



# CONTRASTIVE AND COMPARATIVE LEXICAL COLLOCATIONS IN ENGLISH AND ARABIC

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## ***Abstract***

This paper deals with the importance of lexical collocations. The grammatical collocations do exist but the main concern here is directed to the lexical. The notion of English collocations is explained. Then the types are mentioned with some classifications, and restrictions. It is important to distinguish collocations from idioms and free combinations. Some interesting aspects are mentioned here though they are of great number. Arabic collocations, on the other hand, are also illustrated, their notion, factors, types and restrictions. The main sources of Arabic collocations are explained that are presented with the Glorious Quran and borrowed expressions. The paper includes some interesting English collocations with their equivalences into Arabic and vice versa. The main findings are discussed in the paper. Then, the references used are documented. The main keywords: English collocations, Arabic collocations and lexical collocations.



## ***1. Introduction:***

Lexical collocations are important field and they are used everyday without recognizing whether the usage is obligatory or arbitrary. They are usually used by native speaker without thought but in the same time they should be learned by the L2 learner due to their significance. They are variable usages among languages according to the language rules itself but in the same time the process is a universal one. (Rita McCardell Doerr, 1995). Therefore the study of word collocability has a main concern among linguists though it is a recent process. This is done because many linguists believe that there are fixed forms of expressions in every language that are stored in the learners mind. Thus, these fixed expressions are used in speech and writing everyday.

## ***2. Introducing English Collocations:***

### **2.1. Definitions:**

The word collocation is widely different when it is used among linguists or even during language teaching. Since the field is highly problematic, it seems that it is controversial or even vague to many people. Nadja Nesselhauf (2005) explains that the terms is used "to refer to some kind of syntagmatic relation of words." Michael McCarthy and Felicity O'Dell (1996) give another definition in which collocation means a pair or group of words that are often used together. Thus, collocations are used in lexicography. They refer to "habitual co-occurrence" of individual lexical items (David Crystal, 2006). John Sinclair (1991) gives a definition which is the occurrence of two or more words within a short space (span) of each other text, (cited in Nesselhauf, 2005:12). The span may be defined as the distance which might be around four (not only two) words to the right and left of a specific word, e.g.

- *He went back to the house.*
- *When he opened the door, the dog barked.*

All the words except *dog* and *barked* seem to form collocations with the word *house*. They can be called collocates. When *barked* comes in any text, it is expected to come near the word *dog*. The two words *quick* and *fast* are synonyms, but when the word *food* is used in a text, *fast* should be expected to use as in *fast food*. Therefore, it is important to know that collocation is mainly a lexical relationship between words. This makes collocation to be subject more than to be arbitrary from common usage and to be more than from common rules.

There are two major groups of collocations: grammatical collocations and lexical collocations. Grammatical collocations consist of grammatical structures that concords with each other like verbs, nouns, adjectives + preposition, infinitive or a clause, e.g.

*Account for, advantage over, adjacent to, by accident, to be afraid that*

Lexical collocations consist of various combinations of nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. Lexical collocations are the major concern in this paper.

## 2.2. Collocations and Previous Researches:

Studying collocations seems very recent. Nadja Nesselhauf (2005), Abbas Brashi (2005), Tomoko Miyakoshi (2009) and Thanh Ha Le (2010) all agree that the researches concerning collocations are recent, starting with H. Palmer (1938) and then they are developed by J. Firth (1957). Many linguists adopted and developed the views of Palmer and Firth; some of them are even called the neo-Firthians. Each one of them gives a definition of his own as follows:

- Palmer defines collocations as the "successions of two or more words the meaning of which can hardly be deduced from the knowledge of their component words."

