

ENHANCING TRANSLATION ACCURACY THROUGH COLLOCATIONAL AWARENESS: A LINGUISTIC AND COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Good translation involves more than just replacing words between languages. It requires an understanding of collocational patterns, which are common combinations of words that have established meanings. This article looks at how being aware of collocations affects translation accuracy. Using ideas from phraseological theory, corpus linguistics, and psycholinguistic models, the research explores how learners handle collocations during translation tasks. A mixed-methods approach was used, which included translation tests, surveys, and a detailed analysis of errors. The results indicate that learners who are more aware of collocations produce translations that are much more natural, accurate, and idiomatic. The cognitive findings suggest that collocations ease the mental workload by acting as stored multiword units. This study supports the need to include collocational training in translation education.

Key words: Collocations, collocational awareness , translation accuracy, phraseology, corpus linguistics, psycholinguistics, error analysis

Аннотация

В данной статье изучается значение знаний о коллокациях в процессе качественного перевода. Исследование основано на фразеологической теории, корпусной лингвистике и психолингвистических моделях и анализирует способность обучающихся использовать коллокации при выполнении переводческих заданий. Использован смешанный метод, включающий переводческие тесты, опросы и анализ ошибок. Результаты показывают, что учащиеся, хорошо владеющие коллокациями, создают более естественные, точные и идиоматичные переводы. Когнитивные выводы подтверждают, что коллокации функционируют как многословные единицы, снижая умственную нагрузку. Исследование подчёркивает необходимость усиления обучения коллокациям в переводческой подготовке.

Ключевые слова: Коллокации, точность перевода, фразеология, корпусная лингвистика, психолингвистика, анализ ошибок

Annotation

Ushbu maqola sifatli tarjima jarayonida kollokatsiyalarni bilishning ahamiyatini o‘rganadi. Tadqiqot frazeologiya nazariyasi, korpus lingvistika va psixolingvistika asosida o‘quvchilarning kollokatsiyalarni tarjimada qo‘llash qobiliyatini tahlil qiladi. Aralash tadqiqot usuli qo‘llanilib, tarjima testlari, so‘rovnomalar va xato tahlillari o‘tkazildi. Natijalar kollokatsiyalarni yaxshi bilgan o‘rganuvchilar ancha tabiiy, aniq va idiomatik tarjimalar yaratishini ko‘rsatdi. Kognitiv xulosalar esa kollokatsiyalar ongdagi yukni kamaytiradigan ko‘p so‘zli birliklar sifatida ishlashini tasdiqlaydi. Tadqiqot tarjima ta’limida kollokatsiyalar bo‘yicha o‘qituvni kuchaytirish zarurligini ta’kidlaydi.

Kalit so‘zlar: Kollokatsiyalar, kollokatsiyalarni bilish darajasi, tarjima aniqligi, frazeologiya, korpus lingvistika, psixolingvistika, xato tahlili

Introduction

Lexical selection refers to the method through which a translator (or speaker/writer) chooses particular words and multiword expressions to express meaning in the target language. It is difficult because it demands concurrent awareness of semantics, collocational preferences, style, pragmatics and idomaticity, frequency and entrenchment.

Semantics: the literal meaning of words in propositions (to argue vs to quarrel).

Collocational tendencies: which word combinations are standard (pay attention instead of give attention).

Style: formal versus informal options (request versus ask for).

Pragmatics and idiomatic expressions: cultural norms and established phrases (let the cat out of the bag).

Frequency and entrenchment: collocations that occur frequently are more instinctive and seem “right” to native speakers.

Frequent mistakes made by learners illustrate this problem:

strong traffic → instead of heavy traffic

give attention → instead of pay attention

These mistakes arise because learners frequently translate phrases directly or depend on literal equivalents from their first language, which do not align with the conventions of the target language.

Many EFL learners and novice translators struggle with collocations since they frequently rely on direct translation methods. They might choose lexically similar but incorrect terms and fail to identify combinations suitable for the register. Moreover, a lack of authentic input further restricts their capacity to employ collocations accurately.

These difficulties lead to translations that are unnatural, clumsy, or deceptive. Examples include take a decision instead of make a decision or large chance instead of high probability. This underscores the significance of exploring how collocational awareness impacts translation precision.

Finding fixed or semi-fixed word combinations, automatically finding suitable partners, and avoiding literal, L1-based combinations are all components of collocational competence. Collocations serve as "chunks" that are stored in long-term memory, which lessens the processing load during translation from a cognitive standpoint. From a linguistic perspective, they are phraseological units whose acceptability is determined by frequent co-occurrence in native usage. Understanding how learners process these combinations can help improve translator training, assessment, and curriculum design.

