The Difficulty of Translating Collocations from Arabic into English Encountered by a Sample of Arab Students

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ABSTRACT
The present study aimed at exploring the difficulty that was encountered by a sample of Saudi undergraduate students when they translated collocations from Arabic into English. The researchers attempted to identify the reasons behind such a difficulty and find practical solutions to this difficulty. They followed an experimental descriptive method in the study. They also designed a quiz on collocations and administered it to the students as part of the requirements of a course the students were taking at that time. The quiz was given to 50 Saudi undergraduate students at the Department of English at Teachers College of King Saud University in the second semester of the academic year 20015. The quiz consisted of 15 Arabic sentences which apparently included collocations. The research data and findings revealed that the majority of the students could not translate collocations correctly because they adopted literal translation, used bilingual dictionaries and had very little knowledge of the concept of collocations in both languages. To help Arab students overcome this enormous difficulty, the researchers offered some recommendations and suggestions at the end of their study.

Keywords: translation, collocations, literal translation, English-Arabic translation

Introduction
Translation can be viewed as a channel through which both ideas and cultures are exchanged (Hatem and Mason, 1990). Accordingly, translators should be familiar with both the linguistic and cultural aspects of the language from which they translate and the language into which they translate as well. In addition, translation into the first language allows the translator to draw on an in-depth knowledge of the various aspects of his or her culture, because texts are normally coloured with cultural elements such as references to culture-specific items and notions, as well as culturally oriented linguistic features, such as idioms, proverbs, metaphors, swear words and collocations (Newmark, 1988; Bassnett, 1980; Shuttelmortls and Cowie;1997; Ghazala, 2001; Dickins, et al, 2002). The present study tackles the difficulty of translating one cultural element from Arabic into English for a sample of Saudi students at the Department of English at Teachers College of King Saud University. This cultural feature is collocation. There have been some studies on the difficulty of translating collocations from Arabic into English and vice versa (Farghal and Obeidat, 1995; Hussein, 1997; Rabeh, 2009-2010; Boussalia, 2010; Dweik and Abu

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Shakra, 2010 and Shammas, 2013). From the English translations produced by the sample of the current study, 50 Saudi students majoring in English, it was clear that the translation of Arabic collocations into English was extremely difficult and the overwhelming majority followed literal translation after relying mainly on bilingual dictionaries. Accordingly, the present paper will offer some practical and important solutions or recommendations which would help Arab students, and possible second language learners in general, overcome this difficulty.

The objectives of the study

The aim of this research study is to investigate the reasons why Arab students, particularly the sample of the present study, find it very difficult to translate Arabic collocations into English and the ways of overcoming such a formidable difficulty. With this general aim in mind, the current study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To explore the reasons behind the difficulty of translating Arabic collocations into English encountered by the Arab students of the current study.
2. To provide the field of Arabic/English translation research with some significant insights into the difficulty of collocations which Arab university students encounter when they translate from Arabic into English.

The statement of the problem

The current research study examines the difficulty of translating Arabic collocations into English for 50 Saudi students studying English at the Department of English at Teachers College of King Saud University. The study will seek to find answers to the following two main questions:

1. Why does the sample of the Arab students find it very difficult to translate collocations from Arabic into English?
2. What are the solutions that would help Arab students overcome this difficulty?

Literature review

There have been some important studies on the translation of collocations from Arabic into English. It seems that not only Arab students majoring in English find the translation of Arabic collocations difficult, but also foreign learners of Arabic, even at advanced levels, find Arabic collocations hard to learn and use correctly (Hafiz, 2004).

To begin with, Farghal and Obeidat (1995) conducted a study consisting of a translation task that would test the knowledge of 22 English collocations of Saudi students specializing in English at a Saudi university. Much to their surprise, they found out that the percentage of the correct answers in the translation task was only 5.5%. This finding proves that the translation of collocations in general is very difficult for Arab students. In this way, this finding is consistent with the finding of the current thesis pertaining to the difficulty which Arab students face when they translate Arabic collocations into English with one difference related to the source language and the target language. The above study examined the translation of English collocations into Arabic, while the present study investigates the difficulty of translating Arabic collocations into English. In a similar study conducted on a number of Arab students majoring in English, Hussein (1997) found out that Arab students could not produce English collocations correctly.
According to the finding of his study, correctness rate was just 39%. Literal translation seemed to be the obvious reason for the Arab students' inability to produce correct English collocations. This finding backs up the finding of the current study with regard to the difficulty which Arab students face when they translate Arabic collocations into English.

