

# Translation of Collocations into Arabic: A Descriptive Corpus-Based Study

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**Abstract:** Translation of collocations represents a constant translation problem, where extensive linguistic and cultural gaps between languages result in a lack of equivalence of specific-culture, and bound collocational patterns. This study aims to investigate a number of English collocations and their Arabic translations, in order to measure the degree of domestication versus foreignization in translated Arabic texts. This study applies Baker's theoretical framework of equivalence and translation strategies (2018), and makes use of the parallel corpus: OPUS2, on the corpus analysis web-based tool Sketch Engine. This study has shown that domestication predominantly characterises the translation of collocations in Arabic, where equivalence is usually achieved using different translation strategies.

**Keywords:** Collocations, English-Arabic translation, Equivalence, Translation strategies

## 1. Contextualisation

Collocation is one of most common linguistic phenomena that has been widely investigated in the area of linguistics and translation studies. The notion of collocations has been familiar since the work of Palmer (1938), who defines collocations as "successions of two or more words the meaning of which can hardly be deduced from a knowledge of their component words" (p. iv). Baker in her translation textbook: *In Other Words* (2018), refers collocations to certain words to co-occur regularly in a given language, and express a presupposed meaning, which "arises from co-occurrence restrictions on what other words or expressions we expect to see before or after a particular lexical unit" (p. 13). These restrictions, the 'collocational restrictions', are "semantically arbitrary restrictions which do not follow logically from the propositional meaning of a word" (p. 54).

Collocation has been a subject of numerous studies in English language. In their dictionary of English, Benson, Benson, and Ilson (1986) classify collocations into two main types: lexical collocations and grammatical collocations. Both types were divided to some sub-types, for instance, lexical collocations can be nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs. On the other hand, grammatical collocation include nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs as well, however, those items usually combined with preposition or grammatical structure such as an infinitive or clause. On the subject of Arabic, collocations also have been extensively investigated in a number of studies, such as (Emery, 1987, 1988, 1991; Ghazala, 1993; Ghazala, 2007; Hafiz, 2002; Hoogland, 1993), where different categorisations for collocations have been suggested. Ghazala (2007) for example, classifies collocations into 17 categories of collocations in Arabic as follows:

- 1) Verb + noun (object), e.g. (يشن حرباً): *wage a war*.
- 2) Noun + adjective, e.g. (حرب ضروس): *fatal war*
- 3) Verb + noun (subject), e.g. (يستعر أوار حرب): *war thirst flared up*
- 4) Genitive case: Noun + noun, e.g. (ويلات الحرب): *woes of the war*
- 5) Noun + preposition + noun, e.g. (حرب على المخدرات): *a war on drugs*
- 6) Noun + noun (genitive/adjective case), e.g. (دورة دموية): *blood circulation*

- 7) Noun + conjunction + noun, e.g. (الماء والكلأ): *water and grass*
- 8) Noun + noun (genitive), e.g. (أمير الشعراء): *prince of poets*
- 9) Verb + preposition, e.g. (يعفي من): *exempt from*
- 10) Noun + preposition, e.g. (وقوف على الحقيقة): *standing on the truth* (grasping the truth)
- 11) Preposition + noun, e.g. (تحت المراقبة): *under probation* (On probation)
- 12) Adjective + preposition, e.g. (محق في): *right in*
- 13) Collocations of countable noun, e.g. (سرب من الطيور): *flock of birds*
- 14) Collocations of un-countable noun, e.g. (رغيف من الخبز): *a loaf of bread*
- 15) Collocations of onomatopoeias, e.g. (فحيح الأفاعي): *hissing of snakes*
- 16) Collocations of similes, e.g. (أصفى من عين الحمامة): *Clearer than the pigeon eye*
- 17) Metaphoric collocations (fixed expressions/idioms, proverbs, metaphors), e.g. (يزرع الشقاق): *discord sows*

The importance of collocation in translation lies in their essential role in achieving the coherence and cohesion of the text. However, they represent a constant translation problem, where extensive linguistic and cultural gaps between languages result in a lack of equivalence of specific-culture, bound collocational patterns. Sometimes, what can be culturally acceptable in one language can be totally odd and ambiguous in another. In addition, the low degree of translators' competence, or the knowledge of collocations, represent another translation problem, where it could lead to difficulties in combining words together, and then resulting in more foreignization, or literal translation, that does not sound native-like nor natural. Furthermore, utilising certain translation strategies in translating collocations can lead to further complications and difficulties.

From the translation studies perspective, the process of collocational translation has been broadly investigated by different studies, such as (Baker, 1992, 2011, 2018; Newmark, 1988; Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958). In these translational studies, collocations were investigated with as association with translation strategies, where they were referred as solutions for handling collocations translational problems. In her model of equivalence, Baker (2018) proposes eight translation strategies to handle various types

of non-equivalence. These translation strategies include, “superordinate by using a more general word, by a more neutral/ or less expressive word, by cultural substitution, by using a loan word and further explanation, by omitting information, and finally by paraphrasing by lengthening the target text” (p.25-46).

