

# Ethnocultural Collocations in the Context of Combinatorial Linguistics

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**Abstract**—The article is devoted to ethnocultural collocations – one of the types of collocations considered in combinatorial linguistics, which studies the syntagmatic connections of lexical units and their combinatorial potential. Ethnocultural collocations are combinatorially conditioned combinations of words reflecting socially significant realities for a certain ethnic group, in other words containing national-cultural specificity, which impedes their understanding by representatives of other linguocultures. The features of these lexical units are their non-equivalence, combinatorial and complex character, stability, regular recurrence in context, and uniqueness for a certain language community. The ethnocultural conditionality of word meanings most clearly characterizes the collocability in terms of the influence of non-linguistic factors on it – historical processes, culture, view of the world and way of life of one or another ethnic group.

**Keywords**—combinatorial linguistics, collocation, ethnocultural collocation, ethnocultural combinatorial lexicology, word collocability

## I. INTRODUCTION

The study of collocations, which are universal structural blocks constituting any natural code, attracts more and more researchers. At the present stage, collocations are most actively studied in corpus linguistics. They are defined as “words which are statistically much more likely to appear together than random chance suggests” [1, p. 29], or words that appear together more often than can be expected due to the randomness of the distribution, that is a combination of two or more words, characterized by the so-called joint occurrence.

Collocations are of particular importance in combinatorial linguistics, which studies the syntagmatic relations of language units and their combinatorial potential. At the same time, collocation is understood as a combinatorially conditioned lexico-semantic unit, possessing structural and syntactic integrity and performing certain speech functions.

Like any science, combinatorial linguistics has its own structure and content. One of its sections dealing with the study of collocations, combinatorial lexicology, is aimed at studying linear relations of words and their combinations, as well as identifying the combinatorial-syntagmatic properties of lexemes. Its content is the description and interpretation of words collocability in various contexts.

The relevance of this study is doubtless, because it deals with the basic blocks of any language, through which all verbal communication is built. They acquire special significance in combinatorial lexicology, which studies the nature of their formation as separate units, or rather, the structural and semantic mechanisms of their formations.

At present, the theory of collocations is developed within the framework of combinatorial science in detail and consistently, defining and describing the following types of such units:

- ethnocultural collocations (Rus.: *palace of sport, Veteran of Labor, reserve officer*; English: *torch singer* – sentimental songs performer, *union suit* – overalls, *weather wisdom* – knowledge of weather signs, etc.) [2, p. 104-108],

- terminological collocations (Eng. *political party*, Turk.: *siyasal parti*; Eng.: *electoral system*, Turk.: *seçim sistemi*; Eng.: *political process*, Turk.: *siyasal süreç*; Eng.: *majority vote*, Turk.: *çoğunluk oyu*; Eng.: *to hold negotiations*, Turk.: *müzakere etmek*, etc. [3, p. 129-131],

- occasional collocations (Eng.: *azure silence* (P.B. Shelley), *melodious hue* (P.B. Shelley), *darkness and the glare of pain* (P.B. Shelley), *poisonous names* (P.B. Shelley), Fr.: *promesses féconde* (A. de Lamartine) – *fruitful promises*, *le vieux soleil* (F.R. de Chateaubriand) – *the old sun*, etc. [4, p. 235],

- colorative collocations (Rus.: *orange revolution, green oil* (environmentally friendly), Eng.: *green with envy, green day* (vegetarian day), *white death* (tuberculosis); *white collars* (office workers, managers) [5, p. 81-90], as well as traditional, expressive and some others.

Careful study of the collocations of individual types contributes to the formation and acquisition of the scientific status of such subdivisions of combinatorial lexicology [6] as ethnocultural combinatorial lexicology [1], occasional combinatorial lexicology [4], as well as combinatorial paremiology [7] and others.

This article is devoted to one of the listed types of collocations – ethnocultural collocations, which are characterized as combinatorially conditioned combinations of words, reflecting socially significant realities within a certain ethnic group. In other words, they contain clear national-cultural specifics that prevents other linguistic cultures

representatives from understanding. The study of these units takes place in the framework of ethno-cultural combinatorial lexicology.

The purpose of this article is to identify the main features of ethnocultural collocations as combinatorially conditioned national-cultural units.

