Cornish syntagmatic lexical relations: Collocations, and multi-word lexemes

Dr Jon Mills, University of Kent

Abstract

Cornish syntagmatic lexical relations include collocations and idioms, and appear on a cline from free combination through recurring combination and restricted combination to fixed expression. Collocations are significant according to their frequency of occurrence. In other words, if an expression is heard often, the words become 'glued' together in our minds. To varying degrees, collocations are restricted with regard to the words with which they combine. Common features of collocation include non-substitutability and non-modifiability. Some expressions, such as idioms, are totally fixed.

However collocation is not merely concerned with the frequency with which words co-occur. Firth writes "You shall know a word by the company it keeps" (Firth 1957a: 11), and that "Meaning by collocation is an abstraction at the syntagmatic level" (Firth 1957b: 196). Thus one of the meanings of *nos* ('night') is its collocability with *tewl* ('dark'), and of *tewl* ('dark'), of course, its collocation with *nos* ('night'). Furthermore collocates of any given word form distinguish that word's different senses. This is particularly noticeable with collocations in which a verb or a noun combine with a preposition, for example: *mires dhe* 'take care of', *mires orth* 'consider', *mires rag* 'seek', and *mires war* 'observe'. This presentation is illustrated with examples from Middle and Late Cornish.

Follow this link for a video of the conference presentation: https://youtu.be/fFG3NrSPgUw