



## English Collocations versus Arabic Collocations: A Pedagogical Dimension

**Rafe S. Zaabalawi**

Gulf University for Science and Technology, Kuwait

### ABSTRACT

*Collocations are words that often arbitrarily cluster in a particular language context (e.g., make progress). Native Arabic learners of English often find difficulty using English collocations in their English discourse. This is probably because such expressions, though occurring in Arabic, are not as frequently used as they are in English. Contrastive studies shedding light on the status of English and Arabic collocations often list collocational expressions in English and provide corresponding equivalent collocations in Arabic. Unlike such studies, the present research does not simply concern itself with whether collocations exist in Arabic as they occur in English. It goes beyond this to compare the rate of frequency and rigidity of English collocations with that of Arabic collocations in reading texts, then relates the results to native Arabic learners' failure to appreciate the use of collocations in English. My research raises two questions. The first is: do collocations in Arabic occur in ordinary discourse as frequently as they do in equivalent English linguistic contexts? The second is: do Arabic collocations consist of words combined as rigidly as those constituting English collocations? The findings have implications for ESL practitioners, syllabus designers, and reading specialists.*

### INTRODUCTION

Collocations are words that naturally, though often arbitrarily, co-occur in a particular linguistic context, e.g., *commit suicide* (Benson, Benson, & Ilson, 1997; Nation, 2001). Husni and Newman (2015, p. 1) describe collocation as “a law unto itself, its rules often defying logic and, thus, are unpredictable.” An area of controversy is whether they constitute a major part of a language’s lexicon. In English, for example, there is literature emphasizing the natural and frequent occurrence of collocations in native speakers’ language exchanges (McCarthy & O’Dell, 2007). However, in Arabic, although there is literature stressing the existence of collocational expressions in everyday discourse (Bahumaid, 2006; Grimm, 2009; Izwaini, 2015; Soori & Awab, 2016), relevant studies do not specify how frequently such expressions occur and whether Arabic speakers need to use these formulae to demonstrate their competence and natural use of the language as is the case with English. In English, using collocations renders the language user’s utterances “much more natural, more native-speaker-like” (*Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English*, 2004, p. vii).

Therefore, the occurrence of collocations in a given language does not necessarily indicate that such expressions are major language units which learners should regularly use in their language exchanges. To add to the confusion, much of the English literature recognizing the role of collocations in Arabic discourse has been written by native Arabic teachers of English (Abdul-Fattah, 2011; Bahumaid, 2006). As such, it seems that such language practitioners began viewing collocations in Arabic as a major part of the Arabic lexical repertoire only after they had realized the integral part which collocations typically play in English itself. However, while collocations adopt generally rigid patterns in a particular language, for example English (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2007), such formulae can be more flexible in another, such as Arabic. In English, for instance, the sequences “do a mistake” and “perform a mistake” are considered collocationally erroneous. In such cases, “do” and “perform” should be replaced with “make.” In Arabic, on the other hand, replacing a word with another in similar contexts does not necessarily render the collocational expression erroneous or make it sound even unnatural or nonnative-speaker-like. For instance, the Arabic verb *yusajil* (*score*), which commonly collocates with the noun *hadaf* (*goal*) in the collocation *yusajil-u hadaf-an* (*score a goal*), can be replaced with other verbs such as *yuHriz* or even *yudxil* in the same context without the new lexical combination's being viewed as collocationally erroneous.

The above arguments suggest that although collocations exist in both English and Arabic, the concept of collocation is applied differently to these languages. In an attempt to provide a better understanding of this element of language, this research addresses two questions. The first is: do collocations in Arabic occur in ordinary discourse as frequently as they do in equivalent English linguistic contexts? The second question is: do Arabic collocations consist of words combined as rigidly as those constituting English collocations?

The data of the study included three English reading texts and three Arabic reading texts. Reading texts are often regarded as linguistic sources where lexical items are naturally combined to produce several sequences of collocations (Kennedy, 2012; Nemat Tabrizi & Akhavan Saber, 2016; Pellicer-Sanchez, 2015). Mohammadnejad (2018) states that “one of the strategies that could possibly enhance EFL learners’ understanding about collocations is reading” (p. 103). As such, reading texts can be viewed as textual means of providing EFL learners with technical information on how to form native-speaker like language patterns in general and collocations in particular (Lewis, 2000). Each English text was coupled with an Arabic text; both share the same subject and have a similar number of words. These two texts were analyzed for the number of collocational expressions used and for the flexibility of the words combined in each of such collocational sequences. Findings show that English typically uses far more collocations than Arabic does. Moreover, the Arabic words making up a particular collocational expression demonstrate much more flexibility in their combination patterns than their English counterparts. The study yielded significant results for ESL practitioners.

