

**The Impact of Collocational Competence on Translation Quality:
Literature Review**

Amal Abdelsattar Metwally

Department of English Language, Faculty of Languages and Translation
King Khalid University, Abha, Saudi Arabia
Corresponding Author: aamotwly@kku.edu.sa

Mona M. Hamad

Department of English Language, College of Science & Arts
King Khalid University, Muhayil, Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

This study reviews the literature on the significance of collocational competence on the quality of translation, being a meaningful lexical relationship between words. Though the value of recognizing collocations in translation is well acknowledged, several earlier studies have underlined students' lack of collocational competence and the difficulties they encounter when dealing with collocations in the translation process. The current study evaluates previous research in this field and examines the influence of lexical and grammatical collocation knowledge in translation from English into Arabic and vice versa. The significance of this review lies in exploring the importance of a translator's collocational expertise in accurately translating lexical and grammatical collocations in the target language. This review aims at answering the review question: How does collocational competence affect translation quality? To answer this question, the researchers examined many studies investigating the impact of collocational competence on the quality of translation. The review further aims at increasing awareness of the significance of this aspect of translation accuracy. The review study provides an overview of pertinent terminology and classifications and a brief introduction to the subject. Then follows an overview of the significance of collocations competence for ensuring the quality of the translation. The final section includes recommendations for translation instructors as well as translators. The review's findings showed a substantial correlation between the quality of the translation and the adequate knowledge of lexical and grammatical collocations.

Keywords: Collocational competence, lexical collocations, grammatical collocations, translation process, translation quality, literature review

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Introduction

Collocations are one of the toughest challenges that translators must overcome. Unfortunately, it is not always simple to locate the precise equivalents of SL collocations in the TL since languages have historically developed their collocations in varied, distinctive, and often arbitrary ways.

While research on collocations has received much attention, there has not been much focus on translating collocations between languages, particularly between English and Arabic and vice versa (Bahmaid, 2006). Collocations are crucial to language teaching and learning. One's ability to communicate more effortlessly and eloquently is substantially enhanced by having a solid command of collocations. Additionally, translating collocations involves other essential aspects (i.e., language proficiency, context, register, culture, and so forth). Therefore, to effectively handle collocations in translation, one must first have a thorough understanding of these concepts. To render an accurate translation of collocations in the Target Language (TL), the translator must first identify and understand them in the Source Language (SL), especially collocations that are culturally and linguistically specific.

The main aim of this study is to investigate the importance of the translator's collocational competence and how this knowledge affects translation quality. This review studies the significance of a translator's collocational knowledge in rendering lexical and grammatical collocations authentically in the target language. The approaches taken by the translators and their capacity to work within the confines of these approaches are one of the criteria used to evaluate or assess a translation. To this end, this review paper attempts to answer the question: How does collocational competence affect translation quality?

To answer this question, the paper is structured as a systematic literature review that aims to locate and synthesize research that bears on the study question, using organized procedures. The literature review is subdivided into two main sections. The first is a review of significant studies on collocations, their classifications in English and Arabic, and the factors affecting the translation of collocations. The second section reviews recent studies on the translation of collocations and emphasizes the crucial role of collocational competence in rendering accurate translations.

Review of Literature

The impact of collocational competence on translation quality has yet to be closely studied in the context of translation from English into Arabic and vice versa. The researchers review various studies to find the previous literature investigating the impact of collocational competence on the quality of translation. This section reviews studies on collocations and their categorization, studies on collocations in English and Arabic, studies on translating culture-specific expressions and investigating the relationship between translation and culture, reflections on translating collocations, and the critical factors affecting the process of translation. The review ends with recent studies on translating collocations to arrive at specific recommendations to be discussed in the following section.

Studies on Collocations and their Categorization

Palmer (1933) was the first to study English collocations, and he referred to this phenomenon as a 'succession of two or more words that must be learned as an integral whole, and not pieced together from its component parts' (Palmer, 1933, p. 5). The concept of collocations—

words whose meanings are connected by their proximity to one another—was first introduced by linguist Firth in 1957, and the Firthian definition, "the company that words keep," is the most well-known one for English collocations (Firth, 1968, p. 182).

