

3 **Abstract**

4 The current study investigates competence of EFL majors in Najran University,  
5 Saudi Arabia to translate into Arabic simple English collocations. The study assumes  
6 the learners are not fully aware of how to translate collocations into Arabic.

7 For this purpose, a sample of fourth level EFL learners were asked to translate  
8 some sentences, each of which contained an English collocation. The sentences  
9 were carefully designed to meet the average level and the few numbers of  
10 students in the rural Province of Sharorah. The responses were thoroughly  
11 analyzed for receptive and translational errors as well as for the causes behind  
12 them.

13 The overall findings are not entirely satisfactory since they demonstrate a striking  
14 challenge in translating collocations due to collocational weakness at both the  
15 receptive and production levels, displaying numerous examples of L1 negative  
16 transfer. The test has revealed four types of translation errors:

17 1. Wrong Translation 2. Violation of Arabic collocation 3. Inaccuracy 4. Excessive  
18 wording.

19 In light of the evaluation of the participants' collocational skills, the study also  
20 makes recommendations for ways to improve the current situation.

21  
22 **Keywords:** English-Arabic translation. collocational competence, lexical collocation,  
23 receptive knowledge, Saudi EFL.

## 34 1. Introduction

35 A collocation in simple words is the habitual association between words. (Lewis,  
36 1997, p. 44) defines it as “combinations of words which occur naturally with greater  
37 than random frequency”. Regarding the interrelation of collocations with native  
38 speakers, (Aghbar, 1990) states that: “A collocation, in its simplest definition,  
39 consists of two words which are linked together in the memory of native speakers  
40 and occur together with some frequency in both written and oral discourse.” For  
41 example, (foot the bill) and (catch a cold) are two commonly used collocations.

42 One of the prominent features of collocations is the consistency and coherence of  
43 their components; i.e., the combinations (fast food) and (quick meal) are considered  
44 collocations because the adjectives (fast and quick), although similar in meaning,  
45 they cannot be used interchangeably.

46 Collocations, according to Many linguists and researchers, are stored in the minds  
47 or memories of native speakers. (Lewis, 2000; Nation, 2001) believed that knowing  
48 a word includes knowing its collocations, therefore, many of those scholars think  
49 that only by using collocations, one can distinguish between native speakers and  
50 foreign language learners, see (Aston, 1995; Fillmore, 1979; Kjellmer, 1991; Pawley  
51 & Syder, 1983) Failure to use accurately collocations for EFL learners is a major  
52 indicator of foreignness (McArthur, 1992; McCarthy, 1990; Nattinger, 1980; Wu,  
53 1996, cited in Jeng-yih Tim Hsu, Chu-yao Chiu, 2008). In this regard,  
54 (Newmark 1981/1988) states:

55 He [the translator] will be 'caught' every time, not by his grammar, which is  
56 probably suspiciously 'better' than an educated native's, not by his vocabulary,  
57 which may well be wider, but by his unacceptable or improbable collocations.

58 There is a general consensus among scholars that collocational competence is a key  
59 element to acquire fluency. (Nation, 2001; Schmitt, 2000; Sung, 2003) state that a  
60 good control of collocations can help language learners to speak more  
61 fluently. (Lewis, 2000; Richards & Rogers, 2001) asserts that collocational  
62 competence is an indispensable component in the process of second/foreign  
63 language acquisition, and that's true, as collocations make the speech natural and  
64 colorful because of their frequent occurrence in discourse. Cited in (El-Dakhs,  
65 2015), Hill estimated their occurrence at 70% of what native speakers say, hear,  
66 read or write.

67 We strongly believe that knowledge of collocations, among knowledge of other  
68 multi-word expressions, can significantly enhance the four skills altogether of  
69 EFL/ESL learners.

70

## 71 2. Translating English collocations into Arabic

72

73 Collocational awareness is one of the problematic areas for EFL learners, both at  
74 the at the receptive and translational levels. Translating collocations is not an easy  
75 task as it evolves around the idea of finding the exact TL equivalence.

