The Problems of Translating Verb-Preposition-Collocation from Arabic into English (A Didactic Study)

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1. Introduction:

Verbs are used to describe an action, event, fact, habit or experience.They constitute the most important part of speech in a language. In English a sentence does not exist without a verb. In Arabic, however, a sentence may have or may not have a verb. In both Arabic and English, many verbs tend to collocate with certain prepositions. This word company, in many cases, defines the meaning of the action denoted by the verb. However, many English verbs do not collocate with prepositions.

Firth (1951:124) is one of the first linguists to define collocation as "the company words keep together," e.g. addled eggs, rancid butter, sour milk … etc.

Collocations are considered transparent semantic units because the meaning of collocation can be inferred from the meaning of the individual words. This point has been expressed by Firth (ibid), as he argues that this keeping company, which he called collocation, is part of the meaning of a word.

Although collocation is highly based on meaning, Palmer (1981: 177) argues that collocation is sometimes fairly idiosyncratic and is not easily inferred from the meaning of the associated words. Thus, when it comes to translation, the

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inexperienced translator may face problems in his/her endeavor to find or select a translation equivalent for an expression.

In this paper, the researcher sheds light on the nature of some structures of Arabic and English VPCs and try to suggest some remedies to the problems that may arise in rendering the texts that include VPCs from Arabic into English

2. Types of Collocations:

McKeown and Radev (2000: 5-6) classified collocations into the following two main types:

1. Grammatical collocations:

Grammatical collocations often contain paired syntactic categories such as:

A. Verb + preposition, e.g. *come to*.
B. Adjective + preposition, e.g. *fond of*.
C. Noun + preposition or preposition + noun, e.g. *witness to*, *by accident*.
In this type of collocation, the open class word is called the base and it determines the words it collocates with.

2. Semantic Collocations:

Semantic collocations are lexically restricted word pairs, where only a subset of the synonyms of the collocator can be used in the same lexical context.

This paper is concerned with the first type; specifically with VPC.

3. Verb-Preposition-Collocation (VPC):

Prepositions constitute one of the parts of speech that exists in any language. Prepositions, in fact, may constitute a permanent difficulty for a foreign learner or user of a language. As Kharma and Hajjaj (1989: 75) put it, prepositions are

among the very commonly used function words, and a sentence is rarely constructed without one. This is why mastery of their use is of vital importance, but that is also why, at the same time, they constitute one of the great difficulties for the foreign learner or user of English as is the case with Arab learners and users of English.

Kharma and Hajjaj (ibid.: 76) relate the difficulty of using prepositions in English by Arabs to the following two main reasons:

1- The complexity of the prepositional system itself in each language. This complexity is reflected in the following cases :

A- Each preposition can indicate several different relations.In English, for instance,the preposition *at* can indicate the following relations: *at his office(place), shoot at (in the direction of), make a guess at something (an attempt to reach…..), at arm's length (distance), at 2 o'clock (point or period of time), at the age of 15 (age), at the second attempt (order), at times (frequency), what is he at (disapproval), at forty miles an hour (rate of movement).*

B- Different prepositions can indicate the same relation, e.g., *at 3 o'clock, on Sunday, in March 1990 (point or period of time).*

C- Many English verbs collocate with special prepositions that are unpredictable and have to be learnt as phrases, e.g., *accuse of, arrive at, complain of.*

2- Interference of Arabic:

In using prepositions, normally the basic and most common sense of each English preposition is presented to the Arab learner or user first, then other uses are added later on. The learner or user at once instinctively equates this first meaning with one Arabic preposition, and soon develops a strong tendency to use that equation all the time.Thus, في طريقـــه

إلينـــا, for instance, under the influence of Arabic becomes *in his way to us* instead of *on his way to us* and بـــالقرب مـــن under the influence of Arabic becomes *next from* instead of *next to* (ibid).

Thus, when it comes to translation, the inexperienced translator may face difficulties to find or select a translation equivalence for an expression.

4. VPC and Equivalence:

Translation is not always a straightforward activity. Some texts are easy to translate, but others are so difficult that they cannot be translated easily.

