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Semantic Aspects of Lexical Collocation in Tamil

Subathini Ramesh

Understanding of a word or words depends upon the context in which they are used. It is also important to note what Jonathan Swift (1666 – 1745) observed “Proper words in proper phrases make the true definition of style.” Therefore, the relationship of words have with each other is important. The evaluation must be made on the basis of the use of Tamil in the various domains of life. It is a fact that it is not used in many domains like modern science, law and medicine. though supporting materials like glossaries and translations have been prepared in it. This paper analysed some lexical items and their collocational meaning in syntactical and semantical situation.

Introduction

Collocation is a term used to address the possibility of occurrence of largely two or more words in lexical or syntactic relations. This article is concerned with the nature and potentiality of co-occurrence of words in sentences. This is called as collocations by Lexicographers and Semanticists. The defining collocation can be understood by general language point of view. The practice of linguists used to refer only a certain combination of words. Zugusta (1971) in his book, “the set combinations whose set ness cannot be disturbed without loss of meaning and many of which function as multi word lexical units, are not considered as collocations”. Idioms and multiword lexical units are treated regularly either as separate entries or a sub-entry and they do not create problems for the lexicographers. Only those combinations which are similar to free combinations in allowing insertions and modifications belong here. The words leisure and time constitute a set collocation.

e.g. The leisure times

The boy over there plays continuously in leisure times.

The boy who was playing continuously in the leisure times, last night met with an accident.

This kind of disturbing the structures is not possible with multi-word lexical units like black jacket, black bird, crane berry etc., and idioms the ball is in your court, A storm in a teacup etc. In this paper such collocations, which are semi-set, will be studied and classified from the point of view from their semantic and lexical properties. An attempt will also be made to devise a method to identify and locate those collocations which shall go into a general Dictionary or a Dictionary of collocations. For semantics, understanding the nature and general properties of collocations, is important. But, for lexicography, the individual properties of lexical units are important and it will be the guiding principle for selection and inclusion in a dictionary.

2. Semantics of collocations

As discussed above while the combinations like leisure and times are structurally free, they are semantically set. Even among semantically set collocations there are degrees of setness. It ranges from class of words with common semantic features to individual lexemes.

Group with common semantic range

2.1 Tamil (Ta.) verb *cey* 'do' collocates with *camay* 'cook', "moothiram" collocates with *viral* 'finger', "muL" 'roja'. Ta. Verb *uuttu* 'to spill or flow heavily' collocates with "taNNiir" 'water', "maLai" 'rain' "siini" 'sugar' *arici* 'rice' "sillarai" 'coin' marking a continuous flow of liquid or solid substance.

2.2. Individual words

Individual words differing in collocation include

aampiLai 'man' and *cinnappiLLai* 'child'

aaTu 'goat' and *cuTTy* 'calf'

aTi 'beat' and *uTampu* 'body'

caappiTu 'idly' and *vaai* 'mouth'

There is another interesting group of collocations in Tamil where the word '*piLLai*' 'young one' co-occurs with humans, animals, birds and plants.

e.g. *ivan nimalanin piLLai* 'this boy is 'Nimalan's child'.

aNil piLLai 'young one of a squirrels'

kiiri-p-piLLai 'young one of a mongoose'

kiLi-p-piLLai 'young one of a parrots'

2.3. Synonyms and Collocational difference

Synonyms differ due to difference in the range of collocations. There are three synonymous verbs in Tamil meaning 'die, be not alive', *caa*, *cettu*, *ira* and *kaalamaaku*. '*caa*' collocates with humans, animals and plants.

- e.g. anta manusan cettuppoonaan. 'That man died'.
 maaTu cettiTTutu. 'The cow died'
 roja cettiTTutu. 'the roja plant died'

But 'ira' can collocate with humans and animals only,

- e.g. anta manisan iRantu poonaan. 'That man died'.
 anta maaTu iRantu pooccu. 'That cow died'.

'kaalamaaku' can occur with humans only.

- e.g. avar kaalamaanaar. 'He passed away'.

3. Classification of collocations

From the point of view of semanticists various types of co-occurrence restrictions are included under collocations in spite of the fact that they are aware of the differences. Collocations can be classified into the following four categories:

- (1) incorporations or encapsulations
- (2) selection restrictions
- (3) semantically bound
- (4) lexically bound

Of these four, first two are predictable and the other two are not predictable. From the point of view of lexicography only those collocations which are not predictable must find a place in the dictionary entries and therefore the first two are not relevant lexicographically. The other two are lexicographically important and must find a place in the entries of a dictionary. The nature of all the four classes will be discussed below.

3.1. Incorporations or encapsulations

The collocations between Tamil verb 'kaTi' 'bite' and 'paal' 'tooth' or 'uTai' 'kick' and kaal 'leg' or the corresponding English words are part of the lexical meaning of the word. This will be clear from the definitions of the words given in the dictionaries. The following are the definitions of English words from the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (1996).

- hit - caned somebody / something with the stick
 knock - to hit somebody / something hard with the fist
 chew - to chew something (vitamin C) into the mouth

These are called incorporations by Nielson (1971) and encapsulations by Lyons (1977:262) i.e. the instruments of action are incorporated or encapsulated in the

meanings of the corresponding verbs. A special feature of these incorporations is that these words incorporated are not used in normal sentences but used only when specifications are necessary. The sentences *avan pirampaal aTittaaan* 'he hit with cane', *saayi vaayaal cappinaan* 'Sai chewed in the mouth', though grammatically correct are not normally used. Only

avan aTittaaan – 'he canned'

Saayi cappinaan – 'Sai chewed'

But *avan iIatu kayyaal aTittaaan*. 'he hit with his left hand'

Saayi nallaay cappi caappittaaan. 'Sai chewed very long time'.

are normal as these are specific. Yet, these are also collocations as **avan vaayaal aTittaaan* 'he hit with his mouth' is not possible:

3.2. Selection Restrictions

The English verbs laugh, think, speak or their corresponding Tamil verbs *ciri*, *ninai* and *kathai* respectively can take only human nouns as subjects. These are called as selection restrictions. These are different from incorporations as these collocational restrictions are based on non-linguistic features, as the capacity to laugh, think, and speak are found with humans only. It is interesting to note that these are not given as part of the definitions. The following are the definitions from Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (1996).

