From Dictionary to Phrasebook?

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Language is characterized by a large number of conventionalized phrases which, unlike idioms, are largely regular, both semantically and syntactically. Biber et al. (1999) call these phrases lexical bundles and highlight the key role they play both in spoken and written discourse. In spite of their high frequency, these types of phrase have not yet received the place they deserve in dictionaries. In this article, we describe how they are integrated into monolingual learners' dictionaries of English and English-French bilingual dictionaries. The description shows that the presentation of these phrases is largely based on intuition and fails to reflect authentic usage as attested by corpus investigation. We make a plea for a more rigorous-corpus-based-integration of these phrases and illustrate our approach with a fully corpus-based section devoted to English for Academic Purposes (EAP), functions that has been integrated as a middle section in the new edition of the Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners.

1. Introduction

One of the major changes that dictionaries have undergone in recent years is the growing integration of phraseological aspects of language. This change reflects the general shift in language studies from the paradigmatic to the syntagmatic axis, epitomized by Sinclair's (1991) "idiom principle". It also reflects a general tendency to strengthen the amount and quality of productively-oriented information in dictionaries (cf. Rundell 1999).

The most marked advances have been made in the area of collocations, which are integrated in various guises in the entries themselves and more recently in dedicated collocation boxes (e.g. in the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* and the *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners*). As collocations have long been recognized as a major stumbling block for learners, this development is a most welcome one. However, recent phraseological studies have brought out the key role played by another set of phraseological expressions that have yet to find the place they deserve in dictionaries. These sequences, which Altenberg (1998) refers to as "preferred ways of saying things", are sequences of words that commonly go together in natural discourse but which, unlike idioms, mostly display syntactic and semantic regularity. Biber et al. (1999: 989) call them "lexical bundles", i.e. "bundles of words that show a statistical tendency to co-occur". These phrases are pervasive in language but take on different forms in speech and writing: they tend to be more verbal and clausal in speech (e.g. *I don't know, I think I might, what's the matter with*) and more nominal in writing (e.g. *the effect of, in the case of, the extent to which*). They vary across registers and have recently been shown to play a key role in academic discourse (cf. Biber et al. 2004, Gilquin et al. 2007a and 2007b, Hyland 2008, Paquot 2007a, Pecman 2008, Siepmann 2006 and 2008). The functions fulfilled by these phrases can be broadly categorized into two groups: (1) propositional or referential phrases, which refer to the content of the message; (2) pragmatic phrases, which play a role in the management of discourse and which can be further subdivided into stance expressions and discourse organizers (cf. Biber et al. 2004). Knowledge of these phrases is essential to produce fluent speech and writing and yet, as pointed out by Sinclair & Mauranen (2006) they "usually get a rather offhand treatment in pedagogical expositions" and as will be shown below, dictionaries are no exception in this respect.

In section 2 we describe what place is currently being allocated to this type of phrase in monolingual learners' dictionaries of English and bilingual English-French dictionaries. In

section 3 we describe a fully corpus-based section on English for Academic Purposes functions, which has been integrated as a middle section in the new edition of the *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* (MED). Section 4 concludes with final remarks and suggestions for further research.

2. Phrases in dictionaries

Siepmann (2008) ascribes the poor coverage of semantically transparent multi-word units in dictionaries to the fact that the pervasiveness of these lexical units and their function in language have only been recognized very recently. He also points to the difficulties that monolingual lexicographic teams may encounter in noticing "the idiomaticity of semantically transparent items, since this idiomaticity becomes much clearer from the contrastive perspective of the foreign-born learner" (Siepmann 2008:193). Another reason lies in the difficulty of integrating these phrases into traditional monolingual and bilingual dictionaries. The fact that they are made up of several words makes it difficult to decide under which headword they should appear. In addition, they often consist of polysemous words whose entries in dictionaries are already quite long and where users may therefore have difficulty locating the relevant phrases.

In this section, we briefly examine the treatment of this type of phrase in the latest editions of four major advanced learners' dictionaries, namely the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* 2005 (seventh edition, henceforth OALD), the *Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner's English Dictionary* 2006 (fifth edition, henceforth COBUILD), the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* 2003 (fourth edition, henceforth LDOCE) and the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* 2005 (second edition, henceforth CALD), and in four bilingual English-French dictionaries, namely the *Larousse-Chambers* 2003 (second edition, henceforth LR), the *Hachette-Oxford* 2007 (second edition, henceforth HO), *Le Robert & Collins Senior* 2006 (eighth edition, henceforth R&C) and the *Harrap's Shorter Dictionary* 2006 (fourth edition, henceforth HSD).

