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Collocational aspects of near-synonyms: Illustrations from a small corpus

Anthony E Backhouse

要 旨

語学教育の重要な目的の一つは、学習者の第二言語の lexical competence (母語話者と同じように語彙を自然に使用・理解できる能力) を育むことである。そのためには学習者向けに編纂された辞書が重要な役割を果たすべきことは言うまでもない。国語辞典や日本人向けの二か国語辞典と比べ、学習者用辞典には日本語語彙の意味・用法についてより多くの情報を含めなければならない。

そういった情報の一つに語彙のコロケーションについての情報がある。一般的に「コロケーション」とは、ある単語が他のどのような単語といっしょに多く使用されるかということの意味するが、その厳密な定義は様ではない。ここでは、例えば形容詞の場合にはどのような名詞を修飾するのか、名詞の場合にはどのような動詞の主語や目的語になるのかといった、同一の構文パターン (construction) 内に現れる単語どうしの傾向を中心に考える。こういったコロケーションは語彙の意味・用法の重要な側面をなしているにもかかわらず、必ずしも国語辞書などの記述には反映されていないのが現状である。

学習者の語彙教育の中心的な課題の一つに類義語の使い分けがある。類義語はそれぞれが別の単語である以上、その意味内容や使い方も異なるはずであるが、その違いは必ずしも明白に記述されていない。この小論では、二組の類義語 (ねずみ色/灰色/グレー、書籍/図書/書物) を取り上げ、コーパスに基づいてそのコロケーションの傾向を比較対照し、コロケーション研究が類義語の意味・用法の追求においても有効であることを論ずる。

0 Introduction

A central, though neglected, goal of language learning is the acquisition

of lexical semantic and pragmatic competence – the ability to use and understand lexical items in the same way as native speakers. Learners' dictionaries, both monolingual and bilingual, have a major role to play in aiding this process, and as a basic requirement they need to provide language learners with a full range of information required in approaching this task.

A familiar aspect of the difficulties faced by learners in this area is the fact that languages are full of 'near-synonyms', i.e. lexical items whose meaning and use overlap in varying degrees, and distinguishing clearly between such items is an important task for learners' lexicography. In many cases, items of this kind may be used to refer to similar phenomena and share translation equivalents in other languages, but differ in wider aspects of meaning and use. Such cases illustrate particularly clearly the fact that full lexical competence requires control of a variety of factors involved in the natural use of vocabulary, and that lexical descriptions for learners must accordingly go beyond simple definitions and glosses. Native speakers gain control of the lexicon on the basis of familiarity with lexical items used in real contexts, and significant aspects of such contexts need to be drawn upon in treatments in learners' dictionaries.

By way of illustration here we take up two groups of near-synonyms in Japanese, and focus upon their collocational properties, based on attested examples drawn from a small corpus study. Under 'collocation' we include, in particular, co-occurrence with other lexical items in syntactic constructions, as well as broader significant linguistic aspects of contexts in which lexical items are naturally used. Our purpose is to show that studies of collocation can reveal a range of information relevant to natural lexical use, and that the provision of such information in learners' dictionaries can enhance their usefulness as guides to lexical competence. Cross-linguistic focus is on English, as the author's native language.

The two groups are (1) *nezumiuro*, *haiiro*, *guree*; and (2) *shoseki*, *toshō*, *shomotsu* (cf common English translation equivalents *grey* (1), *book* (2)). Attested examples for each item were obtained from a lexical search of internet homepage entries conducted via <http://search.yahoo.co.jp/>. The

first 100 entries for each item were collected, from which examples adjudged as unsuitable (cases of homography, names, repeated entries, examples where terms were mentioned rather than used, and examples whose reference was deemed to be unclear) were excluded to form the final corpus. As a lexicographical baseline, the treatment of these items in a representative monolingual (non-learners') Japanese dictionary (Kindaichi et al 1997) is also referred to.

