

CURRENT ENGLISH COLLOCATIONS DICTIONARIES

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Since the structure of the English language is to a large extent determined by the existence of fixed lexical combinations which must be learnt by heart and used as ready-made expressions, it is no wonder that, in the realm of EFL/ESL, both linguists and teachers have paid and are currently paying much attention to this area. A specific type of instrument which can boost the teaching and learning of collocations, and, hence, help the foreign language learner produce fluent, natural-sounding text is the dictionary of collocations. This article sets out to draw a comparison of the latest editions of the best known English collocations dictionaries nowadays. Its ultimate objective is to offer the reader a perceptive, informed view of the strengths and weaknesses of each of these works.

INTRODUCTION

Collocations are one of the distinctive features of the English language at a lexical level (see, for example, Palmer, 1933; Firth, 1957; Bolinger, 1976; Sinclair, 1987; 2008; Cowie, 1998; Hoey, 2005, among others). For this reason, in the area of ELT methodology, much emphasis is laid nowadays on the need to promote the learning and teaching of these lexical combinations “through appropriate instructional methodologies, materials, digital resources, and dictionaries” (Ellis, 2008: 9).

Accurate description of this lexical phenomenon has been one of the traditional concerns of the so-called monolingual learners' dictionaries. The latest editions of MLDs (e.g. *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. 3rd edition, 2008; *Collins Cobuild Advanced Dictionary*. 6th edition, 2009; *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*. 5th edition, 2009; *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners*. 2nd edition, 2007; *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. 8th edition, 2010) have considerably enhanced the treatment of collocations, but characteristic limitations still

persist, mainly in terms of degree of detail in the description and lack of systematization (Rizo Rodríguez, 2008; 2010a).

In fact, a good number of metalexicographical studies have discussed the coverage of collocations in printed dictionaries (see, for example, Benson, 1990; Mittmann, 1999; Bogaards, 1999; Siepmann, 2006; 2008; Moon, 2008; Walker, 2009). Other studies (Rizo Rodríguez, 2010a; 2010b), in turn, have focused on the description of collocations in the electronic edition of the five dictionaries mentioned above, which certainly surpass their paper-based counterparts, mainly on account of their storage capacity, customized access to collocations, and powerful searching function.

However, full lexicographical description of collocations definitely requires in-depth, exclusive attention, as advocated by Hausmann (1979; 1989) and Walker (2009: 297).

The Introduction to the *Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English* (2nd ed., 2009) states clearly: “Modern dictionaries are increasingly giving attention to collocations. But

they are still hampered by trying to provide a whole range of information about any word besides its collocations. A collocational dictionary doesn't have to generalize to the same extent: it covers the entire language on a word by word, collocation by collocation basis." (op. cit., p. v).

Our interest in this article is in the latest English collocations dictionaries receiving the widest recognition and showing a good number of learner-driven features:

- *The BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English: Your Guide to Collocations and Grammar*. 3rd edition revised by Robert Ilson. Morton Benson, Evelyn Benson, Robert Ilson (eds.). Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2009. — BBI3.
- *Macmillan Collocations Dictionary for Learners of English*. 1st edition. Michael Rundell (ed.). Oxford: Macmillan, 2010. — MCD
- *Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English*. 2nd edition. Colin McIntosh (ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. — OCD2.

More specifically, we intend to carry out a succinct critical review of the treatment of "lexical collocations" in these three works in order to gain new insights into the strengths and weaknesses of their description. Some contributions from various reviews and studies of these dictionaries will also be considered (Howarth, 2000; Klotz, 2003; Pérez Fernández, 2003: 45-50; 64-90; Walker, 2009; Coffey, 2011; Nurmukhamedov, 2011; Ptaszinsky, 2011).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In accordance with a large number of studies in this area (e.g. Firth, 1957; Hausmann, 1979; Sinclair, 1991; Fontenelle, 1994; Howarth, 1994; Cowie, 1998; Pérez Fernández, 2003; Moreno Jaén, 2009), we understand the term "lexical collocation" (borrowed from BBI3, p. xxxi), as "a statistically-significant, conventional, restricted, arbitrary, idiosyncratic, non-idiomatic co-occurrence of two or more lexical items usually having compositional meaning" (Rizo Rodríguez, 2010a: 113).

In the description which will be undertaken below, we will refer to a well-established typology of lexical collocations in the specialized literature (the item in italics is the "head" and the accompanying one is its "collocate" —Hausmann's (1979: 189) original terms are "base" and "collocatif"):

- a) Verb + *noun*: e.g. "issue a warning", "put up resistance"
- b) *Noun* + verb: e.g. "elephants trumpet", "the news spreads"
- c) Verb + *adverb*: e.g. "rain heavily", "dramatically increase"
- d) Adjective + *noun*: e.g. "formidable challenge", "high regard"
- e) Adverb + *adjective*: e.g. "deeply absorbed", "heavily wooded"
- f) Noun + preposition + *noun*: e.g. "a gust of anger", "a school of whales".

These are basically the types proposed by the authors of *The BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English* in the first edition published in 1986 (pp. xxiv-xxxviii). Subsequent editions of this work (1997; 2009), as well as Hausmann (1989: 1010), maintained the same classification. Howarth's (1994: 216) typology remains very similar, and that is also the case of the one included in the *Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English* (1st ed., 2002; 2nd ed., 2009), which contains some minor additions. This last work, and also the *Dictionary of English Words in Context* (1st ed., 1979), propose a further type of lexical collocation consisting of a verb (as collocate) and a predicative adjective (as head), e.g. "drive someone mad", "rest assured", not contemplated in the BBI, (which we may call "type g"). Paradoxically, however, in this dictionary some adjective entries (like "old" or "sour") include their corresponding verbal collocates (e.g. "grow old" or "turn/go sour"), a clear inconsistency on the part of the authors of the BBI.

