

Lexical Collocational Errors in the Writings of Iraqi EFL Learners

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Abstract

Collocations have become one of the primary concerns in EFL teaching and learning. Several researchers have perceived the significance of collocations and the requisite of collocation teaching in EFL courses (Bonk, 2000; Tang, 2004; Mahmoud, 2005). Hence, collocational knowledge is essential for EFL learners and collocation instruction in EFL courses is required. Thus, this study investigates the lexical collocational errors in the writings of Iraqi EFL learners. A total of 40 students at Basra University participated in this study. Over 100 pieces of essays written by the participants were collected and analyzed to check various lexical collocational errors. The unacceptable lexical collocations were identified based on the modified version originally proposed by Benson et al (1997). It was found that the lexical collocational errors are mainly due to the negative transfer from Arabic. Depending on the findings of this paper, some practical and effective ways are suggested to increase the learners' knowledge of lexical collocations.

المخلص

لقد اصبح الارتصاف (تنظيم المفردات) احد الشواغل الاساسية في تعليم و تعلم اللغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية. و ينظر العديد من الباحثين الى اهمية الارتصاف و ضرورت تدريسه في مناهج اللغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية(بونك:٢٠٠٠، تانغ:٢٠٠٤ ومحمود:٢٠٠٥).لذلك من الضروري أن يكون لدارسي اللغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية دراية ومعرفة بالارتصاف وتراكيبه. تبحث هذه الدراسة في انواع المفردات الارتصافية التي يستخدمها متعلمي اللغة الانكليزية والاختفاء الارتصافية في كتاباتهم. لفت اشترك ٤٠ طالبا من جامعة البصرة في هذه الدراسة. وكتب هؤلاء اكثر من ١٠٠ مقالة تم جمعها فيما بعد و تحليلها للوقوف على الانواع المختلفة للاخطاء الارتصافية. فقد تم استخراج المفردات التراصفية الغير مقبولة في مقالات الطلاب وتم تحليلها بالاستناد على نسخته بنسون وآخرون المعدلة (١٩٩٧). وقد تبين ان اكثر الاخطاء ترجع الى النقل السلبي (الترجمة الحرفية) من اللغة العربية الى اللغة الانكليزية. و اعتمادا على ما جاء في هذا البحث من نتائج تم اقتراح بعض الطرق العملية و الفعالة لزيادات معرفة المتعلمين بالرصف الصحيح للمفردات.

1. Introduction

Learning a foreign language used to be especially associated with learning its grammatical structures, with lexis being restricted to the area barely large enough to present these structures. In other words, the function of grammar was considered superior while the role of vocabulary has long been underestimated. (Martynska, 2004:1; Hsu & Chiu, 2008:182)

It was not until Lewis(1994,in Martynska,Ibid), who developed the Lexical Approach Theory, that the pivotal role of lexis as the basics of any language becomes highly respectable.

Thus, with the approach of the new millennium, pioneer scholars and researchers emphasized the role of vocabulary in classroom practices (Hsu & Chiu, 2008:182). It is generally agreed that choosing the right words in certain situations is more important than choosing grammatical structures. Furthermore, we cannot use structures correctly if we do not have enough vocabulary knowledge. (Deveci, 2004:1).

Tang (2004:39) affirms that lexical errors are perceived by native speakers as more serious than all other types of error because "it is in the choice of words that effective communication is hindered most" (Ibid). Martynska (2004:11) agrees that a speaker will not use a noun in a proper context unless he/ she knows which words co-occur with it. As a result, knowing a word cannot be limited to merely knowing its meaning; what is crucial is to know its collocational range as well.

1.1 Significance of the Study

The current study specifically investigates the use of English lexical collocations by Iraqi learners of English.

2. Collocation: Definition and Importance

The term 'collocation' has its origin in the Latin verb 'collocare' which means to set in order/ to arrange' (Martynska, 2004:2). It was first introduced by the British linguist Firth to indicate "the habitual co-occurrence of lexical items" (Firth, 1957:196). For instance, the adjectives '**green**', '**red**' and '**golden**' are said to collocate with the noun '**apple**'. Similarly, the lexical item '**time**' can be used in collocation with '**save**', '**spend**' and '**waste**' (Martynska, 2004:1). One might say that there is a core word, i.e. the word that comes to the mind first, and a collocator

that combines with it. One has for example in mind the noun '**crime**' and looks for the verb which combines with it. This has to be either the verb '**commit**' or '**perpetrate**'. While still having the same noun in mind and seeking for an adjective that expresses the bad, violent and harmful nature of the crime one can choose from a limited number of adjectives like '**atrocious**', '**vicious**' and some others. (Devenyi, 2004:1)

