Translation Transformations of Lexical Collocations

Jolita Horbačauskienė, Saulė Petronienė

Abstract. Translation involves taking various features into consideration in different languages, and thus, a common problem for a translator is to find corresponding expressions in the target language (TL). Collocation in its linguistic sense is a relatively new phenomenon and its definition is not fully agreed on. Linguists define the notion of collocation variously: as a combination of words which usually appear together, a grouping of words in a sentence, a combination of words with certain mutual expectancy etc. Since syntactic or semantic features of separate elements of a collocation are unpredictable, the collocation can be easily misinterpreted in the process of translation. The article deals with translation transformations of lexical collocations achieved by translation shifts. The analysis indicates what translation transformations emerge in translating collocations to get the best translation equivalence in TL. The paper focuses on four most common types of lexical collocations: noun + noun, adj + noun, verb + noun and verb + adj + noun. 771 noun + noun, adj + noun, verb + noun and verb + adj + noun collocations have been selected from 81 article of social science magazines. The focus is on translation transformations of lexical collocations achieved by translation shifts.

Key words: *collocation, lexical collocation, translation transformations, translation shifts, class-shift, unit-shift, intra-system shift.*

Introduction

Collocation is an important phenomenon in linguistics and can be defined as a combination of words or terms which commonly appear together (Atkins, Rundell, 2008, p.302; Murphy, 2010, pp.8–9; Sinclair et al, 2004, p.10). They can also be characterized as the manner words combine in a language to deliver natural-sounding speech and writing (McIntosh, Francis, 2009). Information about collocations is important for dictionary writing, natural language processing and teaching/ learning (Martynska, 2004). Since collocational meaning cannot be derived directly from the meaning of its components, it may cause difficulties in the process of translation. Thus, the paper focuses on translation transformations of lexical collocations achieved by translation shifts.

The **object** of the paper is translation transformations of lexical collocations.

The **aim** of the paper is to investigate collocations and their translation transformations in the texts of social sciences.

The **objectives** of the paper are:

- to investigate the concept of collocation as a linguistic phenomenon;

- to determine and research noun + noun, adj + noun, verb + noun and verb + adj + noun collocations and their frequency in the texts of social sciences;

- to examine translation transformations of collocations according to class-shift, unit-shift, intra-system shift.

The **methods** of content, quantitative and descriptive analysis are applied in the research. The paper focuses on four most common types of lexical collocations: noun + noun, adj + noun, verb + noun and verb + adj + noun. For the analysis 771 noun + noun, adj + noun, verb + noun

and verb + adj + noun collocations have been selected from 81 randomly selected article of social science magazines: European Journal of Marketing (2010), European Business Review (2011), Journal of Educational Administration (2010), Journal of Knowledge Management (2011), Leadership & Organization Development Journal (2011). All the collocations are checked in Oxford Collocations Dictionary (McIntosh, Francis, 2009), whereas translation equivalents are searched in the dictionaries (Buračas, 1997; Pearce, 2006; Piesarskas, 1998). The focus of the research is on translation transformations of collocations achieved by translation shifts.

Lexical Collocations and Translation Shifts

As it has already been claimed, collocation is an important phenomenon in linguistics and can be in syntactic, lexical or in no linguistically defined relation. Moreover, it is not easy to determine which co-occurrences are in fact collocations.

Linguists define collocations diversely: tendency for words to occur regularly with other words: *sit/ chair*, *boil/ kettle* (Jackson and Amvela, 2007) or a grouping of words in a sentence (Smadja, 1993). However, Jackson defines collocation as a combination of words that have "a certain mutual expectancy" (Jackson, 1988, p.96). Linguists distinguish seven types of collocations; however, the paper focuses on four most common types of lexical collocations.

Firth was the first to use the term *collocation* in its linguistic sense and categorized collocation within the levels of a language, nearest to the context of a situation and culture (Singleton, 2000, pp.51–52). Halliday et al (2004) emphasizes that collocation is not a mere juxtaposition and claims that distribution should be accounted for in lexical as well as grammatical terms. Moreover, he highlights the crucial role of collocations in the study of lexis.