Alongside lexical collocations, these authors distinguish "grammatical collocations" (BBI3: xix-xxx), "a phrase consisting of a dominant word (noun, adjective, verb) and a preposition or grammatical structure such as an infinitive or clause." (op. cit., p. xix). In other words, these

are grammatical patterns realized by a noun, an adjective or a verb ruling specific prepositions (e.g. “dependence on”, “fond of”, “rely on”), or by a verb taking specific complementation structures (e.g. “enjoy solving puzzles”). As will be shown below, this dictionary is the only one which systematically covers this area.

DICTIONARY DESCRIPTION

Precedents

As expected, English lexicography boasts a few special-purpose dictionaries specially devoted to collocations. Precursors of current works subject to analysis in this article include (Pérez Fernández, 2003: 64-84): *Dictionary of English Words in Context*, by Friederich and Canavan (1st ed., 1979; 2nd ed., 1983); *Selected English Collocations*, by Kozłowska and Dzierzanowska (1st ed., 1982; 2nd ed., 1993); *English Adverbial Collocations*, by Kozłowska (1991); *LTP Dictionary of Selected Collocations*, a simple adaptation by Hill and Lewis of the two previous works (1997); *The BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English*, by Benson, Benson and Ilson (1st ed., 1986); *A Dictionary of English Collocations*, by Kjellmer (1994); and *Collins Cobuild English Collocations* on CD-Rom (1995).

The three collocations dictionaries under review are well-known, recent references in the area and, as such, they will immediately attract the attention of ELT teachers and advanced students alike. To a considerable extent, the three of them build on a good number of features of previous works, but, if we were to select one of the precursors as seminal, that would no doubt be the first edition of *The BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English*, published in 1986, which acquired wide recognition straightaway on account of its innovative features and outshone the rest of the works mentioned above, less widely known. This dictionary set the pace for subsequent works in various respects: its perceptive, detailed theoretical description of collocations (presented in its excellent Introduction, whose text has remained unchanged in the second and third editions); its ample coverage of the collocations of the core vocabulary of English (clearly surpassing the amount of collocational information provided

by monolingual learners' dictionaries) and its learner-driven character (the BBI was conceived of as an aid to encoding natural English and this is manifest in the internal organization of collocational information according to the senses of a headword, the inclusion of usage notes, example sentences or the semantic groupings of collocates).

After the second edition of the BBI (1997), the *Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English –OCD–* (first edition, 2002) appeared, an innovative reference which represented another forward step in the lexicographical description of collocations. In short, current editions of the BBI (2009), of the OCD (2009), and the *Macmillan Collocations Dictionary for Learners of English* (2010) are clearly based on these precursors.

Comparative study

a. Facts and figures

The three works subject to analysis share some features, as will be shown, but their origin and conception are different. As stated earlier, *The BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English* (3rd ed., 2009), and the *Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English* (2nd ed., 2009) are revised editions of the text of previous works (BBI2, 1997; OCD1, 2002), while the first edition of the *Macmillan Collocations Dictionary for Learners of English* (2010) came out just one year ago and, hence, its design may have been partly influenced by the previous dictionaries. This may entail both positive and negative consequences: while shortcomings of previous editions of other works may have easily been avoided by its compilers, it will surely have been hard to produce a totally innovative description.

Let us begin by examining some general facts and figures of the three works. As shown in Table 1 below, the three of them are fairly similar in their *book size*; this parameter, alongside their *number of pages*, may prove relevant when one starts to appraise them. In this area, certain obvious differences can be perceived: BBI3 is clearly the smallest volume, both in its number of pages (462) and in its size. It is a bit smaller and much thinner than the other two. On the other hand,

	BBI3	MCD	OCD2
Book size	14 x 21.5 cm	15 x 21 cm	15.5 x 23.5 cm
Thickness	2.5 cm	4.5 cm	3.5 cm
Number of pages	xli + 462	xiii + 911	xii + 958 + 21
Typographical resources	+	+++	+++
Number of headwords	18,000	4,500	9,000
Number of word combinations	90,000	121,000	250,000
Corpus-based	—/+	+	+

Table 1: Dictionary facts and figures

the number of pages of MCD and OCD2 are roughly the same (911 and 958, respectively), clearly exceeding BBI3 in this respect. Moreover, they are much thicker, especially MCD, and a bit larger in terms of page dimensions.

An obvious, purely visual, explanation for this difference in size of the three books has to do with the *typography* employed and the layout of the entries: after leafing through a few pages, it soon becomes clear that the text entry of BBI3 is more densely packed than that of MCD and of OCD2 (see Figures 1-3 below). This practice, originating in the first edition of this work (1986) and maintained in the second (1997) and third (2009), may well have contributed to a considerable reduction in the number of pages. Surprisingly, no attempt has been made by the publisher to produce a more modern design in the third edition, but that probably would require a total revision of the entry text on the part of the editor, a task not undertaken in this edition. Moreover, use of colour, bold type for collocates, small capitals, italics and similar devices are absent from BBI3 and that again places this dictionary at a disadvantageous position when compared with the typographical resources characteristic of MCD and OCD2 (see Table 1, where the use of one or more plus signs indicates that each dictionary satisfies a criterion to various degrees). Figures 1-3 below clearly illustrate these points.

Another key element responsible for the abovementioned differences in book size is the *number of headwords* in each dictionary as well as the *total number of collocations* included in its entries. According to the details furnished by each work, differences are considerable. BBI2, on its front cover, boasts 18,000 entries and 90,000

collocations; its third edition does not explicitly provide any figures, but it can be assumed that, at least, it features a similar number of entries and collocations. Curiously enough, the Preface to the third edition is scarcely informative with respect to the innovations introduced; we simply know that the text is “20 to 25 % larger” (op. cit. p. ix) and that there are more examples and more detailed usage notes (p. viii). The MCD’s back cover, in turn, claims that this dictionary contains “collocations for over 4,500 carefully-selected key words”, and, according to Coffey (2011: 328), 121,000 collocations. Finally, OCD2 includes “9,000 nouns, verbs and adjectives” and “250,000 word combinations” (back cover).