*At last, give up, let alone, go without, as a matter of fact*

- Firth (1956) believes that collocations are only lexical terminology so that he established what so called a technical term which is "meaning by collocation". Firth explains that 'meaning by collocation' is related to lexical meaning at the syntagmatic level not at the paradigmatic level (cited in Brashi, 2005: 14-5). This means that meaning is conveyed, through collocation, by relating the lexical items from the level of syntagmatic relationships. Paradigmatic relations are such as synonymy and antonymy are not consistent comparing with the syntagmatic ones.
- Peter Howrth (1996) makes great investigations for collocations. The investigations are concerned with huge database of verb-noun combinations which are produced by non-native speakers with different L1s. He compares about 22000 words with native speakers' writings. He then finds two main results. The first is that learners use fewer collocations than the native speaker and this is something natural due to the effect of mother tongue. The second is that there is no correlation between the general proficiency of a learner and the number and acceptability of the collocations used. Howrth finds what he calls 'overlaps', i.e. the non-native speaker face a difficulty with some nouns that share the verbs with the same orthographic features but not all of them. (cited in Nesselhauf, 2005: 7)

### 3. Collocations, Idioms and Free Combinations:

J. Sinclair (1991) states in a very general definitions that collocations are the occurrence of two or more words within a short space of each other in a text. Since collocation might come in more than two words, this means that the above definition suggests that all occurrence of two or more words including idioms and free combinations but they are totally different. What distinguishes collocations from idioms is based on whether the meaning of the whole idiom can be derived from its components, e.g.

*Spill the beans (to reveal a secret)*, (the meaning here cannot be derived from its component)

*Indelible ink* (this phrase is clear and the meaning can be derived from its component).

Jens Bahns (1993) explains that collocations are non-idiomatic expressions and non-free combinations. Free combinations on the one hand are cohesive type of word combination. He gives the noun *murder* as an example. This noun may be used freely with many verbs like *analyze*, *boast of*, *condemn*, *discuss* and *investigate*. These verbs can be combined freely with other nouns also. On the other hand, idioms are relatively frozen expressions whose meaning do not reflect the meanings of their component parts. The phrase '*to scream blue murder*' (*to complain very loudly*) is an example of an idiom. Bahns argues that collocations come somewhere between idioms and free combinations. They are loosely fixed combinations, as in *to commit murder*. The most important distinction that recognizes collocations from idioms is that their meanings reflect the meaning of their constituent parts, and what distinguishes them from free combinations is that they are used frequently. Lexical collocations can be distinguished as follows:



1. Free combinations: their components combine most freely with other lexical items. For instance, the noun *murder* can be freely used with many verbs like *to analyze*, *to describe* ...etc.
2. Idioms: they are relatively frozen expressions. Their meanings do not reflect the meaning of their components parts. Example, *to tick the bucket (die)* [translation from A. P. Cowie, et. al., 1993]
3. Collocations: they are loosely fixed combinations. Collocations fall between idioms and free combinations, e.g. *to commit a murder*. (Brashi, 2005)

#### 4. Types of English Collocations:

McCarthy and O'Dell (1996) and Nesselhauf (2005) explain that there are six types of collocations:

1. Adjective + noun: the adjective that are typically used with particular nouns:

*Jean always wears **red colour**.*

*Alice is a **heavy smoker**.*

*Unemployment is a **major problem** for the government at the moment.*

*She is a **beautiful girl**.*

*Ahmed is a **handsome boy**.*

2. Nouns + verbs:

Here, nouns and verbs often go together, e.g.

*The **economy bombed** in the 1990s.*



*An **opportunity** arose for me to work in China.*

*People feel **educational standards slipped** when the government cut finance.*

### 3. Noun + noun:

Such collocation may be found with the pattern **a.... of....**, e.g.

*Every parent feels **a sense of pride** when their child does well or win something.*

*I felt **a bang of nostalgia** when I saw the old photos of the village where I grew up.*

*By **a stroke of luck** I found my keys in the rubbish bin.*

### 4. Verbs + expressions with prepositions:

The verbs collocates with particular prepositional expressions:

*They **set me up**.*

*When she **spilt** juice on **her** new shirt, the little girl **burst into** tears.*

### 5. Verbs + adverbs:

Some verbs collocate with specific adverbs:

*She **pulled steadily** on the rope and helped him to safety.*

*He **placed** a beautiful vase **gently** on the window ledge.*

*He **whispered softly** to Marsha with important information.*

### 6. Adverbs + adjectives:

Just like verbs, adverbs often have particular adverbs to collocate with them:

*They are **happily married**.*



*She is a **stunningly attractive** woman.*

*I am **fully aware** that there are serious problems.*

*Harry was **blissfully unaware** that he was in danger.*

Note: all examples are taken, directly or indirectly, from McCarthy and O'Dell (1996) and Nesselhauf (2005).