In defining collocations, Cruse (1986) stated that they are a "sequence of lexical items which routinely co-occur, but which still are fully transparent in the sense that each lexical constituent is likewise a semantic constituent" (p. 40). Nattinger and Decarrio (1992) argued that "It has been a practice in linguistics to classify words not only on the basis of their meaning, but also on the basis of their co-occurrence with other words, and in this way to search for increasingly delicate word classes" (p. 20). Lewis (1998) illustrated that collocations have three categories. Many collocations are "strong". For example, we most commonly talk of *rancid butter*, but that does not mean that other things cannot be rancid. The second category is collocations that may be described as "weak collocations". These are words that co-occur with a greater than random frequency. Many things can be long or short, cheap or expensive, good or bad. However, collocations are more predictable. An example is *white wine* or *red wine*. The third category is collocations of "medium strength", and these are the words that go together with a greater frequency than weak collocations. Some examples are *holding a meeting* or *carrying out a study*. It would be futile to attempt to draw a clear distinguishing line between collocations that are predictable from the meanings of the words that co-occur and those that are not. One can provide a semantic explanation for even the more restricted collocations by assigning particular importance to the individual words. We can thus explain *white coffee*, *white wine*, and *white people* by suggesting that *white* means something like "with the lightest of the normal colors associated with the entity" (Palmer, 1981, p. 77).

Newmark (1998) distinguishes two categories of collocations. Syntactic collocations are the first category, which, in his opinion, correspond to two or three words that are commonly used together and are of greater importance to the translator. Examples of these collocations include *green memories* and *delivering a letter*. The second category is the discursual collocates, which refer to elements of a particular lexical frame or field. Since discursual collocates are limited to a particular discourse, they are fundamental to the translation process.

Additionally, Cowie and McCaig (1983) divided collocations into three categories. One lexical item having a figurative sense not found outside that limited context is described as the first form of "restricted collocation," according to their explanation. They note that one of the elements in a "limited collocation" may be either literal or figurative. For instance, it could be argued that the verb "explode" in the phrase "explode a myth/a belief" has a figurative meaning. They concluded that "the choice of the specialized meaning of the verb, which means 'show to be untrue or no longer true,' is contextually determined by occurring inside no other lexical context than that of 'myth/belief'. The second kind of collocation is "bound collocation," which is "a bridge category between collocations and idioms". This collocation exhibits distinctive contextual determination; in other words, "one of the parts is uniquely selective of the other" (p.228). Through repeated, context-dependent use, certain expressions become partially fixed. For instance, the phrase "shrug shoulders" is a constrained collocation where the word "shrug" is selective of the word "shoulder," as in "when I asked her if she minds remaining home, she just shrugged her shoulders" (p.228).

Benson, Benson, and Ilson (1986) explained the contrast between "grammatical collocations" and "lexical collocations". The term "grammatical collocation" refers to collocations in which a grammatical lexical item, usually a preposition, follows a dominant lexical item, such

as a noun or verb, and where the meanings of the prepositions "in the collocations" are unpredictable (p. 43). This distinction demonstrates the metaphorical nature of specific linguistic constructions. The phrases "look after and look up to" are examples of a verb-particle combination or phrasal verb. Lexical collocations are grammatical constructions where the collocates are not "restricted" or "semi-restricted" and often have two equal lexical components. Since these grammatical constructs are "open collocations," the meaning is not idiomatic. Examples include noun-verb pairings like "bells ring" or adjective-noun combinations like "intense competition" (p.43). A lexical item's meaning in a "lexical collocation" is predictable; as a result, it is not idiomatic and could be easily handled in translation. Similarly, Baker (1992) distinguished between "restricted collocations", or words that co-occur according to "semantically arbitrary restrictions which do not follow logically from the propositional meaning of a word" (p.14), and "marked collocations," which are the unusual combinations of words that "involve deliberate confusion of collocational ranges to create new images" (p. 51). These new images created by "marked collocations", constitute an obstacle to inexperienced translators. Such a category of collocations is primarily used in literary language and technical articles as in poetry, fiction, and advertisement. According to Metwally and El-Gemei (2022), "restricted, semi-restricted and bound collocations" are metaphorical because they acquire a non-literal meaning, while "unrestricted and open collocations" are not because they collocate with no restriction while maintaining the literal meaning of their collocates. As such, this classification should be recognized in the translation process to produce a target text of high quality.