Several conclusions may be drawn from these figures. First, the macrostructure (i.e. the list of entries) of BBI3 is the largest of the three works (18,000), although, its total number of pages indicates that the treatment of collocations must evidently be less detailed than in the other works, thus, its number of collocations —90,000— is clearly below the rest. Secondly, the macrostructure of MCD —4,500 key words— is a bit scanty if compared with that of BB3 and OCD2 —9,000. Various searches have clearly proved that point. On the positive side, however, the user will find a wealth of information about these 4,500 headwords, judging by the total number of collocations included (121,000) and its 911 pages. Thirdly, there are more collocational details in OCD2 than in the other dictionaries —250,000 word combinations. This can be amply demonstrated by referring to Figures 1-3.

Another feature that establishes clear differences between the three works is their *corpus support*. Both MCD and OCD2 have been compiled

using the evidence from massive corpora (a 1.6-billion word corpus in the case of MCD and the 2-billion word *Oxford English Corpus* in the case of OCD2). This is a common practice nowadays in dictionary compilation, and, in the case of OCD2, it has enabled its compilers “to include information about American English on an equal footing with British English” (op. cit., p. iv). Unfortunately, BBI3 is definitely obsolete in this respect since its collocations come from “the authors’ intuition” (an outdated practice today, strongly criticized by Ptaszynski, 2011: 147), although they insist that their “task is eased not only by the availability of corpora of contemporary English (such as the British National Corpus [a 100-million word corpus]) but also by the amazing resource of the Internet itself” (op. cit., p. viii). In short, the main source of the information is the lexicographer’s introspection supported by some corpus evidence. In this respect, BBI3 definitely lags behind the others and a more explicit explanation about how the material was gathered would be welcome, as Howarth (2000: 53) rightly notes.

b. Microstructure features

One of the most obvious indications of the debt of BBI3 with its previous editions is the *design of its entries*. On close inspection, it has been found that it is practically identical to that of its 1996 and 1997 editions. The addition to the entry text of new collocates or more example sentences characteristic of BBI3 has not gone hand in hand

with a new entry layout. In this respect BBI3 proves slightly out-of-date and less learner-driven than MCD and OCD2. The two latter dictionaries feature a good number of elements in their entries which make them more adapted to the user.

As can be seen in Figures 1-3 below, there are substantial differences between BBI3 and the other two dictionaries. Entries in BBI3 contain a lot of collocational information but it is densely packed and this is deliberately sought by the compilers (as they admit on page xxxvi): there is no room for internal divisions leading to generous spacing and to bulleted, numbered or indented paragraphs for the morphological, syntactic, and semantic classification of collocates. Instead, the run-on lines used have been designed as a space-saving recourse. Admittedly, BBI3 entries show some internal organization, as can be seen below: the reader will notice the use of divisions headed by figures (1., 2., 3., 4., etc.) which capture the so-called “collocational strings” (op. cit., p. xxxvi), a series of collocations of a headword organized according to some semantic criteria not made totally explicit by the compiler; in each string collocates are listed alphabetically. The shortcoming, however, is that it is hard for users to find their way in this vast, apparently unordered, concentration of text. Moreover, the Spartan typographical resources used also hamper look-up operations: as was noted earlier, no use is made of colour printing, bold type for collocates, italics for example sentences or small capitals to highlight the morphology of collocates.

	BBI3	MCD	OCD2
Learner-driven entry design and components	+	+++	+++
Sense divisions	+	+	+
Semantically-organized collocates	+	+	+
Definition of semantic sets of collocates	—	+	—
Separation of synonymous and non-synonymous collocates	+	—	+
Morphological characterization of collocates and specification of syntactic type of collocation	—	+	+
Example sentences	+	+++	++++
Detailed coverage of grammatical collocations	+	—	—
Entries including collocates only (not heads)	+	—	+
Collocates as entries	—	+	—

Table 2: Microstructure features

authority *n.* ["control"] ["power"] 1. to assert, demonstrate, show; assume; establish; delegate; exercise, exert, use, wield; have; invoke ~ 2. to give up, relinquish, yield ~ 3. to challenge, defy; deny, reject; rebel against; undermine; usurp ~ 4. absolute, complete, full, supreme, unquestioned ~ 5. parental ~ 6. ~ for; over (he assumed ~ for overseas operations; a commanding officer has complete ~ over her personnel) 7. in; with; without ~ (who was in ~?) 8. of ~ (a figure, man, woman of ~; there was an air of ~ about her) 9. under smb.'s ~ (these employees are under my ~) ["legal power"] ["authorization"] 10. to abuse, overstep one's ~ 11. legal; ministerial; presidential; reviewing (mil.); royal ~ 12. by, on smb.'s ~ ("by whose ~ were these funds spent?" "she did it on her own ~") 13. the ~ to + inf. (the police had the ~ to conduct a search; a commanding officer with the ~ to send troops into battle) 14. (misc.) a position of ~ (I am in a position of ~ over these employees) ["expert"] ["source"] 15. to cite, invoke an ~ 16. an acknowledged; appropriate, competent, reliable; indisputable, irrefutable, unimpeachable, unquestioned; leading, respected, world ~; the greatest living ~ 17. an ~ on (an outstanding ~ on chess) 18. on ~ (to have smt. on good ~; we have it on the highest ~ that the meeting has been cancelled) ["government office"] 19. health; local authorities; an airport; a port ~; school authorities

Figure 1: Entry for "authority" in BBI3

authority *N***1** an expert

- **adj+N** acknowledged, foremost, leading, respected, ultimate, world *The author is a leading authority on all forms of motorcycle sport.*

2 a public organization with the power to make decisions

- **adj+N** local, municipal, public, regional *Ms Lakeberg worked as a part-time teacher for the regional authority.*
- **n+N** thing the organization is responsible for broadcasting, education, funding, health, highways, housing, immigration, planning, police, transport *The local education authority deals with applications for school places.*
- ▶ place controlled airport, city, district, hospital, university *City authorities across the country are being forced to cut their budgets.*

