COLLOCATIONS AND TRANSLATION ERRORS MADE BY INDONESIAN LEARNERS OF ENGLISH

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Abstract

A systematic and in-depth analysis of English collocations and their Indonesian translation errors is somewhat rare. This study which was conducted based on an analysis of English texts and students' translations presents empirical data to verify the observations that Indonesian EFL learners produce "unnatural" translations for the respective English word combinations. A total number of 83 collocations from 15 different types were found in three texts; 57 collocations - 43 belong to the syntagmatic type and 14 to the paradigmatic type - were translated quite well, whereas 26 collocations, which all belong to the syntagmatic type, were proved to be the most problematic ones. The findings suggest the direct teaching of collocations and their respective Indonesian equivalents is necessary.

Keywords: translation, collocation, syntagmatic/paradigmatic collocation.

INTRODUCTION

It cannot be denied that translation is truly a significant part in learning a foreign language. In order to get to know a foreign language like English better, students are often demanded to be able to translate English texts idiomatically. In general, a translator ideally aims at producing a translation work which is typical in the target language, while at the same time, it should preserve the meaning associated with the source language. Catford (1965:20) states that translation is the replacement of the textual material in one language (source language) by equivalent textual material in another language (target language).
On the other hand, the Verb + Object Noun and Verb + Verb Noun, which emphasize more on actions, are likely to occur in a political statement as in text 3 and in narration as in text 1 rather than in an article of scientific nature as in text 2.

The paradigmatic type of Antonyms Actions appears with a total number of 4 occurrences – twice in text 3, once in text 1 and 2. Meanwhile, the Antonyms Qualities appears 3 times – once in each text. The Hierarchies Kinship is only found once in text 1 and 2, which are related to family or educational matters.

The syntagmatic type of Adverb + Adjective, Countable Noun + of + Mass Noun, and paradigmatic type of Synonyms Inclusive of Hierarchies of Genus/Species/Sub-species only appear once in text 2 and 3. On the other hand, the Verb + Adverb/Adjective type only appears in text 1 and 3 (once in each text). There are also several types of collocations which appear only once, namely the syntagmatic type of Subject + Verb and the paradigmatic type of Antonyms Objects (both in text 1); syntagmatic type of Adverb + Past Participle used Adjectivally and paradigmatic type of Synonyms Synecdoche (both in text 2); and paradigmatic type of Synonyms Metonymy in text 3.

To find out which types of collocations pose problems for the students, the respective Indonesian equivalent for each collocation is listed. The students’ translations are analyzed and the proportion correct for each collocation is counted.

In text 1, the Adjective + Noun type of ‘demanding ways’, ‘a terrible tragedy’, and ‘bizarre behavior’ becomes problematic with a respective proportion correct of 18.75%, 37.5%, and 50%. It was surprising to learn that 5 out of 16 students did not try to translate ‘demanding ways’, so this concept must have been totally unknown to them. The respective Indonesian equivalent for this collocation is ‘cara-cara yang memaksa’. An attempt was made to relate it to the narrative context rather than leave it blank that resulted in an unnatural Indonesian translation (*perbuatannya selama ini, *permintaan ibunya, *cara mertuanya memerintah, *perlakuan ibunya, *sikap yang buruk). Two students only translated the adjective while ignoring the noun as obvious in *tuntutan-tuntutannya, *permintaannya. This to some extent depicts confusion in determining word classes (*caranya menuntut).

In translating ‘a terrible tragedy’, the students faced a problem in finding an appropriate Indonesian equivalent of the word ‘tragedy’, as shown in several errors where it was translated into *kejadian and *peristiwa. This was rather surprising as the word ‘tragedy’ itself is quite common in
Indonesian language. As for the adjective 'terrible', although 'mengerikan' is actually an appropriate equivalent, it is considered less exact than 'mengenaskan'. Other inappropriate versions include *buruk, *menyedihkan, *tak terduga. Another finding depicts ignoring the adjective, translating the noun only (i.e. *sungguh suatu tragedi). A typical transfer error occurred where tragedy was incorrectly translated into a similar but different concept in the receptor language (*tragis).

