

Meaning by Collocation With Illustrations from Written Arabic

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Brief reading conventions pertaining to some Arabic sounds

Consonants:

ʔ	glottal stop
θ	voiceless, dental, non-sulcal fricative
ð	voiced, dental non-sulcal fricative
ʃ	voiceless, palato-alveolar, sulcal fricative
S	voiceless, dento-alveolar, sulcal, emphatic fricative
D	voiced, dento-alveolar, emphatic plosive
T	voiceless dento-alveolar, emphatic plosive
Ṭ	voiced, dental, non-sulcal emphatic fricative
j	voiced, palato-alveolar affricate
ħ	voiceless, Pharyngeal fricative
ʕ	voiced, pharyngeal fricative
x	voiceless, uvular fricative
g	voiced, uvular fricative
q	voiceless, uvular plosive

Vowels

Each vowel symbol stands for a range of vocalic sounds of the type indicated. Long vowels are shown by doubled letters, e.g. /aa- stands for a long front open vowel.

i	front, close spread
e	mid, front spread
a	front, open, neutral
ɑ	back, open, neutral
o	mid, back, rounded
u	back, close, rounded

Abstract

This paper attempts to study '**meaning**' from the angle of the habitual syntagmatic dependencies which obtain between the 'roots' of lexical items. Such syntagmatic dependencies are technically known as **collocations**. They are abstract lexical associations relating to the underlying forms of the lexical items concerned. For instance, a collocational relationship holds between the Arabic roots (h—y—y) 'to live' and (m—w—t) 'to die' as in:

qaa la ?ana ?uhyii wa?umiit

"He said, 'I give life and cause death.'"

To echo J.R. Firth (1957), it is reasonable to claim that part of the meaning of (h—y—y) 'to live' is its collocability with (m—w—t) 'to die' and conversely, part of the meaning of (m—w—t) 'to die' is its collocability with (h—y—y) 'to live.'

In addition, the paper draws a distinction between the concept of collocation and the transformationalist concept of selectional restriction, and concludes that the latter (i.e. selectional restriction) is more general than the former. Acceptable collocations always satisfy the rules of selectional restrictions, but the converse may not be true.

A syntagmatic dependency — technically known as a collocation — holds between the roots of the two lexical items /yuhyii/ "to give life" and /yumiit/ "to cause death" in Arabic. This kind of syntagmatic dependency is usually bilateral so that the occurrence of either of the two items in an utterance presupposes with a probability greater than chance that the other item will also cooccur in contiguity with it. Of

course, the actual forms which the two roots take in an utterance are subject to variation. In other words the collocational scatter is not limited to a particular grammatical structure. The above items are attested in the following forms, among others no doubt:

1. Nonpast + nonpast, eg.

(i) ?id qaala ?ibraahiimu rabbiya llaadii yuhyii
wa yumiit (?albaqara, 258)
“When Abraham (?ibraahiim) said it is my Lord Who gives life and causes death”

(ii) ʕumma yumiitukum ʕumma yuhyiikum ʕumma ?ilayhi
turjaʕuun (Albaqara, 28)
“Then he brings you back to life and subsequently causes you to die”

2. Active participles,

(i) wa yuxriju lhayya mina lmayyit (?aalu 9imraan, 27)
“And He brings forth the living from the dead”
(ii) “yuxriju lhayya mina lmayyit wa yuxriju lmayyita mina lhayy” (?ar-rum, 19)

3. Nonpast + object, eg.

(i) “daalika bi?anna llaaha huwa lhaqqu wa?annahu yuhyi lmawtaa”
(?al - hajj, 5)
“That is because Allah is truth; He gives life to the dead”

4. Past — past, eg.

wa?annahu ?adhaaka wa ?abkaa, wa?annahu huwa ?amaata wa
?ahyaa (?annajm: 44)
“That it is He Who caused laughter and weeping and caused death and life”

5. Active participle - object, eg.

(i) “?inna daalika lamuhyi lmawtaa wa huwa 9alaa kulli šay?in
qadiir.” (?arruum, 50)
“Surely, He (lit that) will bring the dead back to life, and He is capable of anything!”