To achieve this goal, it is necessary to justify the importance of collocations as universal structural blocks that exist in each language, to designate ethnocultural collocations as a separate type of these units, to justify the importance of their study in the combinatorial aspect.

The methods of ethnocultural collocations research are definitional, componential, functional and semantic analysis, as well as analysis of semes and of dictionary lexemes interpretations. In the study of the types of semantics conditionality and word collocability, we used continuous sampling.

## II. MAIN THESES OF THE THEORY OF COLLOCATIONS

In combinatorial lexicology, collocation is defined as a combinatorially conditioned lexico-semantic unit with structural and syntactic integrity and performing certain speech functions. In recent decades, the theory of collocations has developed the following theoretical principles.

The metaphoric nature of the human conceptual system is the starting point for cognitive scholars to consider collocations in terms of factors such as the semantics of individual components, the influence of metaphor, psychological aspects, etc. [8].

With this interpretation, the cognitive approach negates the arbitrariness of collocations as ready-made language units and sees them as a reflection of the world around us or as units motivated by the metaphor underlying the conceptual system. In addition, with the existence of universal metaphors, each language has national-specific metaphors, which are the basis for the collocations.

There is a notion of collocation competence [9], meaning the ability to combine words correctly and to form collocations for the expression of thoughts. This competence is of great importance in the formation of a secondary linguistic personality. The most complex and unpredictable norms in the language belong to the sphere of word collocability. Native languages do not help when choosing the correct collocations in another language. For example, in Russian it sounds *wild wood*, that is *deep forest* in English. Foreign language and culture studying needs some cognitive basis and the collocation ability makes the communication possible.

Collocation is a universal unit, as evidenced by its presence in any language, the combination of words into a collocation is a universal property: Eng.: *to run a business*, Fr.: *diriger une affaire*, Span.: *llevar un negocio*, Ital.: *gestire un'attività*, Port.: *gerir um negócio*, etc.

However, the set of words that make up a collocation is strictly limited, as evidenced by data from the MacMillan Collocations Dictionary [10, p. 166] by the example of the

English noun *crux* in the meaning of “the most important aspect of something” (essence, an important aspect of something), which forms a combination with: 1) adjectives: **central, main, real, very** (This may be the very essence of our disagreements); 2) verbs: **be, form, lie** (These three recommendations form the *crux* of the report); 3) prepositions: a) with the subsequent preposition **of** (matter or problem) **case, issue, matter, problem, question, story** (*This crux of the matter is that few challenges would go to court*); b) with the preceding preposition **at** and the subsequent **of** with the meaning of “argument or disagreement”, namely, **argument, debate, disagreement, question, story** (*This question – how to reconcile economic development and the reduction of carbon emissions – is at the crux of the debate*).

Collocation as a structural-semantic unit has some ambiguity. This is expressed in the fact that, on the one hand, the words surrounding the word being defined are predictable, one word can easily predict its collocate, for example: Eng.: *a pack of cards*, Span.: *un mazo de cartas*; Eng.: *a clove of garlic*, Span.: *un diente de ajo*, Eng.: *a flock of birds*, Span.: *una bandada de aves*, Eng.: *a bunch of grapes*, Span.: *un racimo de uvas*, etc. From these examples, it can be noted that one word is immediately associated with another, which creates a context and clarifies the meaning of all the words that make up a collocation.

However, on the other hand, as some linguists claim, the main feature of collocation is the unpredictability of one of the elements. First of all, it concerns desemantized words that make up a collocation, words with the so-called “blurred” semantics, for example: Eng.: *do* (*the cooking, the shopping, the washing up, someone a favor, the housework, etc.*), *to break* (*a promise, the law, a record, a leg, someone's heart, etc.*). These examples indicate the opposite, that is, one word cannot be used to predict another word constituting a collocation.

In view of the aforementioned, it can be concluded that the less semantics a word contains, the wider its combinatorial (collocational) potential is.

## III. ETHNOCULTURAL COLLOCATIONS AS A SPECIAL TYPE OF COMBINATORIALLY CONDITIONED UNITS

The main feature that distinguishes ethnocultural collocations from all other types is national-cultural specificity or belonging to a specific linguoculture.