1 *Nezumiiro, haiiro, guree*

These three items all translate as English *grey* in most contexts. (In the case of *nezumiiro*, morphologically *nezumi* 'rat/mouse' + *iro* 'colour', this is a cause of surprise for (some) English speakers, for whom mice are prototypically brown; cf *mousy/mousey*, applied to the colour of hair: 'Mousy hair is a dull light brown colour' (Cobuild 2001).) In a standard dictionary treatment, Kindaichi et al 1997 characterizes both *haiiro* and *nezumiiro* as pale black colours, with *haiiro* being close to white and *nezumiiro* showing a blue-white tinge (*aojiromi*); cigarette ash and concrete are given as typical examples for *haiiro*, and *ienezumi* for *nezumiiro*. *Haiiro* is described as also occurring in various extended unfavourable meanings, as in the example *haiiro no jinsei*. *Guree* is defined as 'haiiro, nezumiiro'. Note in particular that while this treatment indicates that *guree* overlaps in denotation with *haiiro* and *nezumiiro*, it leaves open the general question of the contexts in which the respective items are naturally used.

Different types of lexical items focus attention on different aspects of collocations. For colour terms, which primarily describe qualities of entities, important collocational information includes the range of nouns with which these terms characteristically co-occur as modifiers or predicates. Noun collocations of these types provide us with an indication of what range of 'things' are naturally described as being *haiiro*, *nezumiiro* or *guree*; note that on the basis of the dictionary description above, in the case of *haiiro* we may expect that these will include abstract 'things'. In addition, lexical items from a single domain of meaning (colour terms, in this case) may co-occur in language use, and the patterns of co-occurrence

found are also of interest: Do *haiiro*, *nezumiiro* and *guree* themselves co-occur, and if so in what patterns? Do the three terms differ in terms of their patterns of co-occurrence with other colour terms?

1.1 *Guree*

The corpus yielded 41 separate references for *guree* and composite items (such as *gureekei*, *chakooruguree* etc). (Since our concern is with collocational range, collocation with a given lexical item, whether single or repeated, in one entry is counted as one reference.) The nouns involved, arranged in rough semantic groups, are set out below, with numbers in parentheses indicating numbers of references.

Clothing (14)

tiishatsu (2)

paakaa (2)

besuto

naiki (shoes)

nekutai

kooto

serafimu (women's suit)

rongunikka (trousers)

pantsu

hatto

waishatsu

hankachi

Computer-related (8)

mausu (3)

konpyuutaa

geemukontoroora

tenpureeto

PCshuuhenkiki

hyooji

Personal accessories (6)

baggu (3)

ferutokoroten (bag)

orisaiifu

bureeku (backpack)

Household goods (3)

maajantaku

reizooko

herusumeeta

Paper products (3)

fuutoo

memo

meishiyooshi

Stone types (3)

mikageishi (2)

jari

Personal decoration (2)

paaru

neiruchippu

Others (2)

shiraga

kage

The overwhelming use of *guree* in the corpus (36/41 references) is to specify the colour of manufactured objects (here, being advertised for sale), among which items of personal apparel (clothing, accessories, decorations), computers, and household goods and appliances predominate. Note that the

items of apparel all belong to the modern, 'Western' sector (cf Miura 1979: 62-3). Cases where *guree* is applied to natural colours are restricted to types of stone (being marketed as decorative products). Under Others, in the example of *shiraga* the discussion concerns dyed colours, and the shadows (*kage*) are those in photographs; both these examples involve co-occurrence with other 'grey' terms, as described below.

There are four cases in the corpus where *guree* co-occurs with other 'grey' terms. An entry introducing a photographic exhibition as *Haiiro to kuro no arenjimento* contains the later phrase *kuro ka guree no kage* apparently referring to the same features; we may conclude from this example that, in some cases at least, the referential ranges of *haiiro* and *guree* overlap. Elsewhere, *ferutokoroten* (a bag) is followed by the descriptor *nezumiuro*, which is in turn followed by the description *Koi guree desu*. The *shiraga* entry contains the sentence *Shiraga o makkuro ni someru no de wa naku guree (nezumiuro) ni suru no desu*. Finally, an entry for *baggu* contains the description *guree (nezumiuro)*. Together these three examples suggest clearly that *nezumiuro* denotes a narrower range of colour within *guree*, namely darker shades of grey.

