Rendering Arabic Collocations into English

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Introduction

Lexical items regularly keep company with certain other lexical items and it is such combination that we refer to as 'collocation'. Collocation is a linguistic phenomenon permeating all languages, yet lexical items collocate differently in different languages Arabic and English are no exceptions.

The aim of this paper is, therefore, to investigate and analyze Arabic lexical collocation in terms of their types, selectional restrictions and their patterns and then compare them with their counterparts in English for the purpose of translation. It concludes with some suggestions for rendering each type of Arabic collocations into English.

1. The Concept of Collocation

Etymologically speaking, "collocation" comes from Latin *collocare* meaning "to place together," it points to the fact that "words often occur together and that their meanings are in part conditioned by habitual co-occurrence". (Todd and Hancock, 1986:121) Collocation is in fact a British term which was coined for the first time by British linguist J.R Firth (1890-1960). He is responsible for bringing this term into prominence in lexical studies arguing that" you shall know a word by the company it keeps" (Firth, 1968:179). Thus, "meaning by collocation "becomes established as one of his modes of meaning. In other words, meaning operates at different levels and one type of meaning is collocation:

> One of the meanings of *night* is
>
> its collocability with *dark*, and of
>
> dark, of course, (its) collocation with night.
>
> (Ibid: 196)

It follows that part of the meaning of lexical items in language which can be stated in terms of their collocations and collocability, and of the company they habitually keep which represents the collocational level.

Firth's notion of collocation has been explored by a number of British linguists, notably Halliday (1996: 148-161) and Sinclair (1966:410-430) who endeavored to study lexis in the same way as grammar. Their major aim is generally to search for lexical patterns and to devise methods suitable for the description of these patterns in the light of a lexical theory "complementary to" but not part of grammatical theory (Halliday, 1966:148). As a result, Halliday's chief concern is collocation and how it can be used to generate lexical sets where a set designates a family of lexical items whose membership is set up mainly on formal and statistical bases (Ibid: 148-150). This can clearly be shown by the collocability of the two lexical items *strong* and *powerful* in the following matrix.

Matrix 1. Collocability of Strong and Powerful

Lexical item	Argument	Tea	Car
Strong	+	+	-
Powerful	+	-	+

This means that *strong* and *powerful* are instances of items which collocate with *argument;* hence their common occurrence with the same item will qualify them for membership of the same sets; however, the two items don't share the same collocability in that, each also belongs to a different set. That is, *strong* (but not *powerful*) is a member of that set of items that acceptably collocates

with *tea, powerful* (but not *strong),* on the other hand, is a member of that set of items that acceptably collocate with *car.* This test of collocability , "the company a word keeps "(Carter, 1987: 36-37) depends on a hypothesis that "the more a lexical item is , the more partnerships it will contract with other lexical items. "(Ibid.) Given this, it follows that the two members of a pair of synonyms will by no means behave identically in all contexts and like two identical electric charges, the members of an infelicitous collocation repel each other (Martin, 1984:132) We say, for example *heavy smoker* but *big eater; strong odor,* but *loud noise. false eyes /teeth* ,but *artificial arms / legs, rotten fish, rancid butter* but *sour milk* similarly , *reports are confirmed, treaties ratified, affairs settled,* the *miser is circumspect* , the *saint is vigilant* and the *solder is watchful.* We also talk about an *ally in war, an accomplice in crime* but a partner *in a business* (Bolinger, 1975:102, Wallace, 1982:75).

It is worth noting that certain collocations are associated with specific texts or registers. For instance, the lexical items *rain* and *discourse* are natural as to textual occurrence, but the collocates *rain farming and discourse* processing are likely to be displayed in geographical and psychological text respectively. Likewise, the adjective *high* when combined with other lexical items will help construct collocations manifested in definite registers such as *highway* (civil engineering), *very high frequency* (radio-engineering) *High court* (law) and *High church* (religion) (Bennett, 1968:49).

The British notion of collocation has been tackled by American linguists under different headings, among which are co-occurrence restrictions (Harris, 1957), restrictions of co-occurrence (Chomsky 1965), selection restrictions (Katz and Postal, 1964, Fillmore, 1968) and collocational restrictions (Cruse, 1986).

In his *aspects* (1965:86 and 95) Chomsky classifies co-occurrence restrictions into two types: strict- subcategorization rules and selectional rules. The former are purely syntactic in nature whereas the latter are semantic / pragmatic in nature . Thus. a strict subcategorization rule such as:

$$\text{Eat} \longrightarrow \text{CS/ } [+ \text{ v.t.} + \text{---NP}]$$

States that the formative eat is a verb and it is transitive as in:

1.She eats some meat

in which this formative is analyzed in terms of syntactic features , on the other hand, a selectional rule such as:

$$\text{Eat} \quad \text{CS/ } [+ \text{ v.} \underline{\quad} \pm \text{Animate}]$$

States that the NP which functions as patient of the verb *eat* could be animate or inanimate (See Ibid. 1965:90-93, 120-123,149-160).

