"Tell me what company you keep, and I'll tell you what you are" –
Ideas for EFL teachers about collocations

"Me digas com quem andas que te direi quem tu és" –
Ideias para professores de inglês como língua estrangeira sobre combinações

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Resumo: *Mesmo que o termo combinações não seja conhecido por alguns professores, já possui um lugar importante no ensino de línguas. No passado, o aprendizado de línguas era pensado e ensinado mais como uma questão de estudo da gramática e aquisição de vocabulário. Com o advento da linguística de corpus, entende-se que isso não é suficiente, que é necessário mostrar aos estudantes que mesmo que seja gramaticalmente correta, uma frase pode não parecer nativa se não se fizer uso da combinação correta. Neste sentido, ensinar combinações é uma boa maneira de fortalecer a autonomia dos estudantes para que possam dominar uma língua estrangeira com habilidade. Sob a luz de alguns estudos acerca de combinações, esse artigo pretende descrever esses fenômenos assim como dar suporte aos professores de Inglês como Língua Estrangeira na implementação de atividades com combinações em suas aulas, além de oferecer ideias iniciais para seu uso em sala de aula.*
Palavras-chave: *Combinações; ensino de Inglês como Língua Estrangeira; ideias para sala de aula.*

Abstract: *Even though collocations are not known for some teachers by this name, they already take an important place in language teaching. In the past, language learning was thought and taught more as a matter of grammar study and vocabulary acquisition. With the growth of corpus linguistics, it is understood that this is not enough, but that it is also crucial to show students that even being grammatically correct, a sentence may not sound native-like if they do not use the right collocation. In this sense, collocations are a good way to empower and to enable students to master a foreign language skillfully. Under the light of some studies on collocations, this paper intends to describe these phenomena as well as to provide English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers with support on how to teach collocations in their classes by offering a set of starting ideas.*
Keywords: *Collocations; EFL teaching; classroom ideas.*

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1. Introduction

According to Manning and Schütze (1999), the area 'collocations' has been neglected in structural linguistic traditions that follow Saussure and Chomsky, since structural linguists focus on general abstractions about the properties of phrases and sentences. However, there is a tradition in British linguistics related to the names of Firth, Halliday, and Sinclair who pay close attention to these phenomena. Firth's Contextual Theory of Meaning (apud Manning & Schütze, 1999) highlights the importance of context: the context of the social setting as opposed to the idealized speaker; the context of spoken and textual discourse as opposed to the isolated sentence; and the context of surrounding words, which is important for collocations. Firth is famous for his dictum that a word can be characterized by the company it keeps and his theory comes as an alternative to structural linguistics, which, as aforementioned, does not give attention to these contextual features.

Recently, with the growth of corpus linguistics, there has been growing interest in collocations. References as Kjellmer (1994), Sinclair (1995), Shin and Nation (2008), and McIntosh (2009) demonstrated the magnitude of the topic. Lewis (1993 apud Shin & Nation, 2008), with his Lexical Approach, stressed the importance of learning collocations. Notwithstanding, this approach leads to a critical problem in teaching: the huge number of collocations. Although collocations are present in the majority of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks (Lima, 2008), they are sometimes treated with simplicity or as something without importance, revealing that the topic may be misunderstood by book editors, teachers, and students. Besides, many EFL teachers are not acquainted with the term 'collocations' and of its weight in language fluency. To really aid in teaching, teachers should have a basis to decide what to focus on, what is currently used, what is really important to be taught. Therefore, it is necessary to make teachers aware of collocations, of what technological tools may be used to aid in teaching and of how to teach these 'powerful combinations' effectively.

This paper is based on Shin and Nation's (2008) findings of their research. The authors applied a well-defined set of criteria to arrive at a list of the most useful spoken collocations for elementary learners of English. The objectives are: (1) to present teachers some definitions of collocations; (2) to list reasons why they should be taught and learned; and (3) to aid teachers in the task of creating and implementing activities in real EFL classrooms.

