

Chapter 4

Equivalence Above Word Level

Translation is not merely about finding word-for-word equivalents; rather, it involves a complex process of conveying meaning across languages while maintaining the original intent, style, and context. At the level above individual words, two significant challenges in translation are **collocation** and **idioms and fixed expressions**. Understanding these concepts is essential for producing natural and accurate translations.

4.1 Collocation

Definition of Collocation

Collocation refers to the habitual co-occurrence of words in a language. Certain words tend to appear together more frequently than others due to linguistic conventions, rather than grammatical rules. For example, in English, we say "**strong tea**" rather than "**powerful tea**", even though "strong" and "powerful" are synonyms in other contexts.

Collocations can be categorized into:

- **Adjective + Noun:** heavy rain, deep sleep, rich heritage
- **Verb + Noun:** make a decision, take a risk, break a promise
- **Verb + Adverb:** deeply regret, strongly recommend, thoroughly enjoy
- **Adverb + Adjective:** highly unlikely, widely accepted, completely different

Challenges in Translating Collocations

Translating collocations can be difficult because word pairings in one language do not always have direct equivalents in another language. Some of the major challenges include:

1. **Non-Equivalence:** A collocation in the source language may not exist in the target language. For example, English uses "**commit a crime**", whereas some languages may use a completely different construction.
2. **Literal Translations:** Directly translating collocations may lead to unnatural expressions in the target language. For example, "fast

food" in English might translate awkwardly if rendered as "quick food" in another language.

3. **Cultural Differences:** Some collocations are deeply tied to cultural norms and may not resonate with target-language speakers. For example, the phrase "**a stiff upper lip**" (meaning emotional resilience) may not have a clear equivalent in non-English cultures.
4. **Multiple Acceptable Translations:** Some collocations may have several valid translations depending on the context. For instance, "heavy smoker" could be translated as "strong smoker" or "intense smoker," but one may be more idiomatic in a given language.

Strategies for Translating Collocations

To effectively translate collocations, translators can adopt several strategies:

1. **Using an Equivalent Collocation:** If the target language has a close equivalent, this is the best option. For example, "make a decision" can be translated as "prendre une décision" in French, maintaining the collocational pattern.
2. **Paraphrasing:** If no direct equivalent exists, the meaning can be conveyed in a different way. For example, "do homework" in English might become "complete school assignments" in a language without a similar collocation.
3. **Literal Translation with Adaptation:** In cases where a literal translation may sound unnatural, slight modifications can make it more natural. For example, "break the news" might become "announce the news" in some languages.
4. **Using Loanwords or Borrowed Expressions:** Some collocations are widely adopted across languages due to globalization. For example, "fast food" is commonly understood even in non-English-speaking countries.

Examples of Collocation Challenges

English Collocation	Direct Translation	Natural Translation
Strong tea	Powerful tea	Rich tea
Heavy rain	Hard rain	Torrential rain
Break the law	Destroy the law	Violate the law
Run a business	Walk a business	Manage a business

By understanding and mastering collocations, translators can enhance the fluency and authenticity of their translations.

4.2 Idioms and Fixed Expressions

Definition of Idioms and Fixed Expressions

Idioms and fixed expressions are phrases whose meanings cannot be understood from the literal meanings of the individual words. They often carry cultural connotations and are deeply embedded in linguistic traditions. Examples include:

- **Kick the bucket** (to die)
- **Piece of cake** (something very easy)
- **Under the weather** (feeling sick)

Fixed expressions, on the other hand, are phrases that have a conventionalized structure and are used without variation. Examples include:

- **By and large** (in general)
- **In a nutshell** (briefly)
- **Come what may** (whatever happens)

Challenges in Translating Idioms and Fixed Expressions

1. **Lack of Direct Equivalence:** Many idioms do not have a direct counterpart in the target language. For example, the English idiom "**spill the beans**" (to reveal a secret) does not have an exact equivalent in many languages.
2. **Literal vs. Figurative Meaning:** If translated word for word, idioms often lose their intended meaning. For example, "raining cats and dogs" might be confusing if rendered literally into another language.
3. **Cultural Specificity:** Some idioms are culturally bound and may not make sense to speakers of the target language. For example, "**to have a frog in one's throat**" (meaning a temporary loss of voice) might not have an equivalent in other languages.
4. **Fixed Nature of Expressions:** Fixed expressions often follow strict word orders that cannot be altered. Attempting to modify them may render them meaningless.

Strategies for Translating Idioms and Fixed Expressions

1. **Using an Equivalent Idiom:** If the target language has an idiom with the same meaning, it should be used. For example, the English idiom "**out of the frying pan and into the fire**" (meaning going from one

bad situation to another) has a Spanish equivalent: "**salir de Guatemala y meterse en Guatepeor**".

2. **Paraphrasing:** When no direct equivalent exists, the meaning can be conveyed in different words. For example, "**spill the beans**" might be translated as "**reveal a secret**".
3. **Literal Translation (When Appropriate):** Some idioms have become widely known due to media and globalization, so a literal translation may be understood. For example, "**time is money**" may work in many languages as it has been popularized globally.
4. **Omission:** In some cases, idioms may be omitted if they are untranslatable and do not affect the overall meaning of the text.
5. **Explanation in Footnotes:** When dealing with culturally specific idioms, translators may include a footnote to explain the meaning to the reader.

Examples of Idiom Translation Challenges

English Idiom	Direct Translation	Natural Translation
Break a leg	Break a leg	Good luck
Barking up the wrong tree	Shouting at the wrong tree	Accusing the wrong person
Kill two birds with one stone	Kill two birds with one stone	Achieve two things at once
Let the cat out of the bag	Free the cat from the bag	Reveal a secret

The Role of Context in Idiom Translation

Context plays a crucial role in choosing how to translate idioms. The same idiom may have different connotations depending on its usage. For example, "**to bite the bullet**" can mean to endure pain bravely, but in a military context, it might have a historical reference. Understanding the context allows for accurate and meaningful translations.

Conclusion

Equivalence above the word level is crucial in translation, as collocations and idioms play a significant role in natural language use. While collocations require sensitivity to word pairings and linguistic conventions, idioms demand cultural awareness and creative problem-solving. Translators must employ various strategies, including using equivalent phrases, paraphrasing, or omitting untranslatable elements to ensure clarity

and accuracy. Mastery of these aspects enhances the overall quality of translation and facilitates effective cross-cultural communication.