

**LATIP 2021****International Conference on Language and Technology in the Interdisciplinary Paradigm****FORMATION OF COLLOCATIONAL COMPETENCE THROUGH  
INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES**

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**Abstract**

The article deals with the problem of developing collocational competence among students using modern information and communication technologies. Collocational competence is part of the communicative competence, which has a complex organization. The current study aims to introduce the lexical approach as the basis for its mastering into the practice of teaching a foreign language. Much attention is paid to the principles of using collocations as a learning unit: its multi-context presentation, lexico-semantic principle of selection and organizing the educational material, appropriate usage of computer dictionaries and concordances, and specially designed exercises. Analysis of the teaching foreign language speech principles showed the necessity to focus on the formation of collocational competence as a component of communicative competence, the usage of collocations as a learning unit, multi-context presentation of a lexical unit, inductive mastery and lexico-semantic principle of selection and organizing of the educational material. This paper presents the study of exercises aimed at creating utterances for constructing speech. Students' desire of individual approach to the process of learning language can be met with the help of computer dictionaries and concordances, which provide them with the opportunity to activate the introduced material in a self-study mode and improve the quality of learning while minimizing the time spent. The research results indicate that the creation of a linguodidactic information environment for the organization of self-regulated training of linguistic students can be considered as one of the most important tasks of teaching a language.

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## **1. Introduction**

At the present stage, the ultimate goal of teaching a foreign language is to develop a high level of communicative competence among linguistic students, which fully contributes to their effective communication in a foreign language on general topics and in the field of their future specialty. The works on linguodidactics indicate that an obstacle to full-fledged communication is often insufficient attention to collocations, which are defined as “words which are statistically much more likely to appear together than random chance suggests” (Lewis, 2000, p. 113). In other words, collocations are neutral combinations of two or more words familiar to native speakers, characterized by co-occurrence. In turn, the ability to correctly combine words of a foreign language is called a foreign language collocational competence, or the ability to easily form normative combinations of words.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The relevance of the research topic is due to the fact that in order to successfully communicate, the student and the teacher need to pay special attention to the development of the ability to correctly combine words in speech. The importance of mastering new vocabulary and collocations in a foreign language is the basis for their long-term preservation in the mental lexicon and successful application in various types of speech activity.

## **3. Research Questions**

### **3.1. Word collocability as a linguodidactic problem**

Collocational competence includes the ability to correctly, or normatively, combine the words of a foreign language in speech, therefore, it is necessary to dwell on the importance of the lexemes' collocability acquisition.

The relationship between vocabulary and syntax determines the spread of a word by syntactic links, or syntactic collocability, the relationship of vocabulary and phraseology – lexical collocability, or the spread of a lexeme by other lexemes. Both types of collocability in speech implement semantics depending on the meaning of the word, its connotation, national-cultural specifics, etc. The relation of the collocational features of lexemes to syntagmatics, their formal and semantic features form a system and acquire special significance in the applied aspect of the language.

Collocability actualizes the semantics of words, which indicates its importance for studying the meanings of words in speech, through syntagmatic relations of linguistic units. So, a purely linguistic problem closely intersects with a didactic one, and makes it necessary to dwell on one of the linguodidactic approaches – lexicocentric, based on the fundamental separability of a word as the main unit for studying collocations.

### **3.2. Linguodidactic foundations of the lexical approach as a method of forming collocational competence**

The lexical approach as a relatively new approach in the methodology of teaching a non-native language was formed in the mid-90s. English linguist and methodologist Lewis develops the idea that a language is, first of all, vocabulary, including word collocability, and then grammar; in other words, the language consists not of lexicalized grammar, but of grammaticalized vocabulary. According to the author, language contains standard lexical blocks, the connection of which forms a coherent text.

The basic principles of the lexical approach are: language does not consist of lexicalized grammar, but of grammaticalized vocabulary; grammar as a structure is subject to vocabulary; language consists of building blocks containing words, the connection of which forms a coherent text; lexical blocks are subdivided into the following types: words, phrases, stable and relatively stable expressions; the ability to divide the language into blocks and understand them is the main element of language learning; focus is on receptive, especially listening, skills.

Thus, the basis of language learning is the connection of lexical meanings. From the practice of teaching a foreign language, we know that the study of isolated words, especially outside the context (without demonstrating their collocability), is ineffective. And in the context the word appears in one of its meanings. This fact must be reflected in the language learning process. The smallest linguistic unit within the lexicocentric approach is not a word, but a combination of words (free, stable and semi-stable), i.e. collocation.

