

Translating Arabic Legal Collocations into English: An Analysis of Undergraduate Student Performance, Strategies and Error Patterns

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Abstract:

This study examined the complex challenges faced by undergraduate translation students when translating Arabic legal collocations into English, with a specific focus on translation accuracy, strategic choices, and error patterns. Using a descriptive-analytical approach, the research analyzed data from 65 fourth-year translation students at Sana'a University, who attempted to translate 33 Arabic legal collocations extracted from authentic legal contracts, including marriage agreements, divorce proceedings, lease contracts, and employment documents. The results revealed significant difficulties, with only 21% of the translations rated as accurate and 71% deemed unacceptable. Analysis of translation strategies showed that paraphrase (30.2%) was the most frequently employed strategy, followed by synonym (21.4%), transposition (21.2%), and literal translation (11.5%). Error analysis identified six primary categories: misunderstanding of specialized legal terminology (35%), inappropriate strategy selection (28%), lack of collocational awareness (20%), Arabic linguistic interference (12%), difficulty with culture-specific concepts (3%), and grammatical complexity (2%). Performance varied significantly across collocation types, with culture-specific and legally complex expressions proving most challenging. The findings contribute to understanding specific difficulties in legal collocation translation and provide empirical evidence for developing targeted pedagogical interventions in translator training programs. These results have significant implications for Arabic-English legal translation pedagogy and curriculum development worldwide, emphasizing the need for specialized instruction in legal terminology, strategic competence, and cultural awareness.

Keywords: legal translation, Arabic-English translation, collocations, translation strategies, error analysis, translator training, legal contracts

Introduction

Legal translation represents one of the most specialized and demanding areas within translation studies, requiring not only linguistic proficiency but also a deep understanding of legal systems, cultural contexts, and specialized terminology (Šarčević, 1997). The complexity of legal language, characterized by its precision, formality, and culture-specific terminology, poses unique challenges for translators working across linguistic and legal boundaries. This complexity is particularly pronounced when translating legal collocations, fixed or semi-fixed combinations of words that carry specific legal meanings and function as single semantic units within legal discourse.

The translation of Arabic legal collocations into English presents formidable challenges due to fundamental differences between Arabic and English legal systems, linguistic structures, and cultural frameworks. Arabic legal discourse is deeply rooted in Islamic jurisprudence (Sharia law) and traditional legal concepts that often lack direct equivalents in English common law or civil law systems (Faruqi, 1986). Additionally, the syntactic and morphological differences between Arabic (a Semitic language) and English (a Germanic language) create structural challenges that complicate the translation process (Baker, 2018).

Legal collocations are particularly problematic because they represent conventional patterns of word usage that have evolved within specific legal traditions and cultural contexts. Unlike general vocabulary, legal collocations cannot be translated word-for-word without potentially losing their specialized meaning and legal effect (Abdulwahid & Hamzah, 2017). This creates what scholars term “legal lacunae,” concepts that exist in one legal system but have no direct equivalent in another system.

The significance of accurate legal collocation translation cannot be overstated, as mistranslations can lead to serious legal consequences, misinterpretation of rights and obligations, or complete invalidation of contracts. In international legal contexts, precision in translation becomes even more critical as errors can result in financial losses, legal disputes, or breaches of international agreements (El-Farahaty, 2015).

Despite the acknowledged importance and difficulties of legal collocation translation, there remains a significant gap in empirical research that focuses specifically on how undergraduate students navigate these challenges. Previous studies have examined general difficulties in Arabic-English legal translation (Al-Nakhalah, 2013; Isaacs, 2024) and specific error patterns in collocation translation (Al-

Jarf, 2022; Davoudi & Bahchad, 2020), but few have provided a comprehensive analysis of student performance, strategy selection, and error patterns in the specific domain of legal collocations.

This study addresses this critical research gap by providing an in-depth analysis of undergraduate student performance when translating Arabic legal collocations into English.

