Raising, *discovering and *exploiting awareness:

Using the Internet as a source of collocational knowledge

Elen Le Foll

Technische Hochschule Köln/Osnabrück University

Online Language Learning Research Network OLLeRN
Rationale

• English language learners often struggle to make idiomatic collocational choices in their writing (cf. Nesselhauf, 2005; Laufer & Waldman, 2011; Liu, 2017).

• Speaking “natively is speaking idiomatically, using frequent and familiar collocations” (Ellis, 2001: 45).

• Knowing “which subset of grammatically possible utterances is actually commonly used by native speakers is an immense problem for even the most proficient of non-natives” (Wray, 2000: 486).
Operational definition

• **Collocation** – the combination of words formed when two or more syntactically related words or phrases are often used together within a sentence, in a way that sounds correct to people who have spoken the language all their lives, but might not be expected from the meaning.

• Collocations may be entirely or partially fixed combinations of words or phrases that cannot always be modified according to the standard rules of grammar.

• At least one word in any collocation is a noun, verb, adjective or adverb.
Collocational competence deficiency

- Inadequate resources
- Poor use of resources
- Lack of collocational awareness
- Insufficient exposure
- Intralingual transfer
- L1 interference
- Language learning strategies
- Language teaching approaches
Operational definition

- **Collocational competence** refers to comprehensive lexical knowledge breadth (in particular concerning frequency of use, syntactic and semantic properties, contextual use and collocational use restrictions) and
- the **ability to notice, delineate, understand and memorise collocations as discrete units**, rather than as the sum of their parts, as well as
- to **apply strategies to (re-)produce native-like collocations in context**.
Strategic collocational competence

• Rarely taught and under-investigated
• Exception → dictionary use
• However, nowadays language learners rely heavily on free online resources to solve collocational problems
Aims

To assess the suitability of collocations advanced learners produce

Observe in real time learners’ strategic processes in arriving at these collocational choices

when granted unlimited access to online resources
Participants

• 44 students on Multilingual Communication BA
• Three intact classes
• Advanced learners
• Regular German-English translation classes
• University computer labs
Questionnaire

- L1 and other L2s
- Experience of learning English
- Extended stays in an English-speaking country
- Self-assessed level of Internet skills
- Self-assessed level of English proficiency
You now have to complete a short text about a fictional charity called Demataid. The text is divided into 4 sections. This is section 1.

Fill in the blanks with one or more words to produce an idiomatic and coherent text.

You can use the internet to complete this task. Please open new tabs in Internet Explorer to do so; do NOT close this window!

Demataid is an international non-governmental organisation that seeks to find solutions to _________ poverty, _________ hunger and fight against injustice across the world.

At Demataid, we believe empowered women can change the world for _________ . That's why we tackle poverty issues by _________ girls access to primary and secondary education so they can _________ the benefits of a good education.

We also provide remote communities with the necessary training, skills and information that will enable them to _________ and _________ their rights.

We mount programmes to tackle gender inequality, to _________ the potential of the many girls and women who still _________ systemic discrimination and who most often bear _________ of poverty.
Analysis

• Evaluation of the suitability of collocational choices
• Annotation of screen capture videos
  • Collocational choices
  • Suitability of collocational choices
  • Resources consulted
  • Course of action/query type
This is section 2. You can go back to section 1 to change and check your answers at any time by clicking on the back button. You may use the internet as a resource by opening new tabs.

We mobilise both short and long term relief in humanitarian emergencies, in the aftermath of devastating natural catastrophes or when conflicts force families to flee their homes. We deliver aid to camps for both internally refuge people and for refugees who have had to cross borders to find a safe shelter.

Millions of displaced people suffer from malnutrition. The temporary nature of refugee camps mean most adults are unable to earn money and are thus trapped in a poverty cycle.

Check and correct previous answers

Pause the interview

Elen Le Fate, Fachhochschule Köln – 2015
Results

Collocations produced by participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of collocations produced</th>
<th>suitable</th>
<th>doubtful</th>
<th>unsuitable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>400</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>800</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evaluation of collocational choice

Diagram:

- Start
  - Grammatically correct?
    - Yes
      - Unsuitable collocation
    - No
      - Matches solution from native informant(s)?
        - Yes
          - Suitable collocation
        - No
          - Collocation found in BBI and/or COCA?
            - Yes
              - Suitable collocation
            - No
              - Collocation fits context?
                - Yes
                  - Suitable collocation
                - No
                  - Do native judges approve in context?
                    - Yes
                      - Majority Yes, suitable collocation
                    - Mixed Responses
                      - Unsuitable collocation
                    - No
                      - Majority No, unsuitable collocation

- Unsuitable collocation
- Doubtful collocation
- Suitable collocation
Results
Results

Extended stay in English-speaking country (6 months or longer)?
## Resources consulted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of resource</th>
<th>Frequency of use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linguee</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual dictionaries</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google search engine</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monolingual dictionaries</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parallel texts</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dictionaries of collocations</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machine translation service</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forums</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesauri</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Linguee search results](image)
Query types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course of action</th>
<th>Frequency of action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Looking up surrounding words</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking up equivalent L1 collocation</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checking English collocation guess/intuition</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking up German word to complete blank</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checking English word to complete blank</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Demataid also campaigns for tax justice. We publish reports on companies and rich individuals that benefit from ______ havens that deprive fragile states of the tax ______ they so desperately need to provide social services and ______ growth opportunities.
This is section 2.
You can go back to section 1 to change and check your answers at any time by clicking on the
back button.
You may use the internet as a resource by opening new tabs.

We mobilise both short and long term relief in humanitarian emergencies in the aftermath of
devastating natural catastrophes or when conflicts force families to flee their homes.

We deliver aid to camps for both internally displaced people and for refugees who have had to
cross borders to find a safe place.

Millions of displaced people suffer from malnutrition. The temporary nature of refugee camps
mean most adults are unable to earn money and are thus trapped in a circle of poverty.

Check and correct previous answers

Pause the interview

Dan Le Foll, Fachhochschule Köln – 2015
Practical recommendations

Raise awareness of strengths/weaknesses of online resources

- Demonstrate potential pitfalls of user-contributed vs. standard dictionaries
- Highlight need to pay attention to articles and prepositions in examples
- Time permitting, introduce learners to web concordancers

Specifically teach internet information retrieval skills for L2 writing

- Compare querying methods for Linguee/Reverso Context etc.
- Introduce use of Boolean operators in search engine queries
- Show efficient ways to find and use reliable parallel texts
- Stress necessity of validating collocational choices
References