Nida (1964: 241) points out that the translator should take into consideration the importance of the analysis of the SL and TL languages, careful study of the SL text and the determination of the appropriate equivalence. The question of equivalence is therefore regarded a central issue in the process of translation.

In this regard, Nida (1964: 159) distinguishes between "formal" and "dynamic" equivalence as two opposite types of translation. Formal equivalence focuses on the message itself, in both form and content. Nida terms such translation as "gloss translation", in which the translator attempts to reproduce as literally and meaningfully as possible, the form and content of the original, in order to enable the TL reader to understand as much of the SL context as possible. Dynamic equivalence, by contrast, focuses on complete naturalness of expression and tries to relate the TL reader to modes of behavior relevant within the context of his own culture. Dynamic equivalence, thus, aims to achieve equivalence of response rather than equivalence of form.

However, Arrowsmith (1961:123-124) and Gorjan (1970:201) state that the translation problems are attributed to the various linguistic differences between the SL and the TL.

In this regard, Shunnaq (1999: 34) states that producing equivalence in translating certain Arabic texts into English constitutes main problems to Arab translators, though this is not always the case. Ayoub (1994: 49) and Saleem (2001: 118) state that a literal translation succeeds when there is an accidental systematic or unsystematic correspondence between Arabic and English.

In translating VPCs from Arabic into English, the translator often finds it difficult to find a translation equivalence for an expression. Such linguistic problems are attributed, on the one hand, to the various language specific VPCs between Arabic and English and to the tendency of the Arab users of English to transfer the features of their mother-tongue VPCs into the TL on the other hand.

5. Data Analysis

The following are Arabic texts including VPC instances. Each is followed by discussions and proposed remedies.

SL Text 1:

<div dir="rtl">

"إتهموه بالرشوة"

</div>

No.	Subjects' Renderings	Type of Equivalence		TL VPC
		Formal	Dynamic	

1	They accused him with robbery.	*		- [1]
2	They accused him with robbery.	*		-
3	They accused him of robbery.		*	+ [2]
4	They accused him with robbery.	*		-
5	They accused him with robbery.	*		-
6	They accused him with robbery.	*		-
7	They accused him with robbery.	*		-
8	They accused him of robbery.		*	+
9	They accused him with robbery.	*		-
10	They accused him of robbery.		*	+

Discussion:

Subjects 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7 & 9 seem to be profoundly affected by their mother-tongue VPC. They believe that the Arabic preposition ـب and the English preposition *with* are translation equivalents as they are both used to point to the thing with which the action is done. The aforementioned subjects are completely ignorant of the fact that different linguistic systems differ sharply in the way VPCs are formed. The use of formal equivalence, therefore, seems to be out of place in this example.

Subjects 3, 8 &10 adopted dynamic equivalence and rendered the Arabic preposition ـب into *of.* They succeeded as they provided the accurate TL VPC.

The same thing could be applied to similar English verbs like; *die of, remind of, dream of , convict of, …* etc.

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(1) The symbol (-) means that the subject provided inaccurate rendering that involves unacceptable TL VPC.
(2) The symbol (+) means that the subject provided accurate rendering that involves acceptable TL VPC.

SL Text 2:

<div dir="rtl">

"يتذمر بعض الناس من صوت القاطرة ليلا"

</div>

No.	Subjects' Renderings	Type of Equivalence		TL VPC
		Formal	Dynamic	
1-	**Some people complain from the sound of the locomotive at night**	*		-
2-	**Some people complain from the sound of the locomotive at night**	*		-
3-	**Some people complain of the sound of the locomotive at night**		*	+
4-	**Some people complain from the sound of the locomotive at night**	*		-
5-	**Some people complain of the sound of the locomotive at night**		*	+
6-	**Some people complain from the sound of the locomotive at night**	*		-
7-	**Some people complain from the sound of the locomotive at night**	*		-
8-	**Some people complain of the sound of the locomotive at night**		*	+
9-	**Some people complain from the sound of the locomotive at night**	*		-
10-	**Some people complain of the sound of the locomotive at night**		*	+

Discussion

Subjects 1, 2, 4, 6, 7 & 9 seem to be profoundly stuck to the Arabic VPC. They believe that the Arabic preposition مــن and the English preposition *from* are always translation equivalents. Therefore, they provided odd TL renderings which bear incorrect TL VPC.

