Collocation in English: Comprehension and Use by MA Students at Arab Universities

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Abstract

An intricate area in communication and translation for Arab learners of English is collocation. This paper attempts to assess Arab MA students' comprehension and use of collocation at four Arab universities. Testing these two factors relied on three questionnaires. The first consisted of 20 collocations in Arabic for the 96 respondents to translate into English; the second had 20 English collocations to be translated into Arabic. The third had 9 English collocations with four choices for each along with their Arabic translation equivalents, and the respondents were requested to choose the best collocator for each base. The respondents had no access to any references. The findings revealed that the errors in Questionnaire 1 were 1478 out of 1920 (76.979%), 1218 out of 1920 (63.437%) in Questionnaire 2, and 2712 out of 3456 (78.472%) in the choices of Questionnaire 3. The reasons for such weaknesses were analyzed and suggestions were made.

Key Words: English and Arabic Lexical Collocations, Communication, Translation, MA Students, Arab Universities

1. Theoretical Background

The first scholar to draw attention to the fact that meaning is not restricted to single lexical units was Firth (1935). To him (ibid.), collocation, or lexical meaning, is one of five dimensions of meaning (phonetic, lexical, morphological, syntactic and semantic). In other words, collocation is "the company a word keeps" (Firth, 1957: 11). This is no different from how Stubbs (2002: 225) conceives meaning as embodied in the "semantic relations between the node and collocates". In fact, collocation had already been considered a basic unit of language in actual communication: "Combinations of words in phrases are . . . a good candidate for the basic unit of language in use" (Stubbs 2001b: 14).

The same notion is emphasized by Leech (1974), but in different words. He (Leech (1974: 20) states that one level of the meaning of a word is the result of "the associations a word acquires on account of the meaning of words which tend to occur in its environment". To Ghazala (2006: 65), "Collocations are words which are usually found next to other words, or are 'co-located' with one another". In all of the definitions above, focus is placed on lexical, rather than grammatical, collocation (see Grimm, S., 2009; Sinclair, J., 1991; and Sinclair, J. & Jones, S., 1974). It is this aspect of meaning that I am studying and testing the ability of my respondents to understand and use.

However, Palmer, H. (1933; 1938) was perhaps the first linguist to draw attention to the special significance of collocation in verbal communication. Instead of sufficing with referring to the importance of 'grammar' in learning a language, Palmer (ibid.) sees that every word has its own grammar (for more on this, see Hasan, W., 2004: 7). In fact, it is true that "The polysemy of the word is disambiguated by the representation of its collocates" (Favretti, 2008: 92). It is also true that the translator "will be 'caught' every time, not by his Grammar, which is probably suspiciously 'better' than an educated native's, not by his vocabulary, which may well be wider, but by his unacceptable or improbable collocations" (Newmark, 1981: 180; see also Farghal, M. & Obiedat, H., 1995; Fillmore, C., 1985, among others).

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2005: 293) defines 'collocation' as "a combination of words in a language that happens very often and more frequently than would happen by chance: 'resounding success' and 'crying shame' are English collocations".

This definition, however, does not seem to refer to any criteria that can be adopted for delimiting collocation as a concept or component of language in use. Indeed, "[F]or some linguists, collocations have become a highly controversial phenomenon, as the boundaries between them and other multi-word lexical items do not always happen to be clear-cut" (Grimm, S., P. 2009: 23). Grimm (2009: 24) also sees that "there is no semantic rule that may explain why we say in Arabic (أغلبية ساحقة) instead of (أغلبية قاطعة) or (حبٌّ جمٌّ) instead of (حبٌّ هائلٌ). This justifies Emery's (1991: 61) belief that "collocations are language-specific and hence unpredictable". In fact, "it is doubtful if there could be a definitive 'phrase frequency list', since the units in question are so variable, and can be defined at such different levels of abstraction." Stubbs, M. (2002: 215 - 216)

One example of such arbitrariness in the formation of collocations is clear in the sounds of animals. Thus, in Arabic, as in English, each animal has its own sound, as obvious in these examples and their English translation equivalents below:

"صياح الديك، خوار البقرة، ثغاء الحمل، عواء الذئب، نباح الكلب، زئير الأسد، نهيق الحمار، صهيل الفرس، "إلخ.

