LEXICAL COLLOCATIONS:
ONE WAY TO MAKE
PASSIVE VOCABULARY ACTIVE

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ABSTRACT
The collocational competence of college students was surveyed through a monolingual completion test conducted at National Tsing Hua University. As expected, most informants had difficulty choosing the correct combination of two (or more) lexical items. Even after informants were allowed to seek help from any dictionaries, the test results of ‘takehome’ were still discouraging. The evaluation of collocations in current learners’ dictionaries reveals that the number of ‘verb + noun’ collocational type in general-purpose dictionaries is scanty and many are unsuitably placed with verb entries rather than noun entries. In order to transform ESL learners’ passive vocabulary into active, specialized user-friendly collocational dictionaries for encoding functions would be helpful and the teaching of lexical collocations is absolutely necessary.

INTRODUCTION
Most Chinese students learn English vocabulary by memorizing words in the textbooks or in vocabulary books (Cortazzi, M. and Jin, L. 1993). It is obvious that students only know Chinese definitions of given English words. In other words, what they have learned is passive vocabulary, which may help learners decode, i.e. comprehend texts, but can hardly help them encode, i.e. generate texts. While lexicographers and linguists have pointed out the
importance of recurrent word combinations or, more specifically, of collocations (Channell, J. 1981:119; Celce-Murcia, M. and Larsen-Freeman, D. 1983:55-56; Benson, 1989, 1990), little attention has been paid to the influence of collocational competence on vocabulary learning in Chinese students. To test students’ knowledge of collocations, especially lexical collocations, a monolingual completion test consisting of twenty-five sentences (see appendix) was given to two groups of informants at National Tsing Hua University. One group consisted of 13 freshmen in Nuclear Science and 12 freshmen in Power Mechanical Engineering (Group 1), the other of 13 sophomores and 12 juniors in English (Group 2). These two groups of students were given the same test twice. The first time the participants were asked to complete these sentences in class without help. If they really didn’t know the possible correct English answers, Chinese answers were also acceptable only to make sure they understood the questions. The second time they took the test as a ‘takehome’ exercise. Informants were not allowed to ask native speakers of English or their classmates for answers but were permitted to use all kinds of dictionaries, either their own or from the library. They were required to write down the sources, if any, they had referred to. This paper is based on the assumption that while the deficiency of collocational competence is one of students’ major language barriers, most learners can’t get favorable answers from general-purpose dictionaries. Do we need a special user-friendly collocational dictionary? How should lexical collocations be taught?

I. A brief description of collocations, idioms, and free combinations

To gain a clear picture of what (lexical) collocations are, it is helpful to distinguish them from *idioms* from one hand and from *free combinations* on the other. In one of the useful collocation dictionaries — *The BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English: A Guide to Word Combinations* (1986) — the word *collocation* was defined as follows:

In English, as in other languages, there are many fixed, identifiable, non-idiomatic phrases and constructions. Such groups of words are called
recurrent combinations, fixed combinations, or collocations. Collocations fall into two major groups: grammatical collocations and lexical collocations.

(Benson et al., 1986b: ix)

Definition and examples of idioms, transitional combinations, lexical collocations, and free combinations are provided in Table 1.

### TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classifications</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **idioms** (= relatively frozen expressions whose meanings do not reflect the meanings of their component parts) (Benson et al., 1986a: 252-53) | to kick the bucket (‘to die’)  
to spill the beans (‘to tell a secret too soon or to the wrong person’) |
| ‘transitional combinations’ (= ‘frozen’ than ordinary collocations and have a meaning close to their component parts) (Benson, 1986a: 254); ‘transitional collocations’ (Benson, 1989: 5) | to foot the bill (‘pay the bill’)  
to catch one’s breath (‘to return to normal after being busy or very active’)  
to carry weight (‘be convincing’),  
to see action (‘participate in combat’)  
to take one’s time (‘act slowly’) |
| **lexical collocations** (= arbitrary recurrent word combinations) (Benson, 1986a: 253-54; 1986b: xxiv; 1989: 3) | to reach a verdict, to commit (a) murder,  
to launch a missile, to withdraw an offer,  
to make an impression,  
best / kind / warm / warmest, etc. regards |
| **free combinations** (=the least cohesive type of word combinations) (Benson, 1986a: 252-53; 1986b: ix, xxiv) | to condemn / decry / denounce / acclaim / forget / investigate / report / study / recall, etc. a murder  
to destroy a barn / bridge / document / factory / harbor / road / village, etc. |

