

Collocational Competence and the use of Collocations in Business English

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Abstract: Collocation is crucial to language learning because it helps students become more proficient speakers and enhance their communication abilities. A form of idiomatic expression known as collocations consists of two or more words that frequently and arbitrarily occur together as a standard unit of meaning. The phraseological tradition commonly distinguishes between two types of collocations: lexical collocations and grammatical collocations. A variety of unique terms are employed while discussing customer service and its excellence. The intention of writing the present paper is to impart the collocational knowledge to the students especially of non-native speakers.

Keywords: Business English, Collocational Competence, Communication Abilities, Language Learning

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Introduction

English language learners are primarily focused on increasing their vocabulary in order to enhance the quantity of words they can recall. A necessary component of expanding one's vocabulary is learning collocations. When teaching vocabulary in a foreign language, such as English, the teacher must take into account the language's grammatical, lexical, phonological, and cultural subsystems. One of the many methods and strategies for teaching and learning vocabulary is studying collocations. It is commonly acknowledged that collocations are a crucial component of second language acquisition knowledge and that non-native English speakers need them in order to write or talk effectively and fluently.

Collocational knowledge is part of native speakers' competency, and can cause problematic for learners in circumstances where collocability is language-specific and is not simply dictated by universal semantic limits (McCarthy, 1990). Word combinations that native speakers naturally and commonly use make up collocation. Collocation is crucial to language learning because it helps students become more proficient speakers and enhance their communication abilities.

Significance of Collocations

The four categories of language learning skills—reading, speaking, listening, and writing—are all connected to collocations. Speaking and writing are collocability abilities at the productive level, whereas reading and listening are collocability skills at the receptive level.

The most widely accepted definition of collocations, first proposed by Palmer (1933) and then introduced to the field of theoretical linguistics by Firth (1957), is the propensity of one word to co-occur with one or more other words in a given domain. The Latin verb "collocare," which meaning "to set in order/to arrange," is where the word "collocation" originates. The most traditional and lexical approach to collocation was initially proposed by J. R. Firth (1957), who is regarded as the father of the field. Firth asserted that lexis is autonomous and distinct from grammar since the meaning of a word is decided by the words that occur with it.

One of the many methods and strategies for teaching and learning vocabulary is studying collocations. The notion that collocations are a crucial component of second language acquisition knowledge and that non-native English speakers need them in order to write or talk clearly and fluently is generally acknowledged.

The significance of collocations for language learning and communication skills should be understood by learners. According to James Carl (1998), appropriately employing collocations "contributes greatly to one's idiomaticity and nativelikeness." Lewis said that "fluency is based on the acquisition of a large store of fixed or semi-fixed prefabricated items." Furthermore, Sonaiya (1988) asserted that "lexical errors are more serious because effective communication depends on the choice of words."

Scholars of applied linguistics assert that "mastery of collocations in both their oral and written forms is a key element of natural fluency in English." A form of idiomatic expression known as collocations consists of two or more words that frequently and arbitrarily occur together as a standard unit of meaning. Examples of collocations include "heavy rain" but not "strong rain" and "many thanks" but not "multiple thanks." Collocations are crucial because they give the English language an authentic, native-like tone.

Collocations are syntagmatic word combinations that were initially defined by Firth (1957). He asserts that two axes can be used to illustrate the relationship between lexical units: a horizontal axis that is syntagmatic and relates to the capacity of words to connect with one another, and a vertical axis that is paradigmatic and comprises words of the same class.

According to McCarthy (1995), the relationship between the words in a collocation is essential to vocabulary study and a component of native speakers' proficiency. A few other theorists acknowledged the significance of collocations as well, especially in light of the interaction with mother language. Nation (2001) asserts that word knowledge encompasses understanding of word form, meaning, and usage. The spoken and written forms of words as well as their morphological makeup are included in the feature of word form.

Grammatical and Lexical Collocations

In reality, the term "collocation" is just one of several names used to refer to the same idea: word combining. According to Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992), collocations are "strings of words that seem to have certain 'mutual expectancy', or a greater-than chance likelihood that they will co-occur in any text."

Nonetheless, there are numerous ways to apply and interpret the term "collocation." Here is a brief explanation of how to interpret and apply this phrase in accordance with Benson, Benson, and Ilson (1986a&b):

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.

There are primarily two methods for identifying collocations. Collocations are regularly occurring two- or three-word sequences with a modest degree of transparency and limitation in the phraseological tradition.

