

## *Student's Problems in Translating Collocations from Arabic into English*

*Dr. Salem Yahya Fathy<sup>(\*)</sup>*

### *Abstract*

This paper examines problems of rendering collocations which a group of student translators faced in the process of translating from Arabic into English. The main problem was how to render appropriate target language (TL) equivalents of some collocations as used in the source language (SL) text. The student's translations of collocation were studied and analyzed, and this revealed weaknesses in adopting various strategies in their renditions. The investigation has shown that the collocations were inappropriately rendered by most of the students. The study concludes that inappropriate renditions of collocations may weaken cohesiveness of (TI) text and its texture, and lead to unnaturalness.

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(\*) Lecturer- Dept. of Translation- College of Arts / University of Mosul

### ***Introduction:***

Collocations play a major role in the process of communication as they contribute effectively to creating a text. As Newmark (1988: 213) rightly put it, "If grammar is the bones of a text, collocations are the nerves, more subtle and multiple and specific in denoting meaning, and lexis is the flesh". Collocations employed by the text producer can strengthen the cohesive quality of a text to achieve preciseness in meaning and conciseness in expression. In so doing, the text producer increases density of ideas and concepts revealed in the text.

Individual words could be translated in isolation ,and that is why translation was thought of as easily accessible. However, when several words are threaded together, it becomes self-evident that they can no longer be accepted as an adequate equivalent when translated together. When translating takes place, we assume that the source language (SL) does not choose the same set of words as those in the target language (TL). For example, the lexical items "grow" and "turn" both mean "become", but they are semantically restricted in their normal collocations as below:

grow old	turn nasty
*turn old	* grow nasty
grow fit	turn pale
*turn fit	* grow pale

The examples show that the above verbs have the effect of semantic characterization on accompanying adjectives. The problem would be more complicated when translation is involved from (SL) to (TL) as collocations differ from one language to another. For example, to render into (TL) (English in our case) such as (dukhan kathif: heavy smoking) a straight forward translation may provide inappropriate and inadequate (TL) collocation such as (intensive smoking). Similarly, (strong tea) in English is (heavy tea) in Arabic. Such inappropriate equivalent may sound unnatural and non-native. Thus, the primary linguistic sense is not adequate to meet appropriate translation.

To bring the discussion into focus, translation is typically defined as "the closest natural equivalent to the message of the source language." (Nida, 1982: 331). According to Nida, the term "natural" is at the heart of translation process. Many theorists of translation attempted to categorize types of translation. To them, types of

translation could be generally divided into two main headings: the first one is directed to the form, whereas the second is directed to the message content (see, for example, Catford, 1965; Savory, 1969; Nida, 1974; Newmark, 1982; Aziz and Lataiwish, 2000). However, appropriate rendition of collocation requires the grasp of form and message content. In other words, form and content have significantly equal status when translation of collocation takes place. Baker (1997) includes "normalization" in translation. She suggests that normalization is most evident in the use of typical grammatical structures and collocational patterns. More importantly, the Arabic culture is quite different from that of English and this needs to be taken into account, particularly in the analysis of aspects of collocation which are clearly culture-dependent.

Collocations, fixed expressions, can be considered as a formulaic language (Howarth, 1998; Wray, 1999) and operate as a single semantic unit. The nature of formulaic language make collocation resistant to literal translation: the (TL) may not use lexical formulas that are directly equivalent to those used by (SL) to express the same intended meaning, or at least not with same frequency. Literal translation of collocation read and sound unnatural. Therefore, the problematic area of translating a text

emanates from recognizing naturalness of collocation in the (TL). Collocations are always linked with the concept of naturalness and usage. Inappropriate renditions, then, may lead to a mismatch between the intentions of the text producer and the expectations which warrant its acceptability by native English receiver, and consequently, the possibility of communication becomes so blocked that there is no interaction.

The hypotheses that "every thing we say may be in some degree idiomatic" (Bolinger, 1976: 102), and that "actual uses play a very minor role in one consciousness of language" (Sinclair, 1991: 39) raise a number of different questions for translation research. Is there any evidence that translators be aware of collocational restrictions in the (SL) and (TL)?

From a discorsal perspective, collocation refers to lexical cohesion "that is achieved through the association of lexical items that regularly co-occur" (Halliday and Hassan, 1976: 281). Halliday and Hassan (1976) use the term collocation to refer to the semantic relationships created by the close-occurrence of relatively low frequency words that tend to appear in a limited number of contexts. This network of semantic relationships links together sentences or

paragraphs; units that are structurally independent of each other. These relationships create the cohesive quality of connected discourse and help to create its texture—a term Halliday and Hassan use to refer to the qualities of a text that make it seem coherent.

