

## A SPECIFIC TYPE OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNIT: THE COLLOCATIONS

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*Collocations are idiosyncratic lexical combinations: they are neither predictable nor deducible from other linguistic signs or from general principles. They represent a category of the phraseological studies and here they are examined within the business discourse. The purpose of the current article is that of providing a wide range of combinatorial lemmas from the business sphere and adding morphosyntactic and semantic explanations with the aim of making reflections on the differences and similarities between the Russian and Italian co-occurrences.*

**Key words:** *collocations, phraseological units, business discourse, Construction Grammar, the Italian language, the Russian language.*

Collocation studies insert themselves into the frameworks of natural language generation (the process of producing meaningful phrases and sentences in the form of natural language), computational lexicography (that automatically identifies the important collocations to be listed in a dictionary entry), parsing (the process of analyzing a string of symbols in natural languages), corpus linguistic research (the study of social phenomena like the reinforcement of cultural stereotypes through language) and teaching of foreign languages. Collocations constitute an open research field, which definition is at the same time controversial. Linguists usually propose two approaches: the first one is the open conception (Firth, 1975; Sinclair, 1966) that defines the collocations as syntactically and semantically compatible word bindings. The second one, the tight conception, examines instead the collocations as linguistic phenomena named phraseologisms that find themselves in the middle in the continuum between free combinations and idiomatic expressions, therefore they are often defined half-fixed expressions [Berišić 2017]

At this point it is significant to provide a definition of phraseologism: it is a sequence of words called phraseological units, phraseologisms, word combinations, idioms, phrasemes, set phrases, lexical bundles, multiword expressions, lexical chunks that constitute the phraseology, the set of the “ready-to-use” phrases, “prefabs” of a language. However, this discipline has widened itself across the years: it does not study only the idiomatic expressions,

but embraces also the word combinations and, consequently, the collocations [Ramusino Mollica 2019: 145–146].

Collocations represent co-occurrences of words used together in the discourse. In the British linguistics of the 1950s (associated with the names of Firth, Halliday and Sinclair) the way words combine was explained with two principles, as above mentioned: the open-choice principle and the idiom principle. The first one represents the assumption that practically each position in a clause offers a choice, while, the second one refers to the available large number of semi-pre-constructed phrases that constitute single choices for the language users. In using the language, the speakers alternate between the open-choice and the idiom principle [Erman Warren 2000: 30]. Within the study of collocations, the second principle can be considered the most appropriate one, since the collocations are one of the phraseological phenomena that better illustrate the functioning of the idiomatic principle.

Collocations are characterised by limited compositionality, which is the feature that allows the meaning of a natural language expression to be predicted from the meaning of the inner constituent parts. Collocations are not fully compositional in that there is usually a connotation or an added element of meaning that cannot be predicted from the parts. Another criterion that characterizes the collocations is non-substitutability: it is not possible to substitute near-synonyms for the components of a collocation. In addition to these two criteria, there exists the non-modifiability: many collocations cannot be freely modified with additional lexical material or through grammatical transformations.

The form of collocations is difficult to predict, therefore, the Construction Grammar arose from the need to find a theoretical model that was adequate to describe the phraseological-type units. The Construction Grammar (hereafter CxG) is a linguistic theory that focuses on the idea of language as a continuum between lexicon and grammar. CxG investigates the so-called constructions; that is, pairings of form and meaning, which can be of varying complexity (morphemes, words, syntactic patterns, etc.) and present differing degrees of abstraction/concreteness (for example, non-lexically specified syntactic patterns vs. fixed idiomatic expressions) [Goldberg 2006: 5–6]. About this theory, Fillmore/Kay/O'Connor (1988) proposed that it should include the entire linguistic scenario for a speaker to fully understand and produce a potentially infinite number of linguistic locutions and use them in a competent and efficient way.

Researchers have collected the phraseological units in electronic corpora or databases that are particularly useful alongside the monolingual, bilingual and specialised dictionaries. The databases have contributed to giving quantitative criteria to the semantic-syntactic approach of the research in the field of collocations. Through them it has been possible to identify with certainty which words occur regularly together on the basis of the frequency principle. One of

the projects based on corpora is the “Multilingual Phraseology”, financed by the University of Milan and that involves other universities, such as the University of Roma Tre and the University Heinrich Heine University of Düsseldorf [Benigni Ramusino Mollica Schafroth: 282]. The database is implemented starting from the onomasiological principle: the most representative phraseological units of a given semantic field are presented and thoroughly described.

