



Means and Ways of Translating Foreign Collocations: Linguistic and Contextual Approaches

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Abstract. This study investigates the effective means and ways of translating foreign collocations from English into Uzbek, emphasizing the influence of idiomaticity, semantic transparency, and collocational strength on strategy choice. Using a bilingual corpus compiled from news, academic, and technical texts, collocations were classified as lexical or grammatical, transparent or opaque, and culture-bound or neutral. Strategies such as literal translation, calque, transposition, modulation, equivalence, explicitation, and phraseological substitution were tested. Evaluation was based on expert judgment and an error typology including selectional clash, register drift, and cultural mismatch. Results indicate that context-sensitive strategies outperform literal or calque methods for opaque and culture-bound units, whereas transparent collocations allow faithful, form-preserving translation. The paper proposes a decision framework linking collocation type and discourse function to translation strategy, offering practical implications for translators, educators, and CAT-tool developers.

Keywords: collocations; translation strategies; equivalence; explicitation; phraseology; corpus-based analysis; English-Uzbek translation

1. Introduction

Collocations-habitual co-occurrences of words-constitute a crucial aspect of linguistic competence and idiomatic fluency. Their proper translation plays a vital role in achieving naturalness, accuracy, and stylistic appropriateness in the target language. According to Nesselhauf (2020), collocational translation problems stem from the fact that languages encode co-occurrence patterns differently, reflecting unique cultural and semantic conventions. For translators, this means that literal equivalence rarely ensures idiomatic correctness.

Recent corpus-based studies (Farahani & Tavakoli, 2021; Kashi & Karimova, 2023) emphasize that translation errors often arise from ignorance of collocational constraints rather than grammar or vocabulary. Consequently, both linguistic and contextual analyses are required to handle collocations effectively. Linguistic approaches focus on semantic and syntactic relations within collocations, while contextual approaches evaluate function, register, and discourse position.

Comparative investigations (Ghazala, 2022; Tursunova, 2024) reveal that equivalence and explicitation are particularly effective for idiomatic and culture-bound expressions, whereas literal and calque strategies perform better in technical or formal texts. Nevertheless, few models systematically link collocation typology to the most suitable translation strategies. This research addresses this gap by combining linguistic and contextual perspectives through empirical corpus evidence, contributing to improved translation pedagogy and English-Uzbek translation practice.

2. Methods

A balanced bilingual corpus consisting of approximately 50,000 words was compiled from authentic English and Uzbek sources across three genres: news articles, academic papers, and technical



documentation. The collocations were extracted using *AntConc* software, and manually verified by two professional translators to ensure contextual validity. Each collocation was categorized according to:

1. Type: lexical or grammatical;
2. Transparency: transparent, semi-transparent, or opaque;
3. Cultural dependence: culture-bound or neutral.

Seven translation strategies were examined: literal translation, calque, transposition, modulation, equivalence, explicitation, and phraseological substitution. Translators applied each strategy to representative examples, and their outputs were rated by three expert evaluators using a five-point scale assessing *accuracy*, *idiomaticity*, and *naturalness*. Statistical analysis was performed to determine the frequency and effectiveness of each strategy across genres and collocation types.

Error analysis identified three major error categories: selectional clash, where lexical pairing was unnatural in the target language; register drift, where the stylistic tone mismatched the source; and cultural mismatch, where context-specific meaning was lost.

3. Results

The quantitative analysis demonstrated clear trends between collocation type and preferred strategy. For transparent lexical collocations, literal and calque methods achieved high accuracy scores ($M = 4.7$), confirming their suitability for technical and scientific texts. In contrast, opaque collocations—especially idioms and metaphorical expressions—required equivalence or explicitation to achieve comparable quality ($M = 4.5$).

Culture-bound collocations (e.g., idioms tied to social norms or geography) achieved the best ratings through phraseological substitution or contextual adaptation, reflecting the need for cultural alignment. Transposition and modulation strategies were useful for grammatical collocations involving syntactic restructuring.

Across all genres, context-sensitive approaches consistently reduced idiomaticity errors by 30-35 % compared to literal translation. The proposed decision framework (Table 1) links collocation type, text genre, and optimal strategy, providing a structured reference for translators and educators.

Table 1: Simplified Decision Framework for Translating Collocations

Collocation Type	Transparency	Recommended Strategy	Example
Lexical (technical)	Transparent	Literal / Calque	“energy balance” → “energiya balansi”
Lexical (idiomatic)	Opaque	Equivalence / Explicitation	“break the ice” → “suhbatni yumshatmoq”
Culture-bound	Opaque	Phraseological Substitution	“white-collar worker” → “idora xodimi”
Grammatical	Semi-transparent	Modulation / Transposition	“take responsibility” → “javobgarlikni o‘z zimmasiga olmoq”

4. Discussion

The findings corroborate earlier observations by Nesselhauf (2020) and Ghazala (2022) that idiomatic and culture-specific collocations resist direct translation. The balance between linguistic



accuracy and contextual adaptation is crucial: overly literal renderings cause semantic distortion, while excessive adaptation weakens the stylistic integrity of the text.

Contextual sensitivity emerged as the central determinant of translation success. Translators who considered genre conventions and communicative purpose produced more idiomatic outcomes. The corpus analysis further supports the cognitive-linguistic view that collocations are conceptual units, not arbitrary word pairs. This aligns with Farahani & Tavakoli (2021), who argue that collocational awareness correlates with higher overall translation competence.

Pedagogically, these results suggest the integration of collocation-based modules into translator training curricula. For computational applications, the decision framework can inform machine translation (MT) and computer-assisted translation (CAT) systems by tagging collocations and suggesting context-appropriate strategies. The study thus bridges linguistic theory and applied translation technology.

5. Conclusion

This research demonstrates that translating foreign collocations effectively requires combining linguistic analysis with contextual awareness. Literal and calque strategies remain valid for transparent technical terms, while equivalence, explicitation, and phraseological substitution are essential for opaque or culture-bound collocations. The proposed decision framework provides a systematic way to match collocation type and discourse function with strategy choice.

The study contributes to translation theory by integrating corpus-based empirical evidence with functional analysis, enhancing both human translator competence and CAT-assisted workflows. Future research should expand the corpus across genres and test automatic recognition of collocation types in neural translation models.

References

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