

Iraqi EFL Learners' Use of English Lexical Collocations

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Abstract

The term 'lexical collocation' refers to the habitual co-occurrence of words in a linguistic form. The patterning of lexical collocations does not follow some particular rules. It is highly subject to the native speakers' tendencies and to their cultures. Thus, mastering lexical collocations of the English language is a major problem for the Iraqi EFL learners. The incompatibility between collocations in the learners' mother tongue, (i.e. Arabic language) and those of the target language, (i.e. English language) may further complicate the problem.

In the light of this problem, this study aims at investigating the Iraqi EFL learners' use of the English lexical collocations. The theoretical part of this study presents a discussion of lexical collocations in Arabic and English. The practical part is intended to statistically measure the Iraqi EFL learners' ability to use English lexical collocations accurately.

The statistics shows a low level of performance on the Iraqi EFL learners' part. It is also concluded that the learners employ literal transfer from their mother tongue, substitution, and generalization as communicative strategies to overcome their deficiency in using the English lexical collocations accurately (see 6).

الخلاصة

يشير مصطلح المتلازمات اللفظية إلى تواردها مع تواتر المفردات في سياق لغوي. إن تشكل المتلازمات اللفظية لا يتبع قانونا معيناً بل يكون خاضعاً لميول أصحاب اللغة و ثقافتهم. لذا فإن السيطرة على المتلازمات اللفظية في اللغة الانكليزية يمثل صعوبة كبيرة للطلبة العراقيين من متعلمي اللغة الانكليزية لغة أجنبية. كما إن عدم التوافق بين اللغة الأم (أي اللغة العربية) واللغة الهدف (أي اللغة الانكليزية) قد يزيد المشكلة تعقيداً.

وفي ضوء هذه المشكلة تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى استقصاء استعمال الطلبة العراقيين متعلمي اللغة الانكليزية لغة أجنبية للمتلازمات اللفظية الانكليزية. يناقش الجانب النظري من الدراسة مفهوم المتلازمات اللفظية في اللغة الانكليزية والعربية. بينما يقيس الجانب العملي إحصائياً قابلية الطلبة العراقيين من متعلمي اللغة الانكليزية لغة أجنبية على استعمال المتلازمات اللفظية الانكليزية بشكل دقيق.

وقد أظهرت الإحصاءات مستوى أداء ضعيف للطلبة كما خلصت الدراسة إلى إن الطلبة يوظفون عدد من الأساليب التواصلية كالنقل الحرفي من اللغة الأم والاستبدال والتعميم للتغلب على قصورهم في استخدام المتلازمات اللفظية الانكليزية بشكل دقيق.

1. Introduction

Collocation is "the way words combine in a language to produce natural sounding speech and writing" Deuter et al(2002:vii). An expression such as 'strong tea' is called collocation because the word 'strong' collocates- co-occurs- frequently in the same location as the word 'tea'. In this expression, 'strong' cannot be substituted for the word 'heavy' or 'powerful' for the simple reason that it will not sound natural.

Thus having good collocational knowledge is essential to have good knowledge of a language because the learners' awareness of the way the words are combined with others is a vital factor in the production of accurate and natural sounding language (Grim, 2009b:164).

Since collocational patterns in any language is a reflection of the natives' preferences and of their culture(see 4), the collocational patterns are thus unpredictable and they cause frequent language mistakes and communication breakdowns on the EFL learners' part. What complicates matters is the fact that "what collocates in one language does not necessarily collocate in another"(Zughoul,1991:52).Thus, the problem arises when the EFL learners fail to call up the exact collocation in the foreign language.

The present study is intended to tackle this problem in the Iraqi EFL learners' context. The study aims at:

- 1.sketching the sources of difficulty in collocational patterning.
- 2.showing the importance of collocations in EFL context
3. assessing Iraqi EFL learners' ability to collocate correctly in English.

To achieve these aims, it is hypothesized that:

- 1.Iraqi EFL learners face difficulty in using English lexical collocations.
- 2.Iraqi EFL learners face difficulty in rendering their native lexical collocations into the suitable equivalent English ones.

The study falls into two parts: the theoretical part discusses the concept of collocation in English, and due to the fact that the collocational divergences between the Arabic language (the EFL learners' mother tongue) and the English language (the target language) may be a central part of the problem, the notion of collocation 'التضام' in Arabic has been tackled in away that serves the aims of the study.

