


UDC: 7203.01

LBC: 63.3(2)6-7; 65.497; 71; 71.1

MJ № 369

 10.33864/2617-751X.2025.v8.i7.288-306

## LEXICAL COLLOCATIONS IN LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING

**Rahmani Oumhani\***

**Abstract.** In this study, we focused on lexical collocations in relation to language learning and teaching. We aimed to cover the most important aspects that allow for a general understanding of this topic based on the theoretical and applied research that has addressed it (as reviewed), especially given the scarcity of Arabic research on this subject. We proceeded to define the nature of lexical collocations amidst the conceptual and terminological fragmentation that characterizes them, and to demonstrate their pivotal role in language acquisition and instruction, while also considering their significance in teaching Arabic as a first or foreign language. Our intention in highlighting this linguistic phenomenon was to draw researchers' attention to it and to explore new research horizons that would benefit the teaching of Arabic to its native speakers and to speakers of other languages. Interest in the lexicon has become a distinguishing feature of modern research and studies in the field of language teaching and learning after being neglected for a considerable time. In the past, grammatical structures dominated language instruction.

**Keywords:** lexical collocations, restricted expressions, language teaching and learning, mental lexicon, native language Arabic, foreign language

---

\* Lecturer Class A, Specialization: Arabic Language, University of Medea Yahia fares, Department of Arabic Language and Literature; Algeria

E-mail: [rahmani.oumhani@univ-medea.dz](mailto:rahmani.oumhani@univ-medea.dz)

<https://orcid.org/0009-0003-9142-7770>

**To cite this article:** Oumhani, R. [2025]. LEXICAL COLLOCATIONS IN LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING. "Metafizika" journal, 8(7), pp.288-306.

<https://doi.org/10.33864/2617-751X.2025.v8.i7.288-306>

**Article history:**

Received: 07.06.2025

Accepted: 10.08.2025

Published: 03.11.2025



**Copyright:** © 2025 by AcademyGate Publishing. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the CC BY-NC 4.0. For details on this license, please visit

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>.

## ЛЕКСИЧЕСКИЕ КОЛЛОКАЦИИ В ОБУЧЕНИИ И ИЗУЧЕНИИ ЯЗЫКОВ

**Рахмани Умхани\***

**Абстракт.** В данном исследовании рассматриваются лексические коллокации в контексте изучения и преподавания языка. Целью работы является охват наиболее значимых аспектов, позволяющих сформировать общее понимание данной темы на основе теоретических и прикладных исследований, особенно учитывая ограниченное количество трудов на арабском языке по этой проблематике. В работе предпринята попытка определить природу лексических коллокаций в условиях концептуальной и терминологической разобщенности, охарактеризовать их ключевую роль в процессе усвоения и преподавания языка, а также подчеркнуть их значение в обучении арабскому языку как родному и как иностранному. Подчеркивая актуальность данного лингвистического явления, автор стремится привлечь внимание исследователей и открыть новые направления для изучения, способствующие совершенствованию методики преподавания арабского языка. Интерес к лексике стал отличительной чертой современных исследований в области преподавания и изучения языков после того, как долгое время ему не уделялось должного внимания. В прошлом в преподавании языка доминировали грамматические структуры.

**Ключевые слова:** лексические коллокации, устойчивые выражения, обучение и изучение языка, ментальный лексикон, родной язык-арабский, иностранный язык

---

\* Преподаватель класса А, специализация: арабский язык, Университет Медея Яхья Фарес, кафедра арабского языка и литературы; Алжир

E-mail: [rahmani.oumhani@univ-medea.dz](mailto:rahmani.oumhani@univ-medea.dz)

<https://orcid.org/0009-0003-9142-7770>

**Цитировать статью:** Умхани, Р. [2025]. ЛЕКСИЧЕСКИЕ КОЛЛОКАЦИИ В ОБУЧЕНИИ И ИЗУЧЕНИИ ЯЗЫКОВ. Журнал «Metafizika», 8(7), с.288-306.

<https://doi.org/10.33864/2617-751X.2025.v8.i7.288-306>

**История статьи:**

Статья поступила в редакцию: 07.06.2025

Отправлена на доработку: 10.08.2025

Принята для печати: 03.11.2025




**Copyright:** © 2025 by AcademyGate Publishing. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the CC BY-NC 4.0. For details on this license, please visit

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>.

UOT: 7203.01

KBT: 63.3(2)6-7; 65.497; 71; 71.1

MJ № 369

 10.33864/2617-751X.2025.v8.i7.288-306

## DİL ÖYRƏNİLMƏSİ VƏ TƏDRİSİNDƏ LEKSİK KOLLOKASIYALAR

**Rəhmani Umxani\***

**Abstrakt.** Bu tədqiqatda biz leksik kollokasiyaları dilin öyrənilməsi və tədrisi ilə əlaqəli şəkildə araşdırdıq. Məqsədimiz bu mövzunu nəzəri və tətbiqi tədqiqatlar əsasında ümumi şəkildə dərk etməyə imkan verən əsas məqamları əhatə etmək idi, xüsusilə də ərəb dilində bu istiqamətdə aparılmış araşdırmaların azlığını nəzərə alaraq. Biz leksik kollokasiyaların mahiyyətini müəyyənləşdirməyə çalışdıq, onları xarakterizə edən konseptual və terminoloji parçalanmanı təhlil etdik və dilin mənimsənilməsi və tədrisindəki mühüm rolunu göstərdik. Həmçinin bu fenomenin ərəb dilinin ana və ya xarici dil kimi tədrisindəki əhəmiyyətini də vurğuladıq. Bu dil hadisəsinə diqqət çəkməklə tədqiqatçıların marağını artırmaq və həm ana dili, həm də digər dillərin daşıyıcılarına ərəb dilinin öyrədilməsi üçün yeni tədqiqat istiqamətləri açmaq məqsədini daşıyırdıq. Lüğətə maraq, uzun müddət laqeyd qaldıqdan sonra, dil tədrisi və öyrənilməsi sahəsində müasir tədqiqat və tədqiqatların fərqləndirici xüsusiyyətinə çevrilmişdir. Keçmişdə qrammatik strukturlar dil təlimində üstünlük təşkil edirdi.