Collocation is an ability of lexical items to build steady, conventionalized, syntagmatic relationship with other words. For example, **putrid**, **rotten**, **rancid**, and **addled** are synonyms which designate **rotten food** but they collocate only with a limited number of words: **putrid fish**, **rancid butter**, **oil**, **addled eggs**, **rotten food** (Martynska, 2004:5). Collocations cannot be described by means of general syntactic and semantic rules. They are arbitrary and unpredictable, and therefore need to be memorized and used as such. (Seretan & Wehrli, 2006:40)

Many researchers have proposed that a good control of collocations can help language learners to speak more fluently and collocational knowledge could be a key element in enhancing the EFL learners' speaking ability (Hsu & Chiu, 2008:183). When learners use collocations they will be better understood. Native speakers unconsciously predict what is going to be said based on the use of phrases. If a non- native speaker uses frequently- used patterns (collocations), it will be easier for native speakers to guess what the speaker is saying and may help compensate for other language issues, such as pronunciation. (Deveci, 2004:3)

Carter (1987, in Martynska, 2004:11) perceives collocations as crucial factors of lexical coherence and stresses the need of teaching collocations at all levels of language proficiency.

The authors of Oxford Collocations Dictionary (2002, in Martynska, Ibid) also stress the role of collocation in a language, claiming that it runs through the whole of a language to such extent that no piece of natural spoken or written language is totally free of collocations. Consequently, every student choosing the right collocation makes his/ her speech more natural and more native- speaker- like.

2.1 Factors Affecting the Choice of Collocations

The context in which a collocation is used is important. Certain collocations or expressions are appropriate for certain contexts. Factors such as a difference in status or a social distance between the speaker and the hearer can affect the choice of collocational phrases. For example, we would not greet our boss by saying "**How's it going?**" however, it is all right to greet a friend that way. This example suggests that knowledge of connotation and formality is important in deciding which collocation to use. (Deveci, 2004:2)

There are collocations whose meaning will vary geographically. The collocation "**green orange**" generally stands for unripe orange. Nevertheless, there are parts of the world for which the implication of "**green orange**" would be "**ripe orange**". The meaning of the collocation "**green orange**" therefore will vary according to the provenance of the speaker. There are also collocations which will not be known to quite a large proportion of mature native speakers. Thus "**white noise**" would be understood only by people with certain professional interests. (Wilkins, 1972:129)

2.2 Approaches to Collocations

There are three schools of thought on collocations. These are the lexical approach, the semantic approach and the structural approach. Each approach will now be discussed in turn.

2.2.1 The Lexical Approach

J.R.Firth is widely considered as the father of collocation and the developer of the lexical composition approach. Methodologically, this approach is based on the assumption that the meaning of a word is determined by the co-occurring words. Thus, lexis is considered to be independent and separate from grammar and the New-Firthians, as they were called (represented by Halliday and Sinclair), also kept grammar and lexis separate, though they did not try to devalue grammar in any way (Lexis* ; Martynska,2004:2). Thus, part of the meaning of a word is the fact that it collocates with another word. The other words with which it collocates, however, are often strictly limited. Firth gave the example of the word 'ass', saying that there are only limited possibilities with preceding adjectives, amongst which the commonest are **you silly, obstinate, stupid**" (Firth, 1957:195). One of Firth's revolutionary concepts was to perceive lexical relations as syntagmatic rather than paradigmatic ones, whereas previous grammar had considered only structural relations at the paradigmatic level (Lexis). In the syntagmatic dimension we can clearly see the relationship between linearly lined up words, which make up an individual syntactic unit, here a collocation. In the sentence: '**It writhed on the floor in agonizing pain**' the syntagmatic relationship is between the words: **writhed, floor, agonizing** and **pain**, whereas the paradigmatic relationship is between a word and a group of words which can replace it in the sentence:

*Lexis .Chapter 4:From Collocation to Colligation. Available at www.kielikanava.com/chap4.html

It writhed on the floor in agonizing pain.

bed burning
pavement stabbing
paradigm1 paradigm 2

(Abdullah, 1993:1;Martynska, 2004:4)

Halliday noted that collocation cuts across grammatical boundaries, giving the example of '**he argued strongly/ the strength of his argument**', where the collocation is between '**strong**' and '**argument**'. (Lexis)