Introduction of this approach into the practice of teaching a foreign language will help to develop the ability to “see” lexical blocks in text and speech. Vocabulary contains language elements that were previously always studied separately: grammatical structures, working with new words, pronunciation of sounds. A comprehensive study of these aspects, as well as accurate detection of lexical blocks, grammatical and phonological structures, will contribute to a more effective learning of lexical material, thereby ensuring the implementation of the main idea of the lexicocentric approach – teaching collocations.

The term “collocational competence” was introduced into linguodidactics by Hill (1999) and meant the ability to form “chunks of language” according to the rules of lexical collocability of a given foreign language. If a student acquires such an ability, then his speech can be assessed as fluent, precise and stylistically correct (Hosseini, 2007; Stoichkov, 2008).

In Russian methodology, this term appears as “collocational competence” (Alekseeva, 2011; Sedelkina, 2006), and “collocational awareness” (Bagaryan, 2004). However, there are differences between them in the sense that collocational awareness is the student's knowledge of the words collocability, while collocational competence is defined as the student's ability to combine words in accordance with the norms of the language. The basis of this ability is the knowledge of collocations, on the one hand, and the skill level, on the other. Consequently, having in their meaning a common feature, these terms are not completely identical.

### 3.3. Collocational competence in the structure of foreign language communicative competence

The consistent formation of various kinds of competencies, including collocational, is aimed at the ultimate goal of teaching a foreign language – the formation of students' communicative competence.

So, following the hierarchical principle, foreign language collocational competence is a necessary condition for achieving a high level of proficiency in a foreign language and is part of the lexical competence, which is based, first, on the lexical skills and abilities of the student; secondly, on his personal language and speech experience; third, on the ability to determine the contextual meaning of a word and compare the scope of its meaning in the native and foreign languages; fourthly, on the understanding of the semantic structure of the word and identifying of specific national components in it.

Lexical competence is included in linguistic competence and is defined as knowledge of linguistic resources and forms, as well as the ability to use them in speech. The components of this competence are lexical, grammatical, semantic, etc.

This competence, accordingly, is part of the foreign language communicative competence, which plays a major role in the process of mastering a foreign language. According to The Council of Europe resolution “The Common European Framework of Reference: Learning, Teaching, Assessment”, it includes linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences (Council of Europe).

So, with the goal of forming collocational competence among students, firstly, it is necessary to make a selection of relevant collocations inherent in the most significant layers of vocabulary and, secondly, to simultaneously develop students' lexical skills of word usage, in accordance with the norms of oral and written speech.

The linguistic significance of a collocation lies in the following provisions (Vlavatskaya, 2011):

1) collocations are universal units of language (exist in all natural languages);

2) collocation maximally reveals the meaning of the words from which it is formed and creates a context; the words surrounding the defined word are its distributors, or collocates;

3) collocations are a fundamental universal property of any language, the joint choice of words when combined into a collocation is limited, for example, the collocability of the verb aggravate in the meaning “make something bad become worse” is strictly limited to the set of the following collocates: condition, injure, pain, problem, situation, symptom, etc., as well as adverbs: greatly, seriously and severely;

4) collocation is predictable, i.e. one word can easily predict its collocates, for example, the noun agony is combined only with such verbs as endure, experience, feel, go through and suffer.

Following a broad approach to the definition of collocation, in terms of the degree of freedom and coherence, its range is very extensive and includes free (variable) word combinations, where both words have a high combinatorial rate and a wide range of meaning, for example: a white wall, a wooden table, a nice photo, to walk slowly, to buy a car, etc.

The degree of coherence of collocation components can be different, so, according to the phraseological conditionality of the components, collocations can consist of very stable combinations of words, including phraseological units, for example: fast food, take a look, to do a report, corporate finance, to pay a visit, deep trouble, strong smell, under construction, etc. The number of collocations with a very high degree of stability of the component composition is usually low.

The metaphoric nature of the human conceptual system served as a starting point for cognitive linguists to consider collocations in terms of the semantics of individual components, the influence of metaphors, psychological aspects, etc. (Walker, 2008).

With this interpretation, the cognitive approach denies the arbitrariness of collocations as ready-made units of language and sees them as a reflection of the world around us or as units motivated by the metaphor underlying the conceptual system. In addition, with the existence of universal metaphors, each language has nationally-specific metaphors, which are the basis for collocations.

