



RESEARCH ARTICLE

UNDERGRADUATES' DIFFICULTIES IN TRANSLATING SOME ARABIC COLLOCATIONAL LEXICAL ITEMS WITH REGARD TO THE PRODUCTION OF VERB – NOUN ENGLISH COLLOCATION

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the knowledge of undergraduate students in rendering a range of Arabic lexical collocations into English in different contexts properly, depending on the students' mental linguistic repertoire. It also examined the strategies practiced in their translation to come up with the proper collocation. The study used two main tools. A questionnaire was responded by students and teachers, also a test for students only. The participants were thirty (30) Yemeni students studying at the Department of English, Faculty of Education–Saber and six (6) of the translation course university teachers. The students' knowledge of collocations was measured by a Translation Test of three Arabic lexical collocational items (ضرب - حصر - تخفيف) which were contextualized in fifteen sentences, each of which contained a verb- noun collocation. The results of the statistical analysis showed that there was a negative knowledge of collocations and that the third year B.A. students face difficulty in finding out the exact equivalents and collocation. They were not collocationally competent and they really found difficulty in selecting the words that come together to form good English sentences. Therefore, they violated the system of collocations. As a result, they were not able to produce correct English sentence. The results also showed that the students tend to depend on different language strategies to facilitate their translation such as L1 transfer, synonymy, avoidance and paraphrasing. These strategies lead to poor English translation. Accordingly, some suggestions are put forward to overcome the stated problems.

Keywords: collocations, translation, Arabic collocations, verb noun collocations.

1. Introduction

Collocations are notoriously difficult for non-native speakers to translate, mainly because they cannot be translated on a word by word basis. English foreign language learners encounter many difficulties in translating collocations. The term 'Collocation' is used to describe a combination of words which occur repeatedly in a language. These patterns of co-occurrence can be grammatical in that they result basically from syntactic dependencies or they can be lexical in that, although syntactic relationships are involved, the patterns result from the fact that in a given linguistic environment certain lexical items will co-occur. (Carter, 2002). Collocations are classified respectively into grammatical and lexical ones. Grammatical collocations are characterized by compounding with a preposition, where a preposition is used with a noun, verb or an adjective. The lexical collocations, which are the focus of this study, is the natural combination between content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs). For example, the verb noun (inflicts a wound and withdraw an offer). (Bahns, 1993). Pawley and Syder (1983, p. 191) refer this phenomena to "native-like fluency" as the ability native speakers have to produce long strings of speech which exceed their capacity for encoding and decoding speech. On the contrary, such capacity is especially acute for foreign language learners. Lewis (2000) mentions that advanced learners of a foreign language normally have large and significant phrasal mental lexicon that is readily available to them when they use the language which is their collocational competence. This competence

plays a large part in enabling them to produce language which is fluent, accurate and stylistically appropriate; an ability that is the mark of an advanced language learner. Nesselhauf (2005) also explains that this knowledge and ability to use prefabricated units are essential for the language learner; unfortunately, they also pose considerable difficulties, even for those advanced learner. Acquisition and correct production of such word combinations is a mark of an advanced level proficiency in a language. However important collocations might be, it constitute great difficulties for foreign language learners (EFL). Accordingly, Yemeni foreign language learners, particularly third year undergraduate B.A students at the Department of English, Faculty of Education - Saber, University of Aden, encounter many difficulties in translating collocations, especially lexical collocations. They find difficulty in selecting the words that come together to form good sentences. Therefore, they violate the system of collocation. As a result, they become not able to produce correct English.

2. Research Questions

1. What are the appropriate and inappropriate verb + noun English collocations patterns found in the students' written production?
2. What are the difficulties that the students encounter when translating these Arabic lexical collocational items and the reasons behind the problem (such difficulties)?
3. What are the different strategies used in producing the close English lexical collocational items (equivalents)?

