

**Use of collocant food items in
Arabic and English**

Asst. Prof Baidaa Abbas Ghubin

AL-Zubaidy (Ph.D.)

Dept. of English

College of Education Ibn-Rushd

University of Baghdad

Email: baidaa.abbas@ircoedu.uobaghdad.edu.iq

Abstract

This paper investigates the collocational use of irreversible food binomials in the lexicons of English (UK) and Arabic (Iraq), their word-order motivations, cultural background, and how they compare. Data consisted in sixteen pairs in English, versus fifteen in Arabic. Data analysis has shown their word order is largely motivated by logical sequencing of precedence; the semantically bigger or better item comes first and the phonologically longer word goes last. These apply in a cline of decreasing functionality: logical form first, semantic importance second, phonological form last. In competition, the member higher in this cline wins first membership. While the entries in each list clearly reflect culturally preferred food meals in the UK and Iraq, ten food items recur in both lists, denoting their common ground in staple food cuisine. On the other hand, certain types of preferred meat and drink food items are significantly affected by the cultural norms in both languages.

Key Terms: Irreversible Food collocation; English and Arabic Lexicons; Word-order Motivation; Cultural Food Preferences.

1. Collocation: Definition and Types

The term ‘collocation’ refers to the lexical tendency of certain words to combine together with certain other words (Lyons, 1977: 612). Such a tendency is thought to be universal in all languages, though realized language-specifically (Aisenstadt, 1979: 71). In collocation, two or more words co-occur more often than would be expected by chance, such as the phrase "*a hard frost*", in which the word: "*hard*" collocates with "*frost*", but not with "*strong*", thus: rendering the phrase ‘*strong frost*’ to sound unnatural. In English – and all other languages – many partly or fully fixed expressions – such as “cosmetic surgery”, “crystal clear”, "fast food", "pay

attention", and "powerful engine" – become established, mutually expected collocates through repeated use (Firth, 1968; Halliday, 1966; Sinclair, 1996)).

Both in Arabic and English, collocation can involve seven main types speech-form combinations: adjective + noun (e.g. *excruciating pain*; ألم ممرض), noun + noun (e.g. *a surge of anger*; نوبة سعال), verb + noun (e.g. *commit suicide*; يقترب جريمة), noun + verb (e.g. *lions roar*; الأسود تزار), adverb + adjective (e.g. *completely satisfied*; خالداً أبداً), verbs + prepositional phrase (e.g. *burst into tears*; أجهش بالبكاء), and verb + adverb (e.g. *wave frantically*; يسير مسرعاً).

2. Irreversible Binomial Collocates

The term "irreversible binomial" was introduced in linguistic literature by Yakov Malkiel in 1954 to describe a semantically related pair or group of words – usually connected by: 'and' or 'or' – used together in a certain fixed order. Moon (1998) discusses them under the rubric: 'fixed expressions and idioms'. These binomial lexical items are often near-synonyms (e.g. *checks and balances*; حساب و كتاب) or antonyms (e.g. *life or death*; الآن أو أبداً). They also belong to the same part of speech: nouns (e.g. *milk and honey*; باقلاء و بيض); adjectives (e.g. *short and sweet*; مضحك مبكي); or verbs (e.g. *do or die*; سَمِعَ و أطاع). The order of binomial lexical elements cannot be reversed, and many such combinations show alliteration (e.g. *kith and kin*; كذا و كيت), rhyme (e.g. *make or break*; قول و فعل), or ablaut reduplication (e.g. *chit-chat*; قيل و قال) where the change of one word's single middle vowel changes its meaning. Many irreversible binomials express literal meanings (e.g. *rich and famous*; صباح مساء), but some are entirely figurative (e.g. 'five and dime' for a low-priced variety store; and: دهن و دبس for describing the close friendship between two persons).

Despite their unpredictability, their word-order can reveal some underlying semantic motivations or principles. Norton (2017) – following Allerton (1984) – has identifies four of such motivations in English binomials:

1. Logical sequencing of precedence, and cause-effect: e.g. *first and second; crime and punishment*.
2. The semantically bigger or better item comes first: e.g. *fish and chips, cream and sugar*.
3. The phonologically longer word goes last: e.g. *salt and pepper, cloak and dagger*.
4. Male often goes before female: e.g. *Mr and Mrs, brothers and sisters* (but not: *ladies and gentlemen, mum and dad*).