This article comprises five sections. First, the Literature Review defines the concept of collocation, explores application of the concept in English and Arabic contexts, and reviews research concerning EFL learners’ erroneous collocations produced as a result of language transfer. This section also classifies collocations into categories using the notion of flexibility of constituent words as the basis for such sorting. The second section, Methodology, presents and defends a research paradigm used in the study. The third section, Results, presents the findings of the project. In the fourth section, Discussion, the researcher reviews the results of this study in light of the findings of other research studies and proposes a plan for teaching collocations. This section also indicates how the project contributes to a circumscribed body of literature. The fifth

section, Conclusion, discusses the implications of this research, associates such implications with the relative importance of teaching collocations in English and Arabic, and provides advice for practitioners including teachers and syllabus designers.

It is noted that the phonetic symbols used to transcribe Arabic words in this study are taken from Campbell's (1998) chart of Arabic transliteration (see [Appendix IV](#)).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Collocations are words that arbitrarily accompany one another in a particular context, e.g., *golden opportunity*, not *golden chance*, and *burning desire*, not *blazing desire* (Swan, 2015, p. 231). They are technically categorized as being either lexical or grammatical (Benson, Benson, & Ison, 1986). Lexical collocations refer to those combinations which contain two or more content words (verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs). Examples are *pay attention* (V+N), *keen interest* (Adj +N), *seriously injured* (Adv + Adj) and *work hard* (V+Adv). Grammatical collocations denote combinations that contain any of those content words with a preposition, e.g., *depend on* (V + Prep), *responsibility for* (N + Prep), *angry with* (Adj + Prep), and *separately from* (Adv + Prep) (Jackson, 2007, p 60). This research establishes both categories of collocation as its object of analytic interest.

Collocations exist in various languages. As is the case with English, Arabic discourse makes use of collocational expressions. They are usually referred to as *?al-mutalaazimaat ?al-lafZiya* (المتلازمات اللفظية), literally translated as *verbal companions* (Nofal, 2012). Alternative names such as *?al-taDaam* (التضام) are also proposed to describe the same phenomenon (Hassan, 1973). As mentioned earlier, although collocations are used in both English and Arabic, they do not necessarily occur at the same rate and are not as flexibly combined. In terms of flexibility of combination, collocations can be classified as open, restricted, or bound (Carter, 1987; Cowie, 1978 & 1981).

Open collocations are language formulae whose constituent collocates are freely combined with other collocates depending on context. They are referred to as "freely recombinable" (Cowie, Mackin, & McCraig, 1983, p. xiii). For instance, each of the two collocates in the collocation *make a meal* can be combined with other words. For example, someone can be said to *make a deal* or *prepare a meal*. Similarly, in Arabic Al-Hafiz (2004) refers to *bait-un jamiyl* (beautiful house) as an open collocation where both words, *bait* (house) and *jamiyl* (beautiful) can freely occur with several other words in various lexical contexts.

Restricted collocations contain collocates that are limited in their combinatorial possibilities with other lexical items. As such, they adopt "certain structural patterns, and are restricted in their commutability not only by grammatical and semantic valency (...) but also by usage" (Aisenstadt, 1979, p. 71). They are relatively more rigid in their lexical combination than open collocations. Examples of restricted collocations include *conduct a study* and *reduce stress*. In these cases, constituent collocates are mostly non-interchangeable. In Arabic, Al-Hafiz (2004) exemplifies this category of collocations in the expression *naṣab-a qitaal-un* "نشب قتال" (a fight broke out), where *naṣab-a* and *qitaal-un* naturally co-occur in several contexts, though verb *naṣab-a* can be replaced by verb *bada?-a* (start) in similar contexts.

Bound collocations are those combinations where only a certain word collocates with another. In these cases, lexical constituents cannot be replaced by synonyms, no matter how close in meaning such synonyms may be. Cowie (1981, p. 228) considers these collocations as somewhat

akin to idioms. Benson et al. (1986, p. 258) call them “obligatory collocations.” They also refer to them as “transitional combinations” as such structures are “transitional between idioms and collocations, more frozen than ordinary collocations, *i.e.*, less variable.” (p. 254). Examples of such collocations are *pay attention* and *lose weight*, where the constituent collocates have to co-occur to convey the intended meaning. In Arabic, the collocations *harb-un Daruws* "حرب ضروس" (fierce/destructive war) and *masqat ra?s* "مسقط رأس" (birthplace) are examples of such collocations (Al-Hafiz, 2004). The three aforementioned types of collocations will be used in this research to measure the rigidity level of collocates constituting the collocations found in the English and Arabic texts under study. Each collocation in such texts will be classified by this study’s participants as open, restricted, or bound.

