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DEFINING AN ADJECTIVE BY MEANS OF ITS GRAMMATICAL COLLOCATORS

Abstract: *The collocational method pioneered by the author and followed in his works for years reveals that even grammatical words such as prepositions and some conjunctions (that), as well as grammatical categories (the infinitive) when collocating with adjectives can lead to semantic definitions of adjectives. In the paper the process for achieving this goal has been exemplified by the adjective pleased.*

Key words: *collocation, adjective, preposition, semantic definition.*

Introduction

There are three types of grammatical collocations with prepositions, and they are all complex, consisting of three members:

- (1) verb + preposition + noun, e.g. *think of past, account for behaviour, throw [ball] at boy*
- (2) adjective + preposition + noun, e.g. *angry with parent, keen on mathematics*
- (3) noun + preposition + noun, e.g. *pack of wolves, book on table, interest in poetry*

In several articles the present author has used his collocational method to demonstrate the way collocates (lexical words that make collocation) interweave, the meaning of a collocator (the attached lexeme) elucidating the meaning of a node (the other member of a collocation; Хлебџ 2002, 2003, Hlebec, 2008a, 2008 b, 2011a, 2011b). In an article on Serbian language (Hlebec 2008c), we demonstrated that well-chosen definitions of grammatical patterns (grammatical collocations) can produce definitions of the verbs that use these patterns. In another paper submitted to *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, Poland, in January 2015 and accepted for publication in April 2015, we defined a few performative verbs in terms of prepositional definitions. One paper dealt with defining the personal pronoun *it* by studying its behaviour in lexical and grammatical collocations, with its pragmatic properties added (Hlebec 2013). The aim of the

present article is to show that adjectives that profusely collocate with prepositions can base their definitions largely or solely on the definitions of the collocating prepositions. As an illustration of this principle the adjective *pleased* has been adduced.

Defining some grammatical words and categories

As Hanks (2013: 288) observes,

[m]ost prepositions are maximally complex. It is something of a mystery that native speakers manage to acquire and use everyday words of such complexity naturally and conventionally, while foreign learners have such difficulty with them. Two possible lines of inquiry suggest themselves; either there is some underlying generalisation (a set of subcategorisation rules, perhaps?) governing their idiomatic usage, or more probably these words are not learned independently at all, but only as components of phraseology associated with other, less frequent words.

Our stance is that the trick of mastering the use of prepositions is in the unconscious acquisition of the semantic class of the so-called lexical words as collocators of prepositions. By repeating the same process consciously, the collocational method can bring to light definitions of prepositions. Hanks reminds us of Halliday's "slot-and-filler grammar", according to which the preposition *at* is used with numbers of hours as a paradigm of "fillers" in the slot of *at ___ o'clock*. This view is not much altered if *1, 2, 3 ... 12 o'clock*

phrases are treated as collocators of *at*. However, in this case the number of collocators should be increased to include a much broader category of 'time event viewed as a point (as having no parts)'. This brings us to the definition of this sememe of *at* as: <sth being/doing when «time event viewed as a point» exists>. For example, *I get up at 8 o'clock. The rocks were exposed at low tide. At his death, he was a general. We sleep at night. I met him at dinner. He is poor at present. Ann walked five hours at a stretch. at the beginning; meet at midday.* Thus the noun phrase NUMBER + o'clock comes to be seen as one of the nouns such as *noon, midnight, tide, death, night, lunch, present, beginning, end*, which convey time events as points, indivisible wholes without parts, something like the use of the privative verbs *know, believe, desire, like* etc., which require the non-progressive aspect of simple tenses.

In our notation, definitions of prepositions contain a pair of double angle brackets « » to indicate prepositional objects. Underlined words within these definitions stand for elements that can directly replace the preposition in the given collocation. The semes preceding the underlined seme match the words in front of the preposition. Thus, in the definition of *about* (see below) applied to the collocation *adamant about staying*, 'sb experiences mental phenomenon' corresponds to *adamant*, 'concerning' can replace *about*, while '«sth»' matches *staying*. Braces are used for 'typical', i.e. for variant but important semes.

To take an example illustrating the issue under discussion, the adjective *pleased* can be defined by combining the individual definitions of the collocable prepositions *about, at, for* and *with*, the conjunction *that*, the infinitive with *to* and the semantic effect of the predicate-only position. These function words are illustrated by the following collocations: *pleased + about business/at his success/for passing the exam/for you/with the result/with you/that she has passed the exam/to hear good news.*

As conventional typographic devices, angle brackets < > are used to mark the content of a definition, double angle quotation marks for the noun slot in definitions of prepositions, while the underlined seme refers to the meaning prop-

er of a preposition, i.e. to that part of a definition that can directly replace the preposition.