3. Research Problem

The semantic motivations listed in the previous section are purely descriptive, and are not meant to be used as yardsticks. They are relative collocational guidelines, and may overlap, or compete to obtain precedence. The specific question that this paper attempts to answer is: ‘How the interplay between these competing semantic motivations is realized in the English and Arabic data of collocate binomial food items’. In addition to contrastive semantics, this paper sheds light upon the syntactic and cultural intricacies in the use of irreversible food collocations in English and Arabic. To the best of the researcher’s knowledge, contrastive analyses tackling a specific semantic field, such as that of food items, are lacking.

4. Aim

This paper aims to investigate the manifestations of irreversible food binomials’ used in English and Arabic by singling them out, describe the

characteristics of their semantic features, and how far they affect their word-order. It also aims at finding out how the four semantic motivations cited above function in the Arabic data. Another related aim is to investigate the role of the the entries in the English and Arabic lists in reflecting culturally preferred food meals in the UK and Iraq, and how they compare.

5. Adopted Model of Analysis

Following Firth (1968: 181), the collocation analysis has been conducted on the word-level by defining collocation as the syntagmatic attraction between lexical items. The description of irreversible binomial collocates is based upon Malkiel (1954). As for the interplay between collocates' word-order and their underlying semantic, the model of Norton (2017) has been adopted.

6. Literature Review

Since its introduction by Firth (1957: 194–195; 1968: 181–183), the concept of collocation has proven to have a wide scope of application in the usage-based studies of lexico-grammatical and semantic categories, especially when used to cover any sort of syntagmatic attraction that can hold between not only two or more lexical items, but also morphemes, words, phrases or utterances (Hoey 2005: 158–159; Lehecka, 2015: 2). Collation has been widely used in the statistical analysis of large electronic corpora (Sinclair 1966: 418, Hoey 1991: 6–7). Also, collocation analysis has been widely applied to the domain of frame semantics and the FrameNet project (e.g. Fillmore *et al.* 2003). In the field of contextual semantics, collocation analysis has been extensively used to compare the meaning of near-synonyms, such as *handsome*– *pretty* (Palmer 1976: 96, Leech 1974: 20). In lexicography, dictionaries were produced on the basis

of words' collocation patterns in large corpora (e.g. Collins COBUILD English Dictionary (Sinclair, 1995)). Moreover, collocation analysis has been applied to machine translation, natural language processing, as well as vector-space modelling in the field of distributional semantics (Evert 2005: 23–27; Evert 2009: 1217–1218)

7. Previous Studies

Many Arabic-English collocation researches have been conducted in the field of translation from Arabic into English and vice versa (e.g. Al-Rawi, 1994; Farghal and Shunnaq, 1999; Mustafa, 2010). These studies tackled important cultural and linguistic issues and difficulties in this field. Other studies conducted collocational Arabic-English contrastive analyses (e.g. Ali, 2018; Igaab and Abdulhasan, 2018). The importance of the systematic use of a collocational approach in the compilation of bilingual Arabic-English studies has also been tackled in a few more studies (e.g. Abu-Ssaydeh: 2008). The monolingual study of collocation in Standard Arabic has also been researched (e.g. Emery, 1991). However, contrastive studies in specified semantic fields require more research attention.

8. Data

English research data were collected from: 'list of common nonreversible word pairs' offered at Atkins Bookshelf Website (2016). The list of Arabic food binomials was identified and collected by the researcher herself, being a native speaker of colloquial Iraqi Arabic speech.

9. Method

The two lists of irreversible binomial food collocates in the English and Arabic lexicons are presented, structurally described, and compared, making use of Malkiel (1954) and Norton (2017) linguistic models.

