Syntagmatic Dependencies and Translation

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Abstract:

This paper attempts to study **'meaning'** from the angle of the habitual syntagmatic dependencies 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. In this paper, collocations are discussed in relation to translation. In the course of the discussion some distinctions of collocations in English and Arabic are emphasized and highlighted. In addition, the paper draws a distinction between the concept of collocation and the transformationlist concept of selectional restrictions and concludes that the latter (i.e. selectional restrictions) are more general than the former. Acceptable collocations always satisfy the rules of selectional restrictions but the reverse may not be true.

التبعيات النحوية و الترجمية

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الملخص:-

يحاول هذا البحث دراسة المعنى من وجهت نظر التلازمات اللغوية (اللفظية collocations) بين اصول المفردات وعلاقتها بالترجمة . يتطرق البحث الى انواع واختلافات التلازمات بين اللغتين العربية والانكليزية. فضلاً عن ذالك , يتطرق البحث الاختلاف بين مفهوم التلازم والمفهوم التحويلي (transformationlist) للقيود الانتقائية (selectional restrictions) ويتوصل البحث الى ان القيود الانتقائية هي اكثر عمومية من التلازمات اللغوية , وان التلازمات اللغوية المتعارف عليها دائماً تطابق قواعد القيود الانتقائية وقد لايكون العكس مقبولاً او صحيحاً.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التبعيات النحوية ، الترابطات ، المرادفات ، النطاقات المهنية ، التجميعات المعجمية والنحوية ، القيود الانتقائية.

Introduction

Collocation is a feature of all languages. At its simplest, collocation is *'what goes together with what'."* Combinations of two or more words used in one of their regular, non-idiomatic meanings, following certain structural patterns, and restricted in their commutability not only by grammatical and semantic valence but also by usage" (Aisenstadt, 1979: 71).

It is a linguistic phenomenon existed. in every language. Each language has its own collocations and every language and ways of dealing with them. As a native speaker of a certain language required familiarity and acquaintance with colocations. A translator as well as a foreign leaner of English has to be aware of collocations when he/she translates, since a translator and foreign learner is impossible to be a native speaker in both the SL and TL. Each has to be linguistically and culturally equipped to be able to treat Tl collocations in   a suitable way, even in the cases where collocations between the two languages differ.

Problem of the Study

Dealing with collocations is an important issue due to the significant change in meaning that may take place in erroneous use of collocations or in appropriate way of translating. Many advanced EFL learners make a number of mistakes when translating Collocations from Arabic into English . An EFL learner may not know the meaning of a lexical item but he/she cannot use it properly. The contrasts between the languages concerned are, to some extent, difficult to draw.

Collocations and Translation

Collocations in any two languages are striking and the contrasts between the languages concerned are, to some extent, difficult to draw. This is true of English and Arabic. Many errors can be explained collocationally:

Cultural Differencec

1. The collocability of an item, i.e. its chance to appear in various combinations is not <u>identical</u> in different languages. The collocability of an item varies according to cultural differences which are reflected in the

component parts of the collocation and its relation with the concept and ways of expressing it. For instance, the lexical item **thin** is used to express:

(i) "having opposite surfaces relatively close together'; of small diameter:

thin/ sheet of metal/ ice/ wire/ layer of glue/ cotton of dress.

(ii) 'not having much flesh'; lean:

thin/ body/ waist/ legs etc.

(iii) lacking density

thin/ mist/ haze etc.

(iv) 'having units that are not closely packed together or numerous'

thin/ audience/ population/ hair (=bald)

(v) 'of a liquid or paste lacking substance'; watery:

thin/ soup/ stew/ gravy etc.

(vi) 'of poor quality or lacking some important ingredient'; feeble:

thin/ humour/ disguise/ novel/ excuse (=unconvincing)

In Arabic, the corresponding item (nahi:f) is mainly associated with body (jusmun),

to describe a person who is sick, weak, feeble, lean, pale, etc.

Similarly, the lexical item **heavy** is used to express:

(i) 'great size', 'amount', 'force' etc.

heavy/ metal/ box/ guns/ artillery/ traffic/ fighting/ losses/ casualties/ expenses/ frost/ cold/ breathing/ sleeper/ drinker/ smoker.