Collocations are intermediate forms between the ‘phrasemes’ / ‘set phrases’ and the ‘free phrases’: they are thus also called ‘semi-phrasemes’ and they are opaque forms in which one of the components maintains its literal meaning while the other tends to be used metaphorically. Collocations have contributed to broaden the phraseological studies and have encouraged the establishment of syntactical tests (of substitution, inversion, focalization, isolation, passivization, etc.) and of semantic criteria (non-compositionality, desemanticization of the constituents, capacity to designate conceptual units), allowing phraseologisms to be distinguished in a strict sense from similar constructions [Benigni Ramusino Mollica Schafroth: 277].

In the present article, the Russian and Italian collocations in the business communication sphere are provided and compared. The translation from one language to another is particularly significant to determine whether we are dealing with a collocation or with similar constructions. The linguistic examination is structured on the semantic, grammatical, synonymic, etymological levels. In particular, it refers to the composition of components (base and collocate and subsequently, verb + noun, adjective + noun), the derivation of nouns from verbs, the use of prepositions, the semantic-conceptual aspect and the phenomenon of monocolocability.

According to the component composition there are several groups of collocations, one of these is the verbal phraseologism, such as *достигнуть договоренности* (*raggiungere un accordo*), *довести до сведения* (*portare a conoscenza*), *принять во внимание* (*prendere in considerazione*), *открыть филиал* (*aprire una filiale*), *контролировать работу* (*monitorare il lavoro*), *контролировать производственный процесс* (*monitorare il processo di produzione*), *заниматься вопросами* (*occuparsi delle questioni*), *возглавлять компанию* (*dirigere la compagnia*), *рекламировать фирму* (*pubblicizzare l'azienda*), *подтверждать заказ* (*confermare l'ordine*), *собирать информацию* (*raccogliere le informazioni*), *обсуждать дела* (*discutere le questioni*), *увеличить товарооборот* (*aumentare il giro d'affari*), *построить новый завод* (*costruire una nuova fabbrica*), *начать активную рекламную кампанию* (*avviare un'attiva campagna pubblicitaria*), *предложить работу* (*offrire un lavoro*), *забронировать номер* (*prenotare una stanza*), *подтверждать участие* (*confermare la partecipazione*), *составить опросный лист* (*organizzare un questionario*). However, the main focus is on *принять во внимание* - *prendere in considerazione* where the Russian language

prefers the term *внимание* (*attention*), while the Italian one *considerazione* (*consideration*). In Russian, however, there exists one verb that includes in itself the concept of consideration: *рассматривать*.

In the business communication, some stable verb combinations constitute a style-forming feature; indeed instead of a combination, one verb is preferred. It is interesting at this point to underline the following support verb constructions. They are characterized by the presence of a verb and a nominal object: the verb only conveys the grammatical information, while the object bears the main lexical meaning. Some examples are: *оказать содействие – поспособствовать* (*prestare supporto – contribuire*), *провести анализ – проанализировать* (*condurre un'analisi – analizzare*), *осуществить выплаты – выплатить* (*effettuare un pagamento – pagare*), *принять участие – участвовать* (*partecipare*), *давать гарантию – гарантировать* (*dare una garanzia – garantire*). In these examples, we can notice that Russian and Italian function in the same way: they use both collocations and simple verbs; the only example that is an exception is *принять участие – участвовать* (*partecipare*), where the Italian language prefers the simple lexeme. Indeed, it is rather uncommon to find the correspondent form of *принять участие*, which literally means 'prendere una partecipazione'.

Sometimes the substitution from support verb constructions to lemmas is not even possible like in *провести мероприятие* (*condurre un evento*), *принять меры* (*prendere le misure*), *занять должность* (*ricoprire la carica*), *установить порядок* (*stabilire l'ordine*), *возложить контроль* (*incaricare del controllo*). Between the two groups, that of verbal phraseologisms and that of verbs replacing the combination, researchers attribute to the sphere of the phraseological units only the verbal-nominal combinations that cannot be replaced with one word [Guseva 2014: 151]. Moreover, the Russian collocation *возложить контроль* requires a different construction as respect to the Italian equivalent *incaricare del controllo*. Indeed, the two full constructions are *возложить контроль на кого-то* and *incaricare qualcuno del controllo*: in Russian the preposition precedes somebody and in Italian it precedes the control. The meaning is the same: to charge somebody with the control of something.