The analysis shows that conventionalized phrases are mainly described outside the body of the dictionary, i.e. the alphabetical arrangement of headwords. They are usually grouped by theme in a thesaurus-like structure, usually in middle or back matter sections. This type of presentation is the preferred option in bilingual dictionaries, which regularly include extensive guides to letter writing conventions (formal, informal, business, etc.) and sections on CV writing or telephone conversations. Middle matter sections in learners' dictionaries have traditionally been of a different nature. They have typically included grammar sections (e.g. articles, modal verbs, phrasal verbs), notes on numbers, weight and measures, pronunciation, thematic vocabulary, etc. However, the communication-oriented sections typical of bilingual dictionaries are beginning to make their way into monolingual learners' dictionaries. For example, OALD provides study pages on essay writing, writing a CV or résumé, writing formal and informal letters, telephoning and electronic messaging. LDOCE includes a 2-page language note on writing and another on linking ideas.

In this section, we focus more particularly on middle and back matter sections that aim to improve learners' academic writing skills. English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is heavily routinized and formulaic (cf. Biber et al. 2004, Charles 2006, Pecman 2004, Siepmann 2006); it is characterized by a high rate of "statistically linked combinations" (Hyland 2008: 42), i.e. patterns of co-occurrence that act as "strong register discriminators" (ibid: 44). If they want to reach a high level of academic fluency, learners need to master these (semi-)prefabricated sequences. The inclusion of EAP-oriented middle sections in dictionaries is therefore a welcome development. However, our analysis shows that these sections tend to lack the descriptive rigour that characterizes headwords: they tend to be largely intuition-based rather than resulting from minute corpus-based investigation.

Of the four monolingual dictionaries we have examined, three contain an EAP-oriented writing section. OALD provides a two-page section on "Essay writing" which includes information on "planning and writing an essay or composition", "using links and markers", and "quoting and writing a bibliography". LDOCE provides a two-page section on "linking ideas" which focuses

on "a selection of the most common problems that students face when linking words together, and some suggestions for different ways of doing it" (LDOCE: 980). COBUILD offers a more detailed treatment of EAP markers in a twenty-page back-matter section on "Essay Writing". In the three dictionaries, the sections on EAP markers are usefully organized around rhetorical or organisational functions like exemplifying, comparing and summarizing and the use of these markers is illustrated in authentic corpus-based example sentences.

One of the problems with these sections, however, is that they often have fairly limited coverage. For example, OALD only lists two connectors for the function of "describing consequences", viz. *as a result* and *consequently* (pp. R50). More importantly perhaps, the selected items are not always the most typical ones. For example, LDOCE lists *–ly* adverbs (*firstly, secondly*, *thirdly*) and relatively infrequent connectors such as *first of all* and *to begin with* under "listing ideas in a logical order" (cf. Figure 1) but does not introduce simple adverbs (*first, second, third,* etc.) which prove to be much more frequent in academic writing[1]. Similarly, the first phrase of contrast listed in COBUILD is "…*but in reality*…" (*Property was supposed to belong to the people but in reality belonged to the state*) (COBUILD: 19), which is not very common in academic writing.

> One of the most common weaknesses in essays is that the ideas are not linked together in a clear and logical sequence. One simple way of avoiding this problem is to decide exactly which points you want to make, and then number them, using **firstly**, **secondly**, **thirdly**, etc. and **lastly**. Instead of **firstly** you can also say **first of all**, **in the first place**, or **to begin with**. Instead of **lastly** you can say **finally**.

Figure 1: 'Listing ideas in a logical order' (LDOCE: 980)

In some cases, the selection is clearly misguided. This is the case for the adverb *nowadays* which is listed as the first item under the function of "introducing a point" in OALD (pp. R50) and illustrated with the following sentence: *Nowadays many children spend their time watching TV rather than being active*. Connectors are generally presented in lists of undifferentiated and supposedly equivalent items under broad functional categories, a practice which has been denounced by several linguists in relation to textbook materials (cf. Crewe 1990 and Lake 2004). For example, in the COBUILD, the connectors *on the contrary* and *conversely* are described as phrases of contrast alongside *on the other hand, whereas,* and *in contrast to*. This is very unfortunate as it induces errors such as the frequent erroneous use of *on the contrary* as a contrastive discourse marker in contexts where one would expect *on the other hand* or *by contrast*. The following two sentences extracted from the *International Corpus of Learner English* (*ICLE*) (cf. section 3) illustrate this type of error.