The complete list of colour terms which co-occur with *guree* is as follows: *nezumiuro* (3), *haiiro*, *chakooruguree*, *chakooru*, *raitoshirubaa*; *burakku* (3), *kuro* (2), *makkuro*; *howaito* (3), *shiro* (2), *ofu*; *buruu* (3), *kon* (2), *ao*, *neibii*; *kirokei*, *kikei*, *ieroo*; *beeju* (2), *raitobeeju*, *kogecha*; *murasaki*, *paapuru*; *aka*, *pinku*; *orenji*; *midorikei*, *guriin*, *aasuguriin*. A striking feature is the strong representation of foreign loans across the spectrum; notably, these outnumber even basic native colour terms in the case of *burakku*, *howaito* and *buruu* (although *aka* is an exception in not being ousted by *reddo*).

1.2 *Nezumiuro*

69 references occurred in the corpus. Noun collocations are indicated below.

Clothing (20)

(seifuku no) kiji (2)

obi (2)

chokki (2)

fuku

seifuku

kimono

(kimono no) gara

somemono

koppori

habutae

hoomongi

fundoshi

katakake

booshi

daffurukooto

suutsu

tiishatsu

Paint etc (10)

supuree (2)

puraimaa (2)

hausupeinto

tosoo

toryoo

(kantei no) toshoku

kureyon

jinbutsuga

Animals (4)

nezumi

chinchira

sorasuzume no ohire (changes from yellow)

(tora no) sutoraipu

Natural objects (3)

ishi (3)

Natural phenomena (5)

sora (2)

ame (2)

kami (due to light)

Artefacts (22)

fuusen (in people's hearts)

nuigurumi

hankachi (dirty)

yane

latemono

mooru (moulding)

jūpu

tooki (lamp)

kasa

gohyakuenkooka

kaishuubako

baggu

ferutokoroten (bag)

kiihorudaa

shiiru

kamipakku

atsugami

itagami

(*konpyuuta no*) *keeburu*

(*konpyuutagamen no*) *sen*

mausu

roorodekkusu

Others (5)

echiopia no shushoku

nippon

kuni

kao

shiraga

As with *guree*, the majority of noun collocates (52/69) denote manufactured objects (clothing, paint, and other artefacts), but their range is wider: traditional clothing is well represented, and uniforms of various kinds are evidently commonly described as *nezumiiro*; *nezumiiro* also appears to be in common use with reference to paint; and the range of other artefacts extends beyond personal and household goods to cases such as *yane* and *tatemono*. In addition, unlike *guree*, *nezumiiro* is readily applied to natural colours, as with animals and the effects of natural light; stones appear among the collocates of both terms, but whereas the examples under *guree* refer to (processed?) types of stone being marketed for decorative purposes, the references here are to the colour of stones found in their natural state. Under Others, *echiopia no shushoku* is perhaps a further example of a natural colour; *nippon* and *kuni* involve figurative uses; *kao* relates to a dark-skinned person who has applied some white substance to his/her face; and the *shiraga* example involves dyeing, as mentioned under *guree* above. Overall, *nezumiiro* is thus applied to a wider range of entities than *guree* in the corpus, and takes in natural as well as manufactured colours.

Of five examples in the corpus where *nezumiiro* co-occurs with other 'grey' terms, three involve *guree* and were commented on in 1.1. One co-occurrence with *haiiro* relates to the stripes of a photographed tiger, described as *nezumiiro to haiiro no sutoraipu*; the second describes the effects of gradually darkening light on a sheet of writing paper: *Hi wa zunzun kurete iku no datta. Haiiro kara nezumiiro ni, nezumiiro kara sumiuro ni ... hiru no hikari wa yoru no yami ni kawaroo to shite ita*. Together the two examples show *nezumiiro* and *haiiro* functioning as contrast terms, with *haiiro* denoting a lighter, and *nezumiiro* a darker shade of colour.

