

A COMPARISON OF THE TREATMENT OF COLLOCATIONS

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The dictionaries reviewed in this survey were. the *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary*, 5th edition; the *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*; the *COBUILD English Dictionary*, 2nd edition; the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, 3rd edition.

OALD5 lists a lot of collocates in examples, which often take the form of slashed Phrase-type examples. The advantage of phrase examples is that they take up a lot less space than full sentence examples, and several collocations can be shown at once. Compared with the other three dictionaries, OALD5 seems to have more phrase examples. Consider the collocational information given by dictionaries in the following entries:

responsibility	
OALD5:	take/assume/accept/bear full responsibility for the consequences.
CIDE:	The minister took/accepted full responsibility for (=admitted that he was to blame for) <i>the disaster and resigned.</i>
COBUILD2:	(sense 2) If you accept responsibility for something that has happened, you agree that you were to blame for it or caused it. Someone had to give orders and take responsibility for mistakes.
LDOCE3:	take responsibility for (=agree to be in charge of something or someone) <i>My husband took full responsibility for organizing the trip.</i> assume responsibility for formal (=agree to be in charge of) <i>Richard assumed responsibility for his brother's children.</i> accept responsibility for <i>The management accepts no responsibility for cars left in the car park .</i>

interest	
OALD5:	feel/have/show/express (an) interest in sth
CIDE:	<i>He never seems to show much interest in his children. I've never had any interest in the royal family.</i>

COBUILD2:	(sense 1) If you have an interest in something, you want to learn or hear more about it.
LDOCE3:	show/express interest (=say you are interested in something or want to buy it): <i>Ben has shown an interest in teaming French/Several football clubs have expressed an interest in Giggs.</i>


reputation	
OALD5:	a school with an excellent/enviable/unrivalled reputation a good/bad reputation as a doctor
CIDE:	<i>The company has a worldwide reputation for quality. The hotel has a bad reputation.</i>
COBUILD2:	(sense 2)...If they have a good reputation, people think they are good.
LDOCE3:	a good/bad reputation: <i>This restaurant has a very good reputation.</i>

Although OALD5 says that if the meaning of the collocation is not obvious an extra explanation will be given in brackets, this does not seem to be done adequately. For example, users need to have the meaning of **show/express interest** explained, which only LDOCE3 does, especially the latter half "... or want to buy it". Collocations whose meanings seem transparent to native speakers could turn out to be pitfalls for foreign learners, and lexicographers need to always bear this in mind. It is also important from the point of view of vocabulary acquisition. As Verstraten (1992: p38) says: "Fixed phrases must be thoroughly explained in the learner's dictionary in order to enable the student quickly to enter them into his/her own mental lexicon." With respect to encoding, OALD5 gives more choices, especially adjectives at the entry for the noun, to try and help students expand their active vocabulary. Yet the meanings of collocations listed together should be differentiated wherever possible, as LDOCE3 does at **responsibility**. This is because users need guidance about which collocation they should choose when the collocations are not synonymous. Moreover, it is important to have a criterion for ordering collocations and let users know what it is. Whereas OALD5, CIDE, and COBUILD2 do not give us information about this, LDOCE3 clearly states in the preface (pxvi) that collocations are listed in frequency order, with the most important collocations coming first.

CIDE shows collocations and idioms in bold and explains them when their meaning is not clear from the meanings of their components. As collocations are generally defined as combinations of words that have a certain mutual expectancy, whose meaning is clear from each component, collocations are not usually explained. This poses the same problem as was mentioned above regarding OALD5. CIDE first gives the core meaning of a headword, and then meanings that are figurative or slightly different from the definition are shown or explained in examples. The

space that is not taken by definitions is used to show more collocations. Another way of explaining this is that CIDE shows shades of meaning using collocations, instead of dividing them into several senses as most dictionaries do, because "...different collocations will almost certainly lend special senses to a lexeme" (Nattinger and DeCarrico 1992: p181) and it is sometimes difficult to draw a distinction between senses. The way CIDE is organized makes it very difficult for users to find the entry that has the collocation information they want. CIDE makes entries for each sense of a word and gives them GUIDE WORDS. These are of no help in terms of retrieving collocational information because they are done under the assumption that users have an idea of the meanings of the components of the collocation in question. For example, when learners come across the expression **a free man** and they do not know what free means here, they would be at a loss about which entry to go to: free NOT LIMITED, free NOT IN PRISON, free NO CHARGE, free NOT BUSY, free LOOSE, free WITHOUT, or free GENEROUS. The same is true of **free and easy**. They can, of course go through all the entries from the first one to the last one, but the presentation is not clear enough to browse quickly. CIDE has a good coverage of collocations, which represent a continuum of the meaning of a word. But only highly advanced learners, who are able to understand each example without a definition, would be able to make full use of it, especially for encoding tasks.