Using Baker’s model of equivalence and translation strategies will frame the theoretical framework in this descriptive, corpus-based study, which aims to investigate a number of English collocations and their Arabic translations, in order to measure the degree of domestication versus foreignization in translated texts. Data collection, extraction, and analysis will be discussed in the following section.

## 2. Methodology

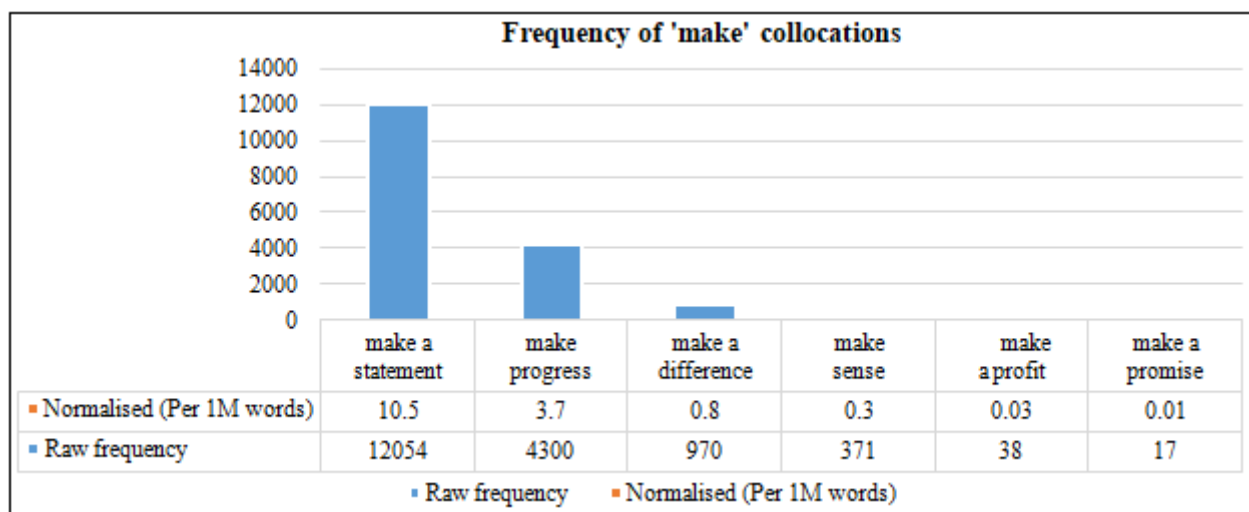
In achieving its goal to investigate collocations and their translation into Arabic, this study employed a quantitative corpus-based approach, with some aspects of qualitative analysis. This study utilised the open-source parallel corpus of English texts and their Arabic translated texts, namely OPUS2, on the corpus analysis web-based tool Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff, Rychly, Smrz, & Tugwell, 2014). OPUS2 is a large collection of freely available parallel corpora that prepared and aligned by Joerg Tiedermann in the OPUS project (Tiedemann, 2016). It covers over 200 languages and language variants with a total of about 3.2 billion sentences and sentence fragments containing over 28 billion tokens. The English-Arabic parallel corpus in

OPUS2, that totalling 1,139,515,048 words, will be used as the main data for this study.

This study focused on words and expressions that collocate with the verb ‘make’ in English, and then conduct an investigation on their translations into Arabic. At first, the parallel concordancing function in Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al., 2014), was used to create concordance lines including all occurrences of make and its collocations in the corpus, in order to provide an overall frequency. In a second step, six common words/expressions that usually collocate with ‘make’ in English, were chosen. Concordance lines were used to identify those collocations in English first, identify their Arabic corresponding translation for these collocation, and then applied Baker’s model of equivalence and translation strategies on those cases, in order to see to what extent domestication versus foreignization are evident.

## 3. Results and discussion

Concordancing process on the corpus analysis web-based tool Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al., 2014), resulted in 36,751 collocation cases, which represents about 32 times per 1,000,000 words. A six very common, data-driven collocations of ‘make’ have been identified, along with their translation into Arabic, namely, **make sense, make a promise, make a difference, make progress, make a profit, and make a statement**. Figure 1, illustrate the raw and normalised frequency (per 1 million words) of those six common collocations:



**Figure 1:** Raw and normalised frequency (per 1M words) of ‘make’ collocations

Built on Baker’s model of equivalence and translation strategies (2018), the following paragraphs will address each collocation, investigate their translations into Arabic based on the equivalence notion, and then discuss to what extent those translations are domesticated or foreignised.