Sinclair(1991, in Martynska,2004:2) introduces the following terminology: an item whose elements are studied is called a 'node'; the number of relevant lexical items on each side of a node is defined as a 'span' and these items which are found within the span are called 'collocates'. Later on Sinclair (Ibid) slightly changes the previous idea that lexis is rigidly separate from grammar and forms an integrated approach. In this new approach both the lexical and the grammatical aspects of collocation are taken into account. Thus, he (Ibid) divides collocations into two categories: the 'upward' and 'downward' collocations. The first group consists of words which habitually collocate with the words more frequently used in English than they are themselves, e.g. **back** collocates with **at, down, from, into, on** all of which are more frequent words than **back**. The 'downward' collocations on the other hand, are words which habitually collocate with words that are less frequent than they are, e.g. **arrive, bring** are less frequent occurring collocates of **back**. Sinclair makes a sharp distinction between these two categories claiming that the elements of the 'upward' collocations (mostly prepositions, adverbs, conjunctions and pronouns) tend to form grammatical frames while the elements of the

'downward' collocations (mostly nouns and verbs) give a semantic analysis of a word .

2.2.2 The Semantic Approach

The supporters of this approach attempt to examine collocations from the semantic point of view , also separate from grammar. Their main goal is to find out why certain words collocate with each other, e.g. why we can say **blond hair** but not **blond car**. This question still represents a challenge for linguists today. (Ibid: 3; Lexis)

2.2.3 The structural Approach

According to this approach, a collocation is determined by its structure and occurs in patterns. So, in contrast to the aforementioned approach, lexis and grammar cannot be separated. Consequently, two categories are defined: lexical and grammatical collocations. Grammatical collocations usually consist of a noun, an adjective or a verb plus a preposition or a grammatical structure such as ' to+ infinitive' or 'that – clause', e.g. **by accident, to be afraid that**. Lexical collocations, on the other hand, do not contain grammatical elements, but are combinations of nouns, adjectives, verbs or adverbs. (Martynska,2004:3) .

Benson et al (1997, in Martynska:Ibid) define collocations as specified, identifiable, non-idiomatic, recurrent combinations. They divide collocations into two groups: grammatical and lexical collocations. Collocations of the first type are distinguished by the following 8 categories:

- 1- noun+ preposition ,e.g. **blockade against, apathy towards**.
- 2- noun + to- infinitive, e.g. **He was a fool to do it . , They felt a need to do it .**
- 3- noun + that – clause ,e.g. **We reached an agreement that she would represent us in court .**

- 4- preposition + noun ,e.g. **by accident, in agony.**
- 5- adjective + preposition ,e.g. **fond of children, hungry for news.**
- 6- adjective + to- infinitive ,e.g. **it was necessary to work, it's nice to be here.**

7- adjective + that – clause,e.g.**she was afraid that she would fail .It was imperative that I be here.**

8- 19 different verb patterns in English, e.g. verb + to – infinitive (**they began to speak**), verb + bare infinitive (**we must work**) and others.

Lexical collocations, on the other hand, include:

- 1- verb + noun (e.g. **break a code, lift a blockade**)
 - 2- verb + adverb (e.g. **affect deeply, appreciate sincerely**)
 - 3- noun + verb (e.g. **water freezes, clock ticks**)
 - 4- adjective + noun (e.g. **strong tea, best wishes**)
 - 5- adverb + adjective (e.g. **deeply absorbed, closely related**)
- (Martynska, 2004:3; Deveci, 2004:2; Mahmoud, 2005: 3)
- Deveci (Ibid) adds another four categories, they are:
- 6- noun + noun (e.g. **a pocket calculator**)
 - 7- verb + adjective + noun (e.g. **learn a foreign language**)
 - 8- adverb + verb (e.g. **half understand**)
 - 9-verb + preposition + noun (e.g. **speak through an interpreter**)

Acquisition and correct production of such word combinations is a mark of an advanced level of proficiency in a language since "fluency is based on the acquisition of a large store of fixed or semi- fixed prefabricated items." (Mahmoud, Ibid). Lexical errors and grammatical errors are equally important, and lexical errors are more serious because effective communication depends on the choice of words. (Ibid).