The phraseological tradition commonly distinguishes between two types of collocations: lexical collocations, which include two content words and possibly an article (e.g., play the guitar, strong tea); and grammatical collocations, which include at least one content word and a grammatical structure, such as a clause or an infinitive, for example: under attack; agreement that + clause (as cited in Toomer, Mark et al. 2024).

Grammatical Collocations: Grammatical collocations are composed of a noun, adjective, or verb plus a preposition, adverb, or grammatical structure like a phrase, gerund, or infinitive:

noun + to + infinitive (It is a pleasure to visit it).

noun + that-clause (They went into an agreement that they would start a new business).

preposition + noun (by chance, in advance, etc.).

adjective + preposition (He is angry at the workers).

adjective + that clause (he was afraid that he would miss the flight).

Lexical collocations: Lexical collocations are frequent occurrences of two or more content words (such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) together. Lexical collocations are made up entirely of content words, as opposed to grammatical collocations. Benson, Benson, and Ilson differentiate between a number of lexical collocation structural types:

verb + noun (inflict a wound, withdraw an offer);

adjective + noun a crushing defeat);

noun + verb (blizzards rage);

adverb + adjective (deeply absorbed),

verb + adverb (appreciate sincerely).

The Use of Collocations in Business English

The ability to sound professional and fluid in business English depends on the usage of collocations, which are genuine word combinations that are commonly used together. They support precise and explicit communication of meaning, particularly in formal contexts like meetings, presentations, and negotiations. Gaining proficiency in collocations can greatly enhance communication and boost self-assurance in professional settings.

Commonly used word combinations that seem natural and fluid in English are known as business collocations. The following are some of the examples:

annual turnover	close a deal	market forces	sales figures
launch a new product	do business	manage a business	make a profit

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Business English Collocations with Noun and Verb Combinations

Table 1 shows the collocations with Noun combinations and Table 2 shows collocations with Verb combinations.

Main word (noun)	Collocations (word combinations)
advantage	comparative advantage, tax advantage, unfair advantage, take advantage
advice	sound advice, expert advice, professional advice, legal advice
agenda	hidden agenda, political agenda, next on the agenda
apology	heartfelt apology, accept an apology, a letter of apology, demand an apology
bill	outstanding bill, unpaid bill, electric bill, foot the bill
brand	leading brand, major brand, well-known brand, brand identity
budget	budget cuts, budget constraints, tight budget, shoestring budget
cost	rising costs, escalating costs, additional costs, operating costs, lower costs
customer	loyal customer, regular customer, satisfied customer, customer service, customer support, attract a customer
debt	outstanding debt, burdened by debt, debt collection, be in debt, pay a debt
decision	tough decision, hasty decision, majority decision, unanimous decision, make a decision, take a decision (British English)
decrease	sharp decrease, steadily decrease, significant decrease, decrease in value
delivery	fast delivery, free delivery, guaranteed delivery, scheduled delivery make a delivery, accept a delivery, receive a delivery, delivery service
department	department head, department store, purchasing department, human resources department, marketing department, finance department
employee	full-time employee, part-time employee, employee benefits
employer	major employer, potential employer, prospective employer
equipment	modern equipment, state-of-the-art equipment, high-tech equipment office equipment, medical equipment
estimate	rough estimate, realistic estimate, reasonable estimate, provide an estimate
experience	lack of experience, considerable experience, valuable experience, hands-on experience, professional experience, personal experience
factory	modern factory, chemical factory, open a factory, factory workers
feedback	positive/negative feedback, instant feedback, feedback about
goal	short-term goal, long-term goal, ambitious goal, realistic/unrealistic goal
increase	dramatic increase, big increase, huge increase, sharp increase, gradual increase, substantial increase
growth	exponential growth, considerable growth, rapid growth, growth rate
invoice	original invoice, final invoice, issue an invoice, send an invoice
margin	profit margin, narrow margin, margin for error, gross margin
market	competitive market, foreign market, global market, international market, black market, growing market, stock market, market value
offer	generous offer, job offer, make an offer, attractive offer, special offer

order (supply)	bulk order, large order, small order, cancel an order, place an order
payment	annual payment, monthly payment, down payment, make a payment
price	high price, exorbitant price, low price, reasonable price, retail price
product	innovative product, finished product, buy a product, sell a product, promote a product, develop a product, launch a product, product design
profit	gross profit, annual profit, generate a profit, maximize profit, profit margin
purchase	bulk purchase, excellent purchase, make a purchase, pay for a purchase
refund	full refund, give (someone) a refund, entitled to a refund
report	comprehensive report, quarterly report, annual report, final report
salary	high/low salary, starting salary, annual salary, monthly salary, salary cut
sale	make a sale, sale price, sales contract, sales agreement, annual sales, monthly sales, total sales, domestic sales, international sales
target	hit a target, miss a target, target market, target date, target audience
wage	high/low wages, fair wage, hourly wage, minimum wage, pay wages
warranty	limited warranty, one-year/ two-year warranty, warranty period