As for the state of Arabic collocations, there is a general consensus among native Arabic teachers of English, as opposed to native Arabic teachers of Arabic, that Arabic collocation has been the Cinderella of the Arabic grammar teaching corpus (Faris & Sahu, 2013; Galal, 2015; Nofal, 2012). They often complain that Arabic specialists have not paid due attention to this linguistic topic. They emphasize the importance of this topic and urge Arabic scholars to address it as an important language area worthy of being researched in its own right. Nofal (2012), for example, maintains “there is a pressing need for descriptive studies of contemporary standard Arabic at various levels of language but especially the lexical, with particular attention to collocational usage” (p. 90). He puts Arabic collocations on an equal linguistic footing with English collocations. He finds similarities between English and Arabic collocations and provides examples from both languages where certain words often occur with other words thus: *qatiy3-un mina ?al-ganam* (flock of sheep) and *matar-un gaziir-un* (heavy rain).

Grimm (2009, p. 22) also laments the fact that Arabic collocation, as a topic, has not received its due share of importance and proposes a taxonomy of collocations in modern standard Arabic, classifying them from a phraseological point of view. She divides collocations into groups and subgroups according to their lexical constituents and semantic categorization. She writes, “What surprises us most is the limited amount of research on collocations that has been conducted within Arabic lexicology, let alone phraseology.” In the abstract of his study on lexical collocations, Izwaini (2015, p. 1) also argues that Arabic collocation has not been given enough attention by Arabic language specialists. He maintains that “Arabic has a wealth of lexical collocations that merits attention and research.” Like Grimm, Izwaini proposes a complex taxonomy of Arabic collocations, including types and subtypes of noun combinations, verb combinations, adjective combinations, and adverb combinations.

Galal (2015) also highlights that Arabic collocations have not received sufficient analytic attention. He argues that students’ proficiency in the use of collocations represents the last consequential step in language mastery, a point also made by Zaabalawi and Gould (2017). He assumes that collocation, as a language topic, is equally important in almost all languages. He states, “Due to the importance of language learning and practice, collocation dictionaries in different languages have come out to help learners overcome difficulties that face them” (p.18). He criticizes the Arabic translation of some English collocations in some collocation dictionaries such as Dar El-Ilm’s *Dictionary of Collocations*, compiled by Ghazala (2007), where several English collocations are translated into non-idiomatic Arabic combinations in spite of the existence of equivalent ready-made Arabic collocations.

The commonly-held belief among several translation specialists that each English collocation has an equivalent Arabic collocation has encouraged some translators to compose some erroneous Arabic collocational combinations, often as a result of literal translation. In this regard,

Grimm (2015, p. 28) states an example of a common, well-established Arabic collocation *lazib-a dawr-an* (play a role). This so-called Arabic collocation does not belong to the bulk of Arabic collocations. In Arabic verb *lazib-a* (play) does not collocate with the noun *dawr* (role) as Arabic *lazib-a* is normally used in contexts where it has the exclusive meaning of ‘do something for enjoyment.’ Therefore, it does not truly collocate with the Arabic noun *dawr*. This is one of several examples of nonexistent collocations often used in Arabic as a result of translators’ occasionally rendering English collocations literally into Arabic. Such translators are unaware that collocations, across languages, do not always have one-to-one correspondence with one another.

In terms of the process of translating collocations across languages such as from English into Arabic, Buhamid (2006) attributes the difficulty which language users encounter in translating English collocations into equivalent Arabic collocations to an administrative problem: the lack of English-Arabic collocation dictionaries. He does not ascribe such a difficulty to the possible lack of corresponding Arabic collocations. He writes “At the level of translation, collocation presents a major hurdle as the translator faces the arduous task of finding acceptable collocations in the target language” (p. 5). Similarly, Alqaed (2017, p. 128) attributes the difficulty which ESL translators face in translating English collocations into Arabic to a lack of specialized dictionaries. She states that “highlighting second language learners’ errors when translating English lexical collocations is due to inaccessible collocation dictionaries.” She apparently considers that English collocations have equivalent Arabic collocations. She writes “when it comes to translating these collocations, second language learners face a problem finding a suitable equivalent of collocations in the Target Language (TL).”