The research aims to answer the following questions:

1. How do undergraduate translation students perform when translating various types of Arabic legal collocations into English?
2. What translation strategies do students employ, and how effective are these strategies for different collocation types?
3. What error patterns emerge from an analysis of student translations, and how do these patterns vary across different categories of legal collocations?
4. How cultural and legal system differences impact translation success and strategy selection.

The objectives of this study are threefold:

1. To quantify performance differences across collocation types and assess overall translation accuracy,
2. To identify strategy preferences and analyze their effectiveness for different categories of legal collocations,
3. To develop a comprehensive typology of errors linked to specific collocation characteristics and translation challenges.

By addressing these objectives, this research contributes to both legal translation studies and translator education by providing empirical evidence that can inform more targeted and effective pedagogical approaches. The findings have significant implications for curriculum development, teaching methodologies, and training programs designed to prepare future translators for the complexities of legal translation in Arabic-English contexts. These insights are crucial for developing effective educational interventions that address real-world challenges.

Literature Review

Collocations and Legal Collocations

Collocations, defined as habitual co-occurrences of words that appear more frequently together than would be expected by chance (Firth, 1957), represent a fundamental aspect of language that significantly impacts naturalness and idiomaticity in communication. Baker (1992) categorizes collocations into several types based on their grammatical structure, including adjective-noun combinations (e.g.,

“strong tea”), noun-noun phrases (e.g., “stream of abuse”), verb-noun collocations (e.g., “pay a visit”), and adverb-adjective patterns (e.g., “fully aware”).

The mastery of collocations is considered a hallmark of advanced language proficiency, as non-native speakers frequently translate word-for-word, leading to unnatural or incorrect expressions (Nesselhauf, 2005; Wray, 2002). This challenge is magnified in legal contexts, where collocations carry precise legal meanings that cannot be altered without potentially changing the legal effect of the document.

Legal collocations represent a specialized subset of general collocations, characterized by their occurrence within legal discourse and their specific legal implications. These word combinations carry precise legal meanings and are often unique to the legal register (Šarčević, 2000). Examples include “null and void,” “render a judgment,” “enter into a contract,” and “burden of proof.” The significance of legal collocations lies in their ability to convey complex legal concepts concisely and unambiguously, making them essential for effective legal communication (Chromá, 2011).

Theoretical Frameworks in Legal Translation

The translation of legal texts is guided by several theoretical frameworks that address the complexities of transferring legal concepts across linguistic and cultural divides. Two prominent theories in this domain are Skopos theory and the concept of legal equivalence.

Skopos Theory, developed by Hans Vermeer in the late 1970s, posits that the purpose (Skopos) of a translation determines the translation methods and strategies to be employed (Vermeer, 1989/2000). This functionalist approach shifts focus from mere linguistic equivalence to the intended function of the target text. In legal translation, the Skopos can vary significantly. For instance, a marriage contract translated for informational purposes will have different requirements than the same contract translated for legal submission in court.

Legal Equivalence, as conceptualized by Šarčević (1997), requires translators to produce target texts that have the same legal effect as source texts. This goes beyond linguistic equivalence and requires a deep understanding of both legal systems involved. When translating legal collocations, the translator’s goal is to find target language collocations that convey the same semantic meaning while triggering equivalent legal consequences.

Challenges in Arabic-English Legal Translation

The translation of legal texts between Arabic and English faces challenges stemming from profound linguistic, cultural, and systemic differences. Arabic legal discourse is heavily influenced by Islamic Sharia law, which has unique terminology, concepts, and modes of expression often lacking direct equivalents in common law or civil law systems (Alcaraz & Hughes, 2002).

Lexical challenges are particularly prominent in legal collocation translation. Many Arabic legal terms are polysemous, having multiple meanings depending on context, which can lead to ambiguity if not carefully translated. Furthermore, the highly formulaic and archaic language found in legal documents in both languages can be challenging to render naturally and accurately in the target language (Hamed & Alqurashi, 2025).