Sinclair examines collocations independently of syntax and divides them into two categories: the *upward* (mostly prepositions, adverbs, conjunctions, pronouns) and *downward* (mostly nouns and verbs) collocations (Sinclair, 1991, pp.115–116). According to Crystal (2007), collocation should not be seen as a collocation of *words*, but of *roots* or *lexemes* with a certain 'scatter' of forms, e.g.: *he works hard, a hard worker, hard-working*, and *hard work*. However, collocation has been regarded as a static phenomenon within a language as a whole rather than as an automated discipline which mirrors the acts of reading and writing.

Many lexicographers point back to early linguistic paradigms which, as a part of their focus on the lexicon, do address the role of collocation in a language. According to Poole, collocation is almost a set phrase "when a word is closely associated with a particular context to the exclusion of other words with a similar meaning" (Poole, 1999, pp.28). However, Halliday and Yallop (2007, p.15) provide a more inclusive view on collocations and are less precise in their definition. They claim that collocations include any set of words in a semantic relation, whereas, marked cohesive effect in a text occurs when two semantically related words occur in close proximity in the text.

Even though, collocation is defined as a combination of words or terms which commonly appear together, genitives tend to occur in fixed collocations, e.g., *at death's door, nature's way, life's work* (Biber et al, 2005, p.83). Moreover, collocations should not be confused with idioms or lexical bundles. Idioms are "expressions whose meaning is different from the meaning of the individual words" e.g., *to have your feet on the ground* is an idiom meaning *to be sensible* (Rundell, Fox 2002, p.710). The essential feature of an idiom is its non-literal, metaphorical (idiomatic) meaning (Jackson, 1988, p.106); meanwhile, fixed sequences of words that are used repeatedly across texts are defined as lexical bundles, many of them containing a pronoun followed by a verb phrase followed by a part of the verb's complement, e.g., *I don't know why..., I would like to..., I thought it was...* (Biber et al, 2005, p.454). Contrary to idioms, lexical bundles do not possess any metaphorical or other special interpretation.

Furthermore, collocations should not be confused with compounds and flexible word pairs. Compounds include word pairs that occur in a language and typically are immutable in function. According to McKeown and Radev (1997), "compounds form a bridge between collocations and idioms, since, like collocations, they are quite invariable, but not semantically opaque". Flexible word pairs include collocations between subject and verb, or verb and object (ibid). However, sometimes it is difficult to separate a collocation from a free combination in which each word contributes its own meaning and which consists of a single-word lexical verb followed by an adverb or preposition with a separate meaning, for example, *come down, go back* (Biber et al, 2005, p.125).

Mel'čuk (1998) provides a more restricted view of collocations and claims that they are positioned within the framework of lexical functions (which is a semantic-

syntactic relation connecting a word or a phrase with a set of words or phrases). This function formalizes the fact that in a language there are words, or phrases, whose usage is bound by another word in the language.

According to Singleton (2000, p.47)

> *words which form collocation are repeatedly 'placed with' each other; that is to say, they often co-occur within a short distance of each other in speech and written text.*

Moreover, they are present in natural spoken as well as written English language (McIntosh, Francis, 2009).

Thus, it can be stated that collocations are lexical units that can be subdivided into different groups according to the features they possess. Different researchers take into consideration different aspects of collocations for their grouping that are discussed in the following sections of the article.

Lexical Collocations vs. Grammatical Collocations

Linguists divide collocations into two major groups: grammatical and lexical collocations.

> *The distinction between grammatical and lexical collocations is based on the status of the constituents of the word combinations as content words or function words (Bartsch, 2004, p.54).*