This overview of prepositional meanings covers only the sememes (lexical meanings) of the grammatical words that collocate with *pleased*.

- (1) *about* <sb experiences mental phenomenon concerning «sth»>¹ examples: *There is something sweet a. the place* = 'sb_{speaker} experiences good mental phenomenon (impression) concerning the place'. *What a. inviting your mother?* = 'What mental phenomenon does sb_{hearer} experience considering inviting sb_{hearer}'s mother?' *Don't worry a. your brother. She is stupid a. money. I feel uneasy a. lending him money;. Aren't you curious a. the results? There is something a. her face that I don't like. There is nothing positive a. walking for five hours. Is there anything a. John that makes you uneasy? angry a. the way he has been treated; adamant a. staying; dispute a. their rights; speculation a. her resignation*
- (2) *at* <sb for short time experiences good - bad emotion because of «phenomenon»> e. g. *He felt deep sorrow at John's death. She rejoiced at his success. He was delighted/elated/happy/thrilled at the thought of being with her. I felt exultant at looking at him. They laughed at his jokes. annoyed/enraged at being disturbed; relieved at news; flattered at being complimented; joy at decision; amazed/amused/angry/appalled/astonished/concerned/disappointed /embarrassed/ furious/humiliated/infuriated/nervous/shocked/surprised/uneasy at her behaviour; mortified at being caught in a lie; her joy at the news; envy at the success; sorrow at having to quit his job; *love (not 'short time') at her child; *pleased at me; *happy at his son (me and son are not states); *sorry (not*

¹ This definition unites the 'talk', 'think' and 'learn' meaning groups of COBUILD Grammar (p.146-149).

- 'emotion') *at having to quit his job/at the mistake*
- (3) *for* <sb experiences {good – bad} mental phenomenon because of «sth»> *The room will look more cheerful f. a spot of paint. famous for beauty; best remembered f. his work; apologise f. insult; tease sb f. being silly; ashamed f. telling lies; disliked f. his arrogance; John was known f. lying. penalty f. littering. I was ashamed/pleased f. you. I feel sorry f. her. ancient Egyptian joy f. the dead; sadness f. the loss*²
- (4) *with* <sb_x experiences good - bad {strong} mental state | when «sb_{x/y}» does (not do) what/when «sth_x» is (not) as | sb_x likes> *They were dumbfounded w. case of illness; He was happy w. his work; Tom was annoyed w. Mary for smoking; Jim was furious w. himself for being late; hesitant w. the tablets; indignant w. the book; indignant w. him for his behaviour; disgusted w. her husband; bored/fed up w. nagging; angry/disappointed/discontented/hesitant/impatient /patient/surprised/upset w. John/sightseeing; disenchanted w. idol/treatment; satisfied w. a new dress, content w. the way things are*
- (5) *that* (conjunction) <sb experiences this thought –concerning– phenomenon: > (Dashes within this definition include meaning proper of a conjunction.) *It is nice t. George did it* (= 'sb_{speaker} experiences this thought concerning event₁ of George doing it, which is known to sb_{hearer} from the situation, which sb_{speaker} is going to EXPRESS as sb_{speaker}'s true: event₁ was nice'); *John is confident/pleased t. she will like him* ('John1 experiences this strong - good thought concerning her liking John1: she will like him')³.
- (6) *to*-infinitive category <sb experiences good - bad | thought concerning/emotion because of | phenomenon> *Bob was satisfied/proud to win the game. Ann was disappointed/sorry/upset to lose the game. John was surprised to have fallen. I was anxious/glad to see her. He was concerned/ worried to hear the news. I'm grateful to be alive* (Bolinger 1977: 147). *She was happy to do it.*

Of course, when collocating with *pleased*, only the seme 'good' of *at, for, with* and *to*-infinitive is activated, while 'bad' as well as and 'not's of *with* are suspended.

Position in a sentence also indicates meaning: the attribute-only position is the evidence of indirect connection, while the predicate-only position indicates 'for a short time' (e. g. *ill/*asleep/ *involved person).