 "*cry* of cock; *low* or *moo* of cow; *bleat* of sheep; *howl* of wolf; *bark* of dog; *roar* of lion; *bray* of donkey; *neigh* of the horse", etc. (for more on this, see Shammas, 2005c: 90 – 92; Nofall, 2012: 77 - 79). Additional similar collocations are obvious in the table below:

Pigs:	الخنازير	Grunt/squeal:	تزعق/تنخر/تزمجر
Oxen	الثيران	low/bellow:	تخور/تمعق
Puppies:	جرو الكلب	yelp:	ينوح/ يعوي
Snakes:	الأفاعي	hiss:	هسّ
Rabbits:	الأرانب	squeak:	نصرّ
Swans	البجع	cry:	يصرخ
Ravens:	الغربان	Croak:	تنعق/تنق
Thrushes:	لسمّن	whistle/sing:	غنّي/تصفر
Rooks/crows	الفداف (طائركالغراب)	caw:	نعب/قاق
Tigers:	النمور	growl/roar:	تزأر/تزمجر
Seagulls:	النورس	scream:	يصرخ
Turkeys:	الحبش	gobble:	يكركر
Vultures:	النسر/الجارح	scream:	يصرخ
Wolves:	الذئاب	howl:	تعوي/تنوح
Small birds:	العصافير الصغيرة	chirp/twitter/pipe:	تصدح/تغرّد/تزمّر

Table 1: Some sounds of animals in Arabic & English (Taken from Shammas, 2005c: 78)

Other such collocations include groupings of different creatures, as in: *flock of sheep*; *herd of cows*; *school of whales*; *pride of lions*; etc. The following list of Arabic collocations is taken from Nofall (2012: 79):

رعيلٌ من الخيل؛ قطيعٌ من الغنم؛ سربٌ من الظباء؛ عصابةٌ من الطير؛ إلخ.

At the same time, to indicate, more or less, the same concept, the term '*rancid*' co-occurs with 'bacon' and 'butter', but '*addled*' with 'brains' and 'eggs'; However, 'sour' and 'milk' collocate with each other. For a larger list in Arabic, see Nofall (2012: 77 - 79).

To some linguists and translatologists, collocation is defined as "essentially a lexical relation between words that are likely to combine regularly with certain other words to form one semantic unit" (Dweik, & Abu Shakra, 2011: 6), and words have only "a certain tolerance of compatibility" (Baker 1997: 63). Moreover, "there are nouns that enter into tight collocational links with verbs and have no separate semantic description" (Fillmore, 1994: 106).

This is obvious in the fact that "the semantic approach tries to define collocations by the actual meanings they have and by the usefulness of combinations of words in different contexts" (Elewa, 2004: 22). Scholars and researchers (Firth J. R., 1968; Benson, M., 1985; Benson, M., Benson, E. and Ilson, R., 1986; Ghazala, 2008; Carter, 1987; Baker 1992; Carter, 1998; Hill, 2000; among others) have classified collocations in different ways and into different types.

Thus, collocations can be lexical or grammatical. Lexical collocations are combinations of nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs, such as *official permission*, *arbitrary government*, *seriously injured.* They range between somewhat fixed and nearly loose combinations. However, it seems that words with 'medium strength' are the most common. Grammatical collocations are exemplified by nouns, verbs or adjectives in association with restricted prepositions or grammatical structures, such as *give in, demand for, dependent on*, and include phrasal verbs.

However, Hausmann (1984: 399; cited in Kimmes, A. and Koopman, H., 2011: 5) differentiates between fixed and non-fixed word combinations: collocation as such belongs to the non-fixed kind of word combinations. Hausmann (ibid.) explains that a collocation consists of a base and a collocator. The base determines its collocator. He goes further to categorize collocations into six different types, in four of which a noun is the base. These types, with the base in bold, are:

1. verb + **noun** as in: express **admiration**;

2. adjective + **noun**, as in: serious **consequences**;

3. **noun** + verb, as in: a **problem** persists;

4. **noun** + noun, as in: job **market**;

5. Adverb + **Adjective**, as in: deadly **serious**;

6. **verb** + adverb, as in: (to) **sleep** soundly.
(see Kimmes, A. and Koopman, H., 2011: 4 - 7, for further elaboration on this.)

However, Going through a "searchable digital library collection containing 380 million five-word sequences drawn from a vocabulary of 145,000 words", Wu, S., Witten, I. & Franken, M. (2010: Abstract: 83) find out that "[T]he dominant collocation types are verb + noun, noun + of + noun, adjective + noun, and noun + noun" (Wu, S., Witten, I. & Franken, M., 2010: 91).

In addition, and from a phraseological perspective, "collocations border on free combinations, on the one hand, and on compounds and idioms, on the other" (Grimm, S. P., 2009: 23). To her, there are four types of such combinations that should be distinguished according to the principles of 'fixedness' and 'transparency', which makes these four different lexical combinations arranged along a continuum. Such Lexical collocations are also classified by Benson et al. (1986) into: 'verb-noun'; 'noun-verb'; 'noun-noun'; 'adjective-noun'; 'adverb-adjective'; and 'verb-adverb'. Sinclair (1991: 116) divided collocations into two different kinds: downward and upward collocations. To him (ibid.), a collocation consists of a *node* that represents the word studied and a *collocate* standing for the word collocating with the node (see also Lewis, 2000: 133-134). Lewis (1997) also classifies collocations into *strong* and *weak*; *frequent* and *infrequent*. This classification relies on the *degree* of restriction or occurrence.