Even if collocations are often clumsily translated, the process of transforming a text from one language into another involves conveying the meaning of that text regardless of the particular language structures of the messages expressed in the text. In their book on meaning and translation, Malmkjar and Windle (2012) define translation as the act of transferring the meaning of language messages from one language to another. They concentrate solely on meaning and set no condition that the translation of a text should have similar language structures to those appearing in the original text. In fact, several collocational combinations in foreign languages such as English are rendered into non-collocational stretches of language in Arabic. The English collocation “make his bed”, for example, is simply translated into Arabic as *yurattib sarirah*, (tidy his bed), which is not normally considered a collocational combination in Arabic. McKeon and Radev (2000) share this view. They maintain that “one cannot assume that a concept expressed by way of a collocation in one language will use a collocation in another language” (p. 12).

In an English-Arabic translation assignment, Faris and Sahu (2013) tested 20 fourth-year students on their mastery of English and Arabic collocations at the University of Basrah. They found that 70% of these students had difficulty rendering English collocations into equivalent Arabic collocations. This seems to suggest again that such researchers assume the existence of one-to-one correspondence between English collocations and Arabic collocations. These same researchers even went so far as to claim that “Without collocations, (...) Arabic translation would be poorer, weaker, and less inspired than the original English” (p. 52).

In two separate studies on collocation errors made by MA translation students, Abdul-Fattah (2011) and Shammass (2013) viewed fluency in the language as a byproduct of foreign language learners’ mastery of collocations in the target language. They applied the idea of being proficient in the use of English collocations, which entails being fluent in the use of English (Lewis, 1997), to the idea of being proficient in the use of Arabic collocations. They, therefore,

assumed that having good command of collocations in English and Arabic results in the language learner's attaining a high level of lexical proficiency in either language.

In a further research study involving twenty 23-30 year-old Iraqi EFL students at a Malaysian university, Mahdi and Mohd Yasin (2015, p. 64) reported major problems faced by their students translating 15 English collocations into Arabic. They attributed such problems to the interference of the students' native language with the target language. The researchers finally concluded that "Collocations are very important in truly understanding a language as they reveal the naturalness and cohesiveness of the text."

The data analyzed in the present study make use of reading texts. Such language selections are viewed by several researchers as examples of language sources where collocational patterns naturally occur in context (Pellicer-Sanchez, 2015). Mohammadnejad (2018) confirms that reading has "a statistical significant effect on EFL learners' collocation learning" (p. 102).

In light of the current state of relevant literature, this study investigates the extent to which the concept of collocations in Arabic necessarily corresponds with its English equivalent construct. The present study focuses on two dimensions of language difference: frequency of use of collocations and their level of rigidity.

## METHODOLOGY

The present study answers two questions. First, do collocations in Arabic occur in ordinary discourse as frequently as they do in equivalent English linguistic contexts? Second, do Arabic collocations consist of words combined as rigidly as those constituting English collocations?

To answer the first question three English texts and three Arabic texts have been selected to serve to produce data for this study (see [Appendices I, II, and III](#)). Each English text is paired with an Arabic text; both address the same subject matter and are of similar length and level of complexity. Selecting texts on the basis of such criteria, particularly that related to language complexity, was thought to produce more reliable results. Later, the collocational expressions in each text were counted and the number of such expressions in each English text was compared with that of its Arabic counterpart. While the collocational expressions in the English texts were classified as either lexical or grammatical, those in the Arabic texts were simply referred to as "collocations" (*?al-mutalaazimaat ?al-lafZiya*) as the relevant Arabic literature combines both categories into one. The researcher selected the aforementioned texts because each dealt with general subject matter. To decide whether the linguistic collocational combinations found in each text, English or Arabic, were real collocations, the researcher sought the advice of native English teachers at the Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST) and native Arabic teachers at the Arab Open University (AOU), both in Kuwait. In pursuing this matter further, the researcher consulted some English and Arabic collocation dictionaries including *Oxford Collocations Dictionary for students of English* (2004) and *Al-Hafiz Arabic Collocations Dictionary* (Al-Hafiz, 2004).

As far as the second research question is concerned, *i.e.*, Do Arabic collocations consist of words combined as rigidly as those constituting English collocations? two questionnaires were devised, one distributed to 20 native English teachers and another to 20 native Arabic teachers. The first contained a list of all the collocations found in the English text (90 collocations) and the second listed all the collocations included in the Arabic text (36 collocations). Following an explanation of open, restricted, and bound collocations with examples, teachers/participants were

invited to classify each collocation listed as open, restricted, or bound (see [Appendices I, II and III](#)). An almost 90% consensus on the classification of these collocations was found.