Defining the adjective *pleased*

When combining the definitions above, although they belong in different categories and parts of speech, the definition of *pleased* emerges almost automatically. Since *pleased* takes part in collocations with *feel* (Do you *feel pleased*?), the definition of the verb *feel*, which is in this meaning followed by nouns and adjectives that denote emotions, should also be taken into consideration in order to marshal a complete definition of *pleased*:

- (8) *feel* <sb experiences #emotion#>

In order to make this process easier to survey, we substituted ordinary numbers for the complete definitions (e.g. the seme 'for a short time' occurs in definition (7) for the predicate-only use, and therefore in our definition of *pleased* it is marked as 7, while 2 appears next to 'sb', 'for a short time', 'experience', 'good', 'emotion because of' and 'phenomenon', which all make up the definition of *at*₂):

² A *for*-phrase function as 'experiencer' (Silva/Thompson 1977: 119). When 'sth' in this definition is realised as 'sb', the situation of empathy is involved.

³ Verbs collocating with *that* belong to the THINKING type of Dixon's categorisation (2005: 139 -144).

<#sb _x # who :	for short time :	experiences :	good mental phenomenon _x :	or thought :	
1234568	27	1234568	2346	13	56
concerning / mental state : or emotion : because of sth {phenomenon _y } :					
156	4	268	2346	13	256
when «sb _{y/x} » does what/when «sth _x » is as sb _x likes >					
4					

The part of the definition that uses two bars flanking a slant (... | ... / ... | ...) should be read as: 'good mental phenomenon or good thought concerning sth {phenomenon or state} as well as good mental state or good emotion because of sth {phenomenon or state}'. In the second occurrence of this device the reading is: 'experiences when «sb_{y/x}» does what sb_x likes as well as experiences when «sth_x» is as sb_x likes'. The seme 'sth' (something) includes the seme 'sb' (somebody).

The adjectival function of *pleased* is rendered by the relative pronoun 'who'. In what respect *pleased* differs from its pertainym verb *please* remains to be investigated by the same collocational procedure.

Since there are also collocations such as *pleased expression/laugh/look/smile*, which make indirect connection (see Hlebec 2010: 79-85) we should expand the directive (noun slot) in the definition of *pleased* by 'expression that shows mental phenomenon experienced by'. In this way, the complete definition of *pleased* appears to be:

<#(expression that shows mental phenomenon experienced by) sb_x# who for a short time experiences good | mental phenomenon or thought concerning / mental state or emotion because of | sth {phenomenon – state} that sb_{x/y} experiences | when «sb_{y/x}» does what/when «sth_x» is as | sb_x likes>

A popular version, suited to a dictionary, can be:

People are pleased when they think and feel good because of something that happens to them or to other persons in a way they like it.

Or even terser:

People are pleased when they like what happens to them or to other persons.

Conclusion

This study, which represents just a small segment of the English language, proves that lexis and grammar are interlocked by means of common semes shared by collocating words. The phenomenon exemplified above, of the meaning of one adjective being shaped on the joint meanings of its grammatical collocators, is not exceptional and it is based on the general and fundamental principle of all English words and probably of any language workings. The same conclusion is supported by a similar investigation treating Serbian verbs with a complement in the instrumental case (Hlebec 2008c), as well as a study of some English performative verbs (Hlebec 2015). Prepositions and other grammatical parts of speech, as well as grammar patterns and categories in addition to specific semes that identify them as such, contain in mental lexicon semantic features that are shared by certain lexical words and vice versa. In the chain of words in speech/writing all kinds of parts of speech combine to make sentences observing the law of collocational hooking up. Semantic definitions reached by the collocational method reveal semantic categories that play part in this process of producing oral and written texts.

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ПРИМЈЕР ДЕФИНИСАЊА ПРИДЈЕВА ПОМОЋУ ГРАМАТИЧКИХ КОЛОКАТОРА

Резиме

Након што се колокацијском методом, разрађеном у ранијим ауторовим радовима, дође до семантичких дефиниција неких граматичких ријечи, прије свега приједлога, те и такве дефиниције могу се користити као кључни подаци за утврђивање семантичких дефиниција придјева када ови колоцирају с већим бројем граматичких ријечи. Оваје је тај поступак илустрован придјевом *pleased*. Овај појединачни примјер не може бити никакав изузетак, што потврђује и слично истраживање везано за српски језик (Хлебец 2008с), те служи и као доказ основног начела на коме почива функционисање језичке активности: ријечи се уланчавају захваљујући њиховим заједничким семантичким обиљежјима похрањеним у менталном лексикону.

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