DIFFICULTIES OF TRANSLATING ENGLISH COLLOCATIONS INTO ROMANIAN

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Abstract: As no two languages are perfectly alike, translation above word level may sometimes prove to be no easy task. The authors’ aim is to highlight some difficulties encountered by a number of Romanian BA students when translating English collocations into their mother tongue. Special attention is devoted to lexical-semantic, grammatical and cultural differences between the two languages, as potential sources of these difficulties.

Keywords: collocation, cultural approach, grammatical approach, lexical-semantic approach, meaning, translation

1. Introduction

In any language, words have the tendency to co-occur in combinations that sound natural to its native speakers, as conventionally accepted ways of saying something in that language. Such combinations are called, by terms commonly attributed to Firth (1957, 1968), collocations (if seen from a lexical perspective, i.e. as combinations of vocabulary items with specific meanings) and colligations (if seen from a grammatical perspective, i.e. as combinations of or with specific grammatical categories).

Collocational tendency, i.e. the “syntagmatic attraction” (Lehecka 2015: 2) between the node and its collocate(s), is more powerful in some cases (fixed/unique/restricted collocations, e.g., auburn/curly hair) and weaker in others (multiple/common/unrestricted collocations, e.g. careful/close/worried/pleading/lingering/long, etc. look), strongly dictated by the propositional content of the words involved (e.g., bank cheque, pay a cheque, write a cheque) and less so in numerous other cases. Baker (2002: 47) explains that, “meaning cannot always account for collocational pattern. If it did, we might expect carry out, undertake or even perform to collocate with visit. Yet, English speakers typically pay a visit, less typically make a visit, and are unlikely to perform a visit. [...] Moreover, words
which we might think of as synonyms or near-synonyms will often have quite different sets of collocates. English speakers typically *break rules* but they do not *break regulations*; they typically talk of *wasting time* but not of *squandering time*. Therefore, irrespective of their strength, one should be aware that collocations exist, and, that they are language-specific, and that one should take them into consideration when translating from one language into another.

As for the grammatical form of collocations, Baker (2002) points out that, in some cases, the relation between the members of the collocation holds regardless of the form they take (e.g., *achieving aims, achievable aims, achievement of an aim, an aim has been achieved*). Yet, “words will collocate with other words in some of their forms but not in others” (2002: 48): English people *bend rules*, but rules are unlikely to be described as *unbendable*, they would rather be referred to as *inflexible*. Adjectives such as *ajar, alive, ablaze* may function syntactically as predicatives, but not as attributes: The door is *ajar*, *The child is alive*, The house is *ablaze* are perfectly grammatical sentences in English, but an *ajar door, *an alive child and *an ablaze house* are incorrect phrases in English.

The few examples above suffice to illustrate the considerable degree of mismatch that may occur between English words when used in collocations. As one would expect, the possibility of mismatch increases even more when equivalents in other languages are sought.

These observations constitute the background of our analysis, which aims at highlighting possible asymmetries between English collocations and their Romanian counterparts, from a lexical-semantic, grammatical and culture-related perspective. At the same time, the paper seeks to bring to the fore possible translation difficulties that may arise from these asymmetries, by referring to some errors twenty-five first year BA students, majoring in Applied Modern Languages, made in their translations into Romanian of 50 English sentences, containing collocations built on some of the patterns that will be discussed in what follows.

2. **English collocations and their Romanian equivalents**

2.1. **Meaning in isolation and contextualized meaning**

The same words may have different meanings when used in isolation and when contextualized, i.e. combined with other words in the structure of various collocations. Translation difficulties may arise and awkward, inappropriate or incorrect equivalents may be suggested as a consequence of one’s not being aware of such differences in meaning.

Thus, the meaning of the same node may change each time it is accompanied by a different collocate (therefore translation should be adjusted accordingly): *to run a program* means to execute a computer program (“a rula un program”), *to run a company* refers to the activity of managing it (“a conduce o companie”), *to run a rope* signifies to stretch it (“a întinde o sfoară”), while *to run water* means to cause
water to flow ("a da drumul la apă"). Similarly, the meaning of the verbal noun run changes when it collocates with different verbs: to break into a run means to suddenly start running ("a o rupe la fugă"), to operate on a run signifies to go/ function on a particular route ("a merge/ funcționa pe o anumită rută"), while to score a run is used in basketball and cricket for scoring a point ("a marca un punct").

2.2. Common and specialized meaning

Specialized terminology in various domains builds on everyday words which are employed with a different meaning (usually metaphorical) in professional contexts. In many cases, the common, everyday meaning provides hints at the specialized sense, but care should be taken by translators when suggesting equivalent terms, since, on the one hand, field-specific vocabulary is fixed and, consequently, translating it does not allow the freedom of choice sometimes possible when translating non-professional, general texts. On the other, extension of meaning of the words that are transferred from common to specialized vocabulary does not manifest uniformly in all languages. For example, ceiling and floor no longer refer to parts of a room, but, by analogy, to the highest and, respectively, the lowest price limits when used in business as collocates of price: price ceiling, price floor ("limita inferioară a prețului", “limita superioară a prețului”). Similarly, blanket loses its every day meaning “piece of soft fabric used as bed cover” in favour of the specialized, descriptive one – “that covers all risks”, in blanket insurance. Such extension of meaning is, however, characteristic of the three English words only; the senses of their Romanian equivalents tavan, podea and pătură have not evolved in the same way (which makes word-for-word translation impossible).