According to BBI, typical lexical collocations consist of nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs. Benson, Benson, and Ilson classify lexical collocations by structural types:

1. verb + noun (*wind a watch, quench one’s thirst*)
2. adjective + noun (*torrential rain*)
This paper is focused on ‘verb + noun’ and ‘noun + verb’ lexical collocations, because verbs and nouns in these two types of collocations are more mutually selective in context than other structural types. In other words, they are more contextually predictable.\(^3\)

In sum, the main characteristics of lexical collocations are that their meanings mostly reflect the meaning of their lexical constituents and that the sequences of lexical items frequently co-occur, even though most native speakers of English are not aware of collocations. Thus, it is not surprising that to most native speakers of English the word commit (‘collocator’\(^4\)) will spring to mind readily when they use murder (‘base’\(^4\)) in a certain context.

II. An outline of Chinese learners’ problems with vocabulary acquisition

It is generally known that memorizing first-language definitions of given target-language vocabulary does not develop proficiency in second language acquisition. Ironically, most Chinese students learn the English words by spelling them and remembering their Chinese counterparts. A great number students are told to “read as much as possible” to enlarge their vocabulary (Channell, 1981:115). While exposure to large numbers of words probably leads to the expansion of passive vocabulary, this passive vocabulary will remain inactive unless learners can consciously and systematically know a word, namely, to be able to use it in speech and writing, “to recall it, to relate it to appropriate object/concept, to use it in appropriate form, to pronounce it recognizably, to spell it correctly, to use correct collocations, to be aware of connotations, to use at appropriate level of formality” (Cortazzi, M. and Jin, L. 1993). Using correct grammatical and lexical collocations is probably the most difficult part of turning passive vocabulary into active vocabulary because students cannot obtain satisfying assistance from general-purpose dictionaries. As a result, it is
understandable that students can perhaps comprehend such collocations as *perform an abortion*, *raise serious doubts*, *walk the dog*, *carry out an experiment*, *enlarge the photograph*, etc. but have hard time producing them when necessary. The most common lexical errors made by intermediate and advanced Chinese students in writing or speech can be categorized as follows:

(A) a lack of collocational competence: e.g.
  *remind/*arouse your memory
  *give/*pay/*put too much praise on her
  *distribute/*spread seven cards to each player

(B) native-language interference: e.g.
  *break the myth
  *a hurricane may attack the island
  *a group of bees

(C) incorrect spelling: e.g.
  *democrates
  *revocate for revoke in revoke one’s driver license
  *boughque for bouquet in *a bouquet of flowers*

III. An in-depth analysis of students’ performance in collocation tests

**Group 1:** 25 freshmen: non-English majors, low-intermediate and intermediate level

In order to attain data on low-intermediate and intermediate students’ performance in collocation, two same tests of 25 questions each were administered to the 25 students in Group 1. While seventeen students offered lexically acceptable answers to one of the 25 sentences in the first test, none gave acceptable answers to nine of them. Interference from Chinese was, of course, to be anticipated. For example, none knew the collocation *explode the myth*. Six wrote *break the myth*, a literal translation of the Chinese collocation. When the students were asked to complete the sentence 13: *Don’t _____ too much praise on her. She will get conceited*, they inserted the following verbs: *give – 11; put – 8; take – 3; say – 2;
*pay – 1. It is clear from the responses that, while most students understood the intended meaning of the missing element, they needed help to deal with the ‘arbitrary’ nature of English collocations (Benson, 1989: 3).