The following research questions are addressed in this study:

What impact does collocational awareness have on translation accuracy?

What linguistic patterns contribute to collocational errors?

What cognitive mechanisms support or hinder collocational retrieval during translation?

How do high-awareness and low-awareness learners differ in translation performance?

The study tests three hypotheses.

H1: Learners who are more aware of collocations will make fewer mistakes.

H2: Most collocational errors will result from L1 transfer and literal translation strategies.

H3: Familiar collocations will impose less cognitive load and be processed more efficiently.

Methodology

This research utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the effect of collocational awareness on the accuracy of translation.

Quantitative aspect: Concentrated on assessing the occurrence and categories of collocational mistakes in translation assignments. This facilitated a comparison of learners with high and low awareness of collocations.

Qualitative aspect: Investigated the cognitive strategies and processes of participants, focusing on how they access and utilize collocations while translating. The qualitative data offered understanding of the processes that led to the identified errors.

This integrated method allowed for an in-depth comprehension of error patterns and the cognitive factors influencing collocational competence in translation.

Twenty EFL translation students, ages 18 to 22, who were all enrolled in translation programs at the B1–B2 proficiency level, participated in the study.

Purposive sampling was used to choose participants based on their enrolment in collocation and translation training courses. To assess their level of awareness, participants took a collocational knowledge test before beginning the main task. They were divided into two groups according to the findings:

group with high awareness (10 students)

group with low awareness (10 students)

Each participant had worked in translation studies for at least a year, and their exposure to real English input varied. Twenty English sentences, including verb–noun collocations (make a decision, take responsibility, meet expectations), adjective–noun collocations (bitter disappointment, heavy traffic, strong influence), verb–preposition combinations (rely on, insist on, participate in), and idiomatic expressions (break the news, catch someone's attention, hit the road), were carefully crafted for the translation task. To assess participants' ability to process collocations of different levels of familiarity, the sentences contained both high-frequency and unfamiliar collocations.

Additional information on participants' cognitive and strategic approaches to translation was gathered through a self-report questionnaire that measured familiarity with collocations, use of literal translation strategies, reliance on L1 equivalents, chunking strategies (recognition and retrieval of collocations as wholes), and perceived difficulty of the translation task. To find patterns, translation errors were divided into five categories: literal translation errors (translating L1 word for word, such as "do an effort"), L1 transfer errors (calculating or using L1-based collocations

incorrectly, such as "do a crime"), incorrect collocate selection (selecting semantically similar but incorrect words, such as "strong traffic instead of heavy traffic"), semantic/pragmatic mismatch (using a collocate inappropriately for context, such as "bitter memory instead of bitter disappointment).

In order to assign participants to groups, the process started with a preliminary collocational knowledge test. They then translated the 20 sentences within 45 minutes, ensuring sufficient time to consider collocational choices. Using a three-point rating system—accurate, partially acceptable, and unacceptable—two independent raters evaluated the translations for accuracy and naturalness. Errors were subsequently categorized according to the predefined scheme to identify common patterns and types. Following the translation task, participants answered questions about their perceived difficulty, collocational awareness, and strategies.

For data analysis, quantitative measures, including mean mistakes and the proportion of each error type, were generated for each group, and comparisons were made between high-awareness and low-awareness participants to discover significant differences in collocational accuracy. Qualitative analysis involved theme coding of participant responses to discover techniques for handling collocations and factors impacting retrieval, including chunking, dependence on literal translation, and dictionary use. In order to comprehend how cognitive mechanisms facilitate or impede accurate translation, relationships between collocational awareness and task performance were investigated. Error types and participant tactics were then analyzed in terms of cognitive load, chunking, and retrieval efficiency.

Result

The quantitative investigation looked at collocational accuracy in both high- and low-awareness groups to see how collocational knowledge affected translation performance. Overall, high-awareness participants made an average of 3.2 errors per task, compared to 8.7 errors for low-awareness participants, demonstrating a significant difference in collocational competence between the two groups.

The analysis of mistake kinds revealed significant trends. Literal translation errors were found in 12% of the high-awareness group's translations but 34% in the low-awareness group's translations, indicating that low-awareness learners rely more heavily on word-for-word translation procedures. L1 transfer errors, in which participants used source-language collocations directly in the target language, were considerably more common in the low-awareness group (29%) than in the high-awareness group (8%). Similarly, incorrect collocate selection accounted for 15% of

errors in high-awareness learners and 28% in low-awareness learners. Semantic or pragmatic mismatches occurred in 10% of high-awareness translations compared to 21% of low-awareness translations, indicating that low-awareness participants frequently chose collocates improper for context. Finally, 5% of the high-awareness group exhibited prepositional or grammatical errors that affected collocations.

