Translation session 5 & 6

Collocation

Collocation is defined as "semantically arbitrary restrictions which do not follow logically from the propositional meaning of a word". Another way of looking at collocation would be to think of it in terms of the tendency of certain words to co-occur regularly in a given language.

For instance, a cheque is more likely to occur with bank, pay or money. However, meaning cannot always account for collocational patterning. If it did, we might expect carry out, undertake or even perform a visit. Yet, English speakers typically pay a visit, less typically make a visit and are unlikely to perform a visit. Moreover, words which we might think of as synonyms or near-synonyms will often have quite different sets of collocates. English speakers typically break rules but they do not break regulations. They usually talk of wasting time but not of squandering time. Both deliver a verdict and pronounce a verdict are acceptable collocations in English. Likewise, pronounce a sentence is acceptable and means more or less the same as deliver/pronounce a verdict. And yet, deliver a sentence is an unlikely collocation.

The adjectives spotless, flawless and impeccable can be thought of as synonyms or near-synonyms and yet they do not combine freely with the same set of nouns.

When two words collocate, the relationship can hold between all or several of their various forms, combined in any grammatically acceptable order. For example, achieving aims, aims been achieved, achievable aims and the achievement of an aim are all equally acceptable and typical in English. On the other hand, it is often the case that words will collocate with other words in some of their forms but not in others. We bend rules in English but are unlikely to describe rules as unbendable. Instead, we usually talk of rules being inflexible.

It would seem then that the patterns of collocation are largely random and independent of meaning. The same degree of mismatch that can be observed when comparing the collocational patterns of synonyms and near-synonyms within the same language is evident in the collocational patterning of dictionary equivalents/near equivalents in

two languages. For example, the English verb deliver collocates with a number of nouns, for each of which Arabic uses a different verb. The Arabic dictionary equivalent of deliver is يسلم

Deliver a letter يسلم رسالة

Deliver a speech يلقي خطابا

Deliver news ينقل أخبارا

Deliver a blow يوجه ضربة

Deliver a verdict يصدر حكما

Another example:

Heavy rainfall مطرغزير

Heavy fog ضباب كثيف

Heavy sleep نوم عميق

Heavy seas بحار هائجة

Heavy meal وجبة دسمة

Heavy industry صناعة ثقيلة

Differences in collocational patterning among languages are not just a question of using, say, a different verb with a given noun. They can involve totally different ways of portraying an event. Patterns of collocation reflect the preferences of specific language communities for certain modes of expression and certain linguistic configurations; they rarely reflect any inherent order in the world around us.

This is not to say that collocations do not often reflect the cultural setting in which they are embedded. Some collocations are in fact a direct reflection of the material, social, or moral environment in which they occur. This explains why to buy a house in English, but in German it is very rare because the practice of house-buying is very different in the two cultures. Law and order is a common collocation in English; in Arabic a more typical collocation would be القانون والتقاليد أو العرف (law and convention/tradition). The English collocation reflects the high value

that English speakers place on order and the Arabic collocation reflects the high respect accorded by Arabs to the concept of tradition.

Collocational range and markedness

Every word in a language can be said to have a range of items with which it is compatible to a greater or lesser degree. Range here refers to the set of collocates, that is other words, which are typically associated with word in question. Some words have a much broader collocational range than others. The English verb shrug has rather a limited collocational range. It typically occurs with shoulders and does not have a particularly strong link with any other word in English. The verb run, by contrast, has a vast collocational range. Some of its typical collocates are company, business, show, car, life, course, program, car…

Two main factors can influence the collocational range of an item: the first is the level of specificity, the more general a word is the broader its collocational range; the more specific it is, the more restricted its collocational range is. The second factor which determines the collocational range of an item is the number of senses it has. Most words have several senses and they tend to attract a different set of collocates for each sense.

Unlike grammatical statements, statements about collocation are made in terms of what is typical or untypical rather than what is admissible or inadmissible. This means that there is no such thing as an impossible collocation. New and unusual combinations of words occur frequently and we do not necessarily dismiss them as unacceptable. The reason for this is that collocational ranges are not fixed. Words attract new collocates all the time, they do so naturally through processes of analogy or because speakers create unusual collocations on purpose.