Divided into five sections, this paper presents in the first section a brief introduction to the topic of study as well as the objectives of the paper. The second section, entitled 'What is a collocation?', provides the reader with definitions of collocations. In the third section, entitled 'Why learning and teaching collocations?', the authors describe some reasons why collocations

should be taught and learned. The fourth section, 'How to successfully implement collocations in the daily EFL teaching routine', seeks to offer some ideas on how to use and teach collocations in the classroom routine. To close, the fifth section brings the authors' final remarks on the topic.

2. What is a collocation?

Briefly stating, collocation is the "way words combine in a language to produce natural-sounding speech and writing" (McIntosh, 2009: V). In the same vein, Manning and Schütze (1999) define it as an expression of two or more words that sound natural to native speakers of the language and correspond to some conventional ways of saying things. An easy way to remember the meaning of collocation is to think of 'co-' (meaning together) and 'location' (referring to place), therefore, collocation can be thought of as referring to words that go together, words that are placed together. Lima (2008) considers collocation a phenomenon in which words combine perfectly. Collocations include noun phrases like *strong tea* and *weapons of mass destruction*, phrasal verbs like *to make up*, and other stock phrases like *the rich and powerful*.

According to Manning and Schütze (1999), collocations are characterized by limited compositionality. An expression can be called compositional only when the meaning of the expression can be predicted by the meaning of its parts. In the authors' words, "collocations are not fully compositional in that there is usually an element of meaning added to the combination" (Manning & Schütze, 1999:141). For instance, in the collocation *strong tea*, *strong* acquired the meaning *rich in some active agent*, which is closely related but slightly different from the basic sense *having great physical strength*. In contrast, idioms are at the extreme of non-compositionality, as in the expression *kick the bucket*. As said by the aforementioned authors (1999:175), "the less compositional and more important a collocation, the easier it often is to acquire it automatically".

Furthermore, in a collocation, the components are not substitutable: it is not possible to put a near-synonym in the place of a component. In the example *strong tea*, it is not feasible to say *powerful tea*. Manning and Schütze (1999) explain that "many collocations cannot be freely modified with additional lexical material or through grammatical transformation" (173). In the example *kick the bucket*, it is not viable to say *kick the full bucket*. In this realm, Sinclair (1991:113) hypothesizes that "if the words collocate significantly, then to the extent of that significance, their presence is the result of a single choice". In the case of frozen expressions as proper names and idioms, any deviation results in changing the meaning of what is said and it may even result in meaning nothing.

Shin and Nation (2008:341) consider a collocation "a group of two or more words that occur frequently together, and it is not restricted to two or three word sequences". These authors propose dividing a collocation into two parts: a pivot word, that is the focal word in the collocation, and its collocate(s), that is the word(s) accompanying the pivot word. For instance, in the collocations *high school*, *high court*, *so high* and *too high*, *high* is the pivot word and the other words as *school*, *court*, *so* and *too* are the collocates of the pivot word *high*.

Several authors (Manning & Schütze, 1999; Lima, 2008) suggest a way to find out whether a collocation is really a collocation: translating it into another language. Whether it is not possible to translate the combination word by word, the person has evidence that it really is a collocation. For instance, the English expression *to make a decision* when translated to Portuguese one word at a time would be *fazer uma decisão*, which is incorrect. In Portuguese, the right expression would be *tomar uma decisão*. Therefore, there is evidence that *to make a decision* is a collocation in English. As Lima (2004) points out, it is so common for native speakers of a language to combine a word with another/others that native speakers do not even notice the process and neither are able to give explanations why the combinations happen.

In short, collocations are conventionalized and their usage demonstrates the speaker's fluency and native-like selection of language use, as when the speaker chooses to say in English *strong tea* instead of *powerful tea*. Nonetheless, in the case of the example given, any speaker of English would also understand the unconventional expression. Linguists that follow a Firthian approach are typically interested in the social implications of language use and language teaching. Collocations are at the heart of this study and researchers make use of different corpuses and several statistical procedures, for instance, to arrive at the most frequent collocations in use. Taking these issues into consideration, the following section deals with the reasons why one should learn and teach collocations.