3. Literature Review

3.1. Collocations

Collocations are recognized as a crucial part of language use and completely distinguish native speakers and non-native speakers (Fontenelle, 1994). This significant role played by collocation in language as well as in translation has been recognized by linguists like Newmark. In this respect, Newmark (1988, p. 213) considers collocations as the "nerves of the text...and lexis is the flesh". Similarly, Abu-Ssyadeh (2007) (as cited in Bader and Mariam 2011, p. 6) indicates that the "interest" and "awareness" of research in the area of collocation is due to the significant role played by collocations as "central to the process of foreign language learning and translation". Despite their importance, collocations in general and Arabic collocations in particular, pose a tremendous challenge to translators. Linguists like (Newmark, 1988, p. 81) Baker, 1992; p. 48) and (Bahumaid, 2006, p. 135) have revealed that translators would be faced by various problems in rendering collocations. Newmark (1988) has affirmed that the translator will have to deal with various problems of different sorts in rendering collocations. Baker (1992), like others, relates these problems to the relative variations of the cultural and linguistic collocability between the SL and the TL. That is to say, lexemes differ in their collectability from one language to another and what collocates in one language does not necessarily collocate in another. Furthermore, certain patterns of collocations reflect preference of the specific language. Baker (ibid:49) gives the example of the verb '*deliver*' whereby, in English it collocates naturally with '*letter*', a '*speech*', '*news*' and a '*baby*', but does not collocate with a '*woman*'. Arabic focuses on the women whereas English prefers to focus on the baby, and this would be unacceptable under normal circumstances to speak of delivering a woman in modern English. Moreover, the collocation range of words may be different in the (SL) and (TL). Baker (1992) also states that "collocations are often semantically arbitrary co-occurrence restrictions which do not follow logically from the propositional meaning of the word" She says that the propositional (denotative) meaning of a word does not always determine the collocational patterning. For example, English speakers typically '*pay a visit*' but less typically '*make a visit*' and they do not '*perform a visit*'. Another example of collocation in English is '*rancid*' and '*addled*'. Though the two words have the same denotative meaning, they have different collocational patterning. '*Addled*' collocates with '*eggs*', while '*rancid*' collocates with '*butter*' (p. 47). Baker says that the most important point about collocation meaning is that each lexeme makes an independent contribution to the meaning of the whole collocation. This recognizes the fact that lexemes have meanings that range from normal to special or from restricted to idiomatic. For example, the central and most frequent meaning for the verb '*dry*' is found in '*dry clothes*' or '*dry weather*'. Clearly, '*dry voice*' (no emotion) or '*dry book*' (boring), are far remote from the central meaning of '*dry*'. (p. 53). Consequently, Baker (1992) adds that collocations could pose a tremendous challenge in translation, particularly if the translator lacks the ability to identify and recognize such collocation patterns, with their "figurative and unique meanings as different from the sum of meaning of individual words". Each language appears to have its own collocation patterns which reflect the speakers' mentality, knowledge, beliefs, arts,

morals, law, customs, habits and other things (Farghal and Shannaq, 1999, p. 122). Finally, it is very important to mention that not all combinations are collocations. According to Maning and Schutz (1999, p. 173), the best way to distinguish between a collocation and a free combination is to translate it into another language; if the literal translation or word for word translation does not work, then this is evidence that this is a collocation. For example 'to pay a visit' is a collocation because one cannot say in Arabic 'يدفع بزيارة' but 'يقوم بزيارة' or simply 'يزور'. So, 'to pay a visit' is a collocation in English.

3.2. Verb + noun collocations (CA Collocations)

Semantically, these collocations are called CA collocations. They consist of a verb denoting 'Creation' (C) and /or Activation (A) and a noun, (Benson 1990, p. 18). Here are examples of collocations with a verb denoting 'creation': come to an agreement, make an impression, compose music, set a record and reach a verdict. Here are examples that express the concept of 'activation': set an alarm, fly a kite, launch a missile, and wind a watch. In some instances, the same noun collocates with one verb or verbs to denote 'creation' and with another verb or (verbs) to denote 'activation' establish a principle (creation), apply a principle (activation); draw up a will (creation) and execute a will (activation). CA collocations are arbitrary and non-predictable. Therefore, in English it is said: make an estimate, but not *make estimation). Commit treason, but not *commit treachery). In English one says: commit fraud and perpetrate fraud. However, only the collocation commit suicide is possible; one does not say perpetrates suicide.

3.3. Verb + noun collocations (EN Collocations)

These collocations consist of a verb meaning essentially; eradication' and/or 'nullification' and a noun. They are called EN collocations. Typically examples are the following: *Reject an appeal, lift a blockade, break a code, reverse a decision, repeal a law, revoke a license, annul a marriage...etc.*) Other EN combinations are free, because the verbs can collocate with a very large number of nouns. For example, the verb 'destroy' can be used with a very large number of nouns denoting physical objects: *to destroy a barn, bridge, building, city, document, factory, harbor and house...etc.* (Benson 1990, p. 20).