Though McCarthy and O'Dell adopt the previous six types, they added in another edition (2008) additional type of collocation which is called 'complex collocation':

*Mary was looking forward to retiring and **taking it easy for a while**.*

*It is time you **put the past behind you** and start focusing on future.*

*Please, **pull yourself together** and go back to work.*

## ***5. Some Special Aspects of English Collocations:***

### **5. 1. Metaphor:**

There is a clear interrelation between collocations and metaphor. Since the collocations are considered as linguistic combinations, they are a source of metaphorical cases in language. (Jurate Vaicenoniene, 2000)

Metaphor is used in non-literal sense, i.e. the writer helps, by metaphor, to understand the situation very clearly. The following examples are to be taken into account (McCarthy and O'Dell, 2008):

<i>collocations</i>	<i>Examples</i>	<i>meaning</i>
<i>Shoulder the blame</i>	<i>Although others were responsible for the problem, Joe decided to <b>shoulder the blame</b>.</i>	<i>Take responsibility for something bad</i>
<i>Foot the bill</i>	<i>Choose what you like from the menu – the company is <b>footing the bill</b></i>	<i>Paying</i>
<i>Head a team</i>	<i>Joe <b>heads a team</b> working on crime prevention</i>	<i>Leads a project group</i>
<i>Have an eye for</i>	<i>Jana <b>has an eye for detail</b>, so ask her to check the report.</i>	<i>is good at noticing</i>

## 5.2. Thoughts and Ideas:

<i>Collocation</i>	<i>Example</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
<i>Judge someone harshly</i>	<i>Don't <b>judge</b> him too <b>harshly</b>. He really couldn't have done things differently.</i>	<i>Be very critical of someone</i>
<i>An error of judgement</i>	<i>Promoting Jack was a serious <b>error of judgement</b>.</i>	<i>Bad decision</i>
<i>Take the view</i>	<i>I <b>take the view</b> that you are all responsible for your own actions.</i>	<i>Believe</i>
<i>Bear in mind</i>	<i><b>Bear in mind</b> that there are often delays to flights during bad weather.</i>	<i>Remember</i>



### 5.3. Talking:

<i>Collocation</i>	<i>Example</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
<i>Four-letter words</i>	<i>Please try to express your feelings without using <b>four-letter words</b>.</i>	<i>Swear words, taboo words</i>
<i>a rash promise</i>	<i>Don't make any <b>rash promises</b>. Think before you agree to anything</i>	<i>Promises made without thinking</i>
<i>an empty promise</i>	<i>She's full of <b>empty promises</b>.</i>	<i>Promises made which the speaker has no intention to keep</i>
<i>a tough question</i>	<i>Do I regret anything? That's <b>a tough question</b>.</i>	<i>Difficult question to answer</i>

### 5.4. Political Headlines:

<i>Collocations</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
<i>Party <b>secures slim majority</b></i>	<i>Wins a small majority</i>
<i>Party <b>present show of unity</b></i>	<i>Publicly appears to be united</i>
<i>Left <b>proclaims victory</b></i>	<i>Makes an official announcement of victory</i>
<i>President <b>delivers key speech</b></i>	<i>(formal, journalistic) makes/gives a speech</i>