Linguists also classify collocations into restricted and non-restricted. Unrestricted collocations have the capacity of being "open to keep company with a wide range of words. Examples are core adjectives, nouns and verbs in particular" Carter (1987: 63). Yamasaki (2008: 76) goes further to stress that "[I]dentical words, used in the same sense, if they are polysemous, can perform different functions even at the textual level and … these functions can be differentiated by distinct collocational and colligational profiles". However, the "choice of vocabulary is not free but regulated by constraints on word co-occurrence" (ibid.). All of these classifications also lead to a distinction between lexical and grammatical collocations. Whereas lexical collocation is a combination of two or more lexemes (e.g. serious damage), grammatical collocation is a combination of a lexeme and a preposition (e.g. rely on). On another plane, collocations are distinguished as being of two levels and/or categories: *restricted* and *marked*. Restricted collocations are "semantically arbitrary restrictions which do not follow logically from the propositional meaning of a word" (Baker, 1992: 14).

Marked collocations "involve deliberate confusion of collocational ranges to create new images", according to Baker (1992: 51). On the other hand, Baker (1992) and other linguists, such as Bahns (1993) and Benson (1985), also categorize word combinations into two major types of collocation: lexical and grammatical.

Carter (1998: 70) classifies collocations on a different cline: (a) unrestricted collocations, which are the commonest such as **take** *a look,*; **run** *a business*, etc; (b) semi-restricted collocations include a number of items, which fit into certain syntactic slots as in *harbor grudges*; (c) familiar collocations that are of regular company, as in *lukewarm reception*; (d) restricted collocations include words that are generally more closed and fixed, such as *stark naked* (see also Carter, 1987). At the same time, "[R]estricted collocations are generally (and justifiably) believed to be the most difficult part of the lexicon both for lexicographic presentation and for second language teaching/acquisition" (Sandomirskaya, I. & Oparina E., 1996: 273).

Collocations are also strong or weak (Hasan, 2004). Thus, collocations, such as *rancid butter*, *addled eggs* are strong. The same can be said of *ulterior motives* or *harbor grudges*. Knowledge of the meaning of the collocator (or collocate) in the examples above does not necessarily enable non-native users of English to associate them with the right base or node. On the other hand, weak collocations are 'more predictable', as in: good boy, white shirt, white wine, etc.

Hill (2000: 63-64) classifies collocations into *unique* collocations, which are fixed; *strong* collocations, which have a few other possible collocates; *weak* collocations, which can be easily predicted; and *medium-strength* collocations, which Hill (ibid.) suggests to be strongly emphasized in class (see also Boonyasaquan, S., 2009).

Others differentiate between habitual and non-habitual collocations. To Firth and Palmer (1968: 181), **"**collocations of a given word are statements of the habitual or customary places of that word in a collocational order but not in any other contextual order and emphatically not in grammatical order". Herbst (1996) seems to agree with Cowie (1994) in the definition of collocation as the habitual association of a word in a given language with other particular words. But the question is: "How often does a combination have to recur to be 'habitual', and who decides what 'sounds natural'? . . . . How big does a corpus have to be in order to establish that a collocation does exist?" (Léon, 2007: 408)

Nonetheless, collocations remain different from idioms. An idiom scarcely permits variations. For instance, '*make friends with*' cannot vary to become '**make a friend with*'. It is an idiom with a fixed structure that yields one meaning in context. Patsala (2004: 1034) adopts these two criteria for the distinction between idioms and collocations: "a) semantic transparency and high frequency of use for collocations, and b) semantic opacity and fixed structure for idioms".

In addition, Palmer (1981) speaks of three types of restrictions on collocation: one of these restrictions is collocational in the strictest sense, regardless of meaning or range; one such restriction is obvious in "addled" being restrictively used or collocated with "eggs" and "brains". (For further information on collocation restrictions, see Allerton's, 1984). This shows that collocation must have developed as a natural selection of a given combination of words to denote or imply a specified meaning as intended by native speakers for a concept, or different from what could precisely be expressed by single words. For instance, "when women are talked about in the paper, the collocates are associated repeatedly with the categories of age, appearance, fashion and vulnerability" (Lauder, 2010: 13). Bragina (1996: 203) goes further to assert that "restricted collocations can be classified as direct citations, syntactically modified phrases, and/or semantically modified citations, as well as combinations which bear allusions to cultural … texts." In fact, the more restricted a collocation is, the more difficult is its translation into another language. This must apply to culture-specific and language-specific terms, such as those used in greetings, condolences, compliments, expressions of thanks and gratitude (see Ferguson, 1983; Shammas, 1995; 2005a), in addition to religious terms (see Dweik, & Abu Shakra, 2011). Therefore, it is true that "elements of metaphoric collocations are uniquely restricted to each other" (Baker, 1992: 61).

