

Proposing a Concordance-based Vocabulary Acquisition for Interpreters, Translators and L2 Learners in Search of a Common Denominator

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Introduction

Interpreters and translators (I&T), as well as L2 learners in general, are equally said to experience the feeling of untranslatability. They argue that certain words and phrases, idioms, conventional expressions and ideas with cultural context appear untranslatable, at least instantaneously. I&T are the professionals who engage themselves in inter-lingual, -personal, -cultural and -social interactions between two (sometimes more than two) different speech communities, struggling to find common denominators across differences, rather than yielding themselves to untranslatability derived from the differences.

As the spheres of human activities and their influences in the real world are expanding at a revolutionary pace, language professionals are discovering the rise of neologisms and novel use of common words in new settings. Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that conventional dictionaries do not help users very much. It seems that the situations surrounding them have become increasingly beyond their control.

The aim of this investigation is to demonstrate that context is indispensable to understand the meaning of utterances, for meaning cannot be understood in the decontextualized situation. To support this idea, first, I shall briefly discuss two different approaches of viewing language: language as a system and as a social medium. Second, I shall present examples of decontextualized situations that an interpreter actually encountered while engaged in English-Japanese translation. Third, I shall investigate how meaning of a synonymous word becomes different in different collocational patterns using concordance lines. The corpus is created from natural language samples taken place in political and economic discourse communities. Finally I shall propose an inclusion of concordance-based vocabulary learning for L2 learners. It will serve as a more discourse-specific vocabulary learning approach for L2 learners including university students who hope to dwell in target discourse community (TDC) in their future career.

I. Theoretical Foundation — Language as a system vs. a social medium

Two Different Approaches in Linguistics and Translation Studies

Before discussing the problems of untranslatability that interpreters and translators are confronted, I shall review the past trends in linguistics and the development of translation studies briefly. In the 1950s to 1960s, a group of linguists such as Joos (1950) or Katz and Fodor (1963) believed that a language is a science which can be atomized into each word fragment. When Chomsky (1965) put forward this idea about a theory-based approach to the description of natural language, the main focus of the study of natural language was on syntactics (Anderman and Rogers 1996). Words, on the other hand, were treated as "a somewhat uninteresting jumble of miscellanea which speakers learn "item by item, in a more or less rote fashion" (Katz and Fodor 1963 in Aitchison 1996:18). While these linguists are classified as those see language as a system of form, Halliday interprets language as "a system of meanings, accompanied by forms through which meaning can be realized (Halliday 1985:xiv)." There are other linguists who share this viewpoint (e.g. Anthony 1973 in Coady and Huckin 1997, Shotter 1993).

Among others, Becker (1975) casts his critical eyes to physicizing language, saying that:

A science to attempt to deny the existence of nearly all of its subject matter (English as she is spoke) and to deny the existence of the substrate of its subject matter (communication between human beings) is scientifically dishonest, and therefore ultimately self-defeating. Modern theoretical

linguistics is rather clearly self-defeated already. (p.4)

Translation studies once adopted Chomsky's theory of Transformational Generative Grammar to facilitate translation (Anderman and Rogers 1996:1), in later years, however, abandoned its early commitment to a science of translation, following a number of new viewpoints growing in the field of translation studies with the emphasis on texts in their macro-context (Snell-Hornby 1991 in Anderman and Rogers 1996:3). In recent years, an increasing level of attention seems to be paid to translation as "an instrument of mediation" (Op. cit.:3). Translation as a process of interlingual communication has gained rigor.

Today, the majority of texts translated are special-language texts dealing with specialized subjects fields (Rogers 1996:69), and accordingly dependence on specialized bilingual dictionaries is increasing among professionals. Ironically enough, though, users complain that the higher the level of specialty of a dictionary, the unfriendlier it becomes. Rogers (Op. cit.:70) points out, "specialized bilingual dictionaries do not normally contain definitions or examples of contextual use, neither do they distinguish clearly between synonyms in the target language." Because of this, it is difficult for users to discern which word is acceptable while others are not and why. As a result, they tend to make stylistic, semantic and pragmatic mistakes in the target language (TL) production. They often produce English sentences not by adopting authentic real-world language samples but by picking up a word from a dictionary, to which learners show their greatest respect for its authority, but which

Bolinger (1965) dismisses as the "frozen pantomime (p.442)." His claim that "dictionaries do not exist to define, but to help people grasp meanings, and for this purpose their main task is to supply a series of hints and associations that will relate the unknown to something know (p.447)" has sufficient reasoning to convince our learners. This being said, however, I should make it clear that I do not deny the viability of bilingual dictionaries. They are, without doubt, of great help if used appropriately but less so if they are simply treated as a collection of lemmas and their translations.

