The Treatment of Lexical Collocations of Six Adjectives Related to Feelings in A Sample of Bilingual Dictionaries English-Italian

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The importance of lexical collocations is nowadays undeniable, especially from a SLA perspective. Besides grammar, learners of a second language also need to access information concerning the lexical environment of words. The knowledge of the restrictions on lexical combinability is part of a L2 competence and should be successfully master by learners.

Possibly, the most important source of information on lexis is the dictionary, thus it should also be (or become) a reference tool for the retrieval of collocations. In particular, bilingual dictionaries seem to be favoured by learners; this makes it increasingly more important for them to represent the combinatorial rules that organise lexis on the syntagmatic axis.

This study aims at investigating the presence and the treatment of some adjectival collocations in three bilingual dictionaries English-Italian. Six adjectives related to the semantic area of emotions are singled out and their nominal, adverbial and verbal collocates looked up in both sections of the dictionaries. The data are then compared to those available from a dictionary of English collocations and from the British National Corpus.

From a quantitative point of view, the study highlights an unsatisfactory presence of adjectival collocations, especially when the collocate is an adverb. The very few collocations found in the dictionaries are often closer to free combinations, therefore doubtfully useful to dictionary users. The collocations are not systematically organised and can be found interchangeably under either the base or the collocator, thus creating a feeling of confusion that leads to poor user-friendliness. On the whole, from the analysis of the data, it emerges that the issue of collocation should be taken into greater account from bilingual lexicography.

1. Introduction

The importance of lexical collocations has come to be largely accepted over the last few decades. Data from corpus analysis show how pervasive the phenomenon is throughout languages, highlighting how neither semantics nor syntax alone can totally account for the way words combine with each other. The awareness of the restrictions on lexical combinability is, in fact, crucial to the naturalness of speech production. Native speakers seem to rely on a regular basis on a series of conventionalised (or institutionalised) chunks of language, rather than use a word by word strategy (Sinclair 1991).

The awareness of the way words are chosen comes to be of particular relevance in a SLA perspective. Learners' output is often marked by a degree of awkwardness, despite being grammatically well-formed. Very often collocations in L2 are put together on the basis of what works in the learners' mother tongue. In a study on the speech production of Italian learners of English, Philip (2007: 5) reports several examples of collocational misbehaviour. For example, given that the nouns *conflitto* and *discordia* [*conflict* and *disagreement*] and the verb *nascere* [*to be born*] collocate in Italian, the instance 'a condominium conflicts and discords can be born with others' was produce. Thus, besides making students aware of the combinatorial restrictions that operate at the lexical level, it is also essential to provide them with materials that supply this type of information. The dictionary is probably one of the most important reference tools at their disposal, therefore, it should guide them through the combinatorial process and provide them with sound and significant data.

When faced with the issue of which dictionary to consult, learners display an incontestable preference for bilingual resources, against teachers and materials' advice to use monolingual tools (Atkins 1985, Atkins and Knowles 1990, Atkins and Varantola 1997, Nuccorini 1992,1994, Béjoint 2002). As a matter of fact, bilingual dictionaries tend to replace monolingual ones, even those especially designed for learners.

Lexicography has been dealing with the issue concerning the presence of collocations in dictionaries for some years (Cowie 1981, Benson 1990, Hausmann 1991, Béjoint 1981, Cop 1988, Siepmann 2006). In most cases, findings have highlighted the need for a more systematic treatment, and efforts have been made to fill the gap between theory and lexicographic practice.

Bilingual lexicography, instead, has been lagging behind for various reasons (Boogards and Hannay 2004). This kind of resource is often less up-to-date in collocational matter and preference is generally accorded to other forms of phraseological units, such as idioms or fixed expressions. Indeed, the theoretical status achieved by collocations throughout the years is not mirrored in a systematic treatment in bilingual lexicography, as it also emerges from this study.

The aim of this research is to start probing into bilingual dictionaries English-Italian in order to evaluate both the presence and the treatment of adjectival collocations. The study investigates the collocations of six adjectives that express emotions: *happy, sad, worried, frightened, amazed, disappointed*.

