

Assessing Collocational Competence by Probating Emotioncy: Testing the Mediating Role of Gender in Educational Dimensions

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper was to examine at shedding more light into the effectiveness of emotioncy on gender in assessing Persian EFL learners' collocational competence. This study used quantitative methods and the learners were from both intermediate and advanced proficiency groups. The results indicated that male participants who received emotioncy levels performed more efficiently on C-test and open ended test in comparison with females who recorded better performance on cloze test. The study suggested important results for EFL instructors that teacher's experiences showed Iranian EFL learners generally have inadequate knowledge of English collocations in particular of restricted collocations. Moreover, some participants in this study believed that collocations could not be regarded as something that EFL learners could acquire without any instruction; therefore, it was essential to incorporate collocation instruction into EFL reading classes. The findings could help teachers and curriculum designers to classify errors in a continuum ranging from the least to the most problematic ones.

Key words: Collocational Competence, Language Proficiency, Emotioncy, Emotioncy-Based Model, Gender

INTRODUCTION

Testing in general and language testing in particular is an indispensable part of any educational program. It is regarded as a thorny area in that it influences individuals' lives in various ways and to different extents. The importance of testing is even more obvious when it is a high-stakes one i.e. when some crucial decisions are going to be made on the basis of test results. Consequently, educators have always been concerned with developing appropriate tests. They have tried to influence on the development of tests. On the one hand, they provide us with accurate information on test takers' skill and on the other they keep us with the latest developments in other testing areas. Their efforts, therefore, result in the emergence of disparate approaches to testing, each of which claims superiority over other testing approaches (Pishghadam, 2015).

Reading is probably the most common and easiest skill of the four skills to be tested; however, testing reading has difficulties and there are issues that anyone testing reading comprehension should know. Generally vocabulary and collocations in particular have significant roles in language learning. Collocations should be correctly taught and learned; otherwise, the production of wrong collocations results in irregularities which ultimately show the learners' spoken or written language to be awkward and non-native. There have

been many linguistic studies which try to define, to describe and to categorize English collocations. Collocations have received less attention than grammar and vocabulary even though their number "amounts to tens of thousands" (Shokouhi & Mirsalari (2010, p.5). Yet, they have been treated marginally in linguistics (Lipske, 2006) and there are "too many fixed expressions for us to simply disregard them as marginal phenomena (Jacendoff, 1995, p. 156).

A review of the literature shows that there is a virtual lack of empirical research on the relationship between EFL learners' collocational knowledge and their performance on cloze test, C-test and open ended test. However, a small number of studies have investigated the relationship between vocabulary size and academic reading comprehension, which is closely related to the topic of this study. There have been investigations into testing collocational knowledge of language learners; however, there exists considerable gap in collocation testing literature, in that little importance has been given to testing collocational knowledge through three test types of cloze test, C-test and open ended test. Furthermore, which of these three test types are more effective than others has not been well addressed.

Inspired by Greenspan's (1992) developmental, individual-differences, relationship-based (DIR) model of first

language acquisition which places emphasis on the affective domain of human behavior, Pishghadam, Tabatabaeyan, et al. (2013) introduced emotioncy as the missing link in shaping human cognition. Believing that words are probably acquired in a cultural milieu and not in isolation, Pishghadam, et al. (2016) stated that people might have different degrees of emotioncy towards varied items of a language based on their sensory experiences. In order to elucidate the concept, Pishghadam (2015) proposed a hierarchical model for different kinds of emotioncy (Figure 1).

This investigation tries to enable the second language learners to understand and treat collocations more favorably, so that in the long run, they know their weak points and utilize new ways to learn them more efficiently. Generally, this study is an attempt at shedding more light on the nature of lexical and grammatical collocations and tries to find Persian EFL learners' weak points and difficulties in acquiring this very important part of a second language and may propose new ways in learning them and survey the relationship between emotioncy and male gender.