The practical part is a test of two questions designed in a form of multiple choices. The test is adopted to measure the Iraqi EFL learners' achievement in using collocations. The participants in the test are the 50 fourth - stage students of the academic year 2012-2013\Department of English\ College of Basic Education\ University of Babylon. The first question which is intended to validate the first hypothesis consists of twelve items and the subjects are asked to choose the word that best collocates the underlined base in each of the given sentences. The second question, which is intended to validate the second hypothesis, consists of ten items. The subjects are asked to choose the English collocation that represents the accurate equivalence of the given Arabic one. Then, the data are collected and analyzed to have a number of conclusions which verify the hypotheses of the study(see 7).

2. The Notion of Collocation in English

The term "collocation" has its origin in the Latin verb "collocare" which means ' to set in order\ to arrange'. As a linguistic phenomenon, it was first introduced by Firth(1957) to define a combination of words associated with each other(Martynska, 2004:2):

- Heavy meal وجبة دسمة (Al-Hafiz: 2004:224).

Collocations consist of two parts: "the base and the collocate" (Grimm,2009a:25). In the example above 'meal' is the base element, and 'heavy' is the collocate.

2.1. Classification of English Collocations

Depending on the degree of occurrence collocations are classified into the following kinds:

1-Open collocations: which have the capacity to keep company with a wide range of words (Cartre, 1987:63):

- catch a train يلحق بالقطار (*)
 -catch a cold يصاب بالبرد
 -catch fire تنتشب فيه النيران
 - catch a fish يصطاد سمكة
 -catch the meaning يفهم المعنى

2. Restricted collocations: which co-occur with a small number of words. The verb 'commit', for instance, has few possible collocates (Eleven et al,1986: 253):

- commit a murder يقتل (the researcher's translation)
 -commit a crime يرتكب جريمة (ibid)
 - commit a suicide ينتحر (ibid)

3-Bound collocations: are described as " a bridge between restricted collocations and idioms; i.e. one of ¹the elements is uniquely selective of the other" Cowie (1981: 228). This type is relatively uncommon in English:

- shrug shoulders يهز أكتافه استهجانا (the researcher's translation)
 -foot the bill يسدد الفاتورة\ يدفع التكاليف (ibid)

2.2. Categories of English Lexical Collocations

Lexical collocation is "the co- occurrence of nouns, adjectives, verbs or adverbs. That is both the base and the collocate in the lexical collocations are content words, i.e. noun, verb, adjective, and adverb Carter(1987:60).Zarei and Baniesmaili (2010: 150) define lexical collocations as the co-occurrences of words which have an approximately equal status. The linguists present various models of the categories of English lexical collocations, this study adopts Benson et al (1986) which seems to be comprehensive:

- 1.verb + noun: express admiration يعبر عن اعجاب (the researcher's translation)
 2.unit associated with a noun: flock of sheep قطيع غنم (ibid)
 3.adjective + noun: strong tea شاي ثقيل (Salah,2009:6)
 4. noun + verb: horse neigh صهيل الحصان (Al-Hafiz, 2004:210)
 5.adverb + adjective: completely satisfied راض تماما (the researcher's translation)
 6.verb + adverb: wave frantically يلوح بحرارة (ibid)

3. The Notion of Collocation in Arabic

The term collocational pattern can be discussed under the Arabic linguistic phenomenon al-talazum or al- tadham (التلازم أو التضام).This Arabic term refers to the words that usually co-occur together and this co-occurrence reflects the tendency of Arab people to frequently use these words in a company(Faihad: 2008: 2):

- ابرم اتفاقا - make a deal (the researcher's translation)
 - غلبه النعاس- fall asleep (ibid)

Izuldeen (2007:1) states that the Arabic collocation consists of 'النواة' i.e. base and 'الكلمة الملازمة' , i.e.the collocate word. In the examples above (النعاس and اتفاق) are the base elements, and (غلب and ابرم) are the collocate elements.