## RESULTS

Table 1 below provides details pertaining to the three English texts and three Arabic texts selected for this research. It demonstrates the total number of words and the total number of collocations found in each. Table 1 also indicates that more collocations are used in the three English texts than in their Arabic counterparts. While the first, second, and third English texts contain 36 collocations out of 806 words, 34 collocations out of 708 words, and 20 collocations out of 538 words, respectively, the first, second and third Arabic texts include 17 collocations out of 808 words, 11 collocations out of 730 words, and 8 collocations out of 536 words, respectively. Because the samples were sufficiently large, a Z-test on the data derived from the three pairs of texts was conducted and revealed that collocations occur in English discourse more frequently than in Arabic discourse (p-values are 0.005, 0.000, and 0.012, respectively). This answers the first question of the research: Do collocations in Arabic occur in ordinary discourse as frequently as they do in equivalent English linguistic contexts?

**Table 1.** Total Number of Words and Collocations in each Text

Texts	English text one (Goodbye to the Greatest)	Arabic text one العالم يستعد لوداع □ حمد علي كلاي	English text two (Professionalism in the Workplace)	Arabic text two الاحترافية في العمل	English text three (An Apple a Day)	Arabic text three الطب الوقائي
No of words	806	808	708	730	538	536
No of collocations	36	17	34	11	20	8
<b>Z-test</b>						
Percentage	0.045	0.021	0.048	0.015	0.039	0.015
P-value	0.005		0.000		0.012	

Table 2 below provides data concerning the proportion of Arabic collocations to English collocations in the three pairs of texts under study. Such proportions provide prima facie evidence that, in general, collocations in English discourse, as mentioned earlier, are far more frequent than those in Arabic discourse.

**Table 2.** Proportion of Arabic Collocations to English Collocations

	English texts	Arabic texts	P-value
Total no of words	2052	2074	0.000
Total no of collocations	90	36	
Proportions	0.044	0.017	

The above table further illustrates that, out of a total of 2052 words in the three English texts, 90 collocations were found with a proportion of 0.044. In the three Arabic texts, however, out of a total of 2074 words, only 36 collocations were found with a proportion of 0.017. A Z-test revealed that the proportion of collocations in the English texts exceeds the proportion of those in the Arabic texts (p-value = 0.000).

Moreover, as is clear in Tables 3 and 4 below, more collocations in the three English texts are classified as bound (72%) than restricted (27%) or open (1%). The same applies to the three Arabic texts where bound collocations comprised 56%, restricted collocations 33% and open collocations 11%. Furthermore, a closer look at the two mentioned tables clearly shows that bound collocations in the three English texts (72%) constitute a higher percentage than those in the Arabic texts (56%). A Z-test comparing two independent proportions was performed on the three categories of bound, restricted, and open collocations for both sets of texts, English and Arabic (see Table 5 below). The result revealed that English has more bound collocations than Arabic at a 10% level of significance, while the other two categories, restricted and open, showed no significant difference between English and Arabic. Tables 3 and 4 provide prima facie evidence that the structure of collocations in English is in general much more rigid than that in Arabic. In other words, Arabic discourse allows much more freedom in forming its collocations than English discourse where collocations adopt stricter patterns. This answers the second research question, do Arabic collocations consist of words combined as rigidly as those constituting English collocations?

**Table 3.** Number of Open, Restricted and Bound Collocations in English Texts

	English text one (Goodbye to the Greatest)	English text two (Professionalism in the Workplace)	English text three (An Apple a Day)	Total	Percentage
No of collocations	36	34	20	90	
Bound collocations	27	24	14	65	72
Restricted collocations	8	10	6	24	27
Open collocations	1	0	0	1	1

**Table 4.** Number of Open, Restricted and Bound Collocations in Arabic Texts

	Arabic text one العالم يستعد لوداع □ حمد علي كلاي	Arabic text two الاحترافية في العمل	Arabic text three الوقائي الطبيب	Total	Percentage
No of collocations	17	11	8	36	
Bound collocations	9	7	4	20	56
Restricted collocations	5	3	4	12	33
Open collocations	3	1	0	4	11

**Table 5.** Z-Test Comparing Two Independent Proportions

Bound collocations		Restricted collocations		Open collocations	
English	Arabic	English	Arabic	English	Arabic
0.719	0.553	0.272	0.356	0.009	0.085
P-value = 0.066*		P-value = 0.390		P-value = 0.263	