**Açar sözlər:** leksik kollokasiyalar, məhdud ifadələr, dilin tədrisi və öyrənilməsi, leksik yaddaş, ana dili ərəb dili, xarici dil

\* A sinfi müəllim, ixtisas: Ərəb dili, Medea Yahya Fares Universiteti, Ərəb dili və ədəbiyyatı kafedrası; Əlcəzair

E-mail: [rahmani.oumhani@univ-medea.dz](mailto:rahmani.oumhani@univ-medea.dz)

<https://orcid.org/0009-0003-9142-7770>

**Məqaləyə istinad:** Umxani, R. [2025]. DİL ÖYRƏNİLMƏSİ VƏ TƏDRİSİNDƏ LEKSİK KOLLOKASIYALAR. “Metafizika” jurnalı, 8(7), səh.288-306.

<https://doi.org/10.33864/2617-751X.2025.v8.i7.288-306>

**Məqalənin tarixçəsi:**

Məqalə redaksiyaya daxil olmuşdur: 07.06.2025

Təkrar işlənməyə göndərilmişdir: 10.08.2025

Çapa qəbul edilmişdir: 04.08.2025



**Copyright:** © 2025 by AcademyGate Publishing. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the CC BY-NC 4.0. For details on this license, please visit

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>.

## **1.Introduction**

Interest in the lexicon has become a distinguishing feature of modern research and studies in the field of language teaching and learning after being neglected for a considerable time. In the past, grammatical structures dominated language instruction. However, scholars have emphasized that "Just as grammar plays a role in ensuring the correctness of pronunciation and the integrity of language in use, the lexicon also plays a role in regulating the proper flow of words and their association in linguistic usage" [Al-Diban, Ibrahim bin Ali, (1436 AH), "The Status of Verb Collocations in Teaching a Second Language," *Journal of the Saudi Scientific Society for the Arabic Language*, Issue 16, p.40]. While it is valid to say that a large number of vocabulary items will not help an individual use the language without relying on grammatical rules, the opposite truth is that the representation of the grammatical system cannot occur without knowledge of vocabulary. When we consider the natural process of language acquisition, the most sensible approach to learning is to prioritize the lexicon over grammar, as a child initially works with vocabulary before engaging with grammar, focusing in the early stages of learning on vocabulary that facilitates language use, and then on the rules that regulate this use.

Vocabulary teaching requires that learners are provided with the necessary tools of units to help them communicate in different situations. This goes beyond single units to include compound units, which form an essential part of the lexicon because of the compositional relationship between their units in real use. Among the first of these units to be mentioned are collocations, which exist in every language. Linguistic studies have demonstrated their influence on language acquisition and their value "in conveying meaning, facilitating smooth communication, enriching expression, achieving linguistic economy and indicating the level and culture of the speaker"[Previous reference, p.14]. Cognitive studies have highlighted their importance in terms of processing speed, retention and their role in expanding an individual's mental lexicon. Recent vocabulary research in the field of language teaching has focused on the phenomenon of collocation in native and second languages. While Western research in this area has been significant, Arabic research remains limited in comparison, especially when compared to the amount of research devoted to the study of single units. This has led us to address the issue of lexical collocations in relation to language learning and teaching, which we present in the following sections.

## **2.Lexical Collocations: Terminology and Nature**

Lexical collocations (Collocations) are linguistic elements that have received considerable attention and study from researchers in various fields related to language due to their specificity in belonging to formulaic language

(Formulaic sequence) or “semi-fixed expressions” [Wray, 2002; Forsberg, 2008; Schmidt, 2004; Wood, 2015]. [Théophanous, Olga, (2021), "Learning Collocations: What Factors Are at Play?" *Modern Languages, Hall Open Science*, 3, p.64]. These expressions have structural relationships that evoke one another effortlessly and are general in that all languages share them, making them “one of the linguistic universals” [Bint Barak Al-Rashid Al-Anzi, Badriya, (2024), "Towards Building a Dictionary of Verb Collocations in Contemporary Arabic Dictionaries," 2nd ed., Riyadh, King Salman Global Academy for the Arabic Language, p.18]. The phenomenon of collocation is considered one of the most linguistically varied and differing in definitions and boundaries among linguists due to “the diversity of their backgrounds and their influence by various linguistic trends and methodologies” [Al-Diban, Ibrahim bin Ali, "The Status of Verb Collocations in Teaching a Second Language," p.15]. coupled with the lack of a reliable methodology in studying them. Additionally, the linguistic space related to collocations is vast, existing in a non-fixed area between free, idiomatic, and grammatical structures. Moreover, there is no consensus among Arab scholars on a single comprehensive term for this concept; the term “Collocation” has been translated into several terms such as التلازم ، التضام ، الرصف ، التصاحب ، التوارد ، and اللفظي الاقتران , among others.