Collocations in English and Arabic

According to Sinclair (1991), a collocation is composed of three components: a "node" that contains collocations, a "span" that he defines as "the number of lexical items on each side of a node that we consider important to that node," and "collocates"—things in the environment created by the span. On the other hand, the collocational vocabulary of Arabic is extensive. Most Arabic collocations are from the Quran, Sunna (Sayings of the Prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him), and Classical Arabic literature (Ghazalah, 2004). The classification of Arabic collocations into multiple groups based on various criteria is similar to how English collocations have been categorized. For example, Emery (1991) classified Arabic collocations into "open, restricted, bound, and idioms". Open collocations are combinations of two or more words that co-occur without any specific relation between them. Both elements are freely re-combinable, and each part is used in a literal common sense. An example of open collocations is the use of the noun الحرب with the verbs بدأت and انتهت (i.e., the war started/ended). The second type is "restricted collocations", which are combinations of two or more words that are employed in one of their common, non-idiomatic meanings, follow specific structural patterns, and are constrained in their commutability by usage in addition to grammatical and semantic valence. An example is the use of the adjective نكراء in collocation with the noun جريمة (i.e., heinous crime). Similarly, El-Gemei (2006) provided evidence that words are semantically related to one another when she commented on a concept like "blooming" that is only associated with plants. "Bound collocations," the third type, is a link between idioms and collocations. Uniquely, one of the elements chooses the other as in the expression أطرقت الرأس (i.e., tilted his head to his chest and remained silent or lowered his eyes to the ground and refrained from speaking). The fourth type is "idioms," which usually have "opaque" constituent elements forming a single semantic unit. For this reason, they present a

challenge to translators because their meaning is unclear. Due to the semantic connections between words, Baker (2011) observed that translators might mistranslate the "source message" of collocation under the influence of their mother tongue.

The Relationship between Translation and Culture

Translation is conceptualized as a means of broadening one's cultural horizons. Delille defines this frame of view as follows: "If you translate, you import the riches contained in foreign languages into your own, by means of felicitous commerce" (As cited in Lefevere, 1992 a, p. 37). Understanding the cultural background of a target language and its collocational structure is necessary for translating it in a meaningful way. In other words, understanding the difficulties brought on by cultural variations aids the translator in producing a high-quality translation. The translation process should take cultural equivalency into account. Nida (1964) confirmed that "Differences between cultures may cause more serious problems for the translator than do differences in language structure" (p. 130).

It is the role of the translator to identify culturally specific collocations and choose the best ways to convey their meanings in the target language. According to Baker (1992), there is a chance for the source text to "contain collocations which transmit what to the target reader would be new connections of ideas" when there are significant cultural differences between the source and target languages (p.59). For this reason, Baker advises offering the target reader hints to aid in his interpretation of the translation of culturally specific collocations. According to Nida (1964), translation issues are likely to arise depending on the cultural and linguistic differences between the two languages. As a result, the linguistic and cultural distinctions between the SL and the TL must be given equal weight. While some believe that culture is the core of translation, according to Newmark (2001), culture is "the largest barrier to translation, at least to the creation of an accurate and competent translation" (p. 328). He (1988) also emphasized that multi-word idiomatic statements are among the hardest to translate (p. 104). Asiri and Metwally (2020) concluded that cultural errors could occur due to inadequate reproduction of culture-specific expressions, while linguistic translation errors are caused by inadequate production of language forms. As such, in the process of translation education, "much attention should be given to students' perception of the power of culture in transferring meaning from the ST (source text) to the TT (target text), in order to build their translation competence" (p. 518).

Studies on Translating Collocations

Although translating collocations is a very intriguing activity for the translator's job, Ghazalah (2004) claimed that it is also challenging and demanding. For this reason, he advises translators to pay close attention to all forms of collocations and to be exceedingly cautious in the process of translation. When language-specific collocations are not adequately analyzed, Abdul-Raof (2001) contended, lexical collocational errors in translation are likely to occur. For example, a common collocation that is acceptable in one language may be considered inappropriate in another. Using the English word "heavy" as an example, he lists some common nouns that go well with it. The Arabic translation of the collocations showed that most of the nouns collocate with different adjectives except the nouns: وزن، مدفعية، صناعة، وجبة that conventionally co-occur with the adjective "ثقيلة، ثقيل" in order to reflect the same collocational meanings as their English equivalents.