Taking such restrictions into account, it is inadmissible to say:

2. He will <u>send</u>

3.* Sincerity <u>admires</u> Jack

since the verb <u>send</u>, being transitive , occurs in the environment of a following NP. On the other hand , the verb <u>admire</u> requires animate subjects.

Being a linguistic phenomenon, collocation also exists in Arabic. Yet, it hasn't been studied systematically as an independent linguistic topic by traditional philologists and modern Arab grammarians. The concept of collocation has been tackled under various labels such as المصاحب (Badawi 1981) التلازم اللفظية (Hassan, 1973) التضام (Ezzat, 1972), and (Ahmad, 1984) التلازم الدلالي (Khalil; 1988) القيود الانتقالية (Abdul Latif,1983) التساوق and (Heliel, 1988) المتلازمات اللفظية.

Al-Jahith, an early Arab rhetorician, recognizes the importance of collocation where lexical items co-occur with certain lexical items rather than with other items stating that:

وقد يستخف الناس ألفاظا منها ويستعملونها وغيرها أحق بذلك ألا ترى أن الله تبارك وتعالى لم يذكر في القرآن الكريم الجوع إلا في موضع العقاب أو في موضع الفقر المدقع والعجز الظاهر والناس لا يذكرون السغب ويذكرون الجوع في حال القدرة والسلامة. (Al-Jahith, 1948:20) .

Thus Al-Jahith's view on collocation corresponds to Firth's « meaning by collocation" that is one the meanings of جوع (hungry) displayed in the Glorious Quran is its collocability with خوف (fear).

Al-Jurjani, another Arab prominent theorist on rhetoric and poetics, also stresses the importance of syntagmatic relation between lexical items and that of contextual meaning in constructing well-formed sentences. This principle is elaborated under his theory of construction or النظم . In this respect, he writes:

لا نظم في الكلم ولا ترتيب حتى يعلق بعضها

ببعض ويبني بعضها على بعض

وتجعل هذه بسبب من تلك

(Al –Jurjani, 1978 :44)

Hassan (1973 :21), a well known modern Arab linguist, studies collocation under the label النظام classifying it into two types التلازم and التوارد. By the first term, he means :

الطرق الممكنة في وصف جملة ما فتختلف طريقة

منها عن الأخرى تقديماً وتأخيراً وفصلاً ووصلاً

وهلم جرا ... وهو بهذا أقرب إلى اهتمام

دراسة الأساليب التركيبية البلاغية الجمالية

منه إلى دراسة العلاقات النحوية والقرائن اللفظية.

(Ibid. : 216-217).

As for the second term, Hassan defines it as follows :

أن يستلزم أحد العنصرين التحليلين النحويين عنصراً

آخر فيسمى هذا النظام *التلازم*.

(Ibid : 2)

Hassan cites the lexical item صاحب "companion" as an example of التوارد when it collocates with other lexical items to map different meanings as in:

الدار

رسول الله

صاحب

الجلالة

المعالي
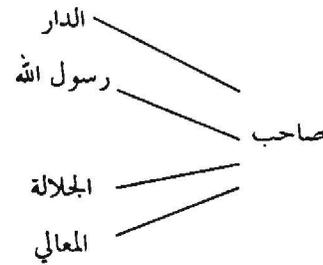
Where they mean مالكها "owner", رفيقه, companion , الملك His majesty and الوزير His excellency respectively. As for the second term, he cites the following examples:

فيه

عنه

رغب

إليه
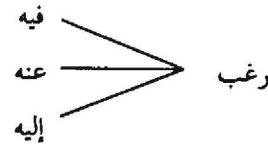
Which they mean طلبه "he wanted," كرهه "he disliked" and استعانة " "he requested somebody to do something," respectively (Ibid.)

2- Patterns of Collocations

Arabic collocations may take a variety of patterns on the basis of their component elements, the commonest of which are the following :

P I   N   V

This pattern consists of a noun and a verb in which the semantic relationship between these two elements is captured.

يخرخر الماء the water murmurs

تخرء القطة the cat purrs

يزأر الأسد the lion roars

This pattern, manifested in both Arabic and English, reflects the sound characteristics of human beings, animals or things reflected by the noun-a linguistic phenomenon known as "onomatopoeia".