Language consolidates the experience of previous generations in the development of national culture. Words and collocations are carriers of knowledge about the surrounding reality, preserving the cultural heritage of the people. Thus, we can say that the lexical level units of the language are ethnocentric.

Ethnocultural collocations are phrases characteristic of a particular linguistic collective that reflect socially significant phenomena of reality (broad church – an organization, group, or area of activity, when it includes a wide range of opinions, beliefs, or styles; booby prize – a prize given as a joke to the person who comes last in a competition; cat walk – a narrow bridge high in the air, for example, between two parts of a tall building, on the outside of a large structure, or over a stage; channel loyalty – the extent to which viewers tend to watch programs from one channel rather than distributing their viewing time across different; family style – a way of serving food, as in boarding houses and some restaurants, in which the people at the table help themselves from large dishes passed around from hand to hand, etc.).

Ethnocultural collocations do not have a unit of a similar level within a pair of languages, i.e. they are characterized by the absence of a lexical unit with the same referential meaning or its incompleteness within a pair of languages (Arkhipova, 2015).

### **3.4. Stages of the collocational competence formation**

The first stage of the collocational competence formation includes the formation of lexical skills. This is one of the most serious problems of teaching foreign language vocabulary, which is a component of the student's speech skills, that creates a kind of foundation for ensuring communication.

The second stage – advanced stage of collocational competence development – is the implementation of the main goal of teaching a foreign language – the ability to communicate in a foreign language on the whole.

The basis for mastering collocational competence among students is a lexical approach that best suits modern methodological, linguistic and psychological requirements. In accordance with the provisions of this approach, teaching foreign language speech is carried out according to the following principles (Alekseeva, 2011):

- 1) the focus of training on the formation of collocational competence as a component of communicative competence;
- 2) using collocations as a learning unit;
- 3) multi-context presentation of a lexical unit;
- 4) inductive mastery of lexical material;
- 5) lexico-semantic principle of selection and organizing of the educational material.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to describe the necessary actions for collocational competence formation by means of information and communication technologies.

To achieve the purpose, it is necessary to solve the following tasks: to consider the theory of word collocability as a didactic problem; to study the basics of a lexicocentric approach to language teaching, indicating the collocational significance of vocabulary; to describe the process of foreign language collocational competence acquisition by linguistic students, based on the provisions of the lexicocentric approach, as well as methods and techniques for the development of lexical connections in the aspect of word collocability; to consider modern ways collocational competence acquisition; to give methodological recommendations for the development of educational material.

#### **5. Research Methods**

The research methods used to solve the abovementioned purposes are:

- observation of the educational process course when teaching a foreign language;
- analysis and generalization of the pedagogical experience of collocational competence acquisition;
- linguo-methodological analysis of lexical units of a foreign language.

#### **6. Findings**

In order to effectively master collocational competence in the process of teaching a foreign language, it is important to take into account the peculiarities of texts in the collocational aspect.

At the first stage of learning, linguistic students face the problem of the need to study various types of collocations and develop their skills in work with these units. This will help students to independently form collocational competence at the next stages of learning a foreign language.

In the era of information technology, students are given unlimited access to a large number of electronic resources. In the domestic methodology, teaching a foreign language associated with the use of computer technologies is commonly referred to computational linguodidactics.

The first corpus-based examples of concordance – an electronic listing of all uses of a particular language expression in context with a reference to the source – was developed within the Collins Birmingham University International Language Database (COBUILD) led by Sinclair (1991). Nowadays every text corpus is provided with a concordance. The use of corpus assignments allows the student to experiment – to conduct his own study of the language, and not to repeat other people's ideas. In the situation of classroom bilingualism, the student's task is to “discover” a foreign language, and the teacher's task is to provide conditions in which students can study on their own.

The main function of concordance is to provide a constructive search for contextual examples with a given word or phrase. The program finds this unit and places it in the middle of the screen, with its distributors and incomplete context represented on both sides of it. The list of contexts is enumerated alphabetically (by left distributor), making it easier to find phrases:

Identifying concordance lines and frequency data, as well as the distribution of words by genre and case register, allows you to find out lexical and grammatical preferences of lexemes. This gives the researcher a basis to study the collocability of a lexeme in a professionally oriented discourse and in grammatical and lexical environment typical of this type of discourse.