10. A list of Irreversible Food Binomials in English

The English lexicon has at least the following irreversible food binomials, as cited in ‘Atkins Bookshelf’ website (2016) under the rubric: ‘list of common nonreversible word pairs’:

1. *bacon and eggs*
2. *bread and butter*
3. *bread and water*
4. *coffee and doughnuts*
5. *cookies and cream*
6. *cream and sugar*
7. *fish and chips*
8. *ham and eggs*
9. *herbs and spices*
10. *milk and honey*
11. *peaches and cream*
12. *pork and beans*
13. *salt and pepper*
14. *sugar and spice*
15. *wine and cheese*
16. *wine and dine*

10.1 English Data Analysis

1. *bacon and eggs*

In this pair, the second of Norton guidelines (bigger first) wins over the third one (lesser-form first), since the first member has two syllables against just one syllable in the second member.

2. *bread and butter*

The same observation made about (1) above applies to this pair regarding the motivation: (bigger first). The pair also satisfies: (lesser form first), giving it a stronger semantic bond. Alliteration adds a third bonding force. This pair also symbolises livelihood, referring to a job or an activity that provides one with the money one needs to live (Cambridge English Dictionary).

3. *bread and water*

All the three first motivations are realized in this pair, whose basic items are deep-rooted in the history of food. It is interesting to see that the first member takes precedence in this pair over the life-giving drink: water. In all the other food binomials in this list, the drink (*coffee* or *wine*) comes first.

4. *coffee and doughnuts*

Both the first and the second members of this pair have two-syllable words; size and sequence do not seem to be at play with the pair's word-order. The first element slot allotted to *coffee* may be assumed to be due to the higher frequency of its daily consumption – both alone and in meals – hence, its relative priority.

5. *cookies and cream*

In this alliterative pair, the phonologically longer member (*cookies*) precedes the single-syllable member of *cream*. The logic in fronting the first member is related to the essential process of this meal, which requires the cookies to be prepared first for the later application of cream. Such 'processing essentiality' also obtains in the second pair in this list.

6. *cream and sugar*

All the first three rules of precedence typically obtain in this pair.

7. *fish and chips*

Same as the first pair.

8. *ham and eggs*

Same as the first pair.

9. *herbs and spices*

Same as the sixth pair.

10. *milk and honey*

Same as the sixth pair. This pair has a Biblical idiomatic use in reference to a country where living conditions are good and people have the opportunity to make a lot of money (Cambridge English Dictionary).

11. *peaches and cream*

Same as the fifth pair.

12. *pork and beans*

Same as the first pair.

13. *salt and pepper*

The first member in this pair is more basic, and is simpler in form, hence its priority. Also, this pair has a specific metaphorical application in that it is not only used to signify the additional seasoning of food, but also in describing healthy interpersonal relationships based on respect and trust. Moreover, '*salt-and-pepper hair*' is a mixture of dark hairs and grey or white hairs (Cambridge English Dictionary).

14. *sugar and spice*

Same as the fifth pair. This pair has an idiomatic use to metaphorically describe someone behaving in a kind and friendly way (Cambridge English Dictionary).

15. *wine and cheese*

Same as the fifth pair. In the process of eating this meal, the wine is sipped first; then, a bite of the cheese is taken, followed by another sip of the wine to experience what the cheese's taste does to the wine's taste.

16. *wine and dine*

This pair is both idiomatic and perfectly rhymed binomial. It signifies entertaining someone with expensive food and drink (Cambridge English Dictionary). In many cultures, wine is paired with food dishes to enhance the dining experience. The fronting of the first member ‘wine’ has to do with the habit of tasting the wine before serving it to the client. Precedence wins out priority here.

To sum up, the first three of Norton’s guidelines appear to be functional in explaining word order in the English data, obtaining in (14) out of sixteen pairs (i.e. at 87.5%). The fourth guideline (men first) does not apply to English food items. On competition, the more important or greater member always wins priority. One complementary rule that can account for the priority of certain pair-membership is the relative process-essentiality of the specific meal ingredient within the pair. The binomial pairs: *milk and honey*, *salt and pepper*, *sugar and spice*, and *wine and dine* exhibit both idiomatic and metaphorical use in the first place. When ‘bread’ occurs in the pair, it always assumes first membership due to its centrality as a food stuff, thus relegating even ‘*water*’ to second-membership, as shown in the third pair. In all other pairs, the drink member - ‘*coffee*’ or ‘*wine*’ - comes first. The most recurrent pair membership is that of *cream*, occurring three times in: *cookies and cream*, *cream and sugar*, and *peaches and cream*.