Carter (1998:63) argues that dictionaries tend to concentrate on the unit of the single word and ignore the kinds of patterns which result when a word forms different syntactic partnerships. He goes on to say that "collocational and colligational patterns are meaning-creating, that there are crucial interdependencies between grammar, lexis and semantics." He warns that "the preoccupation of many linguists with the formal properties of grammar runs constant risks of ignoring lexis and lexico-grammar as the doorway to the creation of meanings (Op. cit.:62)." He further emphasizes this position by citing Sinclair:

There is ultimately no distinction between form and meaning...[The] meaning affects the structure and this is ... the principal observation of corpus linguistics in the last decade." (Sinclair 1991:6-7 in Carter 1998:62)

II. Problems of Untranslatability — Decontextualized Situation

I shall discuss situations in which interpreters and translators feel unable to translate, citing a few examples that an interpreter actually encountered while

working on Japanese-English translation.

Meaning Lost in the Fragmented Utterance

When a speaker divides the whole utterance into sentences, or even cuts a sentence into pieces, it becomes very difficult to translate the message. The speaker stops at every few words, looks to an interpreter, smiling, "Will you translate?" The speaker, out of kindness, chops up the meaningful into meaningless. Example: "As we drove (pause and turn to an interpreter) into a small village (pause and turn to an interpreter) where a little house was (pause and turn to an interpreter) many people (pause and turn to an interpreter) we passed by (pause and turn to an interpreter) smiled at us." (A sample sentence created by the author to illustrate the typical situation.) The interpreter will have a hard time anticipating what will come next and stitching together these fragments into a meaningful message. Chopping up a sentence into pieces could happen if a speaker regards translation as a word-for-word code conversion, a problem rooted in a belief "language as a system."

Silly Jokes, Puns and Play on Words

When a play on words is suddenly uttered in a midst of serious discussion without a marker, it becomes untranslatable. An interpreter who translated for a panel discussion in an international forum wrote in a recent newspaper column about a Japanese panelist who never stopped making puns. The panelist made a pre-empt attack, "*Watashi wa Nagoya jo no shachi no youni shachi hoko batte imasu*" (I am as uptight as the dolphin up on the Nagoya Castle - translated by the columnist) and sent the audience into laughter. The panelist went on and on and finally ended with "*Tabi wo haite tabi ni deyou*" (Let's go on a

journey with a pair of white tabi socks on - translated by the author) as she left the stage. The columnist criticized the panelist for relying on play on words in the international gathering where discussions are often conveyed through simultaneous interpretation, and called for cross-linguistic and -cultural behavioral appropriacy. Although it may be possible to translate these puns anyway, the essence of funny prosodic effects would not be transferable.

Advent of World Englishes

In this age of world Englishes, English is no longer a possession of native speakers. World Englishes, or English spoken or written by non-native speakers sometimes involve grammatical errors and non-standard pronunciation. As such, it is virtually impossible to infer the meaning from syntagmatic relations or phonological representation alone. Interpreters and translators are forced to make logical inference from context in a broader sense referring to the speaker's overall assertion or from his/her past publications. We can no longer expect native-like fluency, correct grammar rules and standard pronunciation from speakers of English.

Cross-cultural Communication Failure

Some lexical items are difficult to translate instantaneously into Japanese because there are no exact Japanese counterparts: e.g. *accountability* or *liability* is not exactly distinguishable from *responsibility* in Japanese; *commitment* and *initiative* are other examples of hard-to-translate lexis. This is perhaps because there are no matching concepts or equivalents in socio-cultural setting of Japanese speech community and in psychology of the Japanese people. Conversely, certain concepts unique to Japanese culture also

seem to be hard to translate with the essence of the original concepts unabated: e.g. *wabi sabi* - spirit of simplicity and rusticity. There are many other idiomatic phrases, metaphorical expressions and proverbs which two different speech communities do not share their background.

