



Research Paper

Comparing Iranian High School Books and Interchange through Nominal**Maryam Amani***

1. M.A. in Teaching English language, University of Ardabil, Iran.

Email: Maryam.amniiii1371@gmail.com**Abstract**

The present study adopts a descriptive–analytical, library-based approach to compare Iranian high school English textbooks with the Interchange series in terms of nominal elements, lexical combinations, the Lexical Approach, prefabricated chunks, and lexical collocations. The main aim is to examine how noun phrases and collocation patterns are represented and distributed in these two widely used educational series, and to assess the extent to which each supports learners in acquiring the lexical and grammatical knowledge needed for fluent and accurate language use. The findings indicate that the Interchange series, owing to its communicative organization and use of authentic-style discourse, exposes learners to a wider range of complex noun phrases, formulaic lexical combinations, prefabricated chunks, and high-frequency collocations, and integrates syntactic and semantic knowledge more effectively. In contrast, Iranian high school textbooks tend to focus on isolated vocabulary and sentence-level grammar, presenting mainly simple noun phrases with limited post-modification. This gap may lead Iranian learners to produce grammatically acceptable but collocational deviant combinations. The study concludes with pedagogical implications for curriculum revision, materials adaptation, teacher training, and further empirical research on the impact of textbooks on learners' writing and speaking performance

Keywords: Interchange, Iranian High School Books, Lexical Approach, Nominal Group, Word Combination.

Introduction

The present study is grounded in a theoretical framework that draws upon several related areas within linguistics and applied linguistics, such as nominals, lexical combinations, the Lexical Approach, prefabricated linguistic chunks, collocations, the role of textbooks in language instruction, and the evaluation of educational materials. Nominals—derived from the Latin **nōminālis** (meaning "pertaining to names")—constitute a broad category that groups nouns and adjectives based on shared characteristics, serving as an umbrella term for words, clauses, and phrases that function like nouns (Simatupang & Dahla, 2018). Understanding the structure of noun phrases is essential for English language users, as mastering the ordering of their components is vital for precise and meaningful communication. Alongside nominals, lexical combinations and formulaic language are recognized as crucial yet under-researched components of vocabulary learning and instruction. The Lexical Approach further emphasizes that language consists not of discrete vocabulary and grammar, but of prefabricated multi-word chunks; these chunks facilitate speech fluency, accuracy, and native-like linguistic choices (Lewis, 1997; Pawley & Syder, 1983). Collocations—defined as lexical combinations that frequently co-occur—play a pivotal role in this discussion; their relationship with noun phrases demonstrates that they can simultaneously function as nominal structures. Given that textbooks remain the primary source of linguistic input and practice in most educational settings (Richards, 2001) and that the evaluation of instructional materials is crucial for their selection and improvement (Cunningsworth, 1995; Ellis, 1997), the specific aim of this study is to compare Iranian high school English textbooks with the **Interchange** series regarding noun phrases. This research seeks to examine the representation and distribution of noun phrases and collocation patterns within these two widely used educational series and to assess the extent to which each assists learners in acquiring the lexical and grammatical knowledge necessary for fluent and accurate language use. By evaluating these textbooks through the lens of nominal categories, the present study aims to reveal their relative strengths and weaknesses and to offer practical strategies for the selection, adaptation, and design of textbooks within the Iranian EFL context.

Literature Review

The fourth dimension of comparison relates to lexical collocations. A lexical collocation is "a continuum that begins with compound words (such as **second-hand**) and lexical chunks (such as **bits and pieces**), encompasses idioms (such as **out of the blue**) and phrasal verbs (such as **do up**), and extends to collocations with varying degrees of stability (such as **set a new world record**)." James Carl (1998) states that the correct use of lexical collocations "contributes significantly to an individual's possession of authentic, native-like linguistic qualities," and Lewis (1993) emphasizes that "fluency relies on acquiring a large store of fixed or semi-fixed prefabricated units. A comparison between the two sets reveals that the **Interchange** series employs lexical collocations with greater awareness and frequency, both in reading and listening input and in

productive tasks. Learners using *Interchange* are repeatedly exposed to high-frequency collocations—such as verb-noun, adjective-noun, and adverb-adjective combinations—and are encouraged to use them in speaking and writing. In contrast, Iranian high school textbooks appear to treat collocations only implicitly rather than systematically, and their exercises rarely require learners to pay attention to the restricted combinability of words. This is a significant shortcoming, as—as noted by Lin (2010)—it is essential to distinguish between idioms, collocations, and other types of word combinations, even when they closely resemble one another. If Iranian learners are not explicitly taught to recognize and produce collocations, they are likely to resort to literal translation from Persian, resulting in combinations that are grammatically acceptable yet collocationally deviant.