The importance of lexical collocations has been recognized by Arabic linguists since ancient times, despite the absence of a specific term for them. Although they did not specifically address collocations as a standalone topic or engage with them according to a particular methodology, they were aware of the interactions between vocabulary items. For instance, Abu Hilal al-‘Askari (d. 395 AH) noted: “Do you not see that it is said (ample bunch) but not’ (many bunches)? You say (ample luck) but not ‘many’; rather, you say (many fortunes) and (many men), but not (a many man)” [Al-askari, Abu Hilal, (1400 AH), *The Differences in Language. Volume One*, Beirut, Dar Al-Afaq Al-Jadida, p.252].

They also used many collocations in ancient books and dictionaries as examples and quotations, such as those found in “books of meanings that included a wide range of them (e.g. Qutrub, d. 210 AH; Abu Zayd al-Ansari, d. 215 AH; Ibn al-Sikkit, d. 244 AH), and other dictionaries of terms that sometimes addressed specific collocations in their definitions, such as *Lisan al-Arab*, *al-Taj*, and *al-Qamus*” [Bint Barak Al-Rashid Al-Anzi, Badriya, "Towards Building a Dictionary of Verb Collocations," p.20 (modified)]. Importantly, the value of collocations was obvious to ancient scholars, who regarded them as part of linguistic competence, where deviation from them could lead to linguistic errors, “due to the existence of lexical pairing constraints that are pleasing to the linguistic taste of a given language, which do not tolerate violations despite their structural and morphological

correctness" [Al-Diban, Ibrahim bin Ali, "The Status of Verb Collocations in Teaching a Second Language," p.34].

Modern Arabs have focused their attention on collocations, devoting several works to defining, classifying and categorising them, while also benefiting from the results of Western studies in the field. Ghazala noted that "the credit for establishing the concept of lexical collocations goes to Ramzi Baalbaki, who first introduced them in his dictionary (A Dictionary of Linguistic Terms)" [Ghazala, Hassan, (2007), "Dar Al-Ilm Dictionary of Verb Collocations," Lebanon, Dar Al-Ilm for Millions, p.05]. Conversely, Western interest in collocations arose in the late twentieth century, particularly with English linguist J.R. Firth's theory of contextual meaning, in which he studied the phenomenon. His followers, such as Halliday, further refined the concept, while Palmer defined and illustrated it with examples in his book (A Grammar of English Words). In addition, the Russian linguists Maltchik and Zholkovsky carried out systematic scientific studies of collocations based on the laws governing their use in their theory (Sense-Text). Sinclair has also contributed statistical studies based on large corpora and computational tools, and we cannot overlook the efforts of lexicographers who have paid considerable attention to collocations by creating special dictionaries, especially in English.

While researchers agree that lexical collocation is a specific type of syntactic relationship that governs the co-occurrence of words to serve a semantic function shared by a linguistic community, they differ in defining its nature and outlining its boundaries. Firth saw it as "a relationship that binds words together, where the collocation of one word does not simply imply its mere proximity to others, but rather the expectation of interchange between them" [Firth, J. R, (1957), "Papers in Linguistics 1934-1951," London: Oxford University Press, p.181]. He defined collocation in terms of "the meaning of the words: where one word typically accompanies another out of familiarity and habit, and the meaning of the context: where some collocations cannot be understood without their context, especially those that do not carry the meaning of their individual parts" [Bint Barak Al-Rashid Al-Anzi, Badriya, "Towards Building a Dictionary of Verb Collocations," p.22-23 (modified)].

Sinclair explored collocation through a corpus linguistics approach and termed it "Window A in Collocation," describing it as "the co-occurrence of two or more words in close proximity within a text" [Sinclair, J, (1991), "Corpus Concordance Collection," Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.170]. He defined this proximity as extending up to five words at most, with four words on either side of the collocation nucleus, linking collocation to the principle of co-occurrence that organizes the relationships of words within a linear sequence and governs their usage during adjacency.

Palmer called collocations “adjacent collocations”, seeing them as closely related to real linguistic structures rather than a statistical phenomenon as posited by Sinclair [Bint Barak Al-Rashid Al-Anzi, Badriya, previous reference, p.23, citing English Edinburg of Hans. L, "Corpus Linguistics and the Description," University Press]. He defined them as “the sequence of two or more words which present as a complete unit without being divided into parts” [The same reference, same page]. Mel’cuk based his concept of collocation on “the principle of idiomaticity, where it cannot be formed from simple words or combinations based on general linguistic rules, but must be stored and used as an inseparable whole” [Najih, Abdul Rahim, (2024), "The Dictionary and Understanding- Issues in Acquisition from the Perspective of Psycholinguistics," Journal of Riyadh Studies, King Salman Global Academy for the Arabic Language, p.182].