Context in a Broader Sense

Many researchers argue that context plays an imperative role in communication (Malinowski 1923; Carroll 1964; Bateson 1972; Goffman 1974; Halliday and Hasan 1976; Goodwin and Duranti 1992; Hatch and Brown 1995). The basic direction of these research works also lead to the idea that context is generated not only from co-textual structures, but also from the inter-personal situation when the utterance is made, or from the past and present socio-cultural settings in which the speakers are situated. Sometimes the speaker's nationality and ethnic or historic backgrounds are involved in a certain context. In such a case, ethnographic schemata of the people engaged in the interaction also shape macro-context. In a nutshell, context entails every aspect of the real world.

When interpreters are called to translate for a particular discourse community such as a car engineering meeting, the first thing they do is to share both the linguistic and extra-linguistic knowledge of that particular TDC. They try to share the context of the TDC by immersing themselves in those communities to become, so to speak, a temporary resident, not a casual visitor (Nakamura 2003). By repeating this virtual inhabitation, interpreters gain new schemata and add them to their real world knowledge. In order for them to interpret the message, they need a firm hold of context which serves as a hint

for comprehending what is meant (intent) by the speaker. Only when they have understood the intent expressed explicitly or implicitly, they can transfer that message into the equivalent of another language.

How, then, can I&T and L2 teaching professionals regain control and credibility over their language use in the face of totally different communities of shared experience? Will they choose to remain silent, being unable to find the common denominator? Will they admit language as "shabby equipment" (Eliot 1969:182) and give up explaining in words? Or will they face up squarely to the reality and explore the common denominator, or shared experience of humans as species? Answers to such philosophical and pragmatic questions may be found if we watch carefully what is happening in real world language use.

III. Practical Orientation — Exploitation of Natural Language Samples for Corpus-based Vocabulary Learning

In the reality of training I&T, the importance of lexicon cannot be overemphasized. The larger the vocabulary base the more helpful it is to grab the meaning and have a vague idea take shape. But of course, it is virtually impossible for us to know the entire lexicon. We know and use the words that "suit our particular purposes (Takefuta 1981)." Now I shall demonstrate how we use the words and phrases for our particular purposes by utilizing concordance lines extracted from the natural language corpus. I shall investigate if concordance lines are useful tools to identify different usage of synonyms, which dictionaries do not distinguish very well.

Learners are often confused by synonyms and synonymous words. Bilingual dictionaries have similar explanations for such lexis as *influence*, *effect* and *affect*. For example, Kenkyusha's Japanese-English dictionary says:

えいきょう 影響

an influence; an effect; an impact <on>; repercussions; consequences

¶ 良い [悪い] 影響

good [bad] influence; a good [bad] effect; 《fml》 a favorable [harmful] influence

¶ …に 影響する [を及ぼす]

influence…; affect …; have [《fml》 exert] and influence on …; have [produce]an effect on…; act [tell] on…

¶ …の 影響を受ける

be affected [influenced] by …

¶ …の 影響で

under the influence of …; owing to …; in consequence of …

影響力

influence

¶ 影響力がある

be influential 《with sb》; 《one's words》 tell 《with sb》

At a glance, users are confused with the use of *influence*, *effect* and *affect*, seemingly synonymous lexis under the single lemma *eikyo*. Are users really able to differentiate the usage of these three? Do they understand in what context are these three synonyms used? What about the natural language samples? Can we identify the distinctive usage of these synonyms?

Procedures of the Computational Analysis

For the purpose of this investigation, I have compiled a research corpus consisting of

some 104,000 words (token) of spoken English texts. Most of these texts have been collected electronically through the Internet. Table 1 in Appendix 1 shows the structure of Political-Economic Corpus.

Using CONC (ver. 1.8) for Macintosh, concordance lines for *affect*, *effect* and *influence* together with their inflected forms have been created and stored in a spreadsheet format.