Syntactic and stylistic differences also contribute to complexity. Arabic legal texts often feature complex sentences with extensive use of passive voice, nominalization, and repetition, which can result in cumbersome English translations if rendered literally. English legal texts, while formal, tend to favor more direct and concise styles (Biel, 2014).

Student Performance and Error Patterns in Legal Translation

Research on student performance in legal translation consistently reveals common difficulties and recurring error patterns. Studies point to a lack of specialized legal knowledge, insufficient understanding of legal systems, and inadequate mastery of translation strategies as primary contributors to translation errors (Al-Ward, 2019).

Abdulwahid and Hamzah (2017) found that Iraqi EFL students achieved only 27% accuracy in translating legal collocations, with performance declining on purely technical terms. Hamed and Alqurashi (2025) identified five primary challenges in legal translation: lexical imprecision, syntactic instability, stylistic flattening, orthographic inconsistency, and punctuation misuse.

Lexical errors represent the most frequent category, involving incorrect word choice, mistranslation of legal terms, or failure to find appropriate equivalents. Students often resort to literal translation, leading to awkward or misleading legal expressions (Farghal & Obiedat, 1995). Davoudi and Bahchad (2020) revealed accuracy rates as low as 11.85% for Arabic-to-English collocation translation.

Syntactic errors involve issues with sentence structure and coherence in the target language, often resulting from carry-over of source language patterns (Belarbi, 2022). Semantic errors relate to

misinterpretation of meaning or failure to convey legal implications (Hassoon & Al-Dahwi, 2020).

Cultural and pragmatic errors occur when translations fail to account for cultural context, leading to technically correct but inappropriate translations (Alwazna, 2019). Al-Jarf (2022) found that 84% of collocation errors involved preposition substitution, with 81% being intralingual errors.

Translation Strategies for Legal Collocations

Translators employ various strategies to overcome challenges posed by legal collocations. According to Shraideh and Mahadin (2015), seven primary strategies are commonly identified:

- **Literal Translation:** involves word-for-word rendering and may be appropriate when direct structural and conceptual equivalents exist between legal systems. However, indiscriminate use can lead to significant errors.
- **Synonymy:** uses target language words with similar meanings, requiring careful consideration to ensure exact legal connotation without introducing ambiguity.
- **Paraphrase:** involves explaining source collocation meaning using more target language words, particularly useful when direct equivalents don't exist or when clarification is needed.
- **Approximation:** uses target language expressions close in meaning but not exact equivalents, employed when precise equivalents are unavailable.
- **Omission:** involves omitting redundant or culturally irrelevant collocations, used cautiously due to potential legal consequences.
- **Transposition:** changes grammatical categories without altering meaning, such as converting noun phrases to verb phrases for a more natural flow.
- **Elaboration and Explication:** adds implicit information necessary for the target audience's understanding, often crucial for culture-specific legal collocations lacking direct equivalents.

Students often struggle with strategy selection, with choices influenced by linguistic proficiency, legal knowledge, and understanding of both the source and target legal system nuances.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-analytical research design to investigate undergraduate translation students' performance, strategies, and error patterns when translating Arabic legal collocations into English. The descriptive approach characterized current student performance and strategy types, while the analytical approach examined underlying reasons for performance levels and categorized recurring error patterns (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Participants

The study involved 65 fourth-year undergraduate translation students from the Department of Translation, Faculty of Languages, Sana'a University, enrolled during the Second Semester of the 2016/2017 academic year. This sample was selected because students had completed nearly four years of translation studies and were expected to have developed substantial translation skills and collocational knowledge.

Materials and Instruments

The primary data collection instrument was a translation test consisting of 33 relatively short sentences containing Arabic legal collocations. These collocations were carefully selected from authentic Yemeni legal contracts, including Marriage Contracts, Marriage Evidence documents, Affidavits for Divorce, Lease Contracts, Employment Contracts, and Real Estate Contracts. The selection process involved consultation with four Arabic language professors from various Yemeni universities to ensure authenticity and representativeness.

The collocations represented various legal domains, including family law, property law, and commercial law. Each collocation was presented in context to ensure an authentic assessment of students' translation abilities.