## 6. Collocations in the Arabic Language:

Arabic is one of the languages that are rich in collocations. Since collocation is a lexical relationship between words in a language, it is a habitual co-occurrence of two or more words together (Brashi, 2005). A few literatures concerning Arabic collocations have been applied recently. Al-Zahrani (1998) investigates the collocational knowledge of 81 advanced Arabic-speaking learners. He applies a test of 50 verb-noun collocations with a cloze test, in which the first phoneme of each collocate is provided. This leads him to a finding that there is a strong relationship between knowledge of collocations and overall proficiency as well as a strong L1 influence. This is natural because many Arabic collocations are predictable. (cited in Nesselhuaf, 2005)

Husamaddin (2000) defines Arabic collocation (الاقتران اللفظي) as :

"الميل الاعتيادي لكلمة ما على مصاحبة كلمات معينة دون غيرها"

The tendency for a word to be a collocate with other specific words rather than the others. [Researcher's translation]

He gives the word طويل (long) as an example. This word can collocate with words like رجل (man), طريق (road), but it cannot come with the word جبل (mountain). It must be جبل شاهق / عال (high mountain). Then, Husamaddin explains that Arabic collocations have elements, types and restrictions.

## 6.1. Elements of Arabic Collocations عناصر الاقتران اللفظي

a. nodal word الكلمة المحورية: in which collocation is frequent with many other words than the meaning surround it, e.g.

اهل البيت Mohammed's relatives (peace be upon him)

اهل الكتاب Christians and Jewry

اهل الذكر Muslim Imams

اهل المدينة residents, inhabitants

b. collocate word الكلمة المقترنة: the word which accepts to be a collocate to the nodal word like البيت، الكتاب، الذكر، المدينة

## 6.2. Types of Arabic Collocations:

a. Usual Collocation الاقتران الاعتيادي: means the predictable collocation which is expected in the context. It also depends on the speaker's knowledge of the language. If a speaker utters the word غصن (branch), the listener will expect the word شجرة (tree).

b. Unusual Collocation الاقتران غير الاعتيادي: This type is restricted to the creator of text, such as the poet. It cannot be predictable due to the context made by the poet himself.

### 6.3. Collocational Restrictions ضوابط الاقتران:

Brashi (2005: 34-5) cites that Husamaddin argues the words in the language which not appear together by chance. There are collocational restrictions according to their usage:

#### 1. Association Agreement توافقية الاقتران:

It means that there is an agreement between words that collocate with each other. The linguistic knowledge plays an essential role to predict such words, as in the above example concerning رجل طويل (a long man) and جبل شاهق (high mountain). Other examples like امرأة جميلة (a beautiful woman) and رجل وسيم (a handsome man) are also of this type.

#### 2. Collocational Range مدى الاقتران :

This means that the range or the number of times the word can be used as a collocate with different words. For instance the word مات (die) can be used with الانسان (human being), الحيوانات (animals), الاشجار (trees)...etc. Therefore, word like مات has a wide range of usage.

#### 3. Co-occurrence of Collocation تواترية الاقتران:

"By co-occurrence we mean words that appear together regularly in the language. This co-occurrence is not governed by grammatical rules. However, it depends on convention and what speakers feel should be said."

For example, سعى بين الصفي والمروة أطاف حول الكعبة,

## 7. *Patterns of Collocations in Arabic:*

Brashi (2005: 37-9) cites that Ghazala (1993a) classifies the Arabic collocations into twenty patterns:

1. noun + adjective, قول سديد (a right saying).
2. noun + noun, شروق الشمس (sun rise).
3. noun + conjunction + noun, الخير و الشر (good and evil).
4. adjective + adjective, جائر ظالم (despotic and oppressive).
5. verb + noun (non-figurative meaning) سمع صوتاً (to hear a sound).
6. verb + noun (figurative meaning) لقن درساً (to teach a lesson).
7. verb + verb root, على علواً (to rise high).
8. verb + adverb, بات شبعاناً (to sleep with a full stomach).
9. verb + preposition + noun, جهش بالبكاء (to burst into tears).
10. verb + relative pronouns + verb, أعذر من أنذر (he who warns is excused).
11. verb + conjunction + verb (antonym), أعطى ومنع (to give and prevent).