Alternatively, Pecina (2009: 22) asserts that "[T]here is no commonly accepted definition of collocation". Thus, collocation is understood "as a meaningful and grammatical word combination constrained by extensionally specified restrictions and preferences" (ibid.). Such a view is also supported by other scholars: "there is no exhaustive and uniform definition or categorization of collocation. Therefore, it tends to be one of the most problematic and error-generating area of vocabulary" Martyńska M. (2004: 5).

In other words, "**collocation** [sic] is essentially word-oriented and cohesive: it refers to the extent to which the presence and meaning of a word 'coheres' or depends on the presence of another word (or words) in the same stretch of text" (Gledhill, C. 2011: 6).

In short, in this study, and following the approach used by MARTÍNEZ A. S. (2011: 763), I particularly focus on the collocations "which can neither be explained in terms of syntax nor be considered as a semantic unit (idiom)". These are mostly adjective + noun collocations (see my Appendices).

II. The Data and Respondents

a. The Respondents

The researcher distributed 150 copies of the three questionnaires composing the corpus of this research paper. As usual, not everyone responded in time. Consequently, I managed to have just a few over one hundred responses at the right time. For the sake of objective analysis and ease of statistical procedures, however, I ignored the last few responses and sufficed with 96 questionnaires distributed equally among all of the four institutions, 24 each. All of the MA students taking part in this data collection were either in their second year of a two-year MA program in translation or MA graduates from one of the four Arab universities in four Arab countries: the Arab Higher Institute of Translation (affiliated with the League of Arab States), Algiers, Algeria; the Department of English at Petra University, Amman, Jordan; the Higher Institute for Interpretation and Translation, Damascus University, Syria; and the Department of English at the Holy-Spirit University of Kaslik, Lebanon.

However, some of them are teachers of English or translators; others are just students. Their ages ranged between 23 and 36. I am aware that this variance in age could have an impact on their performance. But it was extremely difficult for me to take each case of difference in age or experience in the use of English into consideration. I must admit this is one point of weakness in my research. However, it is also true that such tiny discrepancies cannot normally be taken into account. One piece of evidence for this claim is that a change in respondents will naturally result in a change of results. This is a vicious circle that nobody, I am afraid, could always take into account. Age and experience are in constant change, anyway.

b. The Data

The data consisted of three questionnaires. The first one had 20 Arabic collocations for the respondents to translate into English appropriate collocations (see Appendix 1). The second consisted of 20 English collocations to be rendered into equivalent Arabic collocations (see Appendix 2). The third consisted of the *bases* or *nodes* of 9 English collocations along with four choices of *collocators* or *collocates* for each base and the equivalent Arabic collocation (see Appendix 4). In this last questionnaire, the 96 respondents from the four Arab Higher institutions had to choose the right collocator (or collocate) for the right base or node. Finally, two professors kindly accepted to be informants; they, thus, read the data and decided that the most difficult part of the data was questionnaire one, and the easiest was questionnaire two. To them, questionnaire three was quite realistic and should be able to measure the competence of the MA students in understanding and using collocations in English.

III. Method of Analysis

The methods used in the analysis of my findings were both *quantitative*, i.e. statistical, and *qualitative*, i.e. analytical. The data were, thus, tabulated in accordance with the errors committed by the respondents of each institution mentioned above and in relation to each questionnaire, as well. This included assessment of the results obtained from rendering collocations from Arabic into English (Questionnaire 1); rendering collocations from English into Arabic (Questionnaire 2); or selecting the proper collocate or collocator with the suitable base or node of English collocations (Questionnaire 3).

Analytically, the findings in one institution were compared and contrasted with their counterparts in another. The results of each questionnaire were also compared and contrasted for discovering the differences in the respondent's skills and knowledge. Finally, my findings were compared with results of other research projects on the same topic. Reasons for misuse of collocations and the weaknesses of the respondents were analyzed; consequently, recommendations were made.

IV. Findings & Discussion

The findings showed that the total number of errors was 1478 out of 1920 translations in Questionnaire 1, a percentage of 76.979%; 1218 out of 1920 translations in Questionnaire 2, a percentage of 63.437%; and 2712 out of 3456 choices, a percentage of 78.472% (see Table 1 below).

