

Liliana Waicekawsky graduated from the School of Languages in Córdoba as a translator. She is an EFL instructor and a lecturer of English for Specific Purposes at the National University of San Luis. At present, she is part of the research project and also a member of the university translation team. She is also a MA student in Applied Linguistics from National University of Rio Cuarto. Liliana has participated as a speaker in several conferences and has published a variety of scientific papers on evaluation. Her main interests are Appraisal theory and Corpus Linguistics.



Liliana Waicekawsky
Universidad Nacional de San Luis
Ejército de los Andes 950
San Luis
Argentina

The intricacy of hyphenated compound words for non-native speakers of English in an EFL setting

Abstract- One of the most problematic areas for Argentine undergraduate students when reading texts in English are hyphenated compound words because of the difficulty they present in their translation. The complexity of these lexical items is thus analyzed in this paper which has a two-fold aim: first, to report on the morphology of these words in English and then to examine if there are recurrent translation patterns in Spanish for these word classes so as to teach students how to read them correctly. The paper investigates the frequency of occurrence of these words in a corpus consisting of 40 texts of general interest in English retrieved from the web and processed using AntConc and also attempts to shed light on how their translation into Spanish. With a view to this end, a second corpus made up of the translation into Spanish of the above-mentioned texts was also collected. To process such parallel corpora (English-Spanish) ParaConc was used. Results indicate that the morphology of such lexical items is varied and so is their translations. Because students in reading courses in English seem to face major problems with these lexical items, it may be advisable to teach them first how hyphenated compound words are formed and the possible rendering these words may have to help them become efficient readers in ESP (English for Specific Purposes) courses.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, corpus linguistics, a relatively new discipline concerned with the compilation and investigation of corpora, has gained importance for both language teachers and researchers interested in analyzing naturally occurring texts. According to Krieger (2003) the main focus of corpus linguistics is “to discover patterns of authentic language use through analysis of actual usage”. The analysis of corpora, defined by Aston (1996) as “collections of homogeneously-encoded computer-readable text compiled for linguistic purposes” provides new insights into the way language operates. As Danielsson and Mahlberg (2003) assert, “corpus linguistic approaches are of theoretical importance, as they aim to describe language and open new perspectives on grammar and vocabulary”.

This work mainly focuses on the study of vocabulary, on compound words in English. “A compound word is a combination of two or more words that function as a single unit” as cited in *www.getitwriteonline.com*. There are three types of compounds: the closed form, the open form and the hyphenated form. In English, words are combined in a variety of ways forming other word classes. This paper intends to provide a description of the morphology of those words in English and to examine their translation into Spanish, for they are one of the

obstacles many Spanish-speaking students in ESP (English for Specific Purposes) courses face when reading in English because there seem to be no similarly formed lexical items in Spanish.

METHOD

As this study has as its aim to get a deep understanding of hyphenation in English, a corpus of 26 articles from the Jehovah's Witnesses Official Web Site was retrieved. The magazine chosen for this paper was "Awake" and is available on-line, which makes software processing easier. Awake has subheadings, which are divided into 17 sections, from which 3 were selected, *Animals and Plants*; *Health, Medicine and Blood*; and *Lands and People*. The magazine is written in American English but it is translated into 314 languages. The texts produced are expository and descriptive and are written for lay people. The criteria for selection were that the texts are of general interest, they are written in English and Spanish and the presence of compound words is abundant. The articles downloaded produced an electronic corpus of 62,566 words. This computer-readable corpus was processed using AntConc 3.24w. The concordance output showed 446 examples of hyphenated compound words but many of them were not real examples, hence those considered useless were deleted, ending up with only 258 words. To analyze translation patterns, ParaConcord was used.