76 It's a well-known fact that every language has its own inventory of different types  
77 of fixed expressions, among which are collocations. From Arabic, we may come  
78 across collocations such as:

مرضوح عضال، سيل عارم، جمع غفير، صديق حميم، فشل ذريع، أذان صاغية، جبال شاهقة، ردمفحم، جيش  
عرموم، حرب ضروس، عدو لدود، أحمر قان، اصفر فاقع، أبيض ناصع، أخضر يانع.

81 Therefore, it stands to logic, that a good translator should be well-informed of the  
82 collocational inventory of both SL and TL languages, while being able of correctly  
83 choosing identical or equivalent collocations from the target language that match  
84 those in the source language.

85 In Arabic, there is a considerable number of calqued collocations. The following  
86 examples are provided by (Aldeibani, 2014):

87

يلتقط (يأخذ) صورة take a photo  
كذبة بيضاء a white lie  
اللمسات الأخيرة the finishing touches  
بداية واعدة a promising start  
يعلق آمالاً على attach hopes on  
على كل لسان on everyone's lips  
شر لابد منه necessary evil  
نصف المعركة half the battle

96

97 Many scholars acknowledged the challenge of translating prefabricated chunks  
98 such as collocations and idioms. The problem has a twofold character:

99 The first lies in the difficulty of understanding these combinations due to their  
100 arbitrary metaphorical nature.

101 The second one is in rendering them properly, choosing the optimal equivalent  
102 from the target language.

103 A good illustration of the twofold problem can be noticed in the way, how one  
104 word collocates with different words to yield unpredictable meaning(s). A good  
105 example was mentioned by (Aldaibani, 2006) about the collocations of the verb  
106 (hold):

107

108 hold his tongue يمسك لسانه

109 hold a meeting يعقد اجتماعاً

110 hold an election يجري انتخابات

111 the room holds 100 persons. تتسع الغرفة لمئة شخص

112 hold one's ground. يتشبَّث بموقفه

113 hold something under control. يضعه تحت المراقبة

114 hold somebody in high esteem. يكن له تقديراً عالياً

115 hold strange opinions. يحمل أفكاراً غريبة

116 hold the line. يوقف في الانتظار على الهاتف

117 hold a firm/ a tight grip on يحكم قبضته على

118 hold an inquiry into an accident. يفتح تحقيقاً في الحادث

119 hold the position of يشغل منصباً

120

121 This variability of collocations adds to the difficulty of learning and translating  
122 collocations by EFL learners, (Rabeh, 2009). The huge number of collocations-that  
123 estimates at 70% of what native speakers say, hear, read or write-create a real  
124 obstacle for EFL learners to comprehend and translate them into their languages.

125 Nevertheless, translating collocation into Arabic can be an easy and enjoyable task,  
126 provided the translator is well-conversant with the collocations in both languages  
127 as well as being highly cautious about the notion of equivalency.

128 On the other hand, translating collocations becomes particularly difficult if  
129 equivalents or semi equivalents do not exist in the target language. In this case, the  
130 translator may have either to paraphrase the function of the collocation in the most  
131 acceptable way or, if possible, resort to direct or literal translation, such as:

132 1. Borrowing 2. Calque 3. Literal translation.  
133 Despite the fact that direct translation requires the highest level of caution, as the  
134 translated phrase ought to be clearly understood and acceptable in the target  
135 language from the linguistic and cultural points of view, however, this method pays  
136 off when new colorful collocations are added to the repertoire of the language.  
137 For many years, this method used to have been unfairly disapproved of by the  
138 conservatives, thus, creating a state of stagnation. Nowadays, direct translations can  
139 be observed more often, thus, breaking the ice of monotony that has prevailed for  
140 many years.  
141 Arabic seems now more tolerant and more dynamic, keeping pace with the rapid  
142 technological developments and intercultural exchanges. Apparently, the  
143 tolerance might be due to some kind of nostalgia for the past, when Arabic used to  
144 have been open to other languages during its golden age, when translators  
145 were actively encouraged and generously paid.