According to Hatim and Mason (1990), there is always a risk that even the most experienced translators may periodically fail to recognize SL unnatural collocation, which will weaken the translation. Mahmoud (2005) presented empirical data verifying the informal observations and theoretic assertions that EFL learners produce 'unnatural' word combinations. Most of the incorrect combinations were due to negative transfer from Arabic. The findings of this study indicate that there is a necessity for direct teaching of collocations, the inclusion of bilingual glossaries in the EFL course books and designing bilingual collocation dictionaries. Baker (1992) illustrates that the translator may "become occasionally highly engaged in the source text and may develop the weirdest collocations in the target language for no justifiable cause" (p.55). This could be avoided if the translator takes the necessary precautions to be aware of the potential influence of ST patterns before carefully revising the TT and approaching it in the same manner as a target reader who has not been exposed to or influenced by the ST. Husni and Newman (2015) emphasized that collocations frequently include cultural or linguistic distinctiveness, which could present a challenge for translators. For this reason, second language learners gradually lose the ability to distinguish collocations and interpret them into their constituents' literal meaning instead of thinking about their connotative meaning, which will affect the quality of the translation.

Context is quite essential in influencing collocation choice or selection. According to Ghazalah (2004), one who deals with the translation of collocations must pay close attention to the context(s) in which they are employed. He specified three different contexts: the religious context, the technical context, and the literary setting, each of which has particular qualities and, consequently, unique collocations. According to Hatim and Mason (1997), the employment of collocations is crucial to the coherence and cohesion of texts. For instance, combining textual elements that do not naturally correspond in a given language may make the text appear strange to the intended reader, which may adversely influence its ability to be understood. This might also be detrimental to the text's thematic organization and its overall coherence and cohesion. Shapiro sees translation as an "attempt to produce a text so transparent that it does not seem to be translated" (As cited in Venuti 1995, p.1). This kind of transparent translation that adopts a domesticating strategy gives the reader a chance to enjoy the TT more since it "moves the author towards him," as Schleiermacher stated (As cited in Shuttleworth & Cowie, 1997, p.44).

Recent Studies on Translation and Collocations

Many recent studies were conducted on the impact of collocational competence on the produced quality of translation. Bannur, Akkila, and Elwafi (2022) explored the Libyan undergraduates' capability to comprehend English collocations and phrasal verbs, translate them into Arabic and investigate the types of obstacles that these students encounter when they translate English collocational expressions. The study concluded that the participants faced difficulties translating English collocations and phrasal verbs. In addition, the translation production reveals that grammatical, lexical, and cultural aspects were the main problematic areas identified in students' answers. These problems are related to the influence of the SL (Arabic), lack of appropriate vocabulary, difficulty in understanding vocabulary use, lack of translation practice, and the misuse of literal translation and translation teaching methods. However, though the cultural gap between SL (Arabic) and TL (English) is huge, the study suggests that it could be minimized and bridged by using new techniques in introducing the students to collocations and the importance of recognizing them in the process of translation as well as frequent practice in translation.

Wei, Chang, Yang, and Hsu's (2022) attempt was made to clarify the relationship between learners' collocation competence and textual translation ability. The paper examines Chinese EFL university learners' collocation knowledge and their textual translation ability before and following the treatment of collocation-based instruction. This study also observes the correlation between Chinese EFL university learners' collocation knowledge and their textual translation ability. It explores the effects of instruction adopting an online English collocation dictionary on Chinese university learners' textual translation ability. The results suggested that a significant improvement was found in collocation knowledge and textual translation ability. In addition, collocation knowledge and textual translation ability were found to be significantly and positively correlated. Hence, the research outcomes substantially provided pieces of evidence of the relationship between collocation competence and textual translation ability. These findings can benefit EFL teaching by offering writing teachers practical guidance on how collocation knowledge enables it to serve as an optimal solution to EFL learners' problem with textual translation production.

Another study was conducted by Adam and Bashrie (2021) to examine collocation contrastively in both English and Arabic in terms of translation, interpretation, and lexicography. They highlighted how to deal with collocations in translation by reviewing different translation strategies (i.e., idiomatic approach, literal approach, non-collocation to collocation approach, calque, modulation, equivalence, exploitation, transposition, and paraphrase). They concluded that there are no fixed translation strategies that translators can adopt when rendering SL lexical collocations into Arabic. "While some strategies are helpful, others turn out to be of little avail" (p. 9). The study concludes with some recommendations that could reinforce translation and the teaching/ learning process. They suggested avoiding literal translation when translating collocations found in literary writings. Additional techniques that aid in creating dynamic equivalence with literary style in TL ought to be employed. Furthermore, the most crucial approach to using collocations is the one that focuses on communicating the message's inherent meanings rather than just using words. They added that it is necessary to consider other text types, including those related to business, law, and science. According to them, these recommendations, if best implemented, can improve the quality of the teaching, learning, and translating of collocations.