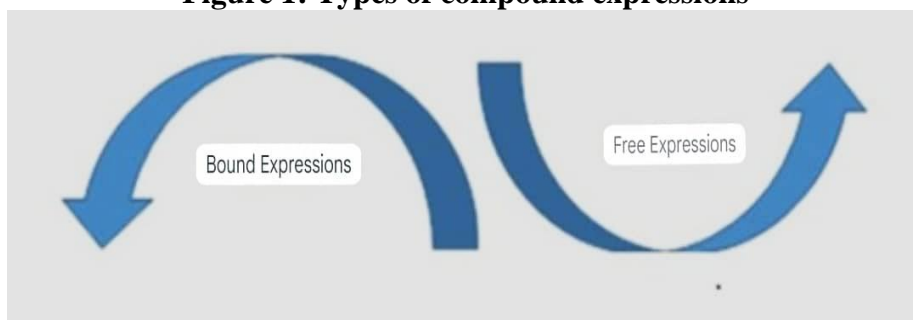
On another note, Abu al-Azm described lexical collocations as “a nominal or verbal linguistic unit composed of two or more words, the combination of which creates a new meaning that is different from the original meanings of the individual words” [Bint Barak Al-Rashid Al-Anzi, Badriya, "Towards Building a Dictionary of Verb Collocations," p.27]. Ibrahim bin Murad distinguished between two types of syntactic relationships that can arise between these units, identifying them as solidarity and collocation. The former refers to “the form of lexical units composed of two or more words or a composite structure that carries a semantic unit that refers to the experience of the linguistic community; however, its elements are gathered in a normal way through free solidarity” [Ben Murad, Ibrahim, (2006), "The Lexical Unit Between Individual and Collocation," Journal of Lexicographical Studies, Issue 5, Morocco, Moroccan Association for Lexicographical Studies, p.24]. The latter expresses “the state of composite lexical units (ready-made phrases) that refer to the experience of the linguistic community and carry a specific assembly of their constituent elements” [The same reference, p.29]. Muhammad Joudah distinguished three terms for three types of collocation: “free collocation, where one word can replace another; solidarity, where one word accompanies another and no substitution or addition is possible; and idiomatic expressions, where two or more words come together to form a semantic unit whose meaning can only be understood by considering the overall intent of the structure” [Al-Diban, Ibrahim bin Ali, "The Status of Verb Collocations in Teaching a Second Language," p.20].

### **3.Towards a defined term and concept for lexical collocations**

The summary of the previous discussion suggests - among other things - that researchers have not settled on a specific term and concept for lexical collocations, making them at times nebulous and unclear, and at other times overly general or narrow. This situation has prompted some to attempt to

delineate the subtle differences between collocations and other overlapping phenomena at different levels that allow clear boundaries to be drawn between them. The first distinction reflects a syntactic distinction between free expressions, which result from the association of words without relational specificity (i.e. those that allow high-level interchange, such as ‘the lesson began and the lecture ended’), and restricted expressions, which result from a relationship of companionship and connection between words to convey a specific meaning.

**Figure 1: Types of compound expressions**



Some researchers have adopted other criteria to distinguish between types of restricted expressions; among these, we have chosen the criteria specified by Ibrahim bin Ali al-Dubayan due to their precision, clarity, and applicability, especially in the educational field. These criteria are transparency, stability, and translatability. Based on this, al-Dubayan defined restricted expressions as follows: [Previous reference, p.21 and beyond (modified)].

**First/ Lexical Collocations (Collocations):**

These are units that are frequently used and circulated, semantically transparent, though their transparency is not complete like that of free expressions, where their meaning equals the sum of the meanings of their parts. They are characterized by the interdependence of their elements, where the collocating element is influenced by the meaning of the base element (e.g., “bitter war,” “the worst of age”). There is a significant degree of change at the structural level, allowing for the substitution of one element with another (e.g., “grab attention,” “catch attention”). The relationship between their parts is arbitrary, governed only by usage (e.g., “committed a crime,” “declared war”), and it is also not justified grammatically (e.g., saying “committed a crime” is grammatically and semantically correct but deviates from usage). Collocations are typically used to fill semantic gaps that cannot be covered by single units. They can be translated literally but with the selection of the appropriate equivalent in linguistic usage.

**Second/ Ready-made expressions (compound expressions):**



These units are more ambiguous and semantically opaque than lexical collocations, but less so than idiomatic expressions, especially when linked to the context of communicative situations (e.g., “There is no power and no strength except with God,” which can imply reliance on God for power and strength, astonishment, lament, or other meanings). The changes that can be made to their constituents are very limited (e.g., “thank you very much”, “many thanks to you”), and the relationship between their parts is arbitrary and not governed by collocation (e.g., “welcome”). Their translation falls between lexical collocations and idiomatic expressions, as they are ready-made expressions for which the translator can find equivalents in other languages.

**Third/ Idiomatic expressions:**

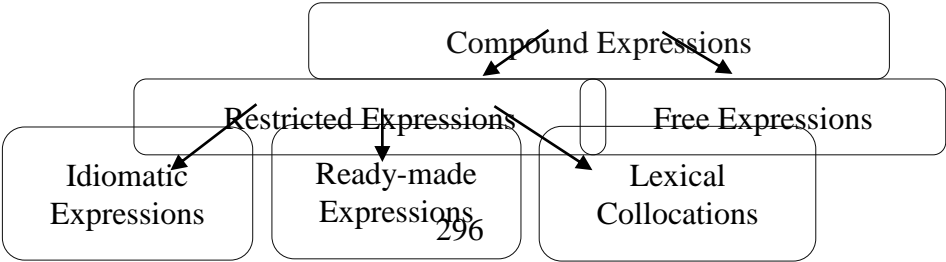
These units are semantically opaque, where their meaning cannot be deduced from the meanings of their individual parts, but is revealed by the overall figurative meaning (e.g. “came back empty-handed”, “full of ashes”). They can sometimes be replaced by a single word (e.g. “to beat one’s palms together in confusion”). They do not allow the modification of their components because of their rigidity (e.g. “daughters of fate”), and there is no collocation relationship governing their parts (e.g. “scattered like dust”, “a hair of Muawiyah”). They cannot be translated literally because they are based on metaphor.

In order to clarify the differences between the above composite units, Ibrahim bin Ali al-Dubayan has compiled them in a single table as follows: [Previous reference, p.21].