The composition of the collocations is not only of the type 'verb+noun', but it can be also of the type 'adjective+noun'. The Russian language adopts the 'adjective+noun' structure in the following combinations: *бартерная сделка* (*affare di baratto*), *именная акция* (*azione nominativa*), *ценная бумага* (*valore mobiliare*), *некачественный товар* (*articolo scadente*), *договорный срок* (*termine contrattuale*), *фирменный знак* (*marchio registrato*), *корпоративная культура* (*cultura aziendale*), *организационная структура* (*struttura organizzativa*), *малое предприятие* (*piccola impresa*), *мелкий производитель* (*piccolo produttore*), *крупный инвестор* (*grande investitore*), *крупное производство* (*grande produzione*); *гибкие цены* (*costi flessibili*),

*мягкая валюта (valuta debole), устойчивый курс (corso stabile), прямой налог (imposta diretta), прямой обмен (cambio diretto), транспортный отдел (ufficio di trasporto), визитная карточка (biglietto da visita), рекламное агентство (agenzia pubblicitaria), главный инженер (capo ingegnere), финансовый директор (direttore finanziario), главный технолог (capo tecnologo), производственный отдел (ufficio di produzione), рабочий телефон (telefono aziendale), домашний телефон (telefono fisso), сотовый телефон (cellulare), розничная цена (prezzo al dettaglio), рабочий день (giorno lavorativo), выходной день (giorno festivo), ежедневное совещание (riunione giornaliera), текущие дела (problemi di attualità), резкое снижение / повышение (calo / aumento brusco), резкий рост (crescita brusca), экспортный товар (merce d'esportazione), импортный / привозной товар (merce d'importazione), металлургическая продукция (produzione metallurgica), мировой рынок (mercato globale), рабочее место (posto di lavoro), химическая продукция (produzione chimica), деловая корреспонденция (corrispondenza d'affari), генеральный менеджер (manager generale), организационный комитет (comitato organizzativo), компьютерный отдел (dipartimento informatico), гарантийный срок (termine di garanzia), опросный лист (questionario), копировальный аппарат (copiatrice), рекламное объявление (annuncio pubblicitario), посадочный талон (carta d'imbarco), паспортный контроль (controllo passaporti).*

It is possible to notice the equivalence one-to-one in almost all examples. Figurativeness is as well evident in combinations such as *мелкий производитель (piccolo produttore)* and *крупный инвестор (grande investitore)* where both languages share the use of the adjectives 'small' and 'big' to characterize the producer or the investor in terms of goods. Differences arises in such collocations as *домашний телефон (telefono fisso)* and *текущие дела (problemi di attualità)*. In the first example, in Russian the adjective derives from the term *дом (casa, home)*, but in Italian it is translated with *fisso (неподвижный, immovable)*; however, the Italian form *telefono di casa* can be as well accepted, while the Russian one *неподвижный телефон* cannot. In the second example, the adjective *текущий* has the function of adjective and participle and it comes from the verb *течь (scorrere, flow)*; thus, *текущие дела* literally means 'flowing business' and brings a highly figurative meaning. As far as *выходной день (giorno festivo)* concerns, the adjective *выходной* derives from the verb *выходить (uscire)*, so literally it is a 'day that goes out', because it usually relates to the last days of the week that figuratively go out of the week days. In Italian the adjective *festivo (праздничный, festive)* is preferred. In addition, in Russian we can find also a fusion of the adjective + noun as it happens in *организационный комитет* that changes in *оргкомитет* and in Italian this does not verify. At the end, some

collocations are collocations only in Russian, in Italian one term is necessary: *опросный лист* (*questionario*) and *копировальный аппарат* (*copiatrice*).

Moreover, the so-called speech standards are included in the phraseology of the official business style. They are a different category from the collocation, because they constitute clichés. Clichés are stereotypical expressions reproducible in typical speech contexts and situations that contribute to the composition of documents. Some of the examples are *в установленном порядке* (*secondo l'ordine stabilito*), *в соответствии с решением* (*in accordo con la decisione*), *согласно постановлению* (*secondo la delibera*), *в связи с нашей предыдущей договоренностью...* (*in relazione al nostro precedente accordo*), *с целью улучшения качества наших изделий...* (*con lo scopo di migliorare la qualità dei nostri prodotti*), *согласно нашему договору...* (*secondo il contratto*), *с благодарностью подтверждаем получение Вашего...* (*ringraziandoLa, confermiamo di aver ricevuto il Suo...*) [Guseva 2014: 151]. Standard linguistic formulas can be as well found in the business correspondence: *в ответ на Ваше письмо* (*in risposta alla Sua/Vostra lettera/mail*), *как и договаривались* (*come da accordi*), *в соответствии с Вашей просьбой* (*in riferimento alla Sua/Vostra richiesta*), *сообщаю / сообщаем Вам следующее* (*con la presente si comunica quanto segue*), *высылаю в приложение* (*invio in allegato*).