Subjects 3, 5, 8, & 10 followed dynamic equivalence and translated the Arabic preposition مــن into *of*. They succeeded as they provided the correct TL VPC.

Same errors could be found with similar English verbs like; *get out of, get rid of, keep out of, make use of, take advantage of, …*etc.

SL Text 3:

<div dir="rtl">

"هذه الكراسي مصنوعة من الخشب"

</div>

No.	Subjects' Renderings	Type of		TL VP C
		Formal	Dynami	
1-	These chairs are made from wood	*		-
2-	These chairs are made from wood	*		-
3-	These chairs are made from wood	*		-
4-	These chairs are made from wood	*		-
5-	These chairs are made from wood	*		-
6-	These chairs are made from wood	*		-
7-	These chairs are made from wood	*		-
8-	These chairs are made from wood	*		-
9-	These chairs are made from wood	*		-
10-	These chairs are made from wood	*		-

Discussion

All the subjects of the study used formal equivalence and provided identical renderings for this text. They mistranslated the Arabic preposition مــن into *from*. The renderings reflect the likelihood that the subjects tend to regard the English preposition *From* as the translation equivalent for the Arabic preposition مـــن either for being negligent or more likely ignorant of the fact that, on many occasions, the keeping company of words reflects the precise meaning of the words.

The English verb *make* and the preposition *of* collocate to indicate that the condition and physical characteristics of the

raw material/s used remain fundamentally invariable after the finishing touches of the industrial process or the like.

The same thing could be applied to similar English verbs like; *build of, compose of, construct of, …* etc.

The proposed Rendering
"These chairs are made of wood".

SL Text 4:

"يُصنع الاسمنت من الطين وحجر الكلس"

No.	Subjects' Renderings	Type of Equivalence		TL VPC
		Formal	Dynamic	
1.	Cement is made from clay and limestone	*		+
2.	Cement is made from clay and limestone	*		+
3.	Cement is made from clay and limestone	*		+
3.	Cement is made from clay and limestone	*		+
4.	Cement is made from clay and limestone	*		+
5.	Cement is made from clay and limestone	*		+
6.	Cement is made from clay and limestone	*		+
7.	Cement is made from clay and limestone	*		+
8.	Cement is made from clay and limestone	*		+
9.	Cement is made from clay and limestone	*		+
10.	Cement is made from clay and limestone	*		+

Discussion

In this example, the subjects of the study used formal equivalence and provided identical renderings, but here they succeeded in their use of formal equivalence as they all provided the proper TL VPC.

The English verb *make* and the English preposition *from* collocate to indicate that the condition and the physical characteristics of the raw materials used are fundamentally changed after the finishing touches of the industrial processes or the like (Cf. text No.3).

The same thing could be applied to similar English verbs like; *result from, separate from, distinguish from*, … etc.

SL Text 5:

<div dir="rtl">

"صوب عليٌ مسدسه نحو الأفعى"

</div>

No.	Subjects' Renderings	Type of Equivalence		TL VPC
		Formal	**Dynamic**	
1.	Ali aimed his pistol to the snake.	*		-
2.	Ali aimed his pistol toward the snake.	*		-
3.	Ali aimed his pistol toward the snake.	*		-
4.	Ali aimed his revolver toward the snake.	*		-
5.	Ali aimed his gun at the snake.		*	+
6.	Ali aimed his gun at the snake.		*	+
7.	Ali aimed his pistol to the snake.	*		-
8.	Ali aimed his pistol at the snake.		*	+
9.	Ali aimed his gun to the snake.	*		-
10.	Ali aimed his gun at the snake.		*	+

Discussion

Subjects 1, 7, & 9 rendered the Arabic adverb نحو into *to*. Subjects 2, 3 & 4 translated it into *toward*. Here also, the subjects are obviously stuck to the SL VPC.