Rabeh (2009-2010) carried out a study on the problems which Arab students face in translating collocations from English into Arabic and vice versa. The findings of his dissertation revealed that Arab students made grave mistakes in translating collocations, and that there were two reasons for such mistakes. "First, students adopt literal translation as the main translation method. Second, students do not give enough importance to collocations which belong to another culture and language" (p. 4). The findings of Rabeh's research study are consistent with the finding of the current research study in terms of the difficulty which Arab students encounter when they translate collocations and the reasons why Arab students translate Arabic collocations incorrectly.

Boussalia (2010) studied the difficulty which some Arab Algerian students, who were third year students of English, faced when they translated English collocations into Arabic. She found out that such a difficulty arises because of the linguistic and cultural differences between English and Arabic. The general finding of the above study which states that the difficulty of translating English collocations lies in the linguistic and cultural differences between English and Arabic is in broad agreement with the findings of the current study. Despite the fact that this study is on the difficulties which face some Algerian students when they translate English collocations into Arabic, its conclusion that literal translation is one of the reasons why Arab students cannot translate English collocations correctly is broadly similar to the finding of the current research study with regard to the difficulty which Arab students confront when they translate Arabic collocations into English. It should be admitted, though, that the researcher made a great suggestion related to the role of English teachers and translation teachers alike in teaching collocations as well as drawing their students' attention to the importance of learning as many collocations as possible. This valuable suggestion is also one of the recommendations made by the current research with regard to how Arab students can overcome the difficulty of translating Arabic collocations into English.

Dweik and Abu Shakra (2010) carried out a research study entitled Strategies in Translating Collocations in Religious Texts from Arabic into English. Their study consisted of a test given to MA translation students from Jordan on translating Arabic collocations chosen from the Holy Quran. The researchers came to the conclusion that most of the Arab students of the study followed literal translation as their translation strategy to translate the Arabic collocations into English. In this respect, the current study agrees with the above research study that most Arab students use literal translation when they translate collocations and so they translate them wrongly. However, the above study focused only on the translation of collocation in religious texts from Arabic into English, and they did not deal with Arabic collocations that would occur in everyday communication, unlike the Arabic collocations mentioned in the current study. The above-mentioned study did not mention that Arab students' heavy reliance on bilingual dictionaries is another reason why they cannot translate Arabic collocations correctly.
Shammas (2013) conducted a research study on the translation of collocations from Arabic into English and vice versa. The study consisted of three questionnaires given to Arab MA students who came from different universities in four Arab countries which were Jordan, Syria, Algeria and Lebanon. One of the questionnaires consisted of a group of Arabic collocations with four English translation choices, and the students had to choose the best translation. Although he classified collocations into many types, Shammas focused only on adjective-noun collocations, probably to limit the scope of his research. Shammas also asked some Arab students about the method(s) they used when they translated the collocations, and they told him that they depended mainly on two strategies; "Resort to literal translation from L1 and substitution mainly based on conjecture" (p. 144). The findings of this research study are quite consistent with the findings of the current study when it comes to the reasons why Arab students cannot translate Arabic collocations correctly. However, the above-mentioned study did not mention that Arab students' heavy reliance on bilingual dictionaries is another reason why they cannot translate Arabic collocations correctly.

Methodology of the research

The researchers followed the analytical descriptive method in this qualitative kind of research. The researchers used a quiz given to 50 Saudi Arabian students at the Department of English at Teachers College of King Saud University in the second semester of the Academic year 2015. The quiz consisted of 15 Arabic sentences containing collocations, the students were allowed to use monolingual and bilingual dictionaries and the time given for quiz was 90 minutes. After the quiz, the researchers examined the students’ translations, marked them and calculated the percentage of the students who translated the collocations correctly and those who could not translate the collocations correctly. A short statistical table was provided to represent this calculation.