Translation Test Design

The test assessed both translation accuracy and strategy use. For accuracy evaluation, a four-point scale was adopted from Rabeh (2010): 0 (No Answer), 1 (Unacceptable), 2 (Acceptable), and 3 (Accurate). For strategy identification, the classification proposed by Shraideh and Mahadin (2015) was utilized, including seven strategies: Literal Translation, Synonym, Paraphrase, Approximation, Elaboration and Explication, Transposition, and Omission.

Data Collection Procedures

The translation test was administered on May 20, 2017, in a controlled classroom environment. Participants received clear instructions and were allowed two hours to complete the test. They were permitted to use bilingual dictionaries during the test to simulate realistic translation conditions.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure content validity, the translation test was submitted to four validators and experts in the English language and translation from Sana'a University and the University of Science and Technology. Based on their feedback, the test was modified, including reducing items from 42 to 33 to improve clarity and manageability.

Reliability was established through a pilot study conducted with 20 graduating translation students during the Second Semester of the 2015/2016 academic year. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) was calculated using SPSS and found to be 0.77, indicating high stability and adequate consistency.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative analysis evaluated student translations using the four-point scale, with frequencies and percentages calculated for each accuracy level across all test items. Translation strategies were identified and quantified using frequencies and percentages. The quantitative data were processed using SPSS software to ensure accuracy and reliability in statistical calculations.

Each student's translation was independently evaluated by two trained raters with Arabic-English translation experience. The analysis involved calculating frequencies and percentages for translation accuracy scores across all collocations.

The qualitative analysis employed systematic error analysis to identify patterns and types of errors when translating different collocation categories. Students' answers were evaluated against model translations validated by experts and professional translators, with assessment focused on both linguistic accuracy and legal appropriateness.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical guidelines by ensuring participant confidentiality and anonymity. All data were collected with appropriate institutional approval, and participants provided informed consent for

their translations to be used in research. Individual student identities were protected, and only aggregated data were analyzed and reported.

Results

Overall Performance in Translating Arabic Legal Collocations

Analysis of student performance in translating the 33 Arabic legal collocations revealed significant challenges. As presented in Table 1, only 21% of translations were rated as accurate, while 8% were considered acceptable. The majority of translations (71%) were deemed unacceptable, indicating substantial difficulties in translating legal collocations from Arabic into English.

Table 1: Students' Performance in Translating Arabic Legal Collocations

Performance Level	Frequency	Percentage
Accurate	460	21%
Acceptable	169	8%
Unacceptable	1,516	71%
Total	2,145	100%

Source: Prepared by the researchers.

Notably, all participants attempted to translate all test items, with no instances of "No Answer" recorded. This suggests students were willing to attempt translations even when uncertain, rather than leaving items blank.

Performance Across Different Collocation Types

Further analysis revealed variations in performance across different types of legal collocations. Some collocations were translated with relatively higher accuracy, such as "عقد نكاح" (marriage contract), "قطعة أرض" (a piece of land), and "الحقوق والامتيازات" (rights and privileges). These collocations appeared more familiar to students, possibly due to higher frequency in general language use or previous exposure in translation courses.

Table 2: Performance Analysis by Collocation Type

Arabic Collocation	English Translation	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Accurate
عقد نكاح	Marriage contract	15.4%	0.0%	84.6%
قطعة أرض	A piece of land	13.8%	18.5%	67.7%
الحقوق والامتيازات	Rights and privileges	49.2%	0.0%	50.8%
إيقاع الطلاق	Pronouncing divorce	100%	0.0%	0.0%
يجرح عدالتهما	Impair their testimony	98.5%	1.5%	0.0%
الوجه الشرعي	Legal judgment	98.5%	1.5%	0.0%

Source: Prepared by the researchers.