Table 1: Collocations with Noun and Verb Combinations (Source: www.businessenglishresources.com)

Main word (verb)	Collocations (word combinations)
focus on	attention, camera, causes, clients, goals, grades, income, markets, media, meetings, outcomes, reports, research, results, talk, training, workshop
generate	business, capital, electricity, employment, energy, funds, income, returns, revenue, sales, savings, wealth
identify	areas, barriers, categories, candidates, causes, defects, departments, errors, factors, flaws, gaps, goals, managers, needs, objectives, opportunities
implement	decisions, ideas, laws, perspectives, plans, policies, priorities, programs, proposals, reforms, regulations, rules, schemes, strategies,
maximize	advantages, benefits, chances, effects, effectiveness, efficiency, gain, investments, production, profits, returns, revenue, sales, time, utility, value
minimize	arguments, conflicts, confusion, contamination, costs, damages, discomfort, difficulties, errors, expenditure, friction, hazards, pain, stress
motivate	buyers, clients, colleagues, customers, employees, leaders, managers, speakers, staff, students, supervisors, team, union, viewers, workers
resolve	conflicts, crises, differences, difficulties, dilemmas, disagreements, disputes, issues, matters, problems, situations, tension
advertise	advertise heavily, advertise nationally, advertise a product
complete	successfully complete, complete on time, complete on schedule
convince	try to convince, manage to convince, hard to convince, somehow convince
develop	develop a strategy, develop a plan
employ	be fully employed, be gainfully employed, be regularly employed
encourage	strongly encourage, try to encourage
establish	attempt to establish, try to establish, become established
invest	heavily invest, carefully invest, wisely invest, invest in
manage	successfully manage, difficult to manage, manage without
organize	effectively organize, efficiently organize, well organized
produce	locally produce, commercially produce
purchase	agree to purchase, purchase something
recruit	actively recruit, need to recruit, recruit for (something)
respond	respond immediately, respond promptly, respond effectively

Table 2: Collocations with Verb Combinations (Source: <https://www.englishvid.com/>)



Figure 1: Business Collocations. (Source: <https://7esl.com/business-collocations/>)

For businesses that sell goods, quality control is essential. Not only to exceed client expectations, but also to guarantee consistency, safety, and dependability. When consumers purchase from your business, they are considering more than simply the item. They're thinking about how nicely they're serviced. There are several different tasks involved in providing customer support. Customer service occurs almost every time a customer engages with a person or system within a business.

A variety of unique terms are employed while discussing customer service and its excellence. A large number of these are word combinations known as "collocations." Individual vocabulary words may be something one acquire frequently, but one doesn't always think or talk in single words. Individuals use language fragments when we speak. They are referred to as collocations.

Business Word combinations that are frequently used when discussing business in English are known as collocations. Words that typically go together are known as collocations. For instance, *do business*, *not make business*, in English. When conducting business internationally, that business English collocation can make all the difference. It's critical to use the correct word when making financial judgments.

In order to use business English, learners of English for Specific Purposes may need to follow certain rules or learn English phrases, writing styles, and conventional business expectations. They also need to have a thorough awareness of English-speaking cultures and practices. There are some common business English collocations cited above in the Tables-1, 2 and Figure 1 for various business operations.

Conclusion

Therefore, one aspect of native speakers' proficiency is their understanding of collocations. Collocation is the natural and frequent use of word pairings by native speakers. Collocation is essential to language acquisition since it improves students' communication skills and makes them more fluent speakers.

The idea that non-native English speakers require collocations to write or speak clearly and fluently, and that they are an essential part of learning a second language. Collocations are a type of idiomatic phrase where two or more words appear together as a standard unit of meaning often and indiscriminately.

In the phraseological tradition, collocations are often occurring two- or three-word sequences with a moderate level of transparency and restriction. It is usual in the phraseological tradition to distinguish between two kinds of collocations: grammatical and lexical. Regarding customer service and its perfection, a number of unique phrases are used. Thus, collocations are business word combinations that are commonly utilized in English business discussions.

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