

REMARKS ON COLLOCATIONS IN COMMERCIAL CORRESPONDENCE

Introduction

English is used as a lingua franca in international business contexts. In the current context of continuing globalisation of markets as well as internationalisation of economy and trade, professionals from institutions and organisations i.e. from large multinational companies to SMEs, are required to master Business English in order to succeed in the international workplace (negotiations, international meetings, conferences, congresses, e-mail, advertising, etc.).

When referring to a certain type of English such as English for Banking, etc. linguists use the term *variety of English*, all these varieties of English being based on General English. (Basturkmen, 2008:15) A particular type of English, such as English for Business and Economics can start at any level, in most cases the learners being adults who are already familiar with the specific meanings due to their professional environment or workplace.

The main characteristics of the language of Business English vs. the language of General English refer to clear and concise communication, a sense of purpose, social aspects and intercultural dimension. (Popescu, 2007:163; Ellis & Johnson, 1994)

Success and failures in businesses rely on effective communication. Commercial Correspondence (or business correspondence or business letter) involves the clear, concise and polite written communication between (at least) two parties. Commercial Correspondence is a broad concept, regarded as an umbrella term that involves a wide range of documents used in various branches of economics, varying from different types of business letters (classified, in their turn, into business-to-business letters and business-to-customers letters, each category including numerous types of letters) to documents related to business reports, personnel appointment, orders, office memorandums, payments, banking, insurance, transportation and shipping, etc.

Nevertheless doing business in a foreign language can be fraught with challenges and difficulties. In this context, acquiring English for business correspondence has become essential. Although business correspondence is characterized by a semi-formal style (it does not have to meet the requirements of the formal academic style) the seven C's of effective business communication must be taken into consideration when drawing up a document or writing a letter: concise – the language should be simple and easy, complete – containing all the facts needed, conversational – the use of conversational tone leads to interaction, clear – ambiguous language should be avoided, considerate – your communication should be courteous, friendly, open and honest, confidence – show that you are well-prepared, check – make sure the document is error free. (Root, 2014)

In order to be able to master Business Correspondence in English, learners should have access to materials tailored to meet their needs. Learners must be also made aware of the presence of collocations they meet them in different business letters or commercial documents etc. as it is better to study collocations in the specific context they occur. A student masters a specialized language if he/she masters its specific collocations.

2. The Importance of Collocations

The importance of collocations in language acquisition, extensively discussed in the literature, has been studied by theoretical linguistics, lexicology and stylistics. (Croitoru, Dumitraşcu, 2006) Being increasingly aware that collocational knowledge plays an important role in language use, numerous scientific papers have been devoted to their study, defining collocations as predictable combinations of words and providing different types of classifications. Thus, when certain words are arranged in a proper order, these words *collocate* and these particular arrangements of words are referred to as *collocations*. A word can have several meanings and can make up different combinations for each of its meanings. *Colligations* are defined as the co-occurrences between node words and grammatical classes or as interrelations of grammatical categories, which concern categories such as word classes and sentence classes. (Firth, 1968:188) *Collocates* refer to words that often occur with particular words. (Cattely, 2005:8)

Although collocations are considered word combinations that “occur naturally with greater than random frequency”, not all “words that co-occur are collocations”. (Morgan Lewis, 2002:25) The arbitrariness (non-predictable nature) of collocations can frequently cause confusion.

Jimmie Hill (Lewis editor, 2000:55) was among those who pointed out the importance of collocations in vocabulary teaching, as due to collocations native speakers are able “to name complex ideas quickly so that we continue to manipulate ideas without using all our brainspace on the form of words”, thus being regarded as an efficient key to fluency.

McCarthy (1990:13) stated that “knowledge of collocational appropriacy is part of native speaker's competence” whereas Lewis (1997) specified that “fluency is based on the acquisition of a large store of fixed or semi-fixed prefabricated items.”

Collocations have been also classified from various perspectives. Thus linguists distinguish between *grammatical collocations* (in which a noun, a verb or an adjective is followed by a preposition or a grammatical structure – an infinitive, an *ing* form, one or more objects or clauses) and *lexical collocations* – for instance *black coffee* – (consisting of a noun and its characteristic quality or action, a verb and its characteristic object, etc. (Pârlog, 2009:125)

A classification of collocations ranges from totally free collocations (*covered market*) to totally fixed and idiomatic, between these extremes being a whole range of combinations. Various other types of classifications for collocations have been suggested, mainly taking into account their componential elements. The number of elements in a collocation ranges from two to maximum seven. (Cately, 2005:8)

Hill (2000) distinguishes between unique collocations (e.g. *foot the bill* = pay a bill), strong collocations – made up of words that almost never occur separately

(e.g. *auburn hair, rancid butter*), weak collocations – being words that co-occur with many other words (e.g. *in broad agreement*) and medium-strength collocations – regarded as most important for ESL classroom (e.g. *hold a conversation*).

