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Collocation

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- **#** In our previous lecture, we mentioned that semantic field theory is essentially concerned with paradigmatic relations. Another important type of relations we need to recognize is the syntagmatic relations between words like "bite" and "teeth", "bark" and "dog", "blond" and "hair".. etc.
- We notice from these examples that certain words tend to appear together or "keep company". This keeping company is what is called in semantics "collocation".

- **#** • Collocation can be seen as part of the meaning of a word. By looking at the linguistic context of words, we can often distinguish between different meanings. Notice the use of "chair" in these examples.
1- sat in a chair
2- the baby's high chair
3- the chair of philosophy
4- has accepted a University chair
5- the chairman of the meeting
6- will chair the meeting
7- the electric chair
8- condemned to the chair
9- These examples are clearly in pairs, giving four different meanings of the word. The above examples help to illustrate Firth's (1951) argument: "You shall know a word by the company it keeps."

Types of Collocational Restrictions

- **#** Here we will discuss the three types of restriction that result in collocation of words in a language.
  ● Types of Collocational Restrictions:
  A. Some collocational restrictions are based wholly on the meaning of the item.
  For example, meaning explains the collocation of "bite" and "teeth". Meaning also explains why it is unlikely to see the collocation "green cow".

- **#** Words may have more specific meanings in particular collocations. In particular collocations, a word may change. Thus, we can speak of "abnormal weather" or "exceptional weather" if we have a heat wave in winter, but "an exceptional child" is not "an abnormal child". In the second example, "exceptional" is being used for greater than usual ability and "abnormal" to refer to some kind of defect.

- # **B.** Some restrictions are based on range - a word may be used with a number of other words that have some semantic features in common. Also, we find that individual words or sequences of words will NOT collocate with certain groups of words.
Looking at the range we know roughly the kind of nouns (in terms of their meaning) with which a verb or adjective may be used.

- For example, we may say "The rhododendron died," but not "The rhododendron passed away." This is in spite of the fact that "pass away" seems to mean "die". We should not use "pass away" with the names of any shrubs. It is not very plausible to say that "pass away" indicates a special kind of dying that is not characteristic of shrubs. It is rather that there is a restriction on its use with a group of words that are semantically related.

- Range accounts for the unlikeliness of collocations like "The rhododendron passed away." In cases like this, we do not reject specific collocations simply because we have never heard them before - we rely on our knowledge of the range.

- **C.** Some restrictions are collocational in the strictest sense, involving neither meaning nor range.
Although collocation is very largely determined by meaning, it sometimes cannot easily be predicted in terms of the meaning of the associated words.
An example of this is the use of "blond" with "hair". We do not normally say "a blond door" or "a blond dress" even if the color was exactly that of blond hair.

- # Another example is words for animal sounds such as: "dog/bark", "cat/mew", "sheep/bleat", "horse/neigh", etc.
This characteristic of language is also found in an extreme form in the collective words such as: "flock of sheep", "herd of cows", "school of whales" and "pride of lions".

- However, there is no clear distinguishing line between those collocations that are predictable from the meanings of the words that co-occur, and those that are not predictable from the meaning. That is because it might be possible to provide a semantic explanation for even the more restricted collocations, by assigning very particular meanings to the individual words. For example, we can account for collocations like "dogs bark", "cats mew" in terms of the kind of noise made.

- This should not, however, lead us to conclude that all of these restricted collocations can be accounted for semantically. For instance, it is difficult to see any semantic explanation for the use of collective terms. The only difference between "herd" and "flock" is that one is used with cows and the other with sheep.

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