Considering that students were encouraged to use dictionaries on the ‘takehome’ exercise, the results were rather discouraging. While nineteen subjects gave correct answers to two of the 25 sentences, still none of them offered acceptable answers to six of them, that is, *inflict losses on, override a veto, raise (a) doubt, jog one’s memory, heap praise on, launch a crackdown on*. Of the 25 sentences on the ‘takehome’ exercise only four sentences were correctly answered by more than half of the students. Ten students wrote *recall* and seven wrote *remind* in the sentence 11: *This photograph may ______ your memory*. While it was apparent again that most students understood the intended meaning of the missing words, it was not easy for them to find semantically and grammatically acceptable answers from their dictionaries. In response to the sentence 15: *Some snakes ______ their skin each year*, they gave the following verbs: *exuviate – 5, *molt/moult – 6, cast off – 2, change – 1, replace – 1, strip off – 1, etc. The majority of the students looked up words in a Chinese-English dictionary or an electronic dictionary to find *molt, exuviate, and cast off*, words which most native speakers of English will rarely use. The easier and more common word, *shed*, can’t be found in the entry for *snake or skin* in most learner’s dictionaries. As expected, the percentage of acceptable answers given by informants on the ‘takehome’ exercise was not much higher than that of the first test. An analysis of these Group 1 students’ acceptable answers is shown in Table 2 below:

**TABLE 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total sentences = 25</th>
<th>First Test</th>
<th>‘Takehome’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sentences with ACCEP† = 75 % – 100 %</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences with ACCEP = 50 % – 75 %</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences with ACCEP = 25 % – 50 %</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences with ACCEP = 0 % – 25 %</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

† ACCEP = The Percentage of acceptable answers
**Group 2**: 25 sophomores and juniors: English majors, upper-intermediate and low-advanced level

The same test of 25 questions was given twice to 25 English majors. In the first test, nineteen informants gave correct answers to one of the 25 sentences, but none offered acceptable answers to five of these 25 sentences: *inflict losses on, override a veto, raise (a) doubt, heap praise on,* and *launch a crackdown on.* For example, no one knew *raised,* an appropriate collocator, to complete the missing item in sentence 8: *Her proposal _____ serious doubts in my mind.* From such responses as *caused, aroused, created, provoked,* and *cast,* it is obvious that, as expected, students made great efforts but failed to come up with the accurate words. As to other 20 sentences given at least one acceptable answer by students, six of them were given only one acceptable answer.

The progress from first test to ‘takehome’ exercise made by students in Group 2 was appreciable when it is compared with that in Group 1. Only four participants knew the collocation *peel a banana* in the first test, but the number of correct answers increased by twelve to sixteen on the ‘takehome’ exercise. Similarly, only two students gave acceptable answers in the first test to sentence 25: *The secret agent used the public phone because he suspected that his phone was _____,* but on the ‘takehome’ exercise thirteen students offered the following acceptable answers: *wiretapped – 5, tapped – 1, bugged – 1, monitored – 4, out of order – 2.* While it is true that there was an improvement on the ‘takehome’ exercise, the overall collocational competence of English majors was still not satisfying. Even when all the acceptable but not preferable answers were counted, the number of sentences with 50% or more acceptable answers is only 9 out of 25 on the ‘takehome’ exercise. The breakdown of the Group 2 students’ acceptable answers is shown in Table 3 below:
TABLE 3
Analysis of acceptable answers to collocation test by 25 students in Group 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total sentences = 25</th>
<th>First Test</th>
<th>‘Takehome’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sentences with ACCEP† = 75% – 100%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences with ACCEP = 50% – 75%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences with ACCEP = 25% – 50%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences with ACCEP = 0% – 25%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

† ACCEP = The percentage of acceptable answers

On their ‘takehome’ exercise, participants were asked to write down the sources they had used in doing the exercise. Unfortunately, most students didn’t record which entries they had referred to, or even which dictionaries, or just wrote, for instance, “from the entry *inflict*” for sentence 5: *Our forces were able to ______ heavy losses on the enemy.* This kind of source, “from the entry *inflict*”, could provide little valuable information about how the word *inflict* had came to mind. In fact, only the test taken in the class can really reflect their collocational mastery. The validity of the ‘takehome’ exercise was somewhat compromised because answers could be circulated among students.

IV. The necessity of teaching collocations and making passive vocabulary active

Semantic errors in the use of lexical collocations make both oral and written communication difficult. Since most Chinese learners only learn the definitions of English words, their passive vocabulary cannot be easily reconstructed into acceptable chunks, let alone natural and meaningful sentences. If students are not familiar with recurrent word combinations, they can only generate awkward and forced sentences in which traces of native-language interference can be found. Lexical collocation is one way to make passive vocabulary active.

