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The Problem of Translating English Collocations into Arabic Language

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the problem of translating English collocations into Arabic among Saudi EFL students. Twenty undergraduate students of fourth year are involved to participate as subjects in this experiment during the academic year 2016-2017. Their ages are between 20-24. All participants are native Arabic speakers learning English as a foreign language. The data collection procedure were a test of fourteen collocation expressions; the most commonly used ones. The students were asked to translate them into Arabic within one hour. The result revealed that Saudi EFL students were incompetent in translating English collocations into Arabic. They relied completely on the literal translation strategy. Their translation of English collocations is poor and unnatural collocations as well. The result revealed also that the students were even incompetent in understanding English collocations as well due to linguistic and cultural difficulties. Therefore, the solution of the problem depends upon raising students' awareness of the process of translating English collocations because it is not a replacement of word-for-word between the two languages as well as paying great attention to the learning process of English collocations; linguistically and culturally.

Keywords: Translation problem, English collocations, cultural and linguistic difficulties

Introduction

A collocation is a pair or group of words that are often used together. These combinations sound natural to native speakers. These conventional sequences are instantly recognizable to native speakers of a language, but remain difficult for second language learners to acquire and use properly. For example there are certain adjectives often occur with certain nouns, e.g. "bright

color" (لون ساطع); a noun with a verb. e.g. "economic boomed" (ازدهر الاقتصاد); a verb with an adverb, e.g. "run quickly" (يجري مسرعا); a verb with a noun; e.g. "watch TV" (يشاهد التلفاز), etc.

Learning collocation is an important part in learning a foreign language. It is difficult to guess the natural combination of words. For example, the adjective "yellow" collocates with paint, but not with hair. Sometimes a combination of words may not be wrong and people can understand them, but it may not be the natural, normal collocation. A learner may say "beautiful boy", but a native speaker would say "handsome boy". If this is the case in learning collocations what about translating them? Is the translation will be good or poor one?

Translation and collocations

Translation is an act of replacing linguistic units from a source to a target language. Catford argues that; "...translation is the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)" (1965: 20). He considered equivalence between source text and target text is important. Accordingly, translation should be regarded as a transfer at both the linguistic and the cultural levels within which a given text is embedded . Learning collocation is not an easy part in learning a foreign language because cultural differences can influence the nature of lexical relationships. Therefore, translating collocations is an area of great difficulty. There are several problems when translating collocations from one language to another. This is due to the discrepancies in the cultural and linguistic structures between the SL and TL. In case of translation between English language and Arabic language, the problem of translation will be greater. Because English and Arabic are from two different language families, Germanic and Semitic, respectively. Since they descend from different language families, English and Arabic have numerous differences in their individual grammars as well as different systems, conventions and lifestyles that add variety and colloquial inference to the nature of collocations. Accurate translations rely on the concept of understanding the exact TL equivalents. Catford (1965, 50) states that "translation equivalence occurs when a SL and TL text or item are relatable (or at least some of) the same features of substance". That is, translating collocations can become inaccurate or difficult when a translator fails to identify the equivalent TL lexical item, which correlates to the lexical item within the SL. This can ultimately result in unnatural collocations within the TL.

Collocations are simply the way certain words habitually occur together. However, these combinations sound natural to native speakers, but language learners have to make a special

effort to learn them because they are often difficult to guess. An example of collocation, as propounded by Michael Halliday, is the expression "strong tea" "شاي ثقيل". The same meaning could be conveyed by the equivalent expression "powerful tea" sounds strange and incorrect. Baker (1992: 55) states that collocations play a vital role in language. They are its beautiful part, and inject a refreshing spirit in it. They are present and inevitable in any kind of text with no exception. In 1933, Harold Palmer's Second Interim Report on English Collocations highlighted the importance of collocation as a key to producing natural-sounding language, for anyone learning a foreign language. Thus from the 1940s onwards, information about recurrent word combinations became a standard feature of monolingual learner's dictionaries. As these dictionaries became 'less word-centered and more phrase-centered', more attention paid to collocation. There are also a number of specialized dictionaries devoted to describing the frequent collocations in a language such as Macmillan Collocations Dictionary (2010).

