

Collocations in translated language: description, methodology, applications

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The search for collocations (or "words that tend to go together") has always been a central concern of corpus linguistics, going back to Firth's inspiring theorization (1956) and Sinclair's early applied work (Jones and Sinclair 1974). Somewhat surprisingly, limited attention has been devoted to this issue within the corpus-based approach to translation studies (CBTS), possibly due to the difficulty of defining collocation operationally in the first place, and then providing a framework for its (cross-linguistic) analysis. Yet, if the successful handling of collocations and collocational exploitation is a fundamental aspect of translation (as well as communicative) competence, as suggested e.g. by Baker (1992), then collocations should figure prominently among the concerns of CBTS.

In this talk I review current approaches to the study of collocations in translation, focusing mainly on descriptive and methodological issues, but also touching upon more applied aspects. I then propose a method that relies on a composite set of corpus resources including monolingual comparable and parallel translation corpora along with non-translational monolingual reference corpora. This makes it possible to bypass some of the data-sparseness problems faced by previous studies (e.g. Danielsson 2001). Results obtained from corpora of texts from different genres are compared, that highlight different trends within different discourse and professional communities with regard to the use of target language collocations.

At the descriptive/theoretical level, implications for the debate over universals, laws and norms of translator behaviour are considered (Toury 1995, Pym 2008). Methodologically, it is argued that follow up studies have to be conducted that aim to evaluate the impact of different reference corpora and/or different statistical measures of collocativeness on the results obtained - pilot experiments in this area are presented. Lastly, taking a more applied perspective, didactic implications are discussed.

References

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