate that the number of siblings does not influence the success of L2 students in the Reading Comprehension Test.

Table 6

ANOVA Test on the L2 students' socioeconomic status

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P*
Intergroup	1201.462	2	600.731	1.387	,257
Intragroup	26847.000	62	433.016		
Total	28048.462	64			

Table 6 shows that socioeconomic status has no significant effect on the reading comprehension skills of L2 students ($F=1.387$; $p=.257$). In other words, the students' socio-economic status does not seem to have a significant impact on their performance in reading comprehension tests.

Table 7

The T-Test on L2 students' having technological devices

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	Sd	p
Yes	38	53.2895	18.42722	2.98929	-.850	63	.040
No	27	57.7778	24.15229	4.64811			

Table 7 shows that having technological devices have not a significant effect on L2 students' reading comprehension skills ($x_{(yes)} = 53.2895$; $x_{(no)} = 57.7778$; $t = -.850$; $p < .005$). Table 7 demonstrates that having technological devices like a computer or tablet has not a significant impact on reading comprehension.

Table 8

The ANOVA test on the L2 students' reading habits

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Intergroup	2164.152	3	721.384	1.700	,176
Intragroup	25884.309	61	424.333		
Total	28048.462	64			

Table 8 reveals that the status of family members' reading habits for their homes did not create a significant difference in the reading comprehension skills of L2 students ($F=1.700$; $p=.176$).

Table 9

The ANOVA test on the language used when watching TV/Video

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Intergroup	2750.373	2	1375.187	3.400	,040
Intragroup	24671.111	61	404.444		
Total	27421.484	63			

According to Table 10, the Turkish use by the L2 students when watching TV/video creates a significant difference in their success in the reading comprehension test ($F=3.400$; $p=.040$).

4. DISCUSSION

This part has two sections. The first section focuses specifically on the reading comprehension skills of L1 and L2 students in relation to types of collocations. The second section discusses the role of sociolinguistic background (such as the language spoken at home and the language used when watching TV/video) in reading comprehension, and how these variables may interact with the four types of collocations to influence student performance.

4.1. The discussion on collocations' role in reading comprehension

This study found that there is a significant difference between the reading comprehension scores of students who are learning Turkish as a second language (L2) and those who speak Turkish as their first language L1 (See Table 1). The mean scores for L1 students are higher than those for L2 students, indicating that L1 students are more successful in reading comprehension tasks. This finding is consistent with previous research, which has shown that bilingual students often struggle with reading comprehension, particularly when they are not proficient in their L2 when they start school (Tulu, 2009; Yılmaz and Şekerci, 2016; Gorjian and Sayyadian, 2017;). Polat (2012) also found that L2 students tend to have lower academic success compared to L1 students, often struggling to adapt to the education system, participate in classroom activities, and fulfill their responsibilities in school. When interpreting these findings together, it seems that L2 students may have difficulty transitioning to an L2 environment due to their extensive use of their home language prior to starting school, which can affect their academic performance and reading comprehension skills.

Yeganeh and Malekzadeh (2015) conducted a study to examine the impact of bilingualism on reading skills. The study took place over a period of 8 weeks and involved 12 lessons (each lasting 60 minutes) with 60 female students at a middle school in Kuhdasht, Iran. The students were divided into two homogeneous groups: a

bilingual group (speaking Laki-Persian) and a monolingual group (speaking only Persian). The researchers administered comprehensive and extensive reading-summarizing activities to both groups. The study concluded that L2 students performed better in reading comprehension than monolingual students. However, Khiyavi et al. (2016) found no significant difference in reading comprehension scores between L1 and L2 students. When considering these findings in the context of our study, which specifically tested collocation knowledge, it seems that the main reason for the difference between L1 and L2 students' reading comprehension scores may be due to their knowledge of collocations. Supporting this interpretation, Cahyo (2015) found a strong relationship between students' collocation knowledge and their reading comprehension skills. Similarly, Aghbar (1990) argued that learners' poor performance in reading comprehension tests is not only due to a lack of vocabulary knowledge, but also a lack of phrase knowledge, including collocations and proverbs. These word patterns are important elements of language and can distinguish native speakers from non-native speakers in terms of language competence.

In this study, L2 students performed better in restricted collocations compared to the other three types of collocations (free collocations, figurative idioms, and pure idioms; see Table 2). The performance on these three types of collocations was similar, but L2 students had more difficulty understanding figurative idioms, which involve metaphorical meanings that may be more challenging to grasp. While there is no previous research specifically examining the separate effects of these different types of collocations on reading comprehension, Hsu (2002) suggests that several factors may influence the learnability of collocations, including the differences between L1 and L2, non-classroom learning experiences, the frequency of collocation use, and the idiomaticity (i.e., the degree to which a phrase is fixed and cannot be understood based on the meanings of its individual words) of the chosen collocations. These factors may also contribute to the differences in performance on different types of collocations observed in this study.

4.2. The discussion on sociolinguistic factors' role in reading comprehension

The current study found that gender has a significant impact on reading comprehension, with female students generally performing better than males. This finding is supported by other research (See also Chavez, 2001; Çiftçi ve Temizyürek, 2008; Sert, 2010; Kanmaz, 2012; Karaarslan, 2015; Akın, 2016; Çelik, 2016; Gorjian and Sayyadian, 2017), but there are also studies that have found no significant difference between male and female students' reading comprehension scores. (Yılmaz, 2006; Kaldan, 2007; Baştuğ, 2012; Baş, 2013; Ağačkıran, 2016). One study (Bugel and Buunk, 1996) even found the opposite result, with male students performing better than female students in reading comprehension. Overall, gender may not be a strong predictor of reading comprehension skills.