3 the power and right to do something

- **adj+N** complete absolute, complete, supreme *He said that he was giving Richardson absolute authority in handling the investigation.*
- ▶ types of authority judicial, legal, moral *If another person completes the form on your behalf, they must have the legal authority to do so.*
- **v+N** give or have authority delegate, devolve, give, grant, have, hold *Education policy is an area where authority is devolved to local municipalities.* • *He did not have the authority to sign the agreement.*
- ▶ use authority assert, exercise, exert *The new Kaiser was determined to assert his authority.*
- ▶ weaken or question authority challenge, question, undermine *Government intervention can undermine the authority of teachers.*

Figure 2: Entry for "authority" in MCD

authority *noun***1** (often **authorities**) people with responsibility for making decisions

ADJ. central, district, federal, local, municipal, regional | government, public | civil, civilian, military, religious, secular | education, health, housing, immigration, law enforcement, planning (BrE), regulatory, tax ◊ *The government is urging education authorities to spend less money.* ◊ *the right of law enforcement authorities to take and retain photographs* | appropriate, competent, proper, relevant, statutory ◊ *He had permission from the proper authorities.*

VERB + AUTHORITY alert, contact, inform, notify ◊ *The system notifies the authorities when a security breach occurs.*

AUTHORITY + VERB agree sth, claim sth, decide sth, deny sth, promise sth, recommend sth ◊ *The health ~ denied negligence.* | allow (sb) sth, approve sth, give (sb) sth, grant (sb) sth ◊ *The local ~ has not granted planning permission.* | refuse (sb) sth ◊ *Immigration authorities refused him entry to the country.* | arrest sb, detain sb, seize sb/sth ◊ *German authorities arrested the author of the computer virus.*

2 power/right to give orders

ADJ. absolute, complete, full | highest, supreme, ultimate ◊ *The commander-in-chief exercises supreme ~ within his zone.* | constitutional, governmental, judicial, legal, political, presidential, regulatory | divine, religious ◊ *These men denied the divine ~ of the Church.* | parental | moral | lawful, legitimate ◊ *He acted without any legitimate ~.*

VERB + AUTHORITY have, possess ◊ *Parents have the ~ to discipline their children.* | assume ◊ *He assumed full ~ as tsar in 1689.* | give sb, grant sb | assert, demonstrate, establish, exercise, exert, show, use, wield ◊ *The new manager obviously felt the need to demonstrate her ~.* | lack | delegate, transfer | cede, give up, relinquish | abuse, exceed, overstep ◊ *Some legal experts think the agency may have exceeded its ~.* | accept, recognize, respect | challenge, defy, deny, question, rebel against, reject, undermine ◊ *She had challenged my ~ once too often.* | usurp

AUTHORITY + NOUN figure ◊ *adult ~ figures such as parents and teachers*

PREP. in ~ ◊ *I need to talk to someone in ~.* | under the ~ of ◊ *Border security will fall under the ~ of the department.* | without ~ ◊ *He took the car without ~.* | ~ over ◊ *He refuses to relinquish ~ over the design process.*

PHRASES an air of ~ ◊ *He bore an air of ~.* | a position of ~ ◊ *She holds a position of ~ in the local church.*

3 person with special knowledge

ADJ. foremost, leading, respected, world

VERB + AUTHORITY cite, invoke ◊ *He justified his innovation by citing respected authorities.*

Figure 3: Entry for "authority" in OCD2

In this area, MCD and OCD2 are definitely more learner-driven, easier to handle, in that the internal divisions in each entry are ordered in accordance with explicit criteria (as will be explained below) and a quick glance is enough for the user to be able to scan the information provided.

A characteristic complexity of English lexical collocations is that the collocate term, apart from being idiosyncratic and arbitrary, largely depends on the meaning of its head (Pérez Fernández, 2003: 589-592). For that reason, lexicographical



Figure 4: Entry extract for "competition" in MCD

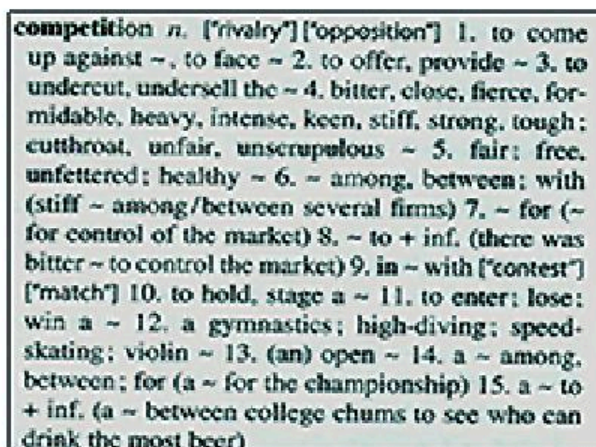


Figure 5: Entry for "competition" in BBI3

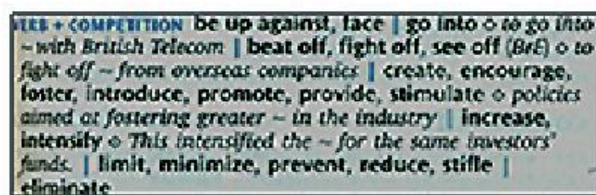


Figure 6: Entry extract for "competition" in OCD2

description must clearly show this association. Hence, it is of utmost importance that dictionary entries should draw clear *distinction of senses* (or meanings) of polysemous words. Thus, the entry for the noun "authority" in Figure 2 above shows a three-fold internal division (which in turn will ultimately determine the presentation of collocational information): "1. an expert; 2. a public organization with the power to

make decisions; 3. the power and right to do something". This practice is followed by the three dictionaries, but, as can be seen in Figures 1-3, sense divisions are more clearly marked in MCD and OCD2 than in BBI3, where the publisher just intersperses indications in square brackets in inverted commas. These explanations may simply go unnoticed by the user.