PROCEDURE

To pursue the first aim of this paper, I selected electronic texts, mostly descriptive and expository, written for the lay public. Each text was selected from www.watchtower.org and saved as TXT. The texts were in English and Spanish, so a different folder was created for each language to save the corpus. To analyze the frequency of occurrence of hyphenated words, AntConc3.2.4w was used. When I typed *-* , the concordancer found 446 cases, many of which were not real compounds, so the final number was 258 hyphenated word classes. Then, the words found were separated according to their formation, showing 21 different categories. Consequently, they were classified into adjectives (attributive and predicative), adverbs, verbs and nouns. Finally, they were separated into topics. As regards the second aim of this paper, that is, to analyze the different translation patterns that hyphenated compounds presented, ParaConcord was used to align the text in English with its corresponding translation in Spanish. Once both texts were aligned, all the possible translations hyphenated compound words had were analyzed .

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the corpus revealed important findings. To begin with, hyphenated compounds belong to different word classes such as adjectives, nouns, verbs and adverbs. Most of these hyphenated words consisted of adjectives used in attributive position (89.15%).

For example: “The **three-foot-wide (1m) structure** is little more than a rough, open platform of dry sticks, tree branches and leaves.” “Although **sugar-free berries** are her favorite menu item...” “Many **garden-friendly insects** prey on destructive ones.” While the amount of said lexical items in predicative position was considerably reduced, only 5.03 %. For example: “...or a baby owl **staring wide-eyed** from the security of its nest...” “...Remember, too, that toads **are garden-friendly**...”. The number of these words functioning as verbs were of 0.77%, which indicates a small proportion of usage. “...some bird species enlist the help of other birds to “*chick-sit*” their young...” “...the Inca preserved lamoid meat by *freeze-drying* it, taking advantage of the cold temperature...” Hyphenated words used as nouns were 5.03%. For example: “...Nevertheless, *cross-pollination* guarantees variety and thus healthier and more resilient plants...” “...Fertilization can be either by *cross-pollination* or *self-pollination*...” There was only one case of a compound word used as an adverb in the following example: “...*It can easily be worn year-round*...”.

Other important finding regarding word formation was that there appeared 21 patterns for these lexical items in the corpora.

1. **Determiner (ordinal number)+ superlative** as in “third-highest mountain”, “third-largest cause”
2. **noun+ noun** “guide-dog trainer”, “gypsy-moth caterpillars”
3. **number+noun** “24-hour period”, “21-month voyage
4. **adjective+past participle** “long-lost treasures”, “high-pitched song”
5. **prefix+ noun** “self-induced”, “anti-TB drugs”
6. **noun+adjective** “sugar-rich berries”, “age-old tradition”
7. **adjective+ adjective** “Greco- Roman times”, “manic-depressive disorder”
8. **noun+ past participle** “machine-worked agates”, “god-given instinct”
9. **noun+adverb** “garden-friendly insects”
10. **determiner (number)+ past participle** “one-horned rhino”, “one-horned rhinoceros”
11. **noun+ present participle** “cotton-producing hinterland”, “ground-nesting birds”
12. **comparative adjective + adjective** “darker-gray markings”
13. **adjective+ noun** “high-voltage cables”, “Modern-day Maya”
14. **adverb+adjective** “less-frequent adjustment”, “ever-watchful predators”
15. **verb+verb** “would-be rapist”
16. **adverb+ past participle** “well-fed lynx”, “well-oiled feathers”
17. **adverb+ present participle** “ever-changing seasons”, “slow-moving glaciers”
18. **comparative adjective + present participle** “lower-yielding arabica tree”
19. **past participle+ preposition** “grown-up offspring”, “sought-after breeds”

20. **superlative adjective+present participle** “fastest-flying bird”

21. This group of words was difficult to categorize because of their complexity. They consisted of expressions, dates and proper names such as Yang-Mo Chung, mid-19th century, up-down greeting, state-of-the-art hiking footwear and skin-to-skin care among others.

According to the evidence found, I would say that the hyphenated compound words in the corpus could be classified into proper names, dates, measure, numbers, prices, temperature, time, age, colours, and place of origin.

