

COLLOCATIONS IN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION DISCOURSE

Abstract: Environmental protection is a field covering widely-approved goals as strategic policies important for global community. There is nothing new in the phrase that pollution has no boundaries and that, wherever it appears, it spreads internationally. While technological development at this stage necessarily goes hand in hand with negative side-effects, it is certainly counter-productive to try and stop or slow it down. Developed technologies are essentially important for the modern world but they mainly produce pollution. The greatest polluters in the world, like the USA, still refuse to sign the documents that are intended to regulate the harmful emissions on the global scale. That would mean a radical change in the way of life that the polluting countries are still unwilling to undertake. On the other hand, it is not possible to ignore the environmental issues because they affect everybody in the world. Knowing that, polluters invent the language that promotes the use of their technologies or mitigate the negative effects of their practices. This paper is going to be focused on the most frequent collocations in environmental protection discourse in order to see how they form the environmental awareness and, possibly, how they justify the current practices.

Key words: collocations, discourse, attitudes, environmental protection, environmental awareness

1. Introduction

In the very beginning, it is necessary to clarify two crucial concepts appearing in the title of this paper. The first is the term *discourse* which still seems to call for some explanations or definitions. „In spite of almost half a century history, the concepts of *discourse* and *discourse analysis* remain imprecisely defined“ (Mišić Ilić, 2008: 155, translation J. T.). According to this authoress, the reasons for the state of affairs are twofold: dealing with language use at the suprasentential level within a specific situational context and the existence of numerous and diverse disciplines which approach discourse from their own angles.

Likewise, the term *collocation* is not easy to define precisely. The boundaries of this field of study are still quite vague which makes the researchers aware of the need to define their findings in terms of some specific starting assumptions. Therefore, for the purpose of this paper Thierry Fontenelle's definition is worth quoting: „... there is no such thing as a clear, non-controversial and all-embracing definition of a collocation. This very notion should be conceived as a rather fuzzy area along a cline

ranging from totally free combinations on the one hand to completely fixed multi-word units on the other“ (Fontenelle, 1994: 9).

This paper, mentioning these two concepts in its title, is therefore dealing with 'fuzzy' areas but at the same time trying to examine the topic and satisfy the demands of thoroughness.

2. Environmental awareness in the narrow discourse community and the general public – transferring attitudes

Messages are sent with the aim of transmitting some sort of information in the form of mere facts, expressive comments, or calls for action in different forms on the part of the receiver. As a matter of fact, this interactive nature characterises every instance of communication. It is, therefore, important for both parties in the process to be aware of the meanings they have in mind when they are engaged in mutual communication. Rather, it is the complexity of meaning that is operative in the communication process because it involves the linguistic formulations but also a host of other components, the background information, the participants, the situation they are in, or simply the whole context. The context, taken in this way, is what enables „comprehension and interpretation to take place“ by its „complex and simultaneous processing“ (Celce-Murcia, 1995: 364). Complexity is certainly an inevitable input when meaning is concerned. Slavica Perović agrees with this: „The wholeness of meaning involves the statement in its context“ (Perović, 2012: 15, translation J. T.). Relating the notion of discourse to meaning, she adds: „...discourse finds, reveals, and deciphers all those meanings that have been hidden somewhere without being explicitly worded“ (ibid.: 12). As if joining her, Batstone goes a step further, mentioning the delicacy of expressing and interpreting attitudinal meanings which are often only implied. Therefore, he calls for a broader context as the field of analysis: „The perception of attitude... cannot be determined solely on linguistic grounds“ (Batstone, 1995: 208).

Environmental awareness or people's awareness of the importance of a healthy living environment as necessary for their survival, is the phenomenon that brings the narrow discourse community and general public together. The field of environmental protection is a field that is somewhere on the border in terms of its relatedness to ordinary people and everyday life concerns. It is a field which is scientifically and methodologically grounded and therefore far from ordinary people. On the other hand, it deals with their life concerns, vital for them. Therefore, when experts, scientists and professionals talk about environmental protection matters, they know that it is not only the narrow discourse community that they address but also ordinary people who are ignorant of the details of the profession but who are vitally interested in the subject simply because they feel that they are endangered by the current industrial practices. Environmental awareness, now a widely acknowledged phenomenon, is the framework which both the narrow and the broad discourse communities share and which makes them communicate with each other.

