

Palestinian EFL Learners' Use of English Lexical Collocations

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ABSTRACT

This study tries to make a comparative study between English and Arabic languages in terms of collocations. Also, the present study attempts to assess Palestinian students' comprehension and use of collocations. To this end, the theoretical part of this study presents a discussion of lexical collocations in Arabic and English. Moreover, the practical part is aimed to statistically measure the Palestinian EFL learners' ability to use English lexical collocations accurately. The participants were 35 third year students from Islamic University of Gaza. Semi-structured interviews a paper-and-pencil test were used to collect data. The results show a low level of performance on the Palestinian EFL learners' part. Also, the findings revealed that the learners employ literal transfer from their mother tongue, and different strategies in order to compensate their deficiency in using the English lexical collocations. The paper concludes with some recommendations that could enhance the process of translation and as well as teaching/learning process.

Introduction

It's a well-known fact that English is one of the most challenging languages to learn. The difficulty students have with it depends on what their first language is; English is going to be easier to be learnt if the students' mother tongue language already has the same roots of English, and is therefore more closely related to it. Mastering collocations in English is one of the problematic areas for EFL students. One of the problems with collocations is its arbitrary nature: there is no "*rule*" that it's "*in regard to*" and not "*on regard to*"—it just is. The traditional vocabulary list may be of little value as words are not learned and used in isolation but rather with the phrases they occur in.

Deuter et al (2008) define Collocation as "the way words combine in a language to produce natural sounding speech and writing". An expression such as ' a large population "is called collocation because the word 'large' collocates-co-occurs frequently in the same location as the word " population. In this expression, 'big' cannot be substituted for the word" large'. To Ghazala (2006, p. 65), "Collocations are words which are usually found next to other words, or are 'co-located' with one another."

Therefore, according to Grim (2009b:164) having sound collocational knowledge is important to have good knowledge of a language; it is a vital element in the production of accurate language. Ahmadian and Darabi (2012 p. 253) clarify the weakness in using the appropriate collocations by EFL "Even advanced language learners may have difficulty handling the choice of lexical items, among near synonyms, in the second language". Martynska (2004, p. 11) in her research concludes that "learning individual words and their meaning does not suffice to achieve great fluency in a second language. Knowing the way words combine into chunks characteristic of the language is imperative".

To Hatim and Mason (1990), collocations are a major problem for the translator; this is because L1 interference normally induces a level of unnatural collocation in the L2. This is because "collocation in particular is not appropriately touched or handled in the curriculum" (Nofal1, 2012: 75). In all of the definitions and studies above, the focus is placed on lexical rather than grammatical collocation. It is this aspect of meaning that I am studying and testing the ability of my respondents to understand and use. The fundamental problem is as Zughoul, (1991:52) states "what collocates in one language does not necessarily collocate in another". Various researchers (Hassan & Menacere, 2019; Ahmad, 2019; Ibrahim, 2019) have studied collocations different contexts, but little attention so far has been paid to the difficulties Palestinian EFL learners face when using English lexical collocations. This study is intended to address this problem in the Palestinian EFL learners' context.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to draw a comparison between English and Arabic languages in terms of the collocations. Besides, the main goal of the study is to assess Palestinians EFL learners' ability to collocate correctly in English as well as to highlight the importance of collocations in EFL contexts. Also, deriving some recommendations on how to teach collocations. The central research question is the following:

1-To what extent Palestinian EFL learners face difficulty in using English lexical collocations?

The study includes two parts: the theoretical part focuses on the concept of collocation in English, and the fact that the collocations systems are different between the Arabic language and the English language. The practical part is a test of two questions designed in a form of multiple choices. The test is adopted to measure the Palestinian EFL learners' achievement in using collocations. Then, the data are collected and analyzed to have a number of conclusions which answer the research question of the study.

The Notion of Collocations in English

The Latin verb "collocare" which means 'to arrange' is the origin of the term "collocation". Collocation as a linguistic phenomenon, it was first introduced by Firth (1957). To Martynska, (2004, p.2): defined collocations as a combination of words associated with each other:

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

Grimm (2009, p.25) pointed out that Collocations consist of two parts: "the base and the collocate". Considering the example above, 'meal' is the base element, and 'heavy' is the collocate.

Classification of English Collocations

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

1-Open Collocations: Cartre (1987, p. 63) defines open collocation as which have the capacity to keep company with a wide range of words

-catch a train	يلحق بالقطار
-catch a cold	يصاب بالبرد
-catch fire	تنشب فيه النيران
-catch a fish	يصاد سمكة

2-Restricted collocations: which co-occur with a small number of words.