> Raskolnikov differs from Onasis, of course. Onasis had everything but he wanted to have more. Raskolnikov, ***on the contrary [by contrast]**, had nothing. (ICLE)
>
> For instance, most Americans have moved to the USA from different countries as immigrants. ***On the contrary [By contrast],** Europeans have lived in their countries for hundreds of years.

Another limitation of these sections is that too much emphasis tends to be placed on connectors, that is, on grammatical cohesion (cf. Halliday and Hasan 1976), to the detriment of lexical cohesion. However, nouns, verbs and adjectives have been shown to serve prominent rhetorical functions in academic prose (cf. Hoey 1993, Flowerdew 1998). Labels, i.e. abstract nouns that are inherently unspecific and require lexical realization in their co-text, either beforehand or afterwards, have also been found to fulfil prominent cohesive roles in this particular genre (cf. Francis 1994).

Of the four English-French bilingual dictionaries, two contain an EAP section. The HO contains a middle-matter section which alphabetically lists "the most frequent link words and expressions", viz. connectors, together with example sentences and their translation. The R&C

[1] The adverb "finally" is also much more frequent than "lastly" in academic prose.

provides a 6-page section on "Essay Writing" organized around rhetorical functions. Unlike HO and the four learners' dictionaries examined, the R&C gives prominence to formulaic sequences (e.g. *it would be interesting to see, we must now consider, several factors contributed to, this would explain, it follows from this that*). While R&C is to be commended for recognizing the importance of this type of phrase in academic writing, the selection of the formulae is sometimes questionable. The section contains some questionable and/or infrequent phrases (e.g. *It is a truth universally acknowledged that* and *it is hard to open a newspaper nowadays without reading that...* to introduce a topic; *when all is said and done, it must be acknowledged that...* and *there is only one logical conclusion we can reach* to introduce a conclusion).

The type of contrastive information on link words and phrases provided in the HO and the R&C poses two major problems. First, French lexical items and their English translations are always presented as one-to-one equivalents, which gives the false impression that the equivalence is always correct, irrespective of the context in which they are used. For example, *now* is presented as the unique translational equivalent of *or* in HO. Second, there are a number of literal translations which constitute clear cases of translationese in these sections. In the R&C, for example, first person plural imperatives in French are systematically translated by *let us* in English although a corpus-based study of first person plural imperatives has shown that the use of this structure is very restricted in EAP (cf. Paquot 2007a and 2008). Examples of infelicitous translation equivalence of this type in R&C include *commençons par examiner / let us begin with an examination of; prenons comme point de départ / let us take as a starting point; venons-en maintenant à / now let us come to; mentionnons brièvement / let us mention briefly; n'oublions pas que / let us not forget that.*[2]

The best way to improve the quality of these sections is to submit EAP words and phrases to the same rigorous corpus-based investigation as is used in the alphabetical structure of dictionaries. An EAP section that has been designed on that basis is described in the following section.

3. Writing sections in MED

Within the framework of a collaborative project between the *Centre for English Corpus Linguistics* of the University of Louvain and *Macmillan Education*, we have carried out a corpus-based study of a set of words and phrases that are used to perform twelve major rhetorical functions in academic writing:

adding information

comparing and contrasting: describing similarities and differences

exemplification: introducing examples

expressing cause and effect

expressing personal opinions

expressing possibility and certainty

introducing a concession

introducing topics and related ideas

listing items

reformulation: paraphrasing or clarifying

reporting and quoting

summarising and drawing conclusions

[2] These findings can be interpreted more globally as being quite representative of a general lack of good contrastive studies on which pedagogical materials can be based. Multilingual corpora clearly have an important role to play here by providing an empirically based source of translation equivalents (cf. Bowker 2003, King 2003).