2.3. Condensed and explicitated meaning

In some cases, the propositional meaning of English collocations is rendered into Romanian by equivalents with a dissimilar structure. Dissimilarities often manifest themselves in the greater length of the Romanian lexical units, caused by some semes inherent in the English collocations elements (either the node or the collocate) that need explicitation. Explicitation in these cases is obligatory (neither optional, nor pragmatic or translation-inherent), i.e. it is imposed by differences between the lexico-grammatical specific parameters of the source and the target languages (Klaudy 2008). The explicitated semes may refer to:

- the object of the action expressed by the node: to apply in writing – a face o cerere in scris (lit. to make a request in writing);
- the manner of the action expressed by the node: to argue calmly – a discuta în contradictoriu cu calm (lit. to discuss in disagreement, with calm);
the duration of the state expressed by the node: to fall into abeyance – a fi suspendat pentru un timp/ temporar (lit. to be suspended for some time/ temporarily);

the cause of the state expressed by the node: false labour – false dureri ale nașterii (lit. false pains of birth giving);

the place of the action expressed by the collocate: to roast beef – a frige la cuptor carne de vită (lit. to roast beef in the oven); to barbecue/ grill meat – a frige carne pe grătar (lit. to cook meat on a grill);

the instrument of the action expressed by the collocate: to nod one’s approval – a încuviința cu capul, a da din cap în semn de încuviințare (lit. to agree with one’s head, to move one’s head to suggest agreement); to bat a ball – a lovi mingea cu bâta de baseball/ cricket (lit. to hit the ball with the baseball/ cricket bat);

the manner of the action expressed by the collocate: to apply thinly – a aplica în strat subțire (lit. to apply in a thin layer);

the quality of the node, as expressed by the collocate: contributory negligence – neglijență care a contribuit la provocarea unui accident (lit. negligence that contributed to causing an accident); cash discount – reducere pentru plata cu numerar (lit. discount for payments made in cash), etc.

The implicit meaning components of both elements (the node and the collocate) of an English collocation may be rendered explicit at the same time, the result being an extended Romanian equivalent: to chant a blessing – a spune pe un ton monoton o rugăciune de mulțumire (lit. to utter a prayer of thankfulness in a monotonous voice).

Sometimes, the collocation element which is formally extended in the translation is the collocate. However, the extension may consist of making explicit a sense component that belongs to it, but refers to the whole collocation as a unit rather than just to the collocate: e.g., striking distance – distanța dintre locul în care se produce un fulger și locul în care acesta lovește (lit. the distance between the place where a lightening is produced and the place where it strikes).

A translation technique based on explicitation, at the semantic level, and on extension, at the formal level, is the paraphrase, which is resorted to when rendering the condensed meaning of idiomatic collocations into non-idiomatic, explanatory Romanian equivalents. The holistic meaning of the entire word combination is made clear (such paraphrases are lexical gap fillers, in fact): e.g., nest egg – bani puși de o parte pentru viitor, cu un anumit scop (lit. money put by for the future, with a certain purpose); spring chicken – nou angajați într-un domeniu, încă lipsiți de experiență (lit. new employees, still lacking experience).

The reverse of the general situation detailed so far in this section also stands proof of the existence of structural dissimilarities between English collocations and
their Romanian counterparts. If, as seen above, explicitation may lead to expanding condensed meaning when transferring a collocation from English into Romanian, making the explicit implicit and, consequently, reducing the length of the original in the target language may also be the appropriate translation choice in some cases. Instances when the meaning of the whole English collocation is condensed into one Romanian word (in the case of verbs, sometimes accompanied by a reflexive pronoun, as the mark of the reflexive voice) concern word combinations such as the following:

- collocations containing delexical verbs as their nodes or collocates (do, get give, go, have, make, take, etc.): e.g., *to do the hair* – *a se coafa*; *to get sick* – *a se îmbolnăvi*; *to get wind* – *a auzi*; *to give a start* – *a tresări*; *to make friends* – *a-și face prieteni*; *to take aim* – *a ochi, a ținti*; *to take an approach* – *a aborda*;

- collocations containing other verbs: *to commit blasphemy* – *a huli, a blasfemia*; *to join the army* – *a se înrola*; *to put to bed* – *a culca*;

- collocations made up of pre-modifier+noun: *gold nugget* – *pepită*; *crane operator* – *macaragiu*; *buzzing noise* – *zumzăit*; *first/ opening night* – *premieră*.

2.4. Modulated and transposed equivalent meaning

Apart from extension by explicitation and reduction by implicitation, English collocations may be rendered into Romanian as formally similar structures, obtained, however, via modulation or equivalence: e.g., *to brush one’s teeth* – *a se spăla pe dinți* (lit. *to wash one’s teeth*); *to slam the door into one’s face* – *a trânti ușa în nas* (lit. *to slam the door into one’s nose*); *to fight tooth and nail* – *a se lupta pe viață și pe moarte* (lit. *to fight for life or death*). Structure shift/ recasting and/or class shift accompany modulation, to obtain naturally-sounding Romanian collocations in cases like: *reigning champion* – *campion actual* (lit. *current champion*); *loud tie* – *cravată stridentă* (lit. *strident tie*); *blood orange* – *portocală roșie* (lit. *red orange*); *business day* – *zi lucrătoare* (lit. *work(ing) day*).

Romanian formally different structures may also be the equivalents of some English collocations. Modulation and structure as well as class shifts are at work in these cases, too: *naturally curious* – *curios din naștere* (lit. *curious since birth*); *live frugally* – *a trăi de azi pe mâine* (lit. *live from today to tomorrow*), etc.

a) A grammatical perspective

From a grammatical point of view, English collocations are only sometimes translatable directly, by applying the word-for-word technique. Perfect lexicogrammatical equivalents such as *a row of chairs* – *un rând de scaune*; *an engine functions* – *un motor funcționează*; *to decrease dramatically* – *a descrește dramatic*; to
consume news – a consuma știri (a calque of the English phrase) are rather the exception than the rule, if one considers the frequency of the word-for-word translation option. The change of word order (or structure shift/ recasting) is much more often the appropriate translation technique, especially in the case of noun phrases, even if the target language words are perfect semantic equivalents of the source language ones. This is the consequence of obeying word order rules in Romanian, where, unlike in English, the modifier follows the noun in non-emphatic noun phrases (if it precedes it, the construction has an emphatic value; e.g., interesting idea – interesantă idee): e.g., total obscurity – obscuritate totală; partial agreement – acord parțial.

