Perceptions on L2 Lexical Collocation Translation with a Focus on English-Arabic

Mai Abdullah Alqaed

English Language Lecturer, Tabuk University

Abstract

This paper aims to shed light on recent research concerning translating English-Arabic lexical collocations. It begins with a brief overview of English and Arabic lexical collocations with reference to specialized dictionaries. Research views on translating lexical collocations are presented, with the focus on English-Arabic collocations. These views have supported the notion that translating English-Arabic lexical collocations by second language learners is a problematic matter that needs attention. Then, highlighting second language learners' errors when translating English lexical collocations is due to inaccessible collocation dictionaries, semantic, syntactic differences between the L1 and L2. This paper concludes with an overview of how teacher instruction can facilitate collocation translation through dictionaries, and a scaffolding method.

Keywords: Collocation, translation, dictionary, and different lexical and grammatical systems.

1. Introduction

Collocations are mainly two words that accompany each other and have a certain meaning. When it comes to translating these collocations, second language learners face a problem finding a suitable equivalent of collocations in the Target Language (TL). These problems can be syntactical, cultural, and semantic.

This enduring debate is noticeable in a number of researches conducted in the twentieth century. As Husni and Newman (2015) commented, collocations are mostly cultural or language specific, but this might pose a problem for translators. In this situation second language learners eventually do not recognize collocations and tend to translate them literally without their connotative meaning. Hence, the translated discourse will sound jarring because of this mistranslation (Bahumaid, 2006).

The significance of this paper is to focus on the nature of English collocations in addition to Arabic ones. There are modest investigations about this topic therefore; this research will contribute to the field of English-Arabic translation. In this paper I will first attempt to investigate the controversial issue of English and Arabic collocations. Then I will consider previous literature concerning translating English to Arabic collocations and vice versa from a semantic point of view. I will then examine the strategies second language learners of English employ when translating collocations. Finally, this paper will posit how teacher instructions can affect positively students' interpretations of collocations.

2. Theoretical Background

1. English collocations.
2. Arabic collocations.
3. Views on Translating English lexical collocations.
4. Second language learners' errors when translating collocations.
5. Teaching instructions on translating collocations.

2.1 English Collocations

English collocations were first examined by Palmer (1933) and he described this phenomenon as "odd comings-together-of-words" (Palmer, 1933:13, cited in Husni and Newman, 2015). But the most famous definition of English collocations was the Firthian one "the company that words keep" (Firth, 1968:182). Firth (1957) was the first linguist to describe collocations, as in the meaning of words is bound by the words occurring next to each other. Leech (1974; 20) followed Firth (1951) on defining collocations and referred to it as "collocative meaning" and he gives a very interesting yet problematic example for second language learners; "pretty" and "handsome" which collocate with different lexical nouns even though they share one meaning. As a consequence of all the different definitions of collocations, different categories of collocations have emerged (Bahumaid, 2006).

Thus it is noted that the English language has a huge number of multi-word units that can be helpful for learning English Language as a second language (Galal, 2015). Also, Baker (1992) highlights the importance of collocations in a language describing it as the "invigorating soul". Consequently, it is vital for a second language learner to be aware of collocations when learning a language. Second language learners unaware of this aspect might fall into the trap of literal translation of collocations, stripping them of all the figurative or indirect meanings they might hold.

In the last three decades, lexicographers have produced specialized collocation dictionaries. Among these dictionaries is the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* by Hornby (1974). Another,

is the *Oxford Collocations Dictionary for students of English (2009) by Colin McIntosh and Ben Francis,* which contains more than 250,000 collocation entries. The *BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English* by Benson, Benson, Ilson (1986) was last revised in 1997.It is considered the first specialized collocation dictionary and contains more than 90,000 combinations and phrases. A later specialized English collocation dictionary is *The Dictionary of Selected Collocations* by Hill and Lewis (1997). This dictionary divided the collocations according to the parts of speech; for example, it lists the noun and all the verbs, adjectives, and adverbs that collocate with that noun (Brashi, 2005). Moreover, a unique English collocation CD-Rom is Collins COBuild (1995). Although it is a rich resource, it is not so accessible for language learners due to its high cost.

