

# Analysis of Collocational Errors in Selected Iraqi Published Papers

تحليل لغوي للأخطاء في الاقتران اللغوي في مجموعة بحوث

منشورة لباحثين عراقيين

Lect

HusseinDhahi al-Hassnawi

University of Kufa - Faculty of Languages

## Abstract

The present study attempts to identify and analyse the collocational errors committed in writing by Iraqi EFL researchers whose major is English. The corpus involves (10 ) papers chosen randomly from various Iraqi universities. The research aims at identifying and analyzing both lexical and grammatical collocational errors. The results show that the performance of Iraqi researchers in both patterns seems to be influenced by L1 transfer. Moreover, it is found that other factors contribute to the high frequency of collocation errors committed by them, namely the lack knowledge of collocational skills, especially with regard to collocational restriction, the misuse of synonyms, and the tendency for overgeneralization. Furthermore, it is found that lexical collocation is the most recurrent error throughout the data. This is due to the grammar-based method, which is broadly adopted in Iraqi classes.

Key words : Collocational errors, Error Analysis, L1 transfer , Collocational restriction

## 1. Introduction

There exists a growing awareness and interest of the importance of collocation as one of the most salient features of all languages. Indeed, it is viewed that collocation is considered a basic unit of language in actual utterances. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976:284), collocation is "the most problematic part of lexical cohesion that is achieved through the association of lexical items that regularly co-occur".

In the same vein, Stubbs (2001b:14) states that " combinations of words in phrases are a good candidate for a basic unit of language in use". Additionally, Firth (1957:183) points out that collocation is the component that usually accompanies words. Likewise, Diana\_ Lea (2002:

viii) stresses that collocation" is the way words combine in a language to produce natural-sounding speech and writing. For example, in English you say strong wind but heavy rain".

Unfortunately, it has been noticed that EFL learners almost have problems in choosing the correct combination of words. The following are wrong examples of wrong combinations:

- a. \*strong car
- b. \*powerful tea
- (Halliday and Hasan, 1976:71)
- c. \* damp writing
- d. \* buxom chicken
- e. \* brief mountain(Palmer,1976 :97 )

As such,Halliday and Hasan (1976: 289) view that collocation is a matter of historical development. In a sense,it is noted that, history cannot be ignored. That is, the environment can decide the context within which the item will be incarnated on this particular occasion.

### **1.1The Problem**

The problem of this paper stems from the fact that Iraqi EFL researchers often face difficulty in writing. Morespecifically, they are incompetent in choosing the correct combinations of words. Due to this lack of knowledge, they makebothlexical and grammaticalcollocational errors.

### **1.2Aims**

The study aims to identify the lexical and grammaticalcollocation errors and provide an analysis for the source of errors in the given data.

### **1.3 Hypotheses**

It is hypothesized that :

- a.L1 interference ,almost, affects the collocational competence for Iraqi researchers which results in making recurrent errors, particularly in writing,
- b. Insufficient knowledge about the combination of words-that is the companies that words keep, leads to making errors in writing throughout their papers,
- c. Resorting to the strategy of synonymy and overgeneralization may contribute to committing collocational errors throughout their writings.

d. Lexical collocation errors are the most recurrent ones compared to grammatical collocations. This is attributed to the focus on grammatical aspects rather than lexical ones in Iraqi universities.

#### **1.4 Procedure**

The study adopts the following steps:

- a. Presenting a theoretical account regarding the concept of collocation, definitions, and classification,
- b. Reviewing the concept of error analysis (EA) and
- c. Approaching the data according to error analysis perspective .

#### **1.5 The limit**

The study is limited to investigating lexical and grammatical collocation errors in ten Iraqi published papers chosen randomly from different universities.

#### **1.6 The Value**

It is hoped that the study will be of value to those interested in the areas of applied linguistics, translation, contrastive analysis, and semantic studies.

### **2. Literature Review**

#### **2.1 Definitions of Collocation**

It has been argued that collocation is regarded as one of the major pillars of acquiring language. As such, many studies have been conducted to account for this concept. For EFL learners, it is not an easy task to speak or write fluently. Thus, MacCarthy (1990:13) reports that even advanced learners produce unsuitable or faulty collocations. Jackson (1982:105) maintains that collocation "refers to the habitual company which words keep". Likewise, Firth (1957:183) argues that collocation is the elements that usually accompany words.