In *The Grammar Book: An ESL/EFL Teacher’s Course*, Marianne Celce-Murcia and Diane Larsen-Freeman point out that “it would be useful for ESL/EFL learners to have access
to the significant collocates of all the lexical items they are expected to acquire and use” (1983:55). Another EFL researcher, Joanna Channell, has not only stressed the importance of collocational properties but also put the semantic theory of vocabulary learning into practice. Together with three researchers, she integrated semantic field theory, componential analysis, and the collocational approach into her unique workbooks for advanced EFL learners (Rudzka et al., 1981a, 1985).

The lack of collocational competence is noticeable when non-native speakers of English need productive language knowledge. Students either use only the limited number of lexical collocations they know or under the influence of their first language “create” unnatural and farfetched collocations. Most intermediate and advanced students know such common collocations as have a quarrel, make a decision, and take the responsibility, but few know the similar collocations like pick/provoke/start a quarrel, arrive at/reach/take (BrE) a decision, and assume/bear/shoulder/undertake the responsibility. Collocational familiarity of English learners lags far behind their passive language knowledge. One reason for this is that a large number of ‘verb + noun’ collocations are “arbitrary and non-predictable”. For example one can say: commit a crime and perpetrate a crime, commit a fraud and perpetrate a fraud. However, one can only say commit suicide, not *perpetrate suicide; commit a sin, not *perpetrate a sin. One can say hold a funeral, but not *hold a burial. Likewise, make an estimate is frequently used, but not *make an estimation (Benson, 1986a:258-59). Therefore, the overgeneralization of collocational range is quite risky. In fact, Benson who based his observation on citations from various newspapers and magazines even concluded that “many native speakers of English need help with collocations” (Benson, 1990:27). Thus, from the test results as well as other researchers we can reasonably infer that, since collocational capacity can not be spontaneously acquired, the teaching of (lexical) collocations is absolutely integral to the encoding of a language by non-native speakers.
V. An evaluation of lexical collocations in current learners’ dictionaries and some other books

Lexical collocations are of great significance to English learners and not many students have access to native speakers with whom they can ‘try out’ the collocational possibilities of new words. Therefore, the learners’ dictionaries are the popular tool most learners frequently depend on. Unfortunately, most current learners’ dictionaries are unsatisfactory for finding lexical collocations. Two major British learners’ dictionaries, the 4th edition of the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (OALD4) and the 1987 edition of the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (LDCE1987), do provide many grammatical collocations. However, in terms of ‘verb + noun’ collocational patterns they are practically inadequate and inappropriately placed with verb entries (‘collocator’) rather than noun entries (‘base’). The OALD4, for instance, omits the following typical ‘verb + noun’ lexical collocations: perform an abortion, deliver/give an address, exercise/wield authority, carry on/launch/mount a campaign, apply for/gain/seek admission, backcomb (BrE)/tease (AmE)/ braid/do/set/style hair, make up/offset/recoup/replace a loss, arouse/excite/inflame/stir up passion, grant/gain/receive recognition, cause/foment/incite/instigate/spark (AmE)/spark off (BrE)/stir up/touch off a riot, etc. Similarly, the 1987 edition of the LDCE excludes these ‘verb + noun’ lexical collocations: get up/muster/screw up/summon up courage, cement/develop/make/strike up a friendship, acquire/accumulate/gain knowledge, alleviate/relieve misery, accomplish/carry out/perform/undertake a mission, adjourn/disband/dissolve (a) parliament, develop/touch up/blow up/enlarge a photograph, concoct/cook up/devise/think up a scheme, to name but a few. Although the 1987 edition of the LDCE does not provide enough lexical collocations, the fact that it gives more than the 1978 edition demonstrates that lexical collocations have recently been attracting lexicographer’s attention in general-purpose dictionaries.

Even when the collocations are listed in the dictionaries, they are often ‘hidden’ under improper entries so that users can’t track them down easily. For example, in the OALD4 users can only find trim one’s beard, charge a battery, set a watch under verb entries, not corresponding noun entries. The 1993 edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs* (ODPV), an innovative dictionary offering many possible “collocates” for particular phrasal
verbs, is also difficult to use. This dictionary does, however, have a unique feature—lists of collocates at the headphrase of an entry (i.e. the phrasal verb or longer idiom which the entry defines and illustrates). A good illustration of a collocate list of nouns is found after the boldface capital O at the headphrase of entry *skirt around*; users can find *question*, *matter*, *problem*, and *difficulty*. Nevertheless, if users just know the collocates *question* and *problem*, it would be practically impossible for them to locate the ‘hidden’ phrasal verbs *skirt around* in the ODPV.