As regards the rendering of these words, eight frequent patterns of translation could be observed in the corpus. The translator makes use of various strategies in an attempt to convey the same communicative function of the source text. Therefore, one of the most common forms of translation found consisted in adding the preposition “**de**” after the noun, as in this example: “...**Guide-dog trainer**, Michael Tucker, author of the *Eyes that Lead*...” “...Michael Tucker, autor del libro *Eyes that Lead (los ojos que dirigen)* y adiestrador **de** perros lazarillos...” and in the translation of the two words that make up the compound as in “...she were being attacked by a **disease-laden mosquito**...” “...como si la estuviera atacando un **mosquito cargado de enfermedades**...” In other examples, the words that form the compound adjective become only one. “A **full-grown male** can reach a height of five feet...” “...Un macho **adulto** puede alcanzar un metro y medio...” In some instances, the translator changes word classes, for example by turning an adjective into a noun. “...Pictures usually portray rural Poland as a deep-**green** landscape of well-watered farms...” “...”En los cuadros se suele representar la Polonia rural con paisajes de gran **verdor**: campos, bosques y fincas bien regadas...” The translator sometimes has to form complete phrases because a one-to-one equivalent does not exist in the target language. For example, “...join us as we better acquaint ourselves with this **much-maligned bird**...”, “...a que junto con nosotros se familiarice mejor con esta **ave a la que tanto se denigra**...” Another strategy the translator uses is to translate the compound as an appositive clause. For example: “...The **fashion-savvy French** were impressed with the delicate material...” “...Los franceses, **amantes de las nuevas tendencias**, quedaron impresionados con el fino material...” Sometimes, the compound adjective and the noun become one word. “...Winston Churchill is one of many **well-known people**...” “...Muchos **personajes**, entre ellos Winston Churchill...” When there is no equivalent in Spanish the translator changes the word. “...The Inca preserved lamoid meat by **freeze-drying**...” “...para **conservar** la carne de llama...” An instance of a linear translation of the compound can be seen in “...to his mate during the entire **120-day breeding period**...”, “...llevar a su pareja unos veinticuatro mil frutos durante **los ciento veinte días que dura la crianza**...”

CONCLUSION

Judging from evidence from the corpus, I may assert that in these types of electronic texts hyphenated compounds abound. This may be due to the descriptive and expository characteristics these texts exhibit. Besides, taking into account that the writer attempts to enrich the texts by appealing to the emotions and trying to convey different sensorial images and feelings to the reader, he/she uses highly packed vocabulary, typical of written language. The results clearly show that hyphenated words may be formed in several ways in English. As Close (1986) asserts “there are no clear rules that can tell us when the compound is written as one word, with a hyphen or as two or more words” Therefore, it is more difficult for a non-native speaker to learn how to form compounds but not to recognize them. In the corpus collected for this research, adjectives whether in attributive or predicative position, accounted for most cases; whereas adverbs represented the opposite. Only one example was found. Adjectives made with past participle and with a passive meaning were widely used in the texts. According to Pit Corder (1960), compound adjectives made with present participles are less common in English. However, in the corpus, the presence of these words was notorious the same as many other examples. As to the translation of hyphenated compounds, I would say that there was no a single pattern identified but many. This may be due to the translator’s intention of trying to convey the same communicative function of the original text. In the cases where there was no a one to one correspondence between the two languages English and Spanish, the translator resorted to: explaining in a full sentence the content of the hyphenated word, to deleting the word in their translation, to making up a complete new sentence close in meaning to the original or to change the word. Thus, I would say that the resources used at the time of translating are vast. As these lexical constructions pose several problems for the translator due to their absence in Spanish, he/she has to make use of all the resources available to be faithful to the original text and convey what the writer attempted to express. Therefore, as the problems arise, the translator using his/ her common sense and ability, attempts to solve all the difficulties he/she encounters in the best sensible way.

Finally, this analysis attempted to help the students in English for Specific Purposes better understand how compound words are formed in English so as to overcome the reading difficulties they face when trying to figure out meaning in a second language.

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