2.3 Categorization of Collocations

It is clear that the relation between lexical items vary according to the degree with which they collocate with one another. In

every language there are items which collocate with high frequency, others which collocate as the need arises, and others whose collocation seems to be impossible. An example of the first type is the word '**dark**' which has a diverse range of collocates. In contrast, an item such as '**rancid**' tends to have strong predictability because it can collocate with only two or three items (Abdullah, 1993:1, 9; Huang, 2001:114). Impossible collocations, on the other hand, happen when the semantic features of both items are not compatible. For example, it is impossible to say '**black snow**', '**round square**', '**hot ice**', etc. (Abdullah, Ibid: 9).

Researchers generally agree that different types of collocations should be placed on a continuum. They indicate that, simply by relying on the meanings of collocational constituent elements, it is hard to draw a clear distinction between collocations that are either predictable or not. The criteria for categorizing different types of word combinations basically include semantic transparency, degree of substitutability, and degree of productivity. On the one end of the continuum are the free combinations with the highest degree of productivity, semantic transparency, and substitutability of items for the constituent elements. On the other end are the idioms that are the least productive, the most opaque in semantics, and the most frozen in terms of substitutability of elements. Between these two extremes are different types of restricted collocations. (Gabrielatos, 1994:2; Huang, 2001:114)

Lewis (2000, in Martynska, 2004:4) argues that most collocations are found in the middle of this continuum. This means that there are very few 'strong' collocations. He distinguishes between 'strong' collocations, e.g. **avid reader**, **budding author**; 'common' collocations which makes up numerous word combinations, e.g. **fast car** , **have dinner**, **a bit**

tired and 'medium strong' ones, which in his view account for the largest part of the lexis a language learner needs, e.g. **magnificent house, significantly different**. Hill (in Martynska, Ibid) adds another category, i.e. 'unique' collocations such as **to foot the bill, shrug one' shoulders**.

Carter (1987, in Martynska, 2004:5) divides collocations into four categories, depending on how restricted they are: 'unrestricted', which collocate freely with a number of lexical items, e.g. **take a look/ a holiday/ a rest/ time/ notice/ a walk;** 'semi- restricted', in which the number of adequate substitutes which can replace the elements of collocation is more limited, e.g. **harbor doubt/ grudges/ uncertainty/ suspicion**. The other two categories include 'familiar' collocations whose elements collocate on a regular basis, e.g. **unrequited love, lukewarm reception** and 'restricted' collocations which are fixed and inflexible, e.g. **dead drunk, pretty sure**. Carter (Ibid) distinguishes between 'core' and 'non- core' words claiming that the more core a lexical item is, the more frequently it collocates. Core words are more central in language than the non- core words and that is why the non-core words can be defined or replaced by the core items. For instance, 'eat' is a core word for **gobble, dine, devour, stuff, gormandize** because its meaning is the basic meaning of every meaning in the group. In Carter's view, words are scattered across a core – non- core continuum and their position on this scale determines their collocability. The nearer to the core end of the continuum a word is, the more frequently it collocates.

In terms of the strength of collocation, it is worth noting that it is not reciprocal, which means that the strength between the words is not equal on both sides, e.g. **blonde** and **hair**. **Blonde** collocates only with a limited number of words describing hair

color whereas hair collocates with many words, e.g. **brown, long, short, mousy**. (Ibid)

2.4 Idioms and Collocations

An idiom is a string of items which are arbitrarily restricted, and this string is regarded as a complete whole which is difficult to change (Abdullah, 1993: 18). The meanings of idioms cannot be predicted from the meanings of individual elements in them. For instance, '**kick the bucket**' means '**die**' and '**red herring**' means '**something said or done to divert attention from the main issue**'. Their meanings will not be readily apparent even to the native speaker when he first comes into contact with them (Wilkins, 1972: 129; Abdullah, Ibid).

Idioms have a tendency to fossilize as complete units even to the point on occasions of preserving forms which no longer occur outside the collocation, e.g. **kith and kin**. Idioms are unproductive because there is no way for grouping items to be substituted. Whereas in collocations, there is no such non-productivity or fixity of association between lexical items. However, sometimes, we may see an idiom which means or equals a collocation. This is clearly seen in the example, '**it rains cats and dogs**'. The items '**cats**' and '**dogs**' may mean or equal '**heavily**' which stands for a linguistic unit that co-occurs with '**rain**'. (Abdullah, 1993:19)

Idiomatic collocations are not a feature restricted to colloquial uses of language, although informal speech is often particularly rich in them. There are plenty which are acceptable in all styles of speech, e.g. **to look after, to give up, so as to, in order to, in point of fact**. (Wilkins, 1972: 129).