*The Words You Need* and *More Words You Need* edited by Rudzka, Channell, et al incorporated semantic field theory, componential analysis and collocational possibilities into diagrammatic grids. An abridged version of componential grid and collocational grid with possible ‘answers’ offered by Rudzka, Channell, et al. is shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Componential Grid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>avoid</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an approaching object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dodge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>duck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shirk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If there is a + against a word this means that the feature is part of the meaning of the word, so here, *dodge* and *duck* both include in their meaning [+ avoid an approaching object]. If there is no +, either the feature is not part of the meaning of the word, or the feature does not help us to know the difference between this word and others in the grid.
If there is a + against a word printed in bold this means that the word collocates with the word or expression at the top of this grid. In this case dodge a blow is a good collocation, whereas *duck a blow is not.

While these informative tables might be useful to advanced students, the ‘answers’ in componential grids occasionally conflict with those in the collocational grids. While avoiding “something one is supposed to do” is part of the meaning of dodge, duck, evade, and shirk, do not “one’s responsibility” and “one’s duty” also mean “something one is supposed to do”? Why is that only “shirk” collocates with “one’s responsibility” and “one’s duty”? Actually, the LDCE1987 defines dodge as “to avoid (a responsibility, duty, etc.) by a trick or in some dishonest way”, evade as “to avoid (esp. a duty or responsibility), esp. using deception” and duck as “(infml) to try to avoid (a difficulty or unpleasant duty)”. In addition, *The American Heritage Dictionary of The English Language (1992)* gives the illustrative phrase evade responsibility at the evade entry. In order to gain native speakers’ intuitions on collocational range, two well-educated native speakers of English were asked to fill out the unabridged collocational grids from *The Words You Need*. Not surprisingly, two sets of rather different answers were provided because of their varying standards and individual preference to the collocational acceptability. With such disagreement among native speakers of English, advanced students will most likely be overwhelmed by the variety of collocational possibilities, regardless of the validity of the ‘answer’ offered by Rudzka, Channell, et al.
The BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English: A Guide to Word Combinations (1986), compiled by Morton Benson, Evelyn Benson, and Robert Ilson, is probably one of the most useful monolingual collocational dictionaries. With 70,000 word combinations and phrases under a total of 14,000 entries, this compact user-friendly collocational dictionary not only presents grammatical information and word combinations in a simple form but also shows the key differences between American English and British English. Part of the BBI entry for examination is reproduced here to show how this dictionary is structured:

examination n. ['test'] ['set of questions'] 1. to administer, conduct, give an ~ 2. to draw up, make up an ~ 3. to monitor, proctor, supervise an ~ 4. to sit (BE), take an ~ 5. to fail; pass an ~ 6. a difficult, stiff; easy ~

With little instruction, most advanced learners would be able to select the exact collocation from several possibilities. Had students referred to the BBI for the ‘takehome’ exercise, they would have easily found in the above entry the correct answers to sentence 21: monitor, proctor, or supervise. One sophomore of English major who had referred to the BBI for her ‘takehome’ gave twenty-one acceptable answers, which was the highest number of correct answers in the collocation tests.

A Dictionary of English Collocations (1990) (英語搭配大詞典), perhaps the first bilingual collocational dictionary edited by Chinese scholars, offers about 300,000 collocational examples grouped around 15,000 headwords. As a matter of fact, this dictionary was partially based on A New Dictionary of English Collocations (1958) by S. Katsumata. The former has an identical framework to the latter but adds some new collocations and excludes some awkward ones. In spite of Benson’s comments that “collocational dictionaries of English compiled in non-English-speaking countries contain innumerable instances of unacceptable English phrases and sentences” (Benson, 1989:3), A Dictionary of English Collocations shows that, with the help of American consultants, dictionary-makers in non-English-speaking countries can compile valuable bilingual collocational dictionaries.
VI. Some pedagogical suggestions about lexical collocations

