

## LEXICAL CONSTRAINTS IN TRANSLATION AND LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN INDONESIA

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**Abstract:** One of the main problems in the process of translating and learning English as a foreign language may be attributed to lexical constraints. Problems exist in both processes (translating and learning) because the two languages involved represent two different systems of expression. The differences in lexical structure between English and Indonesian are predicted to be the main cause of difficulties for EFL learners and translators. Using lexical conceptual structure (LCS), this study has collected data from authentic sources including English novels, brochures, textbooks, bulletins and newspapers. From this data we have identified five types of problems: These problems will be referred to as denominalized verbs or nouns surface as verbs, deadjectival verbs or adjectives surface as verbs, verb semantic structure, collocational combination, and transitive-intransitive alternation. The analysis of these cases has demonstrated that potential problems associated with each case are all lexically related. Therefore it will be argued in this paper that these five cases are part of the main causes for the problems faced by translators and EFL learners.

**Key words:** Lexical constraints, translation

Translation has been defined as ‘the expression in another language of what has been expressed in another or source language, preserving semantic and stylistic equivalences’ (Bell, 1991:5). Preserving equivalence ought to be the central issue of translation. The translator’s goal is to get the message across as accurately as possible, to avoid misunderstanding or misinterpretation on the part of target language (TL) readers. However, the transmission of a message is a complex

process and ensuring accurate interpretation is not an easy task. A good translator must have sufficient knowledge in the area of the translated materials and must be proficient in both languages. These requirements are essential, because an accurate translation often demands total reconstruction in the TL (as in the translation from English as the source language to Indonesian as the target language). There are of course differences in the expression systems between the SL (source language) and the TL, differences that manifest themselves in the structures of sentences and phrases, as well as in individual words.

From a number of lexical studies (Atkins, *et al*, 1986 and 1988; Ard and Gass, 1987; Fisher, 1994), it can be inferred that differences of the expression system in sentence constructions between two languages are lexically related. It will be argued throughout this article that such differences potentially create difficulties for translators unless they have acquired the language proficiency that covers lexical knowledge. It will also be argued that similar problems would be confronting the Indonesian learners of English as a foreign language. Ard and Gass (1987), for example, have demonstrated that problems experienced by foreign students in the United States have turned out to be lexical rather than grammatical.

The lexical constraints in translation and learning English as a foreign language in Indonesia are closely related to the differences between English and Indonesian in the Lexical Conceptual Structure. It refers to the knowledge of a lexical item, which includes all its lexical properties. For example, a lexical entry *river* would include the knowledge of (1) how to pronounce the word; (2) how to spell it; (3) what its lexical meaning is (4) syntactic patterns where the word can enter; (5) the other words that can co-occur with, and so on. In this article, however, the lexical conceptual structure will be seen from at least two areas: Semantic structure, and Collocation that potentially results in a lexical gap between the two languages.

## **SEMANTIC STRUCTURE**

The Semantic Structure specifies that a lexical item should be understood as a word with its semantic and syntactic properties. The lexical properties are therefore the elements that determine the realization of a lexical item in a larger construction. In English the meaning of a word can be realized in a number of syntactic structures. These structures are available because the component of meaning of the lexical item makes it possible to form. For example, the mean-

ings of the word *cook* can be realized in the following structures:

*Dative*

1. I'll *cook* you some bacon and eggs.

*Benefactive*

2. She went home to *cook* a meal for her husband.

*Benefactive with Unspecified Direct Object.*

3. I have to *cook* everyday for all those men.

*Benefactive Reflexive with Unspecified Object.*

4. He had to *cook* for himself.

*Benefactive with Indirect Object or Recipient Permuted.*

5. She had three children to *cook* for.

*Simple Transitive*

6. They have *cooked* some seafood.

*Pseudo Intransitive*

7. Mark could afford to pay someone to *cook*.

*Characteristic Property of Agent*

8. She can *cook* well.

*Pure Intransitive*

9. The fire wouldn't go and the breakfast wouldn't *cook*.

The Dative construction as in sentence 1 can generally be characterized by the permutation of Direct Object (DO) and Indirect Object (IO). In this sentence construction the IO *you* follows while the DO *some bacon and eggs* precedes the verb. The dative is different from the Benefactive construction where the DO follows the verb and the IO, which is also known as Beneficiary or Recipient, is introduced by the preposition *for*, although the two sentences have similar meaning. Interestingly the benefactive construction has more varieties than the dative as illustrated in sentences 3, 4, and 5. Sentence 3 does not show the DO on the surface structure, but it implies one because if someone cooks, there must be some entity being cooked. In sentence 4, the IO is the subject itself and that is why it is called Reflexive. In sentence 5 permutation of IO occurs, but the DO is not specified.