3.1. Classification of Arabic Collocations

Emery (1991: 23) identify the following types of Arabic collocations:

1.Open collocations where the elements are freely commutable and each element can be used in a common literal sense:

- ماء صاف pure water (Al-Hafiz,2004:306)
 - ماء مقطر distilled water (ibid)

(*)The translations of 'catch' in these collocations, and the translations of 'make' in the collocational patterns mentioned in item (4) are taken from [www.cw.routledge.com/textbooks/\(baker\)/](http://www.cw.routledge.com/textbooks/(baker)/)

- ماء عذب sweet water (ibid)
- ماء عكر troubled water (ibid)
- ماء كلّس lime water (ibid)

2. Restricted collocations are those combinations of words that show restricted commutability:

- جريمة نكراء detestable crime (Al-Hafiz,2004:11)
- ابتسامة نكراء detestable smile (ibid)
- هزيمة نكراء crushing defeat (ibid: 360)

3-Bound collocations fall between bound collocations and idioms, in this kind one partner of the cluster selects the other:

- اطرق برأسه bowed his head (ibid:220)
- حرب ضروس fierce war (ibid:118)

3.2 Categories of Arabic Lexical Collocations

The classification system for Arabic collocation does not separate the grammatical collocation from the lexical collocation. However, the present study will focus on the lexical collocations, i.e. collocations of the content words. Grim(2009) mentions the following categories of the Arabic lexical collocations:

1. noun+ verb collocations where the noun is the subject:

- حف الشجر : the trees rustle (soori,2012:12)

2.noun+verb collocations where the noun is the object:

- اخلف موعدا : (he) broke an appointment(Al-Hafiz,2004:25)

3. noun + adjective:

- أغلبية ساحقة : overwhelming majority(ibid:42)

4.noun+ noun: (means *idafa*):

- خسوف القمر: the moon eclipse(ibid:133)

5. adjective + noun:

- خفيف الدم : jocular (ibid: 135)

This classification is similar to that proposed by Shievtiel et al (2004), except for the fact that the latter adds the following two categories:

- 6. verb + adverb: اعتقد واها : wrongly thought(the researcher's translation)

- 7. adjective + adverb: صعب للغاية : extremely difficult (ibid)

4. Collocational Patterning in English and in Arabic

The previous discussion of the notion of lexical collocation in English and Arabic shows that as a matter of concept, the definition of English collocation, its kinds, and categories are quite similar to the Arabic ones. However, collocations are still considered to be problematic for the learners of the foreign language due to the unpredictable mechanisms involved in patterning collocations whether in English or in Arabic. This unpredictability can be attributed to the following characteristics that both the English and the Arabic collocations manifest:

1. Low level of generalization

Collocations are described by Baker(1992:14) "as semantically arbitrary because they do not follow from the propositional meanings of the words outside the collocation combination". That is an element in a collocational pattern may have a meaning different from the meaning of the individual elements in that pattern(ibid:20). It is thus difficult, for example, to generalize the meaning of the verb 'make: يصنع' to all its occurrences in collocational patterns:

- make a cake (يصنع الكيك)
- make a speech (يلقي خطابا)
- make a mistake (يقترف خطأ)
- make a complaint (يتقدم بشكوى)

- make a decision (يتخذ قرار)
 -make a living (يكسب عيشا)

It is the collocate that determines which sense is indicated in a given pattern (Larson, 1998: 155). Larson (ibid) cites the example of the word 'dress' and points out that it is not possible to generalize the meaning of the word 'dress' to all its occurrences:

'dress the child' means (يلبس الطفل) i.e. putting clothes on the child and 'dress a chicken' means (ينزع ريش الدجاجة) i.e. taking the feathers off (ibid).

Low level of generalization is a source of difficulty not only within the one language but also between the two languages as "collocations in Arabic will not often have literal equivalence in English because transferring collocations from one language to another is transferring from one linguistic semantic system to another and from one culture to another" (Heliel, 2002:62). Gorgis and Al-Kharabsheh (2009:32) manifest this fact through showing that the Arabic verb 'ضرب' has different meanings in different collocations; and consequently different English equivalents:

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| - ضرب زيد عمر | <u>Zeid hit</u> Amr. |
| - ضرب العملة | He <u>mint</u> the currency. |
| - ضرب اعصار المدينة | A <u>hurricane struck</u> the city. |
| - المعلم ضرب مثلاً | The teacher <u>offered</u> a proverb. |
| - ضرب لونه الى الصفرة | He <u>turned</u> pale. |
| - ضرب الخيمة | He <u>pitch</u> the tent. |