(ii) 'activity', 'busyness'

heavy/ day/ programme/ schedule.

(iii) 'falling or striking with force

heavy/ blow/ fall of snow/rain/ seas.

(iv) 'density', 'solidity

heavy/ mist/ bread/ fog/ mud/ soil.

(v) 'food difficult to digest'

heavy/ meal.

(vi) 'a person's appearance or way of moving'

heavy/ features (3clumsy or ungraceful).

(vii) 'drowsiness'

heavy/ sleep/ wine.

(viii) 'a feeling of sadness and disappointment'

heavy/ heart.

Again, in Arabic, the corresponding lexical item (Ɵagi:l) has different collocates in the sense that the very item is usually associated with **blood** (damm), **shadow** (ðill), **soul** (ru:h) to describe a person who is abhorrent, disgusting, boring, stupid; with **food** (ta9aam) to express **indigestion;** with **understanding** (fi hi m) to describe a person who is slothful or slow-witted.

Problem of Interference

2. Interference is the translator's worst problem, as it is the language learner's. It may be caused when a person learns to master the patterns of a second language (Newmark, 1981: 122). one touchstone of a good translator is his sensitivity to interference, which affects terminology and language, the encyclopedia as much as it does the dictionary. Any collocation which is understood or accepted in one language might not be understood or accepted in another because it is part of a particular linguistic system. As a result an interference occurs when there are gaps and differences between the two languages (ibid). Therefore, a translator can easily misinterpret a collocation in the source text due to interference from his/her native language. For example, the collocation **'modest appearance'.** The equivalent of **modest** in Arabic (mutawaadi") can suggest a similar fre meaning in some collocations such as **small income** (dakhl mutawaadi'). However, both the adjective **modest** (mutawaadi') and the noun **modesty** (tawaadu) used in connection with a person usually mean that he/she is unassuming.

It is easy to assume that as long as a collocation can be found in the target language which conveys the same or a similar meaning to that of the source collocation, the translator will not be confused by differences in the surface patterning between the two. For example, **'break the law'** is an unacceptable collocation in Arabic. The common collocation, being, literally **'contradict the law'** (xarg/ muxalafit ?iqanuun). An

Arabic translator, one might assume, would not hesitate to make the necessary adjustment since to all intents and purposes, the English/ Arabic collocations have the same meanings, respectively (Baker, 1992: 55).

Translators sometimes get quite engrossed in the source text and may produce the oddest collocations in the target language for no justifiable reason. Confusing the source and target patterns is a pitfall that can easily be avoided once the translator is altered to the potential influence that the collocational patterning of the source text can have on him/ her.

Synonymy in Collocations

3. Related lexical items belonging to the same semantic field do not necessarily have similar collocational range. Thus, though there are bulky thesauruses and dictionaries of synonyms, these dictionaries do not help in the translation process. "The synonyms incorporated in these dictionaries occur in the language in various unpredictable collocation which are not provided in these dictionaries" (Heliel, 1990: 12). Synonyms in collocation in the source language text must be clearly distinguished in the target language text. The source language text must be well written, as synonyms are sometimes used carelessly and ponderously; sometimes mainly for emphasis, as in **'deeply and profoundly', 'tender and loving', 'direct and straightforward'.** This rule applies to pseudo-synonyms such **as 'explication and explanation'**, 'ire and rage', 'stingy and skinflint'. A translator has to know the difference between **'profound'** and **'deep'.** The Arabic collocation (biTr 9amiiq) is an example, where the noun (bi ?r) means (shaft dug in the ground for obtaining water) and the adjective (9 amiiq) could be translated as either **'deep'** or **'profound'.** However, the two adjectives which are synonymous in Arabic differ in their collocability in the sense that, in English, **'deep'** collocates with (**well, river, ge trench, box, wound, cleft, border, shelf**) whereas **'profound'** collocates with (**sigh, silence, sleep, shock, learning, ignorance, changes, awareness, mysteries**). It may be contended that the translator may be confused by the multiplicity of synonyms in a thesaurus or dictionary of synonyms in

the sense that it is extremely difficult to choose the right item for the right collocation.