The use of corpus methods for studying the lexical and grammatical environment of given lexemes allows us to identify (Gorina, 2014):

- 1) the typical context of use in terms of collocations;
- 2) the tendency of words to form speech turns (idioms, various constructions);
- 3) possible syntactic restrictions: syntactic models / constructions, phrasal verbs, etc.;
- 4) semantic restrictions: e.g. the word is applicable only in relation to people; never combined with intensifiers;
- 5) prosodic features: the tendency of a word to appear in certain contexts.

These programs are relatively simple and do not require any extra effort to use, so language learners can use them on their own, as they work online. Research in the field of mastering a foreign language has led to the emergence of important changes in lexicographic practice.

Practical educational lexicography is a rapidly developing branch of lexicography at the present stage. New projects of monolingual dictionaries are being created especially successfully today for those who study English as a foreign language. These include collocation dictionaries such as The LTP Dictionary of Selected Collocations (1998), Oxford Collocations Dictionary (2010), Longman Collocations Dictionary and Thesaurus (2013) and Macmillan Collocations Dictionary (2010), BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English: A Guide to Word Combinations (1990), there are also Internet collocation dictionaries: 1) Online OXFORD Collocation Dictionary, 2) The English Collocations Dictionary online, 3) Free Online Collocations Dictionary and others.

These dictionaries of lexical collocability include the most common word combinations of a certain language – collocations. These are an effective resource in mastering foreign language collocational competence by linguistic students who speak English at a sufficiently high level. Their main purpose is to demonstrate, for a better understanding, how this or that lexeme or expression is used in speech (context). They help to quickly find the right lexeme in context and provide a list of its living examples of use.

### **6.1. Requirements for mastering a foreign language by students**

Communicative competence means knowledge of the language, its phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, stylistics, culture of speech, mastery of these language means and types of speech activity – speaking, listening, reading, writing – within the social, professional and cultural needs of a person. This type of competence is one of the most important features of a linguistic personality, which is acquired as a result of natural speech activity and special training (Lvov, 1999).

The international document “Common European Framework of Reference for Languages” (CEFR) presents a special approach to the classification of lexical units: they are divided into stable word combinations and separate word forms.

Within the block of stable word combinations, we can single out: sentential models, e.g. how do you do, not at all; proverbs and sayings: still waters run deep; archaisms: to bite one's thumb at somebody, lo and behold; phrasal idioms: to be in the black; phrasal verbs: to come up with, to break down, as well as stable word combinations: it's high time, to achieve results, from scratch.

The second block of elements includes separate word forms – words, closed lexical sets and grammatical combinations of words, where the preposition is assigned the key role.

The main teaching strategy in order to master collocational and communicative competences are specially designed exercises and tasks. These learning activities can be classified into six types (Lewis, 1997): deletion, completing, matching, categorizing, identifying chunks (selection of collocations), sequencing (logical alignment of the text).

1. Deletion – one of the main types of exercises – the removal of an extra word from a group of suggested words:

1. CLEAR attitude need instructions alternative day conscience road.
2. LIGHT traffic work day entertainment suitcase rain green lunch.
3. NEW experience job food potatoes baby situation year.
4. HIGH season price opinion spirits house time priority.
5. STRONG possibility doubt smell influence views coffee language.
6. SERIOUS advantage situation relationship illness crime matter.

Collocation dictionaries, which contain the most frequent uses of the words given in the exercise, are the most effective resource for this task.

2. Completing: Complete these phrases by adding a missing collocate:

serious – striking up – deep in – animated

1. Tom and James fell into a \_\_\_\_\_ conversation about what would be the right step to take for the business.
2. They always get into an \_\_\_\_\_ conversation when it involves football.
3. She is very good at \_\_\_\_\_ a conversation with strangers at parties.
4. I found them \_\_\_\_\_ conversation, so I left them to it.

To complete this exercise, the most effective tool will be concordance, which provides information on the collocations in sentences.

3. Matching: The first part of each sentence in List 1 can be completed with all the examples in one of the groups of endings given in List 2. Match the first part with the ending:

List 1

1. I'm wondering
2. I'm trying
3. I'm feeling

List 2

- a. to concentrate.  
to understand it but I can't.  
to remember where I put them.
- b. quite pleased with myself.  
a bit off colour.  
more confident than I did.
- c. what I can about it.  
nothing yet!

- the best I can.
4. I'm doing
- d. what we can do about it.
- if it will make any difference.
- if anyone else knows yet.

This task requires the use of concordance or collocation dictionary, e.g. "The BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English" (1990) and its electronic variant, which contains not only information about lexical collocations, but also about grammatical ones.