The following colour terms co-occur with *nezumi* in the corpus: *guree* (3), *haiiro* (2), *usunezumi*, *chakooruguree*, *gin'iro*, *zooiro*; *kuro* (5), *kokushoku* (3), *kuroi* (2), *makkuro*, *sumiuro*; *shiro* (4), *shiroi* (4), *hakushoku* (2), *kuriimuiro*; *ao*, *airo*, *buruiro*, *ai*, *aikeitoo (no iro)*, *mizuiro*, *nookonshoku*; *kiiro* (4), *kirokei*, *kin'iro*, *karashiuro*, *karashi*; *chairo* (6), *kitsuneiro*, *sabiuro*, *akasakiuro*, *usucha*, *kogecha*, *beeju*, *chokoreetoiro*; *aka* (2), *akai*, *enji*, *kuroenji*, *entanshoku*; *pinku*, *barairo*, *usumomoiro*; *murasaki*, *usumurasaki*, *usuusumurasaki*, *usuakamurasaki*; *orenji* (3), *daidaiiro*; *midori* (2), *kimidori* (2), *midoriuro*, *guriin*, *usukokeiro*. The most notable contrast with *guree* is the reduced prevalence of foreign loans with, in particular, neither *burakku* nor *howaito* occurring here: whereas *guree* tends to co-occur with *burakku/kuro* and *howaito/shiro*, *nezumi* favours *kuro/kokushoku/kuroi* and *shiro/shiroi/hakushoku*.

1.3 *Haiiro*

The corpus yielded 21 clear references for *haiiro*. Noun collocations are shown below.

Natural colours (12)

kabi (2)

shokubutsu

(lora no) sutoraipu

noomiso

noosaiboo

kage (as photographed)

kami (due to light)

tsuchi

yuki (due to *jin'en*)

machi (streets, due to *jin'en*)

ichinichi (due to *kemuri*)

Artificial colours (2)

(tekisuto to aikon no) hyooji

(*haikibutsu no*) *yooki*

Figurative uses (7)

sora (2)

umi

machi (town)

sekai

nikki

watashi

While the number of clear examples is insufficient to support strong conclusions, they suggest that *haiiro* is applied predominantly to naturally occurring colours, less commonly to artificially produced colours (although for some examples there may be room for argument on the choice of placement within these categories). In addition, as indicated in Kindaichi et al, figurative uses account for a relatively high proportion (7/21) of references of *haiiro*: this is clear in the case of nouns which denote abstract entities like *sekai*, *nikki* and *watashi*, but even in concrete cases here the context indicates that it is the joyless mood of the viewer that is centrally involved, rather than necessarily the literal colour of the referents.

The three cases of co-occurrence of 'grey' terms involving *haiiro* (one with *guree*, and two with *nezumiuro*) have been described under 1.1 and 1.2. Co-occurrences of all colour terms are as follows: *nezumiuro* (2), *guree*; *kuro* (2), *sumiuro*; *shiro*; *aka*; *ao*, *buruu*. As with *nezumiuro*, *burakku* and *howaito* are absent.

1.4 Summary

Occurrences in the corpus have provided an indication of the range of nouns which these terms are used to describe. The clearest result is that *guree* is used predominantly to describe the colour of manufactured, 'modern' articles. *Nezumiuro* is likewise widely used with respect to manufactured articles, including traditional Japanese clothing, but also

describes natural colours, while *haiiro* appears rather to favour natural colours as well as figurative uses. Co-occurrence data has also thrown light on aspects of denotation: both *haiiro* and *nezumiuro* fall within the range of *guree*, and there is clear evidence that the two terms may function in contrast, denoting lighter and darker shades respectively.

2 *Shoseki, tosho, shomotsu*

These three items may be characterized as 'difficult' counterparts of *hon*, all of which generally translate as *book* in English. By 'difficult' we refer to the fact that, unlike *hon* which occurs commonly in a wide range of genres including everyday conversation, these items are characteristic of more formal, written-language styles. There is a widespread trend in the Japanese lexicon for an everyday item (commonly, although not in this case, from the native sector of the vocabulary) to have formal counterparts (commonly from the Sino-Japanese sector) which also possess a narrower semantic range (cf Miyajima 1988). While *shoseki*, *toshō* and *shomotsu* are undoubtedly 'near-synonyms', we assume once again that they differ in their conditions for natural use, and our main purpose here is to survey collocational evidence for this. We focus in particular on three main aspects of their behaviour. Firstly we consider the range of predicates with which these nouns collocate as complements: what processes do they typically participate in, as subjects, objects etc? Secondly we look at contexts in which they co-occur as coordinate terms with other nouns: of what sets of things do they commonly appear as members? Finally we take up aspects of their compositional behaviour, mainly in compounds.