2. Methods

The choice of the semantic area of feelings is motivated by an interest in the stereotypical juxtaposition between the British and the Italians, the former being very reserved and the latter being exaggeratedly extroverted. Besides this cultural criterion, the set of possible words has been narrowed down on the basis of their relative frequency of occurrence in the English language. For example, within the set of adjectives expressing the idea of *joy*, one could choose among *joyous, joyful, happy, glad, pleased, delighted*, etc. Given that, in general, the more frequent words are, the larger their set of collocates is, the words have been selected by means of their relative frequency of occurrence on the BNC. The wordlist comprises the following items: *amazed, disappointed, frightened, happy, sad, worried.*

As for what concerns the sample of dictionaries chosen, it includes three English-Italian resources whose editions have been recently updated: Oxford Paravia 2008 (OP), Garzanti Hazon 2008 (GH) and Zanichelli 2007 (Z). The first is an adaptation of the French-English dictionary Oxford-Hachette, first published in 1994 and based on a computerised corpus. The other two, instead, were compiled back in the 60s and have been constantly updated since. Among the three dictionaries, only OP states an explicit policy for collocations according to which collocates are stored under the collocator, not under the base (Hausmann 1991).

For the choice of the collocational structure, the taxonomy elaborated by Benson et al. (1997) has been taken as a model. The following types of collocations have been investigated:

1. verb + adjective: e.g. *to look sad*
2. adverb + adjective: e.g. *unduly worried*
3. adjective + noun: e.g. *happy coincidence*

Within the domain of bilingual dictionaries, collocations can take two main forms: they can be part of full examples (e.g. *It is my sad duty to sentence you*) or be expressed as phrase-type examples (e.g. *To be sad*). No distinction between these two kinds of occurrence has been made in this work. Lexical collocations retrieved under the selected lemmas have been counted in order to assess their presence in quantitative terms. As for what concerns the evaluation of the meaningfulness of the figures, the latter have been compared to those available from the Oxford Collocations Dictionary 2002 (OCD) and percentages have been calculated. The underlying assumption is that a dictionary specifically designed for collocations contains the desirable amount of information to be provided

to dictionary users. It must be pointed out, though, that *desirable* does not necessarily mean *ideal*. In fact, the OCD is surely very accurate but not infallible given that the choice of some elements to the detriment of some others is intrinsic to the dictionary-making process. However, if one wants to interpret the quantitative data, it is necessary to have a reliable enough yardstick, and a dictionary of collocations can happily serve the purpose.

The OCD does not list adjective + noun collocations under the adjective entries, therefore, for the assessment of the data from the dictionaries of the sample, the BNC has been employed. The high number of occurrences together with the roughness of the data from the corpus makes it impossible to estimate the significance of the figures from bilingual dictionaries. However, the frequency and the statistical significance of the collocations have been checked in the BNC so to obtain a qualitative evaluation.

The adjectives have been looked up in the Italian-English section as well (*felice, triste, preoccupato, spaventato, deluso, sorpreso*). Regrettably, it has not been possible to follow the same method in the Italian-English section since no dictionaries of Italian collocations exist and corpora of Italian are too small and specialised.

3. Data

Amazed

OCD
Verbal collocates: be, look, seem, sound, stand
Adverbial collocates: absolutely, quite, totally, utterly | mildly | genuinely | always, constantly, continually | still

GH	OP	Z
1 stupito, sorpreso: to be amazed at (o by) sthg., stupirsi, rimanere stupefatto di qlco.	*[reaction, silence, look, person]* stupefatto, sbalordito (at per); *I'm ~ (that)* mi stupisce *o* mi stupisco (che); *I was ~ to find out that she was pregnant* sono rimasto molto sorpreso quando ho scoperto che era incinta.	stupito; meravigliato; sorpreso; stupefatto * to be amazed at st., stupirsi di qc.; sbalordire per qc.