These corpus-based descriptions were used to inform a 30-page academic writing section in the second edition of the *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* (Gilquin et al. 2007). The section contains a detailed description of a wide range of lexical items that are frequently used in EAP, from single words (adverbs like *therefore* or *namely,* adjectives like *similar* or *possible*; nouns like *cause* or *example* and verbs like *claim* or *discuss*) to word-like multi-word units (*of course, on the contrary, in spite of*, *that is*), collocations (*further reason, close resemblance, remarkably similar, sharp contrast*) and conventionalized phrases (*an example of this is, as described above, this contrasts strongly with*). We selected EAP-specific lexical items according to the corpus-driven method described in Paquot (2007b). This method targets discipline-independent words by making use of measures of keyness, range and dispersion to extract items which appear in a wide range of academic texts. The list was then completed by words and phrases which did not emerge from our corpus analysis but are commonly mentioned in EAP materials. This selection yielded a total of about 350 EAP markers.

For the analysis of these EAP markers, we used the method of "contrastive interlanguage analysis" (Granger 2002: 12-13), which involves two types of comparison: a comparison of native and learner language and a comparison of different learner varieties. The two corpora used were the 15-million word academic subcorpus of the *British National Corpus* (BNC) and the 3.5 million word *International Corpus of Learner English* (ICLE) (Granger et al. forthcoming), which contains essay writing by EFL learners from 16 different mother tongue backgrounds (Bulgarian, Chinese, Czech, Dutch, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Polish, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, Tswana, Turkish).

The BNC, which contains academic texts written by experts from a wide range of disciplines, proved to be an ideal basis to analyse EAP markers from a variety of angles: meaning, frequency, register specificity, syntactic positioning and lexical environment. While our description of EAP words and phrases is mainly in text format, we also make use of graphs and dedicated boxes to raise learners' awareness of major aspects of use. Rather than present EAP markers that express the same rhetorical function (contrast, exemplification, etc.) in lists of seemingly interchangeable items as is all too often the case in EFL reference books and textbooks, we highlight the features that differentiate them so as to help learners to use them appropriately in production. For example, the description in Figure 2 highlights the specificity of the concessive adverb *yet* in terms of meaning and syntactic positioning. Figure 3 highlights the differences in frequency between *however, nevertheless* and *nonetheless* in academic writing, while Figure 4 brings out the speech-like nature of the adverb *though*.

You can use the adverb ***yet*** for introducing a surprising idea after what has just been mentioned. It is typically used:

- at the beginning of a sentence:

  *In terms of influences on their voting decisions, people rated health and education far more important even than unemployment. **Yet** television paid relatively little attention to these issues.*

- at the beginning of a clause introduced by ***and*** or preceded by a comma:

  *Over the last decade and a half, strong conservationist movements have emerged **and yet** there is still no clear idea of how to deal with the ecological problems.*

  *Wordsworth chooses a neutral style, **yet** the total effect is somehow magnificent.*

Figure 2: The adverb *yet* in academic writing (Gilquin et al. 2007: IW19)

BE CAREFUL! The adverb *however* is much more frequent than *nevertheless* and *nonetheless*. Only use *nevertheless* and *nonetheless* when you want to emphasize that the statement you are introducing is true, even though your previous sentence makes this seem very unlikely.

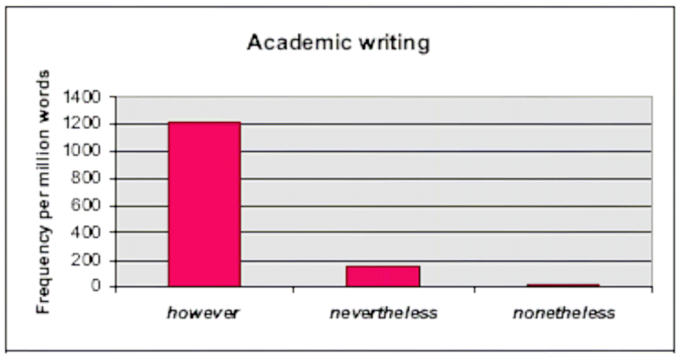


Figure 3: The frequency of *however, nevertheless* and *nonetheless* in academic writing (Gilquin et al. 2007: IW19)