Newmark (1981: 114-115) suggests a classification of collocations that includes all possibilities of words or word-groups with which a particular word can combine: verb + verbal noun, determiner + adjective + noun, adverb + adjective, verb + adverb or adjective, subject + verb, count noun + "of" + mass noun, collective nouns + count noun.

Hill (2000: 51) suggests the following collocational patterns that are most often used in Business English:

- Adj. + N:** e.g. *slack business, slack demand, future delivery, current deposit, temporary account, limited liability, active stock;*
- N + N (+ N) (compound noun):** e.g. *bear market, market leader, market research, market trends, exchange rate, inflation level, dividend reinvestment plan;*
- V + Adj. + N:** e.g. *to make fair profits, to revise the original plan, to withdraw/ revoke a (an import/ export) license;*
- V + Adv.:** e.g. *to examine thoroughly, to increase dramatically, to decline/ fall/ drop slightly /moderately/ substantially/ sharply;*
- Adv. + Adj.:** e.g. *deeply/greatly indebted, strictly confidential, badly damaged;*
- V + Prep. + N:** e.g. *to withdraw from a market, to run something for profit, to sell under price, to exempt/free from a tax, to take somebody into partnership;*
- V + N:** e.g. *to ban promotion, to dominate the market, to flood/ gut the market, to penetrate the market, to charge a price, to fix/settle/set a price;*
- N + V:** e.g. *profits fall/ decline/ drop/ shrink, profits rise/ accrue/ amount , the business is booming, the market is booming;*
- N + V + Adv.:** e.g. *a product sells badly, a product sells well;*
- Binominal N + and + N:** e.g. *coin and bullion.*

Hill (2000:53) highlighted the importance of collocations arguing that the way words combine to form a collocation is fundamental to all language use. Both native and non-native speakers should improve their collocation competence, by drawing their attention upon the use of collocations in a specialized text (as there are numerous collocations in a text, the obscure ones should be ignored). Translating collocations can also be challenging. In many cases, collocations can be rendered by equivalent TL word combination without causing any translation difficulties but there are also many cases of non-equivalence, when literal translation is impossible and a perfect match cannot be identified in the TL in which case paraphrasing may be a possible solution.

3. Patterns of Collocations in Commercial Correspondence

Effective business correspondence makes extensive use of collocations, which requires that „speakers should have very good phraseological competence in order to be able to handle the ready-made language effectively“. (Mardar, 2011:178)

The following classification of collocational patterns most frequently encountered in commercial correspondence is based on Hill's classification (2000: 51) to which several other collocational patterns were added.