Discourse communities also share the same language. Rather, they define or shape it led by the topics their members discuss in their professional or academic fields, but also, and not to be neglected at all, by the attitudes they take towards the topics on the one hand, and towards the intended broader audience if their topics are directed to it. Michael Stubbs' statement that „discourse communities share agreed public goals and mechanisms of communication“ (Stubbs, 1996: 5) is actually a reformulation of the same relationship. In this way he implicitly divides a discourse community into two, more or less, distinct communities: the narrow one involving experts, scientists and professionals, and the broad community which involves the general public. If their goals or purposes are the same, they seem to be united in a single whole: the narrow discourse community actually gets augmented by all the interested parties or the public in general. The two circles in the illustration represent their relationship.

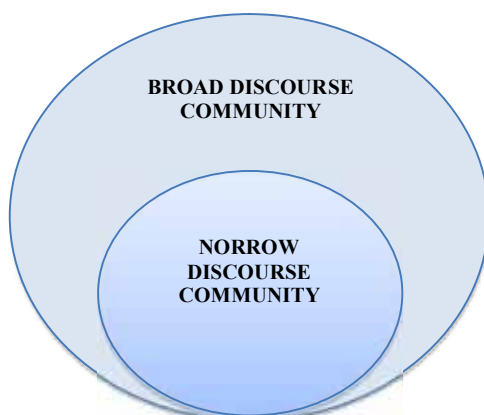


Illustration 1. The relationship between a narrow and a broad discourse community

The first thing that the general public want in the environmental protection field is to share the knowledge with the experts. When they feel endangered, they are ready to ask questions and fight in order to preserve their environment. The sense of endangerment created by modern technological development is therefore a powerful stimulus contributing to the overall attitudes of what can be called 'the broad discourse community'. Because of that, it is very important for real and potential polluters to explain and justify their plans, technologies and practices. If we know that the greatest polluters in the world today are the most developed countries, then it is to be expected that they have to be quite careful about the language they use so that they cover up the real and disastrous consequences of their technologies and actions. This is the place where, apart from formative, attitudinal collocations come in. They all contribute to the general awareness of the problem. However, they are often deceptive, even dangerous, because they are packed in the attitudes of the addressers who want to influence the addressees' attitudes. In this way,

the narrow environmental protection discourse community of experts creates the environmental awareness among the general public, but being equipped with much greater knowledge of the subject, the narrow community is able to select both the facts and the language in which they are formulated. Behaving like this, they can go on ruling the world and preserving the status quo.

One more consideration to be taken into account when discourse is mentioned is its social determination involving the complex relations of the subjects of communication because of which it can be said that „it is always a socially and historically situated mode of action“ (Fairclough, 1993: 134).

Although nature is usually thought of as something poles apart from society, there are also some reasonable attempts to incorporate it into the context of social practice. „Social practice, language use for example, is an action directed to the social world but also to what is called the 'natural world': ...the essence of human labour is that it creates the means of life for people by transforming the 'natural world'“ (Fairclough, 1989: 116). Environmental protection discourse is consequently concerned with these transformations and it is therefore something intertwining between society (and man in it) and nature (and man in it too). The use of language is seen here as a constituent part that fits in the proposed framework.

In this respect, the language used when explaining the sound natural practices and man's interference with them is certainly a reflection of the wish of the participants-in-communication to either maintain the status quo or to change something. The attitude of most polluters nowadays, unfortunately, coincides with the former stance – they do not want to waive their „right“ to go on polluting the world. In order to be successful at that, they are quite skilful in explaining the polluting processes and technologies: they resort to the language that helps them and they use „routine expressions, common ways of formulating things and collocations, which encode commonly accepted ideas“ (Stubbs, 1996: 5).

3. Lexical chunks – collocations

Igor Mel'čuk emphasises that „PEOPLE SPEAK IN SET PHRASES – rather than in separate words: hence the crucial importance of set phrases...or **phrasemes**. ... A phraseme is a lexical unit; and, which is crucial, it is the numerically predominant lexical unit: in any language, phrasemes outnumber words roughly 10 to 1. Collocations make up the lion's share of the phraseme inventory...“ (Mel'čuk, 1998: 1□2) (original emphases).