Effect

13	succeed, and then, in	effect ,	empower people to make the
15	the first place and, in	effect ,	try to provide for the whole
1371	ith Dan Rather and the	effect	of the box office. But first
1653	oyed, or words to that	effect ,	you read that, and you think t
6396	have testified to this	effect .	We are hoping for legislation
6683	have any stimulative	effect .	They have a stimulative
6684	ey have a stimulative	effect	only insofar as they are finan
6690	the same stimulative	effect	as an increase in spending, ye
6691	the long-term adverse	effect	of increasing the role of gov
6733	ercent, has a perverse	effect	and should be reformed in a
6753	That inflation had the	effect	of destroying the net worth o
6846	sed. Yet that was the	effect	of the policy of imposing so
6875	tures. Yet they are in	effect	mandated by the government
8211	have this... carry some	effect	throughout the world? well
8308	lennium will have any	effect	other than on computers and
8421	might have and adverse	effect	on the future of the currency
8580	errisford. 'It had some	effect	on our French volume as
8708	icht treaty) went into	effect	in November 1993, the EC
8753	EMU, which goes into	effect	in January 1999 is to elimina
8762	fter the EMU goes into	effect ,	agreement has been reached
8869	ping countries are, in	effect ,	pegging their currencies to t
9404	hich can have quite an	effect	as it sloshes around the worl
385	m the cost savings we	effected	and waste, fraud and abuse

Concordance Listings and Findings

Effect and its inflected forms (*effected*, *effective*, *effectively*, *effectiveness*, *effects*) occur 38 times, *affect* and its inflection (*affected*, *affecting*, *affects*) 28 times, and *influence* and its inflection (*influenced*, *influential*) 11 times. The followings are the concordance listings for each lexis.

The word *effect* occurs more frequently in the nominal form (13 times). *Effect* appears in lexical combinations: *in effect* (4 times), *went/goes into effect* (2 times) and *to this/that effect* (2 times). However, the meaning of *effect* used as NOUN and that in these lexical phrases seems different, and therefore,

cannot be translated as the same. *Adverse effect* can be categorized as a semi-closed phrasal expression. Among these three synonyms, *effect* is more likely to form phrasal expressions, whose meaning is emancipated from the original meaning of *effect*.

The word *affect* occurs more frequently in

Affect

2149	ody else, these issues	affect	all of us. Martin Luther King
3321	… Well, that doesn't	affect	people making \$30,000. I thi
3477	m not sure the overall	affect,	of what it's going to have on
3672	on every day that will	affect	the future of these people for
6124	red to ? that sure does	affect	economic policy. It makes it
6322	t prices per se do not	affect	social welfare. Inflation mat
6336	time will continue to	affect	the economy for a very long t
6449	how wage cuts would	affect	the behavior of the employee
6489	bal competition which	affect	the inflationary process? Wh
7372	fun, and it happens to	affect	the way that the chattering c
5514	l issue, it has largely	affected	an entire generation of wo
6110	n that politicians are	affected	by the mood of the elector
6378	toay. Has the change	affected	your role as a governor. Poli
8190	ere clearly immensely	affected	by war. And so you don't n
8569	has its stance has not	affected	public or consumer support
3573	n the Medicare issues	affecting	a large part of our audien
5366	particularly at issues	affecting	older men and women. So i
5405.	It's something that's	affecting	both men and women. It af
8267	the powerful changes	affecting	both Japan and the United
3316	rdell bill, it basically	affects	some middle class and some
3567	n. This kind of change	affects	a lot of powerful interests i
5406	oth men and women. It	affects	men who've been conditioe
6262	that monetary policy	affects.	The problem with the manda
6324	rmance, which in turn	affects	the welfare of individuals
6383	matters infobar as it	affects	Congress's agenda with respe
6631	sm and how Fed policy	affects	the economy. The determina

VERB in these concordance samples. Subjects tend to be abstract NOUNs (e.g. issues, competition, change) and the objects of *affected*

are also abstract NOUNs such as people, nations and situations.

Influence is also more often used as NOUN.