Literature Review

The term "collocation" is discussed frequently in many areas of linguistics, such as semantics, systematic linguistics, morpho-syntax, phraseology, corpus linguistics and lexicography. Collocations are defined generally as words that "fit together" intuitively with great expectation in the syntagmatic and paradigmatic levels. The syntagmatic relation of lexical words, which is horizontal, refers to the collocability of words. The paradigmatic relation of lexical words, which is vertical, refers to sets of words in the same class. For instance, the word "dog" is in syntagmatic relation with "hairy" and in paradigmatic relation with "cat."

Collocations are predictable patterns and phrases or groups of words that typically co-occur. They include lexical items and structural patterns which may seem closer to grammar and combinations of words that simply "go together." Collocation is characterized by three main criteria:

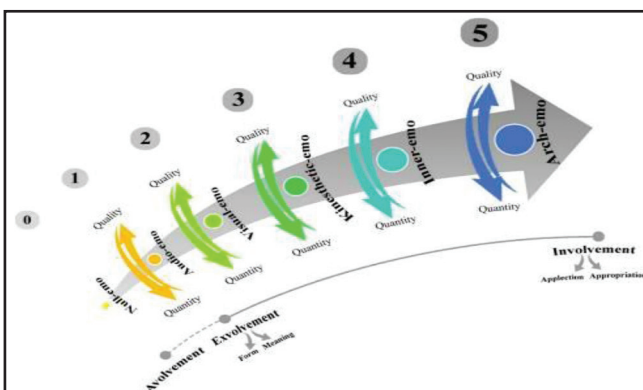


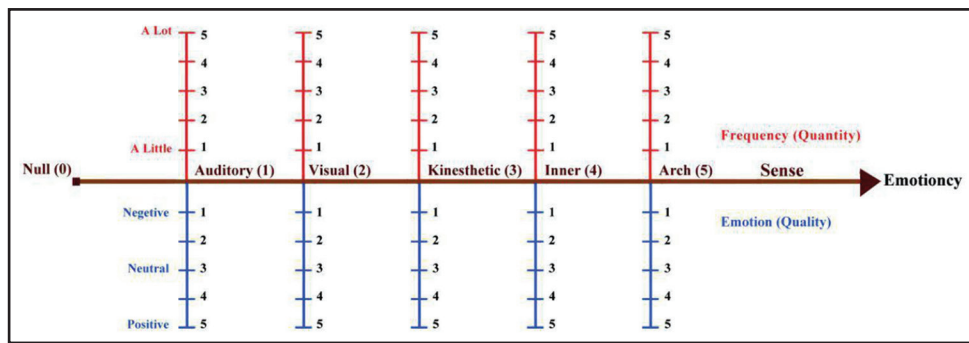
Figure 1. Emotioncy Levels (Adapted from "Emotioncy in Language Education: From Exvolvement to Involvement", By R. Pishghadam, 2015, October, Paper presented at the 2nd Conference of Interdisciplinary Approaches to Language Teaching, Literature, and Translation Studies. Iran, Mashhad)

Non-compositionality, non-substitutability and *non-modifiability* (Bowles, Hugo, 2007,p.08). First, a collocation is *non-compositional* in the sense that we cannot understand its meaning even if we understand the meaning of the individual words. A good example of non-compositionality is an idiom for instance, 'to have an itching palm' meaning 'to be greedy for money' (Kirkpatrick, E. M. & Schwarz, C.M, 1993,p.180).Second, *non-substitution ability* means that we cannot substitute the words that form a collocation for their synonym. For example, in the collocation: *close the meeting*, it's wrong to say *shut the meeting* because "shut" and "meeting" do not go together, whereas one could say shut the door. Finally, Collocations are *non modify able*, that is to say it is impossible to modify them by adding extra words. There are minor deviations from these criteria, but overall they represent collocations.