Knowing the English equivalent of 'ضرب', i.e. (hit) is not enough to have good English competence. A learner of a foreign language cannot generalize the literal lexical item 'hit' to all the collocational occurrences where its Arabic equivalent 'ضرب' occurs because what collocates in one language does not necessarily collocate in another" (Zughoul, 1991:52). Accordingly, literal transference is unacceptable and 'hit the currency', for instance, does not mean 'mint the currency'. The learners thus should know all the possible meanings that the verb ضرب acquires through collocating with certain words, to be able to find and their English equivalents

2-Unpredictability

Hatim (2001:228) argues that the collocational patterns reflect the tendency of the native speakers to use them in a particular way; i.e. these patterns are found conventionally and naturally. They are independent of ideas' associations. For instance, although 'rancid', 'addled' and 'sour' all have the connotation of 'rotten food', collocations such as 'addled butter', and 'rancid egg' are unacceptable in English (Palmer, 1981:77). The only reason behind this unacceptability is the native's tendency to use these words which have the same connotations in the following patterns:

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------|
| -addled eggs | (*) بيض فاسد |
| - sour\ bad milk | حليب فاسد |
| -rancid butter | زبدة زنخه |
| -rotten fruit | فاكهة عفنة |
| -bad\ spoiled meat | لحم فاسد |
| -putrid\ fish- meat | سمك فاسد |

Bowles (2007:8) discusses the same notion under the characteristic of non-substitutability of collocations. He states that it is not possible to substitute the words that constitute a collocation for their synonym, or near synonym. For example, in the

(*) .The translations of these collocations are taken from www.pcintv.com

collocation 'close the meeting: 'يغلق الجلسة الاجتماع', it is wrong to say 'shut the meeting' because 'shut' and 'meeting' do not go together although 'shut' and 'close' have the same connotation and they can substitute each other in constructions such as 'close the door', and 'shut the door'.

Grimm (2009b: 24) refers to the semantic arbitrariness of some of the Arabic collocations saying that there is no semantic rule that may explain why Arab people say 'اغلبية ساحقة' instead of 'اغلبية قاطعة' though the semantics of the word 'قاطعة' mirrors the meaning of the collocational pattern 'اغلبية قاطعة'. Arab people also tend to say 'حب' but not 'حب هائل' though the words ('جم' and 'هائل') have the same connotation of large quantity (too much) of something.

Al-Thaalibi(1999:160)mentions these examples where Arab people say:

- شرب الرجل الماء the man drank water. (The researcher's translation)

- جرع البعير الماء the camel drank water. (ibid)

Though the verbs 'شرب' and 'جرع' denote the act of having water, i.e.(to drink), there is a restriction on the occurrence of each of these two Arabic words with a particular animate entity as it is shown in the instances above.

Non-substitutability makes it difficult for the EFL learners to predict the acceptable collocation in the target language by merely understanding the meaning of that collocation.

3- Variability

Variable collocations are those collocations where several different words may collocate to denote one meaning (Hunt, 2013: 3):

-Make a plan يخطط (the researcher's translation)

- work a plan

-outline a plan

- take a risk يخاطر (ibid)

- put (yourself) at a risk

-run the risk

-pay a visit يزور (Baker, 1992:47)

- make a visit

-deliver a verdict. يصدر حكما (ibid)

-pronounce a verdict.

The instances presented above manifest the point highlighted by Lyons(1977: 262) that a language may express a particular meaning by a combination of more than one lexeme while another language expresses the same meaning in just one word.

Al-Qasimi (1979:30) states that some Arabic collocations are variable that is "the individual lexical items can be substituted by similar words without changing the whole meanings":

- مات: die (Al-Hafiz,2004:306)

- فاضت روحه (ibid:259)

- لقي حتفه (ibid:303)

- هزيمة نكراء crushing defeat (Al-Hafiz,2004:360)

- هزيمة مخزية

- هزيمة ساحقة

Variability poses another difficulty for the EFL learners as they have to know the more than one way of saying the same thing to develop native like collocational patterns.

