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Problems and Strategies of Translating Persian Lexical Collocations into English: the Case of Noun-Verb and Noun-Adjective Collocations

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIRMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF M.A. IN TRANSLATION STUDIES

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September 2013

In the name of God

To my wonderful mother and father for their boundless love, constant support and continuous encouragement.

To all my brothers and sisters for their unselfish and warm-hearted love.

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ABSTRACT

In Iran's academic settings, teaching translation of collocations, which constitutes an integral part for translation students, is largely neglected. This fact causes translation students create a lot of problems in rendering collocations. This study has devoted special attention to translation of collocations. A translation task was given to 85 BA senior translation students to find out their translation strategies and their problems in translating adj-noun and verb-noun collocations from Persian to English. The qualitative analysis of the data showed that the participants used some new strategies. The strategies were classified as the subcategories of five major categories proposed by other researchers. The results of this study showed that participants relied on 'L1-based strategies' more often than other strategies, in translating both adj-noun and verb-noun collocations. Also based on the results, it was found that translating verb-noun collocations seem to be riskless for students compared to adj-noun collocations. Moreover, the analysis of collocational errors in this study showed that learners had serious problems with collocations. The results of this study will give teachers some cues as to the students' difficulties and strategies in rendering collocation, so that they can focus their attention on the problems areas. Also it can help translation students to identify the problem areas and to be sensitive to collocational problems specially when rendering from their L1 to L2.

Key words: Collocation, Translation of Collocation, Students' Strategies

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Adj = Adjective

Adv = Adverb

BA = Bachelor of Arts

BBI = Benson, M., Benson, E., & Ilson, R.

EFL = English as a Foreign Language

ESL = English as a Second Language

L1 = Mother Tongue, First Language

L2 = Second Language

LPS = Low Proficiency Students

MA = Master of Arts

HPS = High Proficiency Students

N = Noun

Prep = Preposition

SL = Source Language

TL = Target language

V = Verb

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Having in mind the fact that linguistics is the direct study of human language and aims at discovering the universals concerning language by means of describing and explaining it, we can say that the study of human errors in the domain of language is a major component of "core linguistics" (Selinker, 1992, p. 150). In this respect, it has been proved that errors play an important role in the study of language acquisition in general and in examining the foreign language acquisition in particular. "This issue evokes linguists' and researchers' interest to investigate errors because it is claimed that they contain valuable information concerning the strategies that learners employ to acquire languages" (Selinker, ibid). Also the study of translators' errors reveals interesting facts concerning the strategies that translators employ to translate a text. The prominent role of errors in translation could be remarked as a vital issue in translation studies. "The heart of translation theory is translation problems; translation theory broadly consists of, and can be defined as, a large number of generalizations of translation problems" (Newmark, 1988, p. 21).

Collocation is a linguistic phenomenon in language whose influence may be more far-reaching than previously acknowledged. Advanced learners of English face a major hurdle in learning English collocations. Students and even teachers predominantly make lexical, stylistic and situational errors. The issue gains more significance when collocational patterns in various languages are compared. As an example, whereas the English *make mistakes*, Iranians *do mistakes* (Sadeghi, 2009).

The following example from Wanner, Bohnet, and Giereth (2006, as cited in Sadeghi, 2009, p. 105) is a good starting point to shed some light on cross-language collocational differences.

> In English one *makes or takes a decision*, in French and Italian one "takes" but does not "make" it (*prendre/*faire une décision, prendere/*fare una decisione*), in German, one "meets it" (*eine Entscheidung treffen*), in Spanish one "adopts" or "takes" it (*adoptar/tomar una decisión*), and in Russian one "hosts" it (*prinjato rešenie*); in English one *gives a lecture*—as in French (*donner un cours*) and Spanish (*dar una clase*)—in German and

Italian one "holds" a lecture (*eine Vorlesung halten, tenere una lezione*), and in Russian one "reads" it (*citato lekciju*); etc.

Considering the role that mastery of collocations plays in the development of communicative competence is indicative of the fact that teaching and learning them will gain immediate significance.

The main concern of this thesis is to investigate the different problems that translation students face when translating collocations which are construed as constituting an important part of any language, and their use being generally presented as typical to the natives. Despite the theoretical rules of translation acquired via learning, students of English still make errors in translating discourse from and into their mother tongue, especially in translating collocations.

The reason behind investigating this topic is that many university students commit errors when trying to translate collocations mainly from Persian into English. In addition, the study aimed at shedding some light on the strategies that Iranian B.A. translation students use in rendering Persian noun-verb and noun-adjective collocations into English and investigating the pitfalls that Iranian translation students face when translating collocations.

This piece of research gathered its momentum from the fact that, in Iran's academic settings, teaching the translation of collocations, which constitutes an integral part for translation students, is largely neglected. Besides, when this phenomenon is taught, it is not seriously treated and instructions are not comprehensive. Therefore, with the above remarks in mind, it would be reasonable to argue that translation of different types of collocations such as lexical ones has not been taken into consideration by Iranian syllabus designers. This provides the present study with impetus to take translation of collocations into consideration. In this study, we also aimed at scrutinizing the strategies that translation students use in rendering Persian noun-verb and noun-adj collocations.