The term *collocation* refers to 'the lexical environment' of a word (Berti, 2010: 1161). This formulation by Barbara Berti conveniently brings the field of environmental protection to mind. The environment of a word, any environment, and the living environment as well, is therefore very important. It matters in many respects and when 'the lexical environment' is concerned, it is very important both for the right appreciation of the cognitive relations behind the word and for foreign or second language acquisition. Different languages have different rules about

'lexical combinability' (ibid.) and general understanding of some message is made easier if chunks or bundles of lexemes are used. These chunks, collocations being an example, are easy to accept because they „lessen the load of language processing“ (Zhao, 2009: 11).

Collocations are the words that fit together. Referring to Firth's position, A. M. Sultany defines them as the tendency of lexemes to 'collocate' or to combine in predictable ways (Sultany: 37). It is a fact that at the syntagmatic level certain lexical combinations can easily be predicted although, for a serious analysis, it is always questionable what makes them predictable or natural or when they start being called collocations. As for their meaning, it is the sum of their parts; unlike idioms, collocations are 'semantically transparent' (ibid: 45).

According to J. McH. Sinclair, „there are virtually no impossible collocations, but some are much more likely than others“ (Sinclair, 1996: 411). Words collocate as a result of their use in the language. People get accustomed to some combinations of words and, following their acceptance, they produce them thus raising their frequency within a discourse.

Collocations in specific discourses or genres can be said to be either formative (creating a particular discourse language and making it specific), and attitudinal (creating some desired effect).¹ Formative collocations are accepted combinations of discourse constituent lexemes a certain community shares. They are frequent and expected considering the shared knowledge of the subject. On the other hand, attitudinal collocations are the combinations that draw attention to something thus producing a cognitive, psychological or emotional effect. The following representation of the process of 'the narrow discourse community □ general public' interaction illustrates the path of information-creation but also of information-gathering:

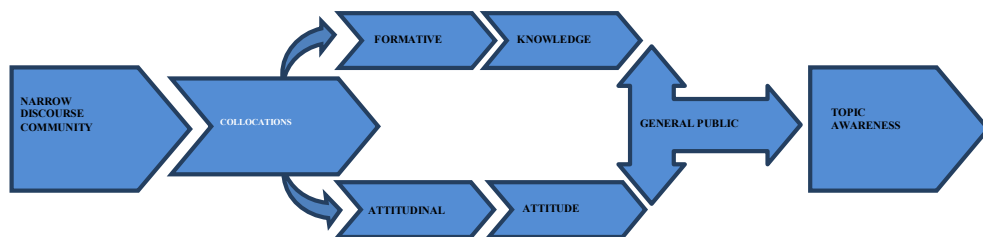


Illustration 2. Information-creation and information-gathering path

Whereas formative collocations appear with a high frequency, attitudinal collocations appear frequently enough so that the message or the attitude they carry can be expected to take root within the discourse community. In this respect, both types of collocations have some degree of regularity. In specific discourses, like environmental protection discourse, formative collocations reflect their topic-relatedness whereas attitudinal collocations reflect the addresser's individuality

¹ V. Stojičić uses the term 'stylistic or creative collocations' for these collocations.

or attitudes. Formative collocations are (or seem to be) attitude-free. They are accepted as part of the 'shop-talk', whereas attitudinal collocations are recognized as carrying a touch of creativity and reflecting the addresser's attitudes. It should be borne in mind that collocations are easily memorised as specific combinations of lexemes with a tendency to become deeply embedded in the brain for a long time. Technical collocations, which is another term for specific purpose collocations, „are significantly different from general purpose collocations“. Wen-shuenn Wu goes on to explain that they are „newly coined terms“, or words with new definitions and they often need „a longer text to make them clear“ (Wu, 2003: 96□97).