11. A list of Irreversible Iraqi Food Binomial in Arabic

1. تمر ومرق (rice and broth)
2. خبز وشاي (bread and tea)
3. خبز وملح (bread and salt)
4. زاد وملح (food and salt)
5. شاي وسكر (tea and sugar)
6. جوز ولوز (walnuts and almonds)

7. دهن ودبس (oil and date molasses)
8. باقلاء وبيض (broad beans and eggs)
9. شاي وكعك/كيك (tea and cake)
10. دبس و راشي (dates' molasses and sesame oil)
11. تمر و لبن (dates and yogurt)
12. زلابية وبقلاوة (zlabia and baklava)
13. فلفل وبهار (pepper and spices)
14. زردة و حليب (yellow rice and milk)
15. قيمر وعسل (cream and honey)

11.1 Arabic Data Analysis

1. تَمَن وَمَرَق (rice and broth)

This pair denotes the staple lunch-meal in Iraq. Both of its members have two syllables. The first member is fronted because of its masculine form, the second being feminine.

2. خُبْز وشاي (bread and tea)

The first member in this pair is fronted due to its basicness. In fact, it is commonly used alone to denote one's livelihood, just like the use of 'bread and butter' in English. The reverse order is also used.

3. خُبْز وملح (bread and salt)

Same as the second pair.

4. زاد وملح (food and salt)

Same as the second pair, with which it is synonymous. It is mainly used metaphorically in reference to the sharing of one's food with others. Such a sharing normally requires the receptor to oblige with gratitude, mutual trust, and respect.

6. جوز ولوز (walnuts and almonds)

This pair can be reversed, and refers to serving nuts in general. The pairing is phonologically motivated by the perfect rhyme.

7. دهن ودبس (oil and dates' molasses)

This alliterative pair serves mainly the idiomatic and metaphorical use of likening a close friendship to the ease of mixing these two ingredients together in the kitchen. The first member has one syllable, the second: two. Both members are masculine.

8. باقلاء وبيض (bread-beans and eggs)

In this alliterative pair, the phonologically heavier first member (which has three syllables, plus a gemination) is fronted due to its basicness, though the second member has just one syllable. Interestingly, the first member is a feminine collective plural form, the second: masculine.

9. شاي وكعك/كيك (tea and cake)

The first member in this pair is fronted because of its basicness. This pair is similar to the English binomial: 'coffee and doughnut', with 'tea' – rather than 'coffee' – being the main hot drink served in Iraq. Both members are monosyllabic, with masculine collective plural forms.

10. دبس و راشي (dates' molasses and sesame oil)

In this pair, the first member – which is monosyllabic - is fronted because of its basicness. The second member has two syllables. This form shows the interplay between Norton's second rule (bigger first) and third one (lesser-form first).

11. لبن وتمر (yogurt and dates)

Both members of this pair are disyllabic and masculine. Less commonly, the reverse order is also used. The first member is commonly served in liquid form as a drink

12. زُلَابِيَّةٌ وَبَقْلَاوَةٌ (zlabia and baklava)

The first member of this pair refers to mini funnel cakes, deep-fried and drenched in sweet syrup. The second member is a layered, sweetened pastry dessert, filled with chopped nuts. Both of them are feminine collective nouns. The first member has two syllables, against three in the second member. So, again, the lesser form wins priority.

13. فِلْفِلٌ وَبَهَارٌ (peppers and spices)

In this pair, the masculine first member wins priority, as both members are disyllabic. Pepper is also more commonly used in seasoning food. This binomial may also be metaphorically used in Iraq to indicate a hot-tempered person. In contrast, when the first member (فِلْفِلٌ = peppers) is metaphorically used alone by itself, it indicates a quick-at-work person, especially a girl.

14. زَرْدَةٌ وَحَلِيبٌ (yellow rice and milk)

Unlike the previous pair, the first member in this pair is feminine, and is bigger in volume, hence its priority. Both members are disyllabic.

15. قَيْمَرٌ وَعَسَلٌ (cream and honey)

In the pair, the greater quantity and the more basic wins out precedence in word-order. Both members are masculine and disyllabic.