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

-foot the bill يسد الفاتورة

Hill (2000: 63-64) classifies collocations into unique collocations, which are fixed; strong collocations, which have a few other possible collocates; weak collocations, which can be easily predicted; and medium-strength collocations, which Hill (*ibid.*) suggests to be strongly emphasized in class.

Categories of English Lexical Collocations

The linguists demonstrate several models of the categories of English lexical collocations. This study adopts the model of Benson et al (1986).

1-Noun-verb combinations: adjectives modify, bells ring, bees buzz.

2-Adjective-noun combinations: a pitched battle, pure chance, keen competition, sincere condolences..

3-Verb-noun combinations:

a. Verbs denoting creation-nouns: make an impression, compose music.

b. Verbs denoting activation - nouns: fly a kite, wind a watch.

c. Verbs denoting eradication and/or nullification-nouns: reject an appeal, recall a bid, break a code, and eliminate a competitor.

4) Adverb–verb combination: barely see, thoroughly plan, hardly speak, deliberately attempt.

5) Adverb–adjective combination: totally acceptable, extremely odd, completely useless.

The Notion of Collocation in Arabic

In Arabic little has been written about collocation. Some traditional Arab grammarians discussed the notion of collocation in Arabic such as Ibn Jinni (1952) (cited in Mustafa 2010). The term collocation is found in Arabic under different titles -talazum or al-tadham (التلازم أو التضامن). Fahad (2008, p.2) states that Arabic term refers to the words that usually co-occur together and this co-occurrence reflects the tendency of the Arab people to frequently use these words in a company.

غَلْبَةُ النَّعَاصِيْرِ fall asleep(*ibid*)

Izuldeen (2007, p.1) states that the Arabic collocation consists of 'النواة' i.e. base and 'الكلمة المترافق' i.e. the collocate word. In the examples above (الناعص) is the base element, and (غلب) is the collocate element.

Classification of Arabic Collocations

Emery (1991, p. 23) identified 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:

Pure water ماء صاف (Al-Hafiz, 2004:306)

Troubled water ماء عكر (*ibid*)

2. Restricted collocations are those combinations of words that show restricted commutability:
هزيمة نكراe crushing defeat (*ibid*: 360)

جريمة نكراe detestable crime (Al-Hafiz, 2004:11)

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

Fierce war حرب ضروس (*ibid*: 118)

Categories of Arabic Lexical Collocations

Grimm (2009) mentions the following categories of the Arabic lexical collocations:

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

the trees rustle حف الشجر (Soori, 2012:12)

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

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

3. noun + adjective:

overwhelming majority (أغلبية ساحقة) ibid:42)

4. noun+ noun:

the moon eclipse خسوف القمر (ibid: 133)

5. adjective + noun:

jocular خفيف الدم (ibid: 135)

6. Adv + adjective

extremely difficult صعب للغاية (ibid)

Another classification was conducted by El Hasan (1982 p. 276) who argues that the lexical collocations, in Arabic, falls into three categories:

1-Synonyms:

إنها ساءت مستقرا ومقاما

2-Opposites

الحياة والموت

The blind one and the one who can see الأعمى والبصير ?al ?ama-wal-basir

3-Complementariness

أريد ورقة وقلم

The arbitrariness in the formation of collocations is noticeable in the sounds of animals. Arabic, as in English, each animal has its own sound. Consider the following examples :

Turkeys:	الحبيش	gobble:	يكركر
Wolves:	الذئاب	Howl	تعوي
Ravens:	الغربيان	Croak	تنعف
Small birds:	العصافير الصغيرة	chirp/twitter/pipe	تصدق/تغرد/زمر

Sounds of Animals in Arabic & English (Taken from Shamma, 2005c: p.78)

Moo of cow;	خوار البقرة
roar of lion	زئير الأسد
bray of donkey	نهيق الحمار

Discussion of Similarities between Arabic and English in terms of Collocations

The similarities between Arabic and English language in terms of collocation will be discussed accurately. First, Collocations of both languages refer to the habitual co-occurrence of individual lexical items. Examples from Arabic are مكة المكرمة "الوطن العربي" and "pay attention" and "fish and chips" are examples from English. Second, collocations are linguistically predictable in both languages. Third, some collocations in both languages dies, others come into existence. Fourth, in both languages the verb of collocations can be substituted such as commit a crime or perpetrate murder. Collocations in both languages is not mere juxtaposition. In other words, the two items can be separated in the sentence or they may occur in two separate sentences. Finally, in both languages the lexemes are variable with other lexemes. For instance, the word "heavy" has many meanings according to the collocations:

Heavy industry
Heavy fog
Heavy rainfall

The Importance of collocation knowledge in EFL learners' context

Collocation knowledge is a clear-cut line that differentiates the native from the non-native speaker. Patessan (ibid) summarizes the importance of learning collocation in the following points: It gives the most neutral way to say something; for example, smoking is strictly forbidden is more natural than smoking is strongly forbidden". Interestingly, It gives more expressive and more precise ways of saying something; for example, he has a permanent disability is more precise than he has a disability that will continue until he dies. Also, it improves the writing and the speaking style. The most important result of lacking of knowledge about collocations is damaging the communication process due to odd expressions.

Methodology

Participants

The participants were 35 third year students from Islamic University of Gaza. They study English as a foreign language and the average age is between 19 to 21. The study will be conducted to investigate the Palestinians students' proficiency of using collocations. The target group (35 students from one class) is asked to answer a questionnaire. The entire target sample finished translation courses in the university. A confirmed consent was obtained from all the participants. The informed consents will be included the procedures of the study, the purpose, and confidentiality issues.

Data Collections Instruments

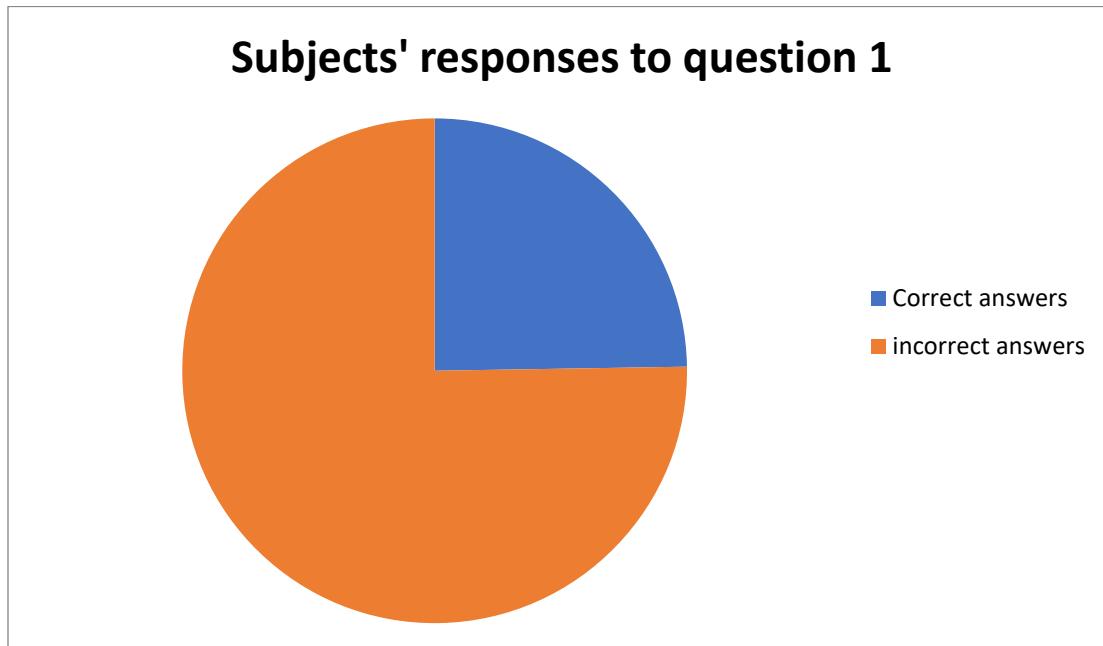
Semi-structured interviews and a paper-and-pencil test were used to collect data. The researcher adopted a test written by Hadi (2014). Piloting study was conducted since the researcher can be sure of the respondent interpretations of the question. The researcher piloted six students who are in circumstances similar to those in the target of respondents will be. The test was required to be answered in the classroom within 15 minutes. The researcher invited three randomly selected subjects from the sample to in-depth interview, in order to discuss the results with them.

