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How to learn English through collocations

This paper deals with the problem how to learn the English language through collocations. We refer to different classifications of collocations: grammatical and lexical. We focus on the exercises that help students improve their knowledge of collocations, develop their collocational competence, get a foreign language fluency in an easy and interesting way.

Keywords: vocabulary; collocation; accuracy; collocational competence; types of collocations.

Teaching vocabulary should be a top priority in every language course, so developing collocational competence is one of the goals of teaching the English language at technical university. Collocations are «the words which are statistically much more likely to appear together than random chance suggests» [2]. So, these words are the words that go together, sometimes in ways that we do not expect, so the ability to correctly combine the words of a foreign language, or the ability to easily form combinations of words is called a collocational competence.

The term «collocational competence» was introduced by Hill and meant the ability to form «chunks of language» according to the rules of a foreign language [1]. Collocational competence will allow language learners to get a foreign language fluency and it is a reliable indicator of high language proficiency level.

Researchers proved that the most learners seem to experience problems in dealing with different types of collocations. Classifications of collocations are different. Some classifications look at lexical or grammatical side of collocations. We offer such examples of lexical collocations:

– *an accident takes place;*
–*a central feature;*
– *make a mistake;*

Grammatical collocations include a noun, a verb that can be combined with any grammatical structure or a preposition. Some of the grammatical collocations are the following:

– *There is a lot of work to do;*
– *in advance;*
– *capable of;*
– *responsible for.*

Other types of collocations can include:
– compound nouns *(e.g., call centre)*

– verb + adjective + noun *(e.g., do a great job)*

– adverb + adjective *(e.g., absolutely impossible; actively involved)*

We need to teach collocations as we teach individual words – vocabulary. The following examples, listed by Michael Lewis [3] reveal how difficult it is to understand the words of this kind.

Which of the verbs tell, say, speak fit best into the gaps in the examples?

1. The actions will…louder than words.

2. Don't worry. Everything you …me is confidential.

3. Can I …to Mr. Harrison, please?

4. You'd better do exactly what the doctor… .

5. To … the truth, I was half expecting it.

6. As I …, they have already appointed somebody.

7. Shall we … two o'clock?

With a common verb *speak* it's necessary to introduce the following collocations:

speak a foreign language;

speak your mind;

speak in public;

speak (French);

speak fluently;

speak clearly;

speak with a (Welsh) accent.

It is important to teach collocations due to their frequency of occurrence and their effect on language processing. The following exercises can help learners develop their collocational competence.

Teachers can ask students to fill in the gaps with the collocations in the sentences. The task *«Which is the correct one»* where students must decide which word is correct. Students find the word which is suitable for the context. For example, *he felt able to talk clearly/openly/genuinely about his feelings.* The correct word is *openly*.

Matching games, collocation grids, bingo games are good at working with collocations to develop accuracy.

Quizlet helps learners develop their collocational competence. Students are eager to use this web tool as it motivates them to learn collocations.

Backward vocabulary test is a pack of definitions provided by a teacher. The task for a learner is to give the correct collocation. Finally, multiple choice questions are good to practice collocations. Learners are asked to find the best collocation for the word. It is also important to select collocations that are active and appropriate. We shouldn't teach collocations that learners will hardly find in natural English. Learners' needs should be taken into consideration while selecting the collocations.

Students of technical universities who learn English in a certain major (e.g., power engineering, computer science) will be interested in learning particular collocations in their field of study in addition to general collocations.

Learners can use collocation dictionaries which have been created especially for learners who study English as a foreign language.

Students can use the following collocation dictionaries:
– The Oxford Collocations Dictionary;
– Longman Collocations Dictionary and Thesaurus;
– Macmillan Collocations Dictionary.

There are also Internet collocation dictionaries:
– Online Oxford Collocation Dictionary;
– The English Collocations Dictionary online;
– Free Online Collocations Dictionary.

These dictionaries include the most common collocations. They help ESL learners develop collocational competence in an effective and interesting way.

The main aim of these dictionaries is to show how this or that word expression is used in speech. Collocation dictionaries help to find the right collocation in context and they give a list of examples, which are used in real life.

Collocational competence is considered to be the main component of language competence. As collocations are widespread in the English language they attract much attention of teachers and learners. It's more important to teach collocations, not separate words.

In fact, collocations contribute much to the meanings of the words and help students understand the English language better.

The present paper offered students some exercises to improve their knowledge of collocations in an exciting way and to develop their collocational competence.

Литература

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