To sum up, Norton's guidelines function in explaining the word-order of the majority of Arabic data – (9) out (15) pairs – at (60%). Feminine form wins out priority in two pairs: (بَاقِلَاءٌ وَبَيْضٌ = bread-beans

and eggs) and (زُرْدَة وَحَلِيب = yellow rice and milk) since their stuff is the greater ingredient in the meal. However, they give precedence up to masculine form when its quantity is greater as in the pair: (تَمَنٍّ وَمَرَق = rice and broth). The centrality of *tea* as the favourite hot drink in Iraq makes it present in three out of (15) pairs, i.e. at (20%). Just one pair - (دِهْن وَدِيس = oil and dates' molasses)- has a primarily and idiomatic, metaphorical use. One other pair - (فِلْفَل وَبَهَار = peppers and spices) - may also be metaphorically used, over and above its literal signification,

12. Contrastive Analysis

An overview of the collocational food binomials in English and Arabic data discussed in this paper shows that their word-order largely exhibits satisfying Norton's (2017) three guidelines: logical sequencing of precedence; the semantically bigger or better item comes first; the phonologically longer word goes last. These apply in a cline of decreasing functionality: logical form first, semantic importance second, phonological form last. In competition, the member higher in this cline wins first membership. Both the English and Arabic binomials have the membership of: *bread, eggs, salt, milk, cream, cake, pepper, honey, sugar, and spices*. Significantly, of the types of meat, the English binomials cite: *bacon, fish, and ham*. In contrast, meat is not present the Arabic binomials, either because it is a traditional ingredient of broth, or it is referred to alone as a full meal, such as in (تِكَّة = tikka) and (كَبَاب = kebab). The hot drink of 'coffee' is absent in the Arabic data, so is 'tea' in the English one. This is due to cultural differences in hot drink preferences. Of course, *wine* and *pork* are absent from the Arabic data due to religious prohibition.

13. Conclusion

The empirical finding that the word-order of collocational food binomials in English and Arabic data discussed in this paper largely follow

the three guidelines: logical sequencing of precedence; the semantically bigger or better item comes first; the phonologically longer word goes last indicates that these principles apply cross-linguistically. More studies are required to investigate their linguistic universality. The second finding that English and Arabic collocate binomials have the membership of: *bread, eggs, salt, milk, cream, cake, pepper, honey, sugar, and spices* points to the fact that these food items are basic in both western and oriental cuisines. Finally, types of preferred meat and drink items are significantly affected by cultural norms.

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بحث استخدام الثنائيات الاسمية المتلازمة للأطعمة في اللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية

المستخلص

تبحث هذه الورقة في استخدام الثنائيات الاسمية المتلازمة للأطعمة في معجم اللغتين الإنجليزية (المملكة المتحدة) والعربية (العراق) ، مع بيان دوافع ترتيب اسمائها ،

وخلفيتها الثقافية ، وتقارنها . وتتألف بيانات البحث من ستة عشر زوجاً من الأسماء المتلازمة باللغة الإنجليزية مقابل خمسة عشر زوجاً باللغة العربية. وقد أظهر تحليل البيانات أن ترتيب كلمات هذه الثنائيات المتلازمة مرهون إلى حد كبير بالتسلسل المنطقي للأولوية ؛ كما يأتي العنصر الأكبر أو الأفضل لغوياً أولاً، ويتأخر ترتيب الكلمة الأطول صوتياً. و تنطبق هذه الأولويات بهيأة منحني تدرجي من الأهم الى الأقل أهمية: الشكل المنطقي أولاً ، الأهمية الدلالية ثانياً ، الشكل الصوتي أخيراً. وفي حالات المنافسة على الموقع الابتدائي ، فإن العضو الاسبق ترتيباً ضمن هذا المنحنى يفوز بالموقع الأول. ومع أن المدخلات في كل قائمة تعكس بوضوح وجبات الطعام المفضلة ثقافياً في المملكة المتحدة والعراق ، غير أن عشرة عناصر غذائية تتكرر في كلتا القائمتين ، مما يشير إلى وجود القاعدة المشتركة في المطبخ الغذائي الأساسي في اللغتين.

المصطلحات الأساسية: الثنائيات الاسمية المتلازمة ؛ قاموس اللغة الإنجليزية والعربية.

دافع لترتيب الكلمات ؛ التفضيلات الثقافية للأطعمة.