Table 1

GH
Verbal collocates: be (20%)

OP
Verbal collocates: be (20%)

Z
Verbal collocates: be (20%)

Disappointed

OCD
Verbal collocates: be, feel, look, seem, sound | leave sb
Adverbial collocates: bitterly, deeply, desperately, extremely, greatly, hugely, sadly, sorely, terribly, very | almost | a bit, a little, mildly, pretty, quite, rather slightly, somewhat | clearly, obviously, naturally | oddly

GH	OP	Z
1 deluso; insoddisfatto, scontento: disappointed ambition, ambizione delusa; a disappointed man, un uomo scontento; I was disappointed at not being able to see him, rimasi deluso di non averlo potuto vedere	1 *(let down)* deluso (about**,** at**,** by**,** with sth. per, da, di qcs.); *to be ~ that* essere deluso dal fatto che; *to be ~ to see that* essere deluso vedendo che; *I am ~ in you* tu mi deludi	deluso; insoddisfatto; frustrato: a disappointed man, un uomo insoddisfatto; disappointed hopes, speranze frustrate * to be disappointed with (o in) sb., rimanere deluso di q. # to be disappointed at losing a match, essere deluso per aver perso una partita

Table 2

GH
Nominal collocates: man
Verbal collocates: be (16%)

OP
Verbal collocates: be (16%)

Z
Nominal collocates: man, hopes
Verbal collocates: be (16%)

Frightened

OCD
Verbal collocates: be, feel, look, seem, sound | become, get | remain
Adverbial collocates: badly, desperately, extremely, genuinely, really, terribly, very | thoroughly | almost, a bit, a little, pretty, quite, rather | suddenly | physically

GH	OP	Z
spaventato, impaurito: to be frightened of s.o., sthg., avere paura di qlcu., qlco.; he is frightened of flying, ha paura di volare; she is frightened to speak, ha paura di parlare; to be frightened to death, avere una paura da morire.	spaventato, impaurito, intimorito; *to be ~* avere paura (of di; to do di fare); *to be ~ that* temere che; *to be too ~ even to look* avere paura persino a guardare**;** *to be ~ about what might happen, about losing one's job* avere paura di quel che potrebbe accadere, di perdere il posto; *to be ~ at the thought of doing* essere spaventato dall'idea di fare; *I've never been so ~ in my life* non ho mai avuto così tanta paura in vita mia; *he's a very ~ man* ha molta paura *o* è molto spaventato	spaventato; atterrito; intimorito; impaurito * to be frightened at (o by) st., spaventarsi per qc. # to be frightened of sb. [st.], aver paura di q. [qc.].

Table 3

GH
Verbal collocates: be (12.5%)

OP
Adverbial collocates: very (6%)
Nominal collocates: man
Verbal collocates: be (12.5%)

Z
Verbal collocates: be (12.5%)

Happy

OCD

Verbal collocates: appear, be, feel, look, seem, sound | become, make | keep sb

Adverbial collocates: extremely, only, too, particularly, really, very | completely, perfectly, quite | genuinely, truly | far from, not altogether, not at all, not entirely, not exactly, not particularly, not too, not totally | fairly, pretty, reasonably, relatively | just | absurdly, amazingly, blissfully, deliriously, ecstatically, radiantly, ridiculously, strangely, surprisingly | clearly, obviously.

GH	OP	Z
felice, content, lieto, beato: a happy marriage, un matrimonio felice; I'm happy to accept your invitation, sono lieto di accettare il vostro invito	*1 (cheerful) [home, memory, atmosphere]* felice, beato; *[person]* felice, contento. *2 (pleased, satisfied)* contento, soddisfatto, appagato; *to be ~ with sth.* essere contento, soddisfatto di qcs.; *he's not ~ about it* non ne è soddisfatto; *to keep sb. ~* accontentare qcn.; *to give sb. sth. to keep them ~* dare qcs. a qcn. perché stia tranquillo	felice; contento; lieto; fortunato: a happy marriage, un matrimonio felice (o fortunato); I was happy to see her again, fui lieto di rivederla; a happy idea, un'idea felice; una buona idea; a happy suggestion, un felice suggerimento; a happy coincidence, una coincidenza fortunata

Table 4

GH

Nominal collocates: marriage
Verbal collocates: be (11%)

OP

Nominal collocates: home, memory, atmosphere, life, person
Verbal collocates: be, keep sb.(22%)

Z

Nominal collocates: marriage, idea, suggestion, coincidence
Verbal collocates: be (11%)

Sad

OCD

Verbal collocates: appear, be, feel, look, seem, sound | become, grow | make sb, find

