Error Assessment in the Translation of Some English Collocations into Arabic: A Case Study of English Department Students at University of Benghazi, EL-Marj Campus, Libya.

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Abstract

One of the main issues that encounter translation learners in the field of translation is collocation. This work aims to identify the students’ deficiencies when attempting to render some English collocations into Arabic. This is done through identifying the major problems that students face when rendering collocations from English into Arabic. Another aim of this work is to discover if there is a difference in meaning in terms of the frequency of a word in the English collocation when rendering into the target, Arabic. Examining these issues depended on a collection of some English collocations samples to be rendered into Arabic. The subjects were undergraduate students from English department, University of Benghazi, EL-Marj Campus. They were chosen randomly from Semester seven. The reason for choosing this semester is that they should have a strong background on English culture, and they have tackled different subjects regarding English cultural and linguistic disparities in their past semesters. They were given two hours to translate these collocations into Arabic. Only general English-Arabic dictionaries were allowed. i.e ‘not collocation dictionaries’ in order to see how these students can transfer them into English and what are the problems they might encounter. Their samples were analysed and recommendations were made in this study.
1. Introduction

Collocation is considered one of the language structures which operate in the area of semantic errors that students might be liable to make. Collocation needs to be given special care when studying translation from English into English and vice versa in both theory and practice. Dickens (2002: 71) highlighted the notion of collocation. In this regard he says: “The term ‘to collocate’ means ‘to typically occur in close proximity with’; hence a ‘collocation’ is an occurrence of one word in close proximity with another”.

It is worth to study collocation within the field of translation because few works have tackled this problem. The study claims that translated collocations into Arabic posed so far the need for investigation of the difficulties confronted by Arabic students. The study will highlight some definitions of collocations and relevant literature review. It also dedicated to analyse the student’s samples and suggest some solutions. Finally, it will give a conclusion and recommendations for forthcoming research.

2. Review of related literature:

This section will introduce a general survey of the literature and main research areas on collocations. Collocation signifies an important constituent of the lexicon of a given previous studies on the translation field have confirmed that collocations play vital role on language are very important lexical constituents in translation. Many scholars highlighted the notion of collocation and its importance in the translation field. In this regard Sarikas (2006: 36), “Collocations are important combinations of words that endow the language with natural sounding speech and writing”. Bell (1991: 97) also claims that collocation is a structure of words gathered together to form different meaning. In this respect he adds, “The basic formal relationship in lexis: the chain (or syntagmatic) relationship between items”.

Despite the fact that collocation is semantically clear, yet there are other collocations cannot be translated from English into Arabic by
applying word-for-word translation. Seretan (2011:116) supports this point of view by stating that, “The choice of the “right word” to use in the TL is often a subtle process, with crucial implications on the translation quality”. Therefore, collocation is a sensitive issue in the field of translation studies and requires deep investigation. Cowie (1981: 224) claims that collocation can have more than one substitution and these substitutions are done according to the situation of occurrence of a collocation. He sees collocation as, “a composite unit which permits the substitutability of items for at least one of its constituent elements”. Baker (2001: 53) has also claimed that collocation can be used in different meaning according to the situation where it is addressed. She sees that there is a difference between the separated meaning of the word and its context meaning. She adds “What we do when we are asked to give an account of the meaning of a word in isolation is to contextualise it in its most typical collocations rather than its rarer ones”. She supports this claim by giving an example for collocation with word, ‘dry’. For example, ‘dry river, dry dry clothes. All these terms provide the meaning of “without water”. Thus collocations are hard to understand unless we provide it within the context of situation in which they are used, and thus translators should comprehend the context in which the collocation is used first, and then resort to translate according to that contextual situation. Baker (ibid) supports my point of view when she asserts,

When the translation of a word or a stretch of language is criticised as being inaccurate or inappropriate in a given context, the criticism may refer to the translator’s inability to recognise a collocational pattern with a unique meaning different from the sum of the meanings of its individual elements.