The importance of the present study is more clearly highlighted by bearing in mind the fact that collocations, as a very important part of language, should be taught and our translation students should be aware of the effects of their translation strategies and the sources of their problems, so that they can find it easy to cope with.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Benson (1986) defines collocation as "a group of words that occurs repeatedly i.e. recurs, in a language" (p. 61). ". For Sinclair (1991), on the other hand, collocations are "items that occur physically together or have stronger chances of being mentioned together" (p. 170). Normally, no specific rule or regulation can be identified to explain these co-occurrences. Sinclair (1991) has given the following examples of collocations:

> "We say *to break rules* but not *to break regulations*; *to hold a funeral* but not *to hold a burial*; *to make an attempt* but not *to have an attempt* and *to have a try* but not *to make a try*, etc. (p. 170)."

Benson et.al (1986b) puts forward a classification according to which collocations can be subsumed under two major categories, namely Grammatical and Lexical collocations. Lexical collocations, according to their syntactic characteristics, are regarded to fall into six major categories namely, adjective + noun, noun + noun, verb + noun, verb + adverb, adverb + adjective, noun + verb (Lewis 2000, p. 51). On the other hand, grammatical collocations are phrases containing a dominant word, such as a noun, an adjective, or a verb and a preposition or grammatical structure like an infinitive or clause.

In the present study, collocations focuses were conceived of as the co-occurrence of words, and the classification of collocations was based on the categories of collocations as proposed by Benson et. al. (1986b) and the scope of this study was restricted to the adj-noun and verb-noun collocations. The rationale behind narrowing the scope of collocations to adj-noun and verb-noun collocations is that we hypothesized that students make more mistakes in this type of collocations.

Selecting appropriate word combinations when producing writing or utterance is one of the major difficulties second language learners face when learning another language and also it is more problematic in translation. In this connection, Bahns (1993) maintains that many teachers have perceived that their students frequently have problems in offering a native like word lexicon. Successful production of English collocations seems to be a challenge to EFL learners at all levels. Fontenelle

(1994), in this respect, claims that many advanced university students of English have difficulty in selecting and using collocations.

In our country, B.A. translation students who are expected to have the ability of translating a text after four years of learning English, perform poorly when facing the translation of collocational sentences.

When there is a confluence between the English collocations and Persian equivalents, the students produce the correct collocations (blank tape/ نوار خالی). However, quite conversely, when there is a deviation between the collocations in the two languages, students face difficulty with the items and they produce collocations such as *do a mistake* instead of *making a mistake* (Namvar et. al., 2012). When translation students try to express their ideas with collocations or try to translate them, such unnatural and unacceptable languages creep in their translation or writing.

Additionally, the difficulty with which translators and second language learners face can be attributed to negative transfer from their mother tongue into English. For example, while translating دندانپزشک از او خواست که دهانش را کاملا باز کند, we will most probably come up with two unnatural translations: "The dentist asked her to widely open her mouth" or "The dentist asked her to completely open her mouth". The collocations "widely open" or "completely open" in these sentences are incorrect, while the correct collocation is "wide open". Scrutinizing the above examples, we could find that the observed errors in this case can be traced back to negative transfer from their mother tongue, because in Persian, structure of کاملا باز is adverb + adjective and the students hypothesize that they should use an adverb form before "open" or they hypothesize that "completely" which is dictionary meaning of کاملا can be a good choice, too. In most cases, most of the students transfer collocations from Persian to English without paying any heed to the question of whether words can collocate with each other or not.

A cursory glance at the literature of the field reveals that in some countries researchers paid attention to the translation of collocations. For instance, Horbacauskiene and Petroniene (2012) deal with translation shifts of lexical collocations in their article. They found out that collocations include combination of words in a semantic relation that occur frequently in similar contexts. The results of their research on translation transformations demonstrated that SL collocations very rarely sustain a form of a collocation in TL after the process of translation.

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Moreover, Liu (1999b) examined collocational errors in students' writings. She identified five sources for learners' error among which negative transfer was the most noticeable source of collocational errors. In another study, Vrbinc (2005) investigated the translation of native speakers of Slovene in order to survey their translation of collocations from Slovene into English. He tried to find out what types of mistakes are made in the field of collocations when native speakers of Slovene translate from Slovene into English. His results suggested that collocations are quite problematic for non-native speakers even if they are aware of them. He concluded that such frequency of mistakes can be attributed to the fact that in Slovenia students are not given any systematic teaching in translation of collocation.

Collocations are a major problem for translators who translate out of their native language. For the translator, rendering into one's mother tongue is often considered less daunting than rendering into one's non-native language. It is common practice that, when it comes to translation at international advanced level, translators are only requested to render into their language of habitual use, for the simple fact that quality and accuracy of their work will be guaranteed (Zarei, 2002). However, the translation of collocations in our country has not received the attention it deserves and it is a rather poorly explored field of research. The present study was carried out to narrow this gap.