Types of collocations

There are several types of collocations. However, the concentration here is on the most important types only that are recurrent and interest the student most. (Cruse, 1977: 71) states that the classification of these types is purely grammatical, depending on the grammatical groupings of word classes according to their occurrence together in language use. The grammatical structure of collocation makes them easier to follow, understand and even translate.

1. Adjective + noun
2. Verb + noun
3. Noun+ noun
4. adjective + adjective
5. Adverb + adverb
6. Noun + verb
7. Verb+ adverb,

1. Adjective + noun collocations

- net weight الوزن الصافي
- fully aware إدراك تام
- excruciating pain ألم مبرح
- regular exercise تمرين منتظم

2. Verb + noun collocations

- order food يطلب طعاما
- giving a presentation يقدم عرضا
- lay the table يجهز مائدة الطعام
- bomb went off انفجرت القنبلة

3. Noun + noun collocations

- driving license رخصة قيادة
- brain drain هجرة الأدمغة
- communication technology تقنية المعلومات
- air attack هجوم جوي

4. Adjective + adjective collocations

- hale and hearty بصحة جيدة
- wealthy and well بصحة وعافية

5. Adverb + adverb collocations;

- willy and nilly رغم انه
- wholly and heartedly بالتمام والكمال

6. Noun + verb collocations

- lion roar زئير الأسد
- polish a car يطلي السيارة
- plane took off أقلعت الطائرة
- order food يطلب طعاما

7. Verb + adverb

- run quickly يجري سريعا
- speaks politely يتحدث بأدب
- driving dangerously يقود بثهور

Methodology

The participants of the research were 20 female Saudi EFL students at Majmaa University. They are undergraduate students aged between 20 - 24. All participants were native Arabic speakers

learning English as a foreign language. The data collection procedure was a translation test. Authors regarded this test as a useful methodology to know how the students are going to translate the English collocations into Arabic. The test consists of fourteen common English collocations. Before the student start the test, authors read the test instructions loudly and clearly to ensure all participants were aware of the nature and intention of the testing. The question was translate the following English collocations into Arabic in an hour timeframe. The use of reference dictionaries was strictly forbidden:

1. Fast sleep
2. Good news
3. Run a company
4. Win confidence
5. Voting right
6. War crime
7. Bees buzz
8. dogs bark
9. Rely heavily
10. Agree completely
11. Hale and hearty
12. Alive and kicking
13. Willy and nilly
14. highly unlikely

The authors collected students' responses for analysis. In the first phase of analysis, they checked responses for accuracy and the students' test marks recorded as the result of the test. Analytically, the method used for analysis was a qualitative one. The results of the test were then examined and the reasons for the common misuse of collocations, as well as weaknesses of the respondents, were analyzed.

Result and Discussion

Adjective and noun is the most popular type of collocations in both English and Arabic. The main problem encountered students in translating this type of English collocations is capturing the proper Arabic collocation. They translated the adjective "fast" literally into "سريع" instead of

" عميق " and "good" into " جيدة " rather than "سارة". In term of translation it is the correct Arabic equivalent, but it is not the correct Arabic collocation.

Type of English collocation	Student translation	Natural Arabic collocation
Adjective + Noun		
Fast sleep	نوم سريع	نوم عميق
Good news	أخبار جيدة	إخبار سارة

The second type of English collocations is Verb and Noun. Students translate the verb "run" into the Arabic equivalent " يجري " instead of " يدير " and the verb "win" into " يفوز " rather than " ينال ". All the students translated the verbs into the common equivalent into Arabic but not the appropriate collocations.