The English preposition *to* and the English adverb *toward* are alternatively used as translation equivalents for the Arabic adverb نحو. But this is not accurate in some exceptions as is the case with the English verb *aim* which does not collocate with such words. Therefore, such renderings as *aim to* and *aim toward* are absolutely odd in English.

Subjects 5, 6, 8 & 10 followed dynamic equivalence and rendered the Arabic adverb نحو into *at*. They succeeded as they provided the suitable TL VPC.

The same criteria could be applied to similar English verbs like; *gaze at, laugh at, look at, scream at, throw at, …* etc.

SL Text 6:

<div dir="rtl">

”غادر علي إلى سوريا يوم السبت الماضي“
</div>

No.	Subjects' Renderings	Type of Equivalence		TL VPC
		Formal	Dynamic	
1.	Ali left to Syria last Saturday	*		−
2.	Ali left to Syria last Saturday	*		−
3.	Ali traveled to Syria last Saturday		*	+
4.	Ali left to Syria last Saturday	*		−
5.	Ali left to Syria last Saturday	*		−
6.	Ali left to Syria last Saturday	*		−
7.	Ali traveled to Syria last Saturday		*	+
8.	Ali left to Syria last Saturday	*		−
9.	Ali left for Syria last Saturday		*	+
10.	Ali left to Syria last Saturday	*		−

Discussion

Subjects 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8 & 10 adopted formal equivalence and provided inappropriate renderings because the English verb *leave* does not collocate with the English preposition *to*. This is due to the impact of the SL language specific VPC.

Subjects 3 & 7 translated the Arabic VPC غادر إلـــى into *Travelled to* which is the translation equivalent of the Arabic VPC سافر الى . In fact, the VPC *travelled to* is acceptable in the TL and semantically it functions as translation equivalent.

The same criteria of English VPCs with the preposition *to* could be applied to similar English verbs like; *go to, come to, bring to, convey to, drop to, …* etc.

Subject 9 translated the SL VPC غادر الى into *left for*. He succeeded as he provided the correct TL VPC.

The same thing could be applied to similar English verbs like; *sail for, fly for, …* etc.

SL Text 7:

<div dir="rtl">"ضربَ سالمٌ حمارهُ بالعصا"</div>

No.	Subjects' Renderings	Type of Equivalence		TL VPC
		Formal	Dynamic	
1.	Salim hit his donkey with the stick.	*		+
2.	Salim hit his donkey with the stick.	*		+
3.	Salim hit his donkey with the stick.	*		+
4.	Salim hit his donkey with the stick.	*		+
5.	Salim hit his donkey with the stick.	*		+
6.	Salim hit his donkey with the stick.	*		+

7.	Salim hit his donkey with the stick.	*		+
8.	Salim hit his donkey with the stick.	*		+
9.	Salim hit his donkey with the stick.	*		+
10.	Salim hit his donkey with the stick.	*		+

Discussion

Here, all the subjects of the study used formal equivalence. They all succeeded because each of them provided the proper TL VPC. The Arabic preposition بـــ and the English preposition *with* are translation equivalents as each of them refers to the object with which an action is done.

The same English preposition could collocate with similar English verbs as; *cover with, arm with, supply with, provide with, …* etc.

SL Text 8:

"أرسلت رسالة لعمي يوم السبت الماضي"

No.	Subjects' Renderings	Type of Equivalence		TL VP C
		Formal	Dynamic	
1	I sent my uncle a letter last Saturday.		*	+
2	I sent a letter to my uncle last Saturday.	*		+
3	Last Saturday, I sent a letter to my uncle.	*		+
4	I sent my uncle a letter last Saturday.		*	+
5	I sent a letter to my uncle last Saturday.	*		+
6	Last Saturday, I sent my uncle a letter.		*	+
7	I sent a letter to my uncle last Saturday.	*		+
8	Last Saturday, I sent my uncle a letter.		*	+

9	Last Saturday, I sent a letter to my uncle.	*		+
10	I sent a letter to my uncle last Saturday.	*		+

Discussion:

Subjects 1, 4, 6 & 8 used dynamic equivalence and rendered the Arabic VPC into V zero PC in the TL. They succeeded as they provided appropriate renderings.