146 Some calqued collocations have already been mentioned above and, here are some  
147 more:

148 Behind closed doors خلف الأبواب المغلقة

149 to play a role يلعب دوراً في

150 to cover the news الأخبار يغطي

151 conspiracy theory نظرية المؤامرة

152 brainstorming عصف ذهني

153

## 154 2. Purpose and questions of the Study

155 The purpose of this study is to explore knowledge of English collocations among  
156 EFL majors, studying in the Faculty of Science and Arts in Najran University,  
157 Sharorah, K.S.A. The study makes use of a questionnaire, containing 12 sentences,  
158 each contains one collocation. The responses then were analyzed for receptive and  
159 translational errors.

160 This study will also attempt to find out the causes behind students' errors while  
161 translating collocations. Therefore, it will attempt to answer the questions about:

162 1. The EFL competence in comprehending English collocations?

163 2. The EFL competence in translating English collocations into Arabic, and the

164 reasons behind their common errors, if there are any?

165

### 166 3. Significance of the Study

167 Although there is a considerable number of studies concerning collocational  
168 competence of EFL learners, none of them has been conducted in the Faculty of  
169 Science and Arts in Sharorah since its establishment 17 years ago.

170 Therefore, the current study will explore and describe the collocational  
171 competence of EFL learners, especially that collocational weakness has been  
172 noticed at both the receptive and production levels. The outcome of this study will  
173 provide an assessment of the participants' collocational competence and suggest  
174 solutions to straighten out the situation.

175

### 176 4. Literature Review

177 The term 'collocation' was firstly introduced by Palmer (1938) in his dictionary:  
178 "A Grammar of English Words". Later, Firth's (1957) as cited in El-Dakhs (2015),  
179 defines it as "the company that words keep", Cruse's (1986) "sequences of lexical  
180 items, which habitually co-occur," (p. 40), McCarthy's (1990) "a marriage contract  
181 between words," (p. 12) and Woolard's (2000) "the co-occurrence of words which  
182 are statistically much more likely to appear together than random chance  
183 suggests," (p. 29).

184 The issue of collocation has attracted the attention of many researchers from the  
185 Arab world, such as, El-Dakhs (2015), Farrokh (2012), (Miqdad, 2012), (Yunus &  
186 Awab, 2011), Alsakran (2011) Noor & Adubaib (2011), Abdul Ridha & Al-Riyahi  
187 (2011), Brashi (2009), Shehata (2008) and many others.

188 Arab researchers investigated the collocational competence of EFL Majors from the  
189 productive and receptive prospects. There have also been some contrastive studies  
190 between the collocations of English and Arabic, as well as some studies in  
191 translation of collocations between the two languages.

192 One of the recent studies on the strategies adopted by EFL majors in translating  
193 collocations was conducted by (Habtoor, Al-Swaidan, 2019). Forty female EFL  
194 learners from the English Department in Najran University were asked to translate  
195 English collocations into Arabic. The results show that the participants' knowledge  
196 of collocations was unsatisfactory and below the expected.

197 In Majmaah University, K.S.A(Sana Abdelhai, Ghada Ahmed,2017) also researched  
198 the problem of translating English collocations into Arabic.Twenty Saudi EFL  
199 students participated in the study. All of them were in their fourth year.

200 The outcome of the study showed that the students were incompetent as their  
201 translation of English collocations into Arabic was poor and unnatural. The  
202 researchers suggested raising students' awareness of collocations by acquainting  
203 them with the strategies of translating them into Arabic.

204 (Ali Abdul Hameed Faris, Rasha Ali Sahu, 2013) attempted to explore translation  
205 competence of Iraqi EFL students in the College of Education at the University of  
206 Basrah. The study revealed that 70% of the participants face difficulties in  
207 translating English collocations into Arabic. The study also attempted to find out  
208 the causes behind the students' errors, suggesting some solutions.