Errors in Arabic-English Collocations (Q. 1)	Errors in English-Arabic Collocations (Q. 2)	Errors in Associating English Collocate with Base (Q. 3)
1478 out of 1920 (76.979%)	1218 out of 1920 (63.437%)	2712 out of 3456 (78.472%)

Table 2: Total Number of Errors (or Deviations) in the 3 Questionnaires

It is obvious that the MA students did extremely badly in Questionnaire 1, i.e. translating collocations from Arabic into English. In Questionnaire 2, i.e. translating collocations from English into Arabic, the respondents did not do well, but the picture called for less pessimism. In Questionnaire 3, where the respondents had to choose the right collocator out of four possibilities for the right base in English, the percentage of errors was the worst, a ratio of 78.472%, although the equivalent Arabic collocations, i.e. the collocator and the base, were provided. However, these deviations were not of the same percentage in all of the universities of the respondents in question. These deviations in the four institutions were distributed as follows, as shown in Table 3 below:

Serial Number of University/Institution	Errors in Arabic-English Collocations (Q. 1) = **1478 Errors**	Errors in English-Arabic Collocations (Q. 2) = **1218 Errors**	Errors in Selecting English Collocates (Q. 3) = **2712 Errors**
Institution 1	**407 out of 480 (84. 791%)**	**422 out of 480 (87.916%)**	**814 out of 864 (94.212%)**
Institution 2	**392 out of 480 (81.666%)**	**409 out of 480 (85.208%)**	**798 out of 864 (92.361%)**
Institution 3	**348 out of 480 (72.500%)**	**212 out of 480 (44.166%)**	**568 out of 864 (65.740%)**
Institution 4	**331 out of 480 (68.958%)**	**175 out of 480 (36.458)**	**532 out of 864 (61.574%)**

Table 3: Distribution of Errors in the Four Institutions

Tables 2 and 3 above reveal several facts. The first relates to the general weaknesses of MA students in the four Arab institutions in understanding, using, and translating English collocations. The second relates to the discrepancies among the respondents of the four institutions. Some of them, particularly the first two, were far less competent than my expectation. The third shows that there is no consistency in the differences of the low performance of one and the same institution in the three questionnaires. For instance, the number of errors made by the respondents of the first two institutions (Table 2) in Questionnaire three is considerably higher than that of the same respondents in Questionnaires one and two, although translating collocations, at least from Arabic into English, is supposed to be more difficult for native speakers of Arabic, especially as the collocations were of the structure adjective + noun (see AL-Kattan, 2007; al-Sakran, 2011). Above all, both of the collocator and the base, in addition to the Arabic equivalents, are provided to the respondents in Questionnaire three. Therefore, associating a collocator with its suitable base was supposed to be easier. At the same time, the respondents of institutions 3 and 4, who generally did better in the three tests than the respondents of the other two, had less errors in Questionnaire three than in Questionnaire one (c. 7%).

One explanation is that the respondents of the first two institutions could have opted for a choice in Questionnaire three or a translation in Questionnaire one by relying on conjecture rather than reliable knowledge. This non-felicitous expectation is reinforced by the fact that, unlike the respondents of institutions 3 and 4, the respondents of institutions one and two had more errors in Questionnaire two than in the supposedly easier questionnaires, one and three.

Thus, the difference between Institution one and Institution four in associating the suitable collocate with the right base of the collocation was over 32% of the total number of errors. There was also a considerable percentage of difference between the two institutions, 1 and 4, in the translation of Arabic collocations into English. It was over 15% of the total number of errors of the relevant respondents of these two institutions. Amazingly, the difference between the total number of errors made by the respondents of the same institutions, 1 and 4, is even wider in the translation of English collocations into Arabic (Questionnaire 2); it was over 51%.

It seems that the better the respondents of a given institution are in English, the more balanced their use of collocations. In other words, because questionnaire 2 is the easiest among the three questionnaires, and because questionnaire three rates second in ease (or difficulty), we notice that the best two institutions did better in questionnaire two and worst in three – which sounds logical and acceptable in the present situation of learning English at Arab universities.

Despite what was said above about the differences among the four Arab higher institutions in understanding, using and translating English collocations, it is obvious that even the respondents of the last two institutions was not up to the level expected from MA students. In fact, more than one third of the collocational translations rendered by the best institution respondents, the fourth, was incorrect in the supposedly easiest questionnaire, two. This ratio of incorrect use of collocations goes up to a percentage of over 61% in questionnaire three and about 69% in questionnaire one. Needless to say, the situation of the respondents of Institution three is even worse (see Table 3 above).

Unfortunately, many errors in the three questionnaires were unexpected. In short, they showed that the respondents generally relied on literal transfer from their mother tongue. In some of these mistakes, the MA student did not even observe the syntactic rules of the target language – which indicates another layer of weakness in the target language as a whole. One example of such deviations is "convinc**ed** argument" instead of "good argument" for "**حجّة مقنعة**" in questionnaire three. To another respondent, "harmless" is the best choice as a **collocator** that associates with "conduct" as a **base** for the Arabic collocation of "**تصرّفٌ لائق**" in the same questionnaire. Another choice is "Gorgeous **Reason**" for Arabic "**سببٌ معقول**". In short, these unlucky examples of collocations were presented by the respondents in Questionnaire three for the Arabic collocations given below (see Appendix IV):