3.4. Collocations in Arabic

Since the purpose of the study is investigating the students' knowledge in translating collocation from Arabic into English. Actually, the Arabic language is rich of many forms of collocations. Careful analysis of Arabic collocations can lead to a semantic relation between the designating words than anything else. For example, the verb ضرب 'sitting up' collocate with خيمة 'tent'. This meaning explains the semantic relation between ضرب and the lexical item خيمة. Another example, is between the noun جريمة 'crime' and the adjective detestable نكراء which also shows the semantic relationship between the two words (Hafiz, 2004, p. 11). It can be said that such semantic relationship holding between collocated words accounts for limited number of choosing words that collocate with others. Comparatively, the way of understanding such a semantic relationship between collocated words may be easier in the Arabic collocations than English ones. The semantic origins of most Arabic words have been recorded by early Arab linguists; which serves in facilitating the process of understanding such a semantic relationship of words in a given collocations. On the other hand, English words collocability may be difficult to identify its semantic relationships. For example, the verb 'explode' with the noun 'myth'. In other words, what is it in the meaning of the word 'explode' that allows it to combine with 'myth' (p. 12). Remarkably, it is noted that many of modern Arabic treatments of collocations stem from the efforts of the School of Firth. Nevertheless, it is perhaps useful to mention that the Arab heritage has wealthy masterpieces of collocational expressions before and after the emergence of Islam. Such expressions are contained in the Holy Quran, the Hadieth, the classic Arabic poetry and proverbs. Over years, the Holy Quran proves its demonstrated miracle by safeguarding and propagating the Arabic language and its expressions. But the onslaught of colonialism and the sweeping invasion of globalization led some to doubt about the greatness of the Arabic language and ignore the unique outstanding efforts of its scholars (Al-Didawi, 2003).

To sum up, collocations are the tendency of certain words to co-occur regularly in a given language. They are created all the time by deliberately putting together words from different or opposing ranges. Empirical evidence has shown that researchers have different perspectives on learners' knowledge of collocations or explored how EFL learners made errors of collocations. Laufe and Waldman (2011) investigate the use of English verb-noun collocations in the writing of native speakers of Hebrew at three proficiency levels. The

data revealed that learners at all three proficiency levels produced far fewer collocations than native speakers, that the number of collocations increased only at the advanced level, and that errors, particularly interlingual ones, continued to persist even at advanced levels of proficiency. Farghal and Obiedat (1995) found that L2 learners had a big gap between their receptive and productive knowledge of collocations. EFL students make collocational errors in their writing because of the interference of their mother tongue, lack of the collocational concept, the interlingual or intralingual, transfer, paraphrase and their shortage of their collocational knowledge. These can be the possible reasons for explaining why EFL students frequently make unacceptable collocations in their writing. Dinha T. Gorgis and A. Al-khrabsheh (2009) attempted to find out the extent to which students of translation can translate three Arabic lexical items, each of which contextualized in ten sentence into English properly, two conflicting views about carrying out a translation task are tested. The two contradictory views are dictionary-free and dictionary-based test session. The results revealed that dictionary-free subjects are tentatively slightly better because they used fewer senses, on average, than the dictionary-based subjects. The optimal translation equivalents revealed that the dictionary-free subjects are doubly poor. Zughoul and Abdulfattah, (2003) also investigated Arab learners of English, even at advanced levels of proficiency, still have difficulty with English collocational sequences. The students' overall proficiency in this linguistic area was found to be inadequate. Communicative collocational strategies employed by the learners while translating. Yemeni researchers also conducted an empirical studies in the area of collocations, Sa'ad, M. (2014) attempted to investigate the effect of the methods that the student use while translating collocations from English into Arabic and vice versa on giving adequate translation. The results of the study revealed that the students of English language face difficulties when they translate collocations and that they are unfamiliar with many of the appropriates / equivalents collocations.

4. Methods

4.1. Population and Sample

The sample of this study consist of 30 students who were randomly chosen out of eighty, from the third year B.A students of English. They studied the 'Translation course' at the Department, of English, Faculty of Education-Saber, University of Aden. Most of the participants are females. The thirty students (30) answered both the questionnaire and the translation test. Six teachers also participated in responding to the questionnaire. All of them are experienced in teaching translation in different faculties at the University of Aden.