Viewed differently, Woolard (2000:29) stresses that certain words are more likely to reoccur together opposing to random occurrence which, seemingly, happens by chance. Semantically speaking, however, Leech (1974:20) refers to collocation as the result of "the associations a word acquires on account of the meaning of words which tend to occur in its environment".

It is assumed that the lack of knowledge about collocation by EFL learners results in poor performance. Thus, Nation (2001:318) states that "all fluent and appropriate language requires collocation knowledge" . Yet, it is noted that through collocation, language does show its potentiality to organize itself and manifests its arbitrariness

simultaneously as well. In this regard, Crystal (1995) affirms that lexical items in collocations are, somehow, mutually predictable.

Similarly, Emery (1991:61) argues that "collocations are language-specific and hence unpredictable". Thus, arbitrariness sounds clear, at least, in the sounds of animals as each animal has its own sound. Viewed differently, Firth (1957:12) stresses that " words are mutually expectant and mutually comprehended".

Semantically speaking, it is viewed that " the semantic approach tries to define collocations by the actual meanings they have and by the usefulness or combinations of words in different contexts (Elewa, 2004:22). Owing to this premise, it can be observed that collocation cannot be attributed to syntactic or semantic relationship. Turner (1973:129) mentions that for better understanding of collocation items one need to rely on " how much an uninstructed reader can notice this, even unconsciously, and whether an instructed reading is a true reading of the author's text".

Most importantly, it has to be said that the focus in all definitions is concerned with lexical, rather than grammatical collocation. Thus, the problem of word combinability need to be more investigated. Unfortunately, there arise various degrees of co-occurrence restrictions. Owing to this restriction, the EFL learner becomes confused in choosing the correct combination of two or more words. In this context, Halliday and Hasan (1976:289) point out that the occurrence of lexical collocation is accompanied with textual history," a particular collocation environment that has been built up in the course of the creation of the text".

## **2.2 Categories of Collocations**

Generally speaking, it can be seen that collocations fall into two major types : grammatical collocations and lexical collocations (Benson and Ilson, 1986b:ix). Grammatical collocations involve noun, an adjective, or a verb plus a preposition or a grammatical structure such as an infinitive or clause. For instance, account for , advantage over, adjacent to , by accident , to be afraid that . . .

on the other hand, it is noted that lexical collocations do not contain prepositions, infinitives, or clauses, but consist of various combinations of nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs. They (ibid) distinguish various structural types of lexical collocations: verb+ noun( inflict a wound , withdraw an offer); adjective + noun( a crushing defeat); noun + verb

(blizzards rage); noun1 + noun2 ( a pride of lions ), adverb+ adjective ( deeply absorbed ) , verb + adverb ( appreciate sincerely).

According to Firth (1957 ), he stresses that the " co-occurrence restrictions are the result of the lexical items and that collocations are reflections of this fact". It is ,almost, seen that words are exclusive on the syntagmatic level, i.e., they do not co-occur freely in similar situations. Thus, Halliday and Hasan(1976: 71 ) highlight this point as they provide this example powerful car vs. strong tea. ForHalliday and Hasan, " the paradigmatic relation of power and strong is not constant, but depends on its linear sequence into which each enters. Owing to this idea, such sequences as strong car and powerful tea would be rejected as uncollocational".(ibid).

Lexical collocations range between fixed and relatively loose combinations. Nevertheless, it seems that words with medium strength are the common type of collocations. Similarly, Lewis (1997) classifies collocations into strong and weak, frequent and infrequent. This categorization depends on the degree of restriction or occurrence.

Likewise, Carter (1987) also classifies collocations into restricted and non-restricted. Unrestricted collocations are flexible; in other words, they have the capacity of being " open to keep company with a wide range of words. Examples are core adjectives, nouns and verbs in particular". Similarly, Diana\_ Lea( 2002: ix ) adopts a pragmatic approach rather than theoretical. She classifies collocations into three types : the fairly weak ( see a film , an enjoyable holiday, the medium – strength (see a doctor , direct equivalent , highly intelligent ) and the strongest and most restricted ( see reason , burning ambition , blindly obvious )

### **3. Methodology**

The study adopts both quantitative and qualitative methods. That is, identifying and analyzing the lexical collocation errors in the given data. The data of the study involves(10 )anonymous Iraqi published papers chosen randomly from different universities. Considering the academic ethics, the researcher has not referred to the actual names of the researchers. Thus, it is statistical and analytical. The study identifies the areas of weakness in relation to collocation competence. Moreover, it provides an assessment of the results contained from identifying lexical and grammatical collocation errors .