### Make a statement

This is the most frequent common collocation in this corpus, totalling 12,054 times, with 10.5 times (normalised per 1M words). With this massive number of ‘make a statement’ cases, the strategy of cultural substitution was predominant. It was commonly translated to (verb + preposition + noun) collocation: (بدلي ببيان) *contributed with a statement*, which is

a common collocation in Arabic too. With this high use of this strategy, it can be concluded that this collocation is well-domesticated into translated Arabic.

### Make progress

This is the second most frequent common collocation in this corpus, totalling 4,300 times, with 3.7 times (normalised per 1M words). This collocation was usually translated to either (يحقق تقدما) *accomplish a progress*, or (يحرز تقدما) *score a progress*. Both translations making (verb + noun) collocations. The first one can be considered as the strategy of using a more general word, while the later one uses the strategy of cultural substitution, where it is considered as a

common collocation in Arabic. Again, with this high use of those two strategies, it can be concluded that this collocation is well-domesticated into Arabic language.

#### Make a difference

This is the third most frequent common collocation in this corpus, totalling 970 times, with 0.8 times (normalised per 1M words). This collocation was translated to many translations, for example, (يؤثر) to *affect*, and (هناك فرق) *there is a difference*, where both apply the strategy of using a more general word, while the first uses a verb, and the second uses a nominal clause. The second type of strategies is represented in the (verb + noun) collocation (يحدث تغيير) *bring about a difference*, which applies the strategy of cultural substitution, while that is very common collocation in Arabic language. The third type of strategies is the paraphrasing by lengthening the target text, for example, (بمثابة الفرقين) *as two differences*, (الفرق الذي يحدث) *the difference that it brought about*, and (يغير من الامر كثيرا) *change that a lot*, where different types of clauses are used. In addition, a number of cases were identified, where the strategy of omission was used. Again, achieving equivalence by using different strategies, reflects how this collocation is well-domesticated into Arabic language. In contrast, a number of cases have been identified, such as translating by the (verb + noun) collocation: (يصنع فرق) *make a difference*, where the literal translation was used. That reflects foreignization cases, while it is not common in Arabic to collocate these two words together. However, these cases represent a very low frequency compared to other cases.

#### Make a sense

This is the fourth most frequent common collocation in this corpus, totalling 17 times, with 0.01 times (normalised per 1M words). It was translated to some translations, for example, it was usually translated to some adjectives such as, (منطقي) *logical*, (الأجدي) *most useful*, and (معقول) *reasonable*, which all apply the strategy of using a more general word. In addition, the strategy of omission was used in numerous cases, where both strategies are ways to achieve equivalence in translated Arabic texts, and thus, domestication characterises the translation of this collocation in Arabic.

#### Make a profit

This is the fifthmost frequent common collocation in this corpus, totalling 17 times, with 0.01 times (normalised per 1M words). This collocation was translated to many translations, for example, it was usually translated to (verb + noun) collocations, such as (كسب الربح) *to earn profit*, (يحقق ربحا) *to archive profit*, (يستهدف الربح) *to target profit*. All these examples apply the strategy of using a more general word. In examples such as, the (verb + noun) collocation (يسعى للربح) *to seek profit*, and the (verb + preposition + noun) collocation (يعود عليه بالربح) *it brings him profit*, translators apply the strategy of paraphrasing by lengthening the target text. Finally, in a number of examples, this collocation was translated to the (verb + noun) collocation (يجني الأرباح) *to reap profit*, in which the strategy of cultural substitution, while that collocation is very common in Arabic. In short, using these strategies reflects a way to achieve equivalence in translated Arabic texts, and thus, domestication characterises the translation of this collocation in Arabic.

#### Make a promise

This is the sixth most frequent common collocation in this corpus, totalling 371 times, with 0.3 times (normalised per 1M words). This collocation was translated to many translations, for example, it was usually translated to some verbs such as, (وعد) *to promise*, and (تعهد) *to pledge*, or to the (verb + noun) collocation (يقدم موعدا/تعهدا) *offers a promise/pledge*, which all apply the strategy of using a more general word. The (verb + noun) common collocation in Arabic (يقطع وعدا) *cuts a promise*, is commonly used, where the strategy of cultural substitution is applied. Once again, achieving equivalence by using different strategies reflects how this collocation is well-domesticated into translated Arabic.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this investigation, the aim was to assess a number of English collocations and their Arabic translations, in order to measure the degree of domestication versus foreignization in translated texts. It was evident in most of those investigated collocations that domestication is the predominant characteristic in translating those collocations into Arabic. That could be ascribed to the high level of translators' competence/expertise, while the equivalence in most of those cases was achieved using different strategies. That leads to some suggested avenues for further research, where the comparison between professional and non-professional translators, or between human and machine translation, can be suggested. These results also may have important implications for the teaching collocations translation, where using parallel corpus would be a valuable source of translation strategies for students and trainees.

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