

本稿は、弊社で社内向けに行っている英語翻訳の基礎コースの抜粋です。この基礎コースは、英語のネイティブスピーカーと日本人技術者と間にある英語に対する感覚の違いを埋めることを目的としたものです。覚えやすいように平易な文例を用いて動詞や前置詞の焦点をあてて行っております。

Prevent, Protect

Translating 防ぐ and 守る



Mike Berry
QA manager

1 Introduction

The words prevent and protect are an occasional source of confusion in translation, partly because they can be used in similar ways. 防ぐ (*fusegu*, prevent) and 守る (*mamoru*, protect) are different in Japanese, but consider the following sentences¹:

建物を地震から防ぐ
tatemono wo jishin kara fusegu

(Translation: *The building is prevented from [suffering] earthquake [damage]*)

建物を地震から守る
tatemono wo jishin kara mamoru

(Translation: *The building is protected against earthquake [damage]*)

- OR -

ドライバを事故から防ぐ
doraibaa wo jiko kara fusegu

(Translation: *The driver is prevented from [suffering] accidents*)

ドライバを事故から守る
doraibaa wo jiko kara mamoru

(Translation: *The driver is protected against accidents*)

The two sentence structures are obviously very similar in Japanese and overall have a similar meaning.

In this Technical English Note, we will try to highlight the difference in meaning between *prevent* and *protect*, and give some example sentences.

... see next page

¹ The words in square brackets [like this] are not actually present in the original Japanese, they are inferred from context.

2 Prevent and Protect

Prevent basically means to stop something undesirable happening. *Protect* basically means to keep the named object safe.

The object for the verb *prevent* is the action or event that you want to stop. For example, using **blue** for the verb and underlined green for the object of the verb:

- a) The fuse *prevents* excessive current being applied to the sensor.

However, the object for *protect* is the thing you want to keep safe.

- b) The sensor is *protected* against excessive current being applied by a fuse.

Both sentences basically say the same thing. In the first sentence, the subject is the fuse, and overall it gives an explanation of its purpose. The second sentence is about the sensor, and explains how the current passing through it is limited.

Perhaps, though, it would be clearer to reduce the sentences even more

- a) The fuse *prevents* excessive current being applied.

- b) The sensor is *protected* by a fuse.

Protect + by

As you can see in the previous section, *protect* only needs to specify the object that you want to protect. You don't always have to explain why you are protecting it, it will usually be obvious. You can add an explanation using "by" and the protective object.

The driver is *protected* by a rigid steel safety cell. (car design)

The transceiver is *protected* by a plastic cover. (vehicle radar)

The stator coil is *protected* by a voltage regulator. (motor design)

The "by" part can also be a process or procedure

The sensor is *protected* against corrosion by sealing the casing with resin.

The lens is *protected* by coating it with an anti-scratch material.

The fabric is *protected* by providing a flame-retardant coating.

Protect + [against, from]

You can add an explanation of why you are protecting something by using *from* or *against*. Patents usually require the purpose of each component to be clearly explained, so the following structure using *protect...against* may be useful, or you can use “to” to describe the purpose.

The driver is *protected* against injury by a rigid steel safety cell. (?)

The transceiver is *protected* against damage from flying debris (OK)
by a plastic cover. The cover may also be made of any other
radar-transparent material.

The stator coil is *protected* against the application of excessively (OK)
high voltage by a voltage regulator.

In the second and third examples, the transceiver can probably be completely protected against road gravel, and the stator coil can be completely protected against voltage spikes. For those cases, *protect ... against* sounds reasonable.

The first sentence above, however, has a question mark after it. The sentence is not wrong as such, but by adding the *against* clause, the meaning of the sentence is slightly changed. It now sounds slightly like there is no risk of injury, and the driver is completely safe. Clearly, such protection is impossible, so the sentence looks a little strange.

The next section will suggest an alternative.

Protect + [to, in order to]

Where more explanation of the purpose of the protection is required, but *against* or *from* might be too strong, the following structure is a useful alternative

The driver is *protected* by a rigid steel safety cell to reduce the
risk of injury during a collision.

The sentence is longer than some previous examples, but the explanation required is more complex, so this is reasonable. The other examples from the previous section can also be reorganized in this way, if desired:

The transceiver is *protected* by a plastic cover to prevent damage by
gravel and other road debris.

The stator coil is *protected* by a voltage regulator to smooth out any
voltage spikes.

In one example above, I used the verb prevent, which is explained in the next section.

Prevent

As mentioned before, *prevent* only needs to describe the event or action that you want to avoid. Using the examples from the previous page,

Injury to the driver in an accident can be *prevented reduced* by having a steel safety cell.

Damage to the radar transceiver from flying road gravel is *prevented* by a radar-transparent cover.

Overheating of the stator coil is *prevented* by the ECU 11, which reduces the applied current when the temperature of the temperature sensor 15 exceeds the threshold temperature Th.

The first example has the same problem as the first example for *protect*. It's highly unlikely that there is a zero risk of injury, so *reduce...risk* would be a more appropriate choice.

Other words

There are other possible words with a similar meaning to protect and prevent. For example, in a dictionary you may see *keep safe, save, shield, preserve, guard* etc. However, these words are all used in specific situations, and are difficult to use generally. They often sound non-technical. For this reason, I recommend *protect* and *prevent* as the best choices in most cases.