Adverbial collocates: all, desperately, immensely, extremely, particularly, profoundly, really, unbearably, very | almost | a bit, a little, quite, rather, slightly, somewhat, strangely | deeply, extremely, intensely, terribly, unutterably, very

GH	OP	Z
1 triste, mesto; lugubre, fosco, grave: to make s.o. sad, rattristare qlcu.	to become (o to grow) sad, rattristarsi	sadder but wiser, (fam.) che ha imparato a proprie spese	sad to say, purtroppo.	**1** *[person, face, voice, song, film, news]* triste; *I'm ~ to do [person]* mi rattrista fare; *it makes me ~* mi rattrista; *to be ~ that [person]* essere triste che; *we are ~ about* **o** *at the accident* siamo dispiaciuti per l'incidente; *it's ~ that* è triste che; *it's ~ to hear that* è sconsolante sentire che; *it was a ~ sight* era uno spettacolo penoso.	1 triste; malinconico; mesto; addolorato; afflitto; dolente; doloroso: Don't be so sad, non esser così triste!; a sad experience, una dolorosa esperienza

Table 5

GH
Verbal collocates: make, become, grow (30%)

OP
Verbal collocates: be, make (20%)

Z
Nominal collocates: experience
Verbal collocates: be (10%)

Worried

OCD
Verbal collocates: be, feel, look, seem | get
Adverbial collocates: deeply, desperately, dreadfully, extremely, frantically, genuinely, particularly, really, seriously, terribly, very | increasingly | a bit, quite, rather, slightly | rightly

GH	OP	Z
preoccupato; inquieto; tormentato: he was worried sick about her, era tremendamente preoccupato per lei; he had me worried for a moment until I realised that he was joking, per un attimo mi ha fatto spaventare ma poi ho capito che otiv scherzando // -ly avv.	Preoccupato, inquieto, turbato; *to be ~* essere preoccupato; *to look ~* avere l'aria preoccupata *o* sembrare preoccupato; *to be ~ about sb., sth.* Essere preoccupato per qcn., qcs.; *to be ~ about doing* avere timore di fare; *to be ~ that* avere timore *o* paura che, essere preoccupato all'idea che; *there's no need to be ~* non è il caso di preoccuparsi.	Preoccupato; impensierito; agitato; inquieto: a worried look, un'espressione preoccupata; to be worried about sb. [st.], essere preoccupato per q. [qc.]; I was worried sick, ero agitatissimo; to be unduly worried, preoccuparsi senza otive

Table 6

GH
Verbal collocates: be, have (40%)

OP
Verbal collocates: be, look (40%)

Z
Adverbial collocates: unduly (6%)
Nominal collocates: look
Verbal collocates: be (20%)

4. Analysis

The most striking result that emerges from the quantitative analysis of the data is that adverb + adjective combinations are generally not included in the dictionaries. Only two exceptions are made: *unduly worried* (Z) and *very frightened* (OP). From a phraseological point of view, the latter is a plain free combination and would certainly be of little use to Italian learners of English.
The absence of adverbial collocates is a peculiar trait, especially given the high number of adverb + adjective word combinations presented in the OCD, where this type of collocation considerably outnumbers the type verb + adjective. Not only that, but most of the adverb + feeling-related adjective collocations are phraseologically more interesting and possibly more useful to Italian users than the verb + feeling-related adjective ones. Thus, it is worth briefly investigating whether they are included in the dictionaries at all. Keeping the target users of a bilingual dictionary in

mind, it is advisable to carry out the analysis on collocations that are both phraseologically and contrastively significant.

