PROBLEMS IN INTERPRETING COLLOCATIONS FROM MACEDONIAN INTO ENGLISH AND VICE VERSA

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This paper talks about language propensity to transfer information and connect it to the act of interpreting, explaining what interpreting is and distinguishing between consecutive and simultaneous interpreting. It goes on to introduce the concept of collocations by defining and classifying them, and providing examples for each type so as to make the distinction clearer. It connects proper use of collocations and better language user competence, imperative for interpreters. Then it presents and covers an original research conducted with university students of consecutive and simultaneous interpreting from Macedonian into English language and vice versa analysing the students' knowledge and proper use of collocations connected to two specific topics – economy and politics. It also exemplifies the different types of mistakes the students made in their renditions and analyses the sample of collocations, specifically observing the most and least common types of collocation structures present in the sample of examples. Finally, the paper concludes that around 50% of the analysed collocations are incorrectly rendered by the students, which stresses the importance of introducing collocations in the curricula of interpreting, therefore language learning as well.

Keywords: collocations, language learning, research, mistakes, interpretation

ПРОБЛЕМИ ПРИ ИНТЕРПРЕТИРАЊЕТО КОЛОКАЦИИ ОД МАКЕДОНСКИ НА АНГЛИСКИ И ОБРАТНО

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Во овој труд се говори за особеноста на јазикот да пренесува информации и ова се поврзува со чинот на толкување, така што се објаснува толкувањето и се прави разлика меѓу консекутивното и симултаното толкување. Понатаму, се воведува концептот за колокации преку нивно дефинирање и класифицирање, а дадени се и примери за секој одделен вид колокација, со цел да се направи јасна разлика меѓу нив. Во трудот се поврзува правилната употреба на колокациите и подобрата компетентност на корисниците на јазици, клучна за толкувачите. Потоа е претставено и опфатено оригинално истражување спроведено со студенти по консекутивно и симултано толкување од македонски на англиски јазик и обратно, во кое се анализира колку студентите ги знаат и правилно ги користат колокациите поврзани со две конкретни области – економијата и политиката. Исто така, дадени се примери за различните видови грешки што ги прават студентите во своите толкувања и се анализира примерокот колокации, поконкретно се разгледуваат најчестите и најретките видови структури колокации присутни во примерокот. Најпосле, во трудот се заклучува дека околу 50 % од анализираните колокации се погрешно протолкувани од студентите, што ја истакнува значајноста од воведување на колокациите во наставните програми за толкување, оттука и при учењето јазици.

Клучни зборови: колокации, учење јазик, истражување, грешки, толкување

1 Introduction

The first basic language property pivotal for the portrayal of humankind is the ability of language to express human's inner thoughts, their ideas and concepts. Humans use language to get their intentions across to other people and this is probably the second basic language property – human language is a prerequisite for the universal propensity of human culture and that is transmission of information.

The explosive growth of globalization, as well as regional integration has propelled the need for people who do not speak each other's languages to still be able to understand one another. So when it comes to the above mentioned transmission of information from one language to another, what we are actually talking about is the conveying of understanding which is best done by interpretation, either consecutive or simultaneous.

2 Interpretation

The *Webster's New World Dictionary of American English* describes interpretation as: "the act of explaining the meaning of; making understandable" and an interpreter as: "a person who interprets; specifically a person whose work is translating a foreign language orally, as in a conversation between people speaking different languages".

The difference between consecutive interpretation and simultaneous interpretation is that during consecutive interpretation the interpreter first listens to the speaker, then takes notes of what they have just heard and then finally reproduces the speech in another (usually referred to as the target) language, whereas in simultaneous interpretation the interpreters listen to the speaker through earphones and while speaking into a microphone reproduce the speech in another (i.e. target) language as it is being delivered in the speaker's (usually referred to as the source) language.

3 English Collocations

The *Cambridge International Dictionary of English (CIDE)* defines collocation as: "a word or phrase which is frequently used with another word or phrase, in a way that sounds correct to people who have spoken the language all their lives, but might not be expected from the meaning." However, the term collocation was introduced into the world of linguistics in the 1950s by the English linguist John Rupert Firth who defined collocations as "the common co-occurrence of particular words" (Firth 1962: 195).