Errors in translating 'bizzare behavior' were caused by the students' inability to find an appropriate Indonesian equivalent of the noun 'behavior' (i.e. perilaku) as they translated it into *perbuatan, *perlakuanannya, *peristiwa, *hal, *tingkah, and *kelakuan. One student ignored the adjective 'bizzare' thus, produced a translation error *sikap petani ini.

The previous problematic type is then followed by the Verb + Verb Noun type of 'mumble a reply' with its proportion correct of 25% and the Subject + Verb type of 'the mule reared up' with a proportion correct of 31.25%. The errors the students made in translating 'mumble a reply' are quite varied. The first tendency was translating the verb only while ignoring the noun as obvious in errors *mengomel-ngomel, *akan mengomel, *menggerutu, and *bergumam. While doing this, the students also had problems in finding an appropriate Indonesian equivalent of 'mumble' (i.e. menggumamkan). This is supported by the second tendency, that was translating the whole phrase but did not find the appropriate Indonesian equivalent of the verb as shown in several errors where 'mumble' was translated into *membisikkan, *mengkomat-kamitkan, *berkomat-kamit, *bergumam, and *menggumam. The last two also depicted problems in using intransitive and transitive verbs, which in this case should have been the me–kan combination with 'gumam'. The very subtle distinction between 'komat-kamit' and 'gumam' also posed a problem for the students. As the former is an intransitive verb, it cannot be combined with a noun. It is also interesting to note that the noun 'reply' (i.e. jawaban) was incorrectly translated into *kalimat yang sama, *membalas, *menjawab, *balasan, and *mengulangnya. Such errors also depict problems in differentiating word classes, in this case between the verb and the noun.

The errors in translating 'the mule reared up' must have been caused because it is a totally unknown concept. The word 'mule' was translated into *kuda, *kuda betina, *kuda poni, *keledai, *anak kuda, and *anak keledai. Meanwhile, the verb 'reared up' should have been translated into mengangkat kedua kaki depannya, or berjingkrak. However, some of the students could not even find an appropriate Indonesian equivalent and translated it in such inappropriate versions as *mendepak, *mengamuk,
Looking at the errors, one might say that 'keledai' is actually acceptable as this term seems to be more familiar rather than the word 'bagal'.

In text 2, the students seemed to face difficulties in translating nine collocations of Adjective + Noun namely 'intense dispute', 'home-schooling families', 'political dispute', 'home-schooling movement', 'recent figures', 'a good idea', 'teaching techniques', 'educational alternative', and 'small communities' with their respective proportion correct 12.5%, 18.75%, 18.75%, 25%, 25%, 25%, 31.25%, 43.75%, and 43.75%. While 3 students did not try to translate 'intense dispute', the errors varied. It is interesting to note that even though they translated the whole phrase, they did not get an appropriate Indonesian equivalent of the adjective 'intense' (i.e. sengit), as it was translated into *kuat, *hebat, and *politikus dan masyarakat. The noun 'dispute' (i.e. pertikaian) was translated into *topik, *perselisihan, *perdebatan, and *pembicaraan. The key here lies in the word 'dispute', which in this context should have been translated into 'pertikaian'. The home-schooling movement is no longer being discussed but it has created two big groups, the pro and the contra side which argued and defended themselves strongly as the right side. The totally unknown concept of 'home-schooling' in 'home-schooling families' posed problems for the students. As a result, they could not find an appropriate Indonesian equivalent for the adjective 'home-schooling' as shown in *sekolah di rumah, *kegiatan pendidikan di rumah, *pendidikan rumah, and *sekolah rumahan. The second mistranslation happened as the students changed the form of the adjective 'home-schooling' into the Indonesian relative clause *yang sekolah di rumah, and verbs *belajar di rumah, and *bersekolah di rumah. Overtranslation happened as the students added verbs which did not relate to the collocation as shown in the error *yang melakukan pendidikan, *yang memilih home-schooling. It is quite shocking to find out that the students could not translate the noun 'families' into the appropriate Indonesian equivalent keluarga-keluarga, as shown by translation errors *anak-anak, *para pelajar. The error *bersekolah di rumah occurred as the students ignored translating the noun 'families'.

