Lecture 4

Word-Combination

I. What is a Word-Combination? Lexical and Grammatical Combinability

The word-combination (WC) is the largest two-facet lexical unit observed on the syntagmatic level of analysis. By the degree of their structural and semantic cohesion WCs are classified into three WCs and phraseological units, cf.: at least, point of view, by means of, to take place.

Lexical combinability (collocation) is the aptness of a word to appear in certain lexical contexts, e.g. the word question combines with certain adjectives: delicate, vital, important.

Each word has a certain norm of collocation. Any departure from this norm is felt as a stylistic device: to shove a question.

The collocations of correlated words in different languages are not identical, e.g. both the English flower and its Russian counterpart цветок can be combined with a number of words denoting the place where the flowers are grown: garden-flowers, hot-house flowers; садовые цветы, оранжерейные цветы. But the English word cannot enter into combination with the word room to denote flowers growing in the rooms, cf.: комнатные цветы – pot flowers.

Grammatical combinability (colligation) is the aptness of a word to appear in certain grammatical contexts, e.g. the adjective heavy can be followed by a noun (heavy storm), by an infinitive (heavy to lift). Each grammatical unit has a certain norm of colligation: nouns combine with pre-positional adjectives (a new dress), relative adjectives combine with pre-positional adverbs of degree (dreadfully tired).

The departure from the norm of colligation is usually impossible:

mathematics at clever is a meaningless string of words because English nouns do not allow of the structure N + at + A.

II. Meaning of Word-Combinations

Meaning of WCs is anlysed into lexical and grammatical (structural

components).

Lexical meaning of the WC is the combined lexical meanings of its component

words: red flower – red + flower. But in most cases the meaning of the whole

combination predominates over the lexical meaning of its constituents, e.g. the meaning of the monosemantic adjective atomic is different in atomic weight and atomic bomb.

Polysemantic words are used in WCs in one of their meanings: blind man

(horse, cat) – blind type (print, handwriting). Only one meaning of the adjective blind (unable to see) is combined with the lexical meaning of the noun man (human being) and only one meaning of man is realized in combination with blind.

The meaning of the same adjective in blind type is different.

Structural meaning of the WC is conveyed by the pattern of arrangement of the component words, e.g. the WCs school grammar and grammar school consist of identical words but are semantically different because their patterns are different. The structural pattern is the carrier of a certain meaning quality-substance that does not depend on the lexical meanings of the words school and grammar.

III. Interdependence of Structure and Meaning in Word-Combinations

The pattern of the WC is the syntactic structure in which a given word is used as its head: to build + N (to build a house); to rely + on + N (to rely on sb).

The pattern and meaning of head-words are interdependent. The same head-word

is semantically different in different patterns, cf.: get+N (get a letter); get+to+N (get to Moscow); get+N+inf (get sb to come).

In these patterns notional words are represented in conventional symbols

whereas form-words are given in their usual graphic form. The reason is that

individual form-words may change the meaning of the word with which it is

combined: anxious+for+N (anxious for news), anxious+about+N (anxious about

his health).

Structurally simple patterns are usually polysemantic: the pattern take+N

represents several meanings of the polysemantic head-word: take tea (coffee), take

neasures (precautions). Structurally complex patterns are usually monosemantic:

the pattern take+to+N represents only one meaning of take – take to sports (to sb).

IV. Motivation in Word-Combinations

Motivation in WCs may be lexical or grammatical (structural). The WC is

motivated if its meaning is deducible from the meaning, order and arrangement of

its components: red flower – red+flower – quality+substance – A+N. Non-

motivated WCs are indivisible lexically and structurally. They are called

phraseological units.

The WC is lexially non-motivated if its combined lexical meaning is not

deducible from the meaning of its components: red tape –bureaucratic methods.

The WC represents a single indivisible semantic entity.

The WC is structurally non-motivated if the meaning of its pattern is not

deducible from the order and arrangement of its components: red tape – substance

– N. The WC represents a single indivisible structural entity.

V. Categories of Word-Combinations

The study of WCs is based on the following set of oppositions each

constituting a separate category:

1. Neutral and stylistically marked WCs: old coat – old boy;

2. Variable and stable WCs: take a pen – take place;

3. Non-idiomatic and idiomatic WCs: to speak plainly – to call a spade a spade;

4. Usual and occasional WCs: blue sky – angry sky;

5. Conceptually determined and conceptually non-determined WCs: clean dress – clean dirt;

6. Sociolinguistically determined and sociolinguistically non-determined WCs: cold war – cold soup.