Here an important distinction must be made between collocations, which as we saw are a combination of lexical words, and colligations where a lexical word is tied to a grammatical word, or as Hoey (2005) puts it "a kind of grammatical 'collocation'" (ibid, 42). This distinction is crucial since as regards errors, research conducted by McCretton and Rider points out that lexical mistakes are the most serious mistakes when it comes to language use, since we can understand a speaker when they use an incorrect tense, but not if they use a wrong word. Furthermore,

mistakes in collocations are the most frequent when it comes to non-native speakers, since mistakes regarding collocations are part of lexical mistakes.

In the past few decades research into the field of language learning has pointed out the benefits of learning collocations and these include increasing learners' language competence, enhancing learners' communicative competence and, quite importantly, improving the naturalness or the quality of being or sounding like a native-like speaker. It should be emphasised that producing and understanding collocations are two quite distinct concepts. While any non-native speaker will probably have no difficulties in recognizing and understanding a collocation, they will find it much more difficult to use a collocation or select the appropriate term. This can also be considered one of the most serious stumbling blocks in language learning.

Nattinger (1980) stated that "language production consists of piecing together the ready-made units appropriate for particular situations, and that comprehension relies on knowing which of these patterns to predict in these situations" (ibid, 341). He also claimed that collocations can help learners in committing these words to memory and defining the semantic area of a word, and can permit learners to know and to predict what kinds of words would be found together. Moreover, he gave the reasons for teaching lexical phrases, most important of which was that teaching lexical phrases (collocations with pragmatic functions) will lead to fluency in speaking and writing because they shift learners' concentration from individual words to larger structures of the discourse and to the social aspects of the interaction.

When it comes to teaching collocations in the classrooms, teachers need to explain to students that even though using incorrect collocations in speech or sentences can be syntactically (i.e. grammatically) correct and that any native speaker of English would most certainly understand the meaning of the combination of words, the combination itself is unlikely or "unnatural". This means that some words are more likely to combine with specific other words to form natural-sounding combinations, while other types of combinations are simply not found in the language even though they would be possible and understandable, at least theoretically.

4 Classification of collocations

There are many criteria according to which collocations are categorized. For instance, Cowie's *free* (or *open*) *collocations* which allow substitution of either of their elements without semantic change in the other elements (e.g. *business deal*, *good deal*, *long-term deal*) and *restricted collocations* in which one element is used in a figurative or specialized sense (e.g. *command respect*, *commit suicide*). Then there is the division of collocations into *lexical*, those that involve two items belonging to open (non-finite) classes as are verbs, nouns or adjectives (e.g. *booming economy*, *get paid*, *keep a secret*), and *grammatical collocations* that involve one element from an open class and an element from a closed class as is a preposition (e.g. *in business*, *to be afraid that*). Or Hill's categorization of collocations (see Table 1) depending on how closely their constituents are associated with each other.

Table 1. Hill's categorization of collocations
1. Unique collocations (e.g. *to foot the bill*, *to shrug your shoulders*): the verb is not used with any other nouns.
2. Strong collocations (e.g. *rancid butter*): the words are very closely associated with each other, e.g. rancid is most commonly used with *butter* or *bacon*;
3. Weak collocations (e.g. *money problems*): are made up of words that collocate with a wide range of other words, these combinations are completely free and predictable;
4. Medium-strength collocations (e.g. *to make a mistake*, *to hold a meeting*): These are neither free nor completely fixed.

In this paper, however, we will follow the classification of collocations proposed by Benson et al. (1986 ix-xxiii) (see Table 2) which, in general, takes into account the elements that the collocations contain.

Table 2. Classification of collocations proposed by Benson et al. (1986 ix-xxiii)
1. Verb + noun (e.g. *draw up a contract*, *to regain control*)
2. Noun + verb (e.g. *an opportunity arises*, *standards slip*)
3. Adjective + noun (e.g. *consumer goods, quick sale*)
4. Adverb + adjective (e.g. *highly economical, strictly businesslike*)
5. Verb + adverb (e.g. *invest heavily, export illegally*)
6. Noun + noun (e.g. *a package salary, a snippet of information*)
7. Verb + prepositional phrase (e.g. *to ask for a discount, to be busy with a customer*)

Categorizing collocations aids the learning process for students, yet also the teaching process for language instructors. It familiarizes the students with the possible collocation structures which in turn helps them make fewer mistakes. Most importantly, it makes students more aware of collocations and their very frequent use by language users.