Collocational cohesion has been found to be "the predominant means of connecting sentences in discourse." (Witte and Faigley, 1981: 193). Fowler (1986:64) and Aziz (1998: 90) describe collocation as a type of lexical cohesion. Hoey (1991), and Hatim and Mason (1990) argue that collocation patterns extending across longer stretches of text play a part in creating genres and registers. By the same token, Lin (1998) states that generating a text requires knowledge about valid combinations of words.

From a linguistic perspective, a collocation is defined as a habitual and frequent co-occurrence of two or more lexical items as realizations of structural elements within a given syntactic form (Firth, 1957: 14; Bolinger, 1968: 100; Marton, 1977: 57; Carter, 1978: 63; Fernando, 1996: 37; and Stubbs, 2001: 29). Most collocations are restricted and prototype since there is no logical semantic explanation and they are accompanied by specific lexical items which do not seem to be connected to their

meaning but to their lexical environment (Lyons, 1977: 262; Palmer, 1980:79; Radford, 1988: 370). Manning and Schutze (1999) state that collocations are characterized by limited semantic compositionality, and Howarth and Nesi (1996) claim that most sentences contain at least one collocation. Sinclair (1991) argues that words take their meaning from their collocation environment.

### *Collecting Data*

In the test carried out in this paper, inappropriate renderings of collocations were identified, typified and recorded in all the translated text in the sample. The translations of the collocations in the text were judged against the translations provided by the researcher and judged by competent professor translators. The translations provided of the SL collocations as TL equivalents are judged as being either appropriate or inappropriate. Appropriateness in this study is used to mark "pragmatic success"(van Dijk, 1977), whereas inappropriateness is judged when (TL) equivalents of collocations did not help (TL) readers interpret the meaning of the (TL) text as intended by the text producer, and did not conform with the rhetorical and semantic-pragmatic functions of collocations in the (SL) text. The analysis indicated that seven collocations used by

the text producer were the most problematic area faced by the students in their renditions.

### ***The Study Material and Subject***

The corpus of the study includes translations from Arabic into English, that is, from the student translators' native tongue to the English language. This study is based on one extract taken from an editorial selected from (Al-Rai Alakhar: Iraqi Paper ) of September 3, 2003. The editorial is an argumentative text entitled "The American Dilemma". The subjects of the study constitute one translation section (comprising 40 fourth year students) at the Translation Department of Mosul University in Iraq. The text was translated over one session. Twenty translations of the students were randomly selected and inappropriately seven collocations of their renditions were analyzed.

### ***Discussion and Analysis of the Students' Renderings of the (SL) Collocations***

Collocations guide the readers to understand the meaning of the text and they create the linkage of ideas expressed in sentences, and whole text. Collocation is the most difficult type of cohesion to

analyze because items said to collocate involve neither repetition, synonymy, super ordination, nor mention of general items. What is important is that the items said to collocate "share the same lexical environment." (Halliday and Hassan, 1976: 286)

The analysis will place focus on the nature of inappropriate renditions made by the student translators. We believe that such analysis could be of help to minimize the occurrence of errors when rendition of collocation is involved, and may be helpful to us as teachers of translation because tell us what the problems are and how student translators are moving towards the goals we have in mind. The study concentrated on only seven collocations that student translators found difficult to render into the (TL).

The analysis shows that collocations underlined in the sample text (see the Appendix) had not been fully grasped by a great number of the student translators. This, of course, tends to misrepresent the text producer's intention and make the text "foreign" to the English readers. The table below provides statistical data of the students' attempted renderings of the collocations in the text.

