

## Syntagmatics of Nominative Collocations in Modern English Essay



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The concept of word-combination or collocation is obviously the key-notion for research in syntagmatics. By collocation we mean the habitual association of a word with other particular words resulting in different syntagmatic types of word-combinations. It follows that the word-combination is a well-defined syntagmatic unit formed or coined in accordance with a definite syntactic pattern filled in with some lexical items. Sometimes the set of word-combination patterns is explained without any recourse of formulae, based metalinguistically on the principle of simply selecting one actual, lexically complete word-combination to stand for the pattern as a whole.

This means human beings store not just words in isolation in their brains, but also the prototypical syntagmatic patterns associated with each word. Each syntagmatic pattern is associated with the potential of a word or phrase to contribute to the meaningfulness of an actual utterance in a given context. From a cognitive point of view the idiosyncratic set of prototypes associated with each word may be slightly different in the same speech community, but such is the normative power of social pressures that any gross differences in prototyping are in due time eliminated and stereotypes of word usage emerge.

Thus, the word-combination is a compound unit of speech which is semantically both global and articulated. It follows from the latter definition that the term word-combination or collocation is used to denote a combination of two or more meaningful words which is functionally equivalent to a word, i.e. serves to express one global notion in spite of the separability of its components. The word-combination can be regarded as the dialectical unity of both morphosyntactic and lexical-phraseological aspects of speech formation. Therefore, the word-combination is known for its "two sided", controversial character. Its one face is turned to the word, and the other - to the sentence. While the word is the ultimate language unit of speech construction and the sentence is the result of speech production, the word-combination is the unique and basic element in this process because of its double nature: it is both ultimate and final, like a word and a sentence. This double, two-sided dialectical character of the word-combination accounts for its enormous potentialities and also for the great methodological significance in the syntactical syntagmatic study revealing as it does the dialectical unity of language and speech.

It should always be borne in mind that the language is a sociolinguistically determined system of linguistic units which have become global due to the fact that the things, the objects they denote are naturally thought of together by members of a given

speech community. That is to say, within the social life, the everyday social experience of speakers some elements or ultimate names of objects go together easily, are readily associated or can be combined in specific speech situations. We may, therefore, conclude that quite a number of word-combinations are not created or produced by the author, but recreated, reproduced on the semantic level. Otherwise stated, the unproductive or collocative sphere of speech formation is not completely free as it has certain linguistic norms to follow. On the other hand, compared with the sphere of phraseology proper, that is, to the domain of idiomatic complexes which are devoid of any freedom of usage, cannot be changed and are used ready-made in speech, the syntactical syntagms can be considered as enjoying a certain degree of freedom. In other words, research in the field of syntactical syntagms is based on the study of concordances of words in a large corpus providing evidence for how words are actually used in different stereotypical sets of syntagmatic prototypes which in their turn have their specific characteristics in different discourse types or speech varieties (functional styles).

Like all the other functional variations of the generic repertoire of publicistic style, the genre of contemporary essay too is built on the ontological juxtaposition of fact and fiction. This unity of fact and fiction conditions the functional motivation of all the linguistic units (nominative and verbal syntactical syntagms included) used in essay.

Our study of the nominative syntactical syntagms carried out on the semantic and metasemiotic levels of investigation demonstrates clearly that the essay tends to use the widest variety of typical and specific compound nominative groups (nominative word-combinations) determined by and based on the unity and at the same time contradiction of the informative and emotive aspects of speech.

In the descriptive nominative syntagmatic units below the observed target words in the form of adverbs or adjectives expressing a natural quality characterizing a person or a thing are peculiar in collocating themselves with an adverb of positive evaluation. In the last two examples the target word denoting either a negative personal characteristic or an unpleasant state or condition appears in its syntagmatic relation with the collocate which is an adverb of negative evaluation.