As far as the findings are concerned, the study comprises a detailed description of the most recurrent errors within the data. Furthermore, the findings are compared with previous studies in this field.

**3.1 Error Analysis**

Error analysis is a systematic manner which attempts to identify, explain, and evaluate errors from a collection of language learner data. Furthermore, analysing a learner error and comparing it to that of the target language is adopted (Corder,1971).He (ibid ) maintains that it is needed to take into consideration that some errors are attributed to the learner's mother tongue.However,according to James (1998:6), he proposes that the analysis of errors referred to as transfer is " a sub-procedure applied in the diagnostic phase of doing error analysis".Brown (1994:205)states that errors incorporate a " noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker".

**3.2 Statistical Tools**

There are (10 ) anonymous Iraqi published papers chosen randomly from various universities to be investigated-that is calculating the recurrent collocation lexical and grammatical errors, analysing the data and providing assessment for the reasons of the errors made. The model which is adopted in the study is " Oxford Collocations Dictionary (2009)".It involves adjective + noun, quantifier+ noun , verb + noun , noun + verb, noun + noun , preposition + noun , noun + preposition , adverb + verb , verb + verb , verb + preposition , verb + adjective , adverb + adjective,and adjective + preposition collocations.

**4. Data Analysis**

The corpus consists of (10 ) papers .The collocation errors identified in the data are listed in three tables. Table(1) is dedicated for the total number of errors ,whereas table ( 2 ) is dedicated for the distribution of collocationalerrors.Table (3) contains a detailed distribution for the errors and the percentage.Furthermore, an appendix includes the wrong collocationalerros with correct collocations provided below.

**Table 1: Distribution and percentage of collocational errors in the subjects**

<b>Subjects</b>	<b>No. of errors</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>S1</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>17,4 %</b>
<b>S2</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>10,6 %</b>
<b>S3</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>10,6 %</b>
<b>S4</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>9,8 %</b>
<b>S5</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9 %</b>
<b>S6</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9 %</b>
<b>S7</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9 %</b>
<b>S8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9 %</b>
<b>S9</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8,3 %</b>
<b>S10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6,8 %</b>

**Table 1: Total number of collocational errors.**

<b>Grammatical collocational errors</b>	<b>Lexical collocational errors</b>	<b>Total number of errors</b>
<b>52</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>132</b>

**Table 2: Distribution of collocational errors .**

Subjects	Grammatical Collocational errors	Percentage	Lexical Collocational Errors	Percentage
S1	11	22,6	12	23,6
S2	6	11,3	8	10,1
S3	6	11,3	8	10,1
S4	3	5,6	10	12,6
S5	5	9,4	7	8,8
S6	5	9,4	7	8,8
S7	4	7,5	8	10,1
S8	4	7,5	8	10,1
S9	5	9,4	6	7,5
S10	3	5,6	6	7,5

**Table 3: Detailed Distribution of Collocational Errors.**

**5. Results and Discussion**

The findings demonstrate that the total number of errors is ( 132 ) out of ( 10 ) papers. For lexical collocation errors , the number is ( 80 ), while for grammatical errors the number is ( 52 ) (See table (1) and (3) above).

To examine these findings, it seems that most errors are roughly similar throughout all subjects. For instance, it is shown that adjective + noun, verb + preposition are respectively the most recurrent errors throughout the subjects, while , it is revealed that adverb + adjective is the least error all through the subjects. This weakness can be attributed to the lack of collocational competence. In a sense, although they know the meaning of the words given, yet they are unaware of collocational restriction-that is one which is unusually idiosyncratic or language-specific: grill collocates with meat but not with bread, while the reverse is true for boast (Firth,1951; cited in Trask,1993:49).In relation to the misuse of synonyms, it seems that most errors, regardless of the negative transfer of Arabic, constitute high percentage out of the total number of errors. For instance, finished her work not ended her work ; make change not do change ; reject an idea not refuse an idea ; ancient history not old history and so on.In the same context, it is argued that most errors are interlingual.Hence, Richards (1974:98 ) states that these "

errors reflect the general characteristics of rules and failure to leave conditions under which rules apply". As such, it is evident that Iraqi EFL researchers know the meaning of words; however, they do not know their restrictions. This is, almost, due to the lack of knowledge in the restrictions of using the word.