The current study found no significant difference in reading comprehension skills among L2 students based on the number of siblings they have. Previous research

supports this finding (Berber, 1990), revealing that having a larger or nuclear family does not affect the students' academic success. Since activity of reading mostly depends on individual efforts, it may not be correlating with the extent of family. In contrast to the current study, another previous study by Çalışkan (2000) found that children from smaller families had better reading comprehension skills than those from larger families. This may be due to the fact that families with fewer children have more time and resources to support their children's learning and address any weaknesses they may have.

The current study found no correlation between L2 students' reading comprehension levels and their socioeconomic status. However, other research has found that students from lower or higher socioeconomic backgrounds may perform differently in reading comprehension. For example, a study in South Africa (Völkel et al., 2016) found that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds performed better in reading comprehension than those from higher backgrounds. The researchers suggested that the reason why students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds outperformed those from higher backgrounds in reading comprehension, as found in their study, may be due to a greater sense of belonging to their schools and a greater effort to improve their academic performance. Other research has suggested that students with higher family income may have better reading comprehension skills and overall academic achievement compared to those with lower family income (Çalışkan, 2000). According to Şengöl (1995), a child's language skills and intelligence can be affected by their socioeconomic, sociocultural, and educational conditions. Additionally, the child's academic performance may be directly related to their family's income.

The current study found that having access to technological devices, such as computers and tablets, is not associated with better reading comprehension skills. Similarly, Gül (2008) found that people who spend less time on the internet and computers perform better in reading comprehension. Other research (Ertem, 2010; Korat, 2010; Yıldız et al., 2022) demonstrates an opposite finding, with studies showing that students who spend more time on the internet or use e-book applications tend to have better reading comprehension skills. Overall, the impact of technology on reading comprehension is not strongly documented and may depend on the specific context and how the technology is used.

In the current study, there was no relationship found between the L2 students' regular reading habits (such as reading books, newspapers, or journals) and their reading comprehension skills. According to Koçyiğit (2003) and Güleçol (2017) people who understand text on their first reading, regularly read every day, and have their own bookshelves tend to have better reading comprehension skills. Additionally, studies have shown that students who regularly read tend to have better reading comprehension skills compared to those who do not. The regular reading habit is also believed to have a positive impact on reading comprehension (Sabak, 2007; Sert, 2010).

The current study found that there is a relationship between the language used by L2 students while watching TV/video and their reading comprehension skills. Specifically, students who learned Turkish as a second language and watched TV/video programs in Turkish were able to improve their vocabulary and were better able to guess the meanings of words, which may have helped with their reading comprehension. Similarly, Van Den Broek (2001) found that watching television has a positive effect on students' decoding and reading comprehension skills. This suggests that watching TV/video programs in Turkish may be beneficial for students learning the language as a second language.

5. CONCLUSION

The results of our study suggest that L1 students have a higher level of reading comprehension compared to L2 students. Additionally, L1 students demonstrated better performance in tasks involving restricted collocations compared to other types of collocation. This difference may be due to the varying levels of opaqueness in meaning between the different collocation types. Furthermore, we found that gender has a significant impact on reading comprehension, with female students generally performing better than males. However, the other research puts forth contrary results. Thus, gender may not be a significant predictor in reading comprehension. However, we did not find a significant difference in reading comprehension scores based on factors such as the number of siblings, socioeconomic level, or reading habits. On the other hand, we discovered that L2 students who own technological devices and use Turkish while watching TV or videos have higher reading comprehension scores.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations are divided into three sub-parts for researchers, teachers, and policy-makers.

For researchers:

- This study focused on reading comprehension, which is a receptive language skill. Future research that focuses on collocations can help to expand upon current knowledge by examining productive language skills..
- The study was conducted with fourth grade primary school students. It would be interesting to conduct similar research with students from other grade levels and compare the results.

For teachers:

- Doing collocation-based activities in the classroom could be beneficial for helping second language learners improve their knowledge of collocations. Teachers could

use techniques such as collocation cards and games to increase students' understanding of these lexical units.

- Teachers can encourage their students to watch age- and language-appropriate television programs as a way to learn new words and collocations and enhance language development.

For policy-makers:

- In the case of Turkey, policy makers, including the National Ministry of Education and private institutions, should invest more resources in meeting the pedagogical needs of second language Turkish students. This could include creating digital resources, books, and dictionaries specifically designed to teach collocations.
- School administrators can hold meetings to motivate the parents of second language students to use Turkish more at home and increase their awareness of the language.

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Ethics committee approval for this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of İstanbul Medeniyet University with the decision dated 04.10.2021 and numbered 2021/10-10.

Statement of Contribution of Researchers to the Article:

Selim Tiryakiol and Safiye Bölükbaşı planned and modeled the study. Bölükbaşı conducted tests and interviews with students as well as performing data analysis. Tiryakiol and Bölükbaşı interpreted the results and wrote the discussion, conclusion and recommendations in collaboration. This study is a product of MA thesis conducted by Safiye Bölükbaşı under the supervision of Dr. Selim Tiryakiol at Graduate School of Social Sciences at İstanbul Medeniyet University

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest

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