As seen in the definitions above English collocations can be defined as mainly two words having a semantic relationship. This linguistic phenomenon is unique but rather difficult for language learners. The cause of this difficulty is due to differences in the cultural nature and syntactic structure of the two languages discussed in this proposal. From these two aspects translating collocations have been a problematic issue for second language learners of English. Before translating collocations, student translators should be made aware of the indirect message that a collocation might hold before trying to find the target language equivalent. When the translator fails to present an accurate translation it will result in an unusual expression in the target language (Al-Rawi, 1994).

2.2 Arabic Collocations.

Arabic is a rich language concerning its lexicography, and there are a number of manuscripts that discuss lexicons. One of the first was *Mabadi'au l-ughah* by Al-Iskafi (1906). It has a logical arrangement of the lexicons according to a specific subject; for example, it started with natural phenomenon words then it tackled other issues such as clothes, food, and animals, and the final section was dedicated to rare lexical items (Brashi,2005). Even though it is a rich resource for many lexical items it did not shed light on Arabic collocations. Another Arabic lexicographical work is *Adabu l-kaatib* by Ibn Qutaybah (1963) which is divided into 3 parts; lexical, morphological, and semantic lexicons. The advantage of this book is the rich linguistic information, but the disadvantage is that it is not arranged alphabetically hence it is not easy to use.

Al-Ayoubi (2010) described Al-thaalibi's Fiqhu l-lughah (1986) being divided into different parts and chapters in order to describe the Arabic lexical items. This work is divided into three parts similar to Ibn Qutaybah's work. It is also arranged according to topics so it can be considered a mini-encyclopaedia rather than a dictionary. *Al-mukhassas* by Ibn Sidah (1996) is organized according to different categories. Similar to the other lexicographical work it is limited in discussing Arabic collocations and not much help for the language learner (Galal, 2015). Finally, Wehr (1980) *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic; Arabic –English*, is considered a general purpose dictionary organized alphabetically. It has not included particular information about Arabic collocations. Consequently, it might not be much helpful for a language learner and translator seeking specific information about collocations.

After discussing previous Arabic lexicographical work, it is noticeable that there has not been much work on Arabic collocations. Two recent collocation dictionaries have therefore been published to meet with the needs of language learners and translators. The first is by Hafiz (2004) *Arabic Collocations Dictionary*, which can be considered the first specialized Arabic-English collocation dictionary. The second is *Dar El-ilm's Dictionary of Collocations* (2007) compiled by Hasan Ghazala, which is an English-Arabic collocation dictionary. Galal (2015) illustrated the weaknesses of these two dictionaries. He noted that the *Arabic Collocations Dictionary* (2004) did not cover a wide range of Arabic collocation, thus might not be totally useful for language learners and translators in particular. On the other hand, *Dar El-ilm's Dictionary of Collocations* (2007) was criticized for translating English collocations to literal, direct, and free Arabic translations, overlooking the fact that there is usually an equivalent Arabic collocation (Galal, 2015). Even though these two works have been scrutinized, they have not been thoroughly researched to examine the benefits of these recent collocation dictionaries on language learners and translators. Until they are pedagogically applied, however, we can say that they are two beneficial collocation dictionaries.

2.3 Views on translating English Lexical Collocations.

Despite all the focus on collocation research, there has been little attention paid to translating collocations across languages and especially English-Arabic collocations and vice versa (Bahumaid, 2006). Farghal and Obeidat (1995) tested second language learners' English collocation competence on a translation task and only 5.5% of the 22 English collocations were correctly translated. Furthermore, Hussein (1997) tested Arab students' production of English collocations and only 39% of the students got them correct. Thus, in these previous researches, collocation competence among Arab learners of English has proved to be a problematic issue.