Lexical collocations are essential to English learners when they want to speak or write naturally. However, the results of the classroom and ‘takehome’ tests in collocational competence leave no doubt that they are not acquired by memorizing vocabulary and must be specifically taught. Some suggestions for teaching them are as follows:

(A) A number of typical collocations should be presented from the beginning of second language acquisition. Many kinds of collocations, especially the ‘verb + noun’ type, can be learned by students with intermediate vocabulary ability, for example: fly a kite, walk a dog, set an alarm, break a code, withdraw an offer, bridge/close/fill a gap, arouse/generate/stir up interest (in), etc. If ESL learners are exposed early enough to large numbers of collocations, vocabulary usage may not become fixed or fossilized in their second language learning.

(B) Emphasis should be placed on lexical collocations with high frequency of co-occurrence rather than on those with figurative uses. Language in use is so flexible and idiosyncratic that not all educated native speakers of English agree with certain judgments of collocability, let alone the metaphorical, imaginative, and creative uses of language which result in the constant formation of new lexical collocations (Rudzka et al., 1981b:6).

(C) When possible, the teaching of collocations should be simplified by using contrastive analysis of lexical collocations (Bahns, 1993). Those with direct Chinese equivalence sometimes do not have to be taught, e.g. lose one’s patience, logical/persuasive argument, shake one’s confidence, furnish/offer/provide information, etc. However, this guideline can’t invariably apply to all lexical collocations that have Chinese counterparts. The collocation explode the myth, for instance, should be emphasized because its Chinese equivalence 打破神話 will mislead learners to use break the myth.
CONCLUSION

The common belief that words should be learned in context emphasizes the importance of collocations in second language acquisition. It is true that the use of lexical collocations is somewhat subjective and little empirical evidence of collocational frequencies in English is available (Cowie, 1981:224). Yet the fact that four native speakers of English gave 16 out of 25 identical answers to questions on the collocational test confirms that the recurrent word combinations do exist. Certainly, there are instances where native speakers of English disagree on judgment of collocational acceptability, but what matters is that such judgments can be made. After all, it is native speakers’ experience of frequent expressions that are repeated in given circumstances that contributes to lexical collocations (Bolinger and Sears, 1981:55). Since lexical collocations can not be heuristically acquired, the help of user-friendly collocational dictionaries is important to non-native writers and speakers of English. In addition, from the fact that most Chinese students have low level competence in collocations, we can conclude that even if some linguistic predicaments about lexical collocations should be further tackled, they must be included in the syllabus of second language learning because having a good command of lexical collocations is one way to make passive vocabulary active.

Notes

1. The non-English majors were treated as low-intermediate to intermediate students (Group 1) while the English majors served as upper-intermediate to low-advanced students (Group 2). In order to give an unambiguous collocation test, four native speakers of English were asked to help fill out the blanks before students took it. They all provided semantically acceptable answers to this test and most of them were exactly the same answers, for instance: peel a banana, hurricane may hit/strike, give many injections, inflict heavy losses, override a presidential veto, tap/bug a phone, enlarge/blow up the photograph, jog your memory, this check doesn’t bounce, etc.

2. According to an informal survey, about three quarters of the students either looked up the words in dictionaries or asked their classmates instead of asking their teachers or native
speakers of English when they had English questions. However, this time informants were only allowed to use dictionaries, the method they often applied.

3. Other patterns of collocations, however, have much looser lexical cohesion. A case in point is the ‘adjective + noun’ collocation, e.g., a great effort. Native speakers of English can easily think of several other collocating adjectives for ‘effort’ and maintain the similar meaning, such as: all-out, every, enormous, Herculean, strenuous, valiant, etc. Of course, the variability in phrases of this ‘adjective + noun’ pattern is also sometimes relatively restricted. In the collocation idle curiosity, for example, the word idle usually can not be replaced by such synonyms as: lazy, indolent, inactive, inert, etc.