*A very private, humble man, he seemed **genuinely puzzled** that I wanted to know about his life. "There's nothing extraordinary about me," he scolded.*

(Wallace Terry "It's Such a Pleasure to Learn"; 249)

*I didn't do **exceptionally well** at CCNY – or at least, I didn't think so at the time. I passed with straight C's and graduated only because of my superior grades in ROTC, the Reverse Officer Training Corps.*

(Colin L. Powell "The Unwritten American Bargain"; 209).

*But there was a second appeal as well, and it was that my great-grandmother was everything I would have made her if I were inventing her. She was spunky, **dazzlingly defiant**, and I was sure, beautiful.*

(Elizabeth Stone "Family Stories"; 21)

*Recently, I was made **keenly aware** of the different Englishes I use.*

(Amy Tan, "Mother Tongue"; 53)

*The sentences of the first books I read were coolly impersonal. Toned hard. What most bothered me, however, was the isolation reading required.*

(Richard Rodriguez "Reading to Know"; 240)

*John Singleton, a 23-year-old black man, has a notoriously insular and mostly white Hollywood establishment purring.*

(Karen Grigsby Bates, "They've Gotta Have Us"; 107)

*The tobacco industry, coupled with Hollywood movies in which both hero heroine smoked like chimneys, won completely over people like my father, who were hopelessly addicted to cigarettes.*

(Alice Walker, "My Daughter Smokes"; 27)

In the first five examples the positive evaluative adverbs (lexical syntagms) *genuinely*, *exceptionally*, *dazzlingly*, *keenly*, and *cooly* are collocated with the target words *puzzled*, *well*, *defiant*, *aware*, *impersonal*. The emotive function is mostly realized by the collocate (*genuinely*, *exceptionally*, *dazzlingly*, *keenly*, *cooly*) whereas the informative aspect is conditioned by the target word (*puzzled*, *well*, *defiant*, *aware*, *impersonal*). It is important to point out that in our examples all the collocates are realized on the metasemiotic level as they are bearers of either adherent or inherent connotative qualities. The permanent figurativeness of the collocates of the first type (inherent) in no way depends on the context, on actual use, while that of the second type (adherent) is acquired in a certain context and depends on the creativity of the author. The connotativeness of the adverb *keenly* derives from the inherent quality of the word indicating strength, depth, eagerness. The adverb *cooly* possesses an inherent quality denoting calmness, absence of excitement or enthusiasm. The adverbs *genuinely*, *exceptionally*, *dazzlingly* are no less expressive although they are bearers of adherent and not inherent connotative overtones. The stylistic field or atmosphere the collocations have created to a greater extent depends on the collocate and to some extent on the target word and its interrelation with the collocate.

In the last two samples the collocations are still more expressive due to the fact that both the collocates (*notoriously*, *hopelessly*) and the target words (*insular*, *addicted*) are to a certain degree charged with negative overtones. However, the informative side is mostly secured by the target word.

Thus, the nominative syntactical syntagmatic construction Adv. + Adj./Adv. is most typical of the style of modern essay. There are many other such collocations which are widely used in modern essay (*uncritically superstitious*, *inescapably true*, *intensely hot*, *blissfully ignorant*, *intractably reticent*, *uncharacteristically deferential*, *irreversibly disagreeable*, *genuinely detestable*, *vaguely familiar*, *breathhtakingly dumb*, etc). Such word partnerships (word-combinations) are always descriptive and refer to persons and things. Very often they are charged with the richest emotional connotation and doubled emotiveness, expressivity and evaluation as in the examples below:

*Among them, I believed, was my father, a madly brilliant free spirit, who entered college at 16 and medical school at 18, and did not quit until he had received three medical degrees.*

(Lindsay Patterson, "My father Doctor Pat"; 41)

*The old woman's stories were all like that: unwashed and a little frightening, but **hypnotically descriptive** and as imaginative as any prose Smith has ever seen.*

(Robert Draper "This Lady Came Down from the Mountains"; 114)

*The Town of my childhood could be called bizarre, **agonizingly repressive** or cruel at times, and the land in which it grew could be called harsh in the violence of its seasonal changes.*

(Margaret Laurence "Where the World Began"; 44)

Our study of nominative syntagmatic peculiarities of essay revealed another interesting type of the construction Adv. + Adj./Adv widely used in the genre. One of the components (in this case the target word) in such syntagmatic units is of neutral character which respectively results in collocations which are more informative than emotive, more usual than occasional.

