

DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO THE CONCEPT OF COLLOCATION IN ENGLISH: WHY LEARN COLLOCATIONS?

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ABSTRACT

Research background. A collocation is a combination of two or more words that are commonly used together in English. Collocation is an indispensable element of any English text and no piece of natural spoken or written language is totally free of collocation. There exist different approaches to the concept of collocations in English. However, there is no exhaustive and uniform definition or categorization of it. Second language learners do not have many guidelines to follow considering the admissibility of collocation, thus collocations seem to be an insurmountable obstacle to the attainment of native like fluency and is one of error generating areas in general English and especially in EAP (English for Academic Purposes) and ESP (English for Special Purposes).

Research aims were to analyze and systemize different theoretical approaches to the concept of collocation in English with reference to the data of scientific research as well as give the answer why collocations should be learned and taught at all levels of language proficiency and within different registers.

Research method used – theoretical analysis of classical and modern research articles on collocation in English.

Research results. Various linguistic schools have had different approaches to the study of collocations. Acquisition of collocations can be the source of particular difficulties for L2 learners in attaining native-level competence. Collocations should be taught from the very beginning at all levels of language proficiency.

Discussion and conclusions. As a result of analysis and systemization of scientific data the following conclusions have been made:

1. Collocation is a lexical co-occurrence of lexemes. In order a lexical combination could be called a collocation it should satisfy the criterion of frequency and grammatical structure;

2. Lexis and grammar cannot be separated;

3. Lexis is inseparable from semantics.

4. Knowledge of collocations can help develop language proficiency in such areas as English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Students' motivation to learn collocations and make good use of them in their essays, research works and academic language should be increased.

Keywords: collocational, co-occurrence, language acquisition, register.

INTRODUCTION

Collocation is an indispensable element of any English text and no piece of natural spoken or written language is totally free of collocation. Second language (L2) learners do not have many guidelines to follow considering the admissibility of collocation, thus collocations seem to be an insurmountable obstacle to the attainment of native like fluency and is one of error generating

areas in general English as well as in EAP (English for Academic Purposes) and ESP (English for Special Purposes).

This linguistic study is primarily concerned with the usefulness of collocation in the process of teaching foreign languages as well as problems they may cause for L2 learners, especially in attaining language proficiency in academic and specialized

language writing essays, scientific articles, etc. Collocational knowledge could facilitate L2 learners in avoiding language errors, ambiguity and help express more clearly the information they want to convey.

Speech formation, its functioning and development are determined by the opposition of two contradictory factors: on the one hand, creativity, unlimited realization of language potentialities, on the other – non-productivity, fixedness, use of prefabricated closely bound units.

English linguist John Sinclair suggests two main principles of language model:

- the open-choice principle,
- the idiom principle (Sinclair, 1991)

The open-choice principle is a way of seeing language text as the result of a very large number of complex choices. At each point where a unit is completed (a word, a phrase or a clause), a large range of choices opens up and the only restraint is grammaticalness. “It is called a slot and filler model, envisaging texts as series of slots which have to be filled from a lexicon which satisfies local restraints” (Sinclair, 1991, p.109).

However, it is clear that words do not occur at random in a text. It would be impossible to produce a normal text simply by operating the open-choice principle.

There are sets of linguistic choices which come under the heading of register and which can be seen as large-scale conditioning choices. Once a register choice is made, then all the slot-by-slot choices are reduced in scope or even pre-empted.

The idiom principle accounts for the restraints that are not captured by the open-choice model. The essence of this principle is that a language user has available to him a large number of semi-preconstructed phrases that constitute single choices.

The freedom with which the speaker brings together words in speech may be restricted by requirements of the language itself, its syntactic structure, its inner regularities and laws, which can be presented in the dichotomy of colligation and collocation.

Colligation is defined as the morpho-syntactically conditioned combinability of words in speech. It is based on the abstract form of language; its syntactic patterns. It is obvious that speech formation would be impossible without certain general patterns which must be accepted by the speaker. The speaker is obliged to obey the

general syntactic rules for combining words of a particular class. The general syntactic patterns are followed by the speaker regardless of the concrete lexical meanings of words which “fill in “the formula (for instance, when forming the simplest and most classical kind of word combination – a binary attributive word combination – the speaker of English places an adjective before a noun, while in French the syntactic pattern of the same kind of word combination would require the reverse order.