3. Why learning and teaching collocations?

For the EFL student, learning and using collocations is not as simple as for a native speaker. There are so many collocations that the learner may feel overwhelmed and incapable of learning them. Furthermore, there are no collocation rules that can be learned. The native English speaker intuitively picks up the correct collocation, based on a lifetime experience of hearing and reading the words in connected speech. The non-native speaker has a more limited experience and may collocate words in such a way that it sounds odd to the native speaker.

There are many reasons why teachers and learners should be interested in collocations. The first one is that knowing collocations enables the learner to improve her/his language use, bringing as benefits the development of fluency and native-like selection. It is commonsensical that adult native speakers have at their disposal hundreds of thousands of 'lexicalized sentence

stems' and it is argued that EFL learners might need a similar number for native-like fluency. It may seem a too hard task for EFL learners, but following Shin and Nation (2008), we acknowledge that "chunked expressions enable learners to reduce cognitive effort, to save processing time, and to have language available for immediate use" (340).

As previously mentioned, there is usually more than one possible way of saying something but only one or two of these ways sound natural to a native speaker. For example, *let me off here* can also be said as *halt the car*. The last sentence is grammatical but the problem is that the native speakers do not say it that way. According to Shin and Nation (2008:340), "this unnatural language use is problematical for learners in EFL contexts where the focus is on grammar. They may produce grammatically correct sentences, but many of them may not sound native-like". Moreover, Wilkins (apud Lima, 2008:29) asserts that "even the extremely proficient foreign language speaker is still to be marked out as a non-native speaker if in his speech and writing he seems to avoid the collocations that would be characteristic of the native speaker". As the citations revealed, EFL learners should know how to use collocations properly, since it is an essential ingredient for fluency.

Many learners of English may be familiar with the different adjectives that are used to describe a good-looking man and a good-looking woman. It is observable that people commonly say *a beautiful woman* and *a handsome man*, and not so frequently *a beautiful man* and *a handsome woman*. In fact, it is quite possible to describe a woman as handsome. Shoebottom (2009) explains that describing a woman as handsome may imply that she is not beautiful in the traditional sense, but rather that she is mature in age, has large features, and certain strength of character. Correspondingly, a man could be described as beautiful, but this would usually imply that he had feminine features in the same way that calling a man pretty would suggest effeminacy and would be done pejoratively. In a footnote, Shoebottom clarifies that the text was first written in 1990's and that more recently 'matters have changed', being more common to hear *beautiful men*, without denoting femininity. Whitefield-Madrano (2011) reveals that etymologically speaking, handsome means 'easy on the eyes'. She reviews the use of the collocation *handsome woman* in some literary texts and concludes that the collocation usually denotes admiration, general appreciation. In the same vein, one may use the collocation *handsome woman* to refer to a woman that has a certain elegance and confidence. Nowadays, just by making a quick search at Google, the reader may notice that the pejorative use of *pretty* to *men* is decreasing. Evidently, the distinctions between the uses of these collocations depend on the time period (language changes through time) and also on the set of people's concepts (what is beautiful for one person may not be beautiful for the other). Anyway, the learner must be acquainted with these issues and be aware of the social consequences of the words they use.

In the same line of thought, for the EFL learner it may not be an easy task to understand why native speakers talk of *fast food* and *quick meal*, but not usually of *quick food* and *fast*

meal. Likewise, a man may be tall but never high - except in the sense of being intoxicated -, whereas a ceiling may only be high, not tall. In addition, one can refer to a dwelling as a *big house* or a *large house*, both involving the same meaning, whereas referring to a house as a *great house* is not equivalent. A *great house* means that the house is very good. When someone uses *great* for *house*, s/he may mean a *large house*, although this would not be the default inference. Moreover, *great* and *big* may be used together to form *great big house* without being redundant, while *big large house* would not be possible, since it is redundant. Equally, people may make a big or a great mistake, but not a large mistake. As well, people may be a little sad but not a little happy. A person may go to an open-air restaurant and may need a breath of fresh air, and so forth; there are endless examples of collocations of this type.