The big challenge of students of translation is to obtain a strong knowledge of the meanings of the source language collocations. This is because; the lack of this knowledge would make serious translation errors. Students should not turn a blind eye on the link between words as well as
the diversities of collocations but instead have a good understanding of both items. They have to use language competence while deciding which verb goes with which object and what its equivalent meaning is in the target language. In situations where the translators and translation students do not discover the equivalent of the collocation in the target language, they should not translate it, therefore, avoiding misrepresentation and other problems. Instead, they should use the original in their translation process Sarikas (2006). The next section will show some problems encounter students of translation when attempting to render a collocation from English into Arabic and what some scholars have said in this regard.

**3. Problems Encounter Students when Translating Collocation**

The problematic issue of collocation is that it functions with two or more lexical items that take place together in different frameworks in one language. Larson (1984: 141) summarizes this suggestion. In this context she says, “Knowing which words go together is an important part of understanding the meaning of a text and translating it well”. The English collocation, for instance, ‘jump to a conclusion’ is a symbolic connection between jump, which means to skip, and conclusion, which means an end of something. However, when these collocated metaphors are rendered into Arabic, they create epistemic dissonance in the TL. Darwish (2010) reports that some Arab journalists have translated this English metaphorical collocation as ‘يقفز الى النتائج’, which literally means ‘to jump to the results’, a meaningless phrase since ‘يقفز’ (‘jump’) and ‘النتائج’ (‘results’) do not collocate to produce a suitable metaphor in Arabic. As we have stated, collocations play a vital role in language. They add beautiful aspects to language.

The hard mission of the translators here is to confirm that the given Arabic text contains the same aesthetic features as the English text. For instance, there are English collocations that do not have their identical counterparts in Arabic in terms of reflection, such as ‘peaceful death’ (موت هادئ), ‘bad news’, (خبر سبئ)، etc. In this case, the suggested Arabic
equivalents cannot be viewed completely as collocations. Fairly, they can be believed of as semi-collocations or simply translations (Ghazala 1995). A strong sign of Ghazala’s claims can be found in the Arabic collocation expression, “مدخن مدمن” made up of two words each of which has its own meaning. Conversely, when they are put together as a sequence they give a collocational meaning that these words cannot be translated separately. The intended meaning can be carried by giving its closest collocation in English language correspondent i.e. ‘heavy smoker’ (Othman 2013).

Therefore, if students of translation do not aware of English collocations, they would fail to provide sensual expressions in the process of translation. Kussmaul (1995:17) advises translators to be aware of the differences of collocations between languages due to the linguistic disparities between languages. He also stresses:

The biggest problem, however, is that a translator without sufficient linguistic sensitivity will not notice these things at all. The role of an effective translator, therefore, is to notice these differences and to know how to deal with them.

A successful translator, therefore, has to render the SL collocation into the target, as if it is as natural as in the source. Here, we can follow up Nida and Tabers’ claim which is (1969: 12) "the best translation does not sound like a translation".

4. Corpus resources and Data Analysis

The data in this study consist of some English collocations. These collocations were chosen because of their everyday usage in the English speaking countries. These collocations have been chosen to be translated from English into Arabic by randomly selected undergraduate students from the Department of English at the University of Benghazi, EL-Marj Campus.
4.1 Database and Subjects

Ten students were selected randomly from the English Department at the University of Benghazi, EL-Marj campus to contribute in the translation of Collocations into Arabic. These chosen students were aged between nineteen and twenty five years and consisted of both males and females. Those randomly chosen students were selected to undertake the tests because they were expected to be more competent in both English and Arabic. While their language skill was not tested, I thought them to have a good background on collocations because they would have already studied English language in their past six semesters. As for Arabic, it is normal that the Students’ skill is normally high because it is their first language. Students had two hours to translate these collocations into Arabic. They were allowed to use bilingual (English into Arabic) dictionaries.

The students were allocated a number from (1) to (10) and then simply referred to as student 1, student 2, in my analysis of the samples in order to simplify the analysis. The results were categorized and calculated in terms of percentages. Ten English collocations were selected they have been used for everyday conversations, and are still used by English people.

This study was conducted to following Catford’s method. This method gives new approaches for text analysis. I approached the analysis of the student samples by investigating each single detail in depth. The analysis was conducted at word level: that is to say, at the level of right word choice in a given collocation. In addition, I will provide a comparison between English collocation and Arabic translated version in order to ensure that the meaning is properly transferred. I will also provide the right translation for each collocation. The main type will be investigated in this study is the semantic translation errors, and those occur in terms of the study of word meaning, and other important features of collocations. Errors of this type will result in serious problems during the process of translation. It is expected that students might commit error at this level.