Similarly, when trying to translate 'political dispute', the students failed to find the appropriate Indonesian equivalent of the noun 'dispute', as shown in translation errors *topik, *pokok pembicaraan, *suatu masalah, *perdebatan, and *kehebatan. Confusion about word classes appeared as the students mistranslated the adjective 'political' into Indonesian nouns *politik, *sistem politik, and *para politikus. While doing this, the students seemed to still have been influenced by the word 'intense' in the previous
collocation that they translated the noun ‘dispute’ into *kuat and *kuatnya.

For the next collocation, the errors that the students made in translating ‘home-schooling movement’ depicted the same problems as in translating ‘home-schooling families’. The totally unknown concept of ‘home-schooling’ was translated into several inappropriate Indonesian equivalents of *sekolah di rumah, *pendidikan yang diterima di rumah, *bersekolah di rumah, *sekolah rumahan, *home-schooling, *pembelajaran di rumah, and *belajar di rumah. It is surprising that several students were not able to translate the familiar word ‘movement’ resulting in translation errors *arah langkah, *kegiatan, *pergeseran, and *perkembangan. The translation error *sekolah rumahan occurred as the students simply ignored the noun ‘movement’.

In translating ‘recent figures’, the students failed to find an appropriate Indonesian equivalent for the noun ‘figures’ as shown in several errors where it was translated into *jumlah angka, *perhitungan, *jumlah, *takoh-takoh, *komentator, *skala perhitungan, *angka, *diagram, and *gambaran. In this respect, to find the appropriate Indonesian equivalents, the students should have made use of a context which showed that ‘figures’ was related to the data. To relate this to people, i.e. ‘takoh-takoh’ and ‘komentator’ were inappropriate. Free translation occurred as the students added a verb in the translation that they made as can be seen in the translation errors *yang dilakukan and *mengemukakan.

The very subtle distinctions between ‘baik’, ‘bagus’, and ‘cemerlang’ were posed a problem for the students when they translated the collocation ‘a good idea’. However, here the most appropriate Indonesian equivalent of the adjective ‘good’ is ‘cemerlang’, as it collocates with the word ‘idea’.

It is quite surprising to learn that in translating the next collocation ‘teaching techniques’, the students failed to translate the noun ‘techniques’ into ‘teknik’ as shown in translation errors *cara and *strategi. Another problem occurred when they translated the adjective ‘teaching’ as shown in translation errors *mengajarnya, *belajar, and *mengajar.

The next collocation ‘educational alternatives’ is problematic because the students misplaced the adjective ‘educational’ and the noun ‘alternative’. Here, the appropriate Indonesian equivalent changes the adjective ‘educational’ into a noun in Indonesian ‘pendidikan’ and vice versa, the noun ‘alternatives’ is changed into an Indonesian adjective of ‘alternatif’. However, the word ‘pendidikan’ comes before ‘alternatif’. The problem appeared as the students changed the position of the collocation into *alternatif pendidikan or *alternatif dari pendidikan. To some extent these two translations might be accepted, but here they are considered less appro-
appropriate. Inappropriateness also appeared as the students could not find the most appropriate Indonesian equivalent of the noun ‘alternative’ as shown in the translation errors *pilihan, *cara lain, and *suatu cara.

A problem in determining the appropriate Indonesian equivalent of the noun ‘communities’ resulted in an inappropriate translation of the collocation ‘small communities’, where it was translated into *kelompok and *perkumpulan.

