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COLLOCATIONS AND STRUCTURAL- SEMANTIC CLASSIFICATION IN COMBINATORIAL LINGUISTICS

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Abstract

This study examines the structural-semantic classification of collocations as an important object of combinatorial linguistics. Collocations are viewed not as random word combinations, but as stable lexical units formed through grammatical patterns, semantic compatibility, and conventional language use. The aim of the research is to identify major structural models of collocations and analyze their semantic functions using examples from Uzbek, English, and Russian. The study applies descriptive, comparative, and structural methods. Particular attention is given to verb + noun, adjective + noun, noun + noun, and light verb constructions. The findings show that each model reflects specific semantic relations such as action, evaluation, nomination, and institutional meaning. Cross-linguistic comparison demonstrates that similar meanings may be expressed through different lexical patterns in different languages. It is concluded that the integration of structural and semantic approaches provides an effective basis for studying collocations in modern linguistics. The results may be useful for corpus studies, translation, lexicography, and language teaching.

Keywords: Collocation, combinatorial linguistics, structural-semantic classification, lexical compatibility, valency, syntagmatic relations, corpus linguistics, phraseology, cross-linguistic analysis, Uzbek language

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Introduction

In contemporary linguistics, increasing attention has been paid to the ways in which words combine in natural language use. Although grammatical rules determine the structural organization of sentences, actual communication is also governed by conventional lexical combinations that speakers recognize as natural and acceptable. These recurrent combinations are commonly described as collocations. They occupy an important place in lexical studies because they demonstrate that language production depends not only on grammatical correctness but also on habitual patterns of lexical co-occurrence. For this reason, collocations have become a central topic in phraseology, corpus linguistics, lexicography, translation studies, and foreign language teaching.

The theoretical foundations of collocation studies can be traced to the work of Firth (1957), who introduced the well-known principle that the meaning of a word can be understood through “the company it keeps.” This idea emphasized that lexical meaning is strongly connected with contextual environment and regular co-occurrence. Later, Sinclair (1991) developed this perspective through corpus-based research and demonstrated that many combinations previously considered free are in fact highly predictable and statistically recurrent. His distinction between the *idiom principle* and the *open-choice principle* showed that speakers often rely on prefabricated lexical patterns rather than constructing utterances word by word. These findings significantly influenced modern corpus linguistics and strengthened the role of collocations in linguistic theory.

Further research clarified the structural and pedagogical importance of collocations. Hausmann (1989) argued that vocabulary learning is largely collocation learning, since lexical competence requires knowledge of typical word partnerships rather than isolated lexical items. Similarly, Cowie (1998) emphasized that collocations occupy an intermediate position between free combinations and idioms because their components preserve individual meanings while showing restricted combinability. Nesselhauf (2005), using learner corpus

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data, demonstrated that collocations are one of the most problematic areas for second-language learners, as students often know the meaning of separate words but fail to produce natural combinations. These studies confirm that collocations are essential both theoretically and practically.

Another important theoretical basis for the present study is valency theory, associated with Tesnière (1959). Valency theory explains the combinational potential of lexical units, especially verbs, and their ability to govern other sentence elements. However, while valency mainly addresses syntactic compatibility, collocation studies extend this perspective by focusing on lexical selectivity and semantic preference. In other words, several words may be grammatically possible in the same position, but only one or two become normatively accepted in actual usage. Thus, collocation research broadens traditional views of combinability and provides a more complete picture of lexical behavior.

Within combinatorial linguistics, collocations are regarded as one of the clearest manifestations of lexical compatibility. They reveal that lexical units combine according to internal systemic norms rather than free substitution. For example, English uses *make a decision*, Uzbek uses *qaror qabul qilmoq*, and Russian uses *принять решение*. Although the conceptual meaning remains similar, each language selects a different lexical pattern. This demonstrates that collocations simultaneously reflect universal communicative needs and language-specific lexical traditions. Therefore, they are particularly valuable for comparative linguistics and translation studies.

Despite extensive international research, the issue of structural-semantic classification of collocations remains highly relevant. Many studies concentrate either on frequency and corpus statistics or on pedagogical applications, while fewer works integrate grammatical structure with semantic function. A comprehensive approach requires examining both dimensions simultaneously. Structural classification identifies productive models such as verb + noun,

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adjective + noun, noun + noun, and light verb constructions, whereas semantic classification explains relations such as action-object interaction, evaluation, emotional expression, conceptual nomination, or institutional meaning.