4. Hausmann breaks down all lexical collocations into a ‘base’ and a ‘collocator’ (Benson, 1989:6). According to Hausmann and Benson, the ‘base’ and ‘collocator’ relationship can be shown as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1) verb + noun</th>
<th>--&gt; (collocator) (base) [e.g. ‘to carry insurance’]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) noun + verb</td>
<td>--&gt; (base) (collocator) [e.g. ‘dogs bark’]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) adjective + noun</td>
<td>--&gt; (collocator) (base) [e.g. ‘compelling argument’]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4) verb + adverb</td>
<td>--&gt; (base) (collocator) [e.g. ‘confess frankly’]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5) adverb + adjective</td>
<td>--&gt; (collocator) (base) [e.g. ‘hopelessly addicted’]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Hausmann’s principles, “in dictionaries designed to help users decode, i.e. comprehend texts, collocations should be placed at the entries for collocators. On the other hand, in dictionaries (such as learners’ dictionaries), designed to help users encode, i.e. generate texts, collocations should be placed at the entries for bases.” (Benson, 1989:6)

5. * -- ‘unacceptable’ words, phrases, or sentences
    ?* -- ‘tending to unacceptability, but not fully unacceptable’
    ? -- native speakers are unsure about acceptability
6. Chinese translation of the collocations was not listed on the tests so that students would consider any reasonable and meaningful answers. If informants had been given complete Chinese collocations to their corresponding English ones, more specific answers would have been elicited. In that case *out of order* won’t be treated as an acceptable answer to sentence 25.

7. From Hausmann’s viewpoint, in learners’ dictionaries (e.g. the LDCE1987 and OALD4), designed to help users formulate texts, collocations should be placed at the entries for bases, i.e. nouns in ‘verb + noun’ collocation patterns. A solution to these improperly placed collocations, Benson suggested, could be the addition of a noun index, showing in which verb entries each noun occurs (Benson, 1989:8).

8. Figures are taken from publisher’s advertisements. The latest *Collins COBUILD English Words in Use – A Dictionary of Collocations* (1991) were briefly mentioned in *Lexical collocations: a contrastive view*, an article written by Jens Bahns in 1991. However, I have been unable to obtain a copy for evaluation.

9. Figures are taken from publisher’s advertisements.

References


Wang, W. 王文昌, 1990, A Dictionary of English Collocations (英語搭配大詞典), 中央圖書出版社。
Appendix

1. If a fire breaks out, the alarm will ____________.
2. You must ____________ a banana before you eat it.
3. A hurricane may ____________ the island at any moment.
4. Nurses must ____________ many injections every day.
5. Our forces were able to ____________ heavy losses on the enemy.
6. The American Congress can ____________ a presidential veto.
(Sentences 1 to 6 are quoted from “The Structure of the Collocational Dictionary”.)
7. ____________ seven cards to each player. (Collins COBUILD Essential English Dictionary – “deal” entry)
8. Her proposal ____________ serious doubts in my mind. (BBI)
9. We can’t ____________ the possibility that she was murdered by her husband. (LDCE1987 – “rule” entry)
10. The statistics have finally ____________ the myth that women are worse drivers than men. (LDCE 1987 – “explode” entry)
11. This photograph may ____________ your memory. (OALD4 – “jog” entry)
12. I hope this check doesn’t _____________. (OALD4 – “bounce” entry)
13. Don’t ____________ too much praise on her. She will get conceited. (NTC’s Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs and Other Idiomatic Verbal Phrases – “heap” entry)
14. The Constitution of the United States was ____________ so that women could vote. (World Book Dictionary – “amend” entry)
15. Some snakes ____________ their skin each year. (LDCE1987 – “shed” entry)
16. An estimated 1.2 million illegal abortions are ____________ in the United States annually, with many women dying as a result. (The Home Medical Manual, Vol.1, p.2)
(I made the following sentences.)
17. If North Korea gives up its nuclear weapons, a lot of countries will ____________ economic sanctions against it.
18. The judge may ____________ your driver’s license if you violate the traffic regulations again and again.
19. He was attacked by a/an ____________ of bees yesterday.

20. He ____________ the photograph. (made it bigger)

21. You have to ____________ the examination carefully so that no one cheats on the exam or leaves the room without permission.

22. Mary received a/an ____________ of flowers from her boyfriend on Valentine’s Day.

23. The police department prepared to ____________ one of its biggest crackdowns on drunk drivers.

24. After the torrential rains stopped, the floods ____________.

25. The secret agent used the public phone because he suspected that his phone was ____________.