1. Straight behavior for "**سلوك مستقيم**";

2. Robust beating for "**ضرب مبرّح**";

3. Lucky chance for "**فرصة سانحة**";

4. Persuaded argument for "**حجّة مقنعة**";

5. Excellent book for "**الكتابُ المقدّس**"; etc.

Of course, such deviations are repeated by different respondents in different ways that show unexpected errors from MA translation students in the area of collocation. On the level of translating collocations from Arabic into English, the picture is not that promising, either. Consider the following English collocations suggested by the respondents for the Arabic collocations given against them below (see Appendix I for comparison):

1. illusions for "**خداع بصري**", instead of "Optical illusions";

2. darn poorness for "**فقر مدقع**", instead of "Abject poverty";

3. intangible handwriting for "**كتابة (يد) لا تقرأ**", instead of "Illegible handwriting";

4. incredible results for "**عواقب وخيمة**", instead of "Dire consequences";

5. clean water for "**مياه صالحة للشرب**", instead of "Potable water";

6. Intentional murder for "**القتل العمد**", instead of "Premeditated killing".

The list of such errors goes on and on (see Appendix 1 for the equivalents of the 20 Arabic collocations in it). Moreover, many questions are left unanswered.

This is simply because the respondent has no clue about the translation equivalent of the collocation in question. As for the translation equivalents of English collocations, these errors are quoted as examples:

1. "**اتصال فعلي**" for "Verbal communication" instead of "**تواصل لغوي**";

2. "**عجز**" for "Congenital defect", instead of "**عيب وراثي**";

3. "رخصة رسمية" for "Official permission", instead of "تصريح رسمي";

4. "مخيلة عنيفة" for "Wild imagination", instead of "خيالٌ واسعٌ" or "خيالٌ جامحٌ";

5. "نكتة قديمة" for "A stale joke", instead of "نكتة بايخة";

6. "مسائل عالقة" for "Controversial issues", instead of "قضايا خلافية", etc.

Finally, one collocation, "Stuffy apartment", was not translated by any of the 96 respondents. Scores of other collocations were not even attempted "lest they be erroneous" according to the language of some respondents I interviewed.

In fact, after interviewing 10 of the 96 respondents, I discovered that they followed two major strategies in solving the problems they encountered: Resort to **literal translation from L1** and **substitution mainly based on conjecture** (see Zughoul, M. R. & Abdul-Fattah, H., 2003, for other strategies). Therefore, it is not surprising to find scholars calling for direct teaching of collocation to EFL learners at schools and universities: Zughoul, M. R. & Abdul-Fattah, H., (2003: Abstract) state that their "findings have substantiated the . . . need for explicit instructional focus on collocation in school and university". This is further supported by other scholars in a more explicit way. Thus, Gyllstad, H. (2007: 253) believes that "in an L1 acquisition setting, children learn language from exposure only. However, in an L2 setting, a complement to this exposure would be some sort of explicit learning of collocations."

Similar results in other research studies showed the following percentages of errors in tests on the knowledge and use of collocation: thus, in tests on the use of verb + noun collocation, the average percentage of errors of Chinese students was 48.13%; in other tests, it was about 89% (Wang, 2011: 114 – 117). He (Wang, 2011: 117) says, for example, that "when the subjects are required to use a verb + noun structure . . . in English, 55.3% of them . . . . may use some inappropriate verbs, such as 'make', 'take' or 'give'". The percentage of errors in tests on collocation at an Iraqi university was just over 71% (Ahmed, 2008: 69). He (ibid.) also concludes that "the lowest average of the students' score is in the Adjective + Noun and Adjective + Adverb areas, 0.94 and 0.97 respectively" (Ahmed, 2008: 67). In Saudi Arabia, the rate of errors or, as Brashi, (2001: 28) calls them, "unacceptable" answers, in 'blank-filling test of English collocations' was 62%". (see also Farrokh, P., 2012; Benson, M., 1985; Benson, M., Benson, E. and Ilson, R., 1986, among others).

To Hatim and Mason (1990), collocation is a major problem for the translator; this is because L1 interference normally induces a level of unnatural collocation in the L2. This is because "collocation in particular is not appropriately touched or handled in the curriculum" (Nofal1, 2012: 75). In fact, "it turned out that L2 learners rely on their grammatical knowledge and formulate sentences through linguistic processes, rather than access and retrieve the word units in the storage in the mind" (Natsumi, 2012: 8). Zughoul, (1991) also finds that wrong collocations are mostly the result of the learners' lack of reading in English and heavily relying on bilingual dictionaries in translating into English.

In studying the students' ability in translating a business text from Thai into English, Boonyasaquan S. (2009: 85) found out that the "students' English proficiency level was rather low since the mean was at 11.5 while the total score was 30." Above all, "investigation showed that the adjective + noun pattern of collocational violations were found at the highest level" (ibid.). For Iranian learners, Namvar, (2012: 49) "showed that there was a strong correlation between students' knowledge of collocations and their general proficiency"; her results also "illustrated that *adjective + noun* collocations . . . were the most difficult" (ibid.) Therefore, Nesselhauf (2005: 252) recommends that some combinations are "arbitrary to some degree and therefore have to be learnt."