Consequently, they resort to overgeneralize some features of the option so as to fit them in an utterance. Spontaneously, this tendency results in collocational errors accordingly. Moreover, it is observed that EFL learners mostly focus on individual words neglecting how words co-occur with. In other words, they learn collocations as separate words rather than in linear sequences. Most importantly, one can see clearly the "negative transfer" of L1 on the performance of Iraqi researchers on the level of writing. This transfer can be positive on producing collocations when some concepts are similar in both L1 and L2. In contrast, it is viewed that negative transfer occurs when there is no identity with regard to syntax or semantic aspects. Likewise, Darvishi (2011 :56 ) points out that " EFL students make collocational errors in their writing because of the interference of their mother tongue, lack of collocational concept, the inter-lingual ...and their shortage of their collocational knowledge". It is observed that these results agree with Bazzaz and Samad (2011) with regard to pattern (adjective+ noun).

In the light of these findings, it is revealed that such deviations ,i.e. making wrong collocations are resulted from the design of syllabi all over Iraqi universities. There is no mention of collocation in the syllabi at all levels of students in the departments of English. Furthermore, it is seen that including " Collocation " in the syllabi of the departments of English, almost, enhances the skill of writing. Additionally, it is noted that the last hypothesis has been confirmed since lexical collocation error is more recurrent than grammatical one. This result is due to the grammar-based method, which is broadly adopted in Iraqi universities.

## **6 .Conclusions and Recommendations**

The study has come up with the following conclusions :

1. Iraqi EFL researchers are not qualified enough in collocation patterning; in a sense they combine words inappropriately. Thus, the second and the third hypotheses are confirmed and validated.
2. The number of errors that can be attributed to the mother tongue (L1 ) vastly exceeds all other categories.

3. The study shows that the subjects make more lexical errors than grammatical ones throughout.
4. It is recommended to include teaching collocation in the syllabi of the departments of English all over Iraq. This is due to the vital importance of collocation in enhancing the communicative competence in speaking and writing.
5. Iraqi EFL learners are recommended to make effective use of monolingual English dictionaries, particularly the Oxford Learners' Dictionary (OALD), Oxford Collocations Dictionary (OCD), which are helpful for acquiring the collocational items as effectively as possible.
6. Researchers and teachers are recommended to conduct other studies to measure the ability of Iraqi EFL researchers to produce lexical and grammatical collocations in speaking- that is the high performance of speaking results in effective academic writing.

### ملخص البحث

تشكل موضوعة التلازم او الاقتران اللغوي موضوعة رئيسية في اكتساب اللغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية بالنسبة للباحثين العراقيين على كافة مستويات اللغة وبشكل خاص ( الكتابة ). يركز البحث على احصاء الاخطاء الواردة في عشرة بحوث لباحثين عراقيين من جامعات مختلفة ومن ثم تحليل الاسباب المحتملة لحصول الاخطاء. لقد كشفت الدراسة بان هنالك جملة من الاسباب تؤدي الى ارتكاب الباحثين العراقيين اخطاء في عملية ضم الكلمات لبعضها او ما يصطلح عليه ( الاقتران ) ، من هذه الاسباب التأثير السلبي للغة العربية الذي يعد الاكثر شيوعا في الكتابة لدى الباحثين العراقيين- متكلمي اللغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية ، علاوة على ذلك يلجا الباحثون بسب قلة الخبرة في هذا الموضوع الى انتهاج اسلوب التعميم بسب عدم القدرة على الاستخدام الصحيح للمفردة في سياقها المناسب. واخيرا اظهرت نتائج البحث بان الخطأ في اقتران المفردات اكثر من الخطأ في الاقتران النحوي ، ويمكن ان يعزى ذلك الى التركيز في الجامعات العراقية ( عموما ) على النحو وقلة الاهتمام بالتواصل اللغوي باستخدام المفردة مع بعضها في سياق صحيح او مناسب .