Furthermore, it is not enough for the EFL learner to know that the words *hold* and *conversation* mean in Portuguese, respectively, *segurar* and *conversa*, *diálogo*. The learner should know how to combine both in the collocation *hold a conversation* (*manter uma conversa*). As well, a learner may be familiar with the meanings of *book*, *table*, *chair*, and *meeting*, but may not understand the collocations *book a table* and *chair a meeting*. It is important to recognize the meaning of isolated words, but knowing how to combine words in a natural and accurate way is much more important. Therefore, teaching collocations to all students, from beginner to advanced, is an excellent way of helping them in the task of improving their knowledge and fluency in English.

This paper takes for granted the idea that learning collocations is an efficient way of improving learners' language proficiency. As benefits, learners can have alternative and richer ways of expressing themselves; their language will sound more natural and will be more easily understood. Besides, it is easier to remember and use language in chucks or blocks rather than as single words. Furthermore, it is of paramount importance to be acquainted with the most frequent collocations, as they are the most useful and have greater chances of being met and employed. Nevertheless, teaching collocations might seem something difficult or impossible, particularly due to the high number of instances and contexts of use. That is a good reason why teachers should have at hand some tools to help them in this task. One of them is the list of 100 most frequent collocations in spoken English raised by Shin and Nation (2008:346-348). The data source used was the ten-million-word spoken section of the British National Corpus (BNC). It is central to highlight that the corpus is derived from British, largely adult, and a mixture of very colloquial and rather formal speech. The table in the following pages is a good source for teachers who wish to know the most frequent collocations, to show students and to implement activities that make use of these expressions. Additionally, there is the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), with over 450 million words collected from 1999-2012, and it is available for free on the Internet: <http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>.

Rank	Collocations	Frequency*
1	*you know*	27348
2	*I think (that)*	25862
3	*a bit*	7766
4	*(always [155], never [87] used to {INF}*	7663
5	*as well*	5754
6	*a lot of {N}*	5750
7	*{No.} pounds*	5598
8	*thank you*	4789
9	*{No.} years*	4237
10	*in fact*	3009
11	*very much*	2818
12	*{No.} pound*	2719
13	*talking about {sth}*	2489
14	*(about [91]) {No.} percent (of sth [580], in sth [54], on sth [44], for sth [38]*	2312
15	*I suppose (that)*	2281
16	*at the moment*	2176
17	*a little bit*	1935
18	*looking at {sth}*	1849
19	*this morning*	1846
20	*(not) any more*	1793
21	*come on*	1778
22	*number {No.}*	1661
23	*come in (swe, sth)*	1571
24	*come back*	1547
25	*have a look*	1471
26	*in terms of {sth}*	1463
27	*last year*	1347
28	*so much*	1334
29	*{No.} years ago*	1314
30	*{Det-the [879], this [39], a [21]} county council*	1273
31	*this year*	1255
32	*go back*	1250
33	*last night*	1244
34	*Rather than*	1243
35	*Come out*	1163
36	*Very good*	1160
37	*I hope (that [455]) {N, S V}*	1155
38	*{No.} times*	1147
39	*that way*	1145
40	*said well (that, what) {S V}*	1135
41	*at the end (of sth [737])*	1122
42	*{Det-that [425], this [146], the [142]} sort of thing*	1113
43	*for example (if SV [30])*	1107
44	*as far as*	1079
45	*said to {smo}*	1076
46	*mean (that) {S V}*	1066
47	*come on (to swe, smo [65])*	1059
48	*{FREQUENCY, QUANTITY} a week*	1056
49	*all the time*	1044
50	*thank you very much*	1041

