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## **Lexical Collocations: Denominative and Cognitive Aspects**

### **Abstract**

The main purpose of this paper is to suggest foundations for a flexible typology of lexical collocations. This would rely (a) on referential features; (b) on functional semantics; (c) on cognitive and conceptual information; (d) on cultural data contained in the meaning; (e) on the type of discourse in which the lexical collocation is typically used. Phraseologisms are considered to stand in very close relation to culture and knowledge. Cultural data is shown to determine the choice of the collocator.

### **1. Introduction**

Lately, there has been growing interest among linguists in the reformulation of theoretical and applied approaches to the problem of word combinatorics. Within the structural framework, the combinatorial aspect was mostly considered in terms of syntax and the purpose was to find rules, as universal as possible, according to which free units combine into syntactic chains. By contrast, the latest trends aim at the analysis of the lexicon for factors restricting free combinability.

In this connection, there has been considerable interest in lexical collocations as pre-fabricated language units (Cowie 1994a). Broadly

speaking, differentiation between collocation and co-location (Knowls 1994) implies combinatorial effects that are derived from meaning potential, linguistically relevant aspects of meaning being gradually expanded to include many facts previously neglected as "extralinguistic". For instance, the correlation between combinatorial language units and linguistic world picture, including cultural connotations (a domain practically unexplored by language theory) seems to be a highly promising direction of research.

Another aspect of the problem is the definition of the position of lexical collocation with respect to the rest of the phraseological corpus and with respect to free word combinations. To draw a demarcation line means to work out a typology of lexical collocations (see Cowie 1994b for a comparative analysis of respective classification approaches in Western linguistics and in Russian phraseology).

However, a unified typology of lexical collocations seems a difficult task at present. The main reason is that quite different foundations have been suggested by different authors for the isolation and classification of lexical collocations. Instead of a typological paradigm which rigidly divides the corpus into classes, we prefer a flexible multi-dimensional net of typological motivations which would result in an "and/or" classification, not necessarily leading to the formation of classes. In fact, this would be a poly-modal classification of types of relationship that exist between the base and the collocator. Such a flexible system is believed to be useful in relieving lexicographers of the notorious phraseological margin which is full of "occasional" word combinations traditionally referred to as "usage peculiarities".

For better understanding, the terms "base" and "collocator" will be used as suggested in Hausmann (1985) and adopted in Western lexicography.

## 2. Lexical collocations: a nominative point of view

In the Anglo-Saxon tradition, the greatest emphasis is put on the syntactic aspect of lexical collocations, with further division into substantive, verbal, adjectival and adverbial phrases. Indeed, this division is the first step in lexicographic presentation; see, for instance, Morkovkin (1978), though in Benson (1989) semantic information is included in a syntactical classification of collocations as an additional parameter. However, classification by surface

structure is often hindered by its basic contradiction with deep semantics. Hidden predicates in *рассвет/закат культуры* have no verbal counterparts, and no solution can be found at the surface level of the phrase. Surface syntax is a very important parameter of classification, but when applied on its own it leaves the usage margin too wide.

In the structural perspective a lexical collocation is a case of "excessive" linguistic expression (at best they are viewed as "stylistic" means, as in Bally (1961), but they are more often referred to the idiosyncratic domain of usage). On the other hand, in terms of the theory of naming, such language units can be interpreted as a way of implementing "linguo-creative order" (B.A. Serebrennikov). In fact, in the Russian language they serve to compensate for the shortage of morphological word- and form-building means (the Future Tense of *побеждать* — *одержу победу* — is best expressed through a collocation; so is an aspectual meaning of *помогать* — *оказать помощь*, etc.) As for lexical collocations with abstract nouns, they assume full responsibility for form- and word-building, since traditional morphological means of derivation are not used here.

In the Russian tradition of naming theory, V. Vinogradov proposed the theory of bound meaning (the dependence between the semantics of the base and the choice of the collocator). A classification of phraseological units based on the degree of "boundness" (semantic cohesion) was widely adopted in Soviet linguistics. In general, "bound" meaning is described as (a) producing functional dependence between the base and the collocator; (b) involving semantic transposition of the collocates (c) serving as a special form-building and derivative mechanism (Telia 1981, 1986).