6. Verbal Nouns Conjoined

(i) walaa yamlikuuna mawtan walaa hayaah. (?alfurdaan, 3)
“and they have no power over life nor death”

7. Conjoined verbal nouns formed on the measure /maf9al/, eg.

(i) qul ?inna Salaatii wanusukii wa maḥyaaya wa mamaatii lillaahi rabbi l9aalamiin. (?al?an9aam, 162)

"Say my prayers and my services, my life and my death are for Allah, Lord of the universe."

Evidently this kind of lexical accompaniment is not bound up with any particular grammatical relationship between the pair of items concerned except to the extent that the construction in which they occur is generated by the grammar of the language. The actual forms that collocate are referable to some abstract category which will be defined below. But it is worth adding that the two items may be immediately dominated by the same node (cf 3(ii)) or may not (cf. 1(ii), and 8 below)):

8. qaala ?annaa yuhyii haadihi llaahu ba9da mawtihaa. (?albaqara, 259)
He said, "how will Allah bring this (village) to life now that it had died (lit. after its death)"

Furthermore, a collocation like that above might, as Mitchell (1975:120) and Halliday (1966:151) point out, cut across sentence boundary.

Consider:

9. walaā taḥsabanna llaḍiina qutiluu fii sabiili llaahi ?amwaatan bal ?aḥyaa?un 9inda rabbiḥim yurzaquun. (?aalu - 9imraan, 169)

"And do not think (that those) who were killed in the cause of Allah are dead. On the contrary, they are alive and well-provided for by Allah."

Thus in 9 the word /?amwaatan/ "dead" is the complement of the object (relative clause) /?alladiina qutiluu.../ "who were killed.../", whereas its collocate /?aḥyaa?un/ "alive" is predicate in another sentence conjoined to the first namely /bal (hum) ?aḥyaa?un.../

"on the contrary, they are alive...".

The foregoing statement indicates that a collocation is best regarded as abstract lexical relationship. It is abstract because it relates to the underlying forms of the lexical items concerned, rather than to specific, pronounceable forms. The term "root" in Arabic linguistics expressed most commonly as three "radicals" (i-e consonants) is a convenient abstract framework for generalizing the concept of collocation between two items. Thus, in the light of the above examples it can be said that a collocational relationship obtains between, (ḥ-y-y) "to live and (m-w-t) "to die". This kind of collocability is no doubt "meaningful", and one can justifiably echo J.R. Firth and say that part of the meaning of (ḥ-y-y-) "is its collocability with (m-w-t) and of (m-w-t) its collocability with (ḥ-y-y).

To say that such collocations are "meaningful" is to interpret "meaning differently from the more usual notions of reference and sense relations. Thus, for instance, anybody wanting to learn Standard Arabic (including, it may be pointed out, native children), and having learned the forms /mawt/ "death" and /hayaah/ "life" separately in other contexts, will be that much wiser to know that the two collocate in this language as in 10.

10. (a) ?allaḏī xalaqa lmawta walḥayaata liyabluwakum ?ayyukum
?aḥsanu 9amalaa (?almulk, 2)

'The One Who created life and death to put you to the test so that those who have better deeds will stand out'

(b) walaa yamlikuuna mawtan walaa ḥayaatan walaa nuṣuuraa
(?al-furqaan, 3)

"and they have no power over death or life or (the) raising (of the dead)".

It is part of the formal meaning of, say, the definite article "the" in English, and the equivalent /ʔal/ in Arabic that each of them cooccurs with a noun in a noun phrase, eg. The teacher (s) the milk the Amazon
"ʔal mudarris(uun) al laban al ʔamazoon; and similarly it is part of the meaning of /ḥ-y-y-/ "to live" that it collocates with /m-w-t/ "to die", notwithstanding the fact that the former relationship is grammatical and consequently generalizable, whereas the latter is lexical and therefore particular. Both are syntagmatic relationships which the student of the language must examine in his search for "meaning".