The interest in ethnocultural collocations is due to the fact that the studying of a language requires a wider coverage of its cultural peculiarities, which are not less important than linguistic. Linguistic and cultural competence of a person can help him see and realize what a person who is not familiar with the cultural-specific units and realities does not see. All people live in a special national-cultural space, and this becomes especially noticeable when confronted with the phenomena of another culture. Based on this, it is necessary to consider this vocabulary on the material of several languages.

We call non-equivalent those lexical units, whose relevant components are impossible or difficult to transmit at a similar level of expression [11, p. 8]. These lexical units suggest an indication of the fact that there is no equivalent in the input

language, and the reason for its absence, which makes them national-specific. It allows to include units with national-cultural and national-linguistic features in the concept of “non-equivalent vocabulary”.

The situation of the complete absence of lexical unit linguists explain for extralinguistic reasons – directly by the absence of an object or phenomenon. The incomplete coincidence of referential meaning is expressed in the fact that the original lexical unit denotes a broader concept than that, used as an equivalent. Such cases require additional details of the context, since the unfamiliar extra-linguistic situation is not fully understood by non-native speakers.

Our understanding of the concept of “ethnocultural collocation” is confirmed with the presence of some components in lexical meaning, which act as words collocability mechanisms and with the recognition of the lexical units’ ethnocentricity, namely the existence of restrictions on the collocability for extralinguistic and linguistic factors.

The national specificity of these lexical units is manifested in the fact of verbalization of phenomena and objects of reality that are significant for the language community, for example, Rus.: *giant stature, park of culture and rest*, etc.

The process of realities selection is based on the study of one culture relatively to another. Key concepts are considered along with the categories of national culture and are relevant for intercultural communication: a sense of space, clothing and appearance, food and habits, time perception, relationships, values and norms, beliefs and attitudes towards the supernatural, mental processes, etc. Being non-equivalent relatively to another language, ethnocultural collocations are of particular interest, therefore they require individual research and interpretation. There are some criteria at the heart of these units’ understanding.

The criterion of stability. According to existing concepts, any phrase is considered stable if it exists as a whole – invariable and used ready-made. It is important to note that the desire for stability or lexicalization (phraseologization) is very characteristic of the English language. This phenomenon can be observed when a combination of words turns into a complex word over time, for example, *weekend, businessman*, etc.

The stability of a language unit is in its regular reproducibility in a ready-made form in the speech of a linguistic group, which can be determined by statistical processing of texts corpus, or the fact that it is in the collective linguistic memory. An indicator of reproducibility is the conventionality of meaning. Partially or completely non-motivated meaning indicates a combination as stable.

As for phrases with the direct meaning, the presence of additional meaning motivated by background knowledge becomes one of the factors of stability, assigned to the plane of expression. For example, *maple sugar*. The meaning of this collocation is not limited to the fact that it is just maple sugar, it contains semes expressing that maple sugar and maple syrup are symbols of Canada and some US states. Thus, stable phrases are laconic, facilitate mutual understanding, since it is easier to use ready-made names, which are a sign of a developed language.

The criterion of non-equivalence. Collocations serve for nomination and do not have single-word correlates, for example, *plea bargain* – an agreement between the court and the defendant, that the latter admits guilt in committing a less serious crime and will receive minimal punishment, and a more serious crime will not be considered by the court; *first-time buyer* – a potential house buyer who has not previously owned a property; *pudding face* – the feeling you have when you wake up in the morning and your face is puffy from sleep; *storm window* – are windows that are mounted outside or inside of the main glass windows of a house. Russian language has no equivalent collocations, and, therefore, they can only be reproduced descriptively.

The criterion of cultural value. When selecting ethnocultural collocations, it is necessary to be guided by their cultural value, the role in the process of the national culture perception: the sphere of everyday, political life, cultural activities of people, etc.

The selection of cultural-connotative units can be determined by the criteria of well-knownness, usage, functional role – occurrence in the texts of the language community, and the need for explanation. In order to highlight culturally important information, linguists carry out a contrasting comparison.