Collocation is defined as lexically-phraseologically conditioned combinability of words. “By this we mean that when the speaker combines words in speech his freedom is restricted by the lexical-phraseologically “valencies of words”, their lexical-phraseological attraction or repulsion” (Alexandrova, Ter-Minasova, 1987, p. 37).

Thus, the process of speech formation is conditioned, on the one hand, by morphosyntactic or colligational factor, which is more general, more abstract, a kind of formula separated from concrete lexical meanings of words (*adjective+noun, adverb+adjective, noun+noun, noun+verb, verb+noun, verb+adverb, verb+expression with preposition*, etc.) and, on the other, lexical-phraseological, or collocational, which is something particular, something specific.

The general colligation patterns form the skeleton of a speech event, while specific lexical filling, the collocational aspect, shapes its body, makes it real.

This research arises out of the importance of collocation itself. It is important to study collocation because:

- It is a frequently discussed phenomenon;
- There are different attitudes towards the phenomenon of collocation and its categorization;
- Collocations are defined and interpreted differently;
- Collocations are significant in the process of second language acquisition.
- Collocation tends to be one of the most problematic and error-generating areas of academic and special vocabulary.

Research aims were to analyze and systemize different theoretical approaches to the concept of collocation in English with reference to the data of scientific research as well as give the answer why collocations should be learned and taught at all levels of language proficiency from the very beginning.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research method used – theoretical analysis of classical and modern research articles on collocation in English. The object of the research was collocation in English.

RESEARCH RESULTS

There are several approaches to the concept of collocation in English.

The lexical approach. Supporters of the lexical approach claim that the meaning of a word is determined by the co-occurring words. Lexis is considered to be independent and separable from grammar. Thus, a part of the meaning of a word is the fact that it collocates with another word. The interpretation of collocation by English linguist John Firth became the most popular among other methods of syntagmatic analyses. He introduced the first formal definition of collocation. The meaning of a word is determined by the co-occurring words. “You shall know a word by the company it keeps” (Firth, 1957, p.195). J. R. Firth calls this company “collocation”, which is part of the meaning of a word. Meaning by collocation is an abstraction at the syntagmatic level. Thus, part of the meaning of a word is the fact that it collocates with another word. But those combinations are strictly limited.

After J. R. Firth (1957), and M. K. Halliday (1966) added some insights for the notion. McIntosh investigated the “collocational range”. He noticed that the range of words is not fossilized. M. K. Halliday’s innovation was that he clearly separated lexical matters from grammatical ones.

For M. K. Halliday collocations are examples of word combinations. He introduced the term “lexical set”. It is a set of lexemes that show similar tendencies to collocate. In his works he highlights the crucial role of collocations in the study of lexis.

However, J. Lyons (1977) argues that meaning of a lexeme is not only syntagmatically determined. He spoke about “encapsulation” of meaning, that is, lexicalization of the syntagmatic modifying component. If a lexeme is frequently used in collocation with a restricted set of syntagmatically modifying lexemes or phrases, it may encapsulate their sense.

J. Sinclair in the early period of his investigations argued that collocation in its purest sense recognizes only the lexical co-occurrence of words. Later on J. Sinclair (1996) slightly changed his attitude by dismissing the previous

idea that lexis is separated from grammar. In this new approach both the lexical and grammatical aspects of collocation are taken into consideration. To the above mentioned linguists at this stage of collocation analysis collocation is the occurrence of independent lexemes. They should be analyzed at the preferably lexical level.

The semantic approach. The advocates of this approach attempt to examine collocations from the semantic point of view, also separately from grammar (Martynska, 2004). Their main goal is to find out why words collocate with certain other words. J. Sinclair in his later research emphasized the role of semantic factor in collocations. “There is no assumption that meaning attaches only to the word. It is anticipated that meanings also arise from the loose and varying co-occurrences of several words, not necessarily next to each other” (Sinclair, 1996, p. 99). If there is no meaning between the combining lexemes, our lexicon becomes empty. Lexical semantics, according to Sinclair, is inseparable from grammar.

The structural approach. According to this approach, collocation is determined by structure and occurs in patterns. Therefore, the study of collocation should include grammar. Lexis and grammar cannot be separated and, consequently, two categories are defined: lexical and grammatical collocations, which represent two distinctive but related aspects of one phenomenon. Grammatical collocations usually consist of a noun, an adjective or a verb plus a preposition or a grammatical structure such as “to+infinitive” or “that+clause”, e. g. *by accident, to be afraid that...* Lexical collocations do not contain grammatical elements, but are combinations of nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs.