The serious problem that students face is their wrong choice among more than one word of corresponding meaning in the target language.
Generally speaking, the choice of the precise synonymous correspondence at the word level creates a main problem for students and necessitates use of a variety of language resources. According to Sanchez, (2009:79):

The translator needs to look at the use of the two words in both languages: in which contexts these words normally appear; how often these words are used with a particular meaning when they refer to a particular context or situation; how native speakers use them in general, and so on.

Sanchez’s claim appears in the following ‘some common verbs’ collocation:

**Have a bath**

Only 5% percent of students translated ‘have’ in this context into ‘يقوم’. Consider their translations:

- يقوم بحمام
- يقوم بوضوء

However, four other varieties were ‘يمتلك دوش’, ‘يمتلك حماما’. At the first sight of their translations, the students were confused as to which word to choose from English-Arabic dictionary, which give many meanings for the word, ‘have’. It may be difficult for them to choose the right word in their process of translation. Consequently, they were unsuccessful in giving the exact equivalent collocation in Arabic. In my opinion, testees seemed to have just selected the first word they saw in the English-Arabic dictionary and used this without looking to the collocation’s context. ‘**Have a bath**’ can be then translated into Arabic as:

يأخذ حماما
would be a good choice because it is more extensively used among native speakers of Arabic than the word ‘يقوم حماما’ or ‘يملكل حماما’.

Other collocation error can be found in the English,

**Have a haircut**

Around 25% of the testees translated ‘**have a haircut**’ as ‘يملكل حلاقا’ as ‘**have**’ is commonly known for Arab students as ‘يملكل’), and since they rendered ‘**have**’ into ‘**يملكل**’, the word ‘**haircut**’ would be ‘متجز حلاقة’. However, the suitable translation for the English ‘**have**’ is ‘يقوم’, and the translation of the English collocation is:

يقوم بقص شعره

This misinterpretation of the English collocation refers that the students lack the ability to translate according to the context which Newmark (1991:87) stresses, “All words can be translated independently of their context and text; and this type of isolated translation normally serves as a ‘control’ or yardstick of their contextual meaning”. It is worth to mention that collocations often establish confusion for students. When students see a word in a given collocation, they resort to provide its meaning from the first word that appears in a bilingual dictionary as we have mentioned earlier in this context. Consider the following English collocation:

**Break a promise!**

The English word, ‘**break**’ here has been rendered by most students as ‘يخهف’ with only two of them translate it as ‘يخلخ’. Nevertheless, neither of these was correct for the reason that they depend completely on the first word in the bilingual dictionary without taking into account the context. They have to look thoroughly every single meaning in their bilingual dictionaries and pick the meaning of a given word according to its context. For example, ‘يخلف’ can be a good choice instead of ‘يكسر’ the meaning that
is preferable to be the equivalent of the English, ‘break’. The collocation thus can be translated into Arabic as

يخلف الوعد

Another example of the students’ failure to catch an appropriate target language word due to their absence of understanding of the English collocation words, can be found in their disappointment to offer an appropriate translation of the word ‘catch’ in:

Catch a cold

They resorted to use words such as, ‘يقبض’, ‘يمسك’, or ‘يقبض’ which are incorrect although they gave these meanings from a bilingual dictionary. Students do not know that it is a collocation which is widely used in western English countries. Translating ‘catch’ into ‘أصاب’ would be more appropriate. Thus, an appropriate rendering of this collocation would be as follows:

اصابه الزكام

Students seem to have lacks in their knowledge of English collocations. This is resulted from their lack of the English culture and collocations which may result from the fact that they did not take intensive courses at the university. They need to have specific courses or the university encourages them to take courses in an English speaking country. These suggest deficiencies in students’ knowledge, even though they are in the Seventh Semester although as previously stated this may have resulted from the fact that they have not taken courses in an English-speaking country or have limited engagement with British culture. These deficiencies are evident in their attempts to translate the (adjective + noun collocation). The construction of adjective + noun collocation may cause serious translation problem. Consider the following adjective + noun collocation:
Hard Labour

The key challenge here for students is to find the exact Arabic equivalent collocation for this adjective-noun collocation. Around 25% of participants have good translation, which is, ‘اشغال شاقه’، other 65% render the word, ‘hard’ into ‘قاسي’، which is more or less uncommon with the word ‘labour’ in Arabic ‘عمل’. The other 10% did not give correct translation as they render it into Arabic as ‘حزب العمال’ because they connect the word ‘labour’ into the British ‘labour party’.