4. Environmental protection discourse collocations

The very title of the journal used for this analysis *Clean Energy Solutions* makes it clear that energy is in the focus of nine articles' authors. It is no wonder that this topic occupies the minds of those producing it but also of those spending it because energy is essential for producing materials and artefacts, for industrial and agricultural development, for transport, leisure, and communication. The way it is produced causes depletion of the existing resources, and it suffers from low usability or efficiency – two thirds of the total energy used is lost in its thermal conversion. The fact that the world's population is increasing dramatically implies that more energy will have to be provided along with the negative effects of energy-production also increasing. The inevitable consequences of the processes of obtaining energy and spending energy are harmful environmental impacts which necessarily bring about disastrous changes in the environment. Environmental awareness is a modern phenomenon resulting from these changes.

The number of people expressing their individual and public concerns about the environment is increasingly getting bigger. According to some authors, people's interest in a more caring approach to their surroundings in modern times has largely been confined to periods of prosperity or periods „when they have enough wealth and leisure to enjoy 'the privilege of concern'“ (Porritt, J. and D. Winner, 1988: 20). Wealth and leisure mean high standard of living which can only be enjoyed with enormous consumption of energy. They generally reflect the undeniable progress in the modern way of life but they are also illustrative of the fact that nowadays people manage to satisfy their basic needs relatively easily and have enough time, money and will to be concerned about their surroundings. On the other hand, there are some other theorists who „point out that... we are now in the middle of an entirely new phenomenon, since the present world-wide wave of environmental concern comes at a time of considerable economic uncertainty“ (ibid.). Even though these theorists deny the connectedness of economic certainty and environmental concerns, they don't deny the rise of environmental awareness. Economic development, because it is closely related to energy production and energy consumption, involves harmful environmental effects. Those standing behind it are always confronted by the people equipped with environmental awareness and they are simply made to take into account public attitudes and public concerns.

The title of the journal, *Clean Energy Solutions*, and its subtitle, *Economic Perspectives*, reflect the positions of energy producers who are very careful about the way they speak. They are aware of the reading public and they want to show that, apart from harming the environment, they are also concerned about it. The article titles also clearly show that energy is their focus of attention:

Clean Energy for Tomorrow
Reinventing the Wheels – The Automotive Efficiency Revolution
The Renaissance of Nuclear Energy
Renewables – Looking Toward Inexhaustible Energy
Small Steps Save Big in Energy
Clean Solutions for Power Generation
Developing Markets for Clean Energy Technologies
A Road Map to Investing in Sustainable Energy
Energy Security as a Global Partnership.

The analysis of the titles shows that, apart from the formative collocations, the attitudinal collocations or collocations referring to the authors' stances are present. The authors are aware of what words are good to collocate or place together. The word 'energy' is rightly expected to appear in all the titles. It does appear in seven, its synonym 'power' in one, and the presence of energy is confirmed by the use of *efficiency* in one title – the expected and implied collocation is *energy efficiency*. All the titles try to sound environment-friendly although four titles reveal the authors' wish to stay within the present boundaries of practice with slight modifications only: 'reinventing the wheel' and 'the *renaissance* of nuclear energy'. Two other titles also declare the authors' opting for the status-quo □ they stress that it is not now, but in the future that we are going to achieve our goals: *clean energy for tomorrow*, and *looking toward* inexhaustible energy.

Table 1. lists the collocations found in the articles' titles and subtitles. The ratio between formative and attitudinal collocations shows that formative collocations are in a great majority which is reasonable to expect considering their topic-relatedness. Attitudinal collocations, although much fewer, are eloquent. Energy, both in the aspects of its production and its consumption, suffers from causing dirt and pollution, therefore we, or the authors, are against it; we vote for *clean energy*. Available energy is likely to be exhausted soon, therefore we want to *sustain* it.² In other words, we are committed to solving the present energy crisis and experience this problem as a *challenge* devoting all our abilities, dedication and efforts to the task. Unlike the obvious imbalance between formative and attitudinal collocations in the subtitles (13:1), the ratio between these collocations in the titles is a better one: (4:3). It looks as though the authors wanted to express their own environmental awareness and concerns in the best possible place, in the titles.

² The term 'sustainable energy' carries the implication that we do not want to stop or reduce the pace of economic development although energy production and use, and healthy environment are mutually exclusive. The term 'sustainable development' is controversial in this respect. See Tošić, 2006.