\* Indicates difference is significant at 10% level

## DISCUSSION

As noted in the literature review, some researchers highlighted the importance of collocations in Arabic and appealed to Arabic linguists to do justice to collocations as a major language topic worthy of being researched in its own right (Faris & Sahu, 2013; Galal, 2015; Grimm, 2009; Izwaini, 2015; Nofal, 2012). Other linguists complained about the rarity of dictionaries on Arabic collocations and, therefore, urged language specialists to compile more dictionaries which focus on this element of language (Alqaed, 2017; Buhamid, 2006). Others still conducted an analysis of collocational errors made by native Arabic learners of English in translation assignments and attributed such errors to language transfer (Faris & Sahu, 2013; Mahdi & Mohd Yasin, 2015). A further group of scholars identified the present state of Arabic collocations as a neglected language area and, therefore, proposed a taxonomy of collocations in modern standard Arabic (Grimm, 2009; Izwaini, 2015).

The present study, however, approached collocations from a different language perspective. Its originality lies in its exclusive concern of the relative importance of collocations in Arabic itself. It specifically compares the frequency and flexibility of collocations in Arabic

discourse with the frequency and flexibility of those in English discourse. The findings have shown that Arabic collocations appear much less frequently in natural discourse and have a more flexible structure than English collocations. In other words, apart from their regular occurrence in natural discourse, collocations in English are much more rigid in their lexical combination than those in Arabic. This rigidity has largely contributed to rendering them hard to master by native Arabic learners of English.

The aforementioned findings, therefore, urge EFL specialists teaching English to Arabic native learners not to take it for granted that their students will easily recognize English collocations in natural language texts. Rather, they should promote student awareness of this language area which, though rarely taught in Arabic, has received special attention in English (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2007; Nation, 2001).

Pedagogically, Schmitt (2000) states that collocation “is an advanced type of vocabulary knowledge that is difficult to know how to teach” (p. 89). EFL specialists do not agree on one strategy of how to teach collocations. They are generally divided into two groups. There are those who recommend the use of grammatical exercises such as those with fill-in-the-blank and match-the-two word types (Adelian, Nemati & Fumani, 2015; Fernandez & Schmitt, 2015). They maintain that such a strategy assists learners in gaining the language skills which enable them to use such language patterns proficiently. On the other hand, other EFL experts advocate teaching collocations in reading texts. They claim that such texts demonstrate how these language formulae are used in context and, thus, enhance EFL learners’ productive skills in using these language patterns competently (Kennedy, 2003, Mohammadnejad, 2018; Pellicer-Sanchez, 2015). Similarly, Zaabalawi and Gould (2017) report that English collocations can most successfully be taught through reading texts rather than through conventional exercises such as those with fill-in-the-gap formats as these assignments encourage learners to simply guess the answer. Zaabalawi and Gould reiterate that reading texts “compared with use of conventional (structured) exercises (...) have special utility in promoting natural and spontaneous use of collocations” (p. 22). Consequently, encouraging learners to study collocations in the context of textual passages will develop greater ability for learners to recognize and use such language combinations in natural discourse.

No matter how much EFL practitioners may disagree on which techniques are best to use in teaching English collocations, there is a general consensus amongst them that English collocations should be taught as complete chunks rather than as language formulae composed of individual words (Barfield, 2009; Ellis, 2003; Gyllstad, 2007; Nation & Meara, 2002). For instance, students should learn *quick feet*, not *quick + feet*, *timely fashion* not *timely + fashion*, *make mistakes* not *make + mistakes*, *take steps* not *take + steps*, *hold summits*, not *hold + summits*, *prevent illness*, not *prevent + illness*, *implement plans*, not *implement + plans*, *conduct studies* not *conduct + studies* (see the data in the [Appendices](#)). Nation (2001) advocates that learning a language in the form of chunks is advantageous to EFL learners as it assists them in minimizing the amount of time required to master the language, facilitates language communication and enhances retention of collocations. Altuwairesh (2016) shares this pedagogical view stating that “if language instructors wish English as a foreign language (EFL) learners to attain native-like proficiency, they should be trained on the use of chunks of language and equipped with a large number of them” (p. 13).

## CONCLUSION

In view of the frequent occurrence of collocations in English discourse, several scholars emphasize the fact that mastering collocations in English would enable EFL learners to produce natural, native speaker-like messages (Benson, Benson, & Ilson, 1997; Ellis, 1997; McCarthy & O'Dell, 2007). Hence, these scholars appeal for raising EFL learners' awareness of the existence of such language formulae and counsel EFL teachers to offer their students adequate practice that can secure their students' proficient use of these language combinations. Zaalalawi and Gould (2017) emphasize the role of the teaching material in improving EFL learners' use of English collocations. They maintain that "drawing attention to such structures should be a component of EFL successful language teaching plans if – as is mostly the objective - learners are to attain natural, native speaker-like command of English" (p. 12).