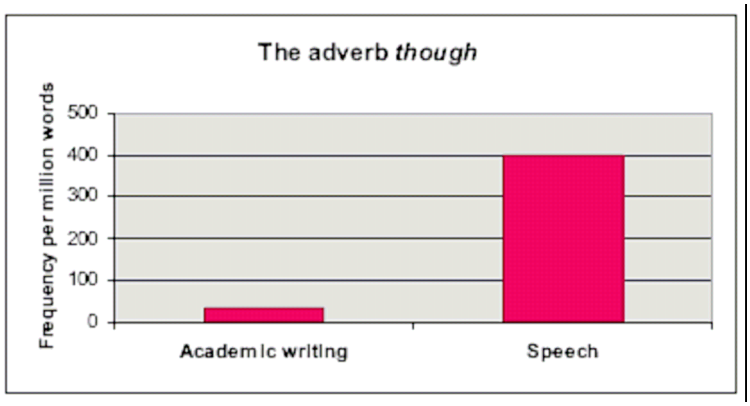


Figure 4: The frequency of the adverb *though* in academic writing and speech (Gilquin et al. 2007: IW19)

A systematic comparison with the learner data highlighted a number of problems which non-native learners experience when writing academic texts. The comparison brought out downright errors like **as it was the case* or **on the other side* (instead of *on the other hand*). More importantly, however, it brought out the EAP markers that learners significantly over- or underuse, an essential step in enriching learners' repertoire. EFL learners, irrespective of their mother tongue backgrounds, prove to make scant use of typical EAP phrases like *this is a typical example of, another issue is, a close analogy can be drawn between*, etc, but to overuse sequences such as *I would like/want/am going to talk about*, which are quite rare in academic writing.

Typical semantic errors are illustrated in "Get it right" boxes such as the one for *on the other side* in Figure 5. These boxes start with an authentic learner error and explain why a particular item is not appropriate in a given context and how it can be corrected. Problems of frequency, register confusion and atypical positioning are dealt with by means of graphs in "Be careful!" notes as shown in Figure 6. This note warns learners against their heavy use of the phrase "*I would like/want/am going to talk about*" in academic writing. Graphs help the reader visualise the differences between learners' behaviour and that of native writers.

Get it right: on the other side

The expression **on the other side** is not used for describing differences between two or more points, ideas, situations, people etc:

✗ *Men have always been responsible for growing food. ~~On the other side~~, women have always taken care of children.*

✓ *Men have always been responsible for growing food. Women, **on the other hand**, have always taken care of children.*

Figure 5: "Get it right" box for *on the other side* (Gilquin et al. 2007: IW9)

BE CAREFUL! Learners often use the expression ***I would like/want/am going to talk about...*** to introduce a new topic. This expression is more typical of speech and is extremely rare in academic writing and professional reports.

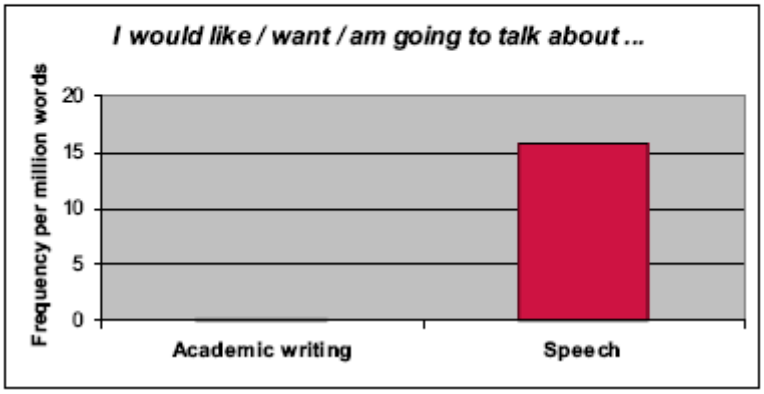


Figure 6: "Be careful" note for "I would like/want/am going to talk about" (Gilquin et al. 2007: IW21)

Besides highlighting infelicitous words and phrases recurring in learner writing, we also offer some of the most common collocates of certain words or phrases in special boxes. In Figure 7, typical verbs used with the conjunct *for example* are listed and examples are provided.

