

COLLOCATION, IDIOMS, AND READY - MADE UTTERANCES

COLLOCATION: Firth argued that you shall know a word by the company it keeps. His familiar example was that of **ass** which occurs in you silly ---, don't be such an --- and with a limited set of adjectives such as silly, obstinate, stupid, awful.... For firth, this keeping company which he called collocation, was part of the meaning of the word. One other example is blond with hair. For, we should not talk about * a blond door or a blond dress, even if the colour were exactly that of blond hair. Similarly rancid occurs only with bacon and butter, and addled with brain and eggs, in spite of the fact that English has the terms rotten and bad and that milk never collocates with rancid but only with sour.

This characteristic of language is found in an extreme form in the collective words - flock of sheep, herd of cows, school of whales, pride of lions.

IDIOMS: We cannot predict, for any given language, whether a particular meaning will be expressed by a single word or by a sequence of words. Thus English punch and kick have to be translated into French with: donner un coup de poing and donner un coup de pied. In these French examples we clearly have instances of collocations that involve some association of ideas; and the meaning of the entire expression can be predicted from the meaning of individual words.

Idioms are a special case of collocation. They are used to refer habitual collocations of more than one word that tend to be used together, with a semantic function not readily deducible from the other uses of the component words apart from each other.

An idiom can also be defined as a group of words whose meaning cannot be explained in terms of the habitual meaning of the words that make up that piece of language. Thus "Fly off the handle" which means lose one's temper cannot be understood in terms of the meanings of "Fly", "off", or "handle" (He has an inflammable temper and flies off the handle easily). Idioms involve the non - literal use of language and can be categorised as follows.

1) ALLITRATIVE COMPARISON: Dead as dodo (That strange plant of yours is as dead dodo: No one is interested in it any more), fit as fiddle (perfectly healthy), good as gold (kindness, gentleness in behaviour)

2) NOUN PHRASES: A blind alley (route that leads nowhere) a close shave (a narrow escape), a red letter day (a day that will never be forgotten).

3) PREPOSITION PHRASE: At six and sevens (unable, unwilling to agree), by hook or by crook (by whatever methods prove necessary), in for a penny, in for a pound (I'm involved irrespective of cost), in deep water (in trouble, in difficulties).

4) **VERB + NOUN PHRASE:** Kick the bucket (die), pop your clogs (die), spill the beans (reveal a secret)

5) **VERB + PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE:** Be in clover (be exceptionally comfortable), be in the doghouse (be in disgrace), be between a rock and a hard place (have no room for manoeuvre).

6) **VERB + ADVERB PHRASE:** Give in (yield), put down (kill), take to (like).

There are also sequences of verb + preposition, such as look after, go for , and sequences of verb, adverb and preposition, such as put up with (tolerate) and do away with (kill), take in deceive.

Idioms differ according to region and according to formality. They are found more frequently in speech than in writing. Although they occur in all languages, they can rarely be translated.

READY-MADE UTTERANCES

These are what de Saussure has called ("locutions toutes faites"): expressions which are learned as unanalysable wholes and employed on particular occasions by native speakers. An example from English is How do you do? which, though it is conventionally punctuated as a question, is not normally interpreted as such. Another "ready - made" English expression is Rest in peace (as a tombstone inscription) which unlike for example Rest here quietly for a moment, is not be regarded as an instruction or a suggestion made to the person one is addressing, but a situationally - bound expression which is unanalysable with reference to the grammatical structure of contemporary English.

The stock of proverbs passed on from one generation to the next provides many instances of "ready - made- utterances" eg: Easy come easy go, All that glisters (glitters) is not gold, etc. Many of our utterances cannot rightly be said to have as their sole, or primary function the communication or seeking of information, the giving of commands, the expression of hopes, wishes and desires, but serve to establish and maintain a feeling of social solidarity and well - being. An example might be It's just another beautiful day, said as the opening utterance in a conversation between customer and shopkeeper. Quite clearly this utterance is not primarily intended to "convey" to the shopkeeper some information about the weather; it is an instance of "phatic communion".

Ready made *utterances may be referred to as " typical repetitive events in the social process". Since they have this character, it would be possible to account for them in a " behaviouristic" framework the utterances in question could reasonably be described as " conditioned responses " to the situations where they occur.