Specialized legal collocations posed significant challenges. For example, all participants provided unacceptable translations for “إيقاع الطلاق” (pronouncing divorce), with common errors including “doing divorce,” “divorce happened,” or “divorce his wife.” Similarly, highly specialized collocations such as “يجرح عدالتهما” (affect their straightforwardness), “الوجه الشرعي” (legal judgment), and “براءة ذمة المشتري” (the buyer is acquitted) had unacceptable translation rates of 98.5% or higher.

Translation Strategies Employed

Analysis of translation strategies revealed clear preferences for certain approaches. Table 3 presents the frequency and percentage of each strategy employed by students.

Table 3: Translation Strategies Used in Translating Arabic Legal Collocations

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Paraphrase	648	30.2%	1
Synonym	438	21.4%	2
Transposition	454	21.2%	3
Literal Translation	247	11.5%	4
Omission	203	9.5%	5
Elaboration and Explication	74	3.4%	6
Approximation	61	2.8%	7
Total	2,125	100%	-

Source: Prepared by the researchers.

Paraphrasing was the most frequently used strategy (30.2%), followed closely by synonym (21.4%) and transposition (21.2%). Literal translation ranked fourth (11.5%), while omission (9.5%), elaboration and explication (3.4%), and approximation (2.8%) were used less frequently.

- **Paraphrase Strategy Analysis:** As the most commonly used strategy, paraphrasing was employed when students couldn't find appropriate equivalents in the target language. For example, "هذا العقد" "قد أبرم من كل الجهات" was translated as "This contract has been entered," "make a contract," or "made this contract" instead of the more accurate "This contract was made and entered."
- **Transposition Strategy Analysis:** The second most common strategy (21.2%) often resulted in unacceptable translations due to limited knowledge of legal collocations. For instance, "الوجه الشرعي" was translated as "legal form," "legal evidence," or "legal sense" instead of "legal judgment," while "طلاقاً بانناً" was rendered as "final divorce" or "clear divorce" instead of "irrevocable divorce."
- **Synonymy Strategy Analysis:** Used in 21.4% of translations with varying success. Some students demonstrated familiarity with certain legal collocations by finding proper English equivalents. For example, "عقد النكاح" was successfully translated as "marriage contract/marriage bond," and "قطعة أرض" as "a piece of land."
- **Literal Translation Analysis:** Accounted for 11.5% of strategies, often resulting in awkward or inaccurate translations. For example, "الإصلاح والنصح" was translated word-for-word as "reform and advise" instead of "reconciliation and advice," and "مجلس العقد" as "the place of the contract" or "the council of contract" instead of "the contract meeting."

Error Pattern Analysis

The qualitative analysis of errors revealed several patterns in student translations:

1. **Misunderstanding of Specialized Legal Terminology (35%):** Students failed to grasp the specialized meanings of legal terms within collocations. For example, in "يجرح عدالتهما" the term "عدالة" was incorrectly interpreted as "justice" rather than "straightforwardness" or "integrity" in this legal context.
2. **Inappropriate Strategy Selection (28%):** Students frequently selected inappropriate translation strategies for different collocation types. Literal translation was often applied to

- culturally-specific or idiomatic legal collocations where more adaptive approaches would have been suitable.
3. **Lack of Collocational Awareness (20%):** Many errors stemmed from limited awareness of collocational restrictions in English legal language, resulting in unusual or non-standard combinations.
 4. **Arabic Linguistic Interference (12%):** Source language interference was evident in many translations, particularly in word order and syntactic structures following Arabic patterns rather than English conventions.
 5. **Difficulty with Culture-Specific Concepts (3%):** Concepts deeply embedded in Islamic legal tradition proved particularly challenging, with no direct equivalents existing in English legal systems.
 6. **Grammatical Complexity (2%):** Students struggled with the grammatical complexity of certain collocations, particularly those involving intricate syntactic relationships.

Strategy Effectiveness Analysis

The relationship between strategy usage and translation success provided insights into strategy effectiveness. While paraphrasing was the most frequently used strategy (30.2%), its effectiveness varied significantly depending on the specific collocation and students' ability to apply it accurately.

