

**Sonja Poulsen (2022). *Collocations as a language resource: A functional and cognitive study in English phraseology*. John Benjamins Publishing Company, 348 pages. ISBN 978-90-272-1083-8.**

What constitutes a suitable theoretical framework for conventional (or habitual) and entrenched collocations (collocations in which the noun evokes the dominant frame) consisting of a verb plus nominal object? This question is addressed in Poulsen's book "Collocation as a language resource: A functional and cognitive study in English phraseology", which is based on a Ph.D. thesis. In her book, Poulsen critically reviews the traditional phraseological approach to collocations and proposes a combined functional and cognitive approach, which "can be used to provide an integrated framework for the study of collocations" (p. 12). Via an in-depth case study of the collocation break an appointment, Poulsen tests the assumption that a combined approach provides a suitable theoretical framework for the study of collocations.

The book is structured into four chapters. Chapter 1 ('Introduction') begins with an outline of the traditional phraseological approach to collocations followed by a discussion of different definitions of the term 'collocation' and a delimitation of Poulsen's understanding of the concept collocation. Subsequently, the chapter outlines what the author considers to be the main elements of the traditional approach to phraseology, the phraseological categorization framework, zooming in on five claims, which she considers to be problematic:

- a) Full compositionality is seen as the norm from which restricted collocations deviate, rather than constituting an exception.
- b) Patterns of collocation are seen as arbitrary rather than motivated.
- c) Distributional patterns of paradigmatic and syntagmatic restrictedness are used to categorize combinations, whereas these patterns may be merely extrinsic and without relevance for the intrinsic properties of the combinations.
- d) Analysability, or transparency, is seen as evidence of full compositionality rather than an independent parameter.
- e) A collocation is seen as a hypotactic structure consisting of a dependent collocater and an autonomous base; a view that does not allow for combinations in which the autonomy/dependence relation is not clearly one-way (p. 11).

On this basis, Poulsen motivates her own approach to collocation, viz, a combined functional and cognitive approach, discussing what a theory of collocations should account for. Chapter 1 concludes with an overview of the book and introduces the research questions that guide the study.

Chapter 2 ('The foundations of the phraseological approach') provides an outline of the traditional phraseological approach to collocations. The Chapter begins with an introduction to the theoretical influences on phraseology, i.e., Firthian linguistics, structural and generative linguistics, the principle of classical categorization, and Russian phraseology, after which the author argues that there is a cognitive strand in phraseology "waiting to conquer the central ground" (p. 27). After outlining the different theoretical influences on phraseology, she critically reviews the categorization of collocations of the traditional phraseological approach in more detail than in chapter 1, arguing that the categorization framework is problematic in several respects, as indicated in chapter 1 (letters a-e). First, she questions the notion of full compositionality as a norm for collocations arguing that lexical items are generally polysemous. Second, Poulsen argues that patterns of collocability are complex and therefore cannot be seen as merely arbitrary as suggested in the traditional phraseological

approach. Instead, she suggests that patterns of collocability are neither arbitrary nor fully predictable (p. 87). Third, it is argued that patterns of paradigmatic and syntactic restrictedness may be extrinsic in nature (p. 27) and as such not adequate for categorising collocations. Instead, to be able to account for the complexity of the collocability patterns, she proposes that the notion of paradigmatic restrictedness is abandoned altogether and that the idea of syntagmatic restrictedness as deviation from a norm of full compositionality is reassessed. Fourth, she argues that analysability should be seen as “relative and independent of the factors motivating a word combination and its psychological and social status” (p. 87). In other words, she sees analysability as an independent parameter rather than as evidence of full compositionality as in the traditional phraseological approach. Fifth, Poulsen questions the assumption that collocations by definition consist of a dependent collocate and an autonomous base, arguing that “allowance should be made for collocations in which the autonomy/dependence relation is not clearly one-way” (p. 27). In sum, based on the above arguments, Poulsen questions the descriptive and explanatory adequacy of the traditional phraseological categorization framework.

Chapter 3 (‘Collocations in a functional and cognitive framework’) is by far the most comprehensive part of the book. By means of an empirical study, Poulsen tests the overall assumption that a combined functional and cognitive approach to collocations is “descriptively more adequate and has greater explanatory potential” (p. 1) than the traditional phraseological approach. The chapter begins with a discussion of ‘functional’ and ‘cognitive’ aspects of language. Subsequently, she moves on to discussing different methodological issues of carrying out an empirical study, i.e., the challenge of measuring the frequency of co-occurrence in corpus data, the challenge of analysing linguistic data in terms of linguistic models, and how synchronic data may reflect the diachronic process of entrenchment and innovation because they reflect past language developments. On this basis, she presents her study, starting with four hypotheses, which she refers to as research questions:

1. The contexts of situation to which conventional and entrenched collocations contribute and their underlying frames can be identified by analysing the internal structure of component items and their mode of integration. In this conventional and entrenched collocations are like other composite structures.
2. In conventional and entrenched collocations consisting of a verb and a nominal object, the noun evokes the dominant frame while the verb profiles a specific aspect of the frame. In collocations that are not entrenched, it is the verb that evokes the dominant frame.
3. Conventional and entrenched collocations can be characterized in terms of the cognitive salience of the verb + nominal object construction in the frame evoked by the noun.
4. The verb in conventional and entrenched collocations has a functional, grammaticalized role as support verb (p. 131).