4. Categorizing: sort these collocations from the text into 2 groups: important issue; promote communication; maintain a balance; cultural background; receive attention; foreign language.

5. Identifying chunks. Divide the text into language chunks:

Teachers should remember that without first learning to use the dictionary skillfully learners will only have access to a small part of the information. All four publishers provide supplementary materials for learning and practicing the techniques necessary to get the full benefit of their dictionaries. The extra investment involved in buying a class set of these materials and going through them with students will be money and time well spent.

This type of exercises contributes to the development of the so-called "lexical vision" of a foreign language, as well as what lexical blocks it consists of.

6. Sequencing (logical alignment of text or chronology of events in texts) contributes to the formation of linguistic vision and understanding of segments of words and their alignment in a logical chain. Put the sentences in the most likely order (Zur, 2015):

- 1) Our expertise is creating simple yet effective learning aids for teachers and students.
- 2) My name is Ola Zur, and I am the creator of Really Learn English. My team and I used our teaching knowledge and years of experience to create our useful resources for teachers.
- 3) They are carefully designed to improve the teaching process and make it more effective.
- 4) These resources were created by myself and my team of expert teachers and writers. They were piloted and tested on students for best learning results.
- 5) These resources will save you many hours of searching for suitable materials (or writing them yourself), and help you achieve the best results with your students.
- 6) In addition, there is no need to wait. You will be able to download the digital books instantly in a printable form.
- 7) Really Learn English is a well-known and loved website for teachers and students around the world. I hope you and your students will find it useful too!

To consolidate in the mental lexicon the meaning and use of new vocabulary in speech situations, there are exercises aimed at learning the syntagmatic connections of words and their correspondences in the native and foreign languages, translation, substitution, transformation, etc., which are almost always accompanied by communicative aims.

Such exercises are aimed at creating utterances using language units for constructing speech, which, in turn, contributes to the development of collocational competence and the formation of attitudes for the effective use of these utterances in speech. It provides a transition to the variational-situational stage, which forms the basis for mastering various types of monologue utterances in the form of a

retelling, story, description, etc. Further they include an essay on a topic, a description of events or actions, etc., and then dialogues, aimed at composing questions to the text which include the studied vocabulary, composing micro-dialogues of various types, etc.

## 7. Conclusion

From a methodological point of view, the problem of teaching students the correct combination of words in speech is one of the most difficult and is considered as a didactic problem. To solve this problem, foreign methodologists (Hill & Lewis, 1998) have developed a lexical approach to teaching, focused on the study of language blocks, through which coherent speech is produced. The main such blocks are collocations – traditional combinations of two or more words, familiar to native speakers, characterized by co-occurrence.

Among the modern means that contribute to the development of collocational competence, there are paper and Internet dictionaries of English collocations, as well as language corpora and concordances – applied programs that analyze the collocability of given lexemes and are useful and reliable sources for acquiring linguistic knowledge. These sources help to increase the motivation of students and improve professional knowledge, primarily in the course of independent learning. The theory of lexicocentric approach to teaching a foreign language distinguishes specially designed exercises (matching, completing, deletion, etc.) and study tasks aimed at mastering collocational competence.

Thus, increasing the lexical vocabulary, expanding the mental vocabulary and mastering the foreign language collocational competence are interrelated. Success in acquiring the ability to easily and correctly combine words of a foreign language depends on several factors at the same time: the textbook material, well-planned independent work of students and the experience of a foreign language teacher.

Currently, students, for the most part, use electronic dictionaries, which have great advantages and allow not only to quickly find the equivalent of a word in another language, but also listen to its pronunciation, study contexts with a given word, and get acquainted with its collocability properties.

In the situation of universal informatization in education, minimizing of psychological, mental and material costs are becoming especially urgent, thus, the use of information and communication technologies comes to the fore in the educational process.

In order to master collocational competence in the process of learning a foreign language, it is advisable to use the latest achievements of corpus linguistics (corpus of texts and concordances), which, in our opinion, can contribute to motivating students and realizing the set goal – a deep study of the word collocability.

Computer dictionaries and concordances are resources fully used in the learning process. They provide students with the opportunity to activate the introduced material in a self-study mode and improve the quality of learning while minimizing the time spent. Thus, the creation of a linguodidactic information environment for the organization of self-regulated training of linguistic students can be considered as one of the most important tasks of teaching a language.

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