Zarei and Koosha (2003) looked at Iranian advanced learners' problems with the production of English lexical collocations. Their study was divided into two phases: in the first phase, they focused on the collocational errors which were extracted from 2400 pages of materials produced in English by Iranians. By analyzing the list of collocational errors which were extracted from the production of 27 high proficiency level Iranians, they found five patterns of collocations which were more problematic. In the second phase, six cued production tasks were given to 64 participants. Their analysis led them to conclude that about 55% of the time, Iranian advanced learners of English had difficulties in their production of English collocations. Hassanabadi (2013) devoted his study to examine lexical and grammatical collocations. Eighty Persian EFL students participated in his study. The results of the study demonstrated that: (a) there is a meaningful relationship between the performance of the learners on lexical and grammatical collocations and (b) there is a significant difference between the learners' performance on various subcategories of collocations.

Huang (2017) conducted a study on the relationship between the collocational competence of EFL learners and their proficiency. The participants in the experimental group received collocational instruction. Before they received instruction, Huang administered a pretest and compared the results with those of a posttest in reading proficiency which was given to the students in both the experimental and control groups at the end of instruction. The aim of the post-test was to measure the development of the students' reading proficiency. In the comparison between the students' pre- and post-tests, Huang found out that the students who were in the experimental group made greater progress in their reading proficiency than those in the control group.

Cloze procedure, which was first introduced by Taylor in 1953 as a measure of readability was soon applied to the measurement of reading comprehension in the first language and then to the testing of achievement in second languages. Cloze test was originally used to measure the reading difficulty of a text. According to Cohen (1984), it is a reliable means of determining whether certain texts are at appropriate level for particular groups of students or not. It also measures textual knowledge. However, the most common pur-



AQI **Figure 2.** A Metric for Measuring Emotioncy (Adapted from “Emotioncy, Extraversion and Anxiety in Willingness to Communicate in English” By R. Pishghadam, 2016a, May, Paper presented at the 5th International Conference on Language, Education and Innovation. England: London)

pose of the cloze test is to measure reading comprehension. According to Heaton (1990), a true cloze test is generally used to measure “global” reading comprehension. However, it is also mentioned that it measures reading comprehension.

Khodadady (2007) administered three cloze tests to eight intermediate adult ESL learners to investigate the relationship between listening comprehension ability and vocabulary knowledge. The written cloze tests were developed on tape scripts and learners had listened to it one week before taking the test. In this study, the majority of participants did not restore even the first cloze item. Due to their extreme difficulty, cloze items do not measure the test takers’ ability and they also do not discriminate high ability learners from their low ability counterparts.

C-test was developed by mutilating the second half of every other word beginning from the second word of the second sentence of a passage. A complete sentence at the beginning of the test and another sentence at the end of the test are left intact. Research on C-test has shown that it is as good as cloze test without some of the above mentioned limitations.

Jafarpur (1995) performed a study to see whether C-test is truly superior to cloze test. He developed twenty versions of the same C-test by applying different deletion starts and deletion rates. The results of data analysis did not confirm most of the characteristics which were originally attributed to C-tests. Jafarpur concluded that:

1. The deletions affect the representativeness of the text, i.e., different deletion starting points and deletion ratios produce different tests, which is suggestive of the invalidity of the procedures.
2. C-tests do not have face validity. Rouhani (2008) conducted a study of C-Test validation with Iranian EFL learners and came to the conclusion that the obtained reliability estimates confirmed earlier reports of high reliability coefficients in connection with the C-Test. He used a content/function word analysis to investigate the content validity of the C-Test. The C-principle showed a satisfactory method of sampling the linguistic elements in the text. Therefore, he claimed that the C-Test enjoys content validity.

Ajideh and Mozaffarzadeh (2012) conducted a comparative analysis on cloze test and c-test as tests of reading comprehension. The aim of this study was to answer the question whether there is any difference between advanced subjects’