Data Analysis

This study used a mixed methods design. To assess Palestinian students' comprehension and use of collocations, a test of two questions was presented to 35 third- stage students from English Department –Faculty of Education- Islamic University .All of the respondents finished Translation one and two courses. The two questions have a multiple-choice format. In the first question, which measures the learners' ability to correctly collocate in English, the learners were asked to choose the word that best collocate 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	10	28.5	25	71.5
2	2	5.71	33	94.29
3	3	8.57	32	91.43
4	6	17.14	29	82.86
5	10	28.57	25	71.43
6	23	65.71	12	34.29
7	9	25.71	26	74.29
8	7	20	28	80
9	11	31	24	69
10	10	28.5	25	71.5
11	5	14.28	30	85.72
12	8	22.85	27	77.5
Total	102	24.2	308	73.3

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

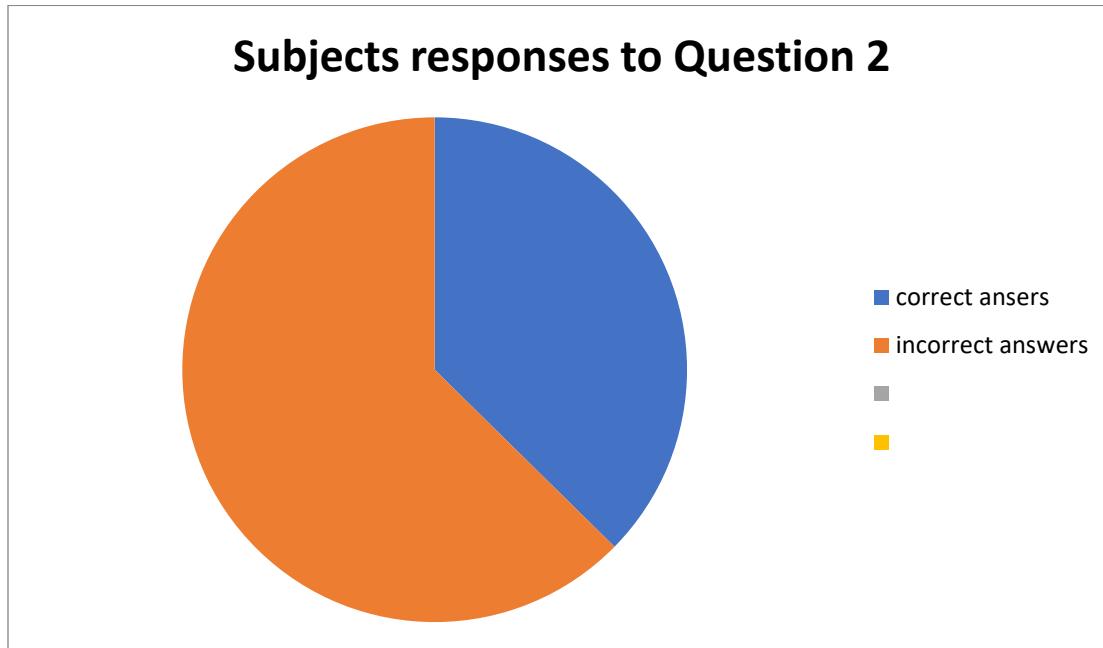


The results reveal that the percentage of the number of the incorrect responses to this question (73.3%) is higher than that of the correct ones (42.2%). Thus, the research question which asks (To what extent Palestinians EFL

learners face difficulty in using English collocations?) is answered. In the second question 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):

N	Number of correct choices	Percentage %	Number of incorrect choices	Percentage %
1	7	20	28	80
2	15	42.8	20	57.2
3	15	42.8	20	57.2
4	6	17.1	29	82.9
5	13	37.14	22	62.86
6	16	45.7	19	54.3
7	14	40	21	60
8	20	57.14	15	42.86
9	5	14.2	30	85.8
10	19	54.2	16	45.8
Total	130	37.1	220	62.8

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



The statistics indicates that the percentage of the number of the correct responses (37.1) is far less than that of the incorrect ones (62.8%). Also, this result indicated to what extent Palestinians learners face problem in terms of collocation use. The overall results of the two questions are disappointing. The subjects' responses are considered unsatisfactory responses. This reflects low collocation competence and their poor language. The EFL learners try to overcome deficiency of collocational competence to convey the intended meaning by using different strategies.

Discussions of the results

After interviewing three of the respondents the researcher found out that respondents relied heavily on the two strategies of transfer literalism. According to Benati and Van (2015), literal transfer occurs when the learner may use a word from their first language into a sentence when he/ she face difficulty with some particular word. Transfer from the Arabic language is evident in the following sample of the responses where the subjects use:

Put make for (تضع الماكياج) instead of wear makeup.