Simple Transitive appears when there is only one object as in sentence 6 where *some bacon and eggs* functions as a single DO. This sentence is quite different from sentence 7 known as Pseudo Intransitive (PsI) (Kilby, 1984) marked by the absence of DO. In its semantic structure, however, the verb *cook* in sentence 7 implies participation of an object, that is, something to cook. In contrast to pseudo intransitive, sentence 9 expresses strongly the non-existence of an object; therefore, it is called Pure Intransitive. The component of meaning that enables the verb like *cook* to appear in PsI construction is when it takes on a non-Agent subject, as in sentence 9. In this sentence, the subject *breakfast* does not perform as the doer of the action cooking. In this sense, it is not possible to imply an object.

Sentence 8 has the same construction as PsI in that the DO is absent at the surface structure, but the meaning of the verb *cook* in this sentence is to label on the nature of the subject, which Levin (1993) refers to as *Characteristic Property of Agent*.

The semantic structure of the verb *cook* that has been elaborated is similar to the Indonesian (*me*)*masak* in some cases but different in others. In Indonesian language sentences 1 and 2 would be translated into the following:

- 1) Saya akan masak kamu bacon dan telur.  
I will cook you bacon and eggs
- 2) Dia pulang untuk masak (makanan) untuk suaminya.  
She went home to cook a meal for her husband

Although similar in sentence construction, to maintain the benefactive meaning, the Indonesian *masak* needs to be morphologically marked by the suffix *-kan* (>*masakkan*) for sentence 1 while sentence 2 returns to the base form (>*masak*). Sentences 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8 are equivalent to the original sentences.

- 3) Saya harus masak setiap hari untuk orang-orang itu.  
I have to cook everyday for all those men
- 4) Dia harus masak untuk dirinya sendiri.  
He had to cook for himself

- 5) Mereka telah masak seafood.  
They have cooked some seafood.
- 6) Mark mampu membayar seseorang untuk masak.  
Mark could afford to pay someone to cook
- 7) Dia bisa masak dengan baik.  
She can cook well

For Indonesian learners of English it is unlikely that these sentences would be troublesome since the verb *cook* can be translated quite straightforwardly into the Indonesian word *masak* without any significant changes. A major change, however, occurs to sentence 9 in which *cook* no longer appears as a verb in Indonesian. This sentence would be translated into the following:

- 9) Apinya padam dan makanan (untuk sarapan pagi) tidak matang.  
The fire went out and the breakfast not cooked.

The word *matang* in Indonesian is an adjective, and it is not acceptable to have a verb following a non-agent subject, while the word *cook* in sentence 9 is a non-agentive verb and does not appear as an adjective. The difference in semantic structure between the Indonesian and English examples would produce a lexical gap which will be discussed later.

## COLLOCATION

Collocation has been defined in various ways, but the key words for a common definition are the co-occurrence of a word with another word that forms a structural combination (see Benson, 1985; Fox, 1988; Bahns, 1993; Heid, 1994). However, Bahns (1993) and Heid (1994) have distinguished between collocational combination and free or fixed combination. In the fixed combination the co-occurrence of two or more words is relatively established in that its individual member is not substitutable and the meaning cannot be retained outside the established combination. The expression *It's raining cats and dogs*, which means a heavy rain, does not relate to the individual components such as *cats* and *dogs*. This idiomatic expression is, therefore, not equivalent to *raining mice and horses*, which in fact does not exist in English. On the con-

trary, there is no restriction in the free combination. The word *my* can collocate with a wide range of lexical items such as *house, wife, work, dream*. The fixed and free combinations are at different extremes in terms of substitutability, and collocational combinations span the median range in terms of possible combinations. Hence the co-occurrence of words in the collocational combination is neither too highly restricted nor completely free. There is a certain degree of selectional restriction that can not be ignored. The English verb *weigh* collocates well with the words *offer, options, matter, words* and so on but not with the word *body*, which is quite common in the Indonesian language as in *menimbang badan* (weigh body). This is an area of difficulty for Indonesian and possibly other learners of English as a foreign language.

### LEXICAL GAP

Lexical gaps can occur in a translation when an expression [E] in the SL does not exist in the TL. The main problem resulting from this lexical gap is how to translate an expression from the source language into the target language where the equivalent expression does not exist. Awareness of lexical knowledge of both languages resolves the problem, since it enables the translator to distinguish different senses of a word accurately. This knowledge should include all the lexical properties especially the extended meanings of the word. In English the word *load* has a number of extended meanings appearing from different contexts. We will see in the following examples that those meanings can only be accurately translated by using different lexical items in Indonesian.