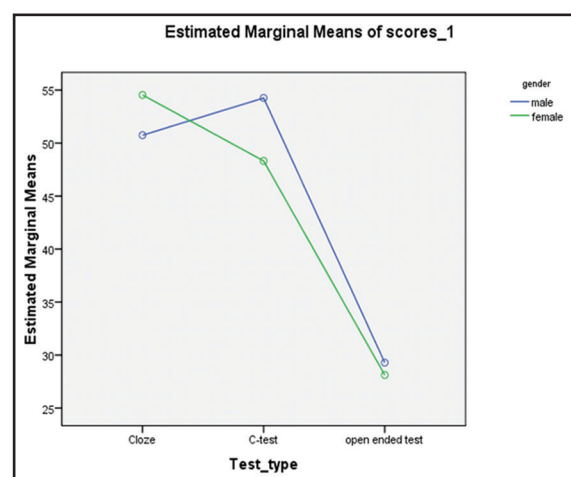


Figure 3. Means plot showing the interaction between test types and gender **AQI**

performance on the C-test and their scores on the cloze test as measures of reading comprehension. The general conclusion and answer which was drawn from the findings of this study was that despite the dominant view that c-test works better than the cloze test, the subjects performed better on the cloze test as measure of reading comprehension.

Emotioncy was developed by Pishghadam, Tabatabaeyan, and Navari (2013) to place emphasis on the roles of senses and emotions in affecting understanding and interpretation. It is believed that the senses from which we receive information can summon up emotions which can relativize cognition (Pishghadam, Jajarmi, & Shayesteh, 2016). According to Pishghadam (2015), emotioncy ranges from avolvement (null) and exvolvement (auditory, visual, & kinesthetic), to involvement (inner & arch). As for exvolvement, *form* and *meaning* of a language are dealt with, while as for involvement, *applection* (application & reflection) and *appropriation* are taken into consideration (Figure 1). In fact, while the former deals with the linguistic aspects of language learning, the latter is related to life issues.

Pishghadam, Tabatabaeyan, et al. (2013) and Pishghadam and Shayesteh (2016) argued that facilitating the process of second/foreign language learning is in touch with establishing emotional connections. For instance, an Iranian student living in southern areas can have a better understanding of words such as *date* and *palm* compared to the student living in northern

Table 1. Six groups of participants based on their emotioncy levels

Degree	Emotioncy levels	Experience
0	Null-emo	The participants in this group had never encountered this word in their lives.
1	Audio-emo	The participants in this group had just heard about it.
2	Visual-emo	The participants in this group had seen it themselves.
3	Kinesthetic-emo	The participants in this group had been in close contact with the people who had done it and touched the spot on the back of people once or more.
4	Inner-emo	The participants in this group had experienced it once or more in their lives.
5	Arch-emo	The participants in this group had studied or conducted some research on it.

regions, probably because the northern person has had little or no encounter with such concepts before and does not have the experience of living in such an environment. Therefore, having little emotional engagement with the mentioned concepts, his understanding of such concepts would be like an observer who has not had the experience of taking part in the action.

Subsequent to reviewing the literature of life education and emotioncy, we now intend to shed more light on the application of emotioncy in L2 teaching and learning. Employing the emotioncy concept in second language education, we can claim that during exvovement, individuals hear, see, and experience a concept, which may contribute to acquiring the forms and the functions of the words related to the concept. To highly emotionalize the words and to get the learners involve in the process of learning words, the teacher can use applection and appropriation. Applection which is a blend of application and reflection means that, teachers should apply the newly learned words to real life situations, making the learners synthesize, analyze, and even evaluate (using Bloom, Englehart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl's (1956) terms) what they have already learned. When they practice in this way, after some time the learners can appropriate the words. Appropriation means words become one's own when they are infused with the real intentions (Bakhtin, 1981). It is our belief that when the learners *aplect* a word, gradually they internalize the word, make it their own property, and display proximal emotions for it. In sum, As Figure 1 shows, exvovement focuses on the linguistic aspects (Form & meaning) while involvement deals with the life dimensions (applection & appropriation) of learning a language Figure 1.