***Percentage of Inappropriate Renderings of collocations in the Text***

No.	Collocation Received Renderings	%of Inappropriate Renderings	Target Renderings
I	Mawaqif muzdawajah	66	Double attitudes
2	isti sal juthura aI-muqawmah	68	Uproot resistance roots,pull out roots of resistance
3	Nawaya mubayyatah	88	Premeditated intentions
r	Atmaa 'tawassui'yah	72	Expansionistic ambitions
5	'Awaqib wakhymah	58	dire, terrible consequences
6	Satuthiru asilatan	36	raise questions
7	Takhfif watat	54	Lessen the impact

The collocations mentioned above were inappropriately rendered by most of the student translators as the influence of their mother tongue is evident. Such inappropriate renderings show that the students might not have realized that at least one of the collocates shifts from its primary sense to a secondary sense, thus, literal translation and/or semantic translation adopted by those students could not work. It seems that those students assume that there is a one to one correspondence between (SL) and (TL). So, they relied heavily on their first language, i.e. Arabic, in rendering the collocates in some of the examples,

preserving the collocation of forms which can properly occur together in the (SL) but not in the (TL). For example, the first collocation "mawaqif muzdawajah" was rendered by some students as "binary stands"; the second one "Isti sal juthur al- muqawmah" as "cut; draw the root of the resistance"; the fourth one "atmaa' tawassui'yah" as "enlarged greed, widened ambitions"; the fifth collocation "satuthiru asilatan" as "excite, agitate, invoke questions"; and the last one "takhfif wat at" was rendered by some students such as "slow down, dilute the impact". Reliance on (SL), as it can be seen, may result in negative transfer and lead to unnatural reading. This collocational clash has been named "anti-collocations" (Allerton, 1984) realized by joining words that do not produce acceptable combinations. This may be due to the linguistic and cultural differences between (SL) and (TL). The percentage of SL transfer adopted by the students was about 30%.

Many students adopted synonymy. It seems that such technique is the easiest one used by non- native speakers (Henzl, 1973; Slum and Levenston1978). Obviously, the students opted for synonymy not because of the absence of the (TL) lexical items; but rather because of the non awareness of the collocability of the lexical items in the (TL). This may be due to learning words individually rather than collocationally. So, those students depended on the open choice

principle; rather on collocational restrictions. This shows that appropriate rendition within collocational restriction into the (TL) is an essential component for realizing natural translation. However, a close examination of collocations reveals that a great number of the students violated the semantic and stylistic restrictions of collocations. For example, the first collocation "mawaqif muzdawajah" was rendered by some students such as "two stands; bilateral attitudes"; the second collocation "Istî sal juthur al-muqawmah" was rendered such as "destroy, put an end to the resistance"; the third collocation "nawaya mubayyatah" rendered such as "bad ,previous, old intentions"; the fifth one "awaqib wakhymah" was rendered as "dangerous results, negative results, serious sequences". Although these lexical items, rendered by about (28%) of the student translators, are synonymous to the (TL) collocates stated in the Table mentioned above, they differ in register and collocations. It seems that those students, aware only of one pair, regardless of its restriction, and therefore, their renditions are not acceptable as appropriate collocates. This lack of valid substitution for synonyms is a characteristic of collocations in general (Manning and Schutze, 1999).

Other student translators adopted paraphrasing in rendering some collocations in the sample text. This may be due to serious deficiency in (TL) collocations. It has been argued that following the technique of paraphrasing should be the last resort in the process of translating (Nida, 1982; Newmark, 1982); however, about (14%) of the students opted for this technique which may lead to weakening the text and blurring its texture. In other words, the strategy followed by those students who tend to replace collocations with simpler alternatives can lead to ill-formed and awkward text. Simplification taking place in such a way without knowledge of collocational constraints can drastically reduce the effectiveness and cohesiveness of the text. For example; the first collocation "mawaqif muzdawajah" was rendered by some students such as "take different resolutions, unequal decisions"; the second collocation "Isti sal juthur al-muqawmah" rendered such as "to remove completely the resistance" the third collocation "nawaya mubayyatah" was rendered such as "what (Israel) wants to realize in mind". Such renditions may hamper text "efficiency" and "effectiveness" (see de Beaugrande and Dressier, 1981). A text is considered efficient when it is utilized in communicating with the minimum expenditure of effort on part of the readers, and effectiveness is realized by leaving a strong

impression on the audience and creating favorable conditions for attacking a goal.

Another interesting point revealed in the analysis is that some translations of collocations read smoothly according to the linguistic norms of the (TL). Unless the source text and the target text are compared, no body will know that the translations are unfaithful to the original message. For example, the first collocation "mawaqif muzdawajah" was rendered such as "American policy"; the fourth collocation "atmaa' tawassui'yah" was rendered is "policy of expansionism; future plans. Such renditions are acceptable on the part of the English reader, but they do not meet the text producer's intentionality. The percentage of this technique adopted by the student translators is about (10%).