- 12.time/place adverbial + conjunction + time/place, اولا و اخيرا (first and last).
- 13.preposition + noun + noun, بمحض الصدفة (by sheer coincidence).
- 14.negative particle + noun + noun + negative particle + noun, لا افراط ولا تفريط (neither excess nor neglect).
- 15.noun + verb, حي يرزق (alive and kicking).
- 16.noun + preposition + noun, الكمال لله (only God is perfect).
- 17.particle (functioning as a verb) + noun, ليت شعري (would God).
- 18.arbitrary grammatical patterns (oath), والذي نفسي بيده (I swear).
- 19.arbitrary grammatical (swearing/cursing), عليك اللعنة (curse on you).
- 20.arbitrary grammatical patterns (compliment), سلمت يداك (well done).

## **8. Some Sources for Arabic Collocations:**

### **8.1. Collocations in the Glorious Quran:**

A lot of expressions and words that are used in daily modern standard Arabic come from Quran. Among these expressions are the collocations. As a matter of

fact, Quran is considered one of the most important sources for collocations even nowadays, e.g.

#### 1. verb + object collocations

- عاهد عهداً (to make a pact)

- نقض عهداً (to break a promise)

- ضرب مثلاً (to give an example)

#### 2. noun + adjective collocations

- خطأ كبير (a serious mistake)

- صديق حميم (a close friend)

- نصر عزيز (a great victory)

- حظ عظيم (good luck)

### 8.2. Borrowed Collocations:

Translation from English (or even other languages) into Arabic enriches the Arabic language with new useful expressions. It is important to know that borrowed words reinforce the language especially when there is an equivalent for the translated expressions or words. Such expressions as الحرب الباردة (cold war) become collocational expressions and always used. There are many

collocational expressions that come from English to Arabic as حركة سياسية (political movement), قوة ضاربة (kindergarten), روضة اطفال (naked steel), سلاح ابيض (striking force), ساعة الصفر (a zoo), حديقة حيوانات (lines of policy), خطوط السياسة (zero hour), عالم المال (the financial world), غرفة تجارية (chamber of commerce)...etc. (Ibid).

### 9. Some Interesting English and Arabic Collocations:

This section will show some English collocations with their equivalence in Arabic and vice versa:

- English collocations:

<i>English collocations</i>	<i>Arabic equivalence</i>
<i>To deliver a letter</i>	يسلم خطاباً
<i>To deliver a speech/lecture</i>	يلقي خطبة/ محاضرة
<i>To deliver news</i>	ينقل اخباراً
<i>To deliver a blow</i>	يوجه ضربة
<i>To deliver a verdict</i>	يصدر حكماً
<i>To deliver a baby</i>	يولد امرأة

- Arabic collocations:

<i>Arabic collocations</i>	<i>English equivalence</i>
استقبال جاف	<i>Cool reception</i>
مناخ جاف	<i>Dry weather</i>
قلم حبر جاف	<i>Ball-point pen</i>
نبرة جافة	<i>Harsh tone</i>
جلد جاف	<i>Rough skin</i>

## **10. Discussions and Conclusions:**

The greatest investigations have been made in English those made by McCarthy and O'Dell who issued a series concerning English collocation in use. On another hand, Abbas Brashi have made a great investigation in Arabic collocations. Therefore, the following points are important:

- ◆ In all languages, collocations are problematic and they are part of the native speakers' competence but for the L2 language learner, such knowledge is difficult to acquire due do the great number of collocational expressions. (Than Ha Le, 2010)
- ◆ English and Arabic share some similar categories of collocations whether they are restricted as in رجل طويل (long man) and جبل شاهق (high mountain), امرأة جميلة (beautiful woman) and رجل وسيم (handsome man), or wide range of using as in مات (die); it can be used in many situations.



- ◆ Restricted collocations are given more attention in both languages because they are highly problematic and the learner encounter a difficulty in determining them.
- ◆ Idiomatic expressions in English make a confusion in distinguishing them from the collocations rather than Arabic.
- ◆ Metaphor is also used through Arabic collocations as in ليلة بيضاء (sleepless night).



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