The aim of this study is to investigate the structural-semantic classification of collocations in Uzbek, English, and Russian and to determine how grammatical patterns interact with lexical meaning. The study applies descriptive, comparative, and functional methods in order to identify productive collocational models and reveal their semantic roles. The scientific novelty of the research lies in the integrated treatment of collocations as multidimensional units in which form, meaning, and usage intersect. The findings may contribute to the theoretical development of combinatorial linguistics and may also be useful for corpus studies, lexicography, translation practice, and foreign language teaching.

Materials and Methods

This study is based on a qualitative linguistic analysis of collocations from the perspective of combinatorial linguistics. The research focuses on the structural-semantic classification of collocations and their role in lexical compatibility. The materials of the study include examples collected from Uzbek, English, and Russian languages, as well as data taken from linguistic dictionaries, phraseological sources, academic publications, and corpus-based studies.

The selection of language material was guided by the frequency, stability, and functional relevance of collocational units in actual language use. Particular attention was given to productive structural models such as verb + noun, adjective + noun, noun + noun, and light verb constructions. These patterns were chosen because they are widely represented in different languages and demonstrate clear combinatorial features.

Several research methods were applied in the study. The descriptive method was used to identify and explain the structural characteristics of collocations. The structural-semantic method helped to analyze the relationship between

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grammatical form and lexical meaning. The comparative method was employed to examine similarities and differences between Uzbek, English, and Russian collocational patterns. In addition, the functional method was used to determine the communicative and stylistic roles of collocations in discourse.

The analysis was conducted in two stages. First, collocations were classified according to their grammatical structure. Second, they were grouped according to semantic relations such as action-object interaction, qualitative description, evaluation, emotional expression, and conceptual nomination. This integrated approach made it possible to reveal both the external form and the internal semantic mechanisms of collocational units.

Results

The analysis of the collected linguistic material demonstrates that collocations are systematic lexical units formed according to stable structural patterns and semantic restrictions. The examined data from Uzbek, English, and Russian reveal that collocations are not random combinations of words, but conventionalized models shaped by language norms, lexical compatibility, and communicative practice. The results show that the most productive structural types are **verb + noun**, **adjective + noun**, **noun + noun**, and **light verb constructions**. Each of these models performs specific semantic and functional roles in discourse.

Verb + Noun Collocations

The study found that the **verb + noun** pattern is one of the most frequent and productive collocational types in all three languages. In this model, the noun usually carries the central lexical meaning, while the verb provides grammatical structure and indicates action, process, or result. Examples include *make a decision*, *draw a conclusion*, *commit a crime* in English; *qaror qabul qilmoq*, *xulosa chiqarmoq*, *jinoyat sodir etmoq* in Uzbek; and *принять решение*, *сделать вывод*, *совершить преступление* in Russian.

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The analysis shows that equivalent meanings are often expressed through different verbs in different languages. For instance, the concept of reaching a conclusion is represented by *draw* in English, *chiqarmoq* in Uzbek, and *сделать* in Russian. This confirms that collocations are language-specific and cannot be translated word-for-word. It also demonstrates that lexical selection is determined by usage tradition rather than logical synonymy.

Another important result is that grammatically possible alternatives are often unacceptable in real usage. Forms such as *do a decision* or *make a crime* are structurally understandable but unnatural. Therefore, collocational competence depends on knowing which combinations are normatively accepted in a language.

Adjective + Noun Collocations

The **adjective + noun** model was identified as highly productive in evaluative, descriptive, and expressive discourse. In this pattern, the noun functions as the semantic core, while the adjective modifies it by expressing quality, intensity, attitude, or emotional coloring.

Examples include *serious problem*, *great opportunity*, *deep respect*, *bitter truth* in English; *jiddiy muammo*, *katta imkoniyat*, *chuqur hurmat*, *achchiq haqiqat* in Uzbek; and *серьёзная проблема*, *большая возможность*, *глубокое уважение*, *горькая правда* in Russian.

The results indicate that many adjective + noun collocations involve metaphorical extension. For example, in *bitter truth* or *achchiq haqiqat*, the adjective originally refers to taste, but in collocation it expresses emotional difficulty or unpleasant reality. This shows that collocations often preserve figurative thinking within everyday language.

The study also found that adjective substitution is limited. Although *strong argument* is natural in English, other possible synonyms may sound less conventional in the same context. Thus, semantic closeness does not always guarantee collocational acceptability.

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Noun + Noun Collocations

The **noun + noun** model was especially productive in academic, political, technical, and institutional vocabulary. This type is commonly used to express conceptual classification, terminology, and thematic specialization.