Collocations like /ḥ-y-y-/ and /m-w-t/ are meaningful in the sense that they are also mutually defining — the referential meaning of /ḥ-y-y/ is best understood in contrast with that of /m-w-t/, and the native speaker of Arabic recognizes the bondage between the two in usage not only as acceptable but also frequent and habitual—hence interesting. The referential meaning of each of these two lexical items can only be understood fully in contrast with that of the other, and the collocability of the two items in the Holy Quran, and elsewhere in Arabic literature, may be a reflection of the mutual relatedness of their conceptual meaning.

Perhaps Firth did not intend to entirely dissociate collocations from "the conceptual or idea approach to the meaning of words" for he says (1957:196) "meaning by collocation is an abstraction at the syntagmatic level and is not directly concerned with the conceptual or idea approach to the meaning of words". But, as pointed out in the previous paragraph, the collocability of two lexical items is deeply rooted in the habitual

usage by native speakers of these items and is all too often a reflection of shared conceptual signification (of such items). Furthermore, since the conceptual world of experience is to a large extent shared by speakers of different languages, a good deal of collocations such as those involving /h-y-y/ "to live" and /m-w-t/ "to die" are also universally shared with discernible similarities in non-literary and literary diction that readily lend themselves to straightforward translation from one language into another. (cf. Firth, 1975).

So, although collocational meaning is essentially concerned with the habitual (and consequently "acceptable") association of lexical items, it is at the same time quite relevant to the semantic interpretation of syntagms. Native speakers of Arabic not only accept

11. ?aSSayfu ħaarr. "The summer is hot"

12. ?alfurnu ħaarr. "The furnace is hot"
but also interpret /ħaarr/ "hot" in 12 differently from /ħaarr/ "hot" in 11. The word /ħaarr/ "hot" in 11 and 12 cannot be said to refer to the same physical properties. In 11 /ħaarr/ is a qualitative adjective that means about 40°C, but in 12 it may mean a minimum of 1000°C (cf. a blast furnace). Native speakers interpret /ħaarr/ "hot" differently in these two instances by virtue of its collocability with the items /?aSSayfu/ "the summer" on the one hand, and /?alfurnu/ "the furnace" on the other. If an engineer measuring the temperature of a blast furnace finds it to be about 40°C he is likely to say:

13. /alfurnu laysa haarran/ "the furnace is not hot" or even,

14. ?alfurnu baarid "the furnace is cold" where /baarid/ "cold" is an antonym of /ħaarr/ "hot."

Collocations are also relevant to the study of meaning in terms of sense relations, eg. synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy and so on. Consider:

13. Xilfu nnaaqah "the breast of the she-camel"

14. Dar9u lbaqarah "the breast of the cow"

15. ʿadyu lmarʿah "the breast of the woman"

Xilf, Dar9 and ʿady are synonymous; they mean "breast". But there are

collocational restrictions of their usage so that they cooccur respectively with /naaqah/ "She-camel" /baqarah/ "cow" and /marʔah/ "woman" as in 13, 14, & 15.

Such collocational restrictions are so binding that if one were to say:

16. *xilfu lbaqara, or

17. *Dar9u lmarʔa, or

18. *Θadyu nnaqah

one would shock the native speaker, notwithstanding the transparency of these unusual constructions.

Consider also 19-20

19. maata rrajul "The man died"

20. maata lkalb "the dog died",

where /maat/ "died" can be used both with /rajul/ "man" and /kalb/ "dog". Now, /tuwuffiya/ "he died (lit. he was caused to die)" is a synonym of /maat/ "he died," but can only cooccur with a (— Human) subject so that 21 is acceptable but 22 is not.