#### 209 **4.1 classification of collocations**

210 Regarding the classification of collocations, the BBI Combinatory Dictionary of  
211 English, cited in Begagić (2014),classifies them into 8 types of grammatical and 7  
212 types of lexical collocations:

##### 213 **4.1.1 Grammatical collocations:**

214 Grammatical collocations consist of an open class word in addition to a  
215 preposition, an infinitive or a clause (e.g., noun + preposition, noun + to infinitive &  
216 adjective + that clause). The following examples illustrate this point:

- 217 1. noun + preposition e.g. blockade against, apathy towards
- 218 2. noun + to-infinitive e.g. He was a fool to do it.
- 219 3. noun + that-clause e.g. We reached an agreement that she would join ourteam.
- 220 4. preposition + noun e.g. by accident, in agony
- 221 5. adjective + preposition e.g. fond of children, hungry for news
- 222 6. adjective + to-infinitive e.g. it was necessary to work, it's nice to be here
- 223 7. adjective + that-clause e.g. she was afraid that she would fail
- 224 8. different patterns in English:  
225 verb + to-infinitive e.g. they began to speak  
226 verb + bare infinitive e.g. we must work.

227

##### 228 **4.1.2 Lexical collocations:**

229 Lexical collocations consist of open class words (e.g., verb + noun, adverb +  
230 adjective and adverb + verb). The following examples illustrate this point:

- 231 1. verb (which means creation/action) + noun/pronoun/prepositional  
232 phrase e.g. come to an agreement, launch a missile
- 233 2. verb (which means eradication/cancellation) + noun e.g. reject an appeal,  
234 crush resistance
- 235 3. (adjective + noun) or (noun used in an attributive way + noun) e.g.  
236 strong tea, a crushing defeat, house arrest, land reform
- 237 4. noun + verb naming the activity which is performed by a designate of  
238 this noun e.g. bombs explode, bees sting
- 239 5. quantifier + noun e.g. a swarm of bees, a piece of advice
- 240 6. adverb + adjective e.g. hopelessly addicted, sound asleep
- 241 7. verb + adverb e.g. argue heatedly, apologize humbly

242

## 243 **5. Methodology**

### 244 **5.1 Instruments and procedure**

245 The research adopted an analytical descriptive approach as it's suitable for this type  
246 of study. For achieving the purpose of the research, the participants were asked to  
247 translate 12 sentences into Arabic, each contained one English lexical collocation.  
248 The sentences in the test were easy enough to suit the average level of the  
249 students in the rural Province of Sharorah. However, these sentences are carefully  
250 chosen to direct the participants' focus solely toward translating the collocations.  
251 It's worth mentioning that using dictionaries while conducting the test was strictly  
252 forbidden.

253

### 254 **5.2 Participants**

255 The study took place during the first semester of 2024. The participants in this  
256 study were 12 Saudi undergraduate male EFL majors aged between 20-24,  
257 studying in their final year at the English Department of Sharorah College of Science  
258 and Arts in Najran University, Saudi Arabia. The participants have studied  
259 translation<sup>1</sup> and translation<sup>2</sup> among many other subjects. All the

260 participants were Arabic native speakers, who had previously learned English at  
261 school for six years.

262

## 263 6. Data Analysis & Results

264 The results of the current study have shown that the participants' general  
265 understanding of collocations was unsatisfactory as many of them experienced  
266 vivid difficulty translating them into Arabic.