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**Appendix : 1 involves Wrong and Correct Grammatical Collocations**

No.	Wrong Collocation	Correct Collocation
1.	accused with	accused to
2.	ashamed from	ashamed of
3.	composed from	composed of
4.	covered by	covered with
5.	divide in parts	divide into parts
6.	exception of	exception to
7.	Except	except for
8.	get rid from	get rid of
9.	Persist on	Persist in
10.	live from	live on
11.	stresses on	Stresses
12.	apply into	apply to
13.	influence on	Influences
14.	consist from	consist of
15.	Wait	wait for
16.	apply on	apply for
17.	corresponds with	corresponds to
18.	Nidastreeses on this point	Nida stresses this point
19.	to seek refuge with	to seek refuge in
20.	to seek refuge of	to seek refuge in
21.	the only one cable to do so	the only one cable of doing so

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22.	three times on a row	three times in a row
23.	to sum it up	to sum up
24.	the opinion on this	the opinion in this
25.	all the way long	along the way
26.	in sight of	in sight into
27.	for revenge	to seek revenge
28.	to act	to action/acting
29.	absorbed at	absorbed in
30.	careful for	careful of
31.	complain for	complain about
32.	big conflict	great conflict
33.	disappointed from	disappointed by
34.	full with	full of
35.	guard from	guard against
36.	indifferent at	indifferent for
37.	jealous from	jealous of
38.	leave to	leave for
39.	to take	from taking
40.	for taking	to take
41.	take revenge	take revenge on
42.	In sight of	In sight into
43.	to kill	from killing
44.	for revenge	to seek revenge
45.	to act	to acting
46.	remarkable in	remarkable for
47.	beneficial in	beneficial for
48.	discourage to	discourage

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		from
49.	choose among	choose from
50.	communicate in	communicate through
51.	apply on	apply for
52.	keep to	keep on
53.	amazed to	amazed at
54.	do change	make change
55.	make an experiment	do an experiment
56.	do progress	make progress
57.	give a compliment	Pay a compliment
58.	take attention	Pay attention
59.	shut the meeting	close the meeting
60.	ended her work	finished her work
61.	the universe started in	the universe began
62.	old history	ancient history
63.	she was damaged in	she was injured in the
64.	gain money	earn money
65.	get a reputation	gain a reputation
66.	Perform success	achieve success
67.	ideas move	ideas flow
68.	beach extends	beach stretches
69.	make a trick	Play a trick
70.	big opinion	strong opinion
71.	do assumption	make assumption
72.	refuse an idea	reject an idea

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73.	great preference	clear preference
74.	strongly condemned	severely condemned
75.	highly disappointed	bitterly disappointed
76.	do decision	make decision
77.	got a baby	had a baby
78.	take a look	have a look
79.	far teaching	distant teaching
80.	high building	tall building
81.	have cold	catch cold
82.	hopeful career	promising career
83.	weigh the budget	balance the budget
84.	make a distinction	draw a distinction
85.	put emphasis	lay emphasis
86.	Paper offers	Paper presents
87.	book rises	book raises
88.	set an example	put an example
89.	precise summary	brief summary
90.	clearly evident	Evident
91.	to convey directly	to convey clearly
92.	Diverse feelings	Vague feelings
93.	secret feelings	Innermost feelings
94.	a scheming villain	an evil villain
95.	exact mind	rational mind
96.	meditative nature	contemplative nature

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97.	Bitterly scolds	Severely scolds
98.	Vengefulbehavior	aggressive behaviour
99.	Speculative temperament	Volatile temperament
100.	Momentous nature	Essential nature
101.	Intimate thoughts	Comforting thoughts
102.	extreme lack	severe lack
103.	Strictly discouraged to	Strongly
104.	Sufficient stimulation	Direct stimulation
105.	Interactive methods	Practical methods
106.	Fair opportunity	Ample opportunity
107.	Actively interact	Directly interact
108.	Single study	Serious study
109.	Classical framework	Basic framework
110.	Mainly work	Primarily work
111.	Important qualification	Necessary qualification
112.	speedy change	rapid change
113.	heated research	heated debate
114.	will meet	will face
115.	The speech of Allah	The words of Allah
116.	One may beg the question	One may raise the question

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117.	By applying the correct attention	By giving the right attention
118.	Other translators sufficed with using	Other translators were content with using
119.	in round terms	Roundly
120.	this chart exhibits	this chart illustrates
121.	Characteristic shows	Characteristic displays
122.	Essential factor	Main, major factor
123.	Entire failure	Complete failure
124.	Strongly appreciate	Sincerely appreciate
125.	She objects on the project	She objects to the project
126.	Swift progress	Rapid progress
127.	Quick conclusion	Hasty conclusion
128.	Considerable amount of studies	Significant number of studies
129.	Authority on	Authority over
130.	Give importance to	Attach importance to
131.	Do assumptions	Make assumptions
132.	Continuous peace	Lasting peace