Also, considering question 11 in the first section, only five respondents answered it correctly. The other respondents answered group of birds instead of school of birds. Accordingly, the respondents have a serious problem with collective words in English. Some examples of collective words are shown in the following table:

chattering of magpies	school of whales.
herd of cows.	pride of lions.
flock of sheep.	A culture of bacteria

In the second question transference from the mother tongue also emerges in the subjects' responses when they use:

drink soup instead of eat soup to mean (يشرب الحساء)

To elaborate, the subjects in all of these responses do not realize what Zughoul, (1991, p.52) stated that "what collocates in one language does not necessarily collocate in another. The responses mirror tension, on the learners' part. According to Baker (1992, p. 56), 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. Zughoul, (1991) determine the reasons behind such weakness are mostly the result of the learners' lack of reading in English and heavily relying on bilingual dictionaries in translating into English.

Conclusion

English collocation is divided into grammatical and lexical collocations. Lexical collocations are combinations of adjective noun; adverb+ adjective; verb+ noun, etc. collocations may impose difficulty on learners of English because there is hardly clear-cut guideline for non-native learners to decide which combinations are exactly acceptable or which one are simply unacceptable. The only way to get a better grasp of English collocations is building up awareness of it and experiencing it receptively and productively. Accordingly, every syllabus should include exercise on collocation in the target language. Besides, let the students prepare glossaries or bilingual collocational dictionaries. Teachers should be aware of giving the grammatical collocation of phrasal verbs or prepositional phrases as lexical units not as individual and abstract units. Besides, when students look up new words in their dictionary, they should be encouraged to also look at words that usually go with the word in question. Finally, the main reason behind the students' collocational weakness is mother tongue transfer.

Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study are restricted in terms of respondents, stage of learning, and time. Accordingly, if we examine other respondents, we are prone to have, somewhat, different results; at the same time, if we test the same students after a year, the findings might also be different. However, this should not minimize the importance of the results, especially as they are not that different from the other results in different cultures and various linguistic backgrounds. Therefore, research on particular groups of learners at different stages of their

schooling and stages of the knowledge of collocation should continue for more discoveries we always attempt to make.

Recommendations

The study has many pedagogical implications for foreign language teachers, and students, translators and syllabus designers. Syllabus designers should propose suitable materials for teaching collocations in schools, and universities. Foreign languages teachers should be trained on how to use and how to teach collocations. Students must have their own "Book of Collocations". Since practice makes perfect, students must practice and use collocations in their daily life. The researcher suggests focusing on teaching collocations from the primary stage using many strategies such as collocations pictionary, online apps, dictogloss , games. The researcher believes that the key of mastering collocations is intensive exposure to the target language by reading and listening.

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Appendix I

Dear Respondent,

This is a questionnaire meant to serve part of my research on Collocation in English and Arabic : Contrastive Study . Your cooperation in answering the questions below would be highly appreciated. You are kindly requested to rely just on your own knowledge without consulting any translator, linguist, dictionary, or the internet. All information provided will remain confidential.

Age: _____

Gender: _____

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 c) 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** our doings.

- a) sincerely b)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:

- a)pitched a tent b)hit a tent c)built a tent ضرب خيمة

- a)inner policy b)local policy c)domestic policy سياسة داخلية

- a)security belt b)safety belt c) salvation belt حزام الأمان

- a)eat soup b)drink soup c)swallow soup يشرب حساء

- a) completely insured b)fully insured c)totally insured مؤمنا بالكامل

- a)heavy tea b)strong tea c)black tea شاي ثقيل

- a)lighten pain b)calm pain c)soothe pain تخفيف الألم

- a)day and night b)night and day c)the night and the day الليل والنهر

- a)swans cry b)swans scream c)swans howl صرخ البجع

- a)school of sheep b)flock of sheep c)group of sheep قطيع من الغنم

Note/ The researcher adopted this test from the dissertation of Shahla Abdul Kadhim Hadi ,University of Babylon /College of Basic Education.

Citation/ Hadi, S. A. K. Iraqi EFL Learners' Use of English Lexical Collocations.

Appendix II

Informed Consent Agreement

Please read this consent agreement carefully before you decide to participate in the study.

This study aims at investigating the Palestinian EFL learners' use of the English lexical collocations.35 students will be asked to answer a list of questions related to the topic of the study. The study will require about 15minutes of your time. The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your data will be anonymous which means that your name will not be collected or linked to the data. Your participation in the study is completely voluntary.

If you have questions about the study, contact:

Diana Abu Khaled

Islamic University of Gaza/ English Department.

Supervisor Agreement:

I agree to participate in the research study described above.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

You will receive a copy of this form for your records.