**Figure 2: Properties of free and restricted expressions in terms of transparency, stability and translation.**

Bound Expressions			Free Expressions	Pivotal Properties
Idiomatic Expressions	Ready-Made Expressions	Propositional Synonyms		
				Transparency
				Constancy
				Translation

Accordingly, the types of composite expressions will be defined as follows:



In this context, researchers have pointed out that the relationship between the units of collocations is a lexical relationship, which is as important as the syntactic relationship in understanding and interpreting linguistic messages and reproducing them correctly on the basis of the meanings acquired (e.g, "declared war", "conducted a war" or "waged a war" and "caught his attention", "took his attention" or "secured his attention" and "knelt down", "sat on his knees" or "squatted on his knees", etc.). The lack of compatibility between two words in the lexical composition makes the construction unattractive to the listener because of its deviation from usage authority, despite its grammatical correctness.

Some researchers have argued that lexical collocations "do not associate their meanings solely with the lexicon, but are linked to cultural, environmental, civilisational and historical factors that reveal the origin of their construction and demonstrate their relationship to reality... They can be understood from their semantic levels and their occurrence in the text, or from the linguistic intuition of the receiver". Meanwhile, some have associated them with meanings that are limited to the linguistic context without situational context [Bint Barak Al-Rashid Al-Anzi, Badriya, "Towards Building a Dictionary of Verb Collocations," p.34]. Mahmoud Jalal al-Din noted that "collocations are of two types: the first type is due to linguistic habit that is not bound to a specific type of construction, such as "bread and salt", where habit alone explains why these two words come together without any logical obstacle. The second type is related to linguistic construction, such as "flew in the sea" and "flew in the sky", where both examples are syntactically correct, but the first is semantically unacceptable, indicating that the lexical collocation here differs from the syntactic relationship [Mahmoud Jalal Al-Din Suleiman, (2018), "Linguistic Collocations and Their Applications in Teaching Arabic," Journal of Educational Sciences, Special Issue for the First International Conference of the Curriculum and Teaching Methods Department, p.289].

On another note, the relationship of collocation or co-occurrence is governed by a set of important rules, which we summarize as follows:

**1.Compatibility of Collocation:** This rule pertains to the degree of clustering in usage and the specificity of the language, meaning how compatible a word is with another word in a given context, appearing natural and conforming to the rules of the language and the habits of its speakers. For example, "firm," "solid," "tight" cluster with "order," "wood," "work." The feature of compatibility maintains linguistic fluency and distinguishes between natural, acceptable collocations and those that are contrived.

**2.Degree of Collocation:** This rule concerns "the extent to which a word can appear or be used" [The same, p.299]. The degree defines the range of possibilities for words in relation to the core word, forming part of the

structural fabric of the language that delineates the relationships and contexts permitted for collocation. Words can be classified according to this rule into:

- High-degree words: These can co-occur with multiple words (shared repetition), such as “large,” which can cluster with “size,” “number,” “form,” “importance,” “impact,” “problem,” or the verb “present,” which can cluster with “request,” “offer,” “help,” “objection,” “evidence,” “report,” etc. This type relies on semantic flexibility and metaphorical deviation, alongside contextual requirements.
- Medium-degree words: These can co-occur with a limited number of words but are not completely restricted, such as “killed,” “devoured,” and “attempted,” which relate to human or animal efforts but do not apply to inanimate objects. They fall within the scope of words associated with specific semantic fields (scientific, social, legal, etc.) and depend on functional context.
- Low-degree words: These can only co-occur with one or two specific words due to semantic specification or contextual association, such as “roar” with “lion,” “whisper” with “night,” and “harvest” with “wheat,” among others.

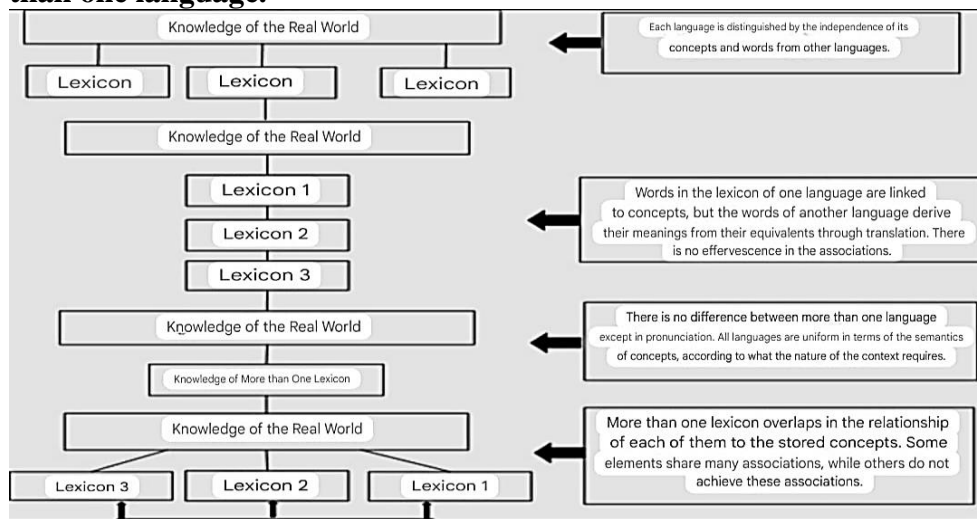
**3.Frequency of collocation:** This rule refers to the frequency of occurrence of collocated words in the natural usage of the speakers of the language, reflecting their entrenchment in the linguistic memory of the community. For example, “circled the Kaaba”. High-frequency collocations are often more stable and enduring, while low-frequency and declining collocations may change or disappear over time.