This weakness seems to be justifiable to some scholars: Ahmadian & Darabi (2012: 179) say that "[E]ven advanced language learners may have difficulty handling the choice of lexical items, among near synonyms, in the second language" (see also AL-Kattan, 2007). To Zughoul, M. R. & Abdul-Fattah, H. (2003: 70), "In the data, many learner incorrect substitutions are traceable to NL transfer or paraphrase and circumlocution." Therefore, Brashi (2001: 30) "recommends trying out the possibility of teaching collocations explicitly to EFL/ESL learners".

In assessing how Iranian EFL learners acquire and/or learn English, Bazzaz, and Samad (2011: 161), in their findings, show "that a word can be best learned with which it associates because learners can remember the word with its associations or collocations". On another plane, Durrant's (2008: 185) "results suggest that adult second language learners are capable of learning collocations implicitly from input" (Durrant, 2008: 185). But, to him (ibid.), the problem is "likely to be a lack of sufficient input".

Darvishi, S. (2011: 56) concludes that "EFL students make collocational errors in their writing because of the interference of their mother tongue, lack of the collocational concept, the inter-lingual or intra-lingual transfer, paraphrase and their shortage of their collocational knowledge".

The results in this paper were quite similar to those of other scholars and researchers. For instance, of the collocations translated, between 68.6 and 77.1 % "of the received translations were marked incorrect" (Dweik, & Abu Shakra, 2011: 29 - 30). In addition, "the participants' receptive collocational knowledge was broader than their productive collocational knowledge" (al-Sakran, 2011: 73). In his findings, Al-Sakran (ibid.) also found out that "adjective-noun and verb-preposition collocations were very challenging and much more difficult" to his advanced Arabic-speaking participants. In fact, in the personal interpretive interviews I made with 10 respondents, I managed to get a clear idea about the reasons for failure in comprehending and/or using collocations in English – and in some cases in the native language, Arabic. These reasons can be summarized in the following: 1. Lack of knowledge of the collocations in question; 2. Shortage or even scarcity of Arabic-English or English-Arabic collocation dictionaries; 3. Lack of consciousness of the role of collocation in expressing 'meaning' as intended in context; 4. Lack of concentration on collocation in EFL or translation classes at Arab universities or schools, although individual differences do exist.

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

In this context, it is understandable to see that some scholars stress that "collocation is one of the most important aspects of knowing a word (Duan and Qin, 2012: 1890). Therefore, "in order to deepen the understanding of a word, students of English must know its collocation" (ibid.). However, Laybutt (2009: 94) "suggests that functional and contextual factors must also be taken into consideration".

I fully agree with Martyńska M. (2004: 11) concluding in her research that "Learning individual words and their meaning does not suffice to achieve great fluency in a second language. Knowing the way words combine into chunks characteristic of the language is imperative". I would rather suggest that every EFL syllabus include some exercises on collocation in the target language. Above all, drawing the learners' attention to the use and role of collocation in expressing meaning should be practiced consciously and explicitly; as a result, the learners can be asked to prepare relevant glossaries. Mono-lingual and bi-lingual collocation dictionaries should be made available.

Nonetheless, we should not forget that such findings, and similar ones, can only be generalized as far as a 'well-defined' group of learners is concerned. In other words, such findings are restricted in terms of respondents, stage of learning, and time. Thus, if we examine other respondents, we are prone to have, somewhat, different results; at the same time, if we test the same students after a year or so, the findings might also be different. However, this should not minimize the importance of the results, especially as they are not that different from other results in different cultures and various linguistic backgrounds. Therefore, research on particular groups of learners at different stages of their schooling and stages of the knowledge of collocation should continue for more discoveries we always attempt to make.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Questionnaire I

Dear Respondent,

This is a questionnaire meant to serve part of my research on '*Collocation in English: Comprehension and Use by MA Students at Arab Universities*'. Your cooperation in translating the Arabic collocations below into English equivalent collocations would be highly appreciated. You are kindly requested to rely *just on your own knowledge* without consulting any translator, linguist, dictionary, or the internet. If you happen not to understand a certain collocation in the source language, or not to know the equivalent or the translation of a collocation in the target language, please *skip* or *ignore* it. All information provided will remain *confidential*. Finally, please hand, send, or e-mail your reply at your earliest convenience.