21. tuwuffiya rrajul "The man died"

22. *tuwuffiya lkalb "the dog died"

Like (16-18) 22 is transparent and it is ruled out on the grounds of collocational constraints rather than intelligibility. Similarly /b-y-D- "white" and /s-w-d/ "black" are antonymous. CF.

23. yawma tabyaDDu wujuuhun wa taswaddu wujuuh

"On the day when certain faces become white and certain faces become black"

However, with /Θawrah/ "coup" /"revolution" and /ʔukduubah/ "a lie", /b-y-D/ "White" is attested but its antonym /s-w-d/ "black" is not, so that 24 & 25 are acceptable whereas 26 and 27 are not.

24. Θawratun bayDaaʔ "lit. a white coup, i.e. a bloodless coup"

25. ʔukduubatun bayDaaʔ "a white lie"

26. *Θawratun sawdaa? "a black coup"

27. *?ukḏuubatun sawdaa? "a black lie"

It is worth noting that in Arabic literature /b-y-D/ normally has positive and desirable connotations whereas /s-w-d/ has negative and undesirable connotations. (cf. 23). However, in conjunction with /9-y-n/ "eye", such connotations do not seem to hold. Cf.

28. bayaaDu 19aynayn "the whiteness of the (two) eyes"

29. sawaadu 19aynayn "the blackness of the two eyes"

With /9-y-n/ "eye" both /b-y-D/ "white" and /s-w-d/ "black" denote colours which are either desirable or undesirable depending on personal preference. However, in 30 /b-y-D/-/9-y-n/ suggests blindness whereas the corresponding /s-w-d/-/9-y-n/ carries no such metaphorical connotation.

30. wabyaDDat 9aynaahu mina lḥuzn "and his eyes became white i.e. he became blind) with giref" (cf. waswaddat 9aynaah "and his eyes became black, (in a literal sense)"

As shown above, the **asymmetry** of distribution of synonyms and antonyms is constrained by the collocational behaviour of the lexical items. It might also be pointed out that one of the two items that constitute certain pairs of antonyms is "marked" and the other is "unmarked" (cf. Palmer, 1976:80). For instance, of the pair: /ḥaraarah/, "hotness/heat" and /buruudah/ "coldness", the former is unmarked whereas the latter is marked, in that one normally says /darajatu lḥaraarah/ "(lit) the degree of hotness, i.e. temperature" rather than /darajatu lburuudah/ "the degree of coldness". To use /darajatu lburuudah/ is to presuppose coldness, whereas /darajatu lḥaraarah/ is a "neutral" expression which presupposes nothing about hotness or coldness.

The lexical items that collocate seem to fall into three major categories:

1. Opposites (including antonyms), eg.

- (i) ?aṣṣarqu walḡarb "the east and the west"
- (ii) ?alḥayaatu walmawt "life and death"

- (iii) ?alkaθiiru walqaliil "the abundant and the scarce"
- (iv) ?al?a9maa walbaSjir "the blind one and the one who can see"
- (v) ?al 9aniyyu walfaqiir "the rich (man) and the poor (man)"

Arabic abounds in such collocable opposites and the Holy Quran in particular is a very rich source of such collocations.

2. Synonyms (or Near Synonyms), eg.

- i. bahjatan wa suruuran "gladness and pleasure"
- ii. ?innahaa saa?at mustaqarran wa muqaamaa "it (hell) is a bad place to settle in and live in"
- iii. ?innamaa ?aškuubaθθii wa ħuznii ?ila llaah 'I complain to Allah about my grief and sadness'
- iv. bimaziidin mina lħuzni wal?asaa "with a great deal of sadness and sorrow"
- v. wallaahu yaĥfaḌukum wa yar9aakum "may Allah protect you and guard you!"