P 2 Adj N

This pattern consists of a noun and an adjective, or the so-called in Arabic : الصفة

والموصوف

جبل شاهق high mountain

ريح عاصف high wind

فراش وثير sumptuous bed

P 3 V N

This Pattern consists of a verb (usually transitive) and a noun:

يحرز انتصاراً to score a victory

يجمع مالا to make money

يشن هجوماً to launch an attack

It should be noted that V N collocations are replaced by a single lexical item as in:

يؤتي الزكاة = يزكي to give zakat

يتخذ قراراً – يقرر to {make / take} a decision= to decide

يلقي نظرة – ينظر to {have / take} a look = to look

P. 4 Adj N V

This pattern consists of a verb followed by the cognate accusative known as المفعول

المطلق in Arabic.

يضرب ضرباً مبرحاً To beat bitterly

يجري جريا سريعاً To run fast

يؤثر تأثيرا عميقاً To affect deeply

P 5 A. Count N 1 (prep) mass N 2

This pattern consists of a term denoting a unit of quantity and the lexical item for the substance it quantifies. Such collocations usually indicate the specific, concrete, small unit of something larger, more general:

قطرة من الماء a drop of water

ملعقة من الدواء a spoonful of medicine

قطعة من القماش an article of clothing

B. Collective N1 (prep) counts N 2

Like pattern (A),this pattern consists of two nouns but the modified noun is countable. It may indicate the larger unit to which a single member belongs:

باقة من الأزهار a banquet of flowers

خشرم من النحل a swarm of bees

قطيع من الماشية a flock of sheep

3- Rendering Arabic Collocational Patterns into English.

Like other linguistic phenomena, collocations- the lexical tramline, of language in Newmark's (1982:116) terms, impose some translational problems when rendered from one language to another. This is attributed to discrepancies in the linguistic and cultural features between the source language and the receptor language.i.e., lexical items collocate differently due to the different co-occurrence restrictions imposed on each language.

In this respect, Roberts writes:

[Collocations]are often stumbling blocks for translators since they represent not a servitude but a preference of a language for a certain word combination.

(Roberts, 1991: 309).

Below are some suggestions adopted for rendering Arabic collocational patterns into English.

P.I.   N   V

In this pattern, the appropriate verb is to be carefully selected for the noun with which it collocates in English:

يثغى الخروف   The sheep bleats
ينق الضفدع   Frogs creak
تعوي الكلاب   Dogs bark

P.2.   Adj   N

In this pattern, the suitable adjective should be selected for the noun with which it goes in English since adjectives do not co-occur freely with nouns:

معركة ضارية   pitched battle
كأس دهاق   brimful cup
عدوو لدود   implacable foe

Another transnational problem pertaining to adj. N collocations may arise when the adjective has the same form in Arabic but when translated, two different counterparts emerge but each collocates with a certain noun. This applies to those adjectives which usually end in *ic* as *ical* such as *economic /economical, historic/ historical, electric/ electrical,* etc. Here are examples:

حصار اقتصادي   economic blockade
أزمة اقتصادية   economic crisis
سيارة اقتصادية   economical car
زوجة اقتصادية   economical wife
تطورات تاريخية   historical developments
رواية تاريخية   historic novel

P.3.   V   N.

In this pattern, the verb is the collocate for which the translator has to find the appropriate equivalent which normally goes with the noun in English.

يسن قانونا   to enact a law
يبذل جهدا   to exert an effort
يعلن حربا   to declare war

P.4. adj.   N   V.

In this pattern, the most suitable adverbial be is a single word or a prepositional phrase, used as an equivalent in English to the Arabic cognate is to be matched in English since adverbials do not collocate feely with verbs:

يتقدم قدوما بطيئا   to approach slowly
يجيب إجابة صحيحة   to answer correctly
يتصرف تصرفا أحمقا   to act foolishly

P.5. A. Count N 1 (prep) mass N 2

In this pattern, the appropriate noun denoting a unit of quantity should be precisely sought in English:

قطعة (أرض/ من الأرض)   a plot of land
سحابة (دخان/ من الدخان)   a cloud of smoke
قالب (صابون/ من الصابون)   a bar of soap

B. Collective N 1 (prep) counts N 2

Translating this pattern is, to a great extent, similar to that of (P.5 A)
Above since both have similar structures:

أسطول(سفن/ من السفن)   a fleet of ship
سرب(طائرات/ من الطائرات)   a squadron airplanes
طقم (كؤوس/ من الكؤوس)   a set of glasses

4. conclusion

In rendering collocational patterns into English, the translator should be aware of the collocational properties and collocability restrictions in English rather than those in Arabic –a case which ends up in producing acceptable collocations in English.

In view of these findings, the researcher recommends that bilingual Arabic-English and English-Arabic dictionaries of collocations be compiled and put in the service of translators to help them easily match the correct and accurate collocations in English.

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