

## THE INFLUENCE OF SEMANTIC ASPECT ON THE LEXICO-GRAMMATICAL COMPATIBILITY OF WORDS

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Compatibilitatea este o caracteristică inerentă cuvântului, ce se evidențiază în îmbinarea lui cu alte cuvinte. În acest articol, este analizat fiecare aspect al colocabilității: lexical, gramatical și semantic, legătura dintre ele și influența aspectului semantic.

It is an indisputable fact that words are used in certain lexical contexts, i.e. in combination with other words. All the texts are full of such combinations of words. It seems so easy to speak or write. All we have to do is just combine the words, thus forming different patterns, increasing the number of existing ones when needed. But, A. Drasdauscas [1] catches our attention that the productivity of word-combination patterns is hardly ever absolute, for a number of different factors tend to restrict it.

If we take, for example, an adjective, from the functional point of view, we know that it can be combined with a noun or with an adverb which serves as an intensifier. At the same time it is known that an adjective cannot combine with a verb because only adverbs determine verbs, while adjectives determine nouns. It follows that the patterns are indeed limited in number. It only seems that while speaking or writing we every time create new ones. In fact, we always use the same. More than that, the speaker cannot freely choose the lexical material to ‘fill’ patterns, one of the constraints imposed upon him being purely collocational, i.e. depending on the lexico-grammatical and semantic combinability of words.

By means of collocations of a word, in I. Constantinescu’s words [2], we understand the range of occurrences which limit its usage in a certain language. Taken in its general meaning, a collocation also called valency, is the aptness of a word to appear in various combinations, i.e. to combine with other words according to the patterns of a certain language.

According to N.Z. Kotyolova [3], the lexical compatibility is the ability of a word (as a lexeme) to collocate with other words (also as lexemes) and the total sum of its lexical valencies. Other authors define it as the ability of a word to collocate syntactically with words from a limited list, i.e. the ability to generally combine with a limited number of words, irrespective of its function in speech.

Having a status of relative independence, the lexical combinability of a word is at the same time interconnected with its grammatical (or syntactic) combinability. The aptness of a word to appear in specific grammatical (or rather syntactic) structures is termed grammatical valency (or combinability). It follows that the minimal grammatical context in which words are used when brought together to form word-combinations is usually described as the pattern of the word-combination.

The grammatical combinability of words may be different. To begin with, the range of grammatical combinability is delimited by the part of speech the word belongs to. For instance, the adjective *heavy* can be followed by a noun (e.g. *heavy storm*) or by the infinitive of a verb (e.g. *heavy to lift*), etc. It follows that the grammatical combinability of each individual word is dependent on the grammatical structure of the language.

This is not to imply that grammatical combinability of words belonging to the same part of speech is necessarily identical. This can be best illustrated by comparing the grammatical combinability of any two words belonging to the same part of speech, e.g. of the two synonymous verbs *suggest* and *propose*. Both verbs can be followed by a noun (*to propose* or *suggest a plan, a resolution*). It is only *propose*, however, that can be followed by the infinitive of a verb (*to propose to do something*). Another example is that of the adjectives *clever* and *intelligent* which are seen to possess different grammatical combinability as *clever* can be used in word-combinations having the pattern: adj + prep *at* + noun (*clever at mathematics*), whereas *intelligent* can never be found in exactly the same word-combination pattern.

The grammatical combinability has also been defined as the spreading of a certain word by means of syntactical forms [4]. For example, the verb *to send* is used without preposition when first answers the question ‘Whom?’ (*to send somebody something*) and it is used with preposition *to* when it answers the

question ‘What?’ (*to send something to somebody*). In this way the grammatical combinability is characterised in forms, while the lexical one is characterised in componential unities.

There is also the idea that the lexical meaning may be described using only the description of syntactical relationships, as there is an identical correspondence between the meaning of the word and its syntactical relationships.

The collocability is, according to many researchers like John Lyons [5], E.M. Mednikova [6] and others, a reliable criterion to bring mainly the semantic laws into relief. It is known that some words seem ‘to boast’ general, unlimited valencies, while others seem to be restricted in the combinatory power. For example, some very common adjectives such as *good, bad, big, small, old, new*, combine with almost any noun. The limitation in collocability (= combinability) is considered to be the condition in choosing the word in order to express a certain meaning. The rules that settle the lexical limitations have the status of norms.

In fact, many authors [7] point out that the problem of combinability of words has two aspects – lexical and semantic ones. It follows that the limitation in combinability of words is first of all connected with the laws (norms) of combining their meanings when choosing one word or another.

V.G. Gak [8] was one of the first linguists who paid attention to the study of semantic combinability. He points out that the correct organisation of expression presupposes the observance of the norms of combinability of words not only on the lexical and grammatical but also on the semantic level, i.e. there must be one and the same meaningful component in the meanings of the combined words. V.G. Gak meant by the meaningful components the common seme or syntagme.

The same ideas are found expressed in ‘К вопросу о лексической сочетаемости’ by N.V. Kossek [9]. He defines the lexical combinability as the word’s valency which does not depend on the grammatical characteristics and may be specified by the ‘agreement’ on the level of meaning. The compatibility of every individual word in a certain syntactical structure depends on the partly coincidence / non-coincidence of sememes of the neighbour words. If, N.V. Kossek remarks, the sememe is viewed as a combination of semes (elementary meanings), then the question of lexical compatibility of words can be reduced to the choice of such syntagmas, whose neighbour members have at least one common semantic unit.