Laugh – make sounds and movements of the face and body that express, amusement or happiness.

speak – to say words

think – to use the mind in an active way to form connected ideas

It is interesting to note that these words can collocate with non-human nouns in fiction or figurative extension. The wall, tree or stone can laugh in a fairy tale. One can say *iyarkaiye avanuTan ceerntu cirippatu pool iruntatu*. 'It seemed that the nature itself was laughing along with him'. We saw that this type of extension is not possible in the case of incorporations. But, a different type of extension leading to polysemy is possible when Ta. *kuTi* 'drink' is used in the meaning of 'smoke', e.g. *avan cikaraT kuTittaaan* 'He smoked a cigarette' and *kaTi* 'bite' in the meaning of 'pinch' as a shoe or *ceruppu*'. E.g. *putu-c-ceruppu kaTikkiratu* 'the new shoe pinches'. Selection restrictions of the above type are taken care of by grammar and are not treated as part of the lexical meaning.

Therefore, both incorporations and selection restrictions are not included as part of the lexicographic collocations. Only the other two types (3) semantically bound

collocations and (4) lexically bound collocations are treated as lexicographically important.

3.3. Semantically bound collocations

These involve co-occurrence restrictions that cover a class of words with shared semantic features. The Tamil verb *koTTu* collocates with nouns which can fall with a continuous flow like *maLai* 'rain', *taNNiir* 'water', etc. It is to be noted that though these collocations also involve semantic features they are not part of the lexical meaning of the words. In other words, these features are not criterial or contrastive for defining the meaning of these lexical items. As these collocational restrictions are properties of the individual lexical units and not fully predictable and vary from language to language, they must be indicated in a dictionary.

3.4. Lexically bound collocations

These include those collocational restrictions which are idiosyncratic features of individual lexical units. The co-occurrence relations of dog and bark, cat and mew, horse and neigh and similar pairs in Tamil, like *naay*, 'dog' and *kurai* 'bark', *kaakam* 'crow' and *karai* 'crow' *mayil* 'peacock' and *akavu* 'make sound' *kuyil* 'cuckoo' and *kuuvu* 'coo' etc. belong here. This is the most common type of collocations treated by both semanticists and lexicographers and these must be included in the dictionary entries.

4. Functions of collocations

What is the purpose and function of collocations in a dictionary? There is an extreme view that the meaning of a lexeme is no more than the set of its collocations. Apart from this, the normal lexicographical method involves that the different senses of the words are arrived at by a study of the different occurrences of a word in different contexts which are its collocations in the language. Therefore, the different collocations help the user to understand the different meanings of a word. In addition, collocational information given in the entry has some specific functions.

4.1. Differentiating the different senses of a polysemous word

A polysemous word with different senses shows corresponding differences in its collocational restrictions. Tamil *KuTi* in its direct sense 'drink' collocates with nouns denoting liquids only like *taNNiir* 'water', *cola* 'soda' etc. It has another sense 'smoke' when it collocates with *cikareTT* 'cigarette' *biiTi* 'beddi' *curuTTu* 'cigar' etc. It has a third sense 'absorb' when it collocates with certain nouns denoting snacks made by deep frying in oil, ghee etc.

e.g. *vadakam atikam eNNai kuTikitu*. 'The vadakam absorb more oil'.

keesarikku niraya ney veeNum. 'The kesari has more ghee'.

4.2. Collocations differentiating between synonyms

We saw above in (2) synonyms meaning 'to die' showing differences in their collocational restrictions. Most of the synonyms found in languages are either near synonyms or partial synonym (Zgusta, 1971:89-100) only and are not substitutable in all the contexts. Explaining the difference between near synonyms or partial synonyms is an important function of a good dictionary and this is done by showing the collocational differences.

4.3. Semantic classification of the vocabulary

Lexical collocations are useful to establish natural groups of words which show the folk taxonomy of the particular language and to differentiate the member words of such groups. In Tamil branching type trees and non-branching type trees differ in words referring to their similar parts. While maram 'tree' is used to refer to both the classes, kilai 'branch' koppu 'twig' ilai 'leaf' collocate with branching trees like ma 'mango' palaa 'jack' etc. Among the non-branching trees tennai 'coconut' panai 'palmyra' iccai 'date palm' collocate with olai 'leaf' maTTai 'leaf stalk' kuruttu 'tender twig' paalai 'spathe of the flower' etc. Among the non-branching trees tennai 'coconut' constitutes a separate class as it collocates with tooppu to refer to 'a grove' and with piLLai to refer to its sapling while the other two have different words.

e.g. tennam tooppu	'coconut grove'
tennam pillai	'coconut sapling'
panam katu	'palmyra grove'
lccan katu	'date palm grove'
panam kanru	'palmyra sapling'
iccai kanru	'date palm sapling'

5. Conclusion

In the conclusion, these lexical items are their lexical and semantic meaning. The collocations are depending on various types of their categories. It is easy for dictionary makers in order to make perfect glossaries and translation. Further elaborate study of collocations is needed to understand their semantic and lexicographic aspects fully.

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