There have been various researchers that have considered this phenomenon. Aziz (1982) stated that English collocations are easily translated into Arabic if they are described grammatically (e.g. noun+ noun or noun+ adjective and so on). However, Nida (1964) and Bani-Younes (2015) see that translators struggle with

cultural and sociolinguistic differences between languages than language structure. Brashi (2005) mentions that student translators face problems due to the different uses of collocations between languages, meaning that two different collocations having the same meaning in two languages. On the other hand, Husni and Newman (2015) discussed the semantic relation of collocations and argued that the tie between words is not clear because of the figurative aspect they hold. El-Gemei (2006) agrees with this notion that words semantically occur with each other and gave many examples; one of them is "terrorism" transcribed in Arabic "erhaab" that occurs only with words in the military field. She also commented on words like "blooming" associated only with plants. Because of the semantic ties between words, Baker (2011) commented that translators can mistranslate the "source message" of a collocation due to the influence of their native tongue.

Morever, the SL and TL might differ in word structure. This will pose a problem for students when translating and was one of the problematic issues that Usama (1998;p.104) encountered when translating English collocations to Arabic because of the different syntactic structures between the two languages; for example, "Willy-nilly" which has the Arabic equivalent of "rghman anfuh". On the other hand, Abu Ssaydeh's (1991) investigation showed that lexical errors were more prominent than grammatical collocations even in advanced foreign learners. Wardell (1991) agrees with Abu Ssaydeh in that, second language learners of English fail to use collocations in the manner of natives.

Brashi (2005) argued that not using the same expression in the same order of the TL can cause loss of translation. He provided an English collocation "strong tea" which might be translated literally into Arabic " shaai gawi" which is not the appropriate Arabic collocation, which we refer to as " shaai thageel". This is in line with Armstrong's (2005) argument that it is easy to know a collocation in the SL but difficult to find the proper equivalent for it in the TL. In addition, Bhumaid's (2006) study showed that collocations holding a metaphorical meaning were harder to translate than direct literal ones, which should be an important issue to point out to student translators. Duan and Qin (2012) emphasized the importance of acquiring the meaning of collocations and the proper way of using them for students learning English, consequently it will then be easier for the student translator to find an equivalent collocation in the other language.

Cultural collocations can form an obstacle for the translator; for example, "patient owl" which in English has a positive connotation symbolizing for "wisdom" while in Arabic an "owl" holds a negative reference of bad luck and pessimism. Thus, an Arab translator when faced with such a collocation can either omit the element or render the meaning behind this collocation as "patient person". On the other hand, a translator can find an equivalent reference for "patient person" figuratively in the targeted language such as "patient camel". Both of these solutions can be very helpful for the translator (Husni and Newman, 2015;19). Bahumaid (2006) in his study revealed that cultural- bound collocations formed a problematic issue for translators translating English and Arabic collocations. Mustafa (2010) explained the linguistic and cultural patterns of collocations but did not suggest any solutions to these problems. On the other hand, Yasin (2015) noted that translating collocations can be a dilemma for second language learners because of the difficulty in choosing the correct word structure, and before that comprehending the message that the collocation hold. Also, Emery (1988) tackled the issue of mistranslating Arabic-English collocations due to the " formal inter-lingual differences or stylistic constraints". Choosing the suitable word structure when translating collocations has been investigated as being a problem by Howarth, 1998; Husain, 1998; Neselhauf, 2003; Mahmoud, 2005; Falahi, 2012; Sadighi and Sahragard, 2013; Mahdi and Yasin, 2015; Bani-Younes, 2015.

Newmark(1988) exemplifies the difficulty of translating English collocations such as " cold-calling, lead time, domino effect". He pointed out this obscurity was due to the grammatical structure of the collocations either, noun-noun or verb- noun and the intended meanings these components hold. Therefore, translating English collocations can form a problematic issue when the target language cannot change a verb to noun, nor can it show a preposition in its rightful place. Moreover, there are English collocations that do not show the function or description of the term, such as "British Council" which was translated in German to adopt with their culture then it was put in the glossary for the reader to understand the true function for the "British Council" (Newmark, 1988; p.146). Thus, a translator resorts to a secondary meaning of an English collocation instead of the main semantic meaning it holds. This is clear in Duan and Qin's (2012) research where they attributed the errors language learners committed when dealing with English collocations to two causes; the interference of their first language and the overgeneralization of the collocation message.