Like structure shift, transposition (rank-bound or rank-unbound) is frequently employed to translate English collocations into Romanian. Thus, rank-bound transposition may be the basis of transformations in:

- a noun pre-modifier in the common case turns into a prepositional noun-phrase post-modifier in the accusative case (structure shift + intra-system shift): life/ safety net – plasă de siguranță (lit. net of safety); hair net – plasă pentru păr (lit. net for hair); cheese omlette – omletă cu brânză (lit. omlette with cheese);
- a noun pre-modifier in the common case turns into a post-modifier in the genitive case (structure shift + intra-system shift): child neglect – neglijarea copilului (lit. neglect of the child); body organs – organe ale corpului (lit. organs of the body);
- a noun pre-modifier in the genitive case turns into a prepositional noun-phrase post-modifier in the accusative case (structure shift + intra-system shift): lawyer’s office – birou de avocatură (lit. office of law);
- a noun pre-modifier in the common or the genitive case turns into an adjective post-modifier in the accusative case (structure shift + class shift): extension ladder – scară extensibilă (lit. ladder extensible); doctor’s office – cabinet medical (lit. office medical);
- a pre-modifying adjective turns into a post-modifying prepositional noun-phrase (structure shift + class shift): unprecedented occurrence – întâmplare fără precedent (lit. occurrence without precedent); naval officer – ofițer de marină (lit. officer of marine); undercover mission – misiune sub acoperire (lit. mission under cover);
- a verb modifying adverb turns into a prepositional noun-phrase (class shift): to applaud heartily – a aplauda din toată inima/ din tot sufletul (lit. to applaud with the whole heart soul); to avoid cleverly – a evita cu dibâcie (lit. to avoid with skill).

Transposition may also be rank-unbound in situations when, for example:

- a noun-phrase pre-modifier turns into a relative clause: aspiring/ budding musician – muzician care promite (lit. musician who ‘promises’).
Modulation, understood as a difference in the point of view taken on something, operates not only at the lexical level (as seen in section 2.4.), but also at the grammatical one. Thus, in some cases:

- an affirmative node may turn into a negative one: to keep an appointment — a nu lipsi de la o întâlnire (lit. not be absent from a meeting/ not miss an appointment); to hold/ stand one’s ground — a nu da înapoi/ a nu ceda (lit. not step back/ not give up);
- a negative node may turn into a negative collocate (the node is expanded by explicitation): to intend/ mean no harm — a nu intenționa/ a nu avea de gând să facă rău (lit. not intend to do harm/ not think about doing harm);
- an active voice collocation (verb + prepositional object) may turn into a passive voice verb): to meet with approval — a fi aprobat (lit. to be approved).

b) A cultural perspective

The cultural perspective taken on English collocations and their Romanian equivalents is doublefold here: on the one hand, cultural specificity is understood in connection with the encoded realities, i.e. as aspects of the surrounding world that exist in the source culture but are either non-existent in the target culture or have been imported into it, but are still perceived as “foreign” by the great majority of the target language speakers; on the other hand, it is seen as being linked to different ways of linguistically encoding realities that are shared between the two cultures.

English collocations that are culture-specific in the former sense include examples like: public-health nurse, old boy network, terassed/ row house, anchor baby, etc. Their Romanian equivalents, obtained by paraphrase or descriptive equivalence, are: asistentă medicală care vizitează la domiciliu lăuze sau persoane recent externate (nurse who visits at their homes women after childbirth or recently discharged patients), rețea de foști elevi ai unei școli particulare, care se ajută între ei (network of a private school former students who help each other), una dintr-un dintr-un șir de case care au pereții laterali comuni (one of a row of similar houses that are joined together by their side walls; not a house with a terrace!), un copil născut în USA, al unei mame care nu are, legal, reședință permanentă în SUA (“a child born in the U.S. to a foreign national mother who is not lawfully admitted for permanent residence; the term is generally used as a derogatory reference to the supposed role of the child, who automatically qualifies as an American citizen under ‘jus soli’ and the rights guaranteed in the 14th Amendment and can thus act as a sponsor for other family members upon reaching the age of majority”, Wikipedia online). Happy hour, video-clip, supermarket, fast food have referents that have been imported into Romanian culture together with their names, which have not been so far replaced by target language words. Consequently, they continue to be used as
loans in the target culture. Other source-culture specific collocations whose referents have been transferred into the Romanian culture may be translated by (near)calques of the original. Some such collocations are: *charity shop* – *magazin caritabil*; *bank holiday* – *vacanță bancară*; *shepard’s pie* – *plăcinta ciobanului*, etc.

Source culture-specific collocations that refer to concepts common to the target culture as well may be translated by modulation/ equivalence, either into structurally similar or into structurally dissimilar phrases: *old as the hills* – *bătrân ca munți* (lit. *old as the mountains*); *poor as a church mouse* – *sărac lipit pământului* (lit. *poor as if stuck to the earth*); *easy as pie* – *simplu ca “Bună ziua”* (lit. *easy as “Good day”*); *happy as a lark* – *fericit de nu-și mai încape în piele* (lit. *so happy that he no longer fits his own skin*); *back of beyond* – *unde a zis dracu “Noapte bună”* (lit. *where the devil said “Good night”*).