Type of English collocation	Student translation	Natural Arabic collocation
Verb + Noun		
Run a company	يجري بالشركة	يدر شركة
Win confidence	يفوز بالثقة	ينال الثقة

The third type of English collocations is noun and noun. Most students translated " right" into " " الصحيح instead of " حق ". It is the literal equivalent and wrong Arabic collocation. Almost all the students translated the English collocation into the correct Arabic one. Because this expression has an identical Arabic collocation.

Type of English collocation	Student translation	Natural Arabic collocation
Noun + Noun		
Voting right	التصويت الصحيح	حق التصويت
War crime	جرائم حرب	جرائم حرب

Noun and verb is another type of English collocations. The problem in translating this English collocation is that students may know the definition of a noun but fail to capture the verb that collocate with it. In the first expression, they do not know the name of the insect's sound but the second one their translation is correct Arabic collocation because they know the name of the dogs' sound.

Type of English collocation	Student translation	Natural Arabic collocation
Noun + Verb		
Bees buzz	طنين النحل	دوي النحل
dogs bark	نباح الكلاب	نباح الكلاب

Verb and adverb type of English collocations is common in both languages; English and Arabic. The problem in translating them is to spot the suitable Arabic equivalent. Students translated heavily into "بتناقل" instead of "بشكل كبير" which is wrong translation and unnatural collocation. the second English collocation as well translated wrong as verb and noun; "completely" translated into "الجميع" rather than "تماما" which is not the equivalent Arabic collocation.

Type of English collocation	Student translation	Natural Arabic collocation
Verb + Adverb		
Rely heavily	يعتمد بتناقل	يعتمد بشكل كبير
Agree completely	يتفق الجميع	يتفق تماما

Another type of collocation is adjective and adjective. The major problem of translating this type is the different grammatical structure between the two languages. For example, the translation of the two English collocations has Arabic structures that are different from the English ones and all students fail to capture the natural Arabic collocation.

Type of English collocation	Student translation	Natural Arabic collocation
Adjective + Adjective		
Hale and hearty	قلبا وقالبا	بصحة جيدة
Alive and kicking	حي ويموت	حي يرزق

In adverb and adverb type of collocation, students faced the problem of cultural equivalent and all of them failed to spot neither correct translation nor natural equivalent.

Type of English collocation	Student translation	Natural Arabic collocation
Adverb + Adverb		
Willy and nilly	الرغبة المكدومة	رغم انه
highly unlikely	الشبه كبير	احتمال ضعيف

As a conclusion, translating English collocations into Arabic is proved difficult for students. All the students failed to pass the translation test. A serious problem was that some students were even unable to understand the English collocation properly and the answer was blank. The common mistake was the use of literal translation from English into Arabic and the result was poor translation. Although literal translation can sometimes work, yet students failed to translate this type of English collocations into their literal equivalent in Arabic. Many students were unable to identify the proper equivalent collocation in Arabic. Due to cultural differences, students failed to translate English fixed phrases into their natural equivalent in Arabic.

Conclusion

In terms of translation, the bigger the gap between the source language and the target language, the more difficult the process of transfer will be. English and Arabic descend from two different

language families, Germanic and Semitic, respectively. Therefore, the linguistic and cultural differences between the two languages make the process of translating a challenge for students.

The result revealed that Saudi EFL students were incompetent in translating English collocations into Arabic. This result evident in the fact that all participants failed to achieve the pass mark and no one showed an acceptable translation and they were unable to identify the proper equivalent collocation in Arabic. Students' common mistakes due to many factors: Firstly, they relied heavily on literal translation strategy between the two languages and the Arabic version was poor translation and not the natural Arabic collocation. Secondly, students were incompetent in English collocations and they pay no attention to their importance as an essential part of learning a foreign language. The solution of the problem depends upon raising students' awareness of the process of translating English collocations because it is not a replacement of word-for-word between the two languages as well as paying great attention to the learning process of English collocations; linguistically and culturally. The authors' recommendation concerns the strategies of teaching and learning English collocations; teachers and students should go hand in hand with collocations and translation to spotlight on the linguistic and cultural similarities and differences between the two languages.

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