5 Research methodology

Research conducted during the academic year 2020/21 (two semesters) at the Department of Translation and Interpreting, Faculty of Philology "Blaze Koneski" – Skopje, University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" in the Republic of North Macedonia shows that little attention is paid to teaching collocations as a result of which students make significant errors in interpreting them. Namely, the participants in the research were comprised of seven third year undergraduate students taking the *Consecutive interpreting from Macedonian into English and vice versa* course, as well as three fourth year undergraduate students taking the *Simultaneous interpreting from Macedonian into English and vice versa* course. Over a period of two semesters the students' renditions of the speeches that were being worked on during the classes were recorded and analysed. The speeches themselves were usually on topics concerning economy and politics. Unsurprisingly, since according to Altenberg (1991) "roughly 70% of the running words in the corpus form part of recurrent word combinations of some kind" (ibid, 128), the speeches had an abundance of collocations connected to these two topics mentioned above. It is important to also note that in order to obtain results that are realistic when it comes to students'

awareness and knowledge of collocations, the students themselves were not informed beforehand about collocations or about the content of the research.

This was a contrastive research that looked at collocations referring to the topics of economy and politics used in Macedonian speeches and how/whether these same collocations were rendered into English by the students. It compared and analysed the collocation structures in both languages, and furthermore focused on L1 interference (or the transfer of linguistic features form one language to another, usually from one's native language to the language they are learning).

6 Results

The research was carried out on a sample of 185 collocations originally in Macedonian which the students later interpreted into English language. The collocations were all part of different speeches (a total of seven speeches) and within the speeches the collocations were not emphasised in any way, i.e. the students were not made aware of them before beginning their interpretations. This was done so that they would be unbiased when it came to rendering the collocations so as to obtain realistic results concerning the students' familiarity and understanding of collocations, as well as to see whether and if so, what types of mistakes they make while working with collocations from their native language into their first or major foreign language, in this case English. The sample of collocations is all to do with the topics of economy and politics (unquestionably, there are other collocations pertaining to other topics in the analysed speeches themselves, but they are not included in this research).

An important aspect of the research to note is that the rendered speeches, and collocations in them, are obtained through students' oral interpretations and not written translations. This is significant because, as the term *interpretation* itself implies, the process involves interpretation techniques which usually lead to target sentences which are shorter than the original ones or clauses which are left out in the rendition, meaning that it is to be expected that some of the collocations are omitted, and sometimes even intentionally so as to abbreviate the target sentence, not necessarily because the student(s) did not know the meaning of the collocation or how to interpret it into English. That being said, there is also the possibility that the student(s) purposely neglected a collocation or several of them in the target speech because they were not familiar with them. Nevertheless, since the goal of interpreting is to express something that has (just) been said in one language into another, the quality of any rendition is judged by how native-like the interpreter's target language is. Since good command of collocations is directly linked to the quality of naturalness, this command is ever more significant not only for interpreters, but language users in general as well.

From a total of 185 collocations, more than half are of the *adjective + noun* type (3rd type), 108 collocations or just over 58% of all the collocations in the sample. Next in number are the *noun + noun* type of collocations (6th type) or 45 examples (24.32%). The *verb + noun* type of collocations (1st type) take up just over 10% (19 collocations in total). Then follow the *noun + verb* type of collocations (2nd type) with 9 examples or 4.86%. Only 2 examples of the *verb + prepositional phrase*

type of collocations (7ᵗʰ type) were found in the sample (1.08%). Finally, the least represented are the *adverb + adjective* (4ᵗʰ type) and *verb + adverb* (5ᵗʰ type) types of collocations or only 1 collocation per type (0.54%).
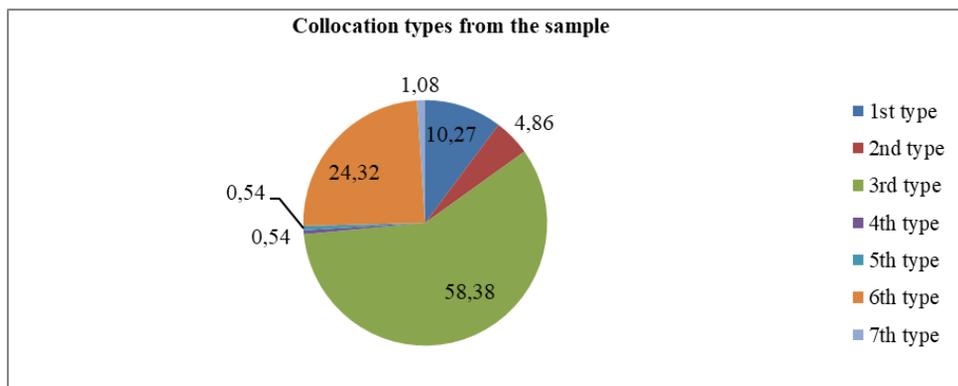
Figure 1. The representation of collocation types from the sample of examples