Pishghadam, et al. (2016) claimed that based on individuals' sensory experiences, they might have different types of emotioncies, namely: null, auditory, visual, kinesthetic, inner, and arch (see Table 1). Moreover, as depicted in Figure 1, Pishghadam (2015) categorized learners into three groups of avolved (no emotional experience), exvolved (auditory, visual, and kinesthetic emotioncies), and involved (inner and arch emotioncies). In the same vein, Pishghadam, Adamson, and Shayesteh (2013) introduced emotion-based language instruction (EBLI) as a new perspective on bilingual education, highlighting the crucial role of emotional involvement in molding individuals' worldviews. They claimed that words evoking higher levels of emotioncy in learners are acquired faster than ones they have no or less emotional experience with. Pishghadam, et al. (2016) later proposed sensory relativism as an expansion of linguistic relativism, claiming that

reality can change within and across individuals, based on the sensory inputs they receive Figure 2 and Table 1.

METHODOLOGY

This study used quantitative methods in utilizing cloze test, C-test and open ended test in measuring collocational competence of Iranian EFL learners and intended to check the effectiveness of emotioncy on male gender based on C-test and open ended test.

First, an Oxford placement test was conducted to determine participants' collocation proficiency in order to select and include those students who scored within acceptable range of collocation proficiency in the study. Second, a 50-item collocation C-test was developed and validated for this study. C-test had 50 items which included five lexical and grammatical categories of nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and prepositions. Third, a 50-item multiple-choice collocation cloze test was developed and standardized for this study. The cloze test included 50 collocation items which included five lexical and grammatical categories of nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and prepositions. Fourth, a 50 item collocation open ended test was developed for this study. The collocation items included five lexical and grammatical categories of noun, verb, adjective, adverb and preposition. The text of the test was similar to cloze test and C-test to provide opportunity for comparison between these three test types. As learners had no clue to help them to fill in the blanks, this test was the most difficult among the test types, although the male gender has been taught with emotioncy in C-Tests and open ended tests to see whether there is any significant difference between two groups when the teacher used emotioncy or not.

RESULTS

As cloze test, C-test and open ended test had similar texts, intermediate and advanced proficiency groups were asked to participate to determine which test was more effective in measuring these two proficiency groups' collocational knowledge. A two-way between groups ANOVA investigating the relationship between test type and proficiency level on learners' collocational competence was used. In order to provide more informative information, a separate one-way between groups ANOVA was conducted for three test types. To investigate the influence of gender on test type and proficiency level, a three-way between groups ANOVA was con-

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of three-way ANOVA regarding the effects of test types, proficiency level and gender on collocation scores

Test_type	Proficiency_level	Gender	Mean	Standard deviation	N
Cloze test	Intermediate	male	41.20	8.306	35
		female	46.91	5.559	35
		Total	44.06	7.583	70
	Advanced	male	60.29	9.739	35
		female	62.17	10.774	35
		Total	61.23	10.239	70
	Total	male	50.74	13.158	70
		female	54.54	11.466	70
		Total	52.64	12.443	140
C-test	Intermediate	male	45.09	11.421	35
		female	38.00	10.683	35
		Total	41.54	11.543	70
	Advanced	male	63.43	8.939	35
		female	58.63	9.490	35
		Total	61.03	9.465	70
	Total	male	54.26	13.747	70
		female	48.31	14.441	70
		Total	51.29	14.360	140
Open ended test	Intermediate	male	24.69	3.879	35
		female	25.09	4.348	35
		Total	24.89	4.095	70
	Advanced	male	33.89	3.529	35
		female	31.14	3.371	35
		Total	32.51	3.694	70
	Total	male	29.29	5.918	70
		female	28.11	4.921	70
		Total	28.70	5.454	140
Total	Intermediate	male	36.99	12.210	105
		female	36.67	11.605	105
		Total	36.83	11.884	210
	Advanced	male	52.53	15.440	105
		female	50.65	16.287	105
		Total	51.59	15.860	210
	Total	male	44.76	15.922	210
		female	43.66	15.752	210
		Total	44.21	15.828	420

ducted. To explain the influence of test type and proficiency level variables separately on five collocational categories of noun, verb, adjective, adverb and preposition, two one-way between groups MANOVAs were conducted.

Three-way ANOVA Results for Gender, Test type and Proficiency

In order to investigate whether gender affects the outcome of interaction between test type and proficiency, a three way ANOVA was conducted.