In the Russian formal business style a wide number of fixed combinations is constructed with nouns derived from verbs; however, in Italian the verb is in some cases preferred, also because it is possible to nominalise an infinitive: *проведение анализа* (*condurre un'analisi*), that literally is 'la conduzione di un'analisi', but in Italian the variant with the verb is preferred and it can be also used with the function of a noun 'il condurre un'analisi'), *ход эксперимента* (*lo svolgimento dell'esperimento*), *достижение договоренности* (*raggiungere un accordo*, that literally is 'il raggiungimento di un accordo', but also in this case the variant with the verb is preferred), *оказание помощи* (*coдействия*) (*concedere un aiuto or un supporto*, that literally is 'la concessione di un aiuto'), *лишение свободы* (*privazione della libertà*). Furthermore, there is a group of combinations, formed by nouns derived from verbs with the prefix *-не*, such as *неисполнение обязанностей* (*trasgressione degli obblighi*). Those components are really fundamental in the business communication because they give uniqueness to the texts [Guseva 2014: 151].

The main difference between the Russian and Italian languages is the use of prepositions and cases. Indeed among the lexical-phraseological characteristics of the business communication there are combinations that need prepositions. For example: *гарантия (чего?) успеха* (*garanzia di successo*), where the Russian language does not use any preposition, but only the genitive case, while the Italian language makes use of the preposition *di*. *Гарантия (в чем?) в этом деле* (*garanzia in questo affare*): both languages use the prepositions and Russian adds the appropriate case used with the preposition *в*,

which is the prepositional case. *Гарантия (на что?) на телевизор (garanzia sul televisore)*: also in this case the two languages adopt prepositions. In addition, in Russian, the variant without the prepositions is sometimes possible: indeed it is possible to say both *меры по воздействию (предупреждению, поощрению)* and *меры воздействия (предупреждения, поощрения)*: the first example adopts the preposition *по*, while the second one uses the genitive case. In Italian those forms can be translated both with and without prepositions: *misure di impatto, misure preventive (or misure di prevenzione), misure di incentivazione*. Moreover, in Russian there exist two different prepositions used for the same construction, while in Italian the correspondent form is only one: *отправить на рассмотрение* and *отправить для рассмотрения (inviare per la revisione)*; *в целях повышения...* and *с целью повышения...* (*per aumentare*); *в адрес* and *по адресу (all'indirizzo)*. As far as the last two examples concern, *в целях повышения* underlines the general aim orientation, while *с целью* specifies the aim of the action; *по адресу* is a form used rather in the oral speech [Roljak 2013: 110].

Some terms do not have an independent meaning, they exist only within a collocation *оказать — помощь, содействие, поддержку, услугу (concedere un aiuto, un appoggio, un sostegno, un servizio)*; *заключить (расторгнуть) — договор, контракт, сделку (stipulare / rescindere un accordo, un contratto, concludere un affare)*. It is interesting to underline the Italian collocation *concludere un affare* that, unlike the Russian language, uses a different verb (*concludere*) from the previous one (*rescindere*). The choice is very strict and the two occurrences combine together in the speech, so that the verb *concludere* will always be in relation to the noun *affare* and the verb *rescindere* with the nouns *accordo* and *contratto*.

The semantically autonomous term within the collocation is called base. The other element is the collocate that can exist only in relation to a base [Hausmann 1989: 191–192]. One example is the Italian locution *rogare un contratto (составлять договор)*, where *contratto* can function without the collocate, while *rogare* needs a base to fully realise its meaning, that can be *legge, atto* apart from *contratto*. Indeed, the gap between the use of verbs in Italian and Russian is here deep: the Italian verb *rogare* is more specific and context-related than the Russian one. The collocate *rogare* is thus the unpredictable part of the collocation.