The rest of the subjects used formal equivalence and rendered the SL VPC ارسلت ... إلــى into *sent ... to*. They also succeeded as they provided suitable renderings.

This case is due to the multiple possibilities of word order in the TL with regard to the use of this verb. The English verb *send* is one of many English verbs which may have a V zero PC or may collocate with the preposition *to*. Thus, the word order depends on whether *someone sends someone else something*, *someone sends something to someone else* or *someone sends to someone else something*. In Arabic, on the contrary, there are only two word orders for we cannot say:

ارسلت عمي رسالة.

The same thing could be applied to similar English verbs like; *give, write, …* etc.

SL Text 9:

"من فضلك, غير لي هذا الجنيه إلى دراهم"

No.	Subjects' Renderings	Type of Equivalence		TL VPC
		Formal	Dynamic	
1	Please, change this pound into shillings.		*	+
2	May you change this pound into shillings,		*	+

	please.			
3	Please, change this pound to shillings.	*		-
4	Would you please, change this pound to shillings.	*		-
5	Please, change this pound into shillings.		*	+
6	May you change this pound to shillings.	*		-
7	May you please, change this pound to shillings.	*		-
8	Please, change this pound into shillings.		*	+
9	Would you mind, change this pound into shillings.		*	+
10	Would you please, change this pound into shillings.		*	+

Discussion

Subjects 1, 2, 5, 8, 9 & 10 provided the suitable TL VPC in their renderings. They followed dynamic equivalence and rendered the Arabic preposition إلــــى into the English preposition *into* which normally collocates with the English verb *change* and any other verb which indicates any kind of transformation on the shape or the physical characteristics of any material.

The rest of the subjects failed as they adopted formal equivalence and translated the Arabic preposition إلــــى into the English preposition *to*. They either neglected the effect of VPC or were totally unaware of it.

The same thing could be applied to similar English verbs like; *translate into, divide into, classify into, analyse into, …* etc.

SL Text 10:

”التقيت بعمي مصادفه في السوق يوم أمس“

No.	Subjects' Renderings	Type of Equivalence	TL VPC

		Formal	Dynamic	
1	Yesterday, I met with my uncle, by chance, in the market.	*		-
2	Yesterday, I met with my uncle, by chance, in the market.	*		-
3	I met my uncle ,by chance, in the market yesterday.		*	+
4	Yesterday, I met my uncle ,by chance, in the market.		*	+
5	I met with my uncle ,by chance, in the market yesterday.	*		-
6	I met with my uncle ,by chance, in the market yesterday.	*		-
7	Yesterday, I met with my uncle in the market by chance.	*		-
8	I met my uncle ,by chance, in the market yesterday.		*	+
9	I met my uncle ,by chance, in the market yesterday.		*	+
10	I met my uncle ,by chance, in the market yesterday.		*	+

Discussion

Subjects 1, 2, 5, 6 & 7 failed as they used formal equivalence and provided incorrect renderings. They were unaware of the TL language specific VPC with regard to this verb.

Subjects 3, 4, 8, 9, & 10 succeeded as they used dynamic equivalence and translated the SL VPC into TL V zero PC because the English verb *meet* has a zero preposition collocation.

The same criteria could be applied to similar English verbs like; *face, encounter, telephone, …*etc.

6. Conclusions

The conclusions of this paper are the following:

1- In many cases, the English preposition *of* functions as translation equivalent for the Arabic prepositions بــ & مــن as in: يــتهم /

convict of / يـــتهم بـــ / *complain of,* يتذمر من / *accuse of,* ب

يتخلص من*get rid of* (for more examples, see the appendix).

2- When the meaning of the Arabic verb does not indicate any kind of fundamental change or transference in the condition and physical characteristics of the raw materials used in some kind of industry or the like, the English version of the verb collocates with the English preposition *of*, as in: '' هذه الكراسي مـــصنوعة مـــن / *these chairs are made of wood*'', '' هذا البيت مبني بالطابوق / الخشب والإســـمنت*this house is built of brick and cement*'' (for more examples, see the appendix).