For example:

*The young bank clerk who worked such long hours for so little money, but who danced, sang, played, flirted – this **naturally vigorous**, sensuous being was killed in 1914, 1915, 1916. I think the best of my father died in that war, that his spirit was crippled by it.*

(Doris Lessing "My Father"; 78)

*Exercising a constitutional right to speak on this kind of matter, he quickly established that the town charter for Kissimmee, Florida, was **completely illegal** and unconstitutional. Legislators had been on the phone all day, and they were **deeply worried**.*

(George Garrett, "The Right Thing to do at the Time"; 290)

*Some say they understand 80 or 90 percent. Some say they understand none of it, as if she were speaking pure Chinese. But to me, my mother's English is **perfectly clear, perfectly natural**.*

(Amy Tan, "Mother Tongue"; 55)

In the above collocations the neutral target words *illegal*, *worried*, *natural* and *clear* are collocated with adverbs *completely*, *deeply* and *perfectly*. The superlative meanings of the latter, however, are not able to change the neutral character of the syntagmatic unit on the whole which appears to function on the semantic level and is devoid of any metasemiotic overtone.

The analysis of the previous examples evidence that any functional investigation presupposes the study of stylistic oppositions (semantic vs. metasemiotic, expressive vs. informative, usual vs. occasional, etc) within linguistic units. In this respect it should be noted that there exist certain stylistic categories invariably based on the notion of opposition. The study of such category forms enables to reveal certain functional-stylistic properties and define the functional-stylistic field to which the given linguistic unit belongs. Those units which realize the given stylistic category to the fullest are considered to be marked members of the category. Other units which don't realize the

given category are the unmarked members of the category. The interrelation between the marked and unmarked elements shapes a certain functional environment which indicates through typical characteristics to a certain discourse type and conditions the motivation of that speech variety (Alexandrova O.V., Ter-Minasova S.G., 1987; 68-70).

**The category of connotativeness** is manifested in word-combinations with emotive-expressive-evaluative overtones realizing the function of impact in contrast to those compound nominative groups, which are stylistically neutral, purely informative and realize the function of message. Otherwise stated, the category of connotativeness – non-connotativeness is based on the contradiction of the two completely different types of linguistic units: word-combinations performing the emotive function (that of impact) and word-combinations performing the informative function (that of message). The interaction between the marked and unmarked elements of the category of connotativeness is a constant, continuous process.

For example:

*So in the middle of the night – and then came the line I was waiting for with a **thrill of pleasure** –she ran off with him in her shift. I didn't know what a shift was and didn't want my settled version of the story disrupted by any new information. I loved the scene as I saw it: in the background was a house with a **telltale ladder** leaning against the second-story window. In the foreground was my great-grandmother, like some pre-Raphaelite maiden, dressed in a garment white and diaphanous and flowing, holding the hand of her beloved as **she ran through a field of dawn, toward her future, toward me.***

(Elizabeth Stone "Family Stories"; 20)

*In reality, she was still a child, but she knew too much to ever reclaim that **wide-eyed innocence** that she wasn't altogether sure that she ever had in the first place. She had forgotten. But she had finally taken the step that she had needed to take and she was proud. She had spoken out of the **depths of her silence** and, surprising as it was to her, people listened.*

(Aliza Moldofsky "Breaking Silence"; 282)

*A strange place it was, the place where the world began. A place of incredible happenings, splendors and revelations, **despairs like multitudinous pits of isolated hells.** A place of **shadow spookiness**, inhabited by the **unknowable dead.** A place of jubilation and mourning, horrible and beautiful.*