2.5. Old and new meaning

It is widely agreed that vocabulary is the most dynamic segment of a language. Changes of various kinds (extension, narrowing, elevation, degradation of meaning, a change of referent, etc.) frequently occur in its evolution. Such changes, if unknown, may be the source of wrong translations. Shakespeare’s plays, for instance, are a good example in this sense: although well known to the modern readers and theater goers in terms of plots and characters, their vocabulary may often be a challenge for the translator. Thus, the word *ancient* should not be translated as if it meant “very old”, but “most experienced person” in *King Lear*:

> Albany: Let’s then determine with the ancient of war
> On our proceedings. (*King Lear*, V.1.32) (David and Ben Crystal 2015: 19)

At the time, the meaning of the verb *to baffle* used to be “to treat shamefully” and not “to puzzle” or “to confuse” as today. Consequently, providing Romanian equivalents for the latter would not be appropriate in the context of the Shakespearean plays:

> Olivia (to Malvolio): Alas, poor fool, how have they baffled thee! (*Twelfth Night*, V.1.357) (David and Ben Crystal 2015: 25)

> Thomas Mowbray: I am disgraced, impeach’d and baffled here. (*Richard II*, I.1.174)

3. Difficulties of translating English collocations into Romanian

This section of the article contains some comments on the students’ translation into Romanian of the 50 English sentences mentioned in the Introduction as well as plausible (we hope) explanations of their choices.
3.1. Meaning in isolation and contextualized meaning

Four of the sentences suggested for translation to test whether the students were able to grasp and render into their mother tongue the difference between the meaning of certain words used in isolation and in specific contexts were:

(1) He bought the book, thus making an addition to his collection of 21st century authors. Does this program help you do addition faster?

and

(2) After I discussed my problems with a friend, my life took a new turn. Seeing her begging on street corners gave me a turn.

In most cases, the students proved awareness of the difference we were interested in and were able to apply translation techniques accordingly. In some cases, however, faulty translations were produced, and several aspects worth discussing arise, though not all of them related to the isolated or contextualized meaning difference. The most frequent improper translations were based on the word-for-word choice: a face o adiție, for both collocations in sentences (1) and a da o întorsătură for give somebody a turn. If a face o adiție sounds unnatural in Romanian, but manages to render the meaning of both make an addition and do an addition, the quasi-literal equivalent a da o întorsătură (the pronoun referring to the experiencer is missing) suggested for give somebody a turn proves that the student ignored the change of meaning of turn in the phrase and the idiomatic character of the collocation it is part of and failed to translate it correctly – therefore, the meaning of the source language collocation was not carried over into the target language. The source of this error may have been the student’s familiarity with the Romanian collocation he suggested, but he, however, misused it in this context: a da o întorsătură is perfect Romanian when employed in constructions with an ergative sense, in which the action expressed by the verb is reflected on a [-human] entity – Decizia lui a dat o altă întorsătură concursului. (lit. His decision gave a different turn to the competition.) A face cale întoarsă! (lit. to turn back) and a face pe cineva să se întoarcă (lit. to make somebody turn,), both quite frequent in Romanian, were also among the students’ wrong translation variants (the latter, by taking into account the pronoun in the English original this time). These wrong choices may have been rooted in a similar type of mismatch, prompted by the students’ employment of well-known Romanian collocations in a context where the English collocation, closely similar in form, was used with a completely different meaning from that approximated by the students.

The desire to preserve the structure of the English collocation, by resorting to modulation instead of word-for-word translation, sometimes also resulted in awkward Romanian constructions. Superficial knowledge of the target language
collocational patterns rather than of the contextualized meaning of certain source language words must have led to the use of the verb+noun collocation *a calcula adunări – to calculate additions* as the equivalent of *do addition*. *A calcula adunări*, just like *a face o adiție*, may be semantically equivalent to the original, but it lacks naturalness in Romanian. The phrase that sounds natural in Romanian is a combination of the two – *a face adunări* (which many of the students opted for, alongside the contracted form *a aduna – to add*).

The same tendency to stick to the form of the original may be identified in the translation of *give (somebody) a turn* as *a da de gândit* (lit. *to set somebody thinking*). Like the contracted translations rendered in the form of single verbs (e.g., *a impresiona, a emoționa, a uimi*), *a da de gândit* could be accepted as a close equivalent of the English collocation, but not as a perfect one. This lack of perfect equivalence is not the consequence of the translators’ inability to distinguish between meaning in isolation and contextualized meaning (our intended focus when we suggested sentences (1) and (2) for translation), but by their inability to render the connotation of the original, more exactly, the intensity of the emotion stirred. Both the Romanian collocation and the single verbs are unsuccessful translation options in this respect. As partial synonyms of *give somebody a turn*, they refer to less intense reactions than those the English collocation suggests.

As expected, in order to translate the sentences in (1) and (2), the choice our students made most often was the word-for-word technique. This led to both acceptable, though not always naturally sounding target language solutions, and also to improper ones. Romanian phrases which are formally very close to the English originals were also suggested, as a consequence of the students’ overlooking the fact that closeness in form is not automatically equivalent to similarity of meaning. Solutions with different connotations from those of the source language combination were put forth as well.

### 3.2. Common and specialized meaning

The students’ familiarity with and ability to translate specialized terminology based on words that are transferred from everyday vocabulary into professional jargon, with an obvious change of meaning, was tested with the help of the sentences in (3):

(3) The accused must agree to his arrest in the event he jumps bail.  
    The Romanian *air arm* had two days of training last month.  
    *Price ceilings* for products are usually set by law.