3- When the meaning of the Arabic verb indicates some kind of fundamental changes in the condition and physical characteristics of the raw materials used in some kind of industry or the like, the English version of the verb collocates with the English preposition *from*, as in: '' يصنع الإسمنت من الطين / *cement is made from clay and limestone*'', وحجــر الكلـــس (cf. conclusion 2), (for more examples, see the appendix).

4- When the meaning of the Arabic verb indicates some kind of emphasis on a particular place, point, area, person, thing, subject, … etc., the English version of the verb collocates with the English preposition *at*, as in: ''صوب علي مسدسه نحو الأفعى / *Ali aimed his gun at the snake*'' (for more examples, see the appendix).

5- The English version of the verb collocates with the English preposition *with* when the Arabic preposition in the Arabic VPC is used to refer to the object with which the action is done, as in: '' ضرب سالم حماره بالعصى / *Salim hit his donkey with the stick*'', (for more examples, see the appendix).

6- Many English verbs may have VPC (collocate with prepositions) or may have V zero PC (do not collocate with

prepositions) depending on the multiple possibilities of English word order, as in: "*I send him a letter*", "*I send a letter to him*", and "*I send to him a letter*". In Arabic, on the contrary, there are only two word orders. (for more examples, see the appendix).

7- When the meaning of the Arabic verb indicates any kind of change or transference in the shape or the physical condition of an object, the English version of the verb collocates with the English preposition *into*, as in: " من فضلك، غير لي هذا الجنيــه إلـــى

دراهـــم *please, change this pound into shillings*", (for more examples, see the appendix).

8- Many English verbs have V zero PC (do not collocate with prepositions), as in: "*I met my uncle*" (for other examples, see the appendix).

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المشاكل الترجمان في ترجمة المصاحبة اللغوية الموجودة في الأفعال المتبوعة

بحروف جر من العربية إلى الانكليزية (دراسة تعليمية)

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ملخص

هذا البحث دراسة تعليمية لترجمة المصاحبة اللغوية الموجودة في الأفعال المتبوعة بحروف جر من العربية إلى الانكليزية، إذ يؤثر الاستعمال الدقيق للأفعال المتبوعة بحروف جر والتي تتضمن حالة مصاحبة مفرداتية لأفعال معينة مع بعض حروف الجر في الاستعمال الفعال للغة، كما و يعكس الكفاءة والأداء الأمثل لمستعملي اللغة.. وهكذا فان أي خروج عن المألوف قد يؤدي إلى تعبير لغوي شاذ أو حتى غير مفهوم، علاوة على ذلك يميز هذا الخروج عن المألوف بين المستعمل الأجنبي ومتحدثي لغة معينة .

وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تطبيق نموذج نايدا في ما يخص المكافئ الشكلي والمكافئ الوظيفي (١٩٦٤) على نصوص لغة الأصل (العربية) ولغة الهدف (الانكليزية) بغية التحقق من التكافؤ الترجمي، وتقترح الدراسة حلولاً لمشكلات الترجمة في الموضوع قيد البحث، وتضمنت معطيات البحث عشرة نماذج من طلبة المرحلة الرابعة في قسم الترجمة ترجموا عشر جمل تحتوي على أفعال مختلفة

The Problems of Translating Verb-Preposition -Collocation from Arabic into English (A Didactic Study)

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متبوعة بحروف جر إلى الانكليزية، وبعد ذلك تم استعمال نموذج نايدا في تحليل نصوص لغة الأصل (العربية) ولغة الهدف (الانكليزية) لبيان الجوانب السلبية والايجابية لطرائق الترجمة المختلفة التي اتبعتها العينة .

تشير نتائج الدراسة إلى أن المكافئ الشكلي ينجح في إيجاد التركيب المكافئ للمصاحبة اللغوية الموجودة في الأفعال المتبوعة بحروف جر، إذ يوجد تماثل لغوي عرضي بين العربية والانكليزية .