4. Cultural incompatibility between the mother tongue and the target language

Baker (1992:49) says that the patterns of collocations reflect the preferences of specific language communities for certain modes of expressions. The verb 'drink' in

English, for instance, collocates naturally with liquids like 'juice and milk', but not with 'soup'. In Arabic, on the other hand, the verb 'drink' collocates with almost all sorts of liquid, hence it collocates with 'soup'. Thus, 'eat soup' in English is equivalent to the Arabic collocation (يشرب الحساء), while 'drink soup' seems foreign, though understandable, to the English culture. By the same token, collocations such as:

- Day and night has as its Arabic equivalence (ليلا ونهارا) rather than (نهارا وليلا) (Al-Hafiz,2004:304)
- Knife and folk has as its Arabic equivalence (شوكة وسكين) rather than (شوكة وسكين) (Larson, 1998:156).
- Black and white has as its Arabic equivalence (ابيض واسود) rather than (اسود وابيض) (ibid).

There is no justification for the difference in the arrangement of the elements in the Arabic equivalent collocations between brackets but the fact that Arab speakers focus on 'ليلا', 'شوكة', and 'ابيض', thus they start the collocation patterns with them.

Fargal and Shunnaq(1999:122)mention that since a collocational pattern reflects the morals and the social environment where they are used, there exist some instances where there is a target language collocation which has the same propositional meaning as the source language collocation but it may have a different expressive meaning. This fact has already been mentioned by Baker(1992:49) who gives the following English collocations and their Arabic equivalents:

- bread and butter (not salt) for the Arabic collocation (خبز وملح)
- law and order (not tradition) for the Arabic collocation (القانون والتقاليد)
- deliver a baby (not a woman) for the Arabic collocation (يولد امرأة)

Such kinds of differences between the mother tongue and the foreign may be subtle but important to produce a native like expressions.

In addition to what has earlier been mentioned, Islam is central to Arab society and to Arabic language which is the language of Al- Quran. This leads to the prominence of certain collocations that have no counterparts in the English language as they are specific to the Muslim society. Most of these collocations have religious connotations:

- الصلاة النافلة Additional prayer (Salah, 2009:8)
- حج مبرور Accepted pilgrimage (ibid)

The cultural background highly affects the way the words collocate in a language and this poses a sort of difficulty on the EFL learners' part represented by using the collocational pattern that suits the target language culture and social tendency.

5. The Importance of Collocational knowledge in EFL Learners' Context

Collocational knowledge is a clear cut line that distinguishes the native from the non-native speaker, or in other words the natural from the unnatural combination of words. Sinclair (1991:110) clarifies the notions of naturalness and fluency stating that a native language speaker has in his mental lexicon a large number of preconstructed phrases that constitute single choices, even though they might appear to be analyzable into segments. When a native speaker produces collocations, he operates at 'the idiomatic' principle; i.e. he retrieves these combinations from his mental lexicon as one block, i.e. each combination is dealt with as one unit conveying one meaning despite the fact that it is made of two or more elements.

Thus, if the collocational knowledge is mastered by the EFL learners, it will provide them with an efficiency of effort and fluency in terms of both decoding and encoding language in that it allows learners to process and produce these chunks at a faster rate as well as conveying more easily the complex ideas that are often expressed lexically(Hill,(1999:63-4) cited in Patessan,1997:3).

Patessan (ibid) summarizes the importance of learning collocations in the following points:

- a. It gives the most natural way to say something; for example 'smoking is strictly forbidden' is more natural than 'smoking is strongly forbidden'.
- b. It gives alternative ways of saying something which may be more expressive and more precise; for example 'he has a permanent disability' is more expressive and more precise than 'he has a disability that will continue until he dies'.
- c. It improves the writing and speaking style; for example 'poverty breeds crimes' seems to be more stylish expression than 'poverty causes crimes'. Having realized that "all fluent and appropriate language requires collocational knowledge (Nation,2001: 318), one realizes that lack of knowledge about collocation on the part of the EFL learners will damage communication process due to the use of odd or possibly out of date expressions.