- 10) Her heart sank under a fearful *load* of guilt.<sup>1</sup>
- 11) A bag of rice in the bottom of the *load*.
- 12) With a *load* on his wagon....
- 13) To *load* up some wool on a wagon.
- 14) *Load* our trailer with wood.
- 15) If the van did not *load* the food.
- 16) Despite his heavy work *load*.

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<sup>1</sup> Those examples were drawn from the Ozcorp, the corpus of Macquarie University for a doctoral thesis entitled "A Study of the Verb Lexicon and its Implication for Learning English as a Second Language" (Priyono, 1998:251)

In the bilingual dictionary compiled by John Echols and Hassan Shadily (1994) the word *load* is defined by reference to six different lexical items in Indonesian. (1) *beban* [=burden], (2) *muatan* [=load, capacity, cargo], (3) *menimbuni* [=fill up], (4) *membebani* [=to burden], (5) *memberati* [=weigh down], (6) *mengisi* [=fill in]. In contrast, the word *beban* is defined by reference to only three English words, *load*, *burden*, and *responsibility*. The verb *muatan* is translated into *heap piles on*, the word *memberati* into the English word *weigh down* or *saddle*, and the verb *mengisi* into the English verb *fill up*. This cross-reference translation shows that the corresponding words of the Indonesian and English examples, which seem equivalent, turn out to have different semantic properties. Initial observations of the Indonesian word *beban* and the English word *load* would show similarities in the core meaning, but those similarities no longer apply in other specific contexts. To retain the original meaning, a different lexical item or expression in the target language is required. Sentences 10 – 16 illustrate the lexical gap between the Indonesian language and the English language. The word *load* in those sentences would have to be translated into the Indonesian language as follows:

- 10) *Hatinya dipenuhi dengan perasaan bersalah.*
- 11) *Sekarung beras di bawah tumpukan.*
- 12) *Dengan muatan di kendaraannya.*
- 13) *Untuk memasukkan kain wool ke kendaraan.*
- 14) *Isi trailer kita dengan kayu.*
- 15) *Kalau kendaraannya tidak memuat/membawa.*
- 16) *Walaupun beban kerjanya berat.*

As is evident from the Indonesian translated sentences, the word *load* must be translated into seven different lexical items. The Indonesian word *beban*, which is the core meaning of the English word *load*, does not have corresponding semantic properties. The sentences indicate that the English *load* is more polysemous than the Indonesian *beban*. The incompatibility of the two corresponding words *load* and *beban* is an example of the lexical gap between the two languages.

## METHOD

The Lexical Conceptual Structure (LCS) that has been elaborated serves as the framework whereby the preliminary data is to be observed and analysed. This data was in the forms of sentences, which contain the predicted troublesome verbs and were collected from authentic materials including unabridged novels, newspapers, magazines, brochures, emails, and textbooks. The data was then observed, analysed and put into the LCS. Lexical categories were then made by contrasting the data with the Indonesian expressions. It is predicted that the problems that translators and learners of English as a foreign language face are lexically related. The predicted areas of difficulty will be categorised into the five cases, namely Denominalised Verb or nouns appear as verbs (DNL), Deadjectival Verb or adjectives appear as verbs (DAV), Verb Semantic Structure or verbs that have complex meanings which can be realised in different syntactic structures (VSS), Collocational Combination, that is, the co-occurrence of a word with other words restricted by selectional principles (CC), and Transitive-Intransitive Alternation, refers to the ability of verbs to alternate from transitive to intransitive uses or the other way around (TIA).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data that has been collected is grouped on the basis of the predicted areas of difficulty. Upon analysis the data can be grouped according to five identified cases as follows:

1. DNL
  - 17) Now he *cupped* his hands by the side of his face to block out the light coming from...
  - 18) The cyclist was wearing a shirt that had King Messenger Service *lettered* across the back.
  - 19) He is learning to *milk* cows.
  - 20) ...but he couldn't *mistake* the gesture of throwing the gun away.
  - 21) Perhaps he should *nose* around a bit more to document his case better.
  - 22) Noel *sensed* something familiar about the woman in the red Toyota.