At this point, the difference between collocations and multiword expressions arises: the first ones are fixed structures only from the paradigmatic point of view, while the latter are cohesive from the paradigmatic and syntagmatic perspectives. This means that in the multiword expressions it is not possible to apply syntactic modifications, such as passive constructions and modifiers. Bisetto defines the multiword expressions as the result of a process of lexicalization that gives a non-compositional meaning to the construction [Bisetto 2004: 36]. One example is *conferenza stampa (пресс-конференция)*,

which is not a type of conference. The distinctive autonomous characteristic of the multiword expressions is that they insert themselves in technical-specialized language sectors.

Furthermore, it is possible to identify types of collocations with a semantic-conceptual aspect. The first one is a collocation with a polysemic collocate that undergoes semantic modifications as regards the original meaning (usually it happens through a process of metaphorization). It is the case of *умаб-квартура* (*quartier generale*) that is not a district, but rather a place where all main functions of an organizations are coordinated (*headquarters*). The second one is the set of collocations with a semantically vague collocate that shows a limited intensity like *mettere in risalto* (*подчеркнуть*). Those two forms do not have any correspondence, as in Italian *mettere in risalto* has a combinatorial feature. The third one is represented by those collocations that confine with free combinations: they admit no more than one specific collocate, such as in *datore di lavoro* (*работодатель*) where a synonym of *lavoro* (*job*) such as *incarico* is not admitted.

As far as *mettere in risalto* concerns, Čermák underlines the concept of mono-collocability, term that refers to an extremely restricted collocation instead of the unique collocation as it is supposed to think. The mono-collocable words are in general defined through formal and semantic criteria. From a formal point of view, they are words that appear within a lexical fixed combination and therefore they cannot be used outside it. From the semantic perspective, they are instead characterised by a lack of an autonomous or independent meaning [Konecny 2018: 62]. This is the case of *risalto* that can exist only combined to the verb *mettere* and the preposition *in*. Another case of mono-collocability is represented by loan words from other languages. They can be Anglicism as in *part-time* or Latinisms with the form of adverbial locution as *in primis*, where the second term is interpreted as mono-collocable since the preposition *in* exists as well in the Italian language. However, loan words should not be considered as single words, but as unique lexeme.

In order to consult the collocations in the dictionaries it is necessary to search for the lemma (base or collocate) beneath which the collocation is registered. The collocations are usually presented beneath the lemma of the base, but sometimes they are found beneath the collocate. For consultation purposes, it would be better to insert systematically the collocation beneath both the base and the collocate, and in case this would not be possible, it would be opportune to insert references among the various entries of the dictionary. Moreover, the monolingual dictionaries do not include metalinguistic interpretations, examples or information about the collocation usage, thus it is difficult for non-native speakers to consult them. Collocations should be highlighted or separated in dictionaries, because the non-native speakers could not recognize them immediately and could then have difficulties at the level of production.



As concerns the bilingual dictionaries, many lexicographers consider sufficient to insert the collocation either beneath the base or the collocate and use references. One lack of the bilingual dictionaries is that they should properly indicate the information on the semantic and morphosyntactic characteristics of a given collocation. For example, they should specify the use of cases, of prepositions, of singular / plural forms, the grammatical links and the possibility of word conversion which constitute the most common mistakes in the transfer from one language to another.

To conclude, at the lexicography level the notion of collocation implies a binary structure 'base+collocate', constituted by verbs, nouns and adjectives. The main languages involved in the analysis of collocations have been Italian and Russian. The verbal variant is predominant in the business discourse, since a wide number of collocations are combined with verbs and are as well derived from them. Importance has been given to the similarities between the two languages as regards the substitution of a collocation with a support verb construction. However, the two languages present dissimilarities in the collocation structure as regards, for instance, the replacement of the functions of the articles with the case, the use of prepositions and the choice of lexicon.

The main difficulty that learners can find is the translation from one language to another. In particular, the meaning of a collocation can be more opaque in the phase of production and less opaque in that of comprehension. The collocation competence creates difficulties when there is no equivalent between the source language and the target language (and this happens above all with support verb constructions), when the collocations in the two languages do not correspond and when there are equivalent forms, but they are apparent and actually their meanings are different.

The variety of the phraseological spectrum has been also analysed and it involves, alongside the collocations, the multiword expressions and the clichés, which are very similar to the collocations for their structure.

The analysis is doubtlessly interesting for future investigations on other lemmas of other language sectors, the way they combine and their structure. The collocation competence is crucial in building up the discourse of specialized fields, where the knowledge of the appropriate language is necessary to produce a natural and efficient text.

The collocation studies can be also deepened in the didactic practice through explicit and implicit methodologies that respectively encourage the learners to translate the phrase and consult specific collocation dictionaries.

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