4.2. The research Instruments

Two questionnaires and a test were used for the purpose of the data collection. These methods have the following purposes:

- The two questionnaires aim at getting information, on the one hand, about students' interests on translation, translating collocations in general and lexical ones in particular as well as the difficulties they face while translating. On the other, they aim at getting the teachers' views on such problems that their students undergo, and how they estimate their students' abilities and knowledge in translating lexical collocations and what are the difficulties they face.
- The test aims at measuring the students' knowledge and ability in translating some Arabic collocational items into English with regard/reference to the English verb and noun collocation. It also intends to test the strategies that the students practiced in their translation to come up with the proper collocation

5. General Discussion of Students' Questionnaire

Regarding all the questions related to the first part 'General questions on translation', the responses clearly indicate that the majority of students like translation to some extent. However, this preference and acceptability are not always. The results also show that literal translation is most preferred by the students. This type of translation seems to be easy and it is common between students (Ghazala, 2008, p. 6). The results also reveals that both translations either from Arabic into English or vice versa comprises the most preferable type of translation to them. In terms of the second part '*The area of difficulty in translation*', constructing a new target sentences is considered as the most problematic area students face in translation. The results likewise exposed that the students encounter some semantic difficulties mainly in dealing with the lexical items. Concerning the third part, '*The area of translating collocations*', the results showed that the students possess a negative attitude towards collocations as a term and how it can be structured for the reason that most of them failed to give the

right definition from the given options. The results also revealed that the majority of them do not know the lexical collocations. Therefore, they find difficulty in translating this type of collocations and how it can be structure. The reason behind such difficulty is that they did not have enough knowledge, experience or vocabulary storage to be used. Moreover, they really faced difficulty in finding the appropriate lexical items i.e. words that can go with other words. In addition, the results also showed that the majority of students actually considered the *adjective + adjective* and *the verb + noun* lexical collocations the most difficult types. Therefore, they found translating collocations from Arabic into English a difficult task particularly, when they involved to choose or find an appropriate and close sense equivalents in English. The results also revealed that the majority of the students realized that this difficulty refers to neglecting translating and practicing the area of collocations.

6. General Discussion Of Students' Questionnaire

The overall responses concerning the first part '*General questions on translation*', emphasized the students' responses, since the majority of teachers said that their students to some extent like translation. The results also showed that literal translation is most preferred by the students. The results also revealed that their students prefer to translate from English into Arabic. In terms of the second part '*The area of difficulty in translation*', constructing a new target sentences and text translation are considered the most problematic area that the students face in their translation. The results also indicated that their students met some semantic and lexical problems, which apparently appeared in the students' low performance of the translation test. Concerning the third part, '*The area of translating collocations*', the results displayed that the students have a negative attitude towards collocation. The results also showed that the majority of the teachers stated that their students did not know the lexical collocations and had scanty knowledge, they still have problems in their translation. The results also revealed that the majority of the teachers explained that their students still have poor background in the field of translating collocations in general and the lexical ones in particular. In addition, the results also showed that the majority of the teachers also stated that *the adjective+ adjective* and *the verb + noun* lexical collocations are the most difficult types. The results also disclosed that the majority of the teachers decided that the type of translating lexical collocations from English into Arabic is more preferable than any other types of translation. The teachers' responses also revealed that their students find great difficulty in finding the close sense equivalent or appropriate lexical item from Arabic into English. Finally, the results showed that the majority of teachers explained that the difficulty of translating collocations was attributed to different procedures practiced by teachers in that they concentrated on the theoretical aspects of translation, translating texts and neglecting and ignoring the area of collocations.