It can be concluded from the findings of this study that since collocations in Arabic are not used as frequently and are not patterned as rigidly as those in English, it is natural for several native Arabic learners of English not to appreciate mastery of such structures. They, therefore, make numerous mistakes in the use of English collocations as these learners are often, as stated earlier, unaware that such structures even exist in English or have certain patterns that they simply have to commit to memory (Abdul Ridha & Al-Riyadhi, 2011; El-Dakhs, 2015). In several translation assignments, native Arabic learners of English, as a result, indulge in literally rendering Arabic messages into English with no attempt to use collocational structures when it sounds more natural to use them. This can explain why native Arabic learners of English struggle with the use of English collocations in their language communication (Abdul-Fattah, 2011; Shamma, 2013).

In the context of teaching English to native Arabic learners of English, therefore, EFL teachers are advised to draw their students' attention to this technical language area and train them in the use of such language combinations if natural, native speaker-like competence is to be gained.

**Rafe Zaalalawi** earned his PhD in applied linguistics from the University of East Anglia in Britain, 1992. As a Fulbright scholar, he conducted post-doctoral research in the United States in 1999. Currently, he lectures on translation and vocabulary learning strategies at Gulf University for Science and Technology in Kuwait.

**Email:** [Zaalalawi.r@gust.edu.kw](mailto:Zaalalawi.r@gust.edu.kw)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to express my deep gratitude to my friend and former colleague, Professor Anthony M. Gould from Laval University in Canada, for his invaluable comments on early drafts of the article.

## APPENDICES

- I. Goodbye to the Greatest
- II. Professionalism in the Workplace
- III. An Apple a Day
- IV. Chart of Arabic Transcription Symbols

### REFERENCES

- Abdul-Fattah, H. (2011). Translatability of collocations: A constant challenge to EFL learners. *Jordan Journal of Educational sciences*, 7(2), 209-219.
- Abdul Ridha, N. S., & Al-Riyahi, A. A. (2011). Lexical collocational errors in the writings of Iraqi EFL learners. University of Basrah, *Journal of the College of Arts* (58), 24-51.
- Adelian, M., Nemati, A., & Fumani, M. R. (2015). The effect of Iranian advanced EFL learners' knowledge of collocation on their writing ability. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 5(5), 974-980.
- Aisenstadt, E. (1979). Collocability Restrictions in Dictionaries. In R. K. K. Hartmann (Ed.), *Dictionaries and their Uses*. Exeter: University of Exeter, 71-74.
- Al-zaalam yastazid li-wadaaz Muhammad Ali Klay. (2016). Retrieved from <https://www.annahar.com/article/399182>
- Al-Hafiz, T. (2004). *Al-Hafiz Arabic Collocations Dictionary*. Beirut: Librairie du Liban.
- Alqaed, M. A. (2017). Perceptions on L2 lexical collocation with a focus on English-Arabic. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 8(6), 128-133.
- Al-Tib al-wiqaa?ii. (2014). Retrieved from <http://www.feedo.net/Prevention/PreventiveCare/PreventiveMedicine.htm>
- Altuwairesh, N. (2016). Teaching collocations in EFL classroom. *Arab World English Journal*, 7(4), 13-20.
- An apple a day. (2009, March 31). Retrieved from Achieve3000.com
- Bahumaid, S. (2006). Collocation in English-Arabic translation. *Babel*, 52(2) 133-152.
- Barfield, A. (2009). Exploring productive L2 collocation knowledge. In T. Fitzpatrick, & A. Barfield (Eds.), *Lexical processing in language learners: Papers and perspectives in honour of Paul Meara* (pp. 95-110). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Benson, M., Benson, E., & Ilson, R. (1986). *Lexicographic description of English*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Benson, M., Benson, E., & Ilson, R. (1997). *The BBI Dictionary of English Word Combinations*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Campbell, S. (1998). *Translation into the second language*. London and New York: Longman.
- Carter, R. (1987). *Vocabulary: Applied linguistic perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- Cowie, A.P. (1978). The place of illustrative material and collocations in the design of a learner's dictionary. In P. Strevens (Ed.), *In Honour of A.S. Hornby* (pp. 127-139). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cowie, A. P. (1981). The treatment of collocations and idioms in learners' dictionaries. *Applied Linguistics*, 2(3), 223-235.
- Cowie, A.P., Mackin, R., & McCraig, I. R. (1983). *Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English*, 2. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Darwish, S. (2014, October 26). Al-ihiraafiya fi al-amal. Retrieved from <https://tinyurl.com/y8l7pmb3>