A parallel feature deriving from the previous one is the organization of collocates attending to the meanings of the head. *Semantically-organized collocates* (or "semantic sets" of collocates – Coffey: 2011: 331) thus greatly facilitate look-up operations: the reader can quickly scan the entry for the collocates matching a specific meaning of the headword. For example, the noun "authority" in Figure 3 takes adjectives like "complete" or "absolute" as collocates when it means "power/right to give orders"; by contrast, when its meaning is "person with special knowledge", its adjectival collocates include "leading" or "respected". This procedure is adopted by the three works examined but BBI3's allocation of collocates to a specific meaning of the headword is obscured by the compact mass of text characteristic of BBI3 entries and its lack of appropriate typography (see Figure 1).

Another device which greatly helps the learner choose the right term is the *definition of semantic sets of collocates*. MCD is the only dictionary which incorporates this innovative, distinctive feature. Thus, in the entry for "competition" from MCD (Figure 4), different series of collocates are preceded by their definition: for example, "prevent others from winning **beat off**, **see off**", "encourage competition **create**, **encourage**, **foster**, **promote**, **stimulate**", "restrict competition **limit**, **restrict**, **stifle**" (bold type in the original). This practice, further enhanced by the allocation of independent paragraphs to each of these series, is of great help to the learner, as Nurmukhamedov (2011: 96) rightly explains in a review of MCD. Readers will notice, if they compare this entry with the corresponding one in BBI3 (Figure 5) and an extract from the one in OCD2 (Figure 6), that MCD clearly outdoes the others in this respect and that the BBI3 entry is the less transparent.

Since sets of collocates are not defined in BBI3 and OCD2, both resort to the *separation of synonymous*

and non-synonymous collocates by means of typographical resources. More specifically, as can be seen in Figure 6, OCD2 uses commas to list synonymous collocates and a vertical blue bar | for semantically unrelated collocates. BBI3, in turn, employs commas and semi-colons respectively to indicate these differences (Figure 5), and collocates are also semantically organized by placing them in different collocational strings headed by figures, but the classification is not explicitly explained. However, an obvious shortcoming noted by Nurmukhamedov (2011: 96) remains: “it is the learner’s responsibility to explore their use [i.e. of collocates] and determine their meaning.” Much in the same vein, Klotz (2003: 60) rightly notes that, since “subtle differences between collocations are not pointed out in the dictionary”, “[OCD] seems to be best suited for advanced learners, who are familiar with most of the bases and collocates.”

A fundamental element in the design of entries must be a *morphological characterization of collocates* and the ensuing specification of the *syntactic type of collocation of a headword*. Both components will enormously contribute to the explicit, unambiguous presentation of the information. For the latter task, dictionaries basically refer to the classification of lexical collocations quoted above (cf. section 2. Theoretical background). Thus, in the MCD entry for “competition” above, users will find separate sections introduced by the codes adj+N or v+N, indicating that collocates for this noun can be specific adjectives or verbs; at the same time, these formulae capture the syntactic pattern of the collocations. This same practice is also adopted by OCD2, which employs explicit labels rather than codes (e.g. **ADJ.**, **AUTHORITY + NOUN**, **VERB + AUTHORITY** in Figure 3 or **VERB + COMPETITION** in Figure 6). Paradoxically, the editors of the BBI3, who are to be credited with proposing the abovementioned classification of lexical collocations, did not incorporate this notation device into the entries of their dictionary, which is seriously flawed in this regard.

Appropriate illustration of collocations by means of *example sentences* is also of much help to the dictionary user. In this area we have noticed that OCD2 surpasses both MCD and BBI3 (in that order). As the entry for “authority” shows (Figure 3), it includes a higher number of illustrative

examples; according to the back cover, it contains a total of 75,000 (MCD and BBI3 do not offer any specific figures). MCD is not so exhaustive, although it highlights its examples in italics, like OCD2. BBI3 offers fewer examples and does not use italics (just brackets), which makes them less prominent. At the same time, the limited number of examples interspersed adds up to the compact accumulation of collocates responsible for the reader-unfriendly entry layout (Figures 1 and 5).

Where The BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English excels and surpasses the others is in its detailed coverage of grammatical collocations (section 2. Theoretical background); this is an area hardly dealt with by MCD and OCD2, which only give the prepositions ruled by verbs, adjectives, and nouns. In accordance with its subtitle (Your Guide to Collocations and Grammar), BBI is not only a dictionary of lexical collocations but also a genuine “valency” dictionary which describes “the combination of words into grammatical patterns” (op. cit., p. vii), i.e. into complementation structures (Rizo Rodríguez, 1990). In fact, in many verbal entries grammatical collocations outnumber lexical collocations. This can be easily appreciated if we compare the different entries for “want” (so detailed in BBI3 and so brief in MCD and OCD2, which only give its lexical collocations) presented below in Figures 7-9.

As can be seen, only BBI3 systematically describes the rich variety of syntactic constructions governed by this predicate. For that purpose, its editors devised a complex system of grammatical codes (consisting of 19 verb patterns –cf. Introduction, pp. xix-xxx) in a manner similar to the descriptions by Hornby (1975: 12-77) and Quirk et alii (1985: chapter 16). In Figure 7, for example, the codes (E), (G), and (H) indicate that “want” can take as complements a “to”-infinitive, an “-ing” form, and a noun and a “to”-infinitive respectively. An obvious shortcoming of this description is that it demands special attention and linguistic capacity on the part of the dictionary user, since grammatical codes of that kind (commonly avoided in most learners’ dictionaries nowadays) are not self-explanatory.