Trang, Anh, and Khanh (2021) conducted a study to investigate the English collocations used in written translation among fourth-year English majors at a university. The researchers used two instruments. The first is a test of English collocations, including five types of collocations: an adjective going with a noun, a verb going with a noun, a noun going with a verb, a noun going with a noun, and a verb going with an adverb. The findings of this study showed that just slightly over half of the student participants could find the correct collocations in written translation. Furthermore, a noun going with a verb and a noun going with a noun are the two main lexical errors made by most of the students. The second instrument is an interview used to seek translation teachers' perspectives on students' ability to translate texts in general and strategies of translation. They perceived that most of their students were unaware of collocations in written translation and still had difficulties in both grammatical and lexical collocations.

Most importantly, Putri (2019) explored the kinds of errors faced by translators and the causes of these errors. The researcher found that the most dominant types of errors in translation experienced by the translators lie in the surface structure, such as semantic, lexical, morphology, and grammar errors. However, a different kind of errors in translation are errors in the deep

structure, which relates to cultural differences between both SL and TL. The second contribution is about the causes of error in translation. The most common cause is a lack of knowledge about the linguistic aspect of the target language, which can cause fatal mistakes. Another primary factor is the anxiety of the translators themselves, which causes translation errors.

In studying collocations, Bin Naser (2017) illustrated the semantic and syntactic nature of collocations and the linguistic features' effect on translation in both Arabic and English. The findings have shown that collocations are not open to any words, as they co-habit with a limited range of terms which is the authentic translation crisis for the translator. These findings were supported by a proposed lexicographical model for collocation translation, which could improve the way Arab translators transfer English and Arabic collocations when encountered during the translation process.

Elhajahmed (2017) investigated, analyzed, and classified lexical and textual translation difficulties encountered by professional diploma students at the Islamic University of Gaza (IUG). The results showed that professional diploma students committed lexical and textual problems. Lexical problems include wrong word choice or wrong lexis and collocation, while textual problems include non-parallel structures, omissions, lexical repetition, redundant pronouns, and incongruent information.

Interestingly, a study was conducted by Melnichuk and Osipova (2016) to explore the role of background culture and lexical knowledge in economic translation. The results of this study pointed out those economic terms, which are difficult to understand and translate. Consequently, specific training is needed in these areas of difficulty. Synonymous, polysemantic words, collocations, metaphors, idioms, and abbreviations are the main lexical obstacles in translation as they make the text difficult to comprehend and translate. Research findings also have pedagogical implications on teaching ESP partly through translation tasks. The study shows that academic curricula, learning materials and training focus should be constantly revised and updated in compliance with today's market needs.

Giaber (2015) studied the nature of the lexical choices used by Baalbaki in translating "A Farewell to Arms" by Hemingway into Arabic and their implications for the novel and its readers. The results of this paper show that M. Baalbaki uses unfamiliar Classical Arabic words, collocations, and Arabic lexical items of Islamic religious connotations. These choices have changed the level of discourse in the novel from informal and/or semi-formal to highly formal and have added an Islamic flavor to the book.

Boonyasaquan (2009) engaged in research to raise awareness in teaching collocations to EFL/ESL students among teachers, curriculum writers, and related personnel, in the belief that collocations play a crucial role in learning the English language. The author presents the results of her research on collocational violations in translation by demonstrating the patterns of the violations and attempting to give plausible accounts for the errors to help avoid problems in learning a foreign/second language and promote effective communication.

In their study, Gorgis and Al-Kharabsheh (2009) focused on finding out the extent to which students of translation can translate Arabic contextualized collocations into English correctly; two conflicting views about carrying out a translation task are tested. The two conflicting views are that avoiding using a dictionary in test sessions would save time and yield better translation products. In contrast, the other view contends that recourse to a dictionary is unavoidable for any translation task.

The researchers used the systematic qualitative method to review the previous studies in order to determine the impact of collocational competence on the quality of translation. They highlighted the fundamental issues of translating collocations and ways to avoid translation inaccuracies due to collocational incompetence. The results of this review might help educators of translation and translation students to be aware of the problems in translating collocations and ways of improving the quality of translation.