According to this table, the mean scores for male and female intermediate students in cloze test were 41.20 and 46.91 respectively which indicated that female intermediate students performed better compared to their male intermediate peers. Male advanced participants gained a mean of 60.29 compared with their female advanced peers with a mean of 62.17 which shows that females had a better overall performance compared with males in cloze test. In case of C-test, male intermediate learners had a mean of 45.09 and female intermediate learners had a mean of 38.00 indicating that males performed better than females in this regard. Male

Table 3. Tests of between subjects effects provided by three-way ANOVA

Source	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Partial eta squared
Corrected model	78339.505 ^a	11	7121.773	109.129	0.000	0.746
Intercept	820882.438	1	820882.438	1.258E4	0.000	0.969
Test_type	50643.448	2	25321.724	388.013	0.000	0.655
Proficiency_level	22880.952	1	22880.952	350.613	0.000	0.462
gender	128.152	1	128.152	1.964	0.162	0.005
Test_type * Proficiency_level	2765.162	2	1382.581	21.186	0.000	0.094
Test_type * gender	1661.390	2	830.695	12.729	0.000	0.059
Proficiency_level * gender	64.038	1	64.038	0.981	0.322	0.002
Test_type * Proficiency_level * gender	196.362	2	98.181	1.504	0.223	0.007
Error	26626.057	408	65.260			
Total	925848.000	420				
Corrected total	104965.562	419				

a.R Squared=0.746 (Adjusted R squared=0.739).

Table 4. Multiple comparisons table showing interaction between cloze test, C-test and open ended test

(I) Test_type	(J) Test_type	Mean difference (I-J)	Standard error	Sig.	95% Confidence interval	
					Lower bound	Upper bound
Cloze	C-test	1.36	0.966	0.373	-1.01	3.73
	open ended test	23.94*	0.966	0.000	21.57	26.31
C-test	Cloze	-1.36	0.966	0.373	-3.73	1.01
	open ended test	22.59*	0.966	0.000	20.21	24.96
open ended test	Cloze	-23.94*	0.966	0.000	-26.31	-21.57
	C-test	-22.59*	0.966	0.000	-24.96	-20.21

Based on observed means. The error term is mean square (Error) = 65.260. *. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level

advanced learners had a mean of 63.43 and female advanced participants had a mean of 58.63 indicating that male advanced learners had better performance in this regard too. In case of open ended test, male intermediate learners had a mean of 24.69 and female intermediate learners had a mean of 25.09 showing that females performed slightly better than males. Male advanced learners had a mean of 33.89 and their female peers had a mean of 31.14 which indicated that males performed better than females in this regard.

The main output from three-way ANOVA is a table labeled Tests of Between-Subjects Effects which comes below

The main table that needs to be taken into consideration is the table labeled as Tests of Between-Subjects Effect. First, the main effects of the independent variables, i.e. test type, proficiency level and gender are investigated. The test type and proficiency level rows indicate a significance level of 0.001 which means that they can affect the scores of the tests. The gender row shows a significance value of 0.162 which indicates that gender is not effective on test scores. The effect sizes of the test type variable and proficiency level variable are 0.655 and 0.462 respectively indicating large effect sizes. Another important point that can be achieved from the above table is the interaction effect.

The results show that cloze test and open ended test, as two test types are significantly different from each other,

$p=0.001$. But cloze test and C-test are not significantly different from each other with a significance value of $p=0.373$. C-test and open ended test show a significance value of $p=0.001$ which means that they are significantly different from each other. Open ended test had a significance value of 0.001 in relation with both cloze test and C-test which indicates that both cloze test and C-test are significantly different from open ended test respectively.

In order to investigate the relationship between two independent variables of test type and gender, a means plot is conducted Figure 3.