The fact that bound meaning stands in a functional relation to the meaning of the base was shown with greatest clarity in the Meaning  $\Leftrightarrow$  Text model by A.K. Zholkovski and I.A. Mel'chuk (Mel'chuk, Zholkovski 1984; Apresyan 1974). The theory describes bound meaning in terms of lexical functions and represents lexical collocations as organized around the key word (the base) which is semantically dominant.

The same dependence was also noted by V.G. Gak (Gak 1972): the connection between the meaning of the base and the choice of the collocator is described in terms of "categorical senses" - certain configurations of meaning (like 'initial/final stage of an active / passive action', etc.). Such "categorical senses" and similar pheno-

mena (which can be treated, though with caution, as depth semantic counterparts of Melchuk's lexical functions) suggest that the motivation lies at a deeper level of meaning, and its analysis should start at the depth levels of semantics and conceptual meaning.

As mentioned above, a cornerstone of "bound" meaning is semantic transposition: metaphor (or another trope) is used to name a semantic parameter contained in the meaning of the base (Telia 1986). A tropeic mechanism is engaged in the formation of collocation in the following way: for example, the Russian word *zav'azat'* (to tie up) began to be used to denote the initial stage of friendship (*zav'azat' druzhbu*), because the primary meaning of the verb ('to fasten [a rope] by connecting its ends and tying them into a knot') "fits" the meaning of the base *druzhba* in its semantic parameter 'mutual connection between two or more people' (cf. *uzydruzhby*, lit.: links of friendship, in the meaning of 'lasting and mature relationship between friends', *razorvat' druzhbu*, lit.: to break [tear] up friendship, in the meaning 'to terminate friendship', where the same semantic connection by association is implemented by means of a word combination).

In fact, the meaning of the base together with respective functional relations can be described in terms of frames, with such frame parameters as:

- (a) aspectual ones (*obretat'*, *khranit'*, *teriat' nadezhdu*; *nadezhdy lopnuli*; *nadezhdavernulas' vozrodilas'*, *umerla*);
- (b) qualitative and quantitative parameters (*robkaia nadezhda*, *slabayanadezhda*, etc.);
- (c) parameters pertaining to the subject's involved in the situation (*rab strastei*, *zhertva obmana*);
- (d) instrumentative parameters (*ruka sud'by*, *perst sud'by*);
- (e) locative parameters (*epicentr bor'by*, *glubina stradania*) and other categories of parameters that are comparable to Fillmore's depths cases;
- (f) parameters that indicate singularity or multitude (*luch nadezhdy*, *vorokh novostei*, etc).

### 3. Semantic vs. conceptual: a cognitive approach to lexical collocations

As has been shown above, semantic analysis of lexical collocations is useful as it produces a system of parameters to

describe the frame of meaning. This is a very important stage in lexicographic representation but in fact it gives no insight into the motivation that controls the choice of a specific collocator to match a specific base. Frame semantics cannot explain the difference between free word combinations like *хороший характер* and *плохая память*, on the one hand, and their transposed “synonyms” *золотой/ангельский характер* and *короткая/девичья память* (lexical collocations), on the other hand. Additional conceptual information must be employed to differentiate between these forms.

An insight into conceptualization could be gained if metaphors were subjected to literal decoding and further analyzed on a cognitive basis. We treat metaphor as a most significant mechanism of conceptualization meaning generation. Deconstructing a metaphor, we can gain access to cultural data involved in conceptualization and to the world picture that is shared by all members of a language community and reflected in its linguistic signs.

In short, the role of metaphor can be described as knowledge acquisition through the *Als Ob* principle which is the mode to assimilate new experience to already existing patterns, on the basis of analogy. As metaphor is the linguistic expression of this process, it is worthwhile considering metaphorical (figurative) linguistic meaning to be a bridge between the world of concepts and the world of semantics. Thus, a cognitive approach to lexical collocations becomes possible due to the presence of metaphor, this principal *linguo-creative* mechanism, in the structure of meaning.