The population of the current research study included 50 Saudi Arabian undergraduates majoring in English at the Department of English at teachers College of King Saud University. The students were in the third year of their study, and they had to take a translation course in the fifth semester of their study. It is worth mentioning that the translation course was the first translation course for the students to take and that they only have two translation courses in the four years of their study at the university.

Findings of the research

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2005:293), a collocation is:

A combination of words in a language, that happens very often and more frequently than would happen by chance: 'resounding success' and 'crying shame' are English collocations.

"A collocation is a combination of two or more words that always occur together consistently in different contexts in languages. That is, a certain noun occurs with a certain adjective e.g.: "blind
Collocations are a universal element featuring in all cultures of the world. However, they differ from language to language and from culture to culture. Besides, collocations do not follow any grammatical rules, so they should be memorized as they are. For this reason, English language learners, to whom Arab students are no exception, make mistakes in the use of collocations in English. The problem becomes very exasperating when Arab students have to translate Arabic collocations into English. According to the data collected from the translation quiz given by the researchers to the Arab students of the current study, 38.8 out of 50 students, representing 71.86% of the overall number of the population of the current study found the translation of collocations from Arabic into English very difficult (Please refer to Table 1 below). This percentage is worth reporting as it is both very high and statistically significant.

Table 1. Arabic collocations with the number of students who could not translate them correctly and their percentage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic sentences</th>
<th>Number of incorrect translations</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>مطلق الشيء / عقلة إضافية.</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>شربت شايًا خفيفة.</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>شربت شايًا تجفًا.</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>حقل قرينة نصرًا.</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>حقق أبي الفكرة فحماً قاطعاً.</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>هذه الخسارة خزي . عار شبيح .</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>قمع الوالد الشاب .</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>قمع الرجل عيدًا على نفسه .</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>قمع أبي عقالى مع جراحة .</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>قمع النك بالبغض .</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>قطعت المملكة العربية شوطة كبيرة على المستوى الاجتماعي .</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>يقود أبي السيرة بحذر .</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>يقود أغلى الدراجه ببطء .</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>يقود الطيار الطيار بحذر .</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>71.86%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some collocations in Arabic which can be translated into equivalent collocations in English are the Arabic collocations 'يثارعاشغةشاعمَة' and 'وثثقاة عطعاقل ةة ا  عطعالأقظي ع ةراعشهثقة'. 48 students could not translate these Arabic collocations into equivalent collocations in English because they lack the cultural knowledge of English collocations and how to use them properly. Accordingly, the students produced strange-sounding English sentences which native speakers of English can easily identify as poor English sentences. Let us examine the source sentence and the different translation attempts made by some Arab students of the current study:

يثير العُملُ مشاكل خاصة مع المدرس والطالب لأنه خرق للثقة وانتهاك للوائح و الأنظمة الجامعية.
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a. Cheated started personal problems between teachers and student because it will roind the trust and break universy rules.
b. Cheating makes special problems with the teacher and the students, because it is …… and unfollowing for the academic rules.
c. Cheating causes problems specially with the teacher and the students, because it breaks the trust and it breaks the universitical systems.

It is obvious from these translations that the Arab students struggled a lot when they had to translate the Arabic collocations above-mentioned, and most of them translated the collocations literally which makes them sound semantically and sometimes grammatically erroneous in English. Moreover, the most obvious reason why some Arab students made such mistakes in translating these collocations from Arabic into English is that most of them looked up the Arabic words in only Arabic/English dictionaries without checking the words they had chosen in a monolingual standard English dictionary which would give them other important cultural information such as collocations, idioms, and examples which most bilingual dictionaries unfortunately exclude.

In much the same way, when some Arab students were asked to translate some Arabic sentences containing collocations, they could not provide equivalent collocations in English for the Arabic ones. In most cases, the Arab students used bilingual dictionaries which would only provide the basic lexical meaning of the words in general without using these words in proper examples or shedding light on this cultural aspect of English. Let us consider the following Arabic sentences along with some English translations as produced by some Arab students of the current study:

I drank light tea.
I drank heavy tea.
Profuse/abundant rain came down yesterday.
Our team achieved a loud/thunderous victory.
My father refused the idea a sharp refusal.
This loss is a hideous/ugly shame/disgrace.