#### **4.Lexical Collocations in the Mental Lexicon**

Many psycholinguistic and neurolinguistic studies have focused on the characteristics of an individual’s mental lexicon regarding the nature of the information stored within it, how it is stored and organized, and the mechanisms for accessing it. This research aims to uncover the dynamics of mental processing during language acquisition or learning, or when transitioning from one language to another. It has been proposed that the lexicon is a list of lexical entries containing essential information related to lexical units and their usage rules. These entries are characterized by flexibility, allowing for the storage of a large amount of information associated with each lexical unit, and they expand in accordance with the growth and diversity of the lexical inventory. Additionally, this lexicon is not composed solely of single units, as suggested in earlier conceptions (Pawly & Syder, 1983; Sinclair, 1987; Kjellmer, 1990; Nesselhauf, 2000; Wray, 2002), [Al-Ghamdi, Ayman, Atwell, Eric, "Towards a Computerized Dictionary of Verb Collocations in Contemporary Arabic," University of Leeds, UK: [<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/112450/1/18.pdf>](<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/112450/1/18.pdf>)] but also includes a variety of composite units that aid individuals in communicating across various daily situations.

Studies have shown that a child's interaction with lexical units generally "initially relates to the inherent capability in their brain, which does not separate these units through any linguistic analysis. They perceive them as single lexical blocks (gestalt processing), which are differentiated as they age (analytic processing)" [Al-Diban, Ibrahim bin Ali, "The Status of Verb Collocations in Teaching a Second Language," p.47]. As a result, their language is rich in restricted units (including collocations), ensuring ease of recall and use, contributing to linguistic economy. The surrounding environment is a primary source for these units, along with what the child generates and stores in memory as a whole connected with intended meanings. The representation of these units in the mental lexicon occurs "as an integrated unit within a single entry" [Ben Allal Younes, (2020), "Linguistic Acquisition and the Activity of the Mental Dictionary- A Neuro-Linguistic Study," 1st ed., Jordan, Modern Books World, p.113], where their structural nature contributes to stronger retention, ease of recall, and immediate use without the need for reassembly, especially if composed of many collocating units. They also contribute to "expanding the mental lexicon by creating links between words and forming new lexical units, particularly those that comprise a single unit" [See: the same reference, same page]. Moreover, the processing cost is lower "compared to processing isolated words in long-term memory, especially those collocations whose meanings cannot be derived from their parts" [See: Najih, Abdul Rahim, "The Dictionary and Understanding," p.187].

When a child learns a second or foreign language, he or she will interact with lexical collocations in the same way as in his or her native language, retaining them as whole units and using them accordingly in context. The question of how lexical units for a second or foreign language are represented in the mental lexicon has attracted the interest of researchers, especially since the lexical inventory of a native speaker is organised according to phonetic and semantic principles. How does this apply to a learner of a second or foreign language? Some researchers - based on linguistic and psychological studies focusing on the lexicon of multilingual speakers - argue that "the two lexicons and linguistic systems are not entirely separate; studies from the 1960s and 1970s have shown the existence of a single complex system or two coordinated systems. What is certain, however, is that a child who learns several languages can always distinguish between them for different purposes" [Ben Allal Younes, "Linguistic Acquisition and the Activity of the Mental Dictionary," p.128]. Ben Allal Younes has attempted to summarise the main manifestations of the mental lexicon for children learning more than one language in a diagram derived from Haravon and Gerstman's concept of assessing the impact of the mental lexicon, which we illustrate as follows:

**Figure 3: Manifestations of the mental lexicon for children learning more than one language.**

Source: Ben Allal, Younes, (2020), 129.

### 5.Acquisition/Learning and Teaching of Lexical Collocations

Many researchers have attempted to uncover the interactive nature of language within a child's mental lexicon during the acquisition of their mother tongue and how it is used. Among the issues that attracted their attention is the coupling of words, which refers to "the event that tends to evoke other related events through semantic ignition during the storage and retrieval of everything happening in the brain" [Previous reference, p.54]. This contributes to expanding the child's cognitive horizons and allows for the development of their linguistic skills. It has been acknowledged that at the beginning of their interaction with language, a child is exposed to waves of speech in which they cannot distinguish compound blocks from parts due to their limited analytical ability. They tend to treat these blocks or sequences with general meanings as single units, storing them as integrated units within a single entry in the mental lexicon and using them as a whole.

This stage is "essential in early language acquisition," as the child perceives all aspects of language (phonetic, morphological, syntactic, and semantic) holistically and interacts with them in this way [Al-Diban, Ibrahim bin Ali, "The Status of Verb Collocations in Teaching a Second Language," p.47]. This reduces the burden of lexical processing and aids in easy interaction and communication with those around them. As they grow older and their cognitive growth and linguistic wealth increase, they will be able to differentiate between linguistic compounds, shifting from holistic processing to analytical processing.

Thus, early language for a child is rich in restricted expressions (including collocations), some of which they receive from linguistic inputs and others they create themselves (regardless of their correctness), serving as their means of communication "before their grammatical and lexical growth allows them to distinguish the internal components of these expressions" [See: previous reference, p.48]. and to control their usage according to contexts and situations. When the child transitions to another language, their acquisition of lexical collocations will depend on their ability to retain what they receive, storing it in memory as fixed holistic units that they can retrieve and use whenever needed. This implies that the strength of retention and recall is related to what is presented in the form of linguistic clusters rather than isolated words, aiding the representation of these expressions in predicting what accompanies them in the same context, thereby increasing communication possibilities and reducing the likelihood of errors.