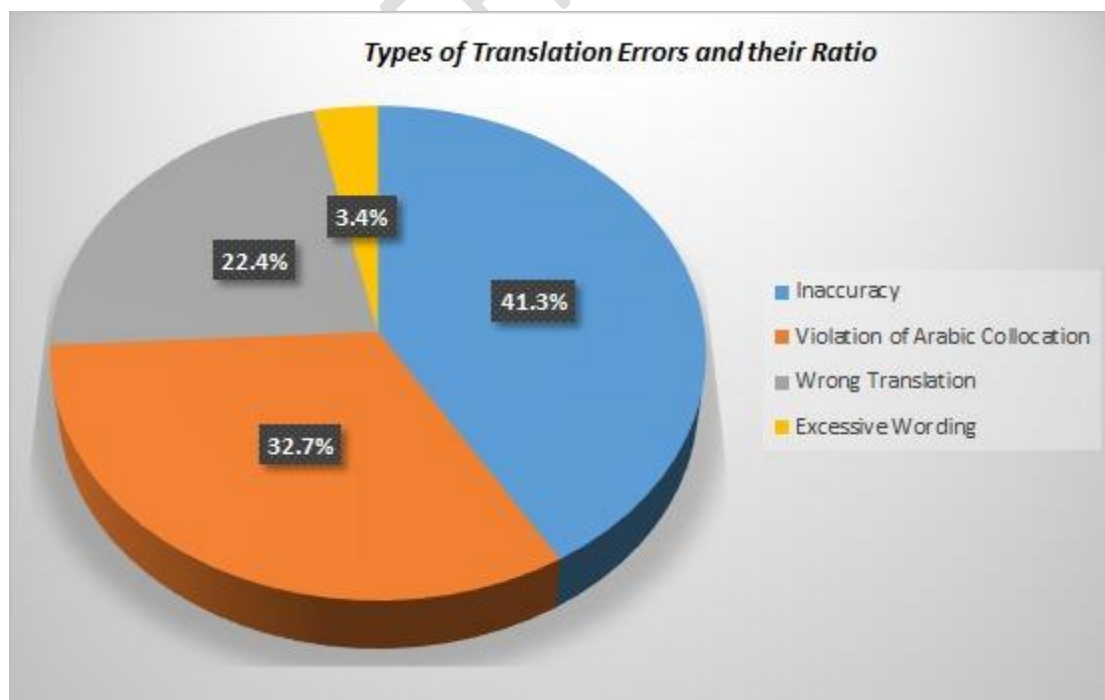
267 The results have shown two major classes of errors:

268 one that is purely related to students' incompetence in Arabic language. Although  
269 this class was not within the focus of our research, there were some crucial  
270 mistakes, such as, wrong order of Arabic VSO sentence by initiating them with the  
271 subject instead of the verb, which is alien and not acceptable to the Arabic. This L2  
272 negative transfer was very common among the responses.

273 The other type of error was in the translation of English collocations into Arabic,  
274 which is the focal point of this study.

275 The findings of the test have revealed diverse mistakes in translation, some of which  
276 were repeated by many respondents. These mistakes were classified into four  
277 classes as follows (see figure 1):

278



279

280 **1. Wrong Translation**

281 This class constitutes 22.4% of the four categories and characterized by the  
282 participants' failure to provide correct translation of the collocations. This is due to  
283 negligence of the metaphoric aspect of collocations, as in:

284

285 **sentence 5:** The doctor took the temperature of the students.

286 This sentence was wrongly translated as:

287 \* The doctor took the students' instrument for measuring temperature  
288 (thermometer).

289 The doctor took the students' thermometer. أخذ الطبيب مقياس الحرارة الخاص بالطلاب.

290

291 **sentence 6.** The children returned home because they had run out of money.

292 The phrasal verb was contracted into the verb (run) and translated as:

293 (... because they were running لأنهم كانوا يركضون ...)

294

295 **sentence 9:** The students finished the test in a record time.

296 This collocation was randomly translated as follows:

297 a) in the appointed time في الوقت المحدد

298 b) in a suitable time في وقت مناسب

299 c) in a certain time في وقت معين

300

301 **sentence 12:** I don't like desk jobs.

302 This collocation was translated according to the order of Arabic:

303 (job desks طاولات العمل)

304

305 **2. Violation of Arabic collocation**

306 This type constitutes 32.7% of the four categories. In this class, although the  
307 respondents show vivid understanding of the meaning, the rendering yielded  
308 distorted Arabic collocation, where at least one of its components is synonymous,  
309 as in:

310

311

312

313 **sentence 1:** Ali made a lot of friends in Sharorah.