Relatively few researchers have given suggestions about how to help the second language translator on dealing with collocations. Bahumaid (2006) explained that the poor performance of translators when translating collocations is due to the lack of training Arab students on rendering collocations in their translation courses. Also, Nofal (2012) emphasized the importance of training students during translation courses on interpreting collocations in both Arabic and English. He also laid emphasis on the role of teachers and curriculum designers to catch learners' attention on the intended meaning behind collocations in both languages, Arabic and English.

2.4 Second language learners' errors when translating collocations
Fakhouri (1995), cited in Nofal (2012), noted that students translating collocations often face problems and commit errors. He further explained these problems and errors due to the lack of specialized bilingual collocation dictionaries. Moreover, students were unable to predict the meanings of the collocations in the targeted language. A third factor is due to the cultural and linguistic differences between Arabic and English. He concluded that the process of learning the vocabulary of a second language might not have included semantic and structural collocations. Zughoul and Abdul-Fattah (2001) discussed the issue that native speakers acquire collocations passively while foreign language learners need to be aware and trained on the production of collocations in a proper way.

Husni and Newman (2015) discussed three difficulties that a translator will face when interpreting a collocation. The first is recognizing a collocation in a text, which sometimes can be difficult to spot. The second comprehends collocations. Nowadays, dictionaries can be a helpful tool for learners and translators even though not much research has been done to measure how collocation dictionaries can be helpful for a translator and language learners. The third difficulty related to the second is reproducing the collocation in the targeted, considering if it has a literal meaning, or figurative, or both.

Students or translators when confronted with a collocation they do not know an equivalent to tend to use processes such as reduction, synonym, reparation, and summarising (Nofal, 2012). Mahmoud (2005) explained in his research that Arab student error when translating English collocations was due to the dissimilarity between the two languages. These errors were contextual, word choice, word form, incorrect prepositional errors, and incorrect lexical collocation. Similarly, Bahumaid's (2006; 144) research showed various procedures used by the translators, such as synonyms or close synonyms, giving the meaning of the collocation, literal translation, and avoidance of the collocation. Husni and Newman (2015) suggested some strategies a translator can use when confronted by collocations; either finding an equivalent, paraphrasing, or borrowing the collocation to the targeted language.

Wardell (1991) emphasized the importance of training second language learners on using collocations. For this reason, the aim behind training students to translate collocations between two languages is not just merely to use their translation techniques and strategies but it gives the second language learner translator a deeper idea about how the second language is structured and then they will have the ability to use and acquire such collocations (Cook, 2010). This is in line with Verstrratan (1992) who comments on language learner use of fixed phrases that can be a sign of language proficiency.

2.5 Teaching instructions on translating collocations
In order for students to translate English collocations properly, they should be aware of the collocations suitable for use in discourse (Duan & Qin, 2012). Thus, teaching them how to use collocation dictionaries might help them comprehend the meaning then properly shape it to the target language. This is stated in the introduction of *Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English* (2003,p.vii). Furthermore, limiting the teacher's role to a facilitator will allow students to independently deal with the second language. This temporary support of the teacher while students perform a task is called "scaffolding" (Wu, 2015). This notion can be supported by Lewis (2000) claim that learning collocations can be acquired through noticing them first. In other words, students should be taught explicitly how to find them in context then render there meaning simply through a dictionary.

3. Conclusion
There are a reasonable number of researches about collocations and how to translate them (Brashi, 2005, 2006; Galal, 2015; Mahdi and Yasin, 2015), which have highlighted this problematic issue. These researches have massively contributed to the field of applied linguistics, paving the path for other studies to explore solutions for such an insufficiency. However, to this researcher's knowledge none of these studies addressed the issue of utilizing collocation dictionaries to help second language learners translating collocations or the use of any kind of instruction. English lexical collocations pose a major problem for second language learners due to the difference between the L1 and L2 in syntactic, semantic, and cultural diversity. Thus, giving second language learners a clear guideline about these differences can aid the translating process, contributing positively in overcoming this inadequacy. Also, there is a gap in recent research concerning English-Arabic collocation instruction through investigating new methods on how to teach students to deal with L2 collocations.

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