Grammatical collocations are comprised of a noun, an adjective or a verb plus a particle; however, sometimes they can be lexicalized as single units (Moehkardi, 2002, p.54) which have a grammatical rather than a semantic relation (Jackson, Amvela, 2007, p.114). The main element in the grammatical collocation is the specific preposition that occurs after a particular verb, noun or adjective, e.g., "*rely + on, fear + of, fond + of*" (ref. Fig.1).
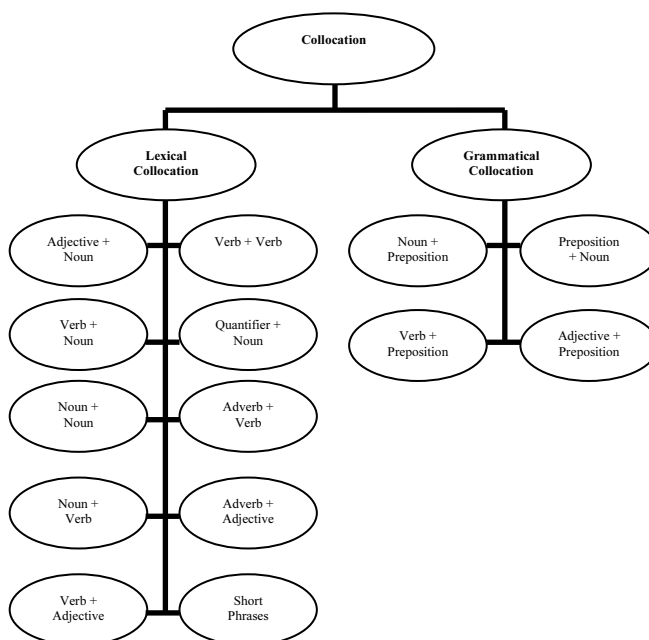

Figure 1. Structural Relations of Collocations (Lea, 2002, p.ix).

Moreover, grammatical collocations "refer to any kind of syntactic element that must accompany a particular word" (ibid).

Smadja (1993) argues that grammatical collocations are similar to lexical ones because of their arbitrariness and co-occurrences of words; however, grammatical collocations are much simpler in structure: many of them include only one open class word which might be the reason for dictionaries to actually include them.

The main difference between lexical and grammatical collocations is that lexical collocations do not contain grammatical elements, e.g., *good work*, *strong tea*, etc. (Moehkardi, 2002, p.59); moreover, lexical collocation "has been called a relation of mutual expectancy or habitual association" (Jackson, 1988, p.114). Each word constituting a lexical collocation plays a significant role because it contributes to the general meaning of the whole. Moreover, lexical collocation is independent of grammatical constraint. In turn, it uses the lexical constraint to explain the contrast between two phrases that are comparable in terms of part of speech but not necessarily constitute lexical collocation (e.g*., powerful car* and *strong car* are in the adj + noun pattern but only the former is considered to be a collocation). Typical lexical collocations consist of open class words: nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs.

Generalizing all the approaches regarding the notion of collocation, it can be stated that collocation in the paper is referred to as hardly modifiable combination of two or more words the meaning of which exists only when these words combine together and co-occur in large corpora. Since the aim of the paper is to analyse translation transformation of English lexical collocations, the research focuses on lexical collocations only.

Translation of Collocations

In dictionaries, interesting extra information is constituted by collocational facts (Miller, 2002, p.8) and a collocations dictionary provides all the words that are commonly used in combination with each headword: nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs. However, translation of collocations can cause difficulties for non-native speakers: numerous collocation translations are idiosyncratic in the sense that they are unpredictable by syntactic or semantic features. Moreover, "a translator can easily misinterpret a collocation in the source text due to interference from his/ her native language" (Baker, 2011, p.59).

Regular dictionaries are of little help in the translation of collocations, and thus, the translator must often "resort to accommodation" what method to choose in order to translate collocations precisely (Shi, 2006). In order to translate collocations accurately, a translator should take into account the following main features of collocations:

- non-compositionality (i.e. the meaning of a collocation is not a straight-forward composition of the meanings of its parts). Collocations are not fully compositional because of an extra meaning added to the combination, e.g., the adjective *strong* in *strong tea* possesses the meaning *rich in flavour* which is different from the original sense *having physical strength*;

- non-substitutability (components of a collocation cannot be substituted by other words even if, in context, they possess the same meaning); e.g., it is not

possible to use *yellow wine* instead of *white wine* even though *yellow* is a suitable adjective for the description of the color of wine;

- non-modifiability (usually collocations cannot be freely modified with additional lexical meaning or through grammatical transformations). It is not possible to modify *frog* in *to get a frog in one's throat* into *to get an ugly frog in one's throat* though noun *frog* can be modified by an adjective *ugly* (Manning, Schütze, 1999, p.184).