The results of the three-way ANOVA comes in the following,

A three-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of three test types, proficiency and gender on collocations' scores. Participants took three test types. They were composed of intermediate and advanced proficiency students and they were from both genders. Also there was a statistically significant main effect for proficiency level, $F(1,408)=350.6$ $p=0.001$ and effect size was large (partial eta squared=0.462). Post-hoc comparisons using the Scheffe test indicated that the mean score for male participants in cloze test was ($M=50.74,SD=13.15$) and the mean score for female participants in cloze test was ($M=54.54,SD=11.46$). The mean score for male participants

in C-test was ($M=54.26, SD=13.74$) and the mean score for female participants in C-test was ($M=48.31, SD=14.44$). It indicated that male participants in C-test performed significantly different from their male peers in cloze test. Also, female participants in cloze test performed significantly different from their female peers in C-test. Male and female participants in open ended test had a mean score ($M=29.29, SD=5.91$) and ($M=28.11, SD=4.92$) respectively.

DISCUSSION

Gender as another involved variable was investigated to see whether it has any role in learners' performances on different three test types and different proficiency levels based on emotioncy. In this study, several major findings were yielded. First, it was indicated in the results without using emotioncy which came out of study that female participants performed much more effectively than their male peers in both intermediate and advanced proficiency groups on cloze test. Second, it was shown that male participants with emotioncy had a better performance than their female counterparts in both intermediate and advanced proficiency group on C-test. Third, the female participants recorded a better performance in intermediate proficiency group on open ended test while their male peers with emotioncy performed better in advanced proficiency group on open ended test. Finally, the above-mentioned points show that gender influences the results which are yielded from the interaction between different test types and proficiency level. To the best of researcher's knowledge, the present study is among few attempts that have been taken to shed light on the role of gender on the interaction between cloze test, C-test, open ended test and proficiency level variable. So, this study provides useful results for EFL researcher interested in this regard.

Educational methods such as emotioncy, cooperative learning and social constructivism stresses the importance of interaction of the participants in the learning situation.

As already mentioned, emotioncy is directly related to reading comprehension. This sense of engagement with a topic can enhance reading comprehension. This finding can be of help to material developers to design texts based on the emotioncy criterion. As Pishghadam, Zabetipour & Aminzade (2016) says the reading texts can be chosen based on the emotional background of learners. It seems that within the notion of emotioncy, localization is implied. Localization emphasizes the role of familiarity with the target culture. Teachers are required to be aware of the criterion in selecting the materials for teaching English in their own contexts.

The texts in this study were not specialized, requiring another study to be done on English for specific purposes (ESP) texts to examine the roles of emotioncy in them. Finally, other studies can be conducted to explore the role of emotioncy with other topics to see whether the same results can be obtained.

This study was conducted to fill a gap in the existing literature in measuring the effectiveness of the cloze test, C-test and open ended test in assessing collocational competence of Iranian EFL learners. This study tried to utilize the lexical and grammatical collocations framework in assessing Irani-

an EFL learners' collocational competence based on emotioncy. On the whole, the results of the conducted analyses suggested that C-test was not superior to cloze test and open ended test in assessing collocational competence of EFL learners. In addition, the analyses confirmed that proficiency level is an important and determining factor and influences participants' performances on different test types. Therefore, the learners from higher proficiency levels performed more effectively on different test types compared with their lower proficiency peers.

Furthermore, gender was also a determining factor for participants' performance on different tests as female learners performed better on cloze test while male learners performed more effectively on C-test and open ended test. Finally, as the texts of these three test types were the same, the findings related to them can be fairly compared to each other and the researcher would be sure of the final results of the study and the male students who has been taught based on emotioncy had better performance in C-Tests and open ended tests.

The findings of the present study may have major implications for language learners, language teaching methodology, EFL instructors, teacher trainers, syllabus designers and materials developers. Furthermore, teacher's experiences show that Iranian EFL learners generally have inadequate knowledge of English collocations, in particular of restricted collocations. Future studies can also investigate other aspects of vocabulary knowledge and emotioncy such as the effects of reading on the learners' vocabulary size and vocabulary depth also to apply emotioncy with other variables. As a final suggestion, since the study was totally quantitative, a comprehensive picture was not drawn. Another study can be conducted qualitatively to explain the findings of the study in more details.

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