Examples include *market economy*, *data analysis*, *energy market* in English; *bozor iqtisodi*, *ma'lumot tahlili*, *energiya bozori* in Uzbek; and *рыночная экономика*, *анализ данных*, *энергетический рынок* in Russian.

The analysis shows that in such constructions one noun usually functions as the semantic center, while the other narrows or specifies its meaning. For example, in *market economy*, the word *economy* is the core concept, while *market* defines its type. This pattern allows languages to create compact and productive nominative structures.

Cross-linguistic comparison reveals structural differences. English and Uzbek frequently preserve noun + noun forms directly, whereas Russian often transforms one component into an adjective or case-marked form. This confirms that semantic equivalence does not require structural identity.

Light Verb Constructions

A separate group of results concerns **light verb constructions**, where the verb loses much of its independent lexical meaning and the noun becomes the main semantic carrier. Examples include *make a suggestion*, *take responsibility*, *give permission* in English; *taklif bildirmoq*, *mas'uliyatni zimmasiga olmoq*, *ruxsat bermoq* in Uzbek; and *дать разрешение*, *нести ответственность* in Russian. The findings show that these constructions are especially common in formal, academic, and administrative discourse. They often provide a more neutral, institutional, or process-oriented style than simple verbs. For example, *make an announcement* may sound more formal than *announce*.

This result suggests that collocations are not only lexical combinations but also stylistic tools that shape register and discourse tone.

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Semantic Grouping of Collocations

The data also allowed collocations to be classified into semantic groups. The most productive groups include:

- **Action and process:** *conduct negotiations, nazorat o'rnatmoq, vesti peregovory*
- **Evaluation:** *serious concern, keskin tanqid, rezkaya kritika*
- **Intellectual activity:** *draw a conclusion, fikr yuritmoq, сделать вывод*
- **Emotional states:** *deep sorrow, katta qivonch, внутренняя тревога*
- **Institutional discourse:** *take responsibility, qaror qabul qilmoq, принять решение*

This demonstrates that collocations function as ready-made semantic models for expressing common communicative situations.

Discussion

The results of the study confirm that collocations should be regarded as an essential component of lexical organization rather than as accidental combinations of words. Their recurrence in Uzbek, English, and Russian demonstrates that word co-occurrence is governed by stable combinatorial principles. This supports the central assumptions of combinatorial linguistics, according to which lexical units possess not only individual meanings but also specific combinational potential determined by language norms, semantic compatibility, and communicative practice.

One of the most significant findings is that collocational equivalence across languages is primarily semantic rather than structural. Similar concepts such as decision-making, drawing conclusions, expressing respect, or describing problems exist in all examined languages, yet they are realized through different lexical patterns. For example, English uses *make a decision*, Uzbek uses *qaror qabul qilmoq*, and Russian uses *принять решение*. Although the conceptual meaning remains stable, each language selects its own lexical model. This

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confirms that collocations are language-specific manifestations of universal communicative needs. Therefore, direct word-for-word translation often leads to unnatural or non-native forms.

The study also demonstrates the close relationship between collocations and lexical competence. Knowledge of grammar alone does not guarantee natural language production, because grammatically possible combinations may still violate collocational norms. Expressions such as *do a decision* or other literal equivalents are understandable but pragmatically unnatural. This observation is particularly important for foreign language teaching, where learners often rely on dictionary meanings without mastering conventional combinations. Consequently, collocational competence should be considered a core element of communicative competence.

Another important issue concerns the relationship between collocations and valency theory. Traditional valency theory mainly focuses on the syntactic ability of words, especially verbs, to combine with required sentence elements. However, the present findings show that syntactic possibility alone cannot explain actual lexical choice. Many verbs can grammatically combine with the same noun, but only certain combinations become normatively accepted. Thus, collocations expand the concept of valency by introducing lexical selectivity and semantic preference. In this sense, combinatorial linguistics may be viewed as a broader framework integrating syntax, semantics, and usage.

The productivity of adjective + noun and noun + noun models further indicates that collocations are important tools of conceptualization. Adjective + noun units frequently express evaluation, emotional coloring, and metaphorical meaning, while noun + noun combinations are highly productive in terminology and institutional discourse. This suggests that collocations do not merely reflect existing meanings; they actively participate in the creation and categorization of knowledge. Through repeated use, they become conventional labels for social, scientific, and cultural concepts.