As pointed out in section 2.2, translating field-specific vocabulary does not offer the translator the liberty to choose from among variants that are sometimes available when translating non-professional texts. S/he is either familiar with the specialized terminology and uses its target language equivalents correctly, or s/he is not and fails to translate appropriately. Those of our students who proved insufficient knowledge of specialized terminology, and therefore mistranslated the collocations
in the sentences grouped under (3), suggested equivalents which were approximations of the originals, obtained by activating their knowledge of the everyday senses of the words the collocations were made up of.

With one exception, the approximated translations of air arm were the closest to what should have been acceptable: aviația armatei (lit. the army aviation), armata aeriană (lit. the air army), armata forțelor aeriene (lit. the air force army) for forțele aeriene/ aviația militară (lit. the air force/ military aviation). The exception was quite interesting in terms of the underlying reasoning in which it may have been rooted: arma cu aer (lit. the gun with air) may have been prompted by the primary, isolated meaning of air (“mixture of gases that we breathe”) and the closeness in form of the English noun arm and the Romanian noun armă (gun).

The equivalents provided for jump bail and price ceilings were, on the other hand, futile attempts at guessing the specialized meaning by starting from the common meaning. Thus, knowledge that the Romanian equivalent of jump over – a sări peste has a non-literal sense as well, i.e. “to skip”, “to elude”, must have been wrongly applied, together with recognition of bail as part of the juridical jargon, when equivalents such as a nu plăti cauțiunea (lit. not to pay bail), a scăpa de închisoare (lit. to skip prison time, to elude prison) were suggested for jump bail (a nu se prezenta la proces după plata cauțiunii - “fail to appear for a court appearance after depositing bail, with the intention of avoiding prosecution, sentencing or going to jail”).

Ceiling, in its common sense of “the surface that is above one in a room”, must have been the word which prompted the wrong (and nonsensical) translation of price ceilings as prețuri pentru produsele de cameră (lit. prices for room products!). Its “one of the limits of a room” sense (and, therefore, in our context, that which puts a limit to prices) must have triggered the truncated translation limita prețurilor (lit. the prices limit), which was, however, closer to the original. Most probably, produse cu prețuri mici (lit. products with small prices) was based on the same kind of analogy.

What follows from here is that, when students are not familiar with specialized terminology in the source language (and, most probably, neither in the target language), in trying to make sense of what a term means, they often resort to their knowledge of the everyday sense of the words that have been transferred from the common to the professional vocabulary. In many instances, as demonstrated, this does not lead to felicitous results.

3.3. Condensed and explicitated meaning

Some sentences given for translation meant to test whether our students were able to produce naturally sounding and semantically equivalent Romanian collocations by either explaining or condensing the meaning of the English originals were the following:

(4) The Allied Forces stormed the beaches of Normandy.
He looked up into her glaring eyes, wondering what to do.
The documentary did homage to our literary heritage. He drove a hard bargain and in the end made a profitable sale.

The students’ attempts at rendering the meaning of the verb storm in the collocation storm the beaches by explicitation resulted in both correct and incorrect/inappropriate Romanian equivalents. In the latter category, a crea o furtună (lit. to create a storm), for example, is misleading, as a native speaker of Romanian would most probably take it to be part of the longer and quite well known phrase a crea o furtună într-un pahar cu apă (lit. to create a storm in a glass of water), i.e. “to blow a small event out of proportion” (‘a tempest in a teapot’, ‘a storm in a teacup’). Even if detached from this predictable context, the meaning of the Romanian a crea o furtună does not correspond to that of storm in the collocation mentioned; though connected to chaos and turbulence, it does not refer to taking a place by assault (potentially, in a war or fight) as the original does.

In the case of glaring eyes, omission rather than explicitation was resorted to by some of our students. On many occasions, the English collocation was reduced to the general term ochi (eyes) or, even more frequently, to a more specific collocation, which still does not cover all the senses of the original meaning, ochi strălucitori/sclipitori (lit. brilliant/shiny eyes). None of the respondents chose a variant that should make explicit the cause of the eyes’ state – rage (ochi care privesc cu mânie/strălucesc de mânie (lit. eyes that watch with rage/shine with rage)).

Most often than not, the collocations in sentences (5) that could have been translated by condensation were not rendered into Romanian by using this technique (which, however, does not mean that all the target language solutions given were not acceptable). For did homage, the word-for-word, but unnatural in Romanian, a face un omagiu was the choice in most cases of non-reductive translation, the Romanian accepted collocation being a aduce un omagiu (lit. to bring an homage). A arăta compasiune (lit. to show compassion) is a choice that may have also been connected to the students’ familiarity with the connotational rather than direct meaning of a phrase peculiar to their own linguistic culture – a aduce un (ultim) omagiu (lit. to pay a (last) homage) used as a pragmatic idiom to show respect for a deceased person, on his/her funeral (by paying homage to the departed, one indeed shows not only respect for him/her, but also, indirectly, compassion for the members of his/her family).

The word-for-word technique was the translation choice in most instances when the students attempted to preserve the verb+noun structure of the English collocation to drive a bargain, instead of condensing its meaning into a single verb. Of these, the phrase a duce o negociere (lit. to carry on a negotiation) is an appropriate variant, but many others are not, due to various reasons: a duce la îndeplinire o negociere (lit. to carry on a negotiation to completion), for example, is an unnatural over-extension of a duce o negociere; a conducere o afacere (lit. to lead a business) and a pierde mulți bani (lit. to lose much money) are part of the Romanian vocabulary, but have completely different meanings from the original (both may
have been prompted by insufficient knowledge of English vocabulary and, consequently, in an attempt to guess the meaning, by wrongly selecting elements that are semantically associated with negotiating – business and money; *a duce o povară grea* (lit. *to carry a heavy burden*), also the consequence of deficient lexical knowledge, must have been triggered by the student’s mistaking *bargain* for *burden*.