Among advocates of the structural approach R. Carter, G. Kjellmer and M. Lewis’ names are mentioned.

R. Carter (1998) defines collocation as a group of words that recurrently co-occur in a language. He distinguishes between grammatical collocations which result not only from grammatical relationship, but most of all from co-occurrence of lexical units in a specific company. The total number of words which can collocate with an X word is called a “cluster” of X. He also points out that certain elements of a cluster are more central than other, which means that they are more likely to co-occur with X.

Swedish linguist G. Kjellmer (1990) states that individual word classes are “collocational” or “non-

collocational” in character: articles, prepositions, singular and mass nouns as well as the base forms of verbs are collocational in their nature whereas adjectives, singular proper nouns and adverbs are not. According to G. Kjellmer English words are scattered across a continuum which extends from those items whose contextual company is entirely predictable to those whose contextual company is entirely unpredictable.

Most words tend to appear towards the beginning of the continuum, which can also be described as a scale of fixedness of collocation. Then it extends from totally free, unrestricted combinations to totally fixed and invariable ones.

M. Lewis (2000) argues that most collocations are found in the middle of this continuum, which means that there are very few “strong” collocations. He makes a distinction between “strong” collocation, “common” collocation which makes up numerous word combinations and “medium strong” one, which account for the largest part of the lexis a language learner needs.

M. Lewis defines collocation as a subcategory of multi-word items, made up of individual words which habitually co-occur and can be found within the free-fixed collocational continuum.

S. Hunston (2002) concluded that there are correlations between grammatical patterns and lexical meaning. All words can be represented by specific patterns and the meanings of words which share patterns have a lot in common. That means that a word has a specific meaning when it co-occurs with a certain word.

To the above mentioned authors lexis and grammar cannot be separated. Therefore two basic types of collocations are distinguished: grammatical which result from grammatical relationship and lexical which result not only from grammatical relationship but most of all from co-occurrence of lexical units in a specific company.

Besides, individual word classes are “collocational” or “non-collocational” in character: prepositions, articles, base forms of verbs, singular and mass nouns are collocational in their nature whereas adverbs, adjectives, singular and proper nouns are not.

Individual words habitually co-occur within the free-fixed collocational continuum.

A new era in linguistics began with the introduction of computers to the study of language. Access to large corpora has uncovered a lot of new facts about language. It made language research more objective and effective and laid a background

to development of Corpus Linguistics. Corpus Linguists specify a key word in context (KWIC) and identify the words immediately surrounding them. This gives an idea of the way words are used.

The processing of collocations involves a number of parameters, the most important of which is the measure of association, which evaluates whether the co-occurrence is purely by chance or statistically significant. Due to the non-random nature of language, most collocations are classed as significant, and the association scores are simply used to rank the results.

Besides, electronic support to dictionary content management has changed a great deal how data are encoded, managed and retrieved (Robichaud, 2011).

From its outset, one of the main concerns of corpus linguistics was the construction of corpora that were representative as closely as possible of natural language. To this end, larger corpora offered not only ever increasing amounts of data but also, more importantly, different kinds. This allowed previously unnoticed patterns of language use to emerge. It also suggested that language itself as a linguistic system, rather than being rule-based, is – inherently probabilistic and that choices made by users of the language are affected by more than just internal linguistic constraints (Laybutt, 2009).

The notion of the influence of context on language choice has also informed the development of smaller, specialized corpora. “The use of these specialized corpora can play a key role in the investigation of the linguistic characteristics of restricted academic disciplines, specialized language and the description of recurrent patterns that may characterize particular genres or registers within a sample of texts. It has found application in particular within such areas as English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP)” (Laybutt, 2009, p. 12).

Collocations in sports. One of the examples of specialized corpora is sports language. The role of sports language is strictly related to the role of sports in man’s life, and the function of linguistic expression in sports is associated with particular patterns of sports behavior of different individuals and groups. Each human activity affects its linguistic expression in terms of vocabulary, phonology and syntax. The sport variation of language has been developed by athletes and all other sports people in order to fulfill their needs of communication in the areas of their sports activities.