A crucial issue in the lexicographical treatment of lexical collocations has to do with the distinction between head and collocates. The former, as we

want II v. 1. to ~ badly, desperately, very much (they ~ed very badly to see us) 2. (d; intr.) to ~ for ("to be in need of") (they will never ~ for anything) 3. (D; tr.) ("to seek") to ~ for (he is ~ed for murder in three states) 4. (D; tr.) ("to desire") to ~ for (we ~ you for our team) 5. (E) ("to desire") I ~ to help 6. (E) ("ought") you ~ to think carefully about what you say to them 7. (BE) (G) ("to be in need of") your shirts ~ mending; the house ~s painting; her hair ~s cutting 8. (H; no passive) ("to desire") they ~ us to finish the job today 9. (J) I ~ them singing in tune! 10. (M) ("to desire") I ~ them to be kept busy at all times 11. (N; used with an adjective, past participle) ("to desire") I ~ them busy at all times; I ~ them kept busy at all times; I ~ them ready in one hour; she ~s the house painted tomorrow 12. (s; used with a past participle) (BE) (nonstandard) your shirts ~ mended 13. (misc.) I ~ them out of the house by tomorrow; (esp. AE) they ~ out of the deal but we ~ in (on it)!; your present is just what I've always ~ed!; all I've ever ~ed is your love! **USAGE NOTE:** It should be noted that the construction *want + for + to + inf.* can be acceptable in CE as in *what they want is for us to finish the job today; they want very much for us to finish the job today.* In addition, a construction such as *they want very much that we should finish the job today* (Pattern L) is acceptable in CE, but typically only when a modifier such as *very much* appears between *want* and the dependent clause introduced by *that*. Nevertheless, *want* does appear in Pattern L in certain regional varieties of English and sometimes in literature: "How long ago Hector took off his plume, Not wanting that his little son should cry" – Frances Cornford (1886–1960), "Parting in Wartime"

Figure 7: Entry for "want" in BBI3

have argued elsewhere (Rizo Rodríguez, 2010a: 116), "is usually conceived of as an autonomous element ruling a specific collocate, which "ne néalise pleinement son signifié qu'en combinaison avec une base" (Hausmann, 1979: 192)". For example, in the collocation "bitterly regret", the verbal base has its own specific meaning, while the intensifying adverb derives its meaning from its joint use with the verb. As Pérez Fernández (2003: 74) notes, the non-native user is familiar with the base (a noun, a verb or an adjective) and often cannot guess which are its idiosyncratic, arbitrary collocates. Hence, they need to look up the entry for the head in order to check its collocational preferences. (Cf. also Coffey, 2011: 334, for a similar view).

Accordingly, an immediate consequence for lexicographical description is that collocates

want v
feel that you would like something

- **adv+V** definitely, desperately, genuinely, obviously, particularly, really *Mourinho only had respect for European winners, and he desperately wanted to win with Chelsea.*

Figure 8: Entry for "want" in MCD

want verb

ADV. badly, desperately, really | just, only, simply ◊ I just want you to be happy. | genuinely, truly ◊ If you truly ~ to help, just do as I say. | always ◊ Thanks for the present—it's just what I've always ~ed. | never

PHRASES all you ~ ◊ All I ~ is the truth. | exactly what you ~, just what you ~

Figure 9: Entry for "want" in OCD2

should be included in the entries for the heads so that the collocational information can serve production purposes (Fontenelle, 1994; Cowie, 1998: 18). Thus, we observe that the collocational dictionaries examined only list nouns, verbs, and adjectives as entries (exceptionally, BBI3 includes some adverbs), and these three types of content words are precisely the heads in the classification of lexical collocations introduced in section 2 above. In consequence, in accordance with that classification, noun entries should include verbs, adjectives, and nouns as collocates (types a: "put up *resistance*", b: "elephants trumpet", d: "high *regard*", and f: "a school of *whales*"); verb entries should indicate their intensifying adverbs (type c: "dramatically *increase*"); and adjective entries should specify their verbal and adverbial collocates (types g: "turn *sour*" and e: "deeply *absorbed*").

As reflected in Table 2 above, only two dictionaries (BBI3 and OCD2) feature *entries including collocates exclusively (not heads)*. In contrast, the *Macmillan Collocations Dictionary* often includes both collocates and heads in entries. For example, in the entry for "support" below (Figure 10), we find intensifying adverbs as collocates of that verb (e.g. "actively" or "fully"), which helps the user intensify the meaning of this verb. However, there are also noun heads (like "campaign" or "project") which take "support" as collocate; in our view, it is very unlikely that the learner will look up the entry for this verb in order to find the nouns accompanying it. So,

this type of data is totally useless for production purposes. Coffey (2011: 335) puts it mildly: “[not] all entries, or parts of entries [...] are immediately relevant to production tasks.” (Italics in the original).

This brings us to a second problem observed, closely related to the former: the *Macmillan Dictionary*, unlike the two other works examined,