Thus, our initial expectations concerning the translation of the collocations by explicitation or, as the case may have been, by condensation were confirmed only in few cases. Most often, other techniques, such as omission or word-for-word translation, were chosen, the result being that the meaning of the source language collocations was not always appropriately conveyed in the target language.

### 3.4. Modulated and transposed equivalent meaning

In general, the collocations whose correct Romanian equivalents can be obtained via modulation or equivalence did not pose major problems to the students tested. Among the sentences containing this type of collocations were:

(6) Everything turned out *wonderfully well*, so we were *deliriously happy*.
- The shawl added a *splash of colour* to her outfit.
- She *washes her hair* every weekend.
- When one tries to lose weight, it is not uncommon to suffer *pangs of hunger*.
- The *skilled occupation* list can be accessed here by all those interested.
- *A catalogue of terrorist crimes* has bloodied the world in recent years.
- The company has received an *explosion of customer complaints*.

Most of the students’ translations were successful (*wonderfully well*, *deliriously happy* and *a splash of colour* were translated faultlessly in all cases). Those which were not, however, were rather inadequate than semantically incorrect, mostly due to lack of naturalness (and subsequent infrequency) in the target language: *a-și spăla părul*, a word-for-word translation for *wash one’s hair* (the Romanian widely circulating phrase is *a se spăla pe cap* (lit. *wash one’s head*)); *crize de înfometare* (lit. *crises of being hungry*) for *pangs of hunger* (*chinurile foamei* (lit. *the torments of hunger*)) is the collocation most likely to be used in Romanian); or *locuri de muncă ce necesită competenţe* (lit. *jobs that require competences*), a paraphrase of the English *skilled occupations* (the collocation most likely to occur as its Romanian equivalent is *munci calificate* (lit. *qualified jobs/occupations*)).

Inappropriate translation solutions were suggested for a smaller number of collocations that should have been translated by equivalence. *A catalogue of crimes* and *an explosion of complaints* are cases in point. The idea of “multitude” conveyed by *catalogue* was grasped by the students, but the Romanian words used to render it were often ill-chosen, though, with the exception of the first, possible in other contexts: *varietate* (*variety*), *listă* (*list*). *Catalog de crime* (lit. *catalogue of murders*), which many of the students considered a word-for-word equivalent of *catalogue of*
crimes, sounds unfortunate in Romanian (o serie de acțiuni teroriste – a series of terrorist actions would have been the equivalent most readily available). The same idea of “multitude” was contained in explosion of complaints; its frequently word-for-word suggested equivalent – explozie de plângeri is as unfortunate in Romanian as catalog de crime (a number of other choices could have been made to convey the meaning of the original in an acceptable Romanian lexical form: avalanșă/ potop/ puhoi/ sumedenie/ mulțime de plângeri/ reclamații (lit. avalanche/ flood/ multitude of complaints)).

a) A grammatical perspective

As seen in section 2.4., if looked at from a grammatical perspective, English collocations may be most often rendered into Romanian by recasting, transposition or grammatical modulation. Sentences (7) to (10) below are some of those we chose to assess our students’ ability to apply these techniques correctly:

(7) She used rancid butter for baking.
   He was saving his strength for the last part of the race.
   The painter has a whiff of genius about him.

(8) The law office administrator job description is given below.
   She looked elegant in a stunning black low neck dress.
   The problem was discussed in a hastily arranged meeting.

(9) Please kindly allow me to introduce myself.
   He enjoys a questionable reputation.

(10) He told her to save her breath because he would not listen to her.
   I mean no disrespect to John, but his performance tonight was not his best.

The results obtained were mixed. Though, most of the times, accurate translations were provided, errors of various kinds were also made.

Rancid butter and save one’s strength were translated correctly without exception, as unt rânced and a-și păstra puterile/ forțele, respectively. The former equivalent was obtained by recasting, prompted by the Romanian specific syntactic peculiarities (as already stated, the modifier follows the noun in Romanian unemphatic word order). The latter presupposed the minor change from the original singular strength to the target language plural puterile/ forțele. A whiff of genius was, however, not as unproblematic as the above two. The majority of the flawed translations given, instead of the correct un pic/ o urmă de geniu, demonstrated that the students interpreted the collocation to refer to one’s being evidently a person with genius intelligence and not to one’s having just an “air”, a slight indication of
exceptional intellect about him/ her. As a consequence, the translations they suggested ranged from word-for-word aer de geniu (lit. air of a genius) and modulated schipire de geniu (lit. glitter of a genius) to the paraphrased variant foarte talentat (lit. very talented).

Transposition, also imposed by the specific Romanian syntax, was applied where needed. Of the collocations in sentences (8), law office, a noun premodifier+noun phrase, was translated correctly as the structure noun+prepositional noun phrase in post-modification position, birou de avocatură. Low neck dress (rochie cu decolteu adânc) was also most frequently transferred into Romanian as a noun post-modified by a prepositional noun phrase, but the meaning of the original collocation was not always conveyed in full or accurately. Rochie cu decolteu (lit. décolleté dress) and its variant noun+adjective rochie decolată (lit. decolleté dress) are cases when it was transferred only partially, while rochie pe gât (lit. dress with a high neck) and rochie cu gulerul jos (lit. dress with a down neck) are illustrations of inaccurate translations (the latter of the last two is non-sensical in Romanian and was produced most probably as the consequence of the student’s intention to follow the English collocation as closely as possible). Partial transfer and inaccurate rendering of the meaning of the source language collocation also occurred in the case of hastily arranged. When it was translated into Romanian as (întâlnire) aranjată (lit. arranged (meeting)), the reference to the manner of the action expressed by the verb was ignored. Aranjată rapid (lit. rapidly arranged), on the other hand, a solution provided by another student, may be considered inaccurate due to its ambivalent connotation – depending on the context, it may carry a positive connotation (rapidly and therefore successfully arranged) or a negative one (rapidly and therefore unsuccessfully arranged).