Influence

635	de that their relative	influence	has declined anyway, sim
2915	icate special interest	influence	in politics, it can pass a b
3404	nanced because of the	influence	of special interests. And
6761	have a very perverse	influence.	In order for deposit insu
6825	ry it has had too much	influence	up to date I has made a
8493	ordr to increase the	influence	of Europe, not only econo
8868	strength and political	influence	are also factors. Many de
603	pshire wil not be as	influenced	by the mony, probably , j
912	ong time. And it also	influenced	my thinkg because Dic
5580	and I'd been very much	influenced	by Freud. When I starte

However, unlike *effect*, *influence* seems to be more an open-ended lexis which collocates relatively freely with other lexis. *Influence*, as far as this concordance listing is concerned, seems less susceptible to lexical constraint as *effect* and *affect* are.

Although the synonyms *affect*, *effect*, and *influence* are explained under the same lemma *eikyo* in a Japanese-English dictionary and their usage appears confusing to users, natural language samples showed a slightly different identification as I observed above. Different meanings emerged when the word forms a part of a closed lexical phrase. Concordance lines show L2 users a clearer picture of lexical choices, and give them a hint to identify collocation-sensitive lexical choices, which dictionaries fail to present.

III. Pedagogic Implication

Rationale behind the Proposal of Corpus-based Vocabulary Learning

Learners' hand-made vocabulary lists often consist of only words side by side with their translation. Seldom do I see them include phrases or sentences which tell the learner how the specific word is used in context. When they write or speak English, they create sentences we have never heard before. Endeavor of production, i.e. speaking and writing, is not, perhaps, necessarily a creative activity. We hear or read a word, phrase or sentence and save them together with associative meaning in our mental lexicon. When we speak or write English, we recall meaning unit such as phrase/chunk/institutional expression from our mental lexicon as necessary in an almost instantaneous manner. I shall regard this production process a reconstruction that Becker suggests in

his statement that "we speak mostly by stitching together swatches of text that we have heard before (1975:1)."

It is widely believed that one effective way to expand our vocabulary base is to increase productive vocabulary by expanding the repertoire of phrasal expressions. It is more beneficial for learners to learn lexical phrases rather than learning each word separately, for meaning cannot be understood word for word. This is why many researchers stress the value of viewing language as chunks or lexical phrases (e.g. Sinclair 1991; Willis 1993, 1998; Carter 1998). Concordance lines offer a new perspective to learners in this regard. I should like to propose the inclusion of a concordance-based vocabulary acquisition approach for professional language users and L2 learners. It will facilitate teaching and learning lexis as a phrasal unit, and furthermore, it will expand their capacity of reproducing the learned lexical items. By exploiting the natural language corpus, users will be able to recognize the usage of lexis in adequate context, i.e. collocational patterns in a narrow sense, psychological, pragmatic and cultural setting in a broader sense. They will be able to learn how and why specific lexis should be selected, and how they can learn lexis that suit their particular purposes. The validity of my investigation will be verified and evaluated after a number of follow-up processes. For instance, learners are encouraged to change their conventional vocabulary learning style to Keyword in Context style; they will be able to check their level of acquisition through periodical vocabulary quizzes in reading or listening programs; they can record their speaking activities to see how much they can reproduce what they have learned. I shall suggest that

teachers must be patient and have far-sightedness in achieving desirable outcome in classroom application of concordance-based vocabulary learning, since vocabulary build-up is a long-term process. For the purpose of practical vocabulary learning, I shall append some example concordance-based vocabulary exercises in Appendices 2 and 3.

Conclusion

Before making concluding remarks, I must admit that there are a number of limitations in this study. I am aware that the size of corpus I used for this investigation is too small to draw any universal pattern, and adoption of concordance will not solve problems overnight. Nevertheless, I consider that this investigation contributes, however modestly, to identifying some signs of super-segmental relations of lexis and lexical phrases in spoken text, with which, I may reasonably support my initial hypothesis that meaning without context does not exist. I also believe that my proposal here will exert awakening effect on learners: importance of seeing natural language samples rather than inordinately obeying the descriptions in a dictionary.

While words in a dictionary are static, real world language is in constant flux. Translation is an undertaking to capture the world at some point and put an appropriate label which best reflects the shared experience of the TDC on a real time basis. We must not forget that the main players of interactions are humans and language is a medium to establish communication rapport between them. I&T, who are there to bridge interlingual communication gaps are also direct players and residents in the real world. Not only language but users of language as

well thrust briskly in the streams of real world continuum.

