Towards a Collocational Dictionary

By : Dr.A.F.Abu-Ssaydeh
English Department-
University of Bahrain

1 - Scope of the Study

This paper attempts to examine the reasons underlying the failure of the Arab translator to select the correct English lexical item when translating a text from Arabic into English. It explores the nature of the problem, examines its causes and proposes a partial solution.

2 - Nature of the Problem

Translation can be defined as a process whereby a message in a certain language (source language) is accurately and appropriately conveyed into another language (target language). Within this context, accuracy would mean that the lexical equivalents in the target language are correctly chosen on the basis of conceptual meaning and the idiosyncratic distribution a particular lexical item may demonstrate. Appropriacy, on the other hand, is a much more complex and more elusive term as attention has to be focused, inter alia, on the medium (whether the message is oral or written), register and the historical background (Leech 1974 and Gairns and Redman 1986).

The choice of the correct equivalent is affected by four factors.

First, the translator may use the English equivalent in all the environments in which the Arabic item in question may occur. A case in point is the Arabic equivalent of the English verb «open» which co-occurs with the nouns door, tap and country in Arabic. In English, the translator is likely to extend the usage of this verb to the same environments instead of using switch on, turn on and conquer respectively.

Secondly, the translator may choose any of the meanings listed against the Arabic entry, especially in the absence of any indication of the difference in meaning or distribution. (See Appendix I).

Thirdly, the translator may choose any of several partially synonymous equivalents (i.e. lexical items which share an element of meaning, thus their interchangeability is restricted to certain environments. (See Appendix II for examples and Appendix III for the distributions of some examples).

Fourthly, the translator may fail to realise that the English lexical items listed as complete synonyms may vary at any of the following levels :

5

Researches and Studies
Recherches et Etudes

AL-LISSAN
AL-ARABI

N° 3 2

1989