Rank unbound transposition occurs when the source and the target structures belong to different levels of the language. Kindly allow and questionable reputation in (9) were among our choices to test whether our students were aware of the necessity to translate them by applying this technique. The results proved that the technique was used in the case of the former collocation, but not in the case of the latter. Most often, they turned the adverb kindly into a suitable clause – vă rog (frumos) (lit. I ask you (kindly)). Nevertheless, their choice of clause was not always appropriate: Vă rog frumos să mă lăsați, which may seem a correct translation choice for kindly allow (me), is actually not its perfect equivalent in the context given. In Romanian, the verb a lăsa for allow is used to produce a felicitous request for permission, while here, allow is employed with a phatic function and, simultaneously, as a means of showing politeness; no permission is genuinely asked for. As for questionable reputation, the majority of the students translated the modifier questionable, literally, as indoelnică, a word that could have been extended under the form of an attributive clause (which is what we had in mind when suggesting it for translation) – care poate fi pusă sub semnul întrebării (lit. that can be placed under the question mark). However, disregarding the node reputation, some also mistook the meaning of the collocate here for one that could have been
activated should the node have been a different one: întrebător (oare) (lit. that asks questions, both literally and figuratively) may be paired with privire (look) and zâmbet (smile) for example, but not with reputation; chestionabil(ă), a calque of the English questionable, not yet recorded in dictionaries of Romanian, is present in online texts, for example, in collocations such as viitor/ text/ transfer, etc. chestionabil (lit. questionable future/ text/ transfer, etc.). Repuțăție chestionabilă does not sound acceptable in Romanian.

Save one’s breath and mean no disrespect in (10) were translated by various techniques, grammatical modulation (which we were interested in) included. For the former, the grammatically modulated forms suggested in Romanian were a nu vorbi degeaba (lit. not to talk in vain) and a nu-și bate gura (lit. not to talk), both implying the change of a positive node into a negative one. A more suggestive variant than a nu vorbi degeaba would have been a nu-și răci gura de pomană (lit. not to cool one’s mouth in vain); it would have also been clearer in meaning than a nu-și bate gura, which may be ambiguous outside a larger context, since, apart from “not talking”, it may also mean “not disclose secrets”. Mean no disrespect was translated by changing the negative node into a negative collocate in, for example, a nu vrea/ a nu intenționa să jignească, a nu vrea să fie lipsit de respect/ nepoliticos (lit. not want/ intend to offend, not want to be lacking respect/ to be impolite), all of them acceptable in Romanian.

b) A cultural perspective

The students’ understanding of the cultural dimension of some English collocations and their ability to appropriately deal with them in translation were also tested. Some of the sentences we used to this end were:

(11) The best charity shops in town can be found in a side street, not far from you.

A penny board is a type of hard plastic board on which you can skate around. She has always been rude to me, but talking like that to my mother was the last straw. Her spectacular success makes me green with envy.

Charity shops – shops in which a charitable organization sells, at low prices, used and new goods donated by people in order to make money to support their declared charitable mission – have appeared in Romania as well, their appellative name being transferred under the form of two lexical-semantic calques: magazine caritabile/ de caritate (lit. charitable shops/ shops of charity). Our students demonstrated familiarity with them and used them in the great majority of cases. Yet, some of the students, possibly as a consequence of their awareness that charity shops were something alien to their own culture felt the need to clarify what they stood for and rendered the English collocation into Romanian by explicitation, in phrases such as magazine pentru acte de caritate (lit. shops for acts of charity) or
magazine pentru făcut donații (lit. shops for making donations), both unnatural in the target language.

Penny board seems to have been perceived as being even more tightly connected to a foreign culture, since the greatest majority of the students tested did not attempt to translate it into Romanian. The few exceptions from choosing direct transfer of the source language collocation into the target language include instances such as the partial translation placă penny, where the node was translated literally into Romanian, while the collocate was preserved in its original form.

Source culture-specific collocations referring to concepts that are shared with the target culture may, in some cases, be translated by modulation/equivalence. As our students demonstrated, choices of how these concepts may be expressed in the target language may vary widely. The last straw is most often translated into Romanian as picătura care a umplut paharul (lit. the drop that filled the glass); this was our students’ main translation option, but other correct versions were also suggested – some, in keeping with the adjective+noun structure of the English collocation: ultimul strop/ultima picătură (lit. the last drop), others, rephrasing the original to be the last straw: a nu mai putea îngădui (lit. not to be able to bear/allow anymore), a pune capac (lit. to put a lid). (Make somebody) green with envy was also translated into Romanian in various acceptable ways, mostly by modulation: (a face pe cineva) mort de invidie (lit. (to make somebody) dead of envy), (a umple pe cineva de) invidie (lit. (to fill somebody with) envy), in whose case the intensity of the emotion suggested by the English collocation is covered by the adjective mort (dead) and by the verb a umple (to fill), respectively. (A face pe cineva) foarte invidios (lit. (to make somebody) very envious) is less intense (though it has a superlative meaning as well) and, therefore, less appropriate as a translation alternative. On the other hand, verde/ negru de invidie (lit. green/ black with envy) may be successful in conveying the superlative meaning of green with envy, but the choice of words results in collocations that sound atypical in Romanian: verde de invidie (lit. green with envy) is obviously a lexical-semantic calque of the original, while negru de invidie (lit. black with envy) seems to contain a mismatch of the node and its collocate – in the target language, negru (black) is usually associated with one’s being upset, not envious: negru de supărare (lit. black because of being upset).