Many applied and experimental studies have confirmed the difficulty of acquiring lexical collocations when learning second or foreign languages, as they represent a burden for the learner. "This difficulty does not only pertain to beginner or intermediate learners but also includes those who have reached an advanced level" [Previous reference, p.52]. Some researchers have linked this issue to the complexity associated with "its relation to common elements in all teaching; there is an overlap between the teacher, the learner, and the author of the textbook. For instance, a textbook that adopts a translation approach often equates collocations in a way that traps the learner in the rigid relationship presented by the book and the specific patterns of words and their equivalents in the target language" [Muhammad Abdullah Saleh Abu Al-Rub, "Verb Collocations," [<https://platform.almanhal.com/Files/2/100211>] (<https://platform.almanhal.com/Files/2/100211>)]. Meanwhile, some researchers have argued that the difficulty varies between beginner learners of the target language and those who have reached an advanced level. The difficulty for advanced learners lies in the discrepancies in using restricted units (including lexical collocations) between the mother tongue and the target language. "This is because language acquisition occurs either by relying on metrics specific to the mother tongue or by general common principles shared among human languages, and in neither case does it pave the way for the learner to navigate restricted combinations" [Al-Diban, Ibrahim bin Ali, "The Status of Verb Collocations in Teaching a Second Language," p.52, citing Rafiq Bin Hamouda, (1436), "Constrained Properties and Barriers to Acquisition," p.28].

On another note, most studies focused on teaching lexical collocations have acknowledged their significant role in acquiring foreign languages (Firth 1957, Boers, Kappel 2006, Hill 2000, Lewis 2000), especially since they represent

approximately sixty to seventy percent of spoken and written discourse. Lewis (2000) stated that “neglecting the teaching of lexical collocations leads to overlooking many linguistic elements that simply express complex ideas, and a learner with a limited number of collocations will have to use lengthy expressions to convey simple ideas”, [See: Najih, Abdul Rahim, "The Dictionary and Understanding," p.184] which may result in syntactic and semantic errors. Furthermore, enabling learners to master collocations facilitates their understanding of words and the rules for arranging them based on the collocation principle, as failing to consider this leads to deviations from linguistic usage. It also enhances their linguistic fluency, grammatical accuracy, quick thinking, and recall, boosting their competencies and self-confidence during interactions with others. Therefore, collocations are crucial for them as foreign language learners, just as they are for learners of their mother tongue.

Some researchers have linked the importance of knowing lexical collocations to the development of reading skills and comprehension. A learner who engages with collocations within reading texts is, in fact, dealing with linguistic clusters rather than isolated words. They aim to identify meaning without having to recognize each part of the collocation separately, which aids in achieving rapid reading by recognizing the first part of the collocation and predicting what follows. This facilitates understanding. Abdul Rahim Najeh noted- based on the processes that occur during eye movement in recognizing words in the text- that “lexical collocations provide support to the reader by reducing the number of words the eye fixates on, as they allow for a reduction in fixation time by skipping over predictable words. This is evidenced by beginners who fixate their eyes on the smallest units and take more time to fixate” (Nation, 2009), in addition to the speed with which words are read when in collocational phrases (Schmitt & Underwood, 2004) [The same reference, p.191].

Researchers have also linked knowledge of lexical collocations to improved spoken and written production, especially since words are not used in isolation but within relational networks that link them. It is therefore essential for learners to be aware of what collocates with words when they are speaking or writing. Collocations serve as a means for learners to use the language in a way that is closer to that of native speakers. Having a stock of lexical collocations enhances a learner’s ability to communicate and achieve fluency. Lewis (2000) pointed out that “a learner with 2000 words can only use them in a limited way, whereas a learner with the same number of words who can form collocations will be better able to communicate”. Hill (2000) emphasised that a learner who knows 2000 words and six collocations for each word knows 12,000 expressions [The same previous reference, p.184].

## **6. Lexical Collocations and Teaching Arabic to Native Speakers and Non-Native Speakers**

The topic of lexical collocations has become one of the most important subjects that has received independent research and studies aimed at teaching languages to both native and non-native speakers. In this regard, we have observed, particularly in studies focused on teaching the English language and some other languages, that there is a notable lack of research dedicated to teaching the Arabic language, with only a few exceptions. Conversely, there is a substantial amount of research concerned with teaching Arabic vocabulary, most of which evaluates what is presented in textbooks and educational curricula or within linguistic activities. These studies also provide insights on the nature and scope of what should be offered at each level, how to organize and arrange it in relation to language components, and methods for consolidating and retrieving it from memory. These units have also received attention in the establishment of curricula and educational programs aimed at teaching Arabic to various levels and groups.

However, restricted units (including collocations) have not received the necessary attention despite their importance. Educators of Arabic recognize that "language learning does not only involve learning isolated words, but also understanding how they interact and relate to each other in their context. The learner's communicative competence hinges on their ability to know the word on one hand and the words that collocate with it on the other" [The same previous reference, p.183.

\*This is also what Muhammad Abu Bakr Qurbah (and others) referred to in the survey study they conducted within the famous bibliometric databases (Google Scholar, EBSCO, ProQuest) to understand trends in studying verb collocations in teaching Arabic as a foreign language over the past ten years, concluding that the research addressing this topic has been limited, totaling no more than nine studies]. Lexical collocation lists have been absent from Arabic teaching curricula and textbooks at all educational stages across various Arab countries, and there is no clear goal among educational authors for teaching or learning them.