7. Test Findings

The results of the test used to measure students' knowledge and ability in rendering three Arabic lexical items with regard/reference to the verb+ noun English collocation. These three lexical items were contextualized in fifteen sentences. i.e. fifteen (15) sentences multiplied by (x) thirty (30) the number of the participants. The number of the correct or incorrect responses were counted separately and each divided by (÷) the total number of the students' response for each lexical item (150) i.e. each five (5) lexical items multiplied by (x) thirty (30) the number of the participants. Therefore, the total number of each lexical item is (150) responses Therefore, the total number of the students' responses made four hundred and fifty (450) i.e. (15 item × 30 participant = 450 response). Regarding the first item (ضرب) the number of appropriate responses recorded by the students were forty seven (47) (31%), while the number of inappropriate responses were one hundred three (103) (69%). On the other hand, the second item (حصر) recorded noteworthy percentages among the students' translation. Only nine (9) (6%) of the students could produce exact translation of this item. Whereas, the number of the incorrect responses, one hundred forty one (141) response which represented (94%). The third lexical item (تخفيف) recorded as well, an overwhelming percentage of the students' incorrect translation of the so-called contextualized lexical item. One hundred forty three (143) (95%) of them could not produce the close verb and noun equivalent. Only seven (7) (5%) of the students were able to give the right translation. For more clarification, the appropriate and inappropriate responses were also explained by the researcher in the following figure.

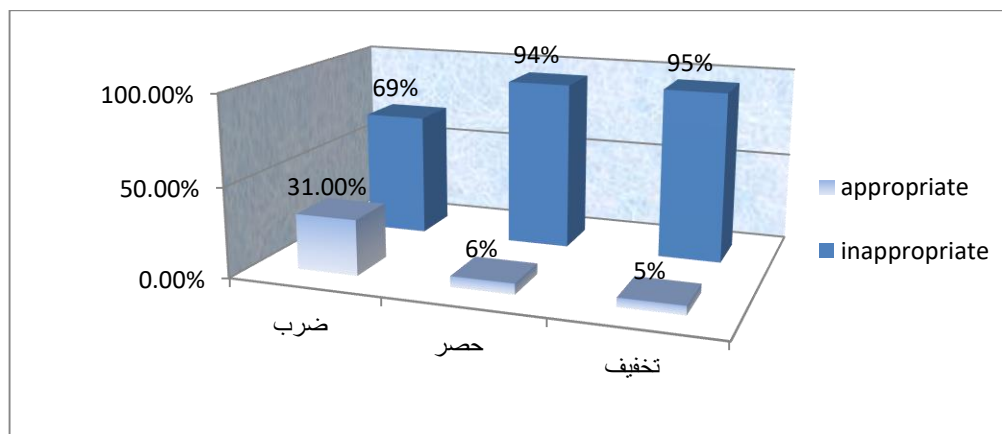


Figure1: The appropriate and inappropriate students' translation

Generally, the high percentages of the inappropriate responses indicate that the third year EFL undergraduate students at the Department of English, Faculty of Education, Saber, facing difficulties in translating the verb + noun lexical collocations. So, this denoted the learners' collocational incompetence made them utilized inappropriate sense correspondents. Despite having a large number of words in the (L2), learners are not fully capable of putting words together in a way that native speakers naturally do. It can be said that EFL learners lack the collocational competence in L2. Collocations, i.e. how words tend to co-occur in a language, seems to cause quite a few problems for English learners since, even though two words when placed together, may appear to seemingly make sense, the resulting combination is sometimes regarded as a deviation in the target language. This probably implies that collocations are arbitrary for language learners (Hill, 1999, p. 5). Likewise, the appropriate responses created by the learners can be attributed to many reasons. For example, in the first item, the students provided verbs like 'sit' and 'give' collocated with the noun 'example' (80% the highest percentage). The reason for the students' success was that most of them used the lexical item (verb) 'gave' for (أعطى) which is also acceptable. Another reason is that the collocational item is almost familiar to the students, for the reason that, it is always heard, spoken and read by them.

8. The Strategies Adopt by the Students in the Test

As a result of the insufficient knowledge to produce the required close English verb + noun collocational lexical item, the students in this test adapted different lexical strategies because they formed lexical items of their own. These incorrect lexical items (deviants) were categorized into four groups of collocational errors. This categorization depends on what the response is. Therefore, this categorization identified four strategies. They are: L1 transfer, avoidance, synonymy and paraphrasing as shown in the following figure:

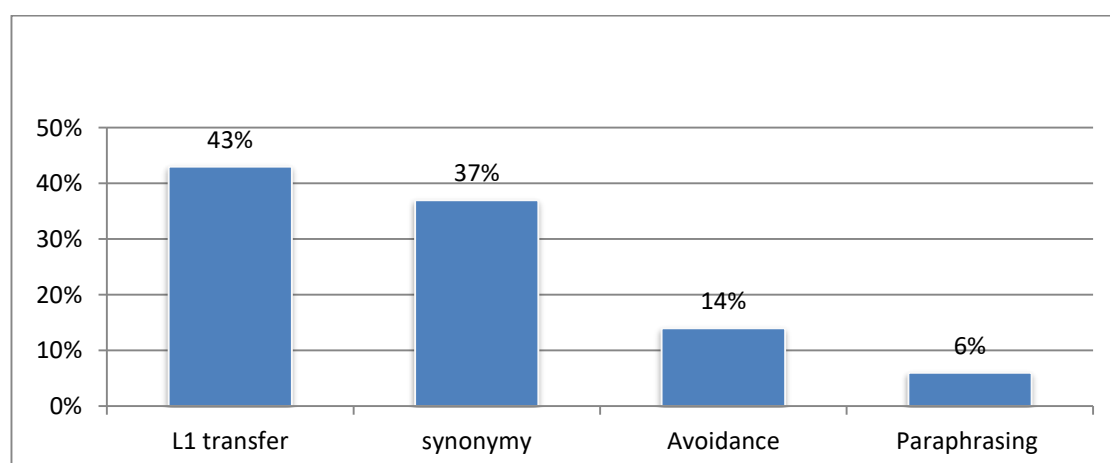


Figure 2: The percentages of the strategies adopt by the students in the translation Test

9. Conclusion

In discussing the research findings, it was concluded that the most prominent difficulties students face are in finding the close lexical equivalent. They were not collocationally competent in translating these lexical collocations into English. As a result, they really find difficulty in selecting and finding the words that come together to form good sentences. Therefore, they violate the system of collocations. As a result, they become not able to produce correct English. Consequently, Nevertheless, the outcomes of this paper cannot be generalized beyond the chosen respondents. This underlines an important message that there must be a concerted efforts to impart the knowledge of these colligations to EFL learners as a means of increasing their language proficiency and collocational competence for future academic and professional development.

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مقالة بحثية

صعوبات ترجمة بعض المفردات المعجمية لدى الطلاب الجامعيين غير الخريجين بالاعتماد على نتاج المتلازم اللفظي الإنجليزي الاسم + الفعل

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المخلص

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى التحقق من معرفة قدرة الطلاب الجامعيين غير خريجين في ترجمة مجموعة من المتلازمات اللغوية المعجمية العربية إلى اللغة الإنجليزية في سياقات مختلفة وذلك بشكل صحيح اعتمادًا على ذخيرة الطلاب اللغوية والعقلية كما ارادت الدراسة التحقق من الاستراتيجيات المتبعة في ترجمتهم تلك للتوصل إلى المتلازم اللغوي المناسب. استخدمت الدراسة أداتين رئيسيتين. تم عمل استبانة من قبل الطلاب والمعلمين وكذلك اختبار للطلاب فقط. وكان عدد المشاركون من الطلاب 30 طالبًا يمثلًا يدرسون في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بكلية التربية صبر وستة (6) من معلمي الترجمة بالجامعة. تم قياس معرفة الطلاب للمتلازمات اللغوية من خلال اختبار لترجمة ثلاثة عناصر معجمية عربية (ثلاث كلمات) (ضرب - حصر - تخفيف) تم وضعها في سياق خمسة عشر جملة تحتوي كل منها على الفعل + الاسم. أظهرت نتائج التحليل الإحصائي وجود معرفة سلبية عن المتلازمات اللغوية وأن طلاب البكالوريوس في المستوى الثالث يواجهون صعوبة في معرفة المكافئات اللغوية المناسبة ولم يكونوا على قدر كافٍ من الأهلية وجدوا صعوبة في اختيار الكلمات التي تتحد معًا لتكوين جمل إنجليزية لذلك اخلوا بنظام المتلازمات ونتيجة لذلك لم يتمكنوا من إنتاج جملة إنجليزية صحيحة. أظهرت النتائج أيضًا أن الطلاب يميلون إلى الاعتماد على استراتيجيات لغوية مختلفة لتسهيل ترجمتهم مثل النقل إلى اللغة الأولى، المرادفات، التجنب وإعادة الصياغة. أدت هذه الاستراتيجيات إلى ترجمة إنجليزية ضعيفة وبناء على ذلك تم تقديم بعض الاقتراحات للتغلب على هذه المشاكل.

الكلمات الرئيسية: المتلازمات، الترجمة، المتلازمات العربية، المتلازمات الاسم + الفعل.