Acceptability /Non-acceptability

4.The degree of acceptability or non-acceptability of a change in meaning depends on the significance of the change in a given context. For example, the nearest acceptable collocation which can substitute **'hard drink'** in Arabic is **'alcoholic drinks'**. But **'hard drink'** refers only to spirits in English like: **(whisky, gin, and brandy)**. In does not include other alcoholic drinks such as **(beer, lager, or sherry)**. The Arabic collocation, however, refers to any alcoholic drinks, including (beer, lager, sherry, as well as spirits).

Collocational Ranges

5. It should be noted that the collocational range of a language like English, does not correspond with that of Arabic, although it may overlap. For example:

English (sharp)	Arabic (haad)
sharp/ tools, human beings	-----------
/knife	-----------
/pin	X
/ needle	X
/ shears	X
/ bend	X
/ slope	-----------
/ turn	X
/ pain	-----------
/ struggle	-----------
/ picture	X
/contrast	-----------
/ cry	-----------
/ taste	X
/ smell	X
/wind	X
/ eyes	-----------

/mind	-----------
/ ears	-----------
/ mind	-----------
/ person	-----------
/intelligence	-----------
/ criticism	-----------
/ contest	-----------
/ competition	-----------
/ work	-----------
/ suit	X
/ note	-----------

Hence, whether the translator moves from English to Arabic or from Arabic to English, he/she requires to know the collocational ranges in both languages. Significantly, L2 learners may commit mistakes when assuming that the collocational range of a new lexical item they have just met is the same as its translation equivalent in his own language. For example, Arabic learners of EFL may make the following errors:

*He closed the door with the key. (locked)

*A voyage by train. (journey)

*I made an experience in the laboratory. (experiment)

*She met a beautiful young man. (handsome)

*John may touch Mr. Ostyn and tell him about the project. (contact)

The errors committed are due to the fact that the mother tongue of these learners differs sharply from English on the lexical level. Moreover, Arabic and English show marked differences in dividing up aspects of external reality or experience. For instance, what English denotes by the three lexical items **'stare', 'gaze'** and **'glare'**, Arabic refers to by using one lexical item (Yuhadiq) (lit= " look at for a long time"). It is no surprise that Arabic- speaking learners of English will find considerable difficulty in learning the precise meaning of these items unless they are made aware of the similarities and differences between the meanings of such items and their collocational properties.

The same sort of difficulty is encountered with many other sets of lexical items, e.g. those referring to:

Kinship =(e.g. aunt, uncle, cousin, brother-in-law);

Killing =(e.g. murder, massacre, pogrom);

Refusal and Acceptance =(e.g. refuse, disagree, accept, agree);

Permission =(e.g. permit, allow, let);

Destruction =(e.g. destroy, devastate, smash, shatter).

The meaning of a lexical item in a particular language, therefore, depends on the existence of other items within the language. This inevitably leads to the conclusion that it does not make a sense to try to teach the meaning of a lexical item in complete isolation from the other items with which it forms a field or a subsystem (Rudzka et.al, 1985: 2).

Grammatical Collocations and Lexical Collocations

6. Collocations are usually divided into two types (Benson, 1985: 61-62). A distinction has to be made between these two types. Grammatical collocations consist of a dominant item (a verb, noun, or adjective) and a grammatical or dependent item, typically a preposition or a grammatical structure such as infinitive of clause. Such collocations present the translator with a fixed number of choices catered by the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (**OALD**) and the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (**LDOCE**). In contrast to grammatical collocations, lexical collocations consist of two equal components, such as (verb + adjective, and verb + adverb) (ibid.). This type of collocations operates not in a closed system, but in an open set. Thus it presents the translator with a much wider choice of items which are, in many cases, unpredictable. The wider choice is to a large extent governed by usage and register. Nevertheless, the freedom of choice is so great that mistakes can easily occur.

