Use of Collocations in English-Japanese Translation made by Intermediate-Pre-Advanced Learners of Japanese

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Recently the importance of translation in foreign language education has been revisited, and the effective use of translation in Japanese language education has also received much attention. In fact, English-Japanese translation exercises are included as part of the curriculum for the writing class in the university I work for, and they seem to have contributed to some extent to the overall language development of our students. However, I have observed quite a few lexical errors and unnatural use of vocabulary which may be attributed to the fact that the learners are translating directly from English, and collocational errors in particular seem noticeable, sometimes to the extent the translated texts hardly make sense.

Among the studies of error analysis of learners of Japanese, Suzuki (2002) and Komori (2003 cited from Suzuki 2014) focus on learners use of collocations and suggest that their collocational errors may stem from the influence of their L1 or L2 (i.e. English). However, those studies were mostly made based on the learners’ free writing compositions in Japanese, rather than on translation, and the effect of learners’ L1 or English may not have been measured beyond speculation; nor can the possibility be ruled out that the learners avoided using collocations of which they were not confident.

In this presentation I will aim to investigate to what extent intermediate to pre-advanced learners of Japanese were affected by the English expressions in the source texts, with particular focus on collocations, when they translated four articles into Japanese (they were allowed to complete the tasks in their own time using any dictionaries). By looking closely into the learners’ translation from the English collocations which seem difficult to translate into Japanese directly, I will analyse their use of Japanese from the point of: 1) naturalness as Japanese words, and 2) closeness of the meaning from the original English expressions. Furthermore, referring to the different types of collocations proposed by Cowie (1994) and Akimoto (1993) (both cited from Suzuki 2014) based on the strength of the connection of words, I will examine the types of collocations that may be particularly difficult for these learners.

By focusing on one of the most salient problems in learners translating into Japanese, I hope to suggest some pedagogical implications for teaching and learning effective translation in Japanese language education.

References