Collocation

Verbs frequently used with **for example**

- to introduce an example that is discussed in further detail over several sentences: consider, take

  *This is very much a generational problem. **Consider, for example**, the new students who begin courses at universities and polytechnics. They cannot remember when Britain was not part of the European Community.*

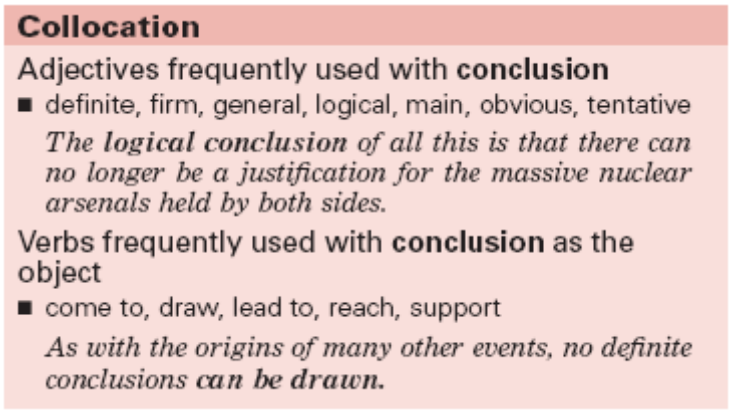
- to refer to someone else's ideas or publications (often between brackets): see

  *Some studies have documented reports of routine racist remarks by teachers (**see for example** Wright in this volume).*

The use of ***see*** is further described in the writing section on Quoting and Reporting.

Figure 7: Collocation box for the conjunct *for example* (Gilquin et al. 2007: IW10)

In addition to a thorough treatment of connectors, special emphasis is placed on other categories of EAP words—nouns, adjectives and verbs—that are also frequently used to fulfil rhetorical functions but tend to be neglected in EFL pedagogical materials. In Figure 8, typical collocates of the noun *conclusion* are provided while Figure 9 lists adverbs frequently used with the verbs *contrast* and *differ*.



Collocation

Adjectives frequently used with **conclusion**

- definite, firm, general, logical, main, obvious, tentative

*The **logical conclusion** of all this is that there can no longer be a justification for the massive nuclear arsenals held by both sides.*

Verbs frequently used with **conclusion** as the object

- come to, draw, lead to, reach, support

*As with the origins of many other events, no definite **conclusions can be drawn.***

Figure 8: Collocation box for the noun *conclusion* (Gilquin et al. 2007: IW29)

Collocation

Adverbs frequently used with **contrast**

- sharply, strongly

*This **contrasts strongly with** the simplicity of word processing, database or even spreadsheet software.*

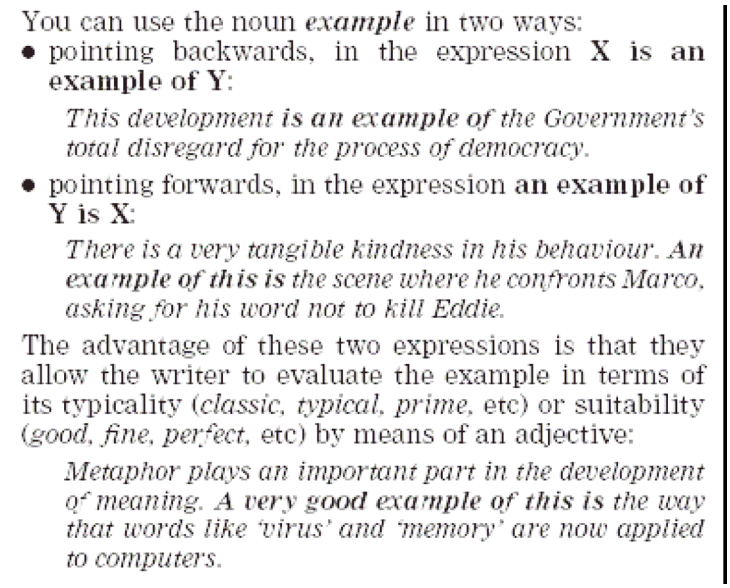
Adverbs frequently used with **differ**

- considerably, greatly, markedly, significantly, slightly, widely

*It did not **differ significantly** between groups.*

Figure 9: Collocation box for the verbs *contrast* and *differ* (Gilquin et al. 2007: IW8)

Conventionalized phrases are described in the main text or in collocation boxes. Figure 10 describes two lexico-grammatical patterns in which the noun *example* is frequently found in academic writing, viz. "X *is an example of* Y" and "*An example of* Y *is* X", while in Figure 11 adjectives that are most frequently used in the structure "*it is* + adjective + *that*" to express possibility and certainty are listed in a collocation box.