The Countable Noun + of + Mass Noun type of ‘a topic of dispute’ which has a 12.5% proportion correct and the Verb + Object Noun of ‘building a consensus’ with its 12.5% of proportion correct also become problematic for students. The inability to interpret the meaning of ‘dispute’ proved to lead to the next problem in translating the phrase ‘a topic of dispute’. A majority of the errors depicted confusion in determining word classes as obvious in the translation errors *hangat diperdebatkan, *masih menjadi perdebatan, *hebat, *sangat kuat, and *hangat. The fact that *hebat was chosen by four students and *sangat kuat by five students is worth noting. This seemed to have been influenced by the word ‘intense’ in the previous combination. As for the translation error *sebuah topic yang hangat, it proved to be a good guess since in Indonesian ‘topik’ collocates with the word ‘hangat’. Hence, the student made use of background knowledge rather than attempting to comprehend the context as a whole.

Although the students translated the whole phrase of ‘building a consensus’, they still could not find the appropriate Indonesian equivalent of the verb ‘building’. Therefore, they made translation errors such as *membangun, *mencapai, and *melalui. Even though the verb ‘building’ actually can be translated into ‘membangun’, it is considered less appropriate because in collocation with the noun ‘consensus’, a more appropriate translation of ‘building’ is ‘membuat’. While doing this, two students changed the verb ‘building’ into the Indonesian noun *pembuatan and one into *pembentukan. The next mistranslation occurred as the students mixed up the affixes me- and me-kan in describing the process of making something with affixes ter- referring to the final result of an action e.g. *terbentuknya and *terbangunnya. The translation error *tanpa persetujuan umum occurred as a student ignored the verb ‘building’. Some translation errors occurred as the students overlapped the respective Indonesian equivalent ‘kesepakatan’ with *persetujuan in translating the noun ‘consensus’. The word *persetujuan cannot be used here since it is an appropriate Indonesian equivalent for the English noun ‘agreement’. The Indonesian equivalent *konsensus which is often used in TV news or newspaper reports cannot be used here because the word ‘konsensus’ in Indonesian is usually
related to governmental matters.

The *Adjective + Noun* type seems to still be the most problematic type as in text 3, there are 4 collocations of this type namely ‘common interests’, ‘necessary action’, ‘strong Indonesia’, and ‘democratic societies’ which proved to be problems for the students with percentages of proportion correct of 12.5%, 18.75%, 37.5%, and 50%. For the first collocation, the adjective ‘common’ was translated into *umum* and *sama*. This was caused by a subtle distinction in meaning carried by the adjective ‘common’, i.e. ‘umum’, ‘sama’, ‘bersama’. The last is an appropriate equivalent to translate the collocation. Two students failed to find an appropriate equivalent of the noun ‘interests’, which they translated into *bertujuan.*

The adjective ‘necessary’ in ‘necessary action’ (i.e. *tindakan yang tepat*) could be interpreted as ‘penting’, ‘tepat’, or ‘diperlukan’. This posed problems for the students where it was inappropriately translated into *penting, *sesuai, and *perlu.* Similarly, the noun ‘action’ was improperly translated into *langkah* and *aksi* instead of ‘tindakan’.

It is surprising to find that the simple combination of *Adjective + Noun* collocation ‘strong Indonesia’ could pose a problem for the students. While six students could not determine the word class and hence translated the adjective ‘strong’ into *kekuatan*, four students simply gave up and left it unfinished. Similarly, for the collocation ‘democratic societies’ (i.e. *masyarakat demokratis*), the problem in finding an appropriate Indonesian equivalent for the adjective ‘democratic’ led to the translation error *demokrasi.* Four students translated ‘societies’ into *kehidupan* instead of ‘masyarakat’.

Most of the students also found difficulties in translating the *Verb + Object Noun* type of ‘damaging industry’, ‘enable authorities’, and ‘implementing laws’ with their respective percentage of proportion correct of 12.5%, 25%, and 31.2%. Problems in selecting exact words were depicted in translating the verb ‘damaging’ (i.e. *menghancurkan/merugikan*), as can be seen in the translation errors *merusak, *berakibat buruk,* and *memperburuk.*

Problems in finding the exact equivalent of ‘authorities’ in the combination ‘enable authorities’ are shown in such versions as *kuasa, *yang berkuasa, *pihak yang berwajib, and *orang-orang yang berkuasa,* instead of ‘pihak yang berwenang’. Totally unknown, this concept was not translated, resulting in the translation error *memungkinkan disetujuinya.* The verb ‘enable’ also became a problem for the students, since three of them mistranslated it into *memberi* and two into *memampukan.* The former clearly resulted from guessing ‘authorities’ to be *kuasa,* so the appropri-
ate combination would be *memberi*.