- 23) In the past, several powerful government leaders have tried to *silence* troublemakers in this country....
  - 24) The protesters *staged* a rally at Merdeka Palace.
  - 25) He *toweled* himself as dry as he could with the damp towel.
2. DAV
- 26) His hair had *grayed* a lot in the month since Aubrey disappeared.
  - 27) All these statements create unnecessary political complications that *upset* the market.
3. VSS (Verb Semantic Structure)
- 28) Omri had almost been angry enough to have *fed* him to the rat.
  - 29) I am putting you in separate ones because I can't *risk* any fighting.
  - 30) *Stand* clear of hazard area while engine is running.
  - 31) People would *benefit* from this road being properly repaired.
  - 32) If we did that everybody would *benefit*, wouldn't they?
  - 33) We request the opportunity to present the necessary corrections to *benefit* the readers.
4. CC
- 34) The buildings were mostly designed using *Indische* architecture with high ceilings and wide windows to *beat* the tropical *climate*.
  - 35) The British Council can not *extend hospitality* to family members.
  - 36) Tires screeched and a horn blared at him as he *interrupted* the flow of traffic.
  - 37) "You're so good to me, pal, and I never get a chance to *return* the *favor*".
  - 38) "Mmm," said the client, indicating clearly that he did not *buy* the *story*.
5. TIA
- 39) Either answer *condemns*.
  - 40) Warren *walked* Aubrey to her car and kissed her goodbye.
  - 41) Nazif and the new directors will *serve* until 2005.

From the observation of the English authentic materials, the five aforementioned cases are identified as potential sources of difficulty. First is DNV, the English noun known by both native and non-native speakers, which changes its function from noun to verb. The functional change of lexical category is common not only in English but also in many other languages (cf. Clark and Clark, 1979). The problem of DNV is that the lexical change is not readily “acceptable” in the perspective of EFL learners because of the unavailability of the equal expression in both SL and TL. The lexical gap between English and Indonesian is made clear in sentence 17 where the DNV *cupped* in the Indonesian language can not be formed derivatively. In fact the Indonesian sentence \**Dia mencangkir(kan) tangannya* (the prefix *me-* and or the suffix *-kan* to denominalise the noun *cangkir*= cup) does not exist as a normal expression in Indonesian speech. Among similar cases is the noun *milk*, which serves as a verb in sentence 19. To form an equivalent expression in Indonesian, by means of derivation, would result in laughter. The literal translation would be *Dia belajar menyusu sapi* (=He is learning to “breastfeed” himself from a cow).

The similar case is DAV, a word which changes its function from an adjective to a verb. Interestingly DAV does not occur as often as DNV in this preliminary investigation (It is probably more common in Indonesian language). However, the occurrence of DAV in English is not readily acceptable in the viewpoint of the Indonesian EFL learners unless they have been exposed quite extensively to it. The English verb *grayed* in sentence 26 is equivalent to the Indonesian *memutih* (turn to white), which is derived from the adjective *putih* (=white), but the question is when an adjective can be used as a verb. This is also the case for the adjective *upset* in sentence 27.

Another potential source of difficulty is from verbs with complex semantic structure (VSS). A sample of a VSS case is available in sentences 28-33. One is the English verb *feed* (sentence 28), which is known as a transitive, takes a beneficiary object. This object-taking property implies that the verb *feed* entails *eat*<sup>2</sup>. Thus a sentence *She has fed the chickens* would entail that the chickens have eaten. However, this common property is adversely different from the one encoded in sentence 28. The sentence *Omri had almost been angry enough to have fed him to the rat* does not contain the same semantic structure as the verb *feed*

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<sup>2</sup> More discussion of lexical entailment can be found in Fellbaum’s article *English Verb as a Semantic Network* published in *the International Journal of Lexicography*, volume 3, number 4, 1990.

in *She has fed the chickens*. If *feed* entailed *eat*, the object *him* would be Beneficiary, but it is not. Instead of being the subject of the entailment *eat*, *him* is adversely the object of that verb while its subject is *the rat*. The other VSS case is found in the verb *benefit*. The sentences 31-33 demonstrate three different semantic structures. In sentence 31, the subject of the verb is the Beneficiary with an explicit source, *road being properly repaired*. In sentence 32, the subject remains the same, but the source is unspecified. The verb *benefit* in sentence 33 is quite on the contrary. It is the object, not the subject that serves as the Beneficiary. In Indonesian language, the meaning of the verb *benefit* as applied in sentences 31, 32, and 33 can be distinguished by morphological markers or by rephrasing. This verb *benefit* would mean *memperoleh keuntungan dari*, *beruntung*, and *menguntungkan*.