(Margaret Laurence "Where the World Began"; 44)

The expressivity of the above word combinations goes too far beyond the limits of informative communication. Moreover, their vivid connotativeness is striking. So striking, that the analysis on the level of word-combinations, sentences and even supraphrasal unities (paragraphs) will somehow mislead us to the supposition that the passage is rather a piece of imaginative writing which realizes the function of impact than a paragraph from the genre of essay which is based on the juxtaposition of fact and fiction. However, in all the three passages the creative message is about the descent, birthplace and childhood of the authors. Besides the inherent connotative combination

*depths of silence* we come across the adherent connotative nominative word groups *a thrill of pleasure*, *a telltale ladder* and authorial *shadow spookiness* and *unknowable dead* in which the productive suffixes *-ness* and *-able* are used to coin the nonce lexical syntagms *spookiness* and *unknowable*. There is also the extended metaphor *she ran through a field of dawn, toward her future, toward me* (the girl eloped with her lover through time and space to start the author's family), the genuine metaphor *despairs like multitudinous pits of isolated hells* (there was so much grief and despair in the author's home town) and the personification *wide-eyed innocence*.

In all the above examples the authors possess qualities typical of a good essayist: flexibility of mind, imagination, mastery of the English language and the ability to feel it. These characteristics play a very important role in presenting their family stories which offer blueprints and ideals, issue warnings and prohibitions and always last because in ways large and small they matter not only for the authors but for the readers as well.

**The category of reproducibility** is also mentioned as "the category of clichéd expression" or "the category of clichédness" in linguistic literature. Although the latter terms seem quite appropriate to express the essence of the category, according to the Russian linguistic school the word *cliché* possess an inherent negative connotation to indicate out-dated, stereotyped notions. Therefore the Russian linguists consider it right to use the term "reproducibility" which adequately expresses the concept and is stylistically neutral (Alexandrova O.V., Ter-Minasova S.G., 1987; 74).

Thus, the category of reproducibility is based on the opposition of regularly reproduced, clichéd, usual and occasional, creative, authorial word groups of speech. In the style of essay the fixed, closely bound, constantly repeated nominative syntactical syntagms enjoy as wide a usage as those which are specially created by the author to evoke a certain emotional reaction from the side of the reader.

For example:

*If we have confronted ourselves in the **middle passage** and found a **renewal of purpose** around which we are eager to build a **more authentic life structure**, these may well be **the best years**.*

(Gail Sheehy "Unpredictable Crises of Adulthood"; 194)

*I don't know what's worse: to have to look at **bad art** to find the **little good**, or to read what the critics say about it all. In no other **field of expression** has so much **double talk** flourished, so much **confusion** prevailed, and so much **nonsense** been circulated: **further evidence** of the **close interdependence** between the arts and the **critical climate** they inhabit.*

(Marya Mannes "How Do you Know It's Good?"; 279)

As evident from the two passages, all the balded regularly reproduced complexes are completely devoid of any metasemiotic colouring or connotativeness. They are all marked members of the category of reproducibility. In contrast to the marked members of the category of connotativeness, which are realized on the metasemiotic level and whose main function is to convey specific emotive-expressive-evaluative notions, the marked members of the category of reproducibility are realized on the semantic level

and carry out an informative function. It should also be noted that the marked members of the category of connotativeness are considered to be unmarked for the category of reproducibility and vice versa.

In spite of the fact of realizing totally different, opposing, contradicting functions, the wide range of different types of nominative word-combinations which belong to the categories of connotativeness and reproducibility are actually constantly cooperating in the genre of essay. The result of the collaboration is the formation of a stylistic field, which is functionally motivated and ontologically built on the juxtaposition of fact and fiction.