2.5 Colligations and Collocations

The term 'colligation' is started by Firth to define "the grammatical company and interaction of words as well as their preferable position in a sentence"(Martynska, 2004:4). This

concept concerns the relationship between grammatical classes, whereas collocation concerns the words which belong to these grammatical classes. For instance, (verb + to-infinitive) is an example of colligation, and (**dread+ think**) is an example of collocation of this colligation. (Ibid)

The collocations of individual lexical items operate in an open set, whereas the colligations of grammatical classes, such as (noun, verb, adverb) and a preposition or a grammatical structure such as infinitive or clause, operate in a closed set or system (Abdullah, 1993: 15).

In colligations the major concern is with items as members of word classes, not as individual lexical items. For instance, moving sands, missing link, milking cows, working class, typing machine and so on are all colligations composed of the structure (gerund + noun) which are members of the grammatical classes of language.

3. Foreign Learners' Difficulties with Collocations

There are certain factors that may influence learners' performance in producing collocations. These factors include: the semantic fields, meaning boundaries, and collocational restrictions. The semantic field of a lexicon is determined by its conceptual field. Examples of conceptual fields include **color**, **kinship**, and **marital relations**. The wider the semantic field of a given lexical item, the more L1 interference errors it might trigger. For instance, some foreign learners of English usually provide '**lead a bookshop**' for the target collocation '**run a bookshop**'. In the same vein, the more synonyms an item has, the more difficulties learners encounter in producing a restricted collocation. The high frequency verbs such as **put**, **go**, and **take** cause serious problems for foreign learners of English. The main reason lies in these verbs' rich polysemy and syntactic complexity. As they form phrases with prepositions, these verbs

create collocational restrictions that require special attention to their collocational environments. These lexical properties surely create different degrees of difficulty for learners (Huang, 2001:115).

The second factor concerns the influence of learners' native language. Since some human situations are similar, different languages have parallel fixed expressions that are syntactically and semantically similar. However, due to culture specificity, certain elements embedded in these expressions differ across languages. Thus distinct expressions may cause a negative transfer from learner's L1.

Huang(Ibid: 116) states that L1 influence is most prevalent when the learners perform translation tasks. Because those learners do not have a sufficient knowledge in collocations, they rely heavily on the L1 as the only resource and thus do better in those collocations that have L1 equivalents than those that do not.

The third factor concerns the learners' collocational competence. Foreign learners generally lack the proper knowledge of English collocations. Compared with their native - speaker counterparts, the ESL/EFL learners produce a lower percentage of conventional collocations but a higher percentage of deviant combinations. The foreign learners had a big gap between their receptive and productive knowledge of collocations.

Foreign learners' ignorance of English culture is another dimension embodied in the issue of lexical competence. This is especially true in the case of idioms because their metaphorical meanings are highly connected with cultural connotations and discourse stereotypes. Idioms represent a unique form of collocation, and several factors affect their comprehension and production. These include the context in which the idioms are

situated, the meanings of the constituents of an idiom, and the learners' conceptual knowledge of metaphors and figurative competence. Idioms are perceived to be more appropriate by native speakers when the context of the idiom is aligned with the intended meaning.

Learners may look for general rules for collocations that do not work for all collocations. For example, they could think that '**put off your coat**' is the opposite of '**put on your coat**'.(Ibid)

4. Methodology

Collocational errors may block mutual communication. Since a collocation is not determined by logic or frequency nor any rules but arbitrary, it has become one of the main obstacles for foreign learners to achieve native-like competence.(Tang,2004:40)

The present study explores the knowledge and use of English lexical collocations used by the Iraqi EFL university learners. It concerns only whether the learners are choosing the right words to match the collocates in a certain semantic field. By describing and analyzing the lexical collocational errors, it is an attempt to trace the underlying factors related to them and thus provides some practical ways to enhance EFL learners' collocational competence.

4.1 Research Design

This study is intended to analyze lexical collocational errors that constantly occur in English essays of the EFL advanced Iraqi learners as it is mentioned before .More specifically, this study is mainly an attempt to answer the following two questions:

- 1- What are the most common lexical collocational errors made by the EFL advanced Iraqi learners?
- 2- What are the possible causes of the lexical collocational errors?

All possible lexical collocational errors recognized in the students' writing will be underlined according to the seven subtypes of lexical collocations which are mentioned in table 1 below. The first six labels of subtypes are suggested by the BBI Dictionary of English Word Combinations (Benson et al, 1997) whereas the seventh 'noun+ noun' subtype recognized by Hausmann (1999) and Kinmes (2004) (in Hsu,2007:198).