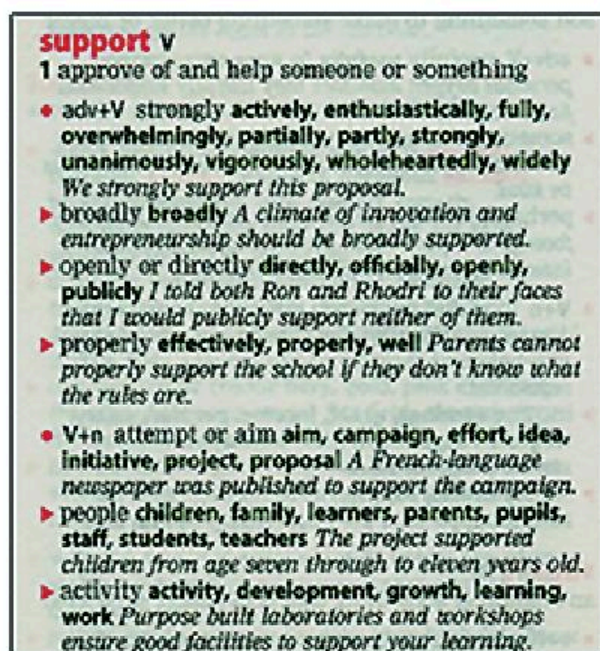


Figure 10: Entry for “support” in MCD

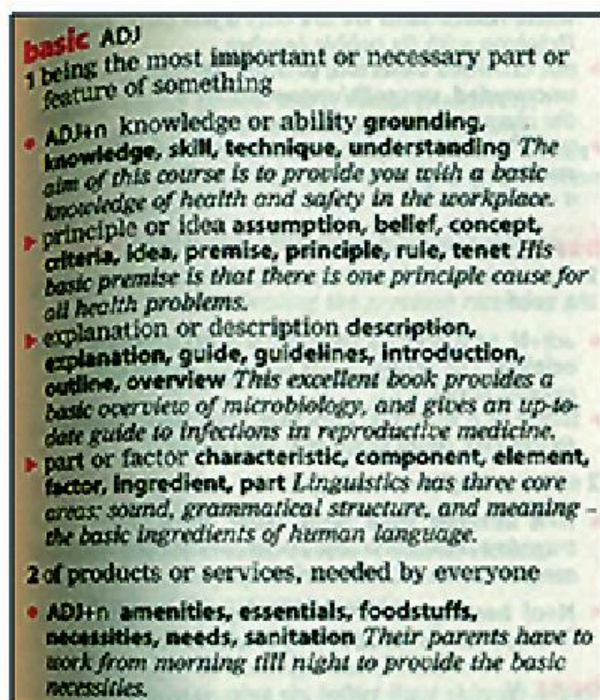


Figure 11: Entry for “basic” in MCD

often incorporates *collocates as entries* (e.g. “basic”), accompanied by their heads (e.g. “assumption”, “belief”, “overview”), which again proves totally ineffective for productive purposes (see Figure 11). In a document on the Internet written by the editor of MCD (see section “c.” below), he claims that entries like those for “basic” (Figure 11) “have a language-awareness function: it is the collocates that help to explain what words like this really mean”. This explanation is not only vague but, in our view, not very convincing. Similarly, some general justification of this type of lexicographical practice has been found in the literature: Bogaards (1999: 128) argues that collocational details of that type could anyway enhance “maximum access to the content of the dictionary”; likewise, Coffey (2011: 335) adds that they might be “relevant to language learning in general”, and Walker (2009: 293) defends this approach by arguing that learners find it hard to “identify the base form” in the “collocational pairing”. Admittedly, the last one is a sound argument which should prompt EFL teachers to make their students familiar with the internal structure of these fixed word combinations so that they can make the most of dictionary consultation. Incidentally, our experience suggests that much of the wealth of information contained in a learner’s dictionary requires a good working knowledge of language. Herbst and Stein (1987: 23) are really emphatic in this regard: “Learners’ dictionaries will be wasted on students who do not have a basic framework of grammatical knowledge.”.

Personally, we totally adhere to Hausmann’s abovementioned analysis of the collocational phenomenon; in our view, the problem posed by collocations mainly concerns the productive mode. That is precisely the rationale behind the decision of the authors of BBI3 and OCD2 to list entries which are always heads and not to include heads in entries. Hence, featuring collocates as entries, as MCD does, is unnecessarily space-consuming, since it only serves decoding purposes.

c. Dictionary extras

Our critical review of the features of the three dictionaries will finally focus on various extra elements of these works. In the first place, we

	BBI3	MCD	OCD2
Introductory pages: explanations on the nature of collocations and on the design of the dictionary	+++	+	++
Usage notes	+	+	++
Special pages: collocations of groups of words semantically related	—	—	+
Study pages: collocations exercises	—	—	+
Separate practice workbook	+	—	—
CD-ROM version	—	—	+

Table 3: Dictionary extras

have noticed considerable differences concerning the front matter of the dictionaries, that is to say, their *introductory pages*. The *BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English*, with its 41 pages (see Table 1 above), is the only one that stands out in this respect. Its introduction proves an excellent source of information on the nature of grammatical and lexical collocations, their typology, and on the design of the dictionary. This introduction has exerted much influence on subsequent studies on English collocations and is much quoted in the specialized literature. On the negative side, considerable linguistic knowledge is required to fully grasp the “involved classification” of grammatical collocations, as Ptaszinsky (2011: 148) suggests. In turn, the introductory pages in OCD2 (12) offer a more succinct explanation on collocations as a characteristic phenomenon of English but provide a very explicit account of their specific treatment in this dictionary, their classification, and how to look them up. Finally, MCD’s introduction is totally vague and inexplicit. Coffey (2011: 339) holds a similar view and notes that there is “no overview of the collocational types [the dictionary] focuses on”. To compensate for this, the publisher has enabled a free link offering a detailed account of how the dictionary was created. It was written by its editor-in-chief, Michael Rundell, and is available at <http://www.macmillandictionaries.com/features/how-dictionaries-are-written/macmillan-collocations-dictionary/>.

As shown in Table 3, the *Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English* stands out on account of various extras. One of them is a wide list of 25 *usage notes*. They are boxes interspersed in the dictionary which group together frequent collocations of words denoting specific semantic

areas (e.g. currencies, jobs, languages, seasons, religions, etc.) —see Figure 12. BBI3 and MCD also include usage notes occasionally, but they are considerably simpler —cf. Figures 13 and 14.

A similar, exclusive attribute of OCD2 is its *special pages devoted to collocations of groups of words semantically related*. A total of 10 pages feature very common collocations of terms related to business, clothes, computers, music or sport, for example. Likewise, this dictionary is the only one that includes *practical exercises* on the collocations of specific semantic areas (e.g. education, jobs, money, driving). 16 different pages are devoted to these activities and others which are aimed at developing dictionary-using skills. But in this area BBI3 stands out with a practice workbook made freely available online by its authors (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1075/z.bbi.workbook>). In its 61 pages, the autonomous non-native learner and the EFL teacher alike will find a variety of practical exercises. MCD and OCD2 do not feature this type of resource, although the *Macmillan Dictionary* web site, in turn, provides free downloadable e-lessons for joint use with the *Macmillan English Dictionary*, the *Macmillan Essential Dictionary* and the *Macmillan Collocations Dictionary*. They can be used in the classroom or for private study (<http://www.macmillandictionaries.com/resources/e-lessons/>).