As we can see, the Arab students who translated the above Arabic sentences into English translated them literally without taking into account the fact that English culture has its own collocations which are completely different from collocations in other languages and cultures including Arabic. As a result of this lack of cultural knowledge of English, the Arab students produced strange-sounding sentences in English, although they are grammatically correct. For example, the first Arabic sentence contains a collocation in Arabic which is "شاي خفيف". This Arabic collocation cannot be translated literally as the students just did because the adjective "light" is used to refer to "weight" in English and not to the taste or color of tea. The same idea goes for the second Arabic collocation which is "شاي نقيلا". In the third Arabic sentence there is
the Arabic collocation "مطر غزير" which the Arab students again translated literally as "profuse/abundant" rain. In fact, the students translated the whole sentence very literally which made the English sentence sound strange and funny. Again, the fourth sentence showed how the Arab students who translated it failed to provide an equivalent collocation in English to the Arabic collocation due to their lack of this cultural aspect of English. Accordingly, they translated "قصرعم طي" literally by providing an adjective referring to "sound" rather than "victory". In the fifth example, the Arab students provided a literal translation for the Arabic expression "رفضاً قاطعاً" by mistakenly using an English adjective which is related to "cutting and utensils" just because the adjective in Arabic is used with utensils and cutting tools/cutlery. Of course, native speakers of English would easily and readily identify this sentence as semantically or culturally erroneous because the noun "refusal or its related verb" does not collocate with the adjective "sharp", but rather with the adjective "flat and its related adverb flatly". As for the last Arabic sentence, the Arab students also failed to provide an equivalent collocation in English for the Arabic collocation "شنيع/ع شنيع" because they adopted literal translation which does not help at all with this cultural feature of English. It is true that the Arabic word "شنيع" means "hideous or ugly" but in isolation, and in Arabic this word collocates with "خزي/ع"; whereas in English the word "shame or disgrace" does not collocate with "hideous or ugly" but with "crying". Again, some Arab students translated the above sentences without thinking that their choice of the words was wrong because they depended on English/Arabic dictionaries which provide the basic lexical meaning of the Arabic words in isolation without taking into account the cultural aspects of English or without even giving English examples of how such words are properly used in English. There will also be a list of Arabic collocations with the students' translations at the end of the thesis. Please refer to the table above for getting the exact number of the students who could not translate the above Arabic collocations into English correctly.

Another kind of collocation in Arabic which posed a challenge to a big number of the Arab students of the current study when they had to translate into English was the verb-noun collocation. The difficulty of this kind of collocation lies in the fact that the same verb in Arabic collocates with a variety of nouns which have nothing in common. Let us examine the following Arabic sentences with the English translations produced by some Arab students of the current thesis to see how such a collocation was really hard to translate into English:

الحافة الشعر
الرجل عهدا على نفسه.
قطع أبي علاقته مع جارنا.
قطع الشك بالمغفر.
قطع الملكة العربية شوًطاً كبيراً على المستوى الاقتصادي.

The boy cut the street.
The man cut a promise on himself.
My father cut his relationship with our neighbor.
He cut (the) doubt with (the) certainty.
Saudi Arabia cut a big stroke/round on the economic level.