Bitterly disappointed is a frequent collocation in English and cannot be literally translated into Italian. However, none of the dictionaries list it under the adjective. In GH, the adverb *bitterly* is only registered under the lemma *bitter*, thus not displaying any collocation. In Z and OP, *bitterly disappointed* is found under the adverb. *Rightly worried* is not listed in any of the dictionaries. *Perfectly happy*, which is not only very significant but also very frequent in English (99 occurrences in the BNC), is only found in OP under the adverb and is translated as *in tutto e per tutto felice*. This translation is semantically acceptable, however, there is a profound difference in the frequency of occurrence of the two expressions: the English collocation is very common and sounds perfectly natural, whereas the Italian equivalent is extremely rare (it has no occurrences in the CORIS/CODIS corpus of written Italian) and sounds rather outdated. Despite being a frequent combination in English, c*onstantly amazed* would not sound habitual if literally translated into Italian (**costantemente stupito/stupefatto/sorpreso*). The collocation is not included in any of the dictionaries. *Badly frightened* is not very frequent, yet it is significant contrastively. It is not found in any of the selected dictionaries. Interestingly, in GH, under the lemma *badly, badly disappointed* is displayed. A check on the BNC shows that the collocation has only 3 occurrences against the 9 of *badly frightened*. *Terribly* is the first most frequent meaningful collocate of *sad* (other adverbs such as *very, really, rather* collocate with it more often but are less interesting). In GH, under the lemma *terribly*, the collocation *terribly hungry* is provided. This combination occurs only three times in the BNC against the sixteen of *terribly sad*, which instead is not included in the dictionary.

As for what concerns verb + adjective collocations, they are much fewer than those presented by the OCD. In OP and GH only 21% of the verbal collocates are given; in Z the percentage decreases to 15%. This is particularly significant if one considers that the number of verbal collocates for the selected adjectives is overall quite low. The most listed verbal collocate is *to be*, which appears under every adjective headword except one. It is interesting to note that there are often more examples reproducing the same grammatical pattern. For instance, in OP the collocation *to be frightened* is repeated in all seven examples provided only varying the colligational patterns (e.g. *to be frightened of/to/that/about/at*).

The selected adjectives form some contrastively relevant collocations that would be worth including in a bilingual resource. For example, *to stand amazed, to leave (somebody) disappointed, to remain frightened, to grow sad, to get worried*. All these collocations would be difficult to be put together by Italian learners of English due to the dissimilarity from their Italian equivalents. With the exception of *to grow sad,* listed by GH under the adjective, all the other collocations are not presented in the English-Italian section of the dictionaries.

In the Italian-English section, supposedly used for encoding task, the number of collocations increases, though not dramatically. In GH, under the adjective *felice* [*happy*], *to be* and *to make* are presented. In OP, *to be, to die, to make* are provided as well as the adverb *blissfully*. In Z no collocates are given. In GH, under the adjective *triste* [*sad*], no collocations other than *to be sad* are suggested. In OP, instead, both *to be* and *to feel sad* are provided. Two adverbial collocates are also included: *awfully* and *terribly*. In Z, *to feel* and *to look sad* are given. As for what concerns the adjective *preoccupato* [*worried*] all the three dictionaries only provide the collocation *to be worried*. *Spaventato* [*frightened*] does not have any collocates in any of the dictionaries. *Deluso* [*disappointed*] and *sorpreso* [*amazed*] only have collocates in Z (*to be*).

The presence of nominal collocates in the English-Italian section of the dictionaries is also very scanty. This would not come as a surprise if collocations were listed systematically under the base

(in this case the noun). Yet this is not always so. In particular, OP's policy is to list collocations under the collocate; nevertheless, only two out of six adjectives show nominal collocates (*happy* and *frightened*). A check on the BNC shows that, in almost all cases, the statistical relevance of the chosen collocates is high in terms of frequency. For example, for the adjective *happy*, *marriage* (110 times) is suggested by both GH and Z, the latter also including *idea* (26 times), *suggestion* (3 times) and *coincidence* (22 times); OP, instead, provides *home* (68 times), *memory* (83 times)*, atmosphere* (25 times)*, life* (188 times) and *person* (27 times). Out of this set of collocates, only *idea, coincidence, atmosphere* and *home* seem to be truly necessary for Italian users in that *happy* takes up a nuance of meaning that its Italian counterpart *felice* does not seem to have. In fact, the first three collocations could be translated as: *bella idea, coincidenza fortunata, atmosfera piacevole*. *Happy home* does not really have an Italian counterpart; however, the BNC shows that the two words occur within the same span not so much in lexical collocation with each other, but as in the structures *to go home happy* or *to be happy at home*. Similarly, *happy* and *idea* do not always form a lexical collocation but are found in each other's proximity by means of the patterns *happy with/about the idea* and *the idea makes someone happy* .