Finally, a major asset of OCD2 is its *digital* version, available on its accompanying CD-ROM, which can easily be installed onto the hard disk of the user’s laptop. From our experience, this tool constitutes an invaluable source of collocational details for the writer working with a word processor. Any word in a document pointed at with the cursor immediately pops

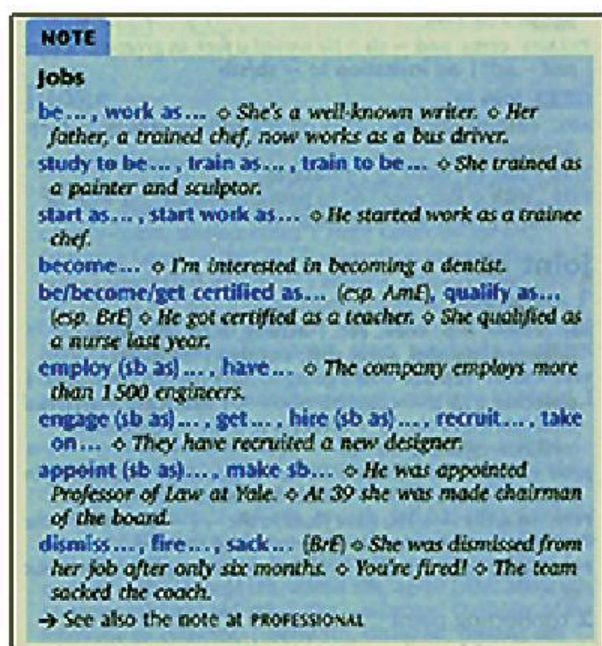


Figure 12: Usage note for "jobs" in OCD2

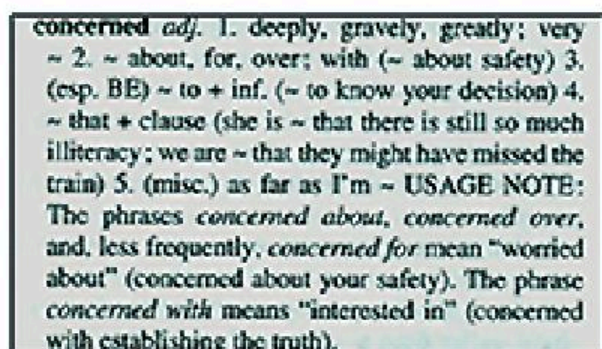


Figure 13: Entry for "concerned" in BBI3

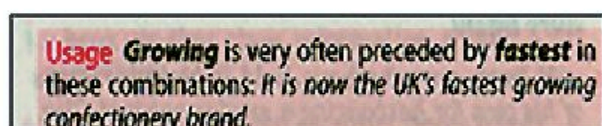


Figure 14: Entry extract for "growing" in MCD

up in a small dictionary window appearing on the same screen as the word processor. The electronic edition has two access modes: it provides the definition, uses, and recorded pronunciation of any word in a text (as a monolingual dictionary proper) and it also offers the collocates of that word. Moreover, this CD-ROM also features a large variety of collocational exercises which will surely prove appealing to the advanced learner and the non-native EFL teacher. Unfortunately, the other works examined do not possess a digital version, which makes them less practical, more cumbersome for users, if they want to refer to them as an aid for computer-

based text production. In this era of "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001), even the most unbridled enthusiasts of the printed book must acknowledge the benefits of the electronic format.

CONCLUSIONS

The foregoing discussion of the most prominent features of these three dictionaries leads to various conclusions. First, it is obvious that the detailed description of collocations characteristic of these works surpasses their treatment in monolingual learners' dictionaries on various grounds; for example, in terms of the number of collocations registered, the systematic association of the various senses of a headword and its collocates, the indication of the morphology of the collocates and of the syntactic pattern of the collocational pairing as well as the support of example sentences and even the inclusion of practical activities in one of these works.

For these reasons, the collocations dictionary may (and should hopefully) become an indispensable tool in the hands of both non-native EFL teachers and conscientious advanced users of English whose proficiency in the language goes hand in hand with their consciousness of the markedly collocational nature of the English language. Admittedly, fruitful consultation of this tool requires some previous knowledge and awareness of the nature of these fixed word combinations and, in particular, of the collocational types discussed above. But this prerequisite should not be too demanding for the advanced language user, precisely the one who can benefit most from this reference tool. It is slightly disappointing, however, that only one of the works examined (the *Oxford Collocations Dictionary*) can be quickly accessed in a digital form, given the usefulness of that format, especially for productive tasks.

Secondly, as regards the comparison of the dictionaries examined, various conclusions can be drawn from the previous study. The *BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English*, now in its third edition, is heavily indebted to its former editions; it is a valuable source of collocational information, as shown by its packed text teeming with collocates, both lexical and grammatical (let us remember that, unlike the two other works, it

systematically describes grammatical collocations), but it is less user-friendly: it demands more look-up skills, given the outdated design of its entries (if compared with the more modern layout of MCD and OCD2).

The *Macmillan Collocations Dictionary for Learners of English* is the most recent description in the area. Its compilers have produced a truly learner-centred reference, mainly characterized by its extremely clear entry design. As revealed by the tables and figures above, it has a large number of positive features, such as its corpus support or the definition of semantic sets of collocates. On the negative side, mention must be made of its reduced number of entries —4,500— (clearly less than the other dictionaries). The conscientious user would also welcome an explicit presentation in the introductory pages of the collocation types used for the description of the material in the entries as well as an explanation of the compilers' conception of collocations. In this way, we would

be in a better position to understand the reasons why heads are included in some entries and collocates are described in independent entries. We would also expect it to be marketed with an accompanying CD-ROM.

Finally, the second edition of the *Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English* brings together a clear, explicit conception of collocational types (originating in BBI1 and other theoretical studies, as explained earlier) and a good number of pedagogical components exclusively designed to serve teaching and learning needs. As reflected in the various tables, out of the three dictionaries, OCD2 is probably the richest, most learner-centred source of collocational details. Its corpus support, its total number of pages, entries and collocations, its extremely clear design, the inclusion of detailed usage notes and abundant example sentences, of practical exercises, and its digital version may satisfy the most demanding non-native user.

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