- El-Dakhs, D. (2015). The lexical collocational competence of Arab undergraduate EFL learners. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 5(5), 60-73.
- Ellis, R. (1997). *Understanding second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Ellis, N. C. (2003). Constructions, chunking and connectionism: The emergence of second language structure (pp. 63-101). In C. J. Doughty & M. H. Long (Eds.). *The handbook of second language acquisition*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Fernandez, B. G., & Schmitt, N. (2015). How much collocation knowledge do L2 learners have. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 166(1), 194-126.
- Faris, A. A. & Sahu, R. (2013). The translation of collocations into Arabic: Problems and solutions. University of Basrah, *Journal of the College of Arts* 64, 51-66.
- Galal, M. M. (2015). Lost in collocation: When Arabic collocation dictionaries lack collocations. *English Language and Literature Studies*, 5(2), 18-38.
- Ghazala, H. (2007). *Dar El-ilm's Dictionary of Collocations (English-Arabic)*. Beirut: Dar El-ilm.
- Goodbye to the greatest. (2016, July 14). Retrieved from Achieve3000.com
- Grimm, P. S. (2009). Collocation in modern standard Arabic revisited. *Zeitschrift für Arabische Linguistik*, 51, 22-41.
- Gyllstad, H. (2007). *Testing English collocations: Developing receptive tests for use with advanced Swedish learners*. Lund: Lund University.
- Hassan, T. (1973). *Al-Lughatu Al-Arabiya–Ma'naha wa-Mabnaha*. Al-Hay'a Al-Misriya Al-Amma Lil-Kitab, Cairo.
- Husni, R., & Newman, D. (2015). *Arabic-English-Arabic translation: Issues and strategies*. New York: Routledge.
- Izwaini, S. (2015). Patterns of lexical collocations in Arabic. *Zeitschrift für Arabische Linguistik*, 61, 72-100.
- Jackson, H. (2007). *Key terms in linguistics*. London: Continuum.
- Kennedy, G. (2012). Amplifier collocations in the British national corpus: Implications for English Language Teaching. *Tesol Quarterly*, 37(3), 467-487.
- Lewis, M. (1997). *The lexical approach: The state of ELT and a way forward*. London: Language Teaching Publications.
- Lewis, M. (2000). *Teaching collocation: Further developments in the lexical approach*. London: Language Teaching Publications.
- Malmkjar, K., & Windle, K. (2012). *The Oxford handbook of translation studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mahdi, A. M., & Mohd Yasin, M. S. (2015). Translating collocations from English to Arabic among Iraqi EFL learners. *English Language and Literature Studies*, 5(3), 57-65.
- McCarthy, M., & O'Dell, F. (2007). *English collocations in use*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McKeon, K., & Radev, D. R. (2000). Collocations. In Dale, R., Moisl, H., & Somers, H., (Eds.): *A handbook of natural language processing* (pp. 507-524). New York.
- Mohammadnejad, L. (2018). The effect of reading short stories on learning English collocations among pre-intermediate EFL learners. *Journal of Sociological Research*, 9(1), 102-116.
- Nation, I. S. P. (2001). *Learning vocabulary in another language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nation, I. S. P., & Meara, P. (2002). Vocabulary. In N. Schmitt (Ed.). *An introduction to applied linguistics* (pp. 35-54). London: Arnold.

- Nemat Tabrizi, A. R., & Akhavan Saber, M. (2016). The effect of critical reading strategies on EFL learners' recall and retention of collocations. *International Journal of Education & Literacy Studies*, 4(4), 30-37.
- Nofal, H. N. (2012). Collocations in English and Arabic: A comparative study. *English Language and Literature Studies*, 2(3), 75-93.
- Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English*. (2004). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pellicer-Sanchez, A. (2015). Learning L2 collocations incidentally from reading. *Language Teaching Research*, 21(3), 381-402.
- Professionalism in the workplace. (2015). Retrieved from Achieve3000.com
- Schmitt, N. (2000). *Vocabulary in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shammas, N. (2013). Collocations in English: Comprehension and use by MA students at Arab Universities. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 3(9), 107-122.
- Swan, M. (2015). *Practical English Usage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Soori, H., & Awab, S. (2016). Verb noun collocations in Arabic and their patterns in lexicography. *Jumal Sultan Alauddin Sulaiman Shah (JSASS)*, 2(2), 14-27.
- Zaabalawi, R. S. & Gould, A. M. (2017). English collocations: A novel approach to teaching the language's last bastion. *Elsevier, Ampersand*, 4, 21-29.