Language is an organic instrument shared by people consisting of the language speech community and beyond. This viewpoint is somewhat ignored in Katz and Fodor's diagram of *bachelor* (in Bolinger 1965:434) and Joos' claim that the linguistic theory cannot deal with semantics and acoustics (Joos 1950). Although I admit that it is risky to compare the abstract with the specific, I must say that their views entail essential irrelevancies, because semantics simply cannot be detached from linguistics, and above all, what to mean and what is meant: "signify and signified" (Saussure 1915) can only be realized through language. For interpreters, language is an only recourse, an indispensable tool to communicate speaker's message to the audience (*Langue and Parole*, again by Saussure). Unless a mind-mirror, a device which can see through people's mind and photographically reflect the image we draw in our inner-self, is invented, there is no other way for us to use language to express and share our feelings and thoughts. It is true that we often feel irritated for not being able to express our feelings exactly in words, but this does not make us throw away language dismissing it as "shabby equipment." Despite these and other plausible deficiencies of language as a means of communication, what else can we rely on? Why not believe dynamism of human communication, and continue working to find common denominators as human species?

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Other Citations

- Newspaper Article** Interpreter's column Shukan ST Sept. 17, 1999 Japan Times
- Dictionary** *Shin Waei Chu Jiten (New Japanese-English Dictionary)* 4th Edition 1996 Tokyo: Kenkyusha

Appendix 1

Sub-corpus	Topics	Genre	Source	Year	Word Count
Politics	U.S. political affairs, economy, social issues	Interview, Debate, Discussion	CNN	1999	55,468
Economy	Global economy: U.S., Asia, Europe	Interview, Debate, Discussion	CNN, NHK Newsweek.com text scanning	1999	48,992
Total					104,460

Table 1 Structure of Political-Economic Corpus

Appendix 2 Sample Concordance Work Sheet

<p>1. Pre Reading Task</p> <p>What are the differences between <i>effect</i>, <i>affect</i> and <i>influence</i>? Discuss with your partner and write down notes with example sentences or phrases.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>effect</i> <i>affect</i> <i>influence</i></p> <p>2. Pair Work</p> <p>Work with the Gapfill Exercise with your partner. Fill the blanks with <i>effect</i>, <i>affect</i> or <i>influence</i> or change the word form as necessary.</p> <p>3. Compare</p> <p>Upon completion, compare your results with the original concordance lines.</p> <p>4. Feedback questions</p> <p>Answer the following questionnaires. You can discuss with your partner.</p> <p>Q1 Do the printouts support your initial guess?</p> <p>Q2 Is the usage of your examples in the above 1 included in the printouts?</p> <p>Q3 Choose one or two good examples that illustrate your explanations.</p> <p>Q4 Extract or encircle any phrasal expressions or combination of words that you have found. Think about the meaning for a while and compare your guess with your dictionary. You can continue looking up the dictionary and confirm the meaning of other phrasal expressions in the dictionary.</p> <p>Q5 What have you learned from this exercise?</p> <p>5. Discuss your findings with other classmates.</p>
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Appendix 3

Gapfill Exercise

1. Well, as you know better than anybody else, these issues () all of us.
2. That sure does () economic policy.
3. These soldiers are making decision everyday that will () the future of these people for years.
4. We have to remember that prices per se do not () social welfare.
5. This kind of change () a lot of powerful interests in the health-care industry.
6. That is, government's role is to create the conditions for success, give people the tools they need to succeed, and then, in (), empower people to make the most of it.
7. He enjoyed, or words to that (), you read that, and you think this is strange.
8. Federal government deficits have any stimulative ().
9. When the Maastricht treaty went into () in November 1993, the EC was renamed the European Union.
10. Yet that was the () of the policy of imposing so-called voluntary import quotas on Japanese cars.
11. You and other observers conclude that their relative () has declined anyway, simply because ...
11. If Congress wants to eradicate special interest () in politics, it can pass a bill that eliminates PAC contributions to candidates.
12. And it also () my thinking because Dick Grasso, who, you know, sponsors this with him every year...
13. I was a psychology major, and I'd been very much () by Freud.
14. Anwar is a personable leader who has made () friends in top positions around the world.
15. ... military strength and political () are also factors.