Discussion

From the review of the literature, it is perspicuous that collocational knowledge and proficiency significantly influence the quality of the translation. The impact of collocational competency on translation and how it can improve the quality of translation were examined in several studies by the researchers. The findings showed that the translator's most crucial step is to recognize the collocations used in the ST and assess their meanings in the light of the surrounding context. Additionally, the translator should use the theory that best serves the translation's objectives while taking the ST's context, register, and nature into account. Given that collocations may be a powerful tool for assisting the translator in accurately communicating the ST, the assessment found that the translator's proficiency with collocations could be utilized as a gauge of translation quality.

Collocations are found to be difficult for non-native speakers to translate for several reasons. First, they are primarily non-literal idiomatic structures that cannot be easily translated. Restricted collocations (Palmer, 1981; Cowie and Macaig, 1983, and Baker, 1992) constitute a challenge in the translation process because they are “metaphorical” structures (Metwally and El-Gemei, 2022). Second, collocations are mostly culture-specific. As indicated by Newmark (2001), culture is “the largest barrier to translation,” at least to the production of a high-quality, competent translation” (p. 328). Third and most importantly, most translation students struggle with grammatical and lexical collocations and are unaware of collocations in written translation (Trang, Anh, and Khanh, 2021).

Collocational proficiency varies among translators in their linguistic and cultural knowledge of the words that conventionally occur together to deliver particular meanings in the TL. It was found that collocations should be given more consideration, especially by translators, as proficiency with collocations enhances and solidifies a translator's overall language proficiency. Translators must not only handle ST collocations correctly and render them in the target language TT but also use more appropriate TL collocations to create appealing and expressive “writings” instead of simple translations that change ST words into TL ones. It is recommended for translators to adhere to the “domestication” method (Venuti, 1995) to become “invisible” and make the TT seem more natural to the target readers. Competence in collocations would enable translators and translation students to produce quality translations. To this end, academic curricula, instructional materials, and training emphasis should be continuously updated. Correct collocation usage contributes substantially to one's idiomaticity, according to James (1998, p. 152, as cited in Mahmoud, 2005). The employment of appropriate and proper collocations distinguishes a native speaker from a proficient language student who can only retain grammar correctness.

Collocations are far more crucial for language learning and translation success in terms of use, acquisition, and quality. Some collocations have a particular function in establishing lexical coherence (Hatim & Mason, 1997). “The more common the collocational pattern, the more

coherent the resulting text" (p.47), they asserted. According to Wei et al. (2022), textual translation skills and collocation knowledge were found to be strongly and positively associated. As such, this review of literature pinpoints that the intensive practice of translation as an interlingual and intercultural communication must be strengthened at the lexical and linguistic level.

Conclusion

This review investigated the use of collocations as a gauge of the competency and quality of the translation. The study examined the implications of sensible collocation selection and the influence they might have on translation quality. It was comprehensible that a translation's usage of more collocations indicates a more experienced translator and, consequently, a higher quality of the translation. Additionally, the appropriate choice of collocations shows that the translator has a deeper comprehension of the ST and the capacity to accurately translate it into the TL in addition to reflecting the ST's direct meanings. When SL collocations are adequately understood and translated into the TL, their meanings are crystallized, and naturalness in the TT is preserved. Finally, collocation competency is of considerable importance to retain and represent not only the ST meanings in translation, but also many other aspects, including naturalness, coherence, and cohesion. As a result, the successful translator is the one who can use TL collocations to their fullest potential in the target language by wisely and deliberately incorporating them into the target text. The intended reader will find the TT to read more naturally the more familiar the collocations employed. This literature review offered the groundwork for further research on the interaction between culture and collocation while considering the translation of culturally specific terms.

About the Authors:

Amal Abdelsattar Metwally is currently an Assistant Professor at the faculty of languages and translation, King Khalid University in Abha. She got her Ph.D. in Corpus Linguistics and her MA in Translation. She is a certified IELTS and TOFEL trainer. She has taught many language skills, linguistics, and translation courses. She has also published several papers in international journals, and she has always been interested in applied linguistics, computational linguistics, translation, and CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning).

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9067-3273>

Mona M. Hamad is a Ph.D. holder in "Curriculum & Teaching Methods of English Language". She has been working as Assistant Professor at King Khalid University, Muhayil, English Department since 2012. She has been awarded King Khalid University Award for Excellence in the field of teaching, faculty member branch in its seventh session 1442/ 2022. Currently, she is working as the deputy of the English Department. Sudan, Khartoum from 2010-2012. Dr. Hamad is a member of KSAALT /TESOL (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Association of English Language Teachers) & ASTEL (Association of Sudanese Teachers of English Language).

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3824-6730>

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