It seems that the Arab students translated the first sentence literally without realizing that it had a verb-noun collocation, and that this collocation should also be translated into an English collocation as English, like most languages in the world, is enormously rich in collocations. So,
the students used the verb "cut" with a noun with which it does not collocate in English. The reason why a big number of students used this verb is that the basic lexical meaning of the Arabic verb "قَطَع" is the English verb "cut", and most Arab students do not use monolingual dictionaries to check up words and their meaning as they think that English monolingual dictionaries take a longer time to give them the right word(s) and that they are more familiar with bilingual dictionaries than with monolingual dictionaries. The second Arabic sentence also contains a collocation, but the students ignored this fact and translated the collocation literally, hence producing a very strange-sounding sentence in English. It is worth mentioning in this context that the English translations are grammatically correct, but they are semantically wrong. Again, the students did not know that the verb "cut" does not collocate with the noun "promise". In the third sentence, the Arab students translated the sentence literally without paying attention to the noun following the verb "cut" which does not actually collocate with this verb. The noun "relationship" does not collocate with the verb "cut" in English as the Arabic equivalent does. The fourth sentence in Arabic with its English translation as produced by some Arab students is another clear indication that the Arab students of the current thesis are not aware of this cultural aspect of English whose components differ from language to language. So, the Arab students kept to literal translation believing that what can be said in Arabic can also be said in English by just replacing the Arabic words with their English equivalents based on their basic lexical meaning. However, they did not know that the verb "cut" does not collocate with the noun "doubt" in English. The last example with its English translation makes it very clear that the Arabic collocation "قيقش ط ع" was very difficult for the Arab students to translate into an English collocation because some of them did not understand its real meaning which is simply "to make great/much progress". Instead, the Arab students focused on providing literal translation for the Arabic collocation. Please refer to the table above for getting the exact number of the students who could not translate the above Arabic collocations into English correctly.

The difficulty of translating Arabic collocations into English collocations becomes even greater when Arab students face a common verb in Arabic which is used with different nouns and in different contexts. A verb like "يُقود" whose basic lexical equivalent in English is "lead/drive" posed a real difficulty to most Arab students of the current thesis because they mistakenly thought that either verb in English could be used with different nouns and in different contexts regardless of whether it collocates with the following noun or not. Let us look at the following simple Arabic sentences with their "wrong" translations in English as produced by the Arab students of the current thesis:

يُقود أبي السيارة بحذر.  
يُقود أخي الدراجة ببطء.  
يُقود الطيار الطائرة بحذر.

My father leads/drives the car carefully.  
My brother leads/drives the bicycle slowly.  
The pilot drives the plane carefully.

As the above examples with their English translations clearly show, translating Arabic collocations into English collocations was very difficult for the majority of the Arab students of the current thesis. It is also clear that the students focused on providing literal translations rather than trying to see if the English verb they provided collocates with the nouns following it or not.
It also seems that the majority of the Arab students did not know that the verb "drive" does not collocate with a bicycle or plane, and so they used drive in all the above translations just because it is lexically equivalent to the Arabic verb "يَقودون". Please refer to the table above for getting the exact number of the students who could not translate the above Arabic collocations into English correctly.

**Conclusion**

The data and findings of the research showed that the Arab students of the current research did face a tremendous difficulty when they translated collocations from Arabic into English because they relied blinding on literal translation, used only bilingual dictionaries to look up the meaning of the words in the target language and had little knowledge of collocations in both Arabic and English. According to this conclusion, the researchers would like to make the following recommendations to Arab universities, Arab students and translation teachers at Arab universities or elsewhere:

1. Arab students majoring in English should be given two translation courses at the undergraduate level every year of their study period, one per semester. The first translation course focuses on Arabic-English translation and the other one focuses on English-Arabic translation. Unfortunately, there were just two translation courses for the Saudi undergraduate students at the English Department of Teachers College at King Saud University, one in the third year and one in the fourth year only. This was one of the reasons why the population of the study did not do well on the quiz.

2. Teachers of translation at Arab universities should draw the attention of Arab students to the differences and similarities between Arabic culture and English culture as this has a great influence on the Arabic language and the English language. They should also provide the students with numerous examples of collocations. In this way, Arab students will be more familiar with collocations and do better on translation assignments and tests.

3. Teachers of translation at Arab universities should teach Arab students to avoid literal translation as much as possible because Arabic and English belong to two different families whose linguistic systems are widely different. They can show the students how literal translation does not work by giving them examples of literal translation in both languages which distort and/or alter meaning and providing them with samples of correct translation.

4. Teachers of translation at Arabic universities should encourage students to use monolingual dictionaries (English-English standard dictionaries) to check the meaning of words as monolingual dictionaries provide much linguistic and cultural information about words and expressions.

5. Teachers of translation at Arab universities should always provide their students with model translations of the translation assignments they give to their students as this will help the students identify their areas of weakness and give them correct and valid translation against which they can measure their own translation.

6. Future research can focus on the difficulty of translating other cultural or linguistic elements which encounter Arab students when they translate from Arabic into English or vice versa.
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References