Two points are worth mentioning here. First, it is generally agreed "that there are no real synonyms, that no two words have exactly the same meaning" as Palmer (1976:60) puts it. Secondly, most of these synonymous collocations are tautological, **formulaic** expressions to be read in the social and obituary columns of newspapers as well as in some contrived lines of verse. Ullmann (1977:154) says, "when one encounters this kind of gratuitous tautology in poetry one has the impression of mere padding designed to fill out the line". Consider this line of verse:

- vi. ħasadu lfataa ? iḏ lam yanaaluu sa9yahu
falqawmu ?a9daa?un lahu wa xuSuumu.

"They envied the young man when they could not match his accomplishment, therefore the tribesmen are his enemies and opponents."

However a collocation of synonyms is sometimes effective in that it serves to reinforce the message. For instance, the collocation of two or more synonyms allows the message to develop into some climactic (or anticlimactic) effect to meet the needs of the situation. Consider, example (iii) Repeated here):

(iii) ?innamaa ?aškuu baθθii wa ħuznii ?ila llaah
where /baθθ/ is deep /ħuzn/ is one sense, and in another, /baθθ/ is grief which is expressed in words, whereas /ħuzn/ remains untold of, in the heart.

Consider also:

- (vii) ?ana la ?akrahuka fahasb, bal ?amqutuk. "I not only loathe you, but loathe you"

,in this example /m-q-t is violent /k-r-h/

3. Complementaries:

This category of collocates may be illustrated by the following examples:

- i. Wamaa xalaqna ssamaa?a wal?arDa wamaa baynahuma baaTilaa. (Saad, 27) "we haven't created the sky (heaven) and the earth in vain."
- ii. qul illaahu ?a9lamu bimaalabi?uu lahu gaybu ssamaawaati wal?arD (?al-kahf, 26) "Say Allah knows best how long they stayed, He knows the secrets of the heavens and the earth!"
- iii. ?alhayawaanu wa nnabaat "Animals and plants"
- iv. bil?hadiidi wa naar "with iron and fire"
- v. fil?haadiri wa lmustaqbal "in the present (time) and the future (time)"
- vi. ?a9Tinii waraqatan wa qalaman "Give me a (piece of) paper and a pen"
- vii. ?arraadyu wa ttalifizyoon "radio and television"
- viii. bil qawli wal?amal "by word and deed/action"

Such collocations consists of conjoined pairs of lexical items comprising categories or phenomena with some strong semantic, spatial, temporal or functional link.

In addition to the above classes of collocations, Arabic abounds in particular instances of noun phrases and verb phrases exhibiting collocations relatable to the generalized patterns of **modification** (cf. 31-35) and case relations i.e. deep relations between verbs and accompanying nouns/noun phrases, (cf. 36-38).

31. Jailatun mu?limah "a dark night"
32. 9ajuuzun 9aqiim "a sterile old woman"
33. Sadiiqu ssuu? "the bad companion (lit the companion of badness)"

34. raja9a bixuffayy ħunayn
 "He returned without accomplishing anything (lit. He returned with Hunayn's pair of shoes)"
35. fajaa?athu ?ihdaaħumaa tamšii 9ala stihyaa?
 "Then one of the two of them approached him, walking shyly"
36. SuluTaatu l?iħtilaal tašunnu hamlata 9tiqaalaatin maħmuumah.
 "The occupation authorities launch a ferocious campaign of arrests"
37. haajarat iTTuyuur 'The birds migrated'
38. ?ar-ra?iisu yaftatiħu ma9raDan fanniyyan fii qaa9at il9arD.
 "The president will open an art exhibition in the show room"

Moreover, set phrases and idioms constitute a special type of collocation: often fossilized and unproductive in that they rarely lend themselves to variation in form, as in 39-41.