#### IV. PROCESS OF ETHNOCULTURAL COLLOCATIONS FORMATION

Concerning the ethnocultural specificity of the language, the idea of fixing people’s experience in the language through phrases, which are the syntactic basis for the formation of more complex unities, is one of the fundamental. To meet the needs of communication free combinations of words transform into a stable vocabulary unit – ethnocultural collocation – equivalent to a single word. The process of phraseologization is understood as a process of semantic transformation, acquisition of semantic integrity, fixing in the normal language and formation of its own lexical environment.

Concerning the process of a certain type of phraseologization, there are some stages of the ethnocultural collocation formation, which consists in semantic and grammatical transformation. Firstly, each ethnocultural unit must pass the so-called “threshold of significance”, when a native speaker has the need for the nomination of a particular object or phenomenon, caused by the peculiarities of thinking and world perception.

Secondly, there is a search for a suitable combination of words to interpret the object, which is fixed in the language over time as an integral structure.

At the next stage, the components of ethnocultural collocation are combined due to the certain mechanisms of collocability and semantic components in the structure of their lexical meanings, because of some extralinguistic limitations. When used together, they acquire specific meaning, unique for a given collocation.

Then comes the stage of an integral meaning formation, depending on the integrity and reproducibility of the collocation. The denotative sememe expresses the

extralinguistic meaning, which is understood out of context, it means that collocability is based on the logical connections, for example, *railroad flat* literally means “railway apartment”. The peculiarity of the denotative sememe is that it carries out a direct connection with the images in the human mental activity. The secondary denotation naming is the connotative sememe, which participates in the formation of a phraseological meaning; thus, this ethnocultural collocation acquires a new meaning – *an apartment with narrow rooms and windows facing one side*.

The secondary denotative sememes correspond to the derivative meaning of ethnocultural collocations. At the same time, the primary and secondary semes of one lexeme interact, but the secondary sememe is autonomously created, for example, *a lollipop man – a person who stops traffic by holding up a circular sign on a pole, resembling a candy, to allow children to cross a road safely*. In this case, there was a semantic shift in the meaning of the word “lollipop”, which needs the context to be understood.

Finally, as the last stage, this complex language unit is fixed in the system and acquires its own formal characteristics and national-cultural specificity, expressed in non-equivalence.

Each component of an ethnocultural collocation serves for expressing a single concept, but just one of them has the denotative correlation, through which the meaning of the second manifests itself, e.g. *spotted dog* – a British pudding, traditionally made with suet and dried, *pocket piece* – a coin for luck, *quality time* – time spent on your favorite or important activity, etc.

Let us consider this process by the example: pollution fever – a “fever” of searching for environmental pollutants, stimulated by large fines in favor of those who discovered. The first stage of phraseologization is the need for the language community to describe this situation. Further, they carry out an associative search for a suitable naming of this phenomenon by means of language, namely “pollution” and “fever”, which form the above-described idea in the semantics of the phrase. Integral reproducibility of this collocation leads to its fixing in the language system and partial semantic transformation. The collocation is non-equivalent regarding the Russian language, since this concept is not expressed by its lexical units. If the phenomenon or subject underlying the future ethnocultural collocation is significant for the life of the people and their language, i.e. socially significant, the neologism gets stability, which is then used independently and becomes “public”.

Based on the facts presented above, we consider it reasonable to study ethnocultural collocations as a special type of phrases with syntactic-semantic unity of combined words connected by the tradition of native speakers and reflecting significant elements for a particular society. Ethnocultural collocations are unique formations that can be identified only within a pair of languages, in other words, in a comparative or contrastive aspect.

## V. CONCLUSION

The experience of people is fixed in the language by means of phrases, which are the syntactic basis for the formation of more complex unities that undergo a process of phraseologization – the transformation of a free phrase into a combination of words equivalent functionally to a word. This process is natural as stable phrases are laconic, ready-made and have the meaning that is broader than the sum of the meanings of their components.

There are differences of varying degrees of importance that cause the emergence of non-equivalent lexical units – ethnocultural collocations in particular – containing national-cultural components. The criteria for distinguishing this type of collocations as lexical units are: combinatorial character, complexity, stability, national specificity – well-knownness in the language community, regular recurrence in context.

The national diversity of linguocultures suggests the manifestation of ethnicity in the semantics of the language and is vividly represented in cultural-specific vocabulary, indicating different ways of conceptualizing and their verbalization, so the importance of their study in the combinatorial aspect is beyond controversy.

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