6.Data Analysis

To measure Iraqi EFL learners' proficiency in using collocations in English, a test of two questions is presented to 50 fourth-stage students of the academic year 2012-2013 from Department of English - College of Basic Education- University of Babylon. The two questions have a multiple choice format. In the first question, which measures the learners' ability to correctly collocate in English, the learners are asked to choose the word that best collocates the base word in each of the twelve given sentences. After collecting the subjects' responses to this question, the statistics gives the results shown in Table (1) below:

(*)N	Number of correct choices	Percentage %	Number of incorrect choices	percentage %
1	5	10	45	90
2	4	8	46	92
3	4	8	46	92
4	1	2	49	98
5	7	14	43	86
6	3	6	47	94
7	10	20	40	80
8	5	10	45	90
9	13	26	37	74
10	11	22	39	78
11	15	30	35	70
12	18	36	32	64
Total	96	16	504	84

Table(1): The Subjects' Responses to Question One

(*)Each row, from 1 to 12, shows the numbers and the percentages of the correct responses and the incorrect ones out of the total number of the responses (50) to each item.

The results denote that the percentage of the total number of the incorrect responses in this question (504, 84%) is higher than that of the correct ones (96, 16%). Thus, the first hypothesis which reads (Iraqi EFL learners face difficulty in using English collocations) is validated.

In the second question, which aims at validating the second hypothesis, the subjects are asked to choose the English collocation that represents the best equivalent of the Arabic collocation given in brackets. The statistics of the subjects' responses to the items of the second question gives the results shown in Table (2):

(*)Item N	Number of correct choices	Percentage %	Number of incorrect choices	Percentage %
1	9	18	41	82
2	15	30	35	70
3	19	38	31	62
4	0	0	50	100
5	12	24	38	96
6	8	16	42	84
7	8	16	42	84
8	9	18	41	82
9	18	36	32	64
10	16	32	34	68
total(**)	114	22.8	386	77.2

Table (2): The Subjects' Responses to Question Two

The statistics indicates that the percentage of the total number of the correct responses (114, 22.8%) is far less than that of the incorrect ones (386, 77.2%). This result validates the second hypothesis which states that (Iraqi EFL learners face difficulty in rendering their native collocations into the suitable equivalent English collocations).

The overall results of the two questions are in fact disappointing. The subjects who are majoring in English give unsatisfactory responses. This mirrors low collocational competence and consequently low language competence. A number of factors may contribute to this low level of collocational competence:

1. The unpredictable patterning of collocation, its appeal to the cultural factors and to the natives' tendencies can be the major reasons for the difficulty of collocation (see 4)
2. The lack of Arabic-English or English-Arabic dictionaries of collocation that survey collocations in the source language and their equivalents in the target language may further complicate matters.

(*) Each row, from 1 to 10, shows the numbers and the percentages of the correct responses and the incorrect ones out of the total number of the responses (50) to each item

(**) 'Total' shows the overall numbers and the overall percentages of the correct responses and the incorrect ones out of the overall numbers of the responses (500) to all the items of the question, i.e. the question as a whole

3. Collocations as a linguistic topic has not been handled in the curriculum. This mirrors the unawareness of the textbook designers of the central role of collocation in developing natural language skills.

However, when the learners encounter communication problems due to the lack of language competence, they try to overcome these problems to convey the intended meaning by using different strategies. In this study, the learners rely heavily on the three strategies of transfer(literalism), generalization, and substitution:

1. Literal transfer

When the EFL learners face difficulty with some particular word they may insert a word from their first language into a sentence, and hope that their interlocutor will understand(Van and Benati,2010:73).Transfer from the Arabic language is prominent in the following samples of the responses where the subjects use:

1. color stains for (ينحل اللون) instead of color runs.
4. put makeup for (توضع الماكياج\ تتزين) instead of wear make up.
6. the team encouragers (مشجعوا الفريق) instead of team fans.
9. verily appreciate (يقدر حقاً\صدقاً) instead of sincerely appreciate.

Transference from the mother tongue also emerges in the subjects' responses to some items in the second question when they use:

1. hit a tent instead of pitch a tent to mean (ضرب خيمة),
2. inner policy instead domestic policy to mean (سياسة داخلية),
3. security belt instead of safety belt to mean (حزام الأمان),
4. drink soup instead of eat soup to mean (يشرب الحساء),
5. completely insured instead of fully insured to mean (مؤمن بالكامل),
6. heavy tea instead of strong tea to mean (شاي ثقيل),
7. enlighten pain instead of soothe pain to mean (يسكن الألم),
8. night and day instead of day and night to mean (الليل والنهار),
9. swan's shout instead of swan's cry to mean (صراخ البجع)

Literal transference may either communicate a piece of meaning far from the intended one and thus breakdown communication, or lead to the production of words combinations that seem foreign and unnatural though communicate understandable message.