**The category of idiomacy** is represented in phraseological units proper, i.e. in idiomatic phraseological units which form a global whole and unlike most collocations are extensively fixed in the dictionaries of idioms. The main quality of such fixed phrases is that the meaning of the whole cannot even partially or through prediction be deduced from the meanings of the components, i.e. an idiom is a fixed group of words with a special different meaning from the meanings of the separate words it is constituted. It is said that idiomacy is more typical of fiction due to the strong emotive and evaluative properties idioms are charged with. In our opinion idiomacy is a typical characteristic of public writing as well and is widely used in the genre of essay which is a form of publicism itself.

Thus for instance:

*I was 7 years old the first time I snuck out of the house in the dark. It was winter and my parents had been fighting all night. They were **short on money and long on relatives** who kept "temporarily" moving into our house because they had nowhere else to go.*

(Lynda Barry, "The Sanctuary of School"; 202)

*In grade school, among the vulnerable and violet girls we were, the feared and despised were those few older girls from what was charmingly termed "**the wrong side of the tracks.**"*

(Margaret Laurence "Where the World Began"; 47)

*He met a German in **no-man's land**, but both slowly lowered their rifles and smiled and walked away. The Tommies were **the salt of the Earth**, the British fighting men the best in the world.*

(Doris Lessing "My Father"; 78)

My father was a small-town southern lawyer, not a writer, but he was a truth-teller. And he would tell the truth, come what may, **hell or high water.**

(George Garrett "The Right Thing to Do at the Time"; 288)

The study of different types of idioms (proverbs, sayings, bibleisms, euphemisms, idioms proper) shows that idioms in general express global experiences and values and are based on the group consciousness of people. Very often they have their exact equivalents in different languages and share a certain commonness of thoughts, ideas, traditions, faith, evaluation, appreciation, etc. Public writing in its turn has a universal extralinguistic origin, a descent which draws it close to the all-human values the idioms express. This is a testimony in favour of the wide usage of idioms in essay.

Although in many cases there are grammatical, stylistic or contextual limitations on the way idioms are used, the meaning of the highly expressive idiom *short on money and long on relatives* is quite predictable due to its social basis, especially in the context. It's not as old as *the wrong side of the tracks* but both of them are chiefly used in American English. The former means "to be poor on the one hand but have many relatives on the other", the latter expresses the idea of belonging to a less respectable district of a town. *No-man's land* is a historical idiom originally indicating the dangerous area lying between two opposing armies. The modern meaning, according to Longman's Dictionary of English Idioms (1987) is "a place or situation of uncertainty or danger where normal rules do not exist". *The salt of the Earth* is from the Bible (Matthew 5:13) and indicates to positive human characteristics: honesty, kindness, thoughtfulness, etc. *Come hell or high water* is a colloquial idiom meaning "whatever happens". The expression *what may* has intensified the informative meaning of the idiom *hell or high water*.

The study of a range of many other idioms used in English essay shows that the stylistic category of idiomacy is widely demonstrated in it and the members of the given category in addition to their ontological, inherent expressiveness and informativeness, acquire additional similar properties in the context which helps them to realize their function of informing and influencing the reader to the fullest.

**The sociolinguistic category** is expressed in compound nominative word groups which are sociolinguistically or extralinguistically determined, i.e. the syntagmatic interrelation between the components of the word-combination is conditioned by a number of social factors which include historical, anthropological, psychological, cultural, political and even economical peculiarities, aesthetic perceptions, traditions and customs of the society or the group under discussion. This is exactly the case when linguistics can hardly be separated from social realities and public experiences. Again, let's not forget that the essay is a form of public writing and as such is a direct reflection of the developments taking place in the society.

The problem with the sociolinguistic category is that in certain cases the reader needs some background knowledge or at least an acquaintance with the vertical context to be able to understand the meaning of the given member word-combination of the category. For example, the Armenian collocation *hairenabaghdz crunk* (*homesick crane*) which enjoys a wide usage in Armenian language, will sound absurd to foreign readers, whereas every Armenian knows that this bird is a symbol of homesickness for the nation. In the same way there are a number of nominative syntactical syntagms peculiar and typical of the English-speaking world in general and the English language in particular.

