

Kostenko Viktoriia
Candidate of Philological Sciences,
Associate Professor of the Department of Foreign Languages,
Latin and Medical Terminology,
Poltava State Medical University
Poltava, Ukraine

**DEVELOPING COLLOCATIONAL COMPETENCE IN ESP
(DENTISTRY) CONTEX**

Acquiring a functional knowledge of a language requires attaining an adequate mastery level in a number of language aspects. One of the primary building blocks in language acquisition is the lexical competence which is manifest in using the vocabulary of the language. L. S. Nation (Nation 1990, 31) stated that knowing a word involves knowing its spoken form, written form, grammatical behavior, collocational behavior, frequency, stylistic register constraints, conceptual meaning and word associations. The collocational competence constitutes a major component of the learner's lexical competence. The learners' knowledge of collocations entails their ability to use words together properly in context. The proper use of collocations in speaking and writing indicates an acceptable level of language proficiency. C. James (James 1998, 152 – 153) holds that adhering to the collocational conventions of a foreign language effectively contributes to “idiomaticity and nativelikeness” whereas the opposite leads to foreignness or to “linguistic strangeness” as Crystal described it (Hamadi 2019, 9).

Collocations are known as a linguistic challenge to non-native speakers due to interference with their mother tongue (Hill 1999, 4; James 1998; Kostenko, Solohor, 2018, 262). Therefore, J. Hill (Hill 1999, 3 – 6), who is suggested to create a term “collocational competence”, insisted on acquiring not just the total meaning of a word, but also its collocational span. Collocational competence was also emphasised by some other researchers (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992; El-Dakhs 2015, 69). The

importance of acquiring collocations in language teaching has been particularly emphasised in the last two decades.

G. Williams (Williams 2002, 48) asserts that discourse communities develop codes for communication through the use of patterns and that this code, rather than individual words, is one of their defining characteristics. Collocations appear to be among these patterns. C. Gledhill points out (Gledhill 2000, 33) that collocations are fundamental units in texts, that they validate the existence of discourse communities, and reflect subconscious efforts to conform to discipline norms.

This paper attempts to investigate the extent to which dental students are able to operate collocations at both the receptive and productive levels as well as outline techniques for teaching collocations to dental students.

The collocations are identified as significant according to their frequency with the help of WordSmith Tools, Version 6, a software package to measure statistically the strength of lexical association among words. The word span (3) and the minimum frequency (10) were set in advance, function words were eliminated from the resulting wordlist. The text files of the textbooks (*English for Professional Use: Dentistry*, 2015, by Solohor et al, *Dentistry English for Dental Practice Textbook and Exercise Book*, 2013, by Baumrukova, and *Career Paths: Dentistry*, 2016, by Evans et al) covering the topics about oral health, common dental disorders and diseases their signs and symptoms, dental procedures then were processed with the software. To select the collocations, the following definition was adopted: “chunks of language-sequences of words that are used repeatedly by speakers and writers” (Biber, Conrad & Cortes 2004, 377). Collocation is the co-occurrence of two or more words significantly more often than is found in similar language genres. Then the core vocabulary including 85 verb-noun and verb-expression with preposition collocations was formed. The most frequent verbs detected were as follows: produce, develop, cause, have, perform, prevent, check, increase, decrease.

The limitation of this study is that it only focused on verb-noun (*provide care; pose the risk; relieve pain; predict a diagnosis*) and verb-expression with preposition collocations (*screen for disease; carry out check-ups; complain of / about pain*),

because the doctor-patient communication requires a broad range of verbs [!!!], therefore, we did not deal with other types of collocations, which are also abundantly represented in English dentistry discourse.

We evaluated the collocation competency of second-year dental students (80 people in 2020 / 21 academic year, 61 people in 2021 / 22 academic year) who took the mandatory course of English for Special Purposes (Dentistry) at the beginning of the course to determine their lexical needs. Their level of knowledge of English after the elective course of General English mainly ranged from A2 to B2, but professional language of dentistry having a plethora of new professional concepts and language conventions might seem more overwhelming. Knowing which types of collocations is especially difficult for dental students enables teachers to design various activities (multiple choice, gap-fill, making sentences using collocations, paraphrase sentences using collocations, etc.) aimed at promoting collocation acquisition and introduce them into each lesson. Since there are no dictionaries of dentistry collocations, the glossary was also compiled based on the verb-noun and verb-expression collocations to facilitate memorization. Regular in-process evaluation of student comprehension helps to identify what adjustments can be made either to lessons or instructional techniques to achieve better results.

The analysis of the test results has demonstrated the most common mistakes made by the students are mainly due to the interference of norms from the Ukrainian to English language. Mistakes in using collocations are often associated with misunderstanding and misuse of grammar and vocabulary in general. Therefore, learning high-frequency collocations becomes of paramount importance to foreign language learners who may encounter difficulties in using collocations properly due to a number of factors, including the influence of their mother tongues, inadequate teaching methods, or inappropriate textbooks.

Thus, this study clearly reveals that the use of collocations presented difficulty for dental students. It also highlighted the significance of the proper use of collocations in writing.

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