- Adj. + N:** e.g. *express delivery, increasing demand, traffic delay, labour dispute, unfair dismissal, outstanding bill, comprehensive insurance, massive output, last-minute cancellation, computer-integrated manufacturing, booming market, VAT invoice, environmental charter, demanding requirement, technical shortcomings, illegal strike, etc. ;*
- N + N (+ N) (compound noun):** e.g. *display stand, insurance premium, cheque guarantee card, order form, cancellation fee, manufacturing subsidiary, shift manager, credit card number, discount voucher, interest rate, invoice value, problem solving skills, administrative procedure, product range, freight company, reserve currency, front-page/full-page advertisement, hire-purchase agreement, holiday allowance, etc. ;*
- V + Adj. + N:** e.g. *be entitled to substantial discount, lead to widespread dissatisfaction, meet fundamental requirements, etc.;*
- V + Adv.:** e.g. *disapprove strongly, introduce gradually, invest heavily, invest tax-free/ abroad, invite officially/cordially/formally, promote indirectly, require specifically/explicitly/expressly/repeatedly, slump dramatically/badly/disastrously/heavily, etc.;*
- Adv. + Adj.:** e.g. *fully insured, potentially capable, extremely/highly / mutually profitable, always advisable, etc.;*
- Adv. + Adj. + N:** e.g. *newly issued banknotes, highly resourceful market, a refreshingly straightforward attitude, internationally agreed guidelines, etc.;*
- V + Prep. + N:** e.g. *ordered according to frequency, discount on orders, disappointment for our customers, etc.;*
- V + N:** e.g. *be threatened with dismissal, withdraw labour, present sb with a bill, take out insurance, issue a cheque, cancel an order, expand output, penetrate the market, seize shipment, resume shipment, express disapproval, fuel discontent, stimulate investments, decline an invitation, launch a product, carry freight, etc.;*
- V + V:** e.g. *be designed to produce, seek to promote, etc.;*
- N + V:** e.g. *the cheque bounces, the invoice raises, investments fall, research reveals/shows/produces/yields sth, shortage occurs, the situation deteriorates/worsens, etc. ;*
- V + N + Adv.:** e.g. *allocate resources efficiently; etc.;*
- N + and + N:** e.g. (phrases) *supply and demand, strength and resilience, strengths and weaknesses, etc.;*
- Adv. + V:** e.g. (was) *unduly delayed, (unless) otherwise specified, etc.;*
- Prep. + N:** e.g. *on order, in your capacity, on your credit card, at a discount, at sb's invitation, on behalf of the plaintiff, under the procedure, for your requirements on request, because of/ due to a shortage, despite/in spite of shortcomings, according to your specifications, with accuracy, etc.;*
- N + Prep.:** e.g. *output of, a reduction in manpower, the shuttle between, strike in protest at/against, etc.;*
- V + Prep.:** e.g. *issue against, issue on behalf of, promote through, resign from, advertise for, etc.;*
- Phrasal verb + N:** e.g. *make out a cheque, come on/onto the market, pay off creditors, phase out a product, draw up the agenda, make up for the shortcomings, set up showroom, carry out a study, etc.;*

Phrasal verb + Adv.: e.g. *spell sth out in detail/precisely/ clearly/fully;*

Phrases: e.g. *cost of manufacture, a range of products, a matter for speculation, next on the agenda, breach of agreement, a lack of consensus, etc.*

Since Commercial Correspondence deals with numerous types of documents from different branches of economics, the frequency of occurrence of collocations is high. Linguists argue that it is better to acquire collocations in context as learners would remember them more easily and therefore their language would sound more natural thus facilitating communication. Understanding and translating collocations should not be a challenging task once learners are familiar with their meanings. In this respect, concordancing is also highly recommended as learners can thus have access to most frequent word partnerships after inserting a particular word they are interested in. (Popescu, 2007:164-165) Thus observing word behaviour in contexts can be achieved by accessing several online concordancers such as those provided by the British National Corpus: <http://natcorp.ox.ac.uk/lookup.html>, Web Concordancer: <http://www.edict.com.hk/concordance/WWWConcappE.htm>, Online BLC KWIC concordancer: <http://ysomeya.hp.infoseek.co.jp>.

There also numerous sites which provide information about business letter writing and samples of genuine commercial correspondence such as <http://www.englishclub.com/business-english/correspondence-samples.htm>.; <http://www.writinghelp-central.com/sample-letters-business.html>; etc. These tools may prove invaluable resources as they provide authentic, real-life samples of business correspondence and learners can benefit greatly from up-to-date materials thus enlarging their mental lexicon.

Conclusions

Over the last few years both teachers and students have become aware of the importance of collocations in English language teaching-learning, admitting that sometimes these are difficult to acquire due to their arbitrary nature and also because they are non-predictable. The context is very important when teaching/learning collocations as words interact with other words to produce textuality. Moreover the context also provides relevant information about their specialized meaning and usage. Developing collocation competence is essential as it helps students improve their ability to produce natural English, their fluency and communication thus ensuring effective business correspondence.

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Concordancers:

- British National Corpus: <http://natcorp.ox.ac.uk/lookup.html>,
- Web Concordancer <http://www.edict.com.hk/concordance/WWWConcappE.htm>,
- BLC KWIC: <http://ysomeya.hp.infoseek.co.jp>.

DESPRE COLOCAȚIILE DIN CORESPONDENȚA COMERCIALĂ

Rezumat: Scopul lucrării noastre este de a evidenția complexitatea și diversitatea cologațiilor utilizate în corespondența comercială oferind o bază teoretică privind definierea acestora, clasificarea, diverse perspective de analiză și interpretare, importanța învățării și predării cologațiilor.

Cuvinte cheie: engleza de afaceri, corespondența comercială, cologații.