Table 1: Subtypes and Examples of Lexical Collocations

Type	Pattern	Example
L1	verb +noun	make an impression, break a code
L2	adjective + noun	strong tea
L3	noun + verb naming an action	bees buzz, bomb explodes
L4	noun1 of noun2	a bouquet of flowers, a pack of dogs
L5	adverb +adjective	strictly accurate , sound asleep
L6	verb +adverb	appreciate sincerely , argue heatedly
L7	noun + noun	company uniform , dress code

The lexical collocations which were found in this study were regarded as acceptable or not with the help of Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary (2003) and Oxford Collocation Dictionary for Students of English (<http://www.xiaolai.net/ocd/file/index.htm>).

4.2 Study Setting and Subjects

The participants were 40 Iraqi students of third stage, from the College of Education, Department of English, University of Basrah. They have been taught English as a foreign language for approximately 10 years .Overall, the subjects were similar in age, rating from 19-21 years old, but factors such as age or sex were overlooked in this study.

The participants were asked to write in different topics (A Stranger on the Bridge, The Advantages and Disadvantages of Mobil Phones, and Smoking). The essays were written as homework assignments and ranged from one and a half to two single spaced pages in length. The students did not know that their writings are going to be under investigation. Over 100 pieces of essays were collocated and analyzed to check various lexical collocational errors and numbers and ratios were counted. When an acceptable lexical collocation was found with spelling or grammatical error, it was also counted as a valid one.

4.3 Results and Discussion

After finishing the process of reading and investigating the participants' writings, it was found out that there were (157) lexical collocational errors in the subjects' writings. These errors were classified and distributed according to the seven subtypes of lexical collocations (as shown in table 2).

Table 2: Number and Percentage of Incorrect Lexical Collocations Found

Type	Pattern	No.of errors	Percent (%)
L1	verb +noun	53	33,76
L2	adjective + noun	39	24,84
L3	noun + verb naming an action	35	22,29
L4	noun1 of noun2	10	6,37
L5	adverb +adjective	5	3,18
L6	verb +adverb	6	3,82
L7	noun + noun	9	5,73
Total		157	100

According to the statistics, it was found out that L1 (verb+noun) lexical collocational errors occurred most frequently in the participants' writings and the percentage of L1 (verb+ noun) errors amounted (33, 76 %). Then L2(adjective + noun) errors came secondly with a percentage of (24,84 %) and (35) errors of L3 (noun + verb naming an action) subtype were counted with a percentage of (22, 29%). As for the other four subtypes of lexical collocational errors L4 (noun1 of noun2), L5 (adverb +adjective), L6 (verb +adverb) and L7 (noun + noun), the percentages of these four subtypes were (6, 37%), (3, 18%), (3, 82%) and (5, 73%) respectively, as shown in table 2.

The subtypes of lexical collocational errors with the highest frequencies may be the most difficult for the EFL learners to use, while it is not necessary that those with lower frequencies are regarded as the easiest to EFL learners to use. On the contrary, it was noticed through out the reading of the subjects' writings that

the participant did not use the lexical collocations of L4, L5, and L6, L7 subtypes a lot in their writings, nor in their correct or incorrect forms and they prefer to make long sentences because they do not know the collocations, which express precisely their thoughts.

The incorrect lexical collocations could be grouped under three main categories (based upon Mohammed study, 2005) as follows:

1- Word Choice: where the choice of one word or both words is incorrect

A- One word incorrect: *a distance city *hit the door *work the job
*preferred use *the clock nocks *sorrow situation
* came in mind

B- Both words incorrect: *clean brain *necessary happen

2-Word Form: where the form of a word is incorrect

*religion man *to terror people *a stranger man
*a good healthy

3-Contextual errors: linguistically correct but contextually incorrect

* took more respect *have a great mark *said lies *bring problems

In order to answer the second question of this study, that's to understand and investigate why the participants made the lexical collocational errors, it is important to find out the sources of these errors. The incorrect lexical collocations could be attributed to: false concepts hypothesized , the use of synonym, ignorance of rule restrictions, negative transfer and approximation. (Liu, 1999b as cited in Li, 2005:57).The sources are classified according to the following table:

*is used in front of every incorrect example

Table 3 : Sources of Collocational Errors

Cognitive Strategies	Intralingual Transfer(1)	False Concept Hypothesized
		Overgeneralization
		The Use of Synonym
	Ignorance of Rule Restrictions	
	Interlingual Transfer(2)	Negative Transfer
Communication Strategies	Paraphrase	Word coinage
		Approximation

False concepts hypothesized errors result from the learners' faulty comprehension of distinctions in the target language. For instance, some learners may use the word **teach** instead of **learn**, **do** instead of **make**. It is stated that those students may think that words such as **make**, **do**, and **teach** are de-lexicalized verbs so they can replace another one freely. Therefore the following errors may be attributed to this factor:

1 An intralingual error is an error which results from faulty or partial learning of the target language. For instance, a learner may produce *He is comes*, based a blend of the English structures *He is coming*, *He comes*.

2 An interlingual error is one which results from language transfer. In other words, it is caused by the learners' native language. For instance, a learner may produce "*cut a relationship*" instead of "*break a relationship*"

Table 4: Lexical Collocational Errors Resulting From False Concepts

Hypothesized

<i>Type</i>	<i>Learner Collocations</i>	<i>Target Collocations</i>
L1	*He <u>appears</u> more respect	He <u>shows</u> more respect
L1	*We <u>teach</u> different materials	We <u>learn</u> different materials
L3	*He <u>reminded</u> he knew the address	He <u>remembered</u> he knew the address
L3	This house <u>relates</u> to my relatives	This house <u>belongs</u> to my relatives

The use of synonyms is found as a second source of using incorrect lexical collocations. Some incorrect lexical collocations occurred because of the misuse of synonyms. It was found out that the participants failed to know the collocability of **proper** with **use** and **widen** with **his friends**. The following table shows some incorrect lexical collocations.

Table5: Lexical Collocational Errors Resulting From the Use of Synonyms

<i>Type</i>	<i>Learner Collocations</i>	<i>Target Collocations</i>
L1	* to <u>bigger</u> your friends	to <u>widen</u> your friends
L2	*They show <u>the preferred</u> use	They show <u>the proper</u> use
L1	*He <u>hits</u> the door	He <u>knocks</u> the door

Errors of ignorance of rule restrictions were the result of analogy and failure to observe the restrictions of existing structure. Two examples of incorrect lexical collocations were

found in the participants' writings, ***much people and much money**. Many examples of ignorance of rule restrictions were found with the grammatical collocational errors but such examples are out of the concern of this study thus there is no need to mention them.

One of the most important factors and an essential source of lexical collocational errors is the negative transfer of the first language. In the case of the current study (Iraqi learners), there are two varieties of Arabic from which the participants can transfer: modern standard Arabic and non- standard Arabic. The participants produced the collocations like ***break blood circles**, ***send me to the house**, and *** shapes of speech** which are attributed to negative transfer of the first language.

Table 6: Lexical Collocational Errors Resulting From Negative Transfer

<i>Type</i>	<i>Learner Collocations</i>	<i>Target Collocations</i>
L2	<i>*Smoking harms <u>carrying</u> women</i>	<i>Smoking harms <u>pregnant</u> women</i>
L1	<i>* It <u>breaks blood circles</u></i>	<i>It <u>destroys red blood cells</u> (haemolysis)</i>
L6	<i>*I <u>still</u> there</i>	<i>I <u>stay</u> there</i>
L2	<i>*This was a <u>big responsibility</u></i>	<i>This was a <u>great responsibility</u></i>
L3	<i>Which <u>locates</u> near my house *</i>	<i>Which <u>lies</u> near my house</i>
L4	<i>*Different <u>shapes of speech</u></i>	<i>Different <u>figures of speech</u></i>

The last factor which may cause the lexical collocational errors is approximation. It refers to the use of incorrect vocabulary item or structure. Table (6) shows a list of errors resulting from approximation.

Table 7: Lexical Collocational Errors Resulting From Approximation

<i>Type</i>	<i>Learner Collocations</i>	<i>Target Collocations</i>
L6	* <i>The people were <u>sleeps</u></i>	<i>The people were <u>sleepy</u></i>
L2	* <i>I saw a <u>stranger</u> man</i>	<i>I saw a <u>strange</u> man</i>
L2	* <i>They tried to <u>terror</u> people</i>	<i>They tried to <u>terrify</u> people</i>
L1	* <i>The man wanted to <u>entrance</u> the house</i>	<i>The man wanted to <u>enter</u> the house</i>
L1	* <i>He did not <u>note</u> him</i>	<i>He did not <u>notice</u> him</i>

Concerning the last two factors, i.e. overgeneralization and word coinage, no errors were found in the participants' writings. Overgeneralization means the creation of a deviant structure in place of two regular structures on the basis of the students' experience of the target language. For example, the students would use the collocation ***I am worry about** instead of **I am worried about**. They probably knew of both idiomatic expressions **I am worried** and **I worry about** but was unable to distinguish the two clearly. From the definition it could be noticed that examples of this kind are mostly grammatical collocations which is not included with our concern in this study. The other factor which is word coinage means that the students make up a new word to communicate the desired concept. The example was ***see sun-up** instead of **see the sunrise**.