Another different lexical structure can also be found in CC (Collocational Combination). In English, it is very common to have a noun co-occur with an adjective such as *high class*, *a high mountain*, *big mistake*. As has been discussed earlier, these co-occurrences are not entirely free but in accordance with the lexical or Selectional Restriction. The Selectional Restriction principle also applies to the combination between verb and its noun phrase object. The evidence found in sentences 34-38, indicates that the selection of the verb object can not be just any noun phrase. These sentences present some noun phrases that are “not expected” in Indonesian language to collocate with the verbs *beat*, *extend*, *interrupt*, and *buy*. Analysis of this evidence would find different selectional restrictions in the Indonesian language. The meaning of the expression *...to beat the tropical climate* could only be retained in Indonesian translation by substituting the verb *beat* (=mengalahkan) with *mengatasi* (=to solve). In sentence 35, the co-occurrence of the verb *extend* and its object *hospitality* also present a peculiar combination. This lexical combination cannot be retained using the same lexical “counterpart” in the Indonesian version as in *\*memperluas keramahan*. Similar cases are shown in sentences 36, 37, and 38. The English expressions *interrupted the flow of traffic*, *return the favour*, and *buy the story* could only be accurately translated into Indonesian with some reconstruction of the original lexical combination. The following comparison will demonstrate how the literally translated version should be reconstructed to retain an accurate transfer of meaning.

Source Language	Literal Version	Reconstructed Version	Rephrasing in Source Lg.
Interrupted the flow of traffic	* <i>Menginterupsi arus lalu lintas</i>	<i>Menyeberang jalan sehingga mengganggu arus lalu lintas</i>	Crossed the street disturbing the traffic
Return the favor	* <i>Mengembalikan budi/jasa</i>	<i>Membalas budi/jasa</i>	Return one's kindness
Buy the story	* <i>Membeli cerita</i>	<i>Tidak mempercayai cerita</i>	Does not believe in the story

In this table, all the three literal versions are asterisked to indicate that they are unacceptable in common Indonesian expressions. The reconstructed versions are the translations that express the accurate meaning of the original expressions in the source language. Thus, the comparison between the literal translation that retain the original lexical combination, and the free translation with some lexical reconstructions, demonstrates that there are substantial differences in the lexical structure of English and Indonesian.

The last potential source of difficulty in this study relates to TIA. The analysis of the English verbs also shows substantial differences in lexical structure. This is due to the fact that lexical properties of the English verbs can essentially be realized in three syntactic categories. The first category is verbs that must take an object in a sentence. The verbs in this category are identified as strictly transitive because they cannot appear without an object. Included in this group are the verbs *contain, put, give*. The second category is verbs that cannot take any object. These verbs are known as Pure Intransitive. Included in this group are the verbs *come, go, die, cry*. The third category is verbs that can appear in a sentence with or without an object. With this property the transitive intransitive alternation is grammatically possible. Therefore, TIA is possible with the verbs *boil, cook, melt, pour, walk*, etc. (Priyono, 1998). Consider the following examples:

- 42) (a) Mary walked to school.  
 (b) Mary walked her child to school.

The verb *walk* in sentence 42a is intransitive, but transitive in 42b. The intransitive *walk* is the closest in meaning with the Indonesian *berjalan*, which is also intransitive. However, the transitive *walk* in 42b would not be readily “accepted” by EFL learners in Indonesia. The reason being that the TIA is the lexical property of *walk*, enables the verb to alternate its transitive use to the intransitive. The Indonesian word (*ber*)*jalan* does not have the same properties so that the verb cannot participate in the TIA.

## CONCLUSION

This article has discussed that the differences of the expression system in sentence constructions between two languages potentially create difficulties for the translators or EFL learners, unless they have acquired the lexical knowledge.

The analysis of a verb’s lexical property has been categorized into five cases, namely DNV (Denominalized verb), DAV (Deadjectival verb), VSS (Verb semantic Structure), CC (Collocational combination), and TIA (Transitive-intransitive alternation). Each case represents lexical properties that enable the respective verb to enter into syntactic patterns that are quite distinguishable from each other. For example, the verb *eat* can be distinguished from the verb *devour* in that the former can participate in TIA while the latter cannot. All five cases are potential sources for difficulty in translation and learning English as a foreign language. As has been elucidated in the previous sections, these five cases are the results of a lexical-based analysis.

Therefore, it can be inferred that all “peculiar” phrases, lexical combinations, or syntactic constructions that have been identified as DNV, DAV, VSS, CC, and TIA are lexically constrained, since all those grammatical elements are covered in lexical properties. In other words, the acquisition of lexicon is the competence that includes the knowledge of lexical properties (including a large part of grammar). For an EFL learner, it would imply that the encoded grammatical aspects should be learned as an integral part of learning vocabulary. Hence, it would render the teaching of grammar, to a great extent, redundant. Although it is not intended to endorse a total elimination of grammar, the reduction of grammar teaching would be a logical implication for this study.

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