For instance, "عقد النكاح" (marriage contract) achieved high accuracy rates (84.6%) when the synonym strategy was employed, while "إيقاع الطلاق" (pronouncing divorce) had 100% unacceptable translations despite 70.8% paraphrase usage. This suggests that strategy effectiveness depends heavily on collocation type, cultural specificity, and students' legal knowledge.

Collocations with familiar legal concepts or cognate elements showed higher accuracy rates. For example, "قطعة أرض" (a piece of land) achieved 67.7% accuracy, while collocations embedding Islamic-specific legal concepts like "براءة ذمة المشتري" (buyer's discharge) showed 98.5% unacceptable translations due to the lack of direct English equivalents.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal significant challenges faced by undergraduate translation students when rendering Arabic legal collocations into English, with implications for both translation theory and pedagogy. The overall performance results, with only 21% accurate translations and 71% unacceptable translations, indicate substantial

difficulties in handling legal collocations. This aligns with previous research by Abdulwahid and Hamzah (2017), who found that 70% of fourth-year Iraqi college students faced difficulties translating collocations.

The variation in performance across different collocation types suggests that certain categories pose greater challenges than others. Collocations with higher frequency in general language use or more transparent meanings (such as “marriage contract” or “piece of land”) were translated with greater accuracy. In contrast, specialized legal collocations with culture-specific meanings or those deeply embedded in Islamic legal tradition (such as “pronouncing divorce” or “the buyer is acquitted”) proved significantly more difficult.

This pattern supports Haliel’s (1990) argument that translating collocation patterns can be problematic primarily because translators struggle to find proper equivalents in the target language, which may not always be available in general-purpose bilingual dictionaries.

Translation Strategies and Their Effectiveness

The predominance of paraphrasing (30.2%) as a translation strategy suggests that students often resort to explaining concepts when they cannot find direct equivalents. However, as Shraideh and Mahadin (2015) note, this strategy is “not highly recommended in translating collocations because it does not give the source text effects to the reader” (p. 337). The high frequency of this strategy indicates a gap in students’ knowledge of appropriate legal terminology and collocational patterns in English.

The significant use of transposition (21.2%) and literal translation (11.5%) further reflects students’ struggles with finding appropriate equivalents. While literal translation can sometimes be effective for transparent collocations, it often fails with culture-specific or idiomatic legal expressions. As Lewis (1993) and Newmark (1988) suggest, translating “chunk-for-chunk” or “collocation to collocation” seeking parallel equivalents would be more effective than word-for-word translation.

The relatively successful use of synonymy (21.4%) for certain collocations demonstrates that when students are familiar with legal concepts and their target language equivalents, they can produce accurate translations. This highlights the importance of developing students’ awareness of specialized legal terminology and collocational patterns in both languages.

The limited use of more advanced strategies such as elaboration and explication (3.4%) and approximation (2.8%) suggests that students may lack the confidence or knowledge to employ these approaches, which require a deeper understanding of both legal systems and languages.

Error Patterns and Their Implications

The error analysis revealed several recurring patterns that provide insights into specific challenges students face. The misunderstanding of specialized legal terminology suggests gaps in students' knowledge of legal concepts and terminology in both Arabic and English. This aligns with Al-Dahesh's (2008) finding that "failure to achieve synonymy is one of the most prominent problems students and translators usually encounter" (p. 335).

The inappropriate selection of translation strategies for different collocation types indicates a need for more targeted training in matching strategies to collocation types. For instance, culture-specific legal collocations may require different approaches than more universal or transparent ones.

The interference from Arabic and the lack of awareness of collocational restrictions in English legal language point to the need for greater exposure to authentic legal texts in both languages and more focused contrastive analysis. As Dweik and Abu Shakra (2010) note, "the wide linguistic and cultural gap between Arabic and English" leads to "the lack of equivalence of specific-culture, bound collocational patterns" (p. 2).

The variability in handling collocations supports Faris and Sahu's (2013) observation that "in English, different collocations for the same meaning can exist, but in Arabic, each collocation has one single meaning" (p. 64). This fundamental difference requires explicit attention in translation training.