It might be thought that the collocational range of an expression is wholly determined by its meaning, so that synonyms must of necessity have the same collocational range. But this does not seem to be so. The range of the lexical valency of words is linguistically restricted by the inner structure of the English word-stock. This can be easily observed in the selection of synonyms found in different word-combinations. Though the verbs *lift* and *raise*, for example, are usually treated as synonyms, it is only the latter that is collocated with the noun *question*. The verb *take* may be synonymically interpreted as ‘grasp’, ‘seize’, ‘catch’, ‘lay hold of’, etc., but it is only *take* that is found in collocation with the nouns *examination, measures, precautions*, etc., only *catch* in *catch somebody napping* and *grasp* in *grasp the truth*.

Or, once again the words *big* and *large* are used as example for J. Lyons explanations. There are many contexts in which *large* cannot be substituted for *big* (in the meaning which *big* shares with *large*) without violating the collocational restrictions of the one or the other. For example, *large* is not interchangeable with *big* in ‘*You are making a big mistake*’. The sentence ‘*You are making a large mistake*’ is, presumably, not only grammatically well-formed, but also meaningful. It is however collocationally unacceptable or unidiomatic. And yet J. Lyons implies that *big* seems to have the same meaning in the first of the two sentences as it does in phrases such as ‘*a big house*’, for which we could, as we have seen, substitute ‘*a large house*’.

It is tempting to argue, in cases like this, that there must be some subtle difference of lexical meaning which accounts for the collocational differences, such that it is not synonymy, but according to J. Lyons, near-synonymy, that is involved. Very often, undoubtedly, the author remarks, collocational differences can be satisfactorily explained, in terms of independently ascertainable differences of meaning. But this is not always so. J. Lyons attracts our attention to the fact that we must be careful therefore not to assume that the collocational range of a lexeme is predictable from its meaning. Indeed, there are cases where it can be argued that the collocations of a lexeme are part of its meaning.

The next pattern we are going to deal with (adverb + adjective) will comprise the adverbs *absolutely, completely, totally* and *utterly*. These adverbs are used to express the highest degree of strength of the meaning and are usually collocated with adjectives whose meaning already contains the idea of an absolute

degree and are not used in comparative and superlative forms. These four adverbs express the same degree and thus are considered to be synonyms. If they are synonyms we can admit that they can replace each other in combination with different words, i.e. it does not matter which one we use as they all express the same idea.

From one hundred sentences containing each of these adverbs we have selected only the word-combinations containing **absolutely**, **completely**, **totally** and **utterly** in combination with adjectives.

The adverb **absolutely**, for example, is frequently found in combinations with the following adjectives: *certain, necessary, imperative, straight, steady, lethal, happy, large, blissful, frontal, senseless, fine, indispensable, sure, essential, appalling, shattered, clear, curable, diabolical, drabulous, fabulous, fantastic, free, gorgeous, justified, normal, precise, satisfied, strong, wonderful.*

The adverb **completely** collocates with the adjectives: *successful, covered, egocentric, absent, unaware, black, repeated, naked, rejected, innocent, infeasible, encased, over, deserted, barking, exposed, re-written.*

The following adjectives combine with **totally**: *confused, unassailable, destroyed, apathetic, deprived, reliable, committed, acceptable, relevant, dependent, perfect, unsuited, predictable, ignored, unexpected, absorbed.*

These are the adjectives which combine with **utterly**: *compelling, confusing, convinced, foursquare, deliberate, detached, dumb, exhausted, grotesque, helpless, inexcusable, obedient, powerless, silent, splendid, spontaneous, strange, stupid, like, wretched, wrong, reasonable, defeated, ignorant, brilliant, peaceful, impossible, predictable.*

At the same time there are adjectives which are found in combinations not only with one of the four adverbs, like:

	<b>absolutely</b>	<b>completely</b>	<b>totally</b>	<b>utterly</b>
absurd	--	+	--	+
alone	--	+	--	+
delighted	+	--	--	+
different	--	+	+	+
horrible	+	--	--	+
lost	--	+	--	+
safe	--	+	--	+
terrified	+	--	--	+
tired	--	+	--	+
true	+	+	--	--

Chart: Compatibility of adverbs **absolutely**, **completely**, **totally** and **utterly** with the same adjectives

After studying all these examples we can notice that even if these four adverbs are synonyms, they are not easily replaced by each of them. More than that, long series of adjectives collocate only to one of the four adverbs, i.e. if the word *fantastic* is found in combination with the adverb **absolutely**, we will not have collocations like: **completely** *fantastic*, **totally** *fantastic* or **utterly** *fantastic*.

From the chart presented above we may conclude the idea that only a few adjectives have the characteristic to be combined with two adverbs in the same time, again not with all the synonymous adverbs. The adverb **utterly** appears to be the most frequently used, being replaced with either **absolutely** or **completely**. On the contrary **totally** is the least used adverb, combining only with the adjective *different*, from the given list.

The conclusion to this study is that while collocating, words have to agree to each other both grammatically and lexically. A combination of words correctly used from the grammatical point of view, does not imply the idea that it is lexically correct, too. At the same time a lexico-grammatically correct word combination may sound unnatural to a native speaker who can suppose its meaning but would never collocate it like that.

Every combination of words is not just a succession of words put together. There are some intralinguistic sense-relations specific for each language that the words settle among them and according to which they combine.

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