Two words frequently occurring together indicate that they have a special function "that is not simply explained as the function that results from their combination" (ibid p.143). Thus, the translator has to adapt the translation as close as it is possible to the TL in order to achieve accuracy in translating collocations.

Translation Transformations

Translation transformation is a small linguistic change that occurs between units in a ST-TT (source text – target text) pair which is called translation shift (Hatim, Munday, 2004, p.26). In the context of translation transformation or translation shift, Catford emphasizes two terms: textual equivalent and formal correspondence where textual equivalent is defined as any TL text or portion of the text which is observed to be the equivalent of a given source language (SL) text or portion of text. Formal correspondence, however, deals with general, non-specific, relationship between elements of two languages; meanwhile, textual equivalence focuses on the relationship that exists between elements in a specific ST-TT pair (Hatim, Munday, 2004, pp.27–28). There are two main types of translation shifts (ref. Fig. 2): level shift and category shift (Baker, Saldanha, 2008, p.272).
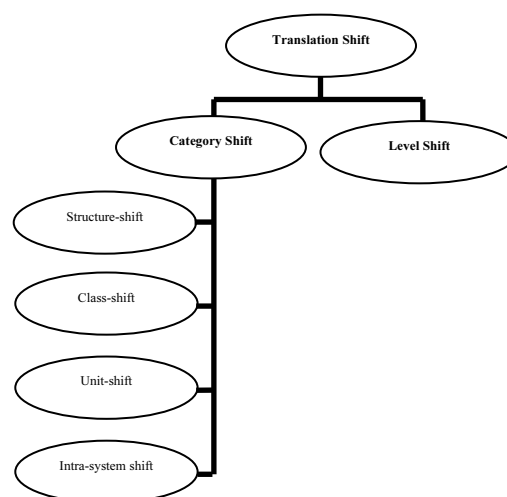
Figure 2. Translation Shifts According to Catford (Baker, Saldanha, 2008, p.272).

Cyrus (2006, p.1240) explains that "level shifts are shifts between grammar and lexis". Meanwhile category shifts are divided into: structure shifts, class shifts, unit shifts and intra-system shifts.

Catford defines structure shift as the grammatical change between the structure of the SL and TL. Meanwhile, class shift is a phenomenon when a word in the SL is translated with a word of a different grammatical class in TL. Unit shift involves changes in rank while inter-system shift occurs internally, within a system, and the change of a term in TL is observed (Baker, Saldanha, 2008, p.272). Further section of the article focuses on the analysis and discusses the results of the research of translation transformations of lexical collocations.

Translation Transformations of English Lexical Collocations in the Texts of Social Sciences

Collocations come in a large variety of forms, thus, noun + noun, adj + noun, verb + noun and verb + adj + noun collocations are selected from the researched articles applying the criterion of structural types of lexical collocations.
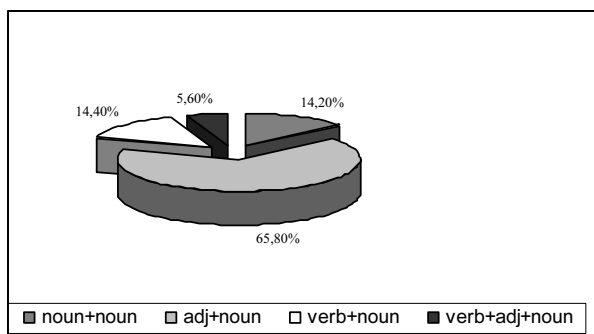

Figure 3. Types of Lexical Collocations.

Figure 3 represents the total number and the frequency of each type of the investigated English lexical collocations, the most frequent being adj + noun collocation (65.8 %). The most important reason of this predominance is that, "adjectives commonly modify nouns, so they add to the informational frequency of registers like academic prose" (Biber et al, 2005, p.187). The second biggest groups of collocations are verb + noun (14.4 %) and noun + noun (14.2 %) types. The verb is one of the parts of speech that is essential for a sentence and is usually acting as a central part of the clause, i.e. the verb usually refers to an action, and meanwhile, a noun is generally a recipient of that action. Verb + adj + noun collocations, however, form only 5.6 % of the researched collocations.