39. ?aTTuyuuru 9alaa ?aškaalihaa ta9a9
 "Birds of a feather flock together"
40. da9 iDDar9a yadirru ligayrika kamaa darra lak
 "Let the breast supply others as it has supplied you"
41. daawi jurħaka laa yattasi9
 "Treat your wound and it won't go deeper"

Collocations might seem to resemble "**selectional restrictions**" in generative grammar. But such resemblance can be illusory! This is so because collocations are concerned with **habitual** and interesting lexical associations like (h-y-y) (m-w-t) as noted above, whereas the rules of selectional restrictions apply to the semantic compatibility of items in a string" whether or not the items habitually collocate. Thus, selectional restrictions would recognize the strings,

/?a19inabu saxan/ "The grapes become hot" and
 /9inabun saaxin "Hot grapes"

as acceptable. The explicit, formal selectional constraints are statable in such rules as:

V CS Aux Det B,

where is a noun and B is a noun (cf. Chomsky 1965:1017. This rule defines a selectional relationship between a verb and the nouns that immediately precede or immediately follow it in a sentence. In this

respect, it can be said that the verb /saxan/ "became hot" requires a subject which is -abstract, i.e.

saxan	CS/	N
V	V	abstract
		other syntactic features

Likewise, the adjectival "saaxin/ "hot" follows a noun which is abstract, i.e.

saaxin	CS/	N
Adj	Adj	Abstract
		other syntactic features

These rules will recognize both /ʔal9inabu saxan/ "The grapes become hot" and /9inabun saaxin/ "hot grapes" as grammatical. On the other hand, the strings:

*/ʔaljamaalu saxan/ *"'Beauty became hot" and

*/jamaalun saaxin/ *"'hot beauty"

are unacceptable because they violate the above selectional restrictions - /jamaal/ being (— abstract).

However, /ʔal9inabu saxan/ "The grapes became hot" and /9inabun saaxin/ "hot grapes," which, as noted above, have passed the test of selectional restriction, do not qualify as collocations in Arabic because there is no mutual expectancy between (9-n-b) and (s-x-n).

Put another way, selectional restrictions are more general than collocations. Collocations are a special subclass of selectional restrictions, so that acceptable collocations always satisfy the rules of selectional restrictions. But not all strings generated by grammar and conforming to the selectional restrictions of co-occurrence count as collocations.

One might justifiably therefore disagree with Dwight Bolinger (1976: 8) who says in this respect that "The selectional restrictions of generative grammar are one kind of collocational restriction, a special kind that can be described in relation to a category of some type, which Mitchell (1975) and others call "colligation". Even a colligation, which, according to Mitchell is a generalization of a class of collocations, on the basis of the shared distribution of collocations qua units, cannot be as general as selectional restrictions; like collocations, colligations must be subsumed under the rules of selectional restrictions. In other

words, selectional restrictions are higher up on the scale of generality than colligations, and the latter, by definition, are higher on this scale than collocations.

The study of collocations is relevant to stylistics. Writers, especially poets have individual lexical preferences and each invents his own characteristic collocations. Firth (1957: 198) describes such collocations as "unique and personal, that is to say a-normal" to distinguish them from the more common ones which are shared by native speakers of the language. Such personal collocations and phrase formations are undoubtedly meaningful in more than one sense. They constitute stylistic departures from the commonplace which separate one writer from another, and are but one aspect of semantic innovation in language. Of course, such idiosyncratic collocations have the potential of becoming more and more familiar as time goes on.

To close this paper it may be in order to point out that speakers of a language do not discredit word associations because they have no memory of them — creativity is an essential feature of language and the door must be kept open for novel formations (literary, or otherwise). For instance, in 1980 a new phrase became very common in the usage of economists and trade specialists in Jordan, namely,

/taršiidu lʔistihlaak/

"consumption counselling"

An influential person used the phrase and it soon spread far and wide. This is an instance of a personal collocation which in the space of a very short period of time was on the lips of almost everybody in the country. Collocations have their own life cycle: they come and go; they are born and they die out or go into a period of disuse ready to be revitalized if and when the right occasion arises.

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