51	*too much*	1034
52	*over there*	1017
53	*that sort (of sth [953])*	1016
54	*looking for {sth}*	990
55	*make sure (that [394]) {S V}*	990
56	*very well*	987
57	*{Det-the [47]} last week*	956
58	*in the morning*	952
59	*it seems {N, A, to INF, that S V}*	945
60	*next week*	940
61	*a number of {sth}*	929
62	*out there*	929
63	*what I mean*	929
64	*get in (swe, sth)*	912
65	*find out {sth}*	908
66	*know that (S V)*	889
67	*leave it*	886
68	*at home*	884
69	*and so on*	872
70	*(about [226]) {No.} minutes*	867
71	*(do) n't mind (sth)*	862
72	*other people*	839
73	*not really*	837
74	*talking to {smo}*	829
75	*mind you*	822
76	*want it*	819
77	*much more*	816
78	*looked at {sth}*	805
79	*the other one*	805
80	*(at [207], about [110], till [50], by [24]) half past {No.1~12}*	798
81	*some people*	797
82	*this week*	794
83	*this time*	787
84	*very nice*	784
85	*I see*	756
86	*I bet (S V)*	746
87	*these things*	742
88	*call it (A, N)*	737
89	*(be-verb) not sure*	721
90	*at the time*	717
91	*thought that {S V}*	714
92	*going out*	712
93	*it comes*	712
94	*go out*	711
95	*quite a lot*	711
96	*even if*	707
97	*last time*	704
98	*hang on*	701
99	*Believe that (S V, N)*	696
100	*(be-verb, become-verb) interested in {sth}*	689

*{ } signals an obligatory type of word that needs to occur in the collocation, ( ) signals an optional but a possible part of the collocation, and [ ] brackets the 'frequency figure'. Frequency refers to the number of occurrences in the corpus.

Table 1: The first 100 collocations (as in Shin & Nation, 2008:346-348).

As it can be seen, the most frequent collocation is *you know*, which occurs 27,348 times in the BNC corpus (10-million-word corpus). It is exceptionally frequent if compared to the third most frequent spoken collocation *a bit*, with 7,766 occurrences. Some collocations as *you know, a bit,* and *come on* are part of the spoken corpus due to their interactional nature. It is essential to highlight that frequency in the list is an important criterion for teachers to select what to focus on. However, teachers should also bear in mind that frequency "[…] is only one of several important criteria like learner need, range of use (for example in both spoken and written use), difficulty, teachability, and suitability for the age and background of the learners" (Shin & Nation, 2008:346). Still, having the list is a useful starting point for devising tasks and also syllabus design.

Furthermore, a good way to find out the strong collocates of any particular word is to use a computer concordancer, which is a program that searches through millions of words of digital text and produces strings containing the word at issue. This way, the typical usage of the word can be analyzed by the user and the user may make of this tool whenever necessary, since some are available on the Internet for free. For some time there was available the Collins Cobuild Concordance and Collocations sample, which was composed of 56 million words of contemporary written and spoken text. Figure 1 is a list showing part of the concordancer results for the word 'face'. It is interesting that the majority of examples do not refer to face as a part of the body; instead, it refers to 'being confronted with', 'being about to experience'.

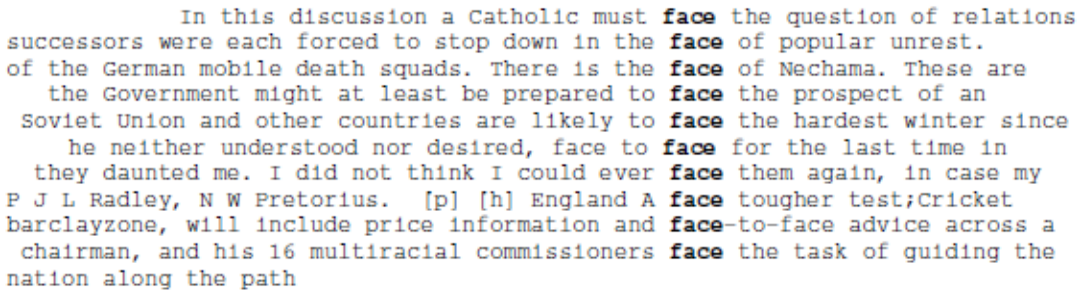


Figure 1: Concordance sample for the word *face* (Collins Cobuild, 2009)

Currently, the BNC website <http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk> offers visitors a 100-million-word collection of samples of written and spoken language from a wide range of sources, designed to represent current British English. As exemplified in figure 1, using a concordancer is an excellent way to learn about how a language is actually used. It is particularly useful for a non-native speaker who does not have strong enough experience or intuitions about English and

has difficulty in choosing collocates. Another excellent modern alternative is to type the word combination into Google (<http://www.google.com>) and check how many results are returned. Searching for *strong tea*, it got 1.470,000 hits, whereas *powerful tea* got 92,100 (in 2009), one may clearly understand which collocation is the most commonly used. Another way of checking collocations is by making use of a collocations dictionary, such as the printed Oxford Collocations Dictionary (McIntosh, 2009) or the online version available for free at <http://5yiso.appspot.com/>. Likewise, EFL learners may make use of special translation tools on the web, such as Linguee (<http://www.linguee.com.br>), that is able to search hundreds of millions of bilingual texts for specific words and expressions the user needs help with. As it could be noticed, there are many tools that learners and teachers may use to improve their knowledge base on collocations.