314 This collocation was translated:

315 كَوّن صداقات عمل صداقات instead of

316

317 **sentence 2.** The students took the bus to the university.

318 This collocation was translated:

319 استقلوا الحافلة أخذوا الباص instead of

320

321 **sentence 3.** The driver made an accident.

322 This collocation was translated:

323 وقع له حادث فعل حادثاً instead of

324

325 **sentence 8.** It rained heavily last night.

326 This collocation was translated:

327 مطرت بغزارة أمطرت بشدة instead of

328 Within this class we came across some translations, where **colloquial** words were  
329 used, which is not acceptable in written Arabic, as in:

330

331 **sentence 1.** Ali made a lot of friends in Sharorah.

332 كَوّن صداقات instead of كَوّن صداقات

333

334 **sentence 4.** The mechanic had a look at the bus.

335 ألقى نظرة instead of أخذ نظرة

336

337 **sentence 5.** The doctor took the temperature of the students.

338 قاس الحرارة instead of أخذ الحرارة

339

340 **sentence 6.** The children returned home because they had run out of money.

341 نفذت النقود instead of خلصت النقود

342

343

344

345

346 **3. Inaccuracy**

347 This class is the highest in number as it constitutes 41.3% of the four categories.  
348 It's characterized by obvious inaccurate translation of the collocations, making it  
349 unreliable, as in:

350

351 **sentence 1.** Ali made a lot of friends in Sharorah.

352 كَوّن صداقات لدى علي الكثير من الأصدقاء instead of

353

354 **sentence 3.** The driver made an accident.

355 وقع للسائق حادث instead of السائق صدم

356

357 **sentence 6.** The children returned home because they had run out of money.

358 نفذ مالهم instead of أفلسوا

359 لنفاذ المال instead of لفقدانهم المال

360 نفذ المال instead of أهدروا المال

361

362 **sentence 7.** Please, keep quite when I'm studying.

363 كن هادئاً instead of أبق صامتاً

364 Within this class there have been some spontaneous translations, as in:

365

366 **sentence 4.** The mechanic had a look at the bus.

367 ألقى نظرة حرص على معاينة

368 ألقى نظرة فحص الميكانيكي

369 ألقى نظرة توجّب على الميكانيكي

370

371 **sentence 11.** Hasan is experienced in mathematics.

372 لديه خبرة عبقرى instead of

373 لديه خبرة خبير instead of

374

375 **4. Excessive wording**

376 This class is the lowest in number. It constitutes 3.4% among the other 3 classes. In  
377 this type, the participants added some unnecessary words to the translation, as in:

378

379 **sentence 9:**The students finished the test in a record time.

380 أنهى الطلاب instead of قام الطلاب بالإنهاء من ...

381

## 382 7. Conclusions, recommendations and pedagogical implications

383

384 The data analysis of this study has revealed four classes of translation errors. This is  
385 ample to conclude that EFL majors in Najran University do experience difficulty,  
386 both in comprehending and in translating collocations into Arabic.

387 This seems a little odd, given that the learners are in their final year and, having  
388 studied the subjects (translation 1 and Translation 2) along with vocabulary building  
389 and other subjects, let alone that the collocations used in this test were easy.

390 In light of the results, we highly recommend checking the efficiency of the syllabus  
391 specifications, textbooks and the methods used in teaching translation and  
392 vocabulary building.

393 We also recommend adopting up-to-date textbooks in vocabulary building that  
394 attach special importance to teaching collocations and prefabricated chunks. Also,  
395 students are to be encouraged to extensively read in English, for reading is an  
396 essential input tool for boosting their vocabulary arsenal.

397 With regard to translation, the participants demonstrated unequivocal difficulty,  
398 showing instances of L1 negative transfer that often ends up with distorted Arabic  
399 collocations, or at least demonstrating noticeable weakness in Arabic, thus, raising  
400 a daring question about their real efficiency in Arabic.

401 Finally, students should be regularly exposed to translating metaphorical  
402 expressions such as collocations, idioms and prefabricated chunks.

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