The language of sports is full of collocations which may be problematic for L2 learners:

Do – athletics, gymnastics, judo, weightlifting, aerobics, yoga, wrestling, archery, etc.;

Play – games: tennis, chess, basketball, badminton, billiards, hockey, rugby, golf, etc.;

Go – jogging, swimming, fishing, skiing, bowling, cycling, skateboarding, surfing, snowboarding, climbing, sailing.

If we take only a small section of “winning and losing” numerous collocations can be found there:

Sportsmen and sportswomen want to win matches, not lose matches.

But you can't win all the time! Sometimes a team or player deserves to win, but gets narrowly defeated/beaten.

Before they go in for/enter a competition, athletes train hard.

They probably attend/do at least five training sessions a week.

Of course, a sportsperson's ultimate aim is to break the world record in their sport.

If they succeed, they set a new world record and become a world record holder.

They are sure to come up against fierce/intense competition as they try to achieve their ambitions.

Sometimes they are satisfied if they just achieve a personal best (McCarthy, O'Dell, 2005, p. 56).

Consequently, collocation in sport language tends to be problematic and error-generating area as well as academic vocabulary and other special vocabularies. In order to help learners of English in the process of acquisition of collocations suggestion was also made by B. E. Laybutt (2009) that, for the study of collocation, language learners may be better served by taking a genre teaching' approach, focusing not only on the surface forms and patterns of individual collocations but also their functional role for cohesion within text, register and genre. In this way, a more systematic and manageable approach to the study of collocation may be achieved.

The precise understanding and command of the language of sports, its terminology and its combinations of collocations, is crucial for an adequate degree of communication in this era of globalization and competition.

DISCUSSION

Why learn collocations?

Various linguistic schools have had different approaches to the study of collocations. Recently, research interests of many linguists have been

focused on the lexical approach to the study of collocations. “The principle of lexical approach is to allow learners experience language items in natural contexts and to learn from their experience. It focuses on developing learners' proficiency with words and word combinations” (Willis, 1994, p-viii). It is based on the idea that an important part of language acquisition is the ability to produce lexical phrases as chunks and that these chunks become the raw data by which learners perceive patterns of language traditionally thought of as grammar (Lewis, 1993). For years L2 teachers were overwhelmed with the idea of communicative approach. Thus, in teaching and learning a foreign language fluency in language was considered to be of more importance than accuracy. However, students of L2 may have good speaking and listening skills but the effectiveness of vocabulary and grammar is still questionable. Lexical approach has been adopted in teaching and learning foreign languages as well.

Acquisition of collocations is difficult for L2 learners as only native speakers can have a good knowledge of collocations. According to M. Stubbs (2005), culturally and communicatively competent native speakers of English are aware of such probabilities and of the cultural frames which they trigger. On the other hand, often native speakers' intuitions about collocations are inaccurate, and they also have to refer to dictionaries.

“For foreign language learners, however, collocation can be the source of particular difficulties in attaining native-level competence due to the seemingly arbitrary nature of the word combinations and the sheer number of collocations present in the language” (Nesselhauf, 2003, p. 230).

Collocation cannot be invented by a second language user as s/he does not have many guidelines to follow considering the admissibility of collocation, whereas a native speaker uses them instinctively.

Knowledge of collocations is vital for the competent use of a language: a grammatically correct sentence will stand out as awkward if collocational preferences are violated.

Learning collocations is a good idea because they can:

- a) give you the most natural way to say something;
- b) give you alternative ways of saying something, which may be more colorful/expressive or more precise;
- c) improve your style in writing;

d) help develop language proficiency in such areas as English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP), which can be especially useful for university students.

Thus, when combining courses with collocations teaching, instructors' priority is to help students acquire collocations. Teachers should be selective about what collocations to teach. They should make sure that collocations are active and appropriate for learners at different stages (Hill, 2000).

Methods of teaching collocations include, for example, providing vocabularies in a collocation form, adopting books that include collocations, training students to observe and note collocations in reading texts, encouraging students to collect their collocation for future use, collecting words from their own topics of interest. This would increase students' motivation to learn collocations and make good use of collocations in their essays, which also helps students to record and memorize words more systematically.

CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

Collocation is an indispensable element of any English text and no piece of natural spoken or written language is totally free of collocation. There exist different approaches to the concept of collocations in English. However, there is no exhaustive and uniform definition or categorization of collocation. The definition of collocation still remains the subject of some debate. Therefore, it tends to be one of the most problematic and error-generating areas of vocabulary.

In this theoretical research attempts have been made to analyze and systemize different theoretical approaches to the concept of collocation in English with reference to the data of scientific research. Besides, as collocations are important in L2 acquisition, we tried to answer the question why collocations should be learned and taught at

all levels of English language proficiency as well as within different registers.

As a result of analysis and systemization of scientific data the following conclusions have been made:

1. Collocation is a lexical co-occurrence of lexemes. In order a lexical combination could be called a collocation it should satisfy the criterion of frequency and grammatical structure.

2. Lexis and grammar cannot be separated.

3. Lexis is inseparable from semantics. Lexemes are associated with each other by meaning relations.

4. Collocation cannot be invented by a second language user as s/he does not have many guidelines to follow considering the admissibility of collocation, whereas a native speaker uses them instinctively.

5. Knowledge of collocations helps L2 learners express more clearly the information they want to convey as well as give you alternative ways of saying something, which may be more colorful/ expressive or more precise;

6. Collocations should be taught from the very beginning at all levels of language proficiency as collocational competence can help language learners produce texts which are not only grammatically but also syntactically correct.

7. A genre teaching approach should be taken for the study of collocation, focusing not only on the surface forms and patterns of individual collocations but also their functional role for cohesion within text, register and genre.

8. Knowledge of collocations can help develop language proficiency in such areas as English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP), which can be especially useful for university students. By encouraging students to collect words from their own topics of interest should increase students' motivation to learn collocations and make good use of collocations in their essays, research works and academic language in general.

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KOLOKACIJOS ANGLŲ KALBOJE: KODĖL REIKIA MOKYTIS KOLOKACIJŲ?

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SANTRAUKA

Tyrimo pagrindimas ir hipotezė. Kolokacija – tai dviejų ar daugiau žodžių junginys, kurį įprasta vartoti kalboje. Anglų kalboje kolokacijos yra ypač plačiai paplitusios.

Egzistuoja skirtingi požiūriai į kolokacijas anglų kalboje. Deja, nėra išsamaus ir vienodo kolokacijų apibrėžimo. Nėra ir taisyklių, kurių laikantis besimokantieji anglų kalbos galėtų žinoti, kurias kolokacijas galima vartoti, kurių – ne. Tad kolokacijos išlieka viena iš sunkiausiai įveikiamų kliūčių mokantis bendrinės anglų kalbos, kartu tai ypač opi akademinės ir specialiosios anglų kalbos problema.

Tikslas – analizuoti ir susisteminti įvairius teorinius požiūrius į kolokacijas remiantis tyrimų duomenimis, taip pat bandyti atsakyti į klausimą, kodėl reikia mokytis ir mokyti, kaip taisyklingai vartoti kolokacijas visų žinių lygių ir įvairių funkcinį stilių anglų kalboje.

Metodai. Buvo analizuojami klasikiniai ir šiuolaikiniai moksliniai darbai, susiję su kolokacijomis anglų kalboje.

Rezultatai. Įvairios lingvistinės mokyklos turi skirtingą požiūrį į kolokacijas. Kolokacijas sunkiai išmoksta tie besimokantieji, kurių anglų kalba yra gimtoji. Taigi žinias apie kolokacijas būtų patartina teikti įvairiais kalbos mokymo lygiais.

Aptarimas ir išvados. Išanalizavus ir susisteminus tyrimo duomenis padarytos išvados, kad kolokacija yra sudaryta iš leksemų. Tai nėra paprastas žodžių junginys, nes jis turi atitikti dažnumo ir gramatinės struktūros reikalavimus. Svarbu tai, kad leksika yra neatsiejama nuo gramatikos ir semantikos. Žinios apie kolokacijas gali padėti besimokantiems anglų kalbos išvengti klaidų, dviprasmiškumo kalboje ir aiškiau perteikti informaciją. Ypač tai svarbu vartojant akademinę anglų kalbą. Taisyklingas kolokacijų vartojimas studentų rašiniuose, mokslo darbuose ir šnekamojoje akademinėje kalboje turėtų būti nuolat skatinamas.

Raktažodžiai: kolokacija, žodžių junginys, kalbos išmokimas, funkcinis stilius.

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