In a nutshell, learning and teaching collocations can empower learners with tools that enable them to master a foreign language skillfully in the long run. By offering the real usage of a language, teachers can improve their classroom activities and also provide their students with the foreign language reality. Thus, in the following section of the article we provide some suggestions of activities involving the topic collocations teachers can implement in their EFL classes.

4. How to successfully implement collocations in the daily EFL teaching routine

Having in mind the importance of learning and teaching collocations, in this section some practical suggestions are made regarding the insertion of collocations in the EFL classroom routine. Following the literature on this issue, it is advisable to begin with the topic in the learners' mother tongue. It means, teachers should show examples, demonstrate that some words in the language require 'partners' that collocate well with them.

First of all, as a warm up, it may be very useful to introduce the subject by its common use in Portuguese. The teacher can ask students to brainstorm expressions that they think are only used in their mother tongue, or even the teacher may prepare a list, hand in, and ask students whether they think 'things' are said the same way all over the world. After raising a list on the board (or reading the ready list) containing expressions in Portuguese such as *nem que a vaca tussa!*, *cara de pau*, *rodar a baiana* and *rodízio de carro*, the teacher may ask students first to try to translate literally the expressions and discuss if they would make any sense in English, as *to twirl the old woman from Bahia* or *wood face*. Probably, students will make some translations, which seem to have some meaning but not the meaning expected. The teacher may, then, use these incorrect expressions to demonstrate that translating expressions word by word may result in an expression that denotes a completely different idea or maybe an expression that does not mean anything. At that moment, students may laugh a little with these literal

translations, and the teacher may ask students whether there is any similar expression in English that would communicate the same idea. Teachers will probably get an *I don't know* as answer, that is the reason why it is highly recommendable to start by finding other ways of saying the same thing in Portuguese first, then they might associate easily with some words they already know. Good clues can be found on books such as "Break the branch[2]" or "How do you say, in English?[3]".

After presenting students examples of collocations and defining what they mean, the teacher may draw balloons on the board with correct and incorrect collocations and discuss with the students which ones might be correct, why, whether there are other interpretations for the incorrect examples, and if there are, what meaning these interpretations would reveal. Hill (1999) proposes some examples in his article for the New Routes magazine, as figure 2 reveals. Teachers might have to make sure students know the meaning of *fresh* and *breath*. A valuable tip on talking about collocations is making students imagine concrete things. Therefore, when talking about *open-air restaurants*, it is good to have the students giving their own interpretations of the expression.

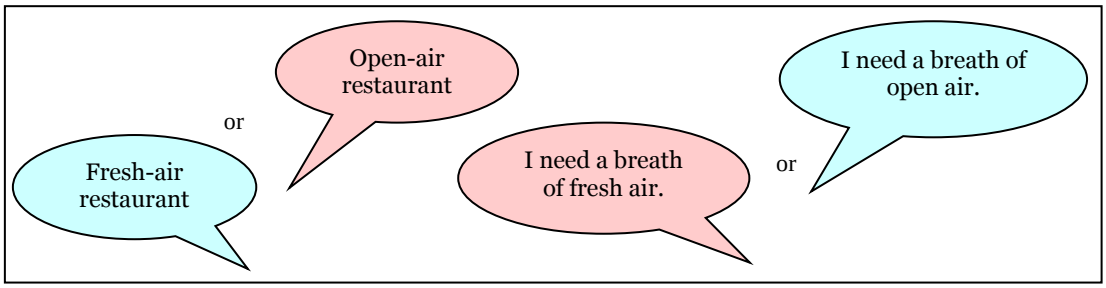


Figure 2: Hill's (1999) idea for teaching collocations

Another idea for making students work with collocations is to provide them with access to comic strips as the following ones from Bill Watterson's Calvin and Hobbes, and Jim Davis, creator of Garfield. Teachers may ask students to find out what words they think commonly appear together and what they mean, or to simply highlight collocations as *come from* and *I wonder*. As well, this first comic strip (figure 3) may be used to aid in the grammar class of indirect request with the question *Do you know where babies come from?*.