In fact, the crucial point is the mode of knowledge acquisition and processing. Here, we are dealing with culture- and language-specific knowledge encoded in linguistic signs and representing what Weisgerber called *Weltansicht* (Weisgerber 1929). The knowledge of cultural linguistic codes, or cultural linguistic competence, is a condition *sine qua non* for the interpretation of lexical collocations.

The present authors suggest the following modes of acquisition of cultural data in lexical collocations:

- (1) cultural connotation;
- (2) cultural seme;
- (3) cultural background;
- (4) cultural concept.

1. By cultural connotation we mean an ethno/socio-cultural interpretation of associative and figurative motifs with respect to cultural categories (mythologems, prototypical situations, archetypes, quasi-symbols, etc.). In our classification, cultural connotation is the most influential parameter as it presupposes tropeic transposition, a typical mechanism in lexical collocations with an abstract base. E.g. in *книга души* and *книга жизни* the dependent component *книга* is used in a figurative meaning. Soul and life are figuratively conceptualized as if they were books - information objects from which anybody who knows the code might obtain knowledge as if from reading a book. The metaphorical re-conceptualization of the collocator (*жизнь, душа*) implies a reference to the Holy Writ. Thus the metaphor ("soul/life as if it were a book") refers to a cultural symbol rather than a class of objects.

2. Cultural seme can be identified in some lexical collocations denoting abstract notions. The base or the collocator signifies cultural realia (such as 'angel' in *ангельский характер* or 'hell' in *ад одиночества*). Different from (1), cultural data is not associated with the conceptual structure, but is part of the literal meaning of the base/collocator.

3. Cultural background is observed in collocations whose base or collocator denotes a historical event or a social phenomenon, highly-ideologized social realia. Thus, *штурманы / капитаны / архитекторы перестройки* denote the agents of a historical social process in the USSR in the late 1980s. Its cultural background is very close to (2), but it has a strong political component of meaning that often has to be explained to non-native speakers.

4. Cultural concepts are constructs of social and spiritual spheres. Thus, *тоска гнетет* contains a cultural concept *тоска* as the base of the collocation. Linguistic comparison shows that such concepts are constructed in a culture/language-specific way: in the case of *тоска*, for instance, there is no exact equivalent in English and comparable psychological states are denoted by a number of words (anguish, sorrow, grief, etc.). Cultural concepts refer to linguistic worldpicture and to the manner of world mapping that is specific for a given language.

#### 4. Collocability resulting from discourse

At the beginning we mentioned the need to differentiate between co-locations and collocations. However, as any phraseologists knows, this is not always easy; in fact, no rigid boundary can be established. As has been said, in every attempt of classification there remains a number of marginal cases - word combinations that can be treated either as free or set phrases depending on what system of description the researcher has adopted as his or her frame of reference. In terms of a cognitive approach, such dubious cases can be viewed as lexical collocations and, therefore, represented in phraseological dictionaries, but a special lexicographic procedure is required to make them "visible" against the background of numberless free word combinations. It has already been noted that the restriction of collocation in such cases results from cohesion which is generated at the cognitive (not semantic) level and reflects the general structure of linguistic world knowledge.

Linguistic world knowledge includes knowledge about "how things normally are". One can speak of ethno/socio-cultural specificity in this ideal world picture.

In Russian, there is a corpus of set phrases that directly reflect such knowledge and, in all their multitude, make up a kind of "encyclopaedia" implemented in linguistic meanings. They can be tentatively classified as follows:

1. The collocator names a constant or frequent property of the signified of the base, e.g.: синее море, зеленая трава, белый снег, темная ночь.
2. The collocator names a functional property of the signified of the base, e.g.: острый нож / острая бритва, мягкая перина. Such collocations are quite explicit as to the "normal" state of things: as a knife is designed for cutting, it is normally sharp. A blunt knife is an abnormal one.
3. The collocator reflects an implicative relation between the collocate and the signified of the base, e.g.: верный друг, несчастная сирота. According to dictionaries, the noun "friend" does not contain the seme 'loyalty', nor does the noun "orphan" contain the seme 'unhappy'. Lexical collocations of such a type contain derived knowledge, the connection between word meaning and implication being so close that if antonymous lexemes are substituted into the

collocation the result is an oxymoronic expression (\*неверный друг, \*счастливая сирота).

