

# Collocations in Translation

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This paper describes how collocations are handled in the Its-2 translation system. We will consider the various scenarios, such as source lexeme to target collocation (1), source collocation to target lexeme (2) and source collocation to target collocation (3).

- (1) fr. avoir envie ('have desire') → to want  
fr. avoir besoin ('have need') → to need  
fr. prendre garde ('take guard') → to watch out  
fr. prendre au piège ('take in trap') → to trap
  
- (2) to shadow/to tail → prendre en filature ('take in spinning')  
awareness / realization → prise de conscience  
scenario → cas de figure  
perjury → faux témoignage  
to brief → donner des instructions
  
- (3) la nouvelle tombe → the news breaks  
to put on a show → donner un spectacle  
to take a look → jeter un coup d'oeil

The general transfer algorithm recursively traverses the syntactic tree structure generated by the parser in the order head, left sub-constituents, right sub-constituents. Lexical transfer occurs during the transfer of a non-empty head. At that time, the bilingual dictionary is consulted and the target language item which has the highest score among all the possible translations of the source language lexical item is selected. For instance, in the case of example (3), the sequence of lexical transfer is given in (4):

- (4) Jean a mangé un biscuit ('Jean has eaten a cookie')
  
- (5) a → ∅, mangé → eat, Jean → Jean, un → a, biscuit → cookie

If a collocation is identified in the source sentence, as in example (6), the lexical item associated with the verb *tomber* will also specify that collocation ('the news breaks'). In such case, lexical transfer occurs on the basis of the collocation and not on the basis of the lexeme<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>In case no correspondence can be found in the bilingual dictionary for the collocation, the collocation is ignored and lexical transfer is made on the basis of the individual lexemes.

- (6) La nouvelle vient de tomber.  
the news comes to fall  
'the news has just broken'

Notice that in such examples collocation knowledge not only provides the proper translation of the verb (*tomber* is to be translated as *break* rather than *fall*), it also provides the proper translation for the noun (*nouvelle* is to be translated as *news* rather than *short story*). A large number of collocations involve highly polysemous words, but in the context of the collocation those words usually have an unambiguous meaning. In this respect, collocation knowledge can be viewed as an effective help to disambiguate otherwise polysemous words.

Finally, we will show how things get somewhat more difficult when the constituents of a collocation are at some distance of each other, due to grammatical processes as relativization, wh-interrogation, passivization, or even pronominalization.