1. -- فقر مدقع
2. -- مرض عضال
3. -- عواقب وخيمة
4. -- ماء فاتر
5. -- مصدر موثوق
6. -- قرار لا رجعة عنه
7. -- طلاق بائن (لا رجعة عنه)
8. -- الزواج العرفي
9. -- سائق متهور
10. -- كتابة (يد) لا تقرأ
11. -- مياه صالحة للشرب
12. -- دليل قاطع
13. -- إصابة خطيرة
14. -- تنفس صناعي
15. -- تنظيم سرّيّ
16. -- خداع بصري
17. -- أسلاك شائكة
18. -- دولة مارقة
19. -- عذر ضعيف (أقبحُ من ذنب)
20. -- القتل العمد

Appendix II: Questionnaire 2

Dear Respondent,

This is a questionnaire meant to serve part of my research on '*Collocation in English: Comprehension and Use by MA Students at Arab Universities*'. Your cooperation in translating the English collocations into Arabic equivalent collocations would be highly appreciated. You are kindly requested to rely *only on your own knowledge* without consulting any translator, linguist, dictionary, or the internet. If you happen not to understand a certain collocation in the source language, or not to know the equivalent or the translation of a collocation in the target language, please *skip* or *ignore* it. All information provided will remain *confidential*. Finally, please hand, send, or e-mail your reply at your earliest convenience.

1. Verbal communication --
2. Official statement --
3. Official permission --
4. Arbitrary government --
5. Drastic war --
6. Heinous crime --
7. Ground offensive --
8. Wild imagination --
9. Fundamental rights --
10. Demilitarized zone --
11. Impulsive behavior --
12. A stale joke --
13. Classified information --
14. Congenital defect --
15. Utter chaos --
16. Controversial issues --
17. Blind obedience --
18. Stuffy apartment --
19. Ignominious defeat --
20. Candid camera --

Appendix III: Suggested Translations of Collocations (Q1 & Q2)

III.1. Suggested English Equivalents

1.   Abject poverty
2.   Incurable disease
3.   Dire consequences
4.   Lukewarm water
5.   Reliable source
6.   Irreversible decision
7.   Irrevocable divorce
8.   Common-law marriage
9.   Reckless driver
10.   Illegible handwriting
11.   Potable water
12.   A clear-cut evidence
13.   A serious injury
14.   Artificial respiration
15.   Clandestine/Underground organization
16.   Optical illusion
17.   Barbed wire
18.   A rogue state
19.   A lame excuse
20.   Premeditated killing

III.2. *Suggested Arabic Equivalents*

1.	تواصل شفوي
2.	بيان رسمي
3.	تصريح رسمي
4.	حكومة استبدادية
5.	حرب ضروس
6.	جريمة نكراء
7.	هجوم برّيّ
8.	خيال واسع
9.	حقوق أساسية
10.	منطقة منزوعة السلاح
11.	سلوك متهور
12.	نكتة بايخة
13.	معلومات سرية
14.	عيب وراثي
15.	فوضى عارمة
16.	قضايا خلافية
17.	طاعة عمياء
18.	شقة فاسدة الهواء
19.	هزيمة مخزية
20.	الكاميرا الخفية

Appendix IV: Questionnaire 3

Dear Respondent,

This is a questionnaire meant to serve part of my research on '*Collocation in English: Comprehension and Use by MA Students at Arab Universities*'. Your cooperation in choosing the best collocate (a, b, c, OR d) for the base (a **noun** in **bold**) in each of the nine rows in the table below would be highly appreciated. You are kindly requested to rely *just on your own knowledge* without consulting any translator, linguist, dictionary, or the internet. If you happen not to understand a certain collocation in the source language, or not to know the translation equivalent of a collocation in the target language, please *skip* or *ignore* it. All information provided will remain *confidential*. Finally, please hand, send, or e-mail your reply at your earliest convenience.

ضربٌ مبرّح	a) Vehement **Beating**	b) Fit **Beating**	c) Robust **Beating**	d) Good **Beating**
حجّة مقنعة	a) Excellent **Argument**	b) Persuaded **Argument**	c) Convinced **Argument**	d) Good **Argument**
الكتابُ المقدّس	a) Excellent **Book**	b) Fantastic **Book**	c) Sacred **Book**	d) Good **Book**
سلوكٌ مستقيم	a) Gorgeous **Behavior**	b) Excellent **Behavior**	c) Straight **Behavior**	d) Good **Behavior**
سببٌ معقول	a) Excellent **Reason**	b) Gorgeous **Reason**	c) Fantastic **Reason**	d) Good **Reason**
صفقة موفقة	a) Rich **Buy**	b) Lucky **Buy**	c) Chance **Buy**	d) Good **Buy**
تصرّفٌ لائق	a) Harmless **Conduct**	b) Gorgeous **Conduct**	c) Lucky **Conduct**	d) Good **Conduct**
فرصة سانحة	a) Happy **Chance**	b) Lucky **Chance**	c) Excellent **Chance**	d) Good **Chance**
صرخة مدوّية	a) Vehement **Cry**	b) Sonorous **Cry**	c) Booming **Cry**	d) Good **Cry**

Choice of Collocate & Base

NB: 'd' is the right answer in each of the choices above.

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