[2]SCHOLES, Jack. *Break the branch?: Quebrar o galho*. São Paulo: Disal, 2008.
[3]IGREJA, José Roberto A. How do you say in English?: expressões coloquiais e perguntas inusitadas para quem estuda ou ensina inglês! São Paulo: Disal, 2005.

Available in GUÉRIOS, Floriano José Costa. *Inglês: Semi-extensivo, diurno*. Curitiba: Posigraf, 2005, p.67.

Figure 3: Calvin and Hobbes comic strip

Learners usually have doubts concerning the situations in which they use the verbs *do* and *make*. The following comic strip (figure 4) from Jim Davis may be used to clarify that for *tea*, the correct verb is *to make*. Teaching collocations with the aid of comic strips, besides being funny, makes collocations easier to be remembered afterwards. The sooner students get used to collocations, the sooner they will develop their knowledge and produce speech that sounds native-like. Moreover, these strips can be used as conversation starters and may support grammar classes. Teachers may use collocations as *know that* to develop any subject they need to teach. For instance, teachers may make students practice the simple past by questioning the class *Did you know that tea is good for health?*, by eliciting the structure 'auxiliary + subject + verb', and also by adding short answers for these questions.

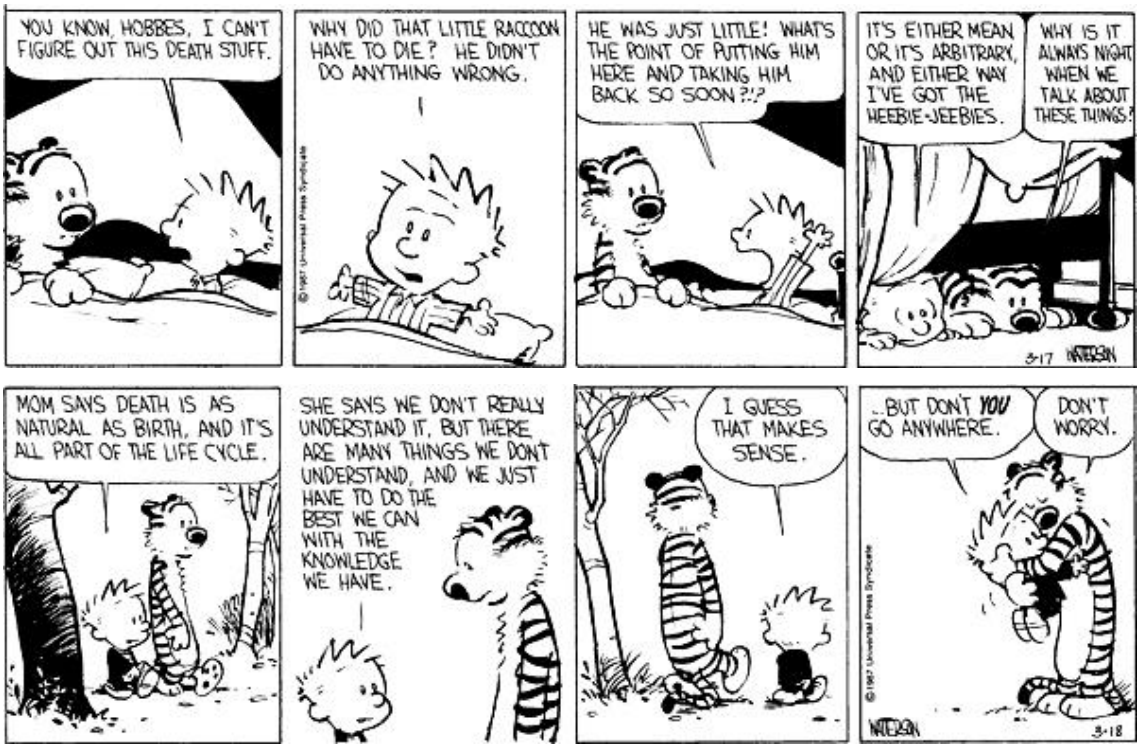
Available on http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_MXMiOHXhuOU/ReKsfoXK2ZI/AAAAAAAAADA/2IVo8YbHQUI/s1600-h/ga810120.jpg Access on June 30th, 2009.