Method and Material

The research design adopted for this study is comparative in nature. We began by examining and analyzing English language textbooks used in Iranian high schools; subsequently, we compared them with the *Interchange* series—conducting a critical analysis—and finally proceeded to document and critique the findings.

Results and Discussions

Nominals and Nominal Groups

The primary and most central dimension of the comparison concerns nominal categories and the structure of noun phrases. A noun phrase is a group of words centered on a noun (the headword); it may consist of a single word without any modifiers or a combination of multiple words arranged around the head. Various lexical categories—including nouns, adjectives, verbs, determiners, numerals, and prepositions—can combine to form a noun phrase, functioning as either pre-modifiers (placed before the head) or post-modifiers (placed after the head). A full understanding of noun phrase structure requires distinguishing the "ideational metafunction" into two modes of construing experience: the experiential mode and the logical mode. Halliday (1985) further argues that English language users cannot function effectively without mastering the ordering of noun phrase components, as this order plays a fundamental role in meaning-making in English. The two textbook series differ significantly regarding the extent to which learners are exposed to simple versus complex noun phrases. This analysis reveals that the *Interchange* series exposes learners to a wider range of noun phrase structures, including multi-word pre-modification, post-modification via prepositional phrases and relative clauses, and the types of embedded structures described by Martin et al. (2010). Since *Interchange* is organized around communicative functions and authentic-style discourse, its units often feature noun phrases that carry a significant information load, requiring learners to process and produce complex noun phrases in order to engage in meaningful communication. In contrast, Iranian high school textbooks appear to rely more heavily on simpler noun phrases—typically consisting of a determiner, an adjective, and a head noun—with limited post-modification and few embedded structures. While this simplicity may reduce the cognitive load on learners during the initial stages, it also implies that Iranian learners may not be exposed to the full range

of noun phrase structures they would encounter in authentic English texts and interactions.

Word Combination and Formulaic Language

The second dimension of comparison concerns lexical combinations and formulaic language. Sentences are constructed from various lexical combinations resulting from morphological changes and syntactic links; consequently, there must be a relationship between the words placed together to form a phrase. Typically, two types of relationships exist within a lexical combination: first, internal or semantic relationships, and second, formal, grammatical, or syntactic (external) relationships. Emphasizes that formulaic language and lexical combinations constitute a crucial part of the vocabulary learning and teaching process, warranting greater attention and scrutiny than they have received to date. Treat lexical combinations and formulaic language as a single category, note that formulaic language encompasses diverse categories, including free lexical combinations, idioms, and collocations. When these two textbook series are examined from this perspective, significant differences emerge. The **Interchange** series appears to present lexical combinations in ways that are contextually rich and communicatively meaningful, exposing learners to a wide range of free combinations, semi-fixed expressions, and high-probability word pairings that reflect natural language usage. In contrast, high school textbooks in Iran tend to present vocabulary as discrete items—often organized around thematic lists and accompanied by translation equivalents—with relatively little attention paid to the combinatorial behavior of words. This means that Iranian learners may acquire a collection of isolated words without gaining knowledge of how these words typically combine with one another. Since effective communication depends not only on knowing words but also on knowing which words go together, this represents a significant shortcoming. In our view, the **Interchange** series aligns better than Iranian high school textbooks with insights from the Lexical Approach and the literature on formulaic language.

The Lexical Approach and Prefabricated Chunks

The third dimension of comparison concerns the lexical approach and prefabricated chunks. Defines a lexical item as "any item that functions as a single semantic unit, regardless of its various derived forms or the number of words composing it," and argues that such items play a crucial role in language learning. Since words are stored as single lexical units, speakers can access the necessary segment holistically—thereby reducing mental processing time—and produce language more rapidly than if they had to assemble individual word units. When the two textbook series are compared regarding their treatment of prefabricated chunks, the **Interchange** series appears to hold the advantage. Its dialogues, reading texts, and communicative tasks are replete with ready-made linguistic chunks that learners can extract and employ in real-life situations. Because these chunks are embedded in meaningful contexts, learners are more likely to notice, internalize, and retrieve them as whole units. In contrast, Iranian high school textbooks tend to focus on sentence-level grammar exercises and isolated vocabulary; consequently, learners have fewer opportunities to encounter and practice multi-word

chunks as integrated units. Textbook designers must deliberately incorporate a rich input of chunks into the materials if learners are to develop the store of prefabricated language that underpins fluency.