When performance was analyzed by collocation type, high-awareness learners consistently beat low-awareness learners in all categories. High-awareness individuals got 90% accuracy on verb-noun collocations such as make a decision and take responsibility, while low-awareness participants achieved 65%. Learners with high awareness scored 85% correct on adjective-noun collocations such as bitter disappointment and heavy traffic, compared to 55% for low awareness learners. Participants with high awareness achieved 88% accuracy in verb-preposition combinations such as rely on and insist on, whereas those with low awareness achieved 60%. Finally, in idiomatic terms such as "break the news" and "get someone's attention," high-awareness learners had 80% correct translations while low-awareness learners had only 50%.

A statistical test revealed that the difference in collocational errors between the two groups was statistically significant. Simply put, pupils with stronger collocational awareness performed better on average, and this difference was not due to chance.

Analysis

The findings show a high link between collocational awareness and translation accuracy. High-awareness learners consistently made fewer errors across all collocation types, validating hypothesis 1. The analysis of error categories indicates that L1 transfer and literal translation are the most common sources of errors, which supports H2. Furthermore, familiar collocations were processed more rapidly and accurately, indicating H3 and the significance of chunking in reducing cognitive burden.

Verb-noun collocations were the most accurately translated, indicating extensive classroom exposure and real input.

Adjective-noun and *idiomatic formulations* caused the most errors among low-awareness learners, emphasizing the challenge of identifying traditional target-language patterns without explicit training.

Verb-preposition combinations had modest errors, highlighting the significance of preposition knowledge and collocational rules in translation.

The qualitative research found that cognitive processes differed across groups. Learners with high awareness rely on pre-stored collocational chunks, which reduces working memory demands and allows attention to focus on text coherence and register. Low-awareness learners show fragmented retrieval, frequent dictionary consultation, and L1 interference, resulting in non-idiomatic translations.

Discussion

The findings highlight the importance of collocational awareness in translation performance, as participants with higher levels of awareness consistently produced more accurate, idiomatic, and natural translations. In contrast, low-awareness learners relied mainly on literal translation procedures and L1 transfer, resulting in frequent errors in all collocation types. These distinctions indicate that collocational knowledge is not just a language asset but also a critical factor affecting overall translation quality.

From a cognitive standpoint, the findings are consistent with theories that propose collocations serve as conceptual blocks kept in long-term memory. Learners who frequently encounter and internalize these chunks can access them more automatically, lowering cognitive burden during translation and facilitating faster, more efficient processing. This supports the ideas of cognitive linguistics, particularly those emphasizing chunking, entrenchment, and frequency-based learning.

Pedagogically, the study confirms the necessity of explicit collocation instruction in translation training. Collocational awareness can be greatly strengthened and learners can progress beyond literal, word-by-word translation with the use of strategies like noticing tasks, corpus-based inquiry, and spaced repetition. These strategies also provide possibilities for recurrent exposure and active retrieval, both of which are crucial for long-term retention.

The examination of mistake patterns also shows that the major causes of collocational errors are still literal translation, L1 transfer, and improper collocate selection. Addressing these challenges involves focused activities that expose learners to actual input and facilitate contrastive analysis between L1 and L2 collocational structures, enabling them to internalize correct usage more effectively.

Practically speaking, translation teachers should create learning exercises that include both common and uncommon collocations to help students become proficient with a variety of idioms. Exposure combined with organized retrieval practice can improve accuracy and fluency, eventually preparing students for increasingly difficult translation assignments.

Conclusion

Collocational awareness significantly improves translation accuracy, according to this study. While learners with low awareness made more mistakes because of literal translation, L1 transfer, and poor collocate selections, learners with higher awareness generated more accurate, natural, and idiomatic translations. The results verify that collocations serve as cognitive "chunks," which, when mastered, facilitate quicker and easier translation.

Pedagogically, the results underline the necessity of explicit collocation instruction in translator training through activities such as noticing tasks, corpus use, and repeated practice. The study shows that improving collocational awareness can greatly enhance translation quality, even though it concentrated on B1–B2 learners in a controlled environment. Future research can expand to diverse proficiency levels and real-world translating scenarios for broader generality.

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