5. Discussion and conclusions

The quantitative analysis highlights an overall unsatisfactory treatment of adjectival collocations in the sample of dictionaries. Adverbial collocates are almost not included; verbal collocates are slightly more present but their relevance in a contrastive perspective is doubtful; nominal collocates are almost always left out and in some cases weak collocations are included. The fact that adverbial collocates are very often dismissed can be partially understood if one thinks of the lesser prominence that this type of combination has if compared to, say, adjective + verb in a sentence. However, this fact cannot justify their almost total exclusion from the dictionaries.

Besides a quantitative problem, there is also a qualitative one. As noted above, the majority of the collocations chosen is not very relevant for Italian users of a bilingual dictionary. If one adopts a phraseological perspective, many are the word combinations that can be ascribed to the set of free combinations, and therefore users would most likely be able to put them together without the aid of a dictionary. For instance, the fact that the six adjectives all collocate with the verb *to be* is somehow redundant for users at any level. Yet, not only *to be* is the most frequent verb found in the sample, but sometimes it is the only collocate suggested. The Italian-English section is slightly richer in verbal collocates; however, it is far from representing a sound source of collocations to which Italian learners could safely turn.

It seems that a very clear demarcation in the way users make use of a bilingual dictionary is drawn: they turn to the Italian-English section for encoding a message, whereas they consult the English-Italian one when they have to decode one. However, this might not always be so as often learners' starting point for encoding is English rather than Italian. Indeed, if one thinks in English, it is more logical to assume that they would wonder about the collocates of an English word, rather than of an Italian one. This feature is strongly related to another problematic aspect that has emerged from this brief study: the criterion according to which collocations should be listed.

As a matter of fact, adjectival collocations are not listed systematically: some of them are to be found under the adjective itself, some under the adverb, some under the verb, some under the noun. This generates confusion and users would not know what to look up, if in need of information on the lexical selection of words. In order to improve the user-friendliness, it would seem more sensible to list the collocates systematically under the base. Thus, for example, *bitterly disappointed* should be found under the adjective *disappointed*, rather than under the adverb *bitterly*. In fact, this way of organising collocations is more similar to the way users come to need the information in the

first place. Given that English is the target language, it is more likely that dictionary users wonder about the ways in which one can be *disappointed* rather than randomly think of the word *bitterly* and look up what words are more likely to be found in its proximity. This way of storing collocations also follows the way in which the OCD is organised. Indeed, hybridising has been a common practice in bilingual lexicography over the years and it could be an effective way to solve some of the most practical problems.

Another way of improving the quality of bilingual dictionaries would be to exploit the property of collocations of being interlocking. Exemplifying sentences could be expressly created so to include more than just one collocation at time. For example, instead of having two separate sentences to *look disappointed* and *utterly disappointed*, the phrase *to look utterly disappointed* provides the same amount of information but it does so in only one instance. This would partially solve the ever-present problem of saving up space. In addition to this, it could also be useful to adopt a typographical convention so to highlight collocations which, as things stand, often pass unnoticed within full sentence examples.

A most needed change would be to create a set of criteria to use in order to single out the collocations that are worth being included in a bilingual dictionary. This set could be based on three parameters: the statistical significance of a collocation (e.g. its frequency of occurrence) together with its phraseological as well as contrastive relevance. Given the theoretical difficulty of labelling word combinations as either collocations or free combinations, a graded index could be created so to have a more shaded picture. This could also be applied for the evaluation of how important a collocation is in a contrastive perspective. In this latter case, the index could be based on the resemblance between the realisations of the collocation in the two languages. For example, *happy idea* is not literally translatable into Italian, thus it would have a higher parameter of dissimilarity if compared to a combination such as *happy person*. Evidently, this is just a sketch of what could be done and it clearly needs more thought and a higher degree of elaboration and formalisation.

Overall, what this study has pinpointed is that the treatment of adjectival collocations in the bilingual dictionaries of the sample is far from being encouraging, unveiling the need for a higher awareness of the relevance of lexical relations among words. The criteria at work in the choice of which collocations to include are often mysterious, most likely based on the dictionary-makers own intuitions. Thus, a more systematic and comprehensive approach would be desirable.

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