The tendency of translating the noun ‘laws’ literally into *hukum* resulted in errors in translating the *Verb + Object Noun* combination of ‘implementing laws’ (i.e. *menerapkan undang-undang*). The translation error *menanamkan hukum* occurred, as the students did not realize that in Indonesian the noun ‘hukum’ cannot collocate with the verb ‘menanamkan’. The translation error *pelaksanaan hukum* was made by five students and occurred as they got confused in determining word classes, hence translating it into a noun instead of a verb.

Among other problematic collocations are *Verb + Adverb/Adjective* type of ‘passing democratically’ which has a 0% proportion correct indicating that this item is a very difficult one, *Verb + Verb Noun* type of ‘discourage investment’ with a 31.25% proportion correct, and *Adverb + Adjective* type of ‘particularly vulnerable’ with its 31.25% proportion correct. The collocation ‘passing democratically’ posed problems for the students in finding an appropriate Indonesian equivalent for the verb ‘passing’ as shown in the translation errors *melaksanakan, *meninggalkan, *memberlakukan, and *menjalankan*. Here, the verb ‘passing’, which collocates with the adverb ‘democratically’, has an exact equivalent of ‘melaluiinya’. The Indonesian suffix –nya here refers to all problems arising from terrorism acts. The students had a tendency to ignore translating the verb ‘passing’; therefore, they simply made a translation error such as *dengan cara yang demokratis*. The translation error *penetapan demokratisasi* happened as the students faced difficulties in differentiating word classes. Here, they changed the verb ‘passing’ into the noun *penetapan* in Indonesian.

The translation errors such as *memperkecil* and *melemahkan* depicted problems in finding an appropriate Indonesian equivalent of the verb ‘discourage’ in the *Verb + Verb Noun* combination ‘discourage investment’, where it should have been translated into ‘mengurangi’ or ‘menurunkan’. It is necessary to add the word ‘minat’ to make the Indonesian translation sound more natural when followed by ‘penanaman modal’.

In the next collocation ‘particularly vulnerable’, the students translated the collocation literally, so it became a problem as can be seen in translation errors such as *sangat mudah diserang* and *paling mudah diserang*. Here, the adverb ‘particularly’ was translated into *sangat mudah* and *paling mudah*, instead of ‘terutama’. While doing this, they also translated the adjective simply into *mudah diserang* whereas based on the context it is supposed to be translated as ‘rentan’. Free translation occurred as the students simply translated the collocation into *menjadi sasaran empuk*. 
CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that syntagmatic types of collocation are commonly found in English texts. The paradigmatic ones could be translated quite well by the students since they are more open-class items; thus, they have less mutual expectancy and do not always form fixed expressions. On the other hand, students found it was challenging for them to translate 26 collocations which all belong to syntagmatic types.

Exposure to a large number of words will surely lead to students’ rapid vocabulary extension. They may learn the primary meanings of new words, but words in combination may express different meanings. Knowing the collocates of a word by familiarizing themselves with the collocational range of a word may equip the students with a good storage of information that they can recall whenever they hear a certain word mentioned and relate it to its collocational range. For example, when they hear the word ‘soldier’ they may be more likely to relate it to words such as ‘war’, ‘guarded’, ‘army’, and ‘weapon’ rather than to ‘blackboard’ or ‘chalk’.

Evoking students’ awareness of the importance of collocations in learning idiomatic English is also crucial. To teach English collocations, it would, of course, be very useful for the teachers to have a rich variety of teaching material like collections of exercises and workbooks, which can be given to the students based on their foreign language learning level. In addition, since some types of collocations are fixed lexical units, they could be listed with their Indonesian equivalents. It may help the students to easily find the respective Indonesian translation of the collocations.

REFERENCES