As our analysis in this section has demonstrated, the types of errors our students made when translating collocations for which (grammatical) modulation and (cultural) equivalence would have been the choices we had in mind range from providing unnatural to partial and inaccurate Romanian equivalents.

3.5. Old and new meaning

The following examples from Shakespearean plays were chosen to test our students’ knowledge of the difference between the meaning of the words weird, unthrifty and stand on in the 16th century and today and their ability to translate them correctly:
(12) Oh, much I fear some ill unthrifty thing. (Romeo and Juliet, V.3.136)
    I dreamt last night of the three weird sisters. (Macbeth, II.1.20)
    Caesar, I never stood on ceremonies! Yet now they fright me. (Julius Caesar, II.2.13-14)

The negative meaning of unthrifty thing was approximated by our students, who used equivalents like lucră rău/ oribil/ nefast/ necurat (lit. bad/ horrible/ ill-fated/devilish thing), without any of them, however, providing the closest equivalent of the English collocation in the particular context of the Shakespearean play – nenorocire (lit. misfortune). Weird sisters, on the other hand, was given, without exception, a word-for-word translation, which contained the Romanian equivalent of the present-day meaning of weird: “strange, unusual” – surori ciudate (lit. strange sisters); the old meaning was obviously not known to them – “that makes prophecies”. The translation of stand on ceremonies – “to believe in prophecies”, in the context given – followed track, so that the Romanian equivalents offered were mostly based on current meanings of the verb stand and the noun ceremonies: a sta la ceremonii (lit. to keep an upright position at ceremonies), a suporta ceremoniile (lit. to be willing to accept ceremonies), a rămâne la ceremonii (lit. to remain at ceremonies). A number of other translation suggestions were incorrect extensions of the basic meanings: a sta – a asista/ a participa la ceremonii (lit. to witness/take part in ceremonies), a suporta – a-i plăcea ceremoniile (lit. to like ceremonies).

All in all, our suspicion that our students may hardly be familiar with the meaning of the words used in Shakespeare’s time was confirmed by their erroneous translations, which were based on the current meaning of these words.

4. Conclusion

The analysis of the errors made by our students when translating the English collocations into Romanian validates our initial claim that the process does not always run smoothly. The errors that affected the quality of the target language solutions they proposed may be placed on a scale, from those with unwanted consequences at the lexical level only to those negatively influencing the semantic level as a whole.

The former category is represented by the choices of phrases that manage to convey the meaning of the source language segments, but would be perceived as lexically unnatural by any native speaker of Romanian (e.g. crize de înfometare (lit. crises of being hungry) instead of chinurile foamei (lit. the torture of hunger) for pangs of hunger; magazin pentru acte de caritate (lit. shop for acts of charity) instead of magazin caritabil (lit. charitable shop) for charity shop); explozie de plângeri, a word-for-word translation of explosion of complaints, etc.).

In the latter category, the equivalents the students provided for certain English word combinations may also be placed on a scale, by taking into consideration how much of the original meaning they managed to render: part of it to none. The
following translation alternatives resulted in a partial transfer into Romanian of the meaning of the English collocations:

- the choice of a target language phrase that differs in connotation from the original, for example, by referring to emotions which are less intense than those expressed by the English collocation (e.g. (a face pe cineva) foarte gelos (lit. (make somebody) very envious for (make somebody) green with envy; a da de gândit (lit. to set somebody thinking) for give somebody a turn, etc.);

- the provision of partial translations of the original (e.g. ochi strălucitori/ sclipitori (lit. brilliant/shiny eyes) instead of (ochi care privesc cu mânie/ strălucesc de mânie (lit. eyes that watch with rage/ shine with rage) for glaring eyes; rochie decoltată (lit. décolleté dress) instead of rochie cu decolteu adânc (lit. dress with a low décolletage), etc.);

- the choice of ambiguous target language wording (e.g. aranjată rapid (lit. rapidly arranged) instead of aranjată în grabă (lit. arranged in a hurry) for hastily arranged; a nu-și bate gura (lit. not to talk) instead of a nu-și râci gura de pomană (lit. not to cool one’s mouth in vain) for save one’s breath, etc.).

Instances when the meaning of the English collocations was not carried over into the target language include:

- the translation of a specialized word borrowed from the common vocabulary by resorting to its non-specialized, everyday meaning (e.g. a nu plăti cauțiunea (lit. not to pay the bail) for jump bail, etc.);

- the incorrect translation of an English collocation by analogy with a target language phrase the students were familiar with (e.g. a arăta compasiune (lit. to show compassion) for do homage (translation under the influence of the Romanian phrase a aduce un (ultim) omagiu), etc.);

- the incorrect translation of false friends (e.g. catalog de crime (lit. catalogue of murders) for catalogue of crimes, etc.);

- the translation of a source language word by a target language word that is close to it in form (e.g. arma cu aer (lit. the gun with air) for air arm, etc.);

- the translation of the English collocation by making wrong selections from the larger semantic field to which one of its terms belongs (e.g. a conduce o afacere (lit. to lead a business) and a pierde mulți bani (lit. to lose much money) instead of a purta o negociere (lit. to carry on a negotiation) for drive a bargain, etc.);

- the translation of a word with its present day meaning where its older meaning should have been considered (e.g. surori ciudate (lit. strange sisters) instead of sisters who make prohpecies for weird sisters; a asista
la ceremonii (lit. to witness ceremonies) instead of believe in prophecies for stand on ceremonies.

Our analysis is a small-scale case study, and the difficulties of translating English collocations into Romanian, highlighted by the errors we have summarized above, are no doubt more numerous and diverse than those we have come across. However, what our research has revealed is hopefully a useful starting point for making Romanian teachers and learners of English as well as translators working with the two languages aware of these difficulties and the challenging problems that they may encounter.

References