In lexicography, Kindaichi et al 1997 defines *shoseki* as *hon*, viewed as a source of personal knowledge and as an object enriching everyday life. *Toshō* is given two sub-entries: firstly, as a 'kangoteki' (i.e. stylistically formal, Sino-Japanese) expression with the same meaning as *shomotsu*; and secondly, as a collective term for books and other documentary resources held in public facilities. *Shomotsu* is defined as a 'kangoteki' expression with the same meaning as *hon*. Aside from the stylistic properties implied by 'kangoteki' for *shomotsu* and for one use of *toshō* (although not for

shoseki, as in our characterization here), this treatment suggests that *shoseki* centres on the edificational aspect of books, *tocho* (in one of its uses) on their role as a public resource, while no specific semantic focus is indicated for *shomotsu*.

2.1 *Shoseki*

The corpus contained 105 references of *shoseki* (including composites). 25 references involved collocations of the noun *shoseki* as subject or object argument with predicates (verbs, verbal nouns + *suru*, or verbal nouns alone (e.g. *shoseki no kensaku*)). These are listed below, arranged by rough semantic groupings of predicates.

Selling (7)

hatsubai (2)

hatsubai suru

hanbai suru (2)

tsuuhan

purezenlo

Buying (5)

koonyuu (2)

gokoonyuu

omolome

gokiboo

Information provision (5)

shookai (2)

goannai

shuuroku suru

matomeru

Information search (4)

kensaku (2)

zenpeejikensaku
mitsukaru

Delivery (2)
shukka
hassoo suru

Stock (1)
torisoroeru

Compilation (1)
seisaku suru

A majority of the references of *shoseki* in these collocations are to books as commercial products: *shoseki* are bought, sold, delivered, stocked, and compiled (in this instance, by the editorial department of a book publisher). *Shoseki* are also the target of information provision and search; much of this, although not all, is provided by publishers and booksellers and sought by prospective customers.

18 references of *shoseki*, either as an independent word or in composites, occurred in co-ordinate contexts involving sets of nouns. The commonest partner terms were *zasshi* (7), *DVD* (5), *CD* (4), indicating that *shoseki* often figures as one member among a range of commercially available sources of information and entertainment.

Finally we consider the behaviour of *shoseki* in composites. In general, caution is needed in comparing the meaning and use of words as free items directly with their behaviour as elements in compounds and derivatives, since word-formation commonly involves additional restrictions of various kinds (for example, on the combination of items from different etymological sectors of the vocabulary) which are not relevant above the level of the word. At the same time, however, consideration of composites of *shoseki*, *tosho* and *shomotsu* is clearly a potential source of additional comparative information of interest for these three terms. *Shoseki* appears in a large

number of composite items, among which we focus on compounds with *shoseki* as the first or second element, exemplified respectively by *shosekikoonyuu* and *ippanshoseki*. The majority of *shoseki*-compounds show a complement-predicate structure, and occurring examples echo the collocations found above: the commonest compound of this type is *shosekikensaku*, followed by *shosekiannai* and *shosekishookai*. *-shoseki* compounds are generally of modifier-head structure, and overwhelmingly the commonest example in the corpus is *denshishoseki*, followed by *shinkanshoseki* and *kanrenshoseki*; compounds indicating subject matter interestingly appear to favour alphabetisms as the first element: *ITshoseki*, *UFOshoseki*, *SFshoseki*.

2.2 *Tosho*

Of the 71 references of *tosho* and composites in the corpus, 11 involved the noun *tosho* functioning as subject or object argument of predicates, listed below.

Information provision (3)

keisai suru

shuuroku

shookai

Information search (3)

kensaku suru

mitsukeru

osagashi

Buying (2)

omotome itadaku

koonyuu suru

Utilization

katsuyoo suru

Location

haika suru

Borrowability

kashidashikanoo na joutai de aru

This range is not dissimilar to that of *shoseki*, but information occupies the major placings, and new semantic areas relate to utilization, location and availability for borrowing.