The point to be highlighted here is that the subjects in all of these responses trespass the fact that "what collocates in one language does not necessarily collocate in another"(Zughoul, 1991:52).The responses mirror tension, on the learners' part, between achieving accuracy of meaning and naturalness of patterning; i.e. they try to produce collocations that are typical in the English language while, at the same time, preserving the accurate literal meaning associated with the Arabic collocation(Baker, 1992:56). In the first question, transference from the mother tongue occupies(135, 26.8%) of the total number of the incorrect responses(i.e.504). In the second question, transference occupies (271, 70.2%) of the total number of the incorrect responses(i.e.386).

2.Substitution

The learners use an incorrect vocabulary item or structure which shares enough semantic features common with the desire item to overcome their poor knowledge of the appropriate collocate(Ellis, 1997: 60-1).Some of the subjects' responses reflect their tendency to replace one word for another one that has similar semantic properties regardless of the restriction on the co- occurrence of these words. This is apparent in the subjects' responses where they use:

1. color spreads instead of color runs to mean (ينحل اللون).
2. business is prospering instead of business is booming to mean (يشهد العمل انتعاشاً)

5. bread pieces instead of bread crumbs to mean (قطع الخبز),
6. team supporters instead of team fans to mean (مشجعوا الفريق),
7. argued strongly instead of argued heatedly to mean (ناقش بحماسة),
8. comfortable sleep instead of sound sleep to mean (نوم هادى),
9. faithfully appreciate instead of sincerely appreciate (يقدر صدقا/حقا),.
10. exactly accurate instead of strictly accurate to mean (غاية الدقة),
11. group of birds instead of school of birds to mean (سرب من الطيور),
12. sound of the cock instead of cry of the cock to mean (صياح الديك) .

As for the second question, substitution strategy foregrounds in the following responses:

1. built a tent (ضرب خيمة) instead of pitched a tent.
2. local policy (سياسة داخلية) instead of domestic policy.
5. totally insured (مؤمن كليا) instead of fully insured.
6. black tea (شاي ثقيل) instead of strong tea.
7. calm pain (يسكن الألم) instead of soothe pain.

The elements of any collocational pattern is uniquely selected as the accepted form among a large number of synonymous expressions. When the natives call up a collocation from their competence, they call it as a one semantic unit though it consists of more than one elements. Thus, the cause of the learners' erroneous samples is that the learners deal with the elements of a collocational pattern individually, not as one chunk. They freely replace the elements of the particular collocation thereby violating the natives' restrictions and hence they produce patterns that sound foreign to the natives. Substitution occupies (275, 54.6%) of the total number of the incorrect responses (i.e. 504) in question one, and (86, 22.3%) of the total number of the incorrect responses (i.e. 386) in question two.

3.Generalization

The use of words in context to which they do not belong (Husada, 2007: 102). Generalization appears when the subjects use:

2. business is expanding (يزدهر العمل) instead of business is booming
5. bread chips (قطع الخبز) instead of bread crumbs.
7. argued hotly (يناقش بحماسة) instead of argued heatedly.
11. herd of birds (سرب من الطيور) instead school of birds.
12. shout of the cock (صياح الديك) instead of cry of the cock.

Generalization also appears in some of the subjects' responses to the following items in question two where they use:

9. swans scream (صراخ البجع) instead of swans cry.
10. school of sheep (قطيع الغنم) instead of flock of sheep.

These samples hint at the subjects' tendency to extend the meaning of certain words to denote a piece of meaning that does not appeal to that word. Again this is because of the lack of knowledge of the English lexical use in general and collocational use in particular. Generalization occupies (94, 18.6%) of the total number of the incorrect responses (i.e. 504) in question one, and (29, 7.5%) of the total number of the incorrect responses (i.e. 386) in question two. In fact, the high percentages that these strategies occupy in the overall result represent a serious problem in the EFL learners' context as the high percentages of these strategies in the subjects' performance mirrors the learners' inability to communicate naturally via the target language.