In order to meet the practical needs of the advanced ESL/ EFL learner, the BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English was published in 1986. It consistently calls the user's attention to the difference between the British variety of English (**BE**) and the American variety (**AE**). The BBI, further, includes both grammatical and lexical collocations. The

goal of this dictionary is to provide a large number of key collocations and to arrange them so that they can be found easily and quickly (Benson, 1989: 2).

Collocations and Phrasal Verb

7. The structure of English compared to Arabic is very different. Although in grammatically simple, English does present considerable problems to the Arabic speaking students, particularly in its colloquial use of verbs followed by prepositions or particles the ways phrasal verbs. Collocations include phrasal verbs. A phrasal verb must be thought as a single

lexical unit since it can enter into collocations with another item (e.g, to write off a debt) (See Draskau, 1986: 26).

Collocations including phrasal verbs are one of the most difficult/in translation from English into Arabic, since the meanings of the phrasal verbs element may be different from the sum of meanings of its morphological components. Usually, the phrasal verb element is translated by a single item, i.e. a verb in Arabic, e.g. go back on a promise (= ? axlaf) Arabic collocations whose English equivalent may involve a phrasal verb pose a major difficulty for the translator. For example:

(a) (yahal mugaadla)   (=work out an equation)
(b) (yubien ?ilaxdaa)   (=show up mistakes)
(c)(yastagiin bisadiiq)   (=fall back on a friend)

Using the phrasal verb elements in translation from Arabic into English is important. The importance lies in the fact that:

1. They are frequently used, especially in informal speech, in preference to verbs of classical origins which have similar meaning but an overtone of formality or pomposity.

 2. They occur frequently in several new specialized fields such as statistics, computer science...etc.

Collocations and Selectional Restrictions

8. 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, whereas the rules of selectional restrictions apply to the semantic compatibility of items in a string "whether or not the item habitually collocate" (Chomsky, 1965: 10). Hence the difficulty the translator encounters in finding the equivalents to the collocations in the source language. His joining together of semantically n compatible parts does not guarantee the production of an acceptable equivalent in the target language. A meaningful combination for the Arabic speaking translator, like *** rise in temperature'** and *** lowering in temperature',** is not acceptable in English simply because in English, we say 'increase in temperature' and **'drop in temperature'.** Similarly, in

Arabic, we can say **'ripe grapes'** but not **'hot grapes',** whereas in English, both are acceptable.

To close this paper it may be in order to point out that the Arabic-speaking translator should be aware of the differences between the two languages and needs to learn the collocations that are acceptable in both languages. Thus contrastive studies in this area and dictionaries based on these studies are badly needed. Only the non-native speaker or translator needs in the first place to learn the habitual collocations he should use in encoding a message in a foreign language. This is because the native speaker is, to a large extent, aware whether a collocation is habitual, occasional or unique and deviating from everyday language

Phonetic Symbols Used (After Erwin, 1963)

A) The vowels:

/i/ as in /?ibn/ 'son'

/ii/ as in /diin/ 'religion'

/a/ as in /matbax/'kitchen'

aa as in /baab/ 'door

u as in /sakatu/ 'they stopped talking'

uu as in /nuur/ 'light'

B) The consonants:

b as in /bhaam/ 'thumb   s   as in /sirdaab/ 'cellar'

t as in /ta9baan/ 'tired   s   as in /samt/ 'silence'

t as in /tiin/ 'mud'   h   as in /hilm/ 'dream t

d as in /dumuu9/ 'tears'   9   as in /9aqil/ 'mind'

d as in /daabut/ 'officer'   h   as in /hunaaka/ 'there'

  k   as in /qatala/ 'he killed'   m   as in /mahlluk/ 'your place'

q as in /qamiis/ 'shirt'   n   as in /nahar/ 'river'

? as in /?amal/ 'hope'   r   as in /rama/ 'throw

 f as in /faaz/ 'win'   y   as in /bayyan/ 'manifesto'

as in / aani/ 'second'   as in /?i tara/ 'he bought'

as in / i?b/ 'wolf"   d3 as in /d3amaal/ 'beauty"

as in / amiir/ 'conscience'

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