8 references of *tocho*, as an independent word or in composites, occurred in co-ordinate contexts involving sets of nouns. Partner terms were *zasshi* (3), *shiryoo* (2), *bideo* (2), *shinbun*. Again, *zasshi* is shared with *shoseki* but, as is clear in particular from the presence of *shiryoo* (and the absence of *CD* and *DVD*), *tocho* appears to involve greater emphasis on role as an information resource, irrespective of commercial factors.

Like *shoseki*, *tocho* appears in a large number of composite formations (including everyday items such as *toshokan*), and here we consider compounds, as for *shoseki* above. *Tocho*- compounds in the corpus are predominantly of modifier-head structure: the commonest by far is *toshomokuroku*, followed by (complement-predicate) *toshokensaku*. *-tocho* compounds with more than one occurrence in the corpus are *shinkantoshō*, *shinchakutoshō*; *suisentoshō*; *sankootoshō*; *nihongotoshō*; *rokuontoshō*.

2.3 *Shomotsu*

The corpus contained 42 references of *shomotsu*. 15 involved predicates taking *shomotsu* as subject or object argument, as listed below.

Influence (3)

eikyooroku o motta

seiyo o kizuuta

sekai o kaeta

Message (2)

kataru

Reading (2)

yomu

Interest

hoshii

Recommendation

suishoo shitai

Existence

sonzai shite iru

Information search

mitsukeru

Authority

tenkyo to suru

Buying

motomeru

Delivery

otodoke suru

Necessity

fuyoo da (in a paperless university)

Shomotsu occurs with a semantically relatively wide range of predicates: like *shoseki* and *tocho* they can be searched for and bought, but more often they are things which carry influence, contain a message, or are read. The collocational evidence suggests that the focus of *shomotsu* is commonly

on (significant) content.

In contrast to *shoseki* and *tosho*, *shomotsu* occurs in only one co-ordinate context in the corpus, paired with *zasshi*. It also appears to form far fewer composite expressions. *Shomotsu*- compounds were *shomotsubunka* (2 occurrences), *shomotsukenkyuu*, *shomotsuseisan* (as a historical process), and *shomotsusooshoku*; -*shomotsu* compounds *kanrenshomotsu*, *kakushushomotsu*, *ruijishomotsu*, and *amerikabijinesushomotsu*. In addition to content area, these compounds focus on books as a cultural product.

2.4 Summary

While these three items all relate semantically to *hon*, textual tendencies indicate that they do so from different perspectives: *shoseki* commonly focuses on *hon* as a commercial product, *tosho* as an informational resource, *shomotsu* as a bearer of significant content and as a cultural product. *Shoseki* and *tosho* (but not *shomotsu*) are also shown to share collocations relating to information provision and search.

An additional semantic property of *tosho*, referred to in Kindaichi et al's dictionary treatment above, is its status as a collective term (i.e. its English translation equivalent is *books* rather than *book*). The corpus contained one co-occurrence of *shoseki* and *tosho*, where the two terms clearly contrast in this respect. The discussion concerns a database consisting of a catalogue of books in Japanese (*nihongotosho no mokuroku*) on a particular topic, and includes the sequence *Shikashi tosho ni wa kakushoseki no shozaijoochoo ga kakete ita*: within collective *tosho*, individuated reference is made by means of *shoseki*.

3 Conclusion

Our aim here has been to demonstrate the value of collocational studies in the investigation of lexical meaning and use. To this end we have taken up two groups of related Japanese items, representative of 'near-synonyms' which pose problems for learners of the language, and examined collocational evidence of different kinds from a small corpus of attested examples.

Despite its limited scale — and we have in any case focused only on

selected collocational aspects of the corpus — we believe that our treatment has succeeded in revealing some significant collocational tendencies and in producing information on natural lexical use which goes beyond existing standard dictionary descriptions.

Native speakers of all languages control the meaning and use of a vast number of lexical items and, as noted earlier, they acquire this mastery on the basis of innumerable encounters with these items used in real contexts. By investigating linguistic aspects of these contexts, collocational studies can expand the range of information available to non-native learners in their own quest for lexical competence.

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