The following table, i.e. (table 8), shows the frequency and percentage of the lexical collocational errors in the participants' writings according to types and sources of errors.

Table 8: Frequencies and Percentages of Lexical Collocational Errors

Type	False Concepts Hypothesized		Synonym		Ignorance of Rule Restrictions		Negative Transfer		Approximation		Total
	no. of errors	%	no. of errors	%	no. of errors	%	no. of errors	%	no. of errors	%	
L1	14	26,42 %	6	11,32 %	zero	zero %	23	43,4 %	10	18,87 %	53
L2	11	28,21 %	3	7,69 %	1	25,64 %	11	28,21 %	4	10,26 %	39
L3	15	42,86 %	5	14,28 %	zero	zero %	9	25,71 %	6	17,14 %	35
L4	4	%40	2	%20	zero	zero %	4	40%	zero	zero %	10
L5	zero	zero %	zero	zero %	zero	zero %	4	%80	1	%20	5
L6	3	%50	1	16,7 %	zero	zero %	2	33,33 %	zero	zero %	6
L7	2	22,22 %	1	11,11 %	zero	zero %	4	44,44 %	2	22,22 %	9
Total no.	49		18		10		57		23		157
Percent	%31,21		%11,46		%6,37		%36,31		%14,65		%100

In terms of the sources of collocational errors, negative transfer was the major source of the lexical collocational errors because it brought about 36% of the total errors of the two types of transfer, more collocational errors resulted from interlingual transfer than intralingual transfer. The reason of this result may be due to the fact that the learners are thinking in their native language when they are writing. Thus whenever they do not know the exact word or the correct item, they try to transfer it from their native language . Sometimes they do this process unconsciously ; that's to say ,they use items from their native language without knowing that these items are incorrect to be used in English. Among the three types of intralingual transfer, more collocational errors resulted from false concept

hypothesized with (31,21%). Only 14, 65% of the lexical collocational errors resulted from approximation.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

Studies on collocations have been carried out in the past two decades but it seems that our understanding of collocations is not enough. The findings of this study show that the Iraqi learners of English as a foreign language, even at advanced level, still have difficulty with English collocations especially lexical collocations. The findings raise the need for a more constructive instructional focus on the phenomenon of collocation in English at the university level. Thus the following practical ways are necessary in teaching and learning lexical collocations for both EFL teachers and learners (based on the suggestions of Taiwo, 2004; Tang, 2004 Deveci, 2004 and Mahmoud, 2005):

1-Developing learners' awareness of lexical collocations: it helps learners to learn more efficiently and effectively, and produce lexical collocations more accurately in their English writings. An effective way for developing awareness of collocations is to pay more attention to a selection of the students' mis-collocations. Through identifying the learners' mis-collocations, teachers not only understand the learners' mis-collocations but also incorporate them into the classroom at proper times to improve and extend vocabulary teaching. Also, designing lexical collocation exercises for the learners to practice is one of the ways to develop the learners' awareness of lexical collocations, such as, lexical matching exercises. This way will enable the learners to develop and distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable lexical collocations.

2-Reinforcing the learners' concept of lexical collocation: the learners should be encouraged to make effective use of English dictionaries, especially the ones which written with learners in focus and consist of common collocations. Dictionaries such as,

the Collins COBUILD English Dictionary, Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary ,Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, BBI Dictionary of English Word Combinations, Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English can help the learners develop better awareness of lexical collocations and enable them to understand the usage of these dictionaries. These dictionaries are practical and suitable to the EFL learners.

3-Avoiding literal translation: most of the incorrect lexical collocations found in this study due to interlingual transfer from Arabic. The participants were affected by their mother language in English writing. Thus it is important for EFL teachers to remind their students that literal translation should be used with great caution. Moreover, EFL teachers should spend extra time working on lexical collocations without direct translation.

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