4. The modifier reflects a property expected of the signified of the base. No implicative link is observed at the surface, motivation is established at the depth level and is associated with conceptual rather than semantic meaning. For example, in the Russian conceptual world picture, a medicine is expected to be bitter. This can be seen in the collocation горькое лекарство, in the idiom подсластить пилюлю, and in a metaphoric lexical collocation горькая правда.

Telling somebody the bitter truth (горькую правду) means to tell him or her something unpleasant with an intention to help or heal him/her (of a bad habit, of a misconception, etc.) Thus, a bitter truth is a truth that heals. Sweet things cannot heal, cf. the Russian proverb Лучше горькая правда чем сладкая ложь.

Likewise злая мачеха describes an expected property. A step-mother is associated with the Other, alien and evil. Therefore, the collocation злая мачеха also finds motivation at the cognitive level. Word combinations such as добрая мачеха, сладкое лекарство sound very much like oxymorons.

Although we were using the terms “collocator” and “base” with reference to word combinations of the above type, classifying them as lexical collocations is only possible in a very special way. Indirectly, their restricted combinability can be demonstrated by the fact that many of them can be expanded into comparisons, e.g.: мягкая перина — мягкая как перина; острый нож - острый как нож. This makes them different from free combinations, cf.: мягкая ткань - \*мягкий как ткань; - острый топор - \*острый как топор; злой человек — \*слой как человек.

However, the semantic cohesion resulting from world knowledge, is quite weak. It is only when a word combination is regularly reproduced in one or more types of discourse that one can speak sufficient of “boundness” for their inclusion in the class of lexical collocations. If this is the case, they acquire cultural markedness.

Thus we identify a class of word combinations which can be treated as lexical collocations under certain conditions and could be described as “discourse stereotypes”. These are semantically non-transposed word combinations which are free combinations in



terms of semantic criteria but which signify a holistic concept, convey connotations and are actively employed in certain genres of discourse. In the most general sense it can be said that such word combinations are culturally restricted by their usage in adopted genres of discourse. Thus, word combinations like *злая мачеха*, *горькое лекарство*, *верный друг*, *синее море* are identified as stereotypes of folkpoetry.

## 5. Conclusion

The problem of typology can be solved for lexical collocations if a flexible classification of conditions restricting collocation is elaborated. The number of such restrictions and a combination of types of restrictions in every individual case would provide grounds for the differentiation between free word combinations and lexical collocations. Results thus obtained could be applied in lexicographic presentation which would take account of relevant information deriving from each type of restriction.

In general, the different types of restrictions described in this paper can be reduced to the following classes:

- (1) The choice of collocator depends upon the semantics of both "partners". The motivation of restricted usage should be looked for in the semantic content of the base and the collocator, and the fixed form and usage are the function of "binding" between senses.
- (2) The choice of collocator is the function of the frame. The lexical collocation serves to fill up a morphological lacuna or to compensate for the lack of derivational mechanisms.
- (3) The choice of collocator is the function of conceptualization of reality, both physical and cultural. Metaphor works as a cognitive mechanism relating the meaning of lexical collocations to other (non-verbal) symbolic systems.
- (4) The choice of collocator is the function of discourse, both in terms of its contents and pragmatics.

Identifying these classes, step by step, in the continuum of fixed expressions, a flexible typological system can be obtained that would account for a much wider scope of linguistic phenomena than would be the case should a classification with fewer dimensions be applied. This principle has an important practical application in lexicography,

as it allows representing a far greater number of items on a systematic basis. The practicability of the proposed approach is being tested by the authors in *The Dictionary of Russian Lexical Collocations* which is being compiled at present.

Last but not least, the proposed approach is important because of the emphasis it lays on the connection between phraseology and culture. Linguo-cultural research of phraseology is a promising theoretical direction and a very significant one in our time of global political changes. The present-day situation in the world shows all the symptoms of increasing "cultural deafness". Cross-cultural contacts are being blocked by ethno-cultural barriers which sometimes seem unsurmountable. The problem of "crosscultural - translation" is not only a political necessity, but also a challenge to the theory of language and culture.

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