Students also struggled with a ‘verb + noun collocation’ which seems that it is not an easy task for participants to render it correctly into Arabic. Consider the following verb-noun collocation:

Pass a law

As we have stated that ‘pass a law’ is a collocation consists of a verb, ‘pass’ and the noun, ‘law’. It seems easy for just 10% of the student and provided its equivalent, ‘يسن قانونا’، whereas the overwhelming majority of them miss the translation and resorted to translate ‘pass’ into Arabic, ‘يمر’ as it is very common for Arabic students that ‘pass’ has only one of the following meanings, i.e, ‘to go through’ or ‘to success’. Therefore, they gave incorrect translation as, ‘يمرر قانونا’، which is considered as word-for-word translation that is not a workable method in translation cultural signs such as collocations. Though students exercise some translation methods as part of their Studies, yet they still did not follow Newmark’s (1988a: 167) advice when he suggests that “The translator recognizes that theoretically and cognitively, no two words out of context have the same meaning”. As we can see from our investigation of the students’ collocation errors, these errors were because they selected simply identifiable lexical items which are very frequently used at this specific period of their study. Lexical selection is a key problem when students are needed to look for the nearest identical equivalence at the word level, as this can only be accomplished if they consider the textual features of the collocation.
5. Results and Recommendations

5.1 Findings:

This paper aims at investigating the translation of English collocations. Collocations were then analysed according to the participants’ translations, and their use of translation strategies. On the basis of analysis of the participant corpus data, it is determined that most of the English collocations have their equivalence in the TL, Arabic. It was found that the strong background knowledge of the source culture, English, plays a crucial role in translating collocations into Arabic. Without taking the background knowledge into consideration, it is believed likely that target readers would not have understood these collocations. The wrong choice of vocabulary led to inaccurate translation because of the students’ misunderstanding of the background for a given English collocation. Consequently, misunderstanding led to bad translation.

In addition, some students resorted to depend completely on bilingual dictionaries, and this is appeared with the way they translated into the target, Arabic, literally which caused deprived results. This was done due to the fact they did not take the importance of the background knowledge of the collocation into account, and thus their translation showed to be incomprehensible. Some 20% of the total number of errors was caused by difficulties with synonymy resulted many translation errors. This is because students find it is impossible to give the right synonymous word for the English collocation due to their inadequate knowledge of English language in spite of the fact that they are students in the department of English at the University of Benghazi. Thus, we found that the majority of the students could not give an accurate synonymous word in the target language, Arabic.

The collocations that consist of (adjective + noun, and verb + noun) also seem very hard for participants. Errors, which are making at this level results from a failure to take into account the fact that they are collocations...
and cannot be translated literally. Participants translated word-for-word, translating each word separately, which led to errors.

Based on the findings of the study, this paper has investigated the variety of students’ ability in the translation of collocations. It also investigated how far students at Benghazi University rendered a sample of collocations in terms of their surface features and in terms of their background knowledge in a given collocation. This work also attempted to prove how far the good knowledge of the English culture is valuable in rendering collocations into Arabic. It has also discovered how teaching translation theories and the knowledge of the English culture can be valuable to the Arab students and help them when to find equivalence in their target language. Finally, this research help students of translation to limit the difficulties involved in the translation of collocations from one language into another.

5.2 Recommendations for future research

Translation needs care from translators to avoid providing the wrong meaning to the target readers. Accordingly, teachers are advised to examine the challenges that students confront when translating collocations. This can be attained by supporting students’ progress in evolving tactics to translate texts that have collocations. Instructors of translation have to provide their students the essential dictionary skills. In addition, I advise teachers to make translation students more aware to have high level of competence in Arabic. Hence, their translation skills will be improved. In conclusion, collocations are cultural signs appeared in all texts such as , literary, scientific, historic, etc. Other kinds of cultural signs such as idioms, metaphors, and proverbs can be investigated.
References