7. Conclusions

1. In both English and Arabic, collocation is a linguistic phenomenon where words tend to accompany each other within a frame of lexical relationship which is highly restricted by the language speakers' tendency and by their culture.

2. In the two languages, collocations are classified, depending on the range of their co-occurrence, into open collocations where an item has a wide range of collocates, restricted collocations where an item has a limited range of collocates, and bound collocations where an item is uniquely selective of its collocates.

3. In the two languages, collocations are characterized by the low level of generalization, non-substitutability, and variability.

As for the conclusions of the empirical part, they can be summarized as follows:

4. Iraqi EFL learners are incompetent in collocation patterning, and they associate words inappropriately. This conclusion is enhanced statistically as the percentage of the total number of the incorrect responses in the first question (504, 84%) is higher than that of the correct responses (96, 16%). Thus, the first hypothesis which reads (Iraqi EFL learners face difficulty in using English collocations) is validated.

5. In the second question, the percentage of the total number of the incorrect responses (386, 77.2%) is higher than that of the correct one (114, 22.8%). This conclusion validates the second hypothesis which says: (Iraqi EFL learners face difficulty in rendering their native collocations into the suitable English equivalents).

6. The statistics shows that out of the total number of the incorrect responses (i.e. 504) in the first question, substitution occupies (275, 54.6%), transfer occupies (135, 26.8%), and finally generalization occupies (94, 18.6%). Out of the total number of the incorrect responses in the second question (i.e. 386), literal transfer occupies (271, 70.2%), substitution occupies (86, 22.3%), and finally generalization occupies (29, 7.5%). The high percentage of these strategies in the learners' achievement mirrors their poor collocational knowledge which in turn mirrors their low language competence.

7. The English and the Arabic language systems are too different to produce identical linguistic patterns in most cases. The nearest acceptable collocation in English will often involve some sense of difference in terms of wording or in terms of patterning. Accuracy and naturalness in collocational patterns can be attained only through the use of the common target language expressions that are familiar to the target recipient. This helps in keeping a good level of communication.

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APPENDIX(1): A Sample of the Test

Q1\Choose the best collocate for the base (a word in bold) in each of the following items

1. This **color** so wash the shirt separately.
a) stains b) spreads c) runs
2. **Business** is.....for estate agents in the south as the property market hots up.
a) booming b) expanding c) prospering.
- 3- He a **diet**.
a. gets b. takes c. goes on
4. She excused herself and went upstairs to..... her **make up**.
a) wear b)lays on c)put
5. We used to feed our pigeons **bread**.....
a)pieces b)crumbs d)chips
- 6.The **team** were terribly disappointed when the captain was injured.
a)supporters b)encouragers c) fans
7. She **argued** ____ about her right to compensation.
a) hotly b) heatedly c) strongly
8. You could never get **sleep** in this house.
a)comfortable b) sound c) deep
9. I **appreciate** your doings.
a) sincerely a)faithfully c. really
10. The statistics were **accurate**.
a) verily b)exactly c) strictly
11. Look at this **of birds** in the sky.
a)school b)group c)herd
12. The..... **of the cock** has awaked me.
a)shout b)cry c)sound

Q2\Choose the English collocation that best fits the Arabic one given in brackets:

1. (ضرب خيمة).
a)pitched a tent b)hit a tent c)built a tent
- 2.(سياسة داخلية).
a)inner policy b)local policy c)domestic policy
- 3.(حزام الأمان).
a)security belt b)safety belt c) salvation belt
- 4.(يشرب حساء).
a)eat soup b)drink soup c)swallow soup
- 5.(مؤمننا بالكامل).
a) completely insured b)fully insured. c)totally insured
- 6.(شاي ثقيل).
a)heavy tea b) strong tea c)black tea
- 7.(تخفيف الألم).
a)lighten pain b)calm pain c)soothe pain
- 8.(الليل و النهار).
a)day and night b)night and day c)the night and the day
- 9.(صراخ البجع).
a)swans cry b)swans scream c)swans howl
- 10.(قطيع من الغنم).
a)school of sheep b) flock of sheep c)group of sheep.