The results from the analysis are presented separately for consecutive and simultaneous interpreting since their nature is quite different. It means that in consecutive interpreting the students may more often opt to avoid or miss out the collocation in their notes and thus not render it, or render it but descriptively, depending on the context. Whereas in simultaneous interpreting the students do not have the possibility of avoiding or replacing the collocations with other structures as much, since as mentioned above, collocations form a large part of the corpus (text or speech) and the nature of simultaneous interpreting imposes less time to analyse than does consecutive interpreting. Consequently the students either recognize the collocation in the source language and know how to interpret it in the target language or they do not and will either render it incorrectly or make an effort to avoid it.

6.1 Consecutive interpreting results

The results from the analysis of the consecutive interpretations of the sample of collocations show that the students managed to render almost all of the collocations, or 96.2% of them. It is important to note that again due to the nature of interpretation, the collocations which have not been rendered might not be a result of students not knowing how to translate them, but rather a different construction they might have used in the target language in which the collocation was omitted.

However, this percentage does not also imply that all of their renditions were correct. Marginally over half or only 54% of the collocations from the source language were correctly translated into the target language. Mistakes vary from improper use of the singular or plural forms like *imports and exports, to word forms that do not exist as is *investitions, to incorrect use of words which form part of the collocation like for example *electrical crisis instead of energy crisis, *economic

stabilization instead of *economic stability*, or **people with disorders* instead of *people with disabilities*.

L1 interference is also noticeable among the examples, to wit the translation of *на протести излегоа* with **went on a protest* and *здравствената заштита* with **the health protection, *health care services* or **health care system*.

6.2 Simultaneous interpreting results

The analysis of the simultaneous interpretations of the collocations shows similar results. Less than 3 percent of the collocations were not rendered, or 97.3% of the sample collocations were interpreted in the target language, which is a rather high percentage. As mentioned above, this might be due to a different sentence construction the students used in which the collocation is interpreted differently; for example descriptively and not as a translation of the actual collocation used in the original speech.

Nonetheless, mistakes were present among these interpretations as well. Similar to the results of the analysis of the consecutive interpretations, the percentage of the correct simultaneous renditions of the students is just under 52%. Namely, among the many mistakes there is the use of nonexistent words as *investition instead of *foreign investment* and **demographical groups* instead of *demographic groups*. As with the consecutive renditions, here again we have an incorrect use of words which form part of the collocation like *energetic crisis instead of *energy crisis*, *economic healing instead of *economic recovery*, **increasing taxation* instead of *increasing taxes*, *economic rise and **economic increase* instead of *economic growth*, and *first quartal instead of *first quarter*.

Concerning L1 interference encountered among the examples of translated collocations form the simultaneous interpretations, the situation is the same as with the consecutive interpretations. There is transfer of linguistic features from the students' native Macedonian into the translations of the collocations into English language. Following are some of these examples: *трошоците за живот* - **cost of life, здравствената заштита* - **healthcare protection, општата популација* - **basic population, животната средина* - **the living environment, владеење на правото* - **right ruling, Министерството за финансии* - **the Ministry of Finances, креваење на свесноста* - **increasing the consciousness*, and more.

7 Conclusion

The analysis has highlighted that the students are not familiar enough with the importance of collocations in general and that they do not have enough specific knowledge regarding collocations and their meaning, since both groups of students had interpreted half of the collocations incorrectly.

An interesting result from this analysis is the fact that the most frequent type of collocation found in this sample of collocations, and that is the *adjective+noun* type of collocation, is rather important when it comes to interpretation into English. Specifically, Macedonian is an analytical language whereas English is a syntactic language. Often, what is expressed in a more descriptive form in Macedonian can

be interpreted into English using only an adjective and noun cluster, which in turn aids interpretation (both consecutive and simultaneous) since it conveys the meaning of the original, yet in a shorter form; as goes the famous interpreters adage 'to kiss it', or *to keep it short and simple*. Were the student interpreters to have been aware of the presence, importance and use of collocations, they would not only have delivered better renditions when it comes to correct translations, but they also could have used that knowledge to work on better sentence structures - ones that are more compact and have greater cohesion.

Furthermore, as already discussed above, better knowledge of collocations will help students sound more native-like (naturalness), which is more than welcome when it comes to interpretation, again both consecutive or simultaneous.

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