With reference to the distinguished points of Shi (2006), all collocations are translated into Lithuanian. The translation of collocations is grouped into two parts: the first part is dictionary translation; the second is suggested translation (ref. Fig. 4).

The results of the research demonstrate that only 36 % of the collocations are offered dictionary translations.

Further analysis of translation transformations of lexical collocations is based on Catford's distribution of translation shifts (ref. Fig. 2). The analysis demonstrates the frequency of lexical collocations and the translation transformations which occur translating them into Lithuanian.

Translation transformations of lexical collocations are grouped into unit-shift, intra-system shift and class-shift. Structure-shift is not analyzed since the analysis is not focused on grammatical change between the structure of the ST and the TT.
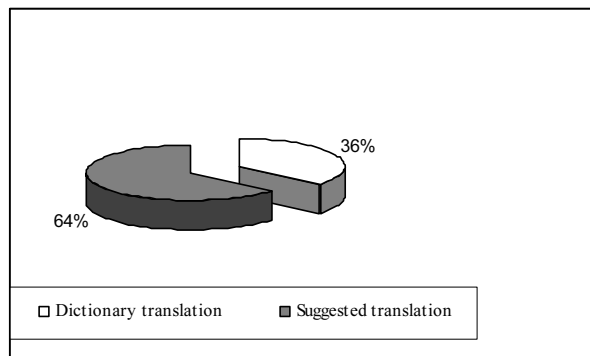

Figure 4. Dictionary and Suggested Translations of Lexical Collocations.

The most common form of translation shift in the research is unit-shift (the shift between word and clause level) which makes 51 % of all translation shifts (ref. Fig. 5).
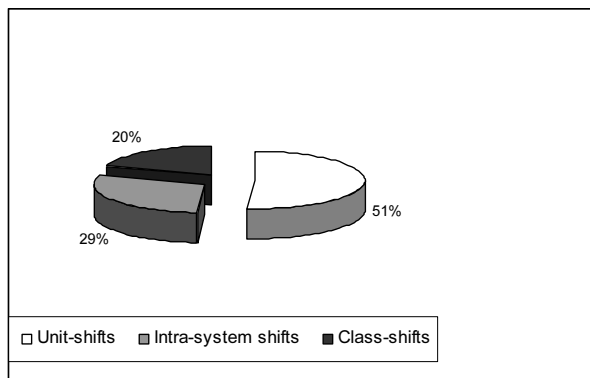

Figure 5. Types of Translation Shifts.

According to Catford, such translation shifts help to achieve the best textual equivalence in translating ST to TT (Baker, Saldanha, 2008, p.271).

Unit shift comprises the largest group of translated lexical collocations. Catford defines it as deviation from formal correspondence in which the translation equivalent of a unit at one rank in the SL is a unit at a different rank in the TL (in Venuti, Baker, 1999, p.145). In the process of translation lexical collocations have transformed from phrase level to word level, e.g., a phrase *post office* in SL becomes a single word *paštas* in TL, *reading room* in SL is translated as *skaitykla* in TL, *business people* in SL is translated as *verslininkai* in TL. Moreover, adj + noun collocation *raw material* in SL is translated as a noun *žaliava* in TL, verb + noun collocation *gain access* in SL has changed into a verb *įeiti* in TL, and a phrase *make sales* in SL is translated as a verb *parduoti* in TL.

Applying unit-shifts, noun + noun and adj + noun collocations have transferred into nouns; verb + noun collocations have become verbs in TL; thus, they have been transferred into single lexical units loosing their collocational characteristics.

The term intra-system shift is used when the SL singular becomes a TL plural and vice versa. During the process of translation intra-system shifts are not very rare (29 %). The majority of the collocations have transformed from

singular category into plural: a noun *interest* in the collocation *interest rate* in SL is in singular but the translation equivalent *palūkanų norma* in TL is in plural; a singular noun *price* in noun + noun collocation *price fixing* in SL becomes a plural noun *kainų fiksavimas* in TL. However, the opposite process is observed as well, e.g., a singular noun *customer* in noun + noun collocation *customer service* in SL is translated in plural *vartotojų tarnyba* in TL.