COBUILD's full sentence definitions make it possible to show information about selection restrictions, grammar context, and usage in the definition. COBUILD definitions are of great use for words in which collocations are an integral part of the definition. Other dictionaries have therefore also incorporated this type of definition. For example, LDOCE3 revised the definition of **absorb** in its second edition as follows:

LDOCE2:	1 to take or suck (esp. liquids) in, esp. gradually
	
LDOCE3	1 if something absorbs a liquid, it takes the liquid into itself from the surface or space around it 7 if a substance or object absorbs light, heat, or energy, it keeps it and does not REFLECT it (=send it back)

COBUILD sometimes seem to stick to their style too much to show how a word is used rather than its meaning, which is the heart of definition. Although the definition of sense 4 of **abuse**, for instance, tells us that **abuse** is often used in the passive in this sense and that the subject must be a human being (or an animal), the corresponding definition in LDOCE3 is more informative in terms of semantic information [2].

COBUILD2:	4 If someone is abused , they are treated cruelly and violently.
LDOCE3:	2 to treat someone in a cruel and violent way, often sexually, especially someone that you should look after.

The presentation of collocations is a big problem in COBUILD2. Collocations have to be presented in a distinctive way in order to make users aware that they are different from free combinations. In COBUILD2 fixed phrases and grammatical collocations are printed in bold and usually placed in the last paragraph(s) of the entry. However, lexical collocations are not marked in any way. (OALD5 shows them either by using phrase examples or by putting them in bold, and CIDE and LDOCE3 have them printed in bold).

One of the features of LDOCE3 is that all fixed expressions (collocations, idioms, lexical phrases) are treated as separate senses and listed in frequency order. This provides users with a quick means of reference and makes users aware of the importance of the phrase in question because phrases with high frequency, which learners are more likely to come across, are given first. However, phrases with relatively low frequency can be difficult to find, particularly at the entry for a word such as **thing** or **heart** which has a lot of fixed phrases.

The table below shows whether collocations given under **compliment** in LDOCE3 are found in the other three dictionaries. LDOCE3 has a good coverage of collocations and their meaning is explained in most cases.

LDOCE3	CIDE	OALD5	COBUILD2
pay sb a compliment*	•	•*	•
take sth as a compliment*	•	•*	•
shower sb with compliments*			
return a compliment*			
fish for compliments*	•*	•*	
pay sb the compliment of doing sth*	•		
my compliments to the chef*	•	•*	•
compliments of the season*		•*	
with the compliments of*			
with our compliments*	• (your)		•*(your)

return the compliment*	•*(+replay)	•	•*
back handed/left handed compliment:*			
* = includes an explanation of the meaning			

It is clear from all the examples cited in this report that COBUILD2 lags behind the other three dictionaries regarding coverage of collocations. Although OALD5 and CIDE have good coverage of collocations, the meaning of the collocations is not explained as often as in LDOCE3. Another problem with COBUILD2 is its presentation, which does not distinguish collocations from free combinations. CIDE does not give users easy access to its collocational information, and high proficiency in English is required for users to make use of the information. LDOCE3 provides more definitions for collocations, which are essential for decoding and help users' encoding to a great extent. Regarding the placement and order of collocations in longer entries, research needs to be carried out to find out which structure users find easier to follow.

NOTES

- 1 However the example for this sense is not very helpful because of the reference to "Giggs". If a user knows that Giggs is a famous football player, s/he understands the example means several teams want to buy him. But if s/he does not know (like me, but I do understand who Gary Lineker is, though!), it is difficult to expect them to interpret "Giggs" as being the name of a football player and therefore understand what the example means.
- 2 Definitions in LDOCE3 generally get to the heart of meaning better than those in the other three dictionaries. Another example is **break free/break loose**:

COBUILD2: If you break free or loose, you free yourself from something or escape from it.

CIDE: The horse tried to break **free** from its stable. (No explanation).

OALD5: (no mention of break free) break loose to escape being confined or restricted (sic).

LDOCE3: to escape from someone or somewhere by using force.

□

REFERENCES

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