Moreover, attention to lexical collocations has been largely absent from most classifications aimed at teaching Arabic as a foreign language and within the reference frameworks for teaching Arabic to speakers of other languages. There has not been a significant focus on them as there has been on individual units, despite their particular relevance to learning the Arabic language on one hand, and to conveying cultural, historical, and environmental information to native speakers on the other.

On another note, the Arabic research that has addressed the teaching of Arabic lexical collocations to foreigners is very limited, as previously



mentioned. For example, when we searched on Google and Google Scholar, we found very few studies\*, some of which aimed to propose theoretical concepts about lexical collocations and their role in teaching a second language [such as the study by Ibrahim bin Ali al-Dubayan, 2016], or to understand teachers' perspectives on lexical collocations and their difficulty in learning (such as the study by Amani Nawawi and Nour Hmeidi Zain al-Din, 2017), or to investigate the impact of collocations on the linguistic environment of non-Arabic speakers [such as the study by Muhammad Abu Bakr Qurbah and Munir Qurbah Abu Bakr, 2024]. Some studies have attempted to reveal the effect of lexical collocations in teaching Arabic as a second language through experimental proposals [like the study by Muhammad bin Abdullah Al-Ateef Al-Qahtani, 2023] or to present practical suggestions that Arabic teachers can use in teaching lexical collocations to learners [such as the study by Mahmoud Jalal al-Din Suleiman, 2018]. However, research utilizing computerized corpora for teaching Arabic, as has been done in teaching English or other foreign languages, is notably absent.

## **7. Conclusion**

The topic of lexical collocations has attracted researchers' attention in recent decades due to its close connection to language learning and teaching, whether for native languages or second languages. In this regard, we have noted that while there are several foreign studies that have made rich scientific contributions (both theoretical and practical), there is a limited number of Arabic studies addressing this topic, particularly in the field of teaching Arabic as a foreign language. This has prompted us to delve into the subject and explore certain aspects that could open avenues for future research.

In light of this, we recommend that researchers in the field of Arabic language education focus on lexical collocations by conducting extensive studies that will help formulate methodological perspectives and provide scientific proposals to enrich the lexical research of Arabic on one hand, and to prepare textbooks and educational programs on the other hand, especially given the significance of linguistic issues in our era. We also recommend that those responsible for teaching Arabic to native speakers and to speakers of other languages:

- Allocate space for lexical collocations within curricula and educational materials, similar to the spaces dedicated to vocabulary.
- Utilize specialized Arabic dictionaries on collocations to present various linguistic activities and train learners to use lexical collocations in different educational situations.
- Focus on educational activities based on a lexical approach and the actual use of lexical collocations in conversations and writing.

- Integrate modern methods and strategies for presenting lexical collocations to learners in order to build genuine communicative competencies.
- Employ modern technology and artificial intelligence tools to provide adaptive teaching and assessment of lexical collocations that consider the characteristics of the Arabic language and the needs of learners.

## **8. REFERENCES**

### **Arabic References**

1. Al-askari, Abu Hilal, (1400 AH), The Differences in Language. Volume One, Beirut, Dar Al-Afaq Al-Jadida.
2. Ben Allal, Younes, (2020), Linguistic Acquisition and Mental Lexicon Activity: A Neurolinguistic Study, 1st ed., Jordan, Al-‘Alam Al-Kutub Al-Hadith.
3. Bint Barak Al-Rashid Al-Anzi, Badriya, (2024), Towards Building a Dictionary of Lexical Collocations in Contemporary Arabic Dictionaries. 2nd ed., Riyadh, King Salman Global Academy for the Arabic Language.
4. Ghazala, Hassan, (2007), Dar Al-‘Ilm Dictionary of Lexical Collocations, Lebanon, Dar Al-‘Ilm Lil-Malayin.
5. Najeh, Al-Rahim, (2024), The Dictionary and Understanding: Issues in Acquisition from the Perspective of Psycholinguistics Journal of Studies, Riyadh, King Salman Global Academy for the Arabic Language.

### **Foreign References**

6. Firth, J. R., (1957), Papers in Linguistics 1934-1951. London: Oxford University Press.
7. Sinclair, J., (1991), Corpus Concordance Collection. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
8. Théophanous, Olga, (2021), learning Collocations: What Factors Are Involved? Modern Languages, Hall Open Science, No. 3.

### **Articles**

9. Al-Diban, Ibrahim bin Ali, (1436 AH), The Status of Lexical Collocations in Teaching a Second Language, Journal of the Saudi Scientific Association for the Arabic Language, Issue 16.
10. Ben Murad, Ibrahim, (2006), The Lexical Unit between Individuality, Solidarity, and Collocation. Journal of Lexical Studies, Issue 5, Morocco, Moroccan Association for Lexical Studies.
11. Asadov A.A. (2025). Totalitarian obstacles and modern challenges in the study of World literature. Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems, 8(5), 442-448; doi:10.56352/sei/8.5.44. <https://imcraaz.org/archive/363-science-education-and-innovations-in-the-context-of-modern-problems-issue-5-volvihi-2025.html>

12. Mahmoud Jalal Al-Din Suleiman, (2018), Linguistic Collocations and Their Applications in Teaching Arabic. Journal of Educational Sciences, Special Issue for the First International Conference of the Curriculum and Teaching Methods Department, Damietta University, Egypt.

**Websites**

13. Al-Ghamdi, Ayman, Atwell, Eric, Towards a Computational Dictionary of Lexical Collocations in Contemporary Arabic, University of Leeds, UK:  
<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/112450/1/18.pdf>
14. Muhammad Abdullah Saleh Abu Al-Rub, Lexical Collocations:  
<https://platform.almanhal.com/Files/2/100211>