Example: compulsive gambler and heavy gambler. The difference between the two is that the first is a common collocation in English whereas the second represents an attempt to extend the range of heavy to include heavy gambler, by analogy with heavy smoker and heavy drinker.

This kind of natural extension of a range is far less striking than marked collocations which involve deliberate confusion of collocational ranges to create new images. A marked collocation is an unusual combination of words, one that challenges our expectations as readers. Marked collocations are often used in fiction, poetry, humor and advertisement precisely for this reason: because they can create unusual images, produce laughter and catch the reader's attention. For instance, an extract of a novel reads "could real peace break out after all?"

War normally breaks out but peace prevails. These unmarked collocations suggest that war is a temporary and undesirable situation and that peace is a normal and desirable one. The deliberate mixing of collocational ranges in the above extract conveys the unexpected image of peace being an abnormal, temporary and possibly undesirable situation.

To sum up, we create new collocations all the time, either by extending an existing range or by deliberately putting together word from different or opposing ranges. As well as being reinforced, the established patterns in a language can therefore be used as a backdrop against which new images and new meanings can be invoked. New colocations often catch on, are reinforced by usage and eventually become part of the standard repertoire of the language.

Metaphors

A metaphor is typically used to describe something, whether concrete or abstract, more concisely, with greater emotional force, and more often more exactly than is possible in literal language. Compare, for instance, the sentence "the president slams politicians" with the more literal "the president harshly criticizes politicians" or the sentence "he is such a rat when faced with difficulties", meaning he is a person who deserts his friends in times of trouble. Of course, an original metaphor is likely to be more expressive than an unoriginal one, but it is also likely to be more imprecise, more open to interpretation.

A metaphor can be defined as a figure of speech in which a word or a phrase is used in a non-basic sense, this non-basic sense suggesting a

likeness or analogy with another more basic sense of the same word or phrase.

Metaphor can give rise to difficulties in translation between any two languages, but where the languages concerned are as relatively different culturally and linguistically as English and Arabic, the difficulties are sometimes quite pronounced.

From the point of view of translation, a useful basic distinction to make is that between lexicalized metaphors and non-lexicalized metaphors. What we mean by lexicalized metaphors are uses of language which are recognizably metaphorical but whose meaning in a particular language is relatively clearly fixed as the word “rat”. In general, we may say that lexicalized metaphors are metaphors whose meanings are given in dictionaries.

In the case of non-lexicalized metaphors, the metaphorical meaning is not clearly fixed but will vary from context to context and has to be worked out by the reader on particular occasions. For instance, the non-lexicalized metaphor “a man is a tree”, which, if used in a context of describing the course of people’s lives, might be interpreted as “the man is like a tree which grows, develops, bear fruits and then loses many of his attractive attribute as the tree loses its branches”. But, in another context, if we say that “Tom is a tree” we might imply that Tom is the type of person whose major psychological features remain hidden.

Because they are not simply relatable to existing linguistic or cultural conventions, original metaphors are difficult to interpret. More specifically, it is necessary to establish the grounds from the context, and in many cases they will be ambiguous.

When it comes to translation, a non-lexicalized metaphor in the SL could be retained as a non-lexicalized metaphor having the same or nearly the same vehicle in the TL. Ex:

كانت البيوت تضاء بالقناديل قبل غزو الكهرباء

Houses were lit by lamps before the invasion of electricity

Here we reproduced the same image in the TL and this is mainly done in literary genres, such as poetry, because they deviate from the usual linguistic norm of expression, so the translator might opt to keep the figurative language and the vivid imagery in the TT.

Another Ex:

القمر لا يستدير بطنه في سمائنا بشكل طبيعي

The belly of the moon does not grow round in our sky naturally

Or we might converse the metaphor into sense and explain it:

There is no natural full moon in our sky

Another way of translating metaphors is replacing them with a standard TL image. Ex:

When you are old and grey

عندما تشيخ ويشتعل رأسك شيبا

We have to differentiate between an idiom which is an expression that conveys something different from its literal meaning, and that cannot be guessed from the meanings of its individual words and a metaphor which is a phrase used to describe one thing but unexpectedly was utilized to describe something different.