You can use the noun ***example*** in two ways:

- pointing backwards, in the expression **X is an example of Y**:

  *This development **is an example of** the Government's total disregard for the process of democracy.*

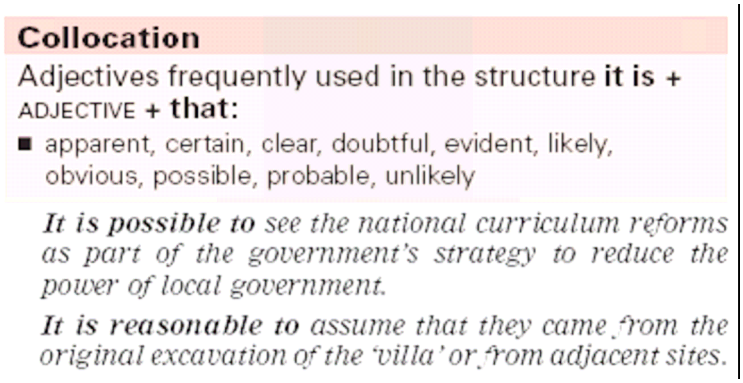
- pointing forwards, in the expression **an example of Y is X**:

  *There is a very tangible kindness in his behaviour. **An example of this is** the scene where he confronts Marco, asking for his word not to kill Eddie.*

The advantage of these two expressions is that they allow the writer to evaluate the example in terms of its typicality (*classic, typical, prime,* etc) or suitability (*good, fine, perfect,* etc) by means of an adjective:

*Metaphor plays an important part in the development of meaning. **A very good example of this is** the way that words like 'virus' and 'memory' are now applied to computers.*

Figure 10: Conventionalized phrases with the noun *example* (Gilquin et al. 2007: IW10)



Collocation

Adjectives frequently used in the structure **it is +** ADJECTIVE **+ that:**

- apparent, certain, clear, doubtful, evident, likely, obvious, possible, probable, unlikely

It is possible to *see the national curriculum reforms as part of the government's strategy to reduce the power of local government.*

It is reasonable to *assume that they came from the original excavation of the 'villa' or from adjacent sites.*

Figure 11: Adjectives frequently used in the structure "*it is* + adjective + *that*" to express possibility and certainty (Gilquin et al. 2007: IW18)

Whilst designed with the foreign language learner and teacher in mind, a large part of this section could also prove very useful for native speakers of English as academic writing skills also need to be learnt in the mother tongue.

4. Conclusion

From time immemorial language users have felt the need to have access to a wide range of conventionalized phrases in the target language. These have tended to be included in phrasebooks rather than dictionaries and to be limited to the types of phrases that allow tourists to survive in a foreign language environment. Indeed, this limitation appears from the very definition of the word *phrasebook* as "a book that explains phrases of a foreign language, for people to use when they travel to other countries" (LDOCE) or "a small book that contains useful words and phrases in a particular foreign language, used especially by tourists" (MED). However, the rapid expansion of corpus-based phraseological studies has shown that conventionalized phrases permeate all registers of language—spoken and written, formal and informal—. As a result, it is difficult to justify the cursory treatment they receive in current dictionaries. There is no reason why the description of conventionalized phrases should be largely intuition-based while the rest of the dictionary is informed by rigorous corpus-based investigation. The "improve your writing skills" section in the MED shows how this rigorous method can be applied to help users achieve higher levels of accuracy and fluency in academic writing. However, to achieve maximum efficiency, it is essential to explore ways of integrating this type of description into the microstructure of dictionaries rather than as a separate middle section. While it is undeniably true that phraseological aspects of language receive a much fuller treatment today than was previously the case, it remains generally true that dictionaries are still "almost exclusively focused on the word, so much so that it is difficult to treat a phrase adequately in a dictionary and difficult to find it once it is there" (Sinclair 2008: 408). Many more multi-word units deserve to have the status of headwords than is currently the case. Why are *of course* and *e.g.* granted the status of headwords while other similar units like *on the contrary* or *for example* only appear as nested entries? Longer sequences such as *as described above, as suggested by, .. is shown in figure x, this would explain, it follows from this,* etc. also deserve to be better integrated but they present an even bigger challenge in view of the space they require and the difficulty they pose in terms of access. One key to these problems lies in making better use of the capabilities afforded by the electronic medium, in particular the multiplicity of access modes it allows (Pecman 2008). Without going as far as turning dictionaries into phrasebooks, there is clearly scope for a degree of "hybridisation" (Hartmann 2005) between the two: dictionaries can and indeed should be much more phrasal than they currently are.

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