The Relationship between Nominals and Collocations

The fifth dimension of comparison concerns the relationship between nominals and collocations, a matter that plays a pivotal role in the present study. A prefabricated language chunk possesses a certain level of productivity; this characteristic allows for the direct substitution of a generated component without the need for complex rule-based combinations. Consequently, a language learner who has mastered these chunks can also command language blocks; a vast number of such groups can be rapidly deployed to assist the learner in expressing ideas fluently and accurately in the second language (Wang, 2017). Terms such as "lexicalized phrasal units," "formulaic sequences," "collocations," "lexical chunks," "lexical phrases," and "lexical clusters" are all used to describe multi-word units, and the use of diverse terminology should not pose a challenge when studying lexical chunks in the field of English language teaching (ibid). Nominals and collocations resemble one another in that both serve as tools and structures for combining words, and both can be classified as subsets of prefabricated structures. This dual nature of collocations and nominals is closely linked to the comparison of the two textbook series. It appears that the "Interchange" series capitalizes on this overlap by presenting collocations within nominal structures and meaningful contexts. Thus, language learners simultaneously acquire both the syntactic knowledge regarding the ordering of noun phrase constituents and the semantic knowledge concerning collocation constraints. In contrast, high school textbooks in Iran largely treat noun phrase structures as grammatical phenomena to be analyzed and collocations as lexical items to be memorized, without systematically integrating the two. Consequently, Iranian learners may be able to syntactically analyze a noun phrase yet fail to select an appropriate collocate for the head noun; conversely, they might recognize a collocation but be unable to use it correctly within a complex noun phrase.

Material Evaluation

The sixth dimension of comparison concerns the evaluation of materials, which establishes the methodological and conceptual basis for the comparison itself. The need to evaluate instructional materials stems from the insight it provides into how a textbook can be improved or justified. Textbook evaluation involves the careful selection of materials and an examination of whether they align with the needs of learners, as well as the goals, methods, and values of a specific educational program; it also yields data regarding the effectiveness of the materials. Such data are useful in determining the appropriateness of the course's predetermined objectives. The fundamental purpose of most evaluations is to provide "useful feedback" to a wide range of stakeholders—such as sponsors, contributors, client groups, staff, administrators, and other relevant parties. Consequently, the evaluation of instructional materials is crucial to language education; it can and should serve as a process that helps teachers gain greater insight into their teaching and learning contexts. In education, evaluation is vital for teachers, as it offers critical information on how to manage students' learning tasks and organize courses.

There are three primary reasons for developing or refining evaluation criteria: formally establishing desired quality levels for educational outcomes and provisions, holding educational service providers accountable, and supporting continuous improvement in education. In the present study, these evaluation frameworks provide the rationale and structure for comparing Iranian high school textbooks with the *Interchange* series. This comparison can be viewed as a form of micro-evaluation focused on a specific linguistic feature—namely, nouns—rather than a broad, macro-level assessment of the two sets of materials. Given that the evaluation of instructional materials aims to provide useful feedback to a wide range of stakeholders, the findings of this comparison are relevant not only to teachers and language learners but also to curriculum developers, textbook authors, and educational policymakers in Iran. If it is found that Iranian high school textbooks exhibit fewer complex nominal structures and collocation patterns compared to *Interchange*, this constitutes precisely the type of evidence that can inform decisions regarding curriculum revision, the adaptation of instructional materials, and teacher training.

Conclusion

Overall, the six dimensions compared present a coherent, comprehensive picture. The *Interchange* series—an internationally published, communication-oriented course—appears to offer richer, more systematic exposure to complex noun phrases, formulaic lexical combinations, prefabricated language units (chunks), and collocations; it integrates knowledge of noun structures and collocations more effectively than Iranian high school textbooks. While playing vital educational and motivational roles within the national education system, Iranian high school textbooks seem to place greater emphasis on isolated vocabulary and sentence-level grammar. These findings carry several pedagogical implications. First, the deliberate and purposeful inclusion of complex noun structures and collocation patterns—presented within meaningful contexts and reinforced through repetition and review across lessons—could benefit Iranian high school textbooks. Second, teachers using these textbooks should supplement their instructional materials with content rich in formulaic language units (chunks) and complex noun structures, drawing upon the strengths of Series like *Interchange* while adapting them to local needs and cultural contexts. Third, teacher training programs should incorporate "materials evaluation" as a core component, enabling teachers to make informed, criteria-based decisions regarding the selection and adaptation of textbooks, rather than relying on subjective and unsubstantiated judgments (Cunningsworth, 1995). Fourth, given the dual nature (syntactic and semantic) of noun phrases and collocations, instructional activities should integrate "form" and "meaning," helping learners understand how noun phrase structure and collocational constraints interact in the production of accurate and idiomatic English. Finally, further empirical research is essential to examine how the differences identified in this comparison affect the performance of Iranian learners—particularly in writing and speaking skills, where knowledge of noun phrases and collocations plays the most direct role. Such research would shift the current discussion from a theoretical, text-based comparison toward an evidence-based explanation of the impact of textbooks on learning

outcomes, thereby contributing to the broader goal of enhancing English language education in Iran.

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