Figure 4: Jim Davis comic strip

Instead of employing a single comic strip, teachers can make use of short stories. They are interesting since the teacher can work on oral stories, raising special issues of the oral modality, such as the frequent use of collocations. In the following short story, from Calvin and Hobbes (figure 5), it is possible to find plenty of examples of collocations, such as *I think so, I*

sure hope, *He looks*, *pretty bad*. The teacher may ask students to read the story with an objective, for instance, looking for the story elements (what?, who?, when?, where?, why?). After reading, the teacher may ask students some questions about the context to make sure students understood the parts of the story. Based on what they understood, the teacher can help explaining details about the language and also propose other activities. Likewise, the teacher may ask students to look for collocations, to highlight them, and to explaining to the teacher why that expression is a collocation.


HAS HE EATEN ANYTHING?
NO.
DON'T DIE, LITTLE RACCOON.
IT WOULDN'T BE VERY GRATEFUL OF YOU TO BREAK MY HEART.
I CAN'T SLEEP.
ME EITHER. I KEEP THINKING ABOUT THE RACCOON.
I HOPE HE LIVES.
ME TOO.
I THINK ANIMALS ARE ALWAYS SO CUTE.
DAD, DID YOU CHECK ON THE LITTLE RACCOON THIS MORNING?
YES, CALVIN. ..I'M AFRAID HE DIED.
WAAHHHH!!
I'M SORRY TOO, KIDDO. BUT HE DIDN'T HAVE MUCH OF A CHANCE.
WAHH AAHH!
AT LEAST HE DIED WARM AND SAFE, CALVIN. WE DID ALL WE COULD. BUT NOW HE'S GONE.
SNIFF ..I KNOW. I'M CRYING BECAUSE OUT THERE HE'S GONE, BUT HE'S NOT GONE INSIDE ME.
THIS IS WHERE DAD BURIED THE LITTLE RACCOON.
I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW HE EXISTED A FEW DAYS AGO AND NOW HE'S GONE FOREVER. IT'S LIKE I FOUND HIM FOR NO REASON. I HAD TO SAY GOOD-BYE AS SOON AS I SAID HELLO.
STILL... IN A SAD, AWFUL, TERRIBLE WAY, I'M HAPPY I MET HIM.
SNIFF
WHAT A STUPID WORLD.
WATTERSON



Available at <http://www.progressiveboink.com/archive/calvinhobbes.htm> access on January 26th, 2012.
Figure 5: Calvin and Hobbes example of short story

5. Final Remarks

At least for beginner and intermediate EFL learners, it is the teacher's task to make students aware of what collocations are and their importance for language proficiency. But that is not enough, teachers should provide students with ways to understand and learn them. By using texts, of any genre, any topic, teachers may offer students a world of collocations, and as earlier students are familiar with where and how to find collocations, better and more natural their English will be.

The basic idea of this paper is that learning and teaching collocations is not rocket science when seen in a simple way. Teachers should know how important collocations are for the development of their students. This paper also aimed at providing ideas to use these lexical items to support their everyday teaching as well as to provide students with real language in use. In this sense, teachers do not have to 'stop' their subjects to teach 'something else'. Teachers may make use of different pieces of text, of the technological tools available, of authentic material to show students 'real English'. Students should be aware of these chunks of the language to understand the reason something they want to say is grammatically correct but does not sound fluent. This will make teaching and learning easier for both teacher and students, once teachers will not have to fight for rules to defend everything they teach and also for students who will get used to the collocations they have the opportunity to know.

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