To add, some student translators (about 8%) rendered only one of the lexical collocates. In other words, they treated with collocation as individual lexical item. For example, the third collocation "nawaya mubayyatah" was rendered such as "plans; thoughts"; the fourth one "atmaa tawassuiyah" was rendered as "demands; wishes; ambitions; aims; desires; hopes"; the fifth one "awaqib wakhmah" was rendered as "troubles; effects".

It is true that the interpretation of one lexical collocate in a text is facilitated by the presence of another, but many students' renditions of collocations could not manage to find appropriate equivalents to collocations. It is obvious that those students are mainly concerned with "correctness" rather than "appropriateness". This may be due to inadequate communicative competence in the (TL). The communicative competence is described by Hymes (1972 b: 278) "there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless". In being so, the student translators should have reproduced collocations appropriate to the context and co-text in which they are made. The lack of communicative competence may make the text communicatively unacceptable. Unfortunately, appropriate renditions of collocations were only (10%).

More importantly, the collocations discussed above have impact upon the strategy of argumentation and the flow of discourse as these collocations are evaluative tools employed by the arguer to realize "impact and appeal " on his readers (Nida, 1990: 144). However, the (TL) renditions provided by most of the students did not realize the "evaluateness parameter" of these collocations

(Farghal, 1992) as their renditions were negatively evaluated in the (SL), resulting in weakening the thread of argumentation in the (TL).

### ***Conclusion***

The analysis of this study shows that there is a serious deficiency on the part of the student translators in the (TL), here English. In their renditions, a collocational clash occurred when words are placed together which should not occur together, according to the rules or usage of (TL). It seems that those students did not realize that collocations which can properly occur together in (SL) may not properly occur together in (TL). This collocational clash is due to some semantic or pragmatic incompatibility between the words in (SL) and (TL), causing unnaturalness in translation. Such clash can cause an abrupt interruption of a relatively smooth reading process in the (TL). Being unaware of co(n)textual collocational restrictions, the collocations in the analysis were inappropriately rendered and negatively evaluated by those students.

Therefore, collocations should be given their due importance as they play a key role in realizing naturalness and cohesiveness of the text. And the teachers of translation should pay a great attention to collocations when the process of translation takes place.

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## ملخص

### مشكلات ترجمة القرائن من اللغة العربية إلى الإنكليزية

د. سالم يحيى فتحي (\*)

يتناول هذا البحث مشكلات ترجمة القرائن التي يواجهها طلبة الترجمة من اللغة العربية إلى الإنكليزية. تكمن المشكلة الرئيسية في كيفية إيجاد المكافئ في لغة الهدف لبعض القرائن كما استخدمت في لغة الأصل. فقد تم دراسة وتحليل ترجمة الطلبة لبعض القرائن وقد أظهرت الدراسة ضعفا في تبني طرائق مختلفة في ترجمتهم لهذه القرائن. كما أوضحت الدراسة أن معظم طلبة الترجمة لم يتمكنوا من إعطاء الترجمة الملائمة لهذه القرائن. وتوصلت هذه الدراسة إلى أن الترجمة الغير ملائمة للقرائن تضعف تماسك نص لغة الهدف ونسيجه وتؤدي إلى العدول عن طبيعته.

ما جاء في خطاب الرئيس الأمريكي بوش من ربط بين ما يسمى بخارطة الطريق وضرورة تحقيق الإصلاحات السياسية في البلدان العربية و إلحاق الهزيمة بالإرهاب، يؤكد على المواقف المزدوجة الأمريكية التي تحمل العرب مسؤولية العنف وتتجاهل في الوقت ذاته الجرائم البشعة التي ترتكبها إسرائيل وبهذا تقوم الإدارة الأمريكية وبشكل غير مباشر بإيقاف الانتفاضة واستئصال جذورها لإعطاء المجال إلى إسرائيل في تنفيذ نواياها المبيتة وتحقيق أطماعها التوسعية في المنطقة.

وفي ما يتعلق بالعراق فقد ادعى الرئيس بوش بأنه سوف يجعل العراق بلدا ديمقراطيا مثاليا في المنطقة، إلا أن الممارسات الخاطئة التي تقوم بها القوات الأمريكية المحتلة في العراق ستكون لها عواقب وخيمة وستثير أسئلة كثيرة قد تؤدي إلى تخفيف وطأة الموقف الأمريكي على الصعيد العالمي.

(\*) مدرس في قسم الترجمة - كلية الآداب / جامعة الموصل.