Centrality of Context and Collocation

The Centrality of Context for Firth

The Centrality of Context for Firth « 1 »

Langendoen (1968), who misunderstood Firth in a number of ways (Halliday 1985: 7; Henderson 1987: 60), was right in believing that 'the single most important notion in Firth's early writings is that of context'. The belief in the importance of 'context' is basic to all Firth's thinking (Henderson 1987: 60). Contexts for Firth may be of many kinds—phonetic, social and grammatical and so on. The idea of phonetic context was what led him away from the rather rigid monosystemic phoneme theory of Daniel Jones2 towards the concept of polysystemic nature of language, with which his name was associated

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His first account of Tamil pronunciation was presented in orthodox phonemic terms. He noted that the phoneme /k/ had at least eight clearly perceptible variants [ḳ, g, ç, k, g, x, c, ĥ,] according to their position in the word and the neighboring sounds, i.e., according to their phonetic context. This would seem to be a straightforward allophonic statement. Other schools of linguistics have interested themselves in phonetic context to this extent, but usually as a way of accounting for what were felt to be insignificant or non-pertinent differences in pronunciation: the true linguistic units that the linguist was concerned with were what was left when contextual variation had been described and so disposed of.

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For Firth, however, contextual variations are an important inherent feature of language, not to be shrugged off as redundant or non-significant. Contextual variants are linguistic signals in their own right, providing information about linguistic structures which is not necessarily to be regarded as less important than the information provided by orthodox phonemes.

Definitions of Collocation

Definition Of Collocations « 01 »

"In English, as in other languages, there are many fixed, identifiable, non-idiomatic phrases and constructions. Such groups of words are called *recurrent combinations*, *fixed combinations*, or *collocations*.

Collocations fall into two major groups: *grammatical collocations* and *lexical collocations*. (Benson et al.,1986b:ix)

Definition of Collocation « 2 »

"frequently recurrent, relatively fixed syntagmatic combinations" (Bartsch, 2004:11)

Definition of Collocation « 03 »

"a tendency for words to occur together" (Sinclair, 1991:71)

➤**Types of Collocation**

➤Lexical Collocation

➤Grammatical Collocation

1) Lexical collocations

The first of these categories, lexical collocation, "consists of nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs" (Benson et al,1986:xxx). The BBI Dictionary (Benson et al, 1986) divides these into seven major types, as per Table 1. The important factor to be considered with these collocations is that there is "no semantic explanation" (Carter, 1998:56) as to why certain words collocate; word choice is constrained, not by semantic or grammatical features, but merely through usage. Different discourse communities, and thus different genres, can have different patterns of collocation.

BBI Dictionary classification of collocations – Lexical collocation

Code	Pattern	Example
L1	*verb + noun/ pronoun (creation/activation)*	„make an agreement"; „set an alarm"
L2	*verb + noun (eradification/nullification)*	reject an appeal"; „lift a blockade"
L3	*adj + noun*	„strong tea"; „reckless abandon"
L4	*noun + verb*	„alarms go off"; „blizzards rage"
L5	*noun₁ of noun₂*	„a swarm of bees"; „a bit of advice"; „an act of violence"
L6	*adverb + adjective*	deeply absorbed"; „strictly accurate"
L7		effect deeply";

2) Grammatical collocations:

Grammatical collocation, on the other hand, primarily results from the operation of syntax (Carter, 1998:51) and typically combines an open class word with a closed class, grammatical word (Lewis, 2000:134). The BBI Dictionary (Benson et al, 1986) categorises grammatical collocation into eight major types, designated G1 to G8, with G8 verb patterns further divided into 19 patterns, G8A to G8S, as per Table 2.

Code	pattern	example
G1	*noun + prep*	„blockade against"; „apathy towards" G2 *noun*
G2	*noun + to-inf*	„a pleasure to do it"; „the foresight to do it"
G3	*noun + that-clause*	we reached an agreement that she would represent us in court"
G4	*prep + noun*	by accident"; „in advance"
G5	*adj + prep*	angry at everyone"; „afraid of him"
G6	*pred adj + to-in.f*	„it was necessary to work"; „she is ready to go"
G7	*adj + that-*	„she was afraid that she would fail the exam"

G8 A	*verbs (trans) that allow dative movement transformation*	„he sent the book to his brother" → „he sent his brother the book"
G8 B	*verbs (trans) that do not allow dative movement*	they described the book to her"
G8 C	*verbs (trans) used with 'for' that allow dative movement transformation*	„she bought a shirt for her husband" → „she bought her husband a shirt"
G8 D	*verb + prep*	„act as"; „adhere to the plan"

G8E	*verb + to-inf*	„they began to speak"; „he decided to come"
G8F	*verb + inf without 'to'*	we must work"; „he had better go"
G8G	*verb +v-ing*	they enjoy watching TV"; „he remembered telling her"
G8H	*verb (trans) + obj + to-inf*	she asked me to come"; „we forced them to leave"

G8 I	*verb (trans) + obj + inf without 'to'*	„she heard them leave"; „we let the children go to the park"
G8 J	*verb (trans) + object + v-ing*	„I caught them stealing apples"
G8 K	*verb (trans) + poss + gerund*	„please excuse my waking you so early"; „ this fact justifies Bob"s coming late"
G8 L	*verb (trans) + that- noun clause*	they admitted that they were wrong"

G8 M	*verb (trans) + obj + inf 'to be' + complement (adj/past part/noun/pronoun)*	we consider her to be well trained"; „the court declared the law to be a violation of the constitution"
G8 N	*verb (trans) + obj + complement (adj/past part/noun/pronoun)*	she dyed her hair red"; „she had her tonsils removed"
G8 O	*verb (trans) + obj + obj*	„the teacher asked the boy a question"; „the police fined him

G8 Q	*verb + wh-word*	„he asked how to do it"; „we told them what to do"
G8 R	*subj (it) + verb + to-inf or that-clause*	„it puzzled me that they never answered the telephone"; „ it surprised me to learn of her decision"
G8 S	*verb (intrans) + complement (noun or adj)*	„she became an engineer"; „she was enthusiastic"
G8 s	*Verb (intrans) + pred adj*	„she looks fine"; „the flowers smell nice"

Collocation and cohesion

As collocation occurs within a lexico-grammatical system, Halliday and Hasan (1976) demonstrated that the lexical items in collocation operate across grammar and serve to provide cohesion to the text as a whole. The words which occur within the text are constrained by the co-text (Brown & Yule, 1983:46), the other items in the surrounding discourse, which regularly co-occur in collocation chains in similar environments (Halliday & Hasan, 1976:287). For this reason Halliday (2004:577) suggested that collocation is often found in specific registers or genres.