In Iran studies on collocation have instigated burgeoning research among Iranian researchers, but studies on translation of collocations have not getting as much attention as it deserves. In this study, the researcher tried to fill the gap by scrutinizing Persian collocations along with their English equivalents in translation of Iranian translation students. For the sake of practicality, the domain of this study has been narrowed down to verb-noun and adj-noun collocations. Aiming at identifying translation students' problems in translating verb-noun and adj-noun collocations, the researcher conducted the present study to test BA senior translation students in translating verb-noun and adj-noun collocations from Persian to English, then the strategies that they use in their translation were determined and their errors were analyzed.

1.3. Research Questions

The present study made an attempt to probe into the collocational errors made by Iranian senior translation students. It also focused on investigating collocational strategies used by the participants and the most frequent strategies. The aim was to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the strategies that participants use in rendering Persian noun-verb and noun-adjective collocations?

2. Which strategies are mostly used by the participants?

3. What collocational error types are made by the senior translation students?

1.4. Significance of the Study

The importance of collocations has long been attested by scholars involved in teaching foreign languages (Xiao & McEnery, 2006). According to Boers et. al. (2006), the importance of such word groups was recognized long ago by Palmer (1925). Brown (1974) and Smith (1983), moreover, believed that knowledge of collocations is important for EFL learners, especially for college-bound advanced learners, and that they should be taught predictable collocations. Marton (as cited in Bahns, 1993) proposed that "mere exposure to the target language is not sufficient for the advanced learner to acquire the knowledge of conventional, which equate with collocations." (p. 58).

The significant role played by collocations in language as well as in translation has been acknowledged by some linguists. In this respect, Abadi (2009) indicates that the "interest" and "awareness" of research in the area of collocation is due to the significant role played by collocations as "central to the process of foreign language learning and translation". Smadja (1995) mentions three main reasons for the importance of providing a translation for collocations. First, they are opaque constructions which cannot be translated on a word by word basis. Second, collocations are domain-dependent. In each domain, there exists a variety of phrases that have specific meanings, and translations should apply only in the given domain.

Finally, correspondence between collocations in bilingual dictionaries, even for widely studied languages, are largely unexplored (cited in Farrokh & Alizadeh, 2013, p. 125).

A quick glimpse at the literature of the field shows that researchers paid attention to the learning of collocations by students. However, the translation of collocations deserves further attentions and Iranian researchers should take it into consideration. This study was an attempt to assess such difficulties that senior translation students encounter in the translation of Persian collocations as reflected in their translation of different sentences of Persian texts.

The focus of the study was on the identification of the students' errors in the area of English verb-noun and adj-noun collocations as well as the strategies they used and the problem sources which caused them to opt for producing what they think to be an acceptable collocational use. Thus, the aim of this study is twofold: (i) to find out Iranian senior translation students problems in translating lexical collocations and to try to making syllabus designers aware of the issues that advanced translation students are unable to deal with after four years of education, and (ii) to scrutinize the strategies they use in rendering Persian lexical collocations into English.

1.5. Definition of Key Terms

1.5.1. Collocation

Lewis (1997a, p. 8) claimed that collocations "are those combinations of words which occur naturally with greater than random frequency. Baker (1992), in a same line of thought, defines collocation as the tendency of certain words to co-occur regularly in a language.

1.5.2. Lexical collocation

According to Benson et. al. (1986a) a lexical collocation typically consists of open class words (noun, adjective, verb or adverb). Lexical collocations, syntactically, are regarded to fall into six major categories namely, adjective + noun, noun + noun, verb + noun, verb + adverb, adverb + adjective, noun + verb (Lewis 2000, p. 51).

Lexical collocations, in contrast to grammatical collocations, do not contain prepositions, infinitives, or clauses. Grammatical collocation is a phrase, which is composed of a preposition and a main word (noun, adjective, and verb) or a structural pattern such as a clause or two-word verbs.

1.5.3. Strategies

"While producing certain L2 collocational strings of language, learners may employ some strategies to fill a lexical gap. Difficulties that students encounter could be partly attributable to different strategies that they use when producing English lexical collocations". Investigating the strategies that learners use while attempting to come up with L2 acceptable collocations shed some light on the underlying processes that students adopt to compensate for the inadequacy in their L2 linguistic system (Noor & Adubaib, 2012, p. 574). Liu (2000b) mentioned some types of strategies that EFL students might make use of in their writing. The following are the seven types of strategies.

1.5.3.1. Retrieval

Retrieval means students' ability to recall collocations from their memory. Without understanding the notion that language do not consist of words but of chunks, "many students have no intention to store collocations in their memory" (Liu, 2000b, p. 482). Consequently, they often fail in searching for the proper collocations they need when they communicated in either speaking or writing.

1.5.3.2. Literal translation

"Students tend to transfer the thought word-for-word from L1 to L2 when not succeeding in finding stored collocations" (Liu, 2000b, p. 482). They use the strategy of literal translation to produce either acceptable or unacceptable collocations.

1.5.3.3. Approximate translation

It is a process of paraphrasing the thought from L1 to L2. Tarone (1984, p 131) defines it as "a strategy use for the production of an incorrect lexical item or structure that shares enough semantic features in common with the desired item".