She sets out to test the hypotheses via a case study of the collocation *break an appointment*. Poulsen then presents the case-study design and the data to be analysed in her study. The study is based on corpus data, but the author rejects the use of statistical tools because she sees “language as analogue rather than digital and motivated by function rather than frequency” (p. 89). This viewpoint lacks nuance and, in principle, means that the researcher will never be able to use statistically based corpus analyses in connection with linguistic analyses, but surely this depends on the purpose at hand. If the purpose is to provide detailed knowledge of unique cases or exceptions, statistical tools are obviously not suitable. However, if the purpose is to unveil word combinations and typical and usual linguistic patterns, statistical searches of electronic corpora are key (Dam- Jensen & Zethsen, 2007, p. 1612). This is the basic premise of corpus-based phraseology (see, for example, Stubbs 2001, Sinclair 1991

and 1996). It would have been interesting if the author had addressed these issues when stating her methodological basis.

For the case study, Poulsen chooses the verb plus nominal object collocation *break an appointment*, using the British National Corpus as a data source for her analyses. First, *break* and *appointment* are analysed separately “with the aim of accounting for their internal, polysemous structure” (p. 134). This is followed by an analysis of the composite structure *break an appointment*. According to her analyses, the first hypothesis - i.e., that conventional and entrenched collocations are like other composite structures – is confirmed, which is hardly surprising. The second hypothesis states that, in conventional and entrenched collocations, the noun evokes the dominant frame, which distinguishes them from other collocations, in which the verb is frame-bearing. The analysis reveals that the second hypothesis is also confirmed, arguing that the noun “evokes the schematic frame exerting top-down coercion on the specific frame, or frame slot, evoked by the collocation” (p. 290). The third hypothesis, according to which conventional and entrenched collocations can be characterised in terms of salience, is also confirmed by the analysis, and the same applies to the fourth hypothesis, which suggests that the verb functions as a support verb.

Chapter 4 (‘Collocations as a language resource: Winding up’) summarises Poulsen’s arguments for a combined functional and cognitive framework and discusses the descriptive adequacy and explanatory potential of the framework. In addition, the suitability of the methodology used and the theoretical implications are discussed. In this context, Poulsen argues in favour of unifying the traditional phraseological approach to collocations with a combined functional and cognitive approach, arguing that “adopting a functional and cognitive approach as the general framework for phraseology may solve the problems of categorization posed by the traditional approach” (p. 304). Finally, Poulsen discusses areas for future research.

To sum up, the book offers empirical insights into the study of collocations and thus makes a contribution to the discussion of the theorisation of collocations.

However, the book is not without points to be criticised or discussed. The fact that the book is based on a PhD thesis raises some problematic issues. The first issue is that the PhD thesis has already been reviewed by an assessment committee, and it remains unclear whether and how the thesis has been revised according to the comments and assessment of the committee. The second problematic issue concerns revision and updating of the thesis. In the preface, Poulsen states that, in the process of writing the book, her dissertation from 2005 has been “thoroughly reviewed” (p. x). However, the reader may question the thoroughness of such revision for several reasons. First, the vast majority of references are from 2005 or earlier with relatively few references to more recent literature. More specifically, of the 314 references included in the book, only 58 references concern works published after 2005, and only 19 works published in 2015 or later. Surely, there must be developments within the field and newer work for the author to draw on. Second, the book would benefit from a thorough revision of the introduction to the book provided in chapter 1, which is very detailed leading to unfortunate repetitions in subsequent chapters. This is, for instance, the case with the discussion of the problem of categorization of the traditional phraseological approach and the motivation for a combined functional and cognitive approach. Third, there is an odd mix-up of the terms *research question* and *hypothesis*. It is problematic that the author states that her work starts from research questions when these, in fact, are hypotheses (p. 25). In addition, the hypotheses themselves may not qualify as “good hypotheses”, equating interesting, controversial and/or bold assumptions to avoid “the risk of triviality” (Chesterman, 2011, p. 71). In the case of this book, one may wonder whether the hypotheses presented are in fact good hypotheses or whether the author already knows the answer to them in advance.

As for methodology, the conclusions of the book rest on the analysis of only a single collocation (*break an appointment*), based on which generalisations are made about collocations in general. This seems to be a somewhat weak basis for making generalisations which raises questions as to the implications and the scope of the book.

The final issues concern the readability of the book. According to this reader, the structure of the book is at times disorienting, which makes it difficult to follow the argumentation. For instance, the discussion of the problems with the categorization of the traditional phraseological approach (pp. 64-86) would benefit from a stricter adherence to the five claims that Poulsen wishes to discuss to make it clear to the reader how each claim is addressed. In addition, section headings are not always helpful, and the vast number of cross-references refer to sections only (without providing specific page numbers), making it a complex matter to follow them.

Despite its limitations, this book can be appreciated for several reasons: With its meticulous analyses of the composite structure *break an appointment*, it is an impressive piece of work, its hypotheses are tested using a large corpus (BNC), and it contributes to the field of collocation studies, proposing a unification of traditional phraseological approaches with functional and cognitive approaches. In addition, the many figures and tables are very helpful to the reader.

The book will be especially interesting for everyone who is interested in the study of collocations and language in context. The book may serve as inspiration for teachers who are interested in functional and cognitive approaches to teaching collocations.

## References

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