Class-shifts as defined in Munday (2008, p.61), Baker, Saldanha (2008, p.272) contain shifts from one part of speech to another. Class-shifts comprise 20 % of all analysed translation shifts: using the class-shift translation strategy, a noun in SL is transferred into the adjective as a modifier in TL and the modifier adjective in SL is transferred into a noun in TL: a noun *balance* in noun + noun collocation *balance sheet* in SL becomes the adjective *balansinė* in TL; a noun *government* in noun + noun collocation *government agencies* in SL changes into the adjective *vyriausybinės* in TL; and a noun *bar* in noun + noun collocation *bar codes* in SL transfers into the adjective *brūkšniniai* in TL; the adjective *economic* in adj + noun collocation *economic downturn* in SL becomes a noun *ekonomikos* in TL; the adjective *public* in adj + noun collocation *public affairs* in SL transfers into a noun *valstybės* in TL.

Translation process is complicated and multifaceted, thus, a translator has to meet with different cultural aspects of two languages. The message of TL must represent the closest equivalent of SL message. In order to achieve this, translation transformations are inevitable. Although the findings are necessarily limited, the results of the research show that the most common type of lexical collocations in the analysed material is adj + noun collocations; meanwhile, unit-shift is the most prevailing translation shift to get the best translation equivalent of lexical collocation.

Conclusions

- Collocations include combination of words in a semantic relation that occur frequently in similar contexts. Different types of collocations depend on several factors: the number of words collocations consist of, the combination method and the degree of rigidness or flexibility;

- The results of the research (which is clearly not definitive and has its limitations in the terms of the potential and limitations of the study) indicate that lexical collocations are frequent in the texts of social sciences and the most common type in the analysed texts is adj + noun collocations (65.8 %). Noun + noun collocations form 14.2 %, verb + noun 14.4 %, verb + adj + noun 5.6 % of all analyzed collocations.

- The analysis of the researched data shows that the most common form of translation shift is *unit-shift* (51 %). Some translation equivalents have not remained as collocations and become single lexical units after applying unit-shift.

- *Intra-system* shifts occur quite frequently (29 %); moreover, most of them have changed their morphological category (singular to plural) in the translation of lexical collocations.

- *Class-shifts* make 20 % of all shifts when SL collocations are translated into different grammatical class in TL; furthermore, change of grammatical class transforms the grammatical structure of the translated collocations.

- The results of the research of translation transformations demonstrate that SL collocations very rarely sustain a form of a collocation in TL after the process of translation.

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Leksinių kolokacijų vertimo transformacijos

Santrauka

Straipsnyje analizuojamos angliškų leksinių kolokacijų vertimo į lietuvių kalbą transformacijos socialinių mokslų tekstuose. Dažna vertėjo problema – rasti atitinkamus posakius vertimo kalboje. Originalo ir vertimo kalbos skiriasi kalbiniais ir kultūriniais aspektais, todėl verčiant yra neišvengiama transformacijų.

Tyrimui pasirinkta 771 leksinė kolokacija, kurias verčiant į lietuvių kalbą, yra nagrinėjamos jų vertimo transformacijos, padedančios gauti tinkamiausią vertimo ekvivalentą. Kolokacijos – tai dažnai vartojami stabilūs žodžių junginiai, kuriuos sudarantys žodžiai dažniausiai eina su tam tikra leksema. Jos yra svarbios natūralios kalbos generacijai, gramatiniam nagrinėjimui, lingvistiniams tekstų rinkinių tyrimams, kalbų mokymui / mokymuisi, taip pat ir verčiant. Lingvistai skiria septynias kolokacijų rūšis, tačiau tyrimui pasirinktos keturios dažniausiai pasitaikančios leksinės kolokacijos: daiktavardis + daiktavardis, būdvardis + daiktavardis, veiksmažodis + daiktavardis ir veiksmažodis + būdvardis + daiktavardis.

Tyrimo rezultatai parodė, kad originalo kalbos kolokacijos po vertimo transformacijų vertimo kalboje praranda kolokacijų savybes ir tampa arba savarankišku leksiniu vienetu, arba žodžių junginiu.

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