Formative collocations	Attitudinal collocations
<i>Titles</i>	
nuclear energy	clean energy
inexhaustible energy	clean energy
energy security	sustainable energy
power generation	
4	3
<i>Subtitles</i>	
affordable energy	energy challenge
renewable energy	
solar energy	
energy conservation	
energy efficiency	
saving energy	
energy transformation	
energy finance	
energy supplies	
energy sources	
nuclear power	
wind power	
power generation	
13	1

Table 1. Collocations in the articles’ titles and subtitles

The following groups of collocations in the journal’s subtitles also mark environmental protection discourse. Three words have clear positive connotations in environmental protection discourse (*solutions, alternative, global*) and one is negative in this context (*market*).

<i>solutions</i>	<i>Alternative</i>	<i>market</i>	<i>global</i>
clean energy solutions	alternative automotive fuels	market barriers	global benefits
low-carbon technology solutions	alternative energy sources	market transformation	global partnership
creative business solutions	carbon finance alternative		

Table 2. Some other collocations in the journal’s subtitles

These collocations clearly show the directions for the future: *solutions* are possible and there are *alternatives* to the polluting energies of nowadays. One

collocation with *solutions* as a node, *creative business solutions*, shows, however, that energy is *business* leading inevitably to the *market*. But we, as the authors, are confident that what we propose is important on the *global* scale.

Three more collocations in the subtitles are worth mentioning: *public policy*, *at the grassroots level* and *individual choice*. On the one hand, we want to have a dialogue about our policy, which is also the general policy of all the people involved in the topic, ordinary people in particular, but on the other hand, the mention of an *individual choice* introduces a note of hedging in the policy.

4. Conclusion

The journal *Clean Energy Solutions* was published by the US Department of State, and it was meant to be a message to all the parties involved and to the general public as to what attitudes about the relationship between energy production, energy consumption, and the environment America holds. Although, as a country, it 'takes the lion's share' in environmental pollution on the global scale, it wants to show its will to save the Earth. One of the sidebar titles about alternative energy projects in Pennsylvania is *Changing the Way America Thinks About Energy*. This is an implication of the fact that its current practices are not environmentally-friendly. The word *change*, on the other hand, shows a positive trend.

Environmental awareness is therefore important in order to preserve the natural resources that sustain life on Earth. This awareness is generally easier to create among ordinary people, who are conscious of the visible consequences of pollution. The narrow environmental protection discourse community is more difficult to persuade. Its members are wavering between the wish to preserve the Earth and another wish to contribute to economic development. In this stage of the Earth's history, these two urges are incompatible. As for the axiological significance on the human scale, environmental protection ranks much higher than economic development. Consequently, those who are engaged in the latter need some resources to improve its position. Language use is a powerful tool capable of achieving the goal. If we accept that „people speak in set phrases“, the use of discourse-specific collocations is a step forward in this direction.

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KOLOKACIJE U DISKURSU ZAŠTITE ŽIVOTNE SREDINE

Rezime

Zaštita životne sredine je oblast koja pokriva široko prihvaćene ciljeve kao stratešku politiku koja je važna za globalnu zajednicu. Nema ničeg novog u frazi da zagađenost nema granica i da se ona, ma gde se pojavila, širi i do drugih država. U ovoj fazi, tehnološki razvoj obavezno prate i negativne uzgredne posledice i sigurno je da je kontraproduktivno pokušavati da se on zaustavi ili uspori. Razvijene tehnologije su od suštinske važnosti za moderan svet, ali one uglavnom izazivaju zagađenost. Najveći svetski zagađivači, kao na primer SAD, još uvek odbijaju da potpišu dokumenta čiji je cilj regulisanje štetnih emisija na globalnom planu. To bi podrazumevalo radikalnu promenu načina života koju zemlje-najveći zagađivači još uvek nisu voljne da sprovedu. Sa druge strane, nije moguće ignorisati probleme u životnoj sredini zato što oni pogađaju svakoga u celom svetu. Znajući to, zagađivači izmišljaju jezik kojim se ublažavaju negativne posledice njihovih aktivnosti. Ovaj rad se fokusira na najčešće kolokacije u diskursu zaštite životne sredine da bi pokazao kako se pomoću njih formira ekološka svest i, eventualno, opravdava današnja praksa.

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