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The findings related to light verb constructions are also theoretically relevant. These units demonstrate that semantic weight may shift from the verb to the noun, while the verb performs grammatical or stylistic functions. Such constructions challenge traditional views of predicate structure and show that lexical meaning can be distributed across several components. They also explain why many formal or academic registers prefer analytic collocational models instead of simple verbs.

From a methodological perspective, the study proves the effectiveness of combining structural and semantic approaches. Structural classification alone identifies grammatical patterns but cannot explain internal conceptual relations. Semantic grouping, on the other hand, reveals meaning categories but may overlook formal organization. Their integration allows a more complete interpretation of collocations as multidimensional linguistic units.

Despite these findings, the study has certain limitations. The research is based mainly on qualitative examples rather than large-scale corpus statistics. Future studies may apply quantitative corpus methods to measure collocational frequency, productivity, dispersion, and contextual variation. In addition, broader typological comparison involving other languages could further clarify universal and language-specific aspects of collocational behavior.

Overall, the discussion confirms that collocations occupy a central position between vocabulary, grammar, and discourse. They are not peripheral phenomena but fundamental mechanisms through which languages organize meaning and natural communication.

Overall, the results confirm that collocations represent an intersection of grammar, meaning, and usage. Their external structure may vary across languages, but their internal semantic organization often remains comparable. The study proves that collocations are central units of lexical organization and reflect the combinatorial nature of language systems.

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The study also demonstrates the close relationship between collocations and lexical competence. Knowledge of grammar alone does not guarantee natural language production, because grammatically possible combinations may still violate collocational norms. Expressions such as *do a decision* or other literal equivalents are understandable but pragmatically unnatural. This observation is particularly important for foreign language teaching, where learners often rely on dictionary meanings without mastering conventional combinations. Consequently, collocational competence should be considered a core element of communicative competence.

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The productivity of adjective + noun and noun + noun models further indicates that collocations are important tools of conceptualization. Adjective + noun units frequently express evaluation, emotional coloring, and metaphorical meaning, while noun + noun combinations are highly productive in terminology and institutional discourse. This suggests that collocations do not merely reflect existing meanings; they actively participate in the creation and categorization of knowledge. Through repeated use, they become conventional labels for social, scientific, and cultural concepts.

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overlook formal organization. Their integration allows a more complete interpretation of collocations as multidimensional linguistic units.

Despite these findings, the study has certain limitations. The research is based mainly on qualitative examples rather than large-scale corpus statistics. Future studies may apply quantitative corpus methods to measure collocational frequency, productivity, dispersion, and contextual variation. In addition, broader typological comparison involving other languages could further clarify universal and language-specific aspects of collocational behavior.

Overall, the discussion confirms that collocations occupy a central position between vocabulary, grammar, and discourse. They are not peripheral phenomena but fundamental mechanisms through which languages organize meaning and natural communication.

Conclusion

The present study has shown that collocations are systematic and stable lexical units formed through the interaction of grammatical structure, semantic compatibility, and conventional language use. They should not be interpreted as random word combinations, since their formation is regulated by internal combinatorial norms that differ from one language to another. In this sense, collocations represent one of the clearest manifestations of lexical organization in modern languages.

The structural-semantic analysis revealed that the most productive collocational patterns are **verb + noun**, **adjective + noun**, **noun + noun**, and **light verb constructions**. Each model performs specific linguistic functions. Verb + noun collocations mainly express action and process; adjective + noun combinations convey evaluation, description, and emotional meaning; noun + noun patterns are especially productive in terminology and conceptual nomination; light verb constructions often serve formal, analytic, and stylistic purposes.

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The comparative examination of Uzbek, English, and Russian demonstrated that similar conceptual meanings may exist across languages, while their lexical realization remains language-specific. This confirms that collocations reflect both universal communicative needs and the unique structural traditions of each language. Therefore, successful translation and foreign language acquisition require not only grammatical knowledge but also mastery of conventional collocational patterns.

The study also confirmed the theoretical value of combining structural and semantic approaches. Structural classification explains the external grammatical models of collocations, whereas semantic analysis reveals the internal conceptual relations between components. Their integration provides a comprehensive methodological basis for investigating collocations within combinatorial linguistics.

In conclusion, collocations occupy an important position between vocabulary, grammar, and discourse. They function as ready-made models of natural communication and play a significant role in lexical competence, language teaching, corpus research, lexicography, and translation studies. Further research based on quantitative corpus data may contribute to a deeper understanding of collocational productivity and cross-linguistic variation.

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