Theoretical Implications

The findings have several theoretical implications for translation studies. First, they support the distinction between legal meaning and legal effect proposed by Šarčević (1997). The high percentage of unacceptable translations suggests that students often achieve linguistic equivalence without capturing the intended legal effect.

The disparity between linguistic accuracy and legal functionality observed in this study reinforces the concept that legal translation

requires a unique skill set beyond general translation competence. Students frequently produced grammatically correct and semantically meaningful English translations that nevertheless failed to function appropriately within English legal discourse contexts.

Second, the results confirm the importance of collocational competence in legal translation. The errors categorized under “lack of collocational awareness” demonstrate that knowledge of individual legal terms is insufficient without understanding how they combine in target language legal discourse. This finding supports recent developments in legal translation theory that emphasize the importance of phraseological competence as a distinct component of legal translator expertise.

The analysis revealed that students often possessed adequate knowledge of individual legal terms in both languages but failed to recognize when these terms formed fixed or semi-fixed collocational patterns. This finding has significant implications for legal translation pedagogy, suggesting that instruction must move beyond vocabulary teaching to address the phraseological dimension of legal language more systematically.

Third, the variation in performance across different collocation types supports the typology of legal collocations proposed by various scholars. The greater difficulty with culture-specific and semi-technical collocations compared to purely technical ones confirms the validity of such categorizations. This finding suggests that legal collocation difficulty is not merely a function of linguistic complexity but also of cultural and legal system differences.

The results contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting functional approaches to legal translation, particularly Skopos theory applications. Students’ varying success with different collocation types depending on their legal/cultural proximity suggests that effective legal translation requires sophisticated judgment about when strict equivalence is possible and when adaptation is necessary.

The findings support more nuanced models of legal collocation translation that account for linguistic, cultural, and systemic factors. The study provides evidence that collocational competence in legal translation requires both linguistic proficiency and legal system knowledge.

Conclusion

This study has provided empirical evidence of the significant challenges undergraduate translation students face when translating

Arabic legal collocations into English, particularly in the complex context of legal contracts today. The findings reveal that different types of legal collocations pose varying levels of difficulty, with culture-specific and specialized legal collocations proving most challenging.

The analysis of translation strategies demonstrates a heavy reliance on paraphrasing, transposition, and synonymy, with limited use of more advanced strategies. While these strategies can be effective when appropriately applied, their frequent use even in cases of unacceptable translations suggests that students may not always employ them with sufficient legal and linguistic precision.

The error patterns identified suggest specific areas where translation training could be enhanced, including deeper knowledge of specialized legal terminology, better matching of strategies to collocation types, and greater awareness of collocational restrictions in English legal language. These findings contribute to our understanding of the specific difficulties students encounter with legal collocations and provide a foundation for developing more targeted pedagogical interventions in translator training programs worldwide.

Recommendations

1. **Develop Specialized Curricula:** Create dedicated legal translation programs that integrate specialized training on collocations, contrastive analysis of legal systems, and explicit instruction in translation strategies.
2. **Enhance Practical Training:** Bridge the gap between theory and practice by increasing the use of authentic legal texts and establishing partnerships with legal institutions to provide students with real-world experience.
3. **Integrate Advanced Technology:** Incorporate corpus linguistics tools, translation memory systems, and research on AI/machine translation into both teaching practices and scholarly inquiry.
4. **Invest in Human Capital:** Provide continuous professional development for faculty in legal translation pedagogy and implement metacognitive strategy training to improve students' self-evaluation and decision-making skills.
5. **Conduct Expertise Research:** Undertake comparative and longitudinal studies to analyze the development of translation competence, employing process-oriented methods (e.g., eye-tracking) to understand the cognitive processes of experts and novices.

6. **Promote Evidence-Based Practice:** Utilize intervention studies to test teaching methodologies and conduct large-scale corpus-based analyses to create an empirical foundation for curriculum design and pedagogical approaches.

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the authors upon reasonable request.

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