For example:

*Although the Passamaquoddies fought bravely in every U.S. war since the Revolutionary War, Marine didn't allow them the right to vote until 1954. English had long ago replaced the Passamaquoddy language in the reservation schools and TV was making English the language of choice at home.*

(Joseph Nicholas "The Voice of the Land is in Our Language"; 311)

*In the past three years, the company has paid out \$1.5 million to build and renovate*



*child-care-centers near its major work sites around the country. In its home base in Wilmington, Delaware, it spent \$ 250.000 and enlisted top executives to set up **Child Care Connection, a state-wide day-care referral service that's used by 75 companies.***

(Joseph Weber "Meet Du Pont's In-House Conscience"; 303)

*Underground! I had visions of **drug-crazed revolutionary zealots. Bombs exploding in federal buildings, God knows what kind of madness.***

(Nash Candelaria, "El Patron"; 271)

*He was also the only black man who was never called "boy", and who was invited to sit in **White Only waiting rooms.***

(Lindsay Patterson, "My Father", "Dr. Pat"; 41)

*My **Ontario Irish grandfather** said "sparrow grass", a more interesting term than asparagus....It should never be forgotten that it is we ourselves who have sold such **a large amount of our birthright for a mess of plastic progress.** When I saw the **War Measures Act** being invoked in 1970, I lost forever the vestigial remains of the naïve wish that repression could not happen here, or would not.*

(Margaret Laurence "Where the World Began"; 48)

*"And sure enough, later I heard from the **Little Aunties** that the **church records** showed we were descended the backstairs way from the **Duke of Wellington**, or was it Marlborough? Damn it, I forgot. But one of them would be beside me all through the war, she said." He was romantic, not only about this **solicitous ghost**, but also about being a descendant of the Huguenots....*

(Doris Lessing "My Father"; 79)

All the balded word-combinations are extralinguistically determined. It is quite evident from the examples that the background knowledge and the realization of the informative function are the major parameters of the category under discussion. The final purpose of even the most connotative collocations (*drug-crazed revolutionary zealots, a large amount of birthright, plastic progress, solicitous ghost*) is to render, directly or indirectly, certain information about the society and the individual as a part of it.

Generalizations made on the study of nominative syntactical syntagms (compound nominative word groups) through the contradiction and unity of the stylistic category forms demonstrate clearly enough the following significant syntagmatic characteristics of English collocations in essay:

- The syntagmatics of essay is a norm based on a stereotypical syntagmatic prototype and to this extent all the collocations are like single words: each of them is associated with a set of prototypical patterns of usage.
- The significant collocate conditions the nature of the whole syntagmatic pattern to a great extent. The prototypical syntagmatic criteria for idiomacy, connotativeness and non-connotativeness is identified through the syntagmatic relationship of the collocation.
- The functional stylistic motivation or the discourse mode is to a great extent

signalled by the syntagmatic linguistic behaviour of collocations, in the case concerned collocations disclose the ontological juxtaposition of fact and fictions in the genre of English essay.

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### **Շարահյուսական շարույթները ժամանակակից անգլերենի խոհագրության ժանրում**

Շարահյուսական շարույթների ուսումնասիրությունը ցույց է տալիս, որ լեզվաոճական այս միավորները հիմնված են լեզվի որոշակի նախատիպային համակարգերի վրա և դրանց համակարգային կիրառությունը մեծապես պայմանավորում է խոսքային այս կամ այն դրսևորման գործառական-ոճական ուղղվածությունը: Ինչպես հրապարակախոսական ոճի բոլոր խոսքային տարատեսակներում, ժամանակակից անգլերենի խոհագրության ժանրում նույնպես շարահյուսական շարույթները աչքի են ընկնում լայն կիրառությամբ և իրականի ու երևակայականի յուրահատուկ հակադրամիասնությամբ: