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How collocations are represented and taught in selected legal English textbooks

Abstract. The article deals with an issue which continues to draw increasingly more attention in LSP teaching, i.e., collocations, with a particular focus on legal collocations and legal English. The aim of the text is to offer an overview of the treatment given to specialised legal collocations in legal English textbooks used in tertiary level institutions in Poland. The methodology employed for selecting the textbooks is presented in detail in the Aims and Methodology section. The selected textbooks were then reviewed in terms of their collocation focus and the extent to which they follow pedagogical recommendations regarding teaching phraseology. Bearing in mind the importance of familiarizing students with natural and accurate language in order to help them master the legal genre, it appears that there is still a need to place more focus on phraseology and extend the formats and number of exercises centred on collocations.

Keywords: legal English, ELP, collocations, teaching, foreign language acquisition

1. Introduction

The literature on the subject offers numerous definitions of the term *collocation*. What is more, it appears that no universally accepted formal definition of collocations, not even a proposal for the definition, exists (Mel'čuk 1998: 23).

Various researchers offer competing definitions in line with the approach they have applied. The three most popular frameworks used by linguists researching collocations are a frequency-based approach (represented by Sinclair 2004; Kjellmer 1994 or Lehecka 2015, for example), a semantic-oriented, or phraseological approach (advocated by Cowie 1994; Mel'čuk 1998; Hausmann 1997 or Gonzalez-Ray 2002) and, last but not least, a relatively new, pragmatically-driven view (Siepmann 2005: 410, 2006)².

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2 An in-depth discussion of the three approaches has already been offered in linguistic literature on numerous occasions, and, consequently, it is beyond the scope of this study. For details see Sinclair 2004,

As its name suggests, the frequency-based approach invokes frequency, which is used in order to calculate association measures using such corpus information as the number of tokens, followed by the frequency of the node, that of the collocate and the frequency of the collocation itself (i.e., node + collocate) in the collocation window (the span of words), supplemented by the collocation window size. As a result of the analysis of the above mentioned data, a number is assigned to the attraction between co-occurring words (Brezina 2018: 70).

Unlike the frequency-based approach, the phraseological one treats collocations as a category situated on the phraseological continuum which encompasses free combinations, collocations and idiomatic expressions. In line with the view presented in Cowie (1994), one of the advocates of the phraseological approach, collocations are “transparent and usually lexically variable” expressions, “associations of two or more lexemes (roots) recognised in and defined by their occurrence in a specific range of grammatical constructions” with “arbitrary limitations of choice at one or more points” (Cowie 1994: 3169).

Espousing the phraseological view, Hausmann (1989) devised an accessible, though somewhat restrictive, structural classification of collocations based on basic grammatical terms. His classification includes combinations of adjectives, adverbs, nouns and verbs whose combinations are viewed as potential collocations, but no reference is made to prepositional phrases or collocations consisting of two adverbs (Hausmann 1989: 1010). An alternative, more comprehensive classification is offered by Benson et al. (2009), who divides collocations into lexical ones (seven types, roughly corresponding to Hausmann’s proposal) and grammatical ones. The latter encompass cases where a dominant word is accompanied by a preposition or a grammatical structure (e.g., an infinitive or a clause) (Benson 2009: xix).

Despite the visible difference, the two approaches are not very divergent, and have been successfully combined to investigate collocations. Some researchers see them as compatible and complementing each other at various stages of analysis, with the frequency-based approach usually preceding the phraseological one (Gledhill 2000: 17).

Last but not least, the third approach, a younger relative of the two presented above, makes an attempt at explaining structural irregularities and non-compositionality underlying phrasemes and collocations by referring to pragmatic regularities which provide a link between the situational context and the linguistic form, which brings us back to the cognitively-based contextualisation theory offered by Fillmore (1976) (cf. Siepmann 2005: 410–411).

Kjellmer 1994, Lehecka 2015 (the frequency-based approach), Cowie 1994, Mel’čuk 1998, Hausmann 1997, Gonzalez-Ray 2002, (semantic oriented approach), pragmatically driven-view (Siepmann 2005, 2006), and a concise summary of the key aspects of all three approaches may be found in Michta & Mroczyńska (2022: 8–14).

Although it seems that researchers find it difficult to adopt a uniform, widely-accepted definition of collocation which will cover all the linguistic features of the phenomenon, we may try and make an attempt to compile a list of criteria of collocability based on characteristics appearing across various studies on collocations. These features will allow us to classify a given phraseological unit as collocation:

1. frequency of co-occurrence;
2. combinatory restrictions;
3. degree of compositionality;
4. degree of transparency;
5. span of words between node and collocate, or collocational window (Patiño 2014: 122–124).

None of the three approaches we have mentioned are as divergent as they may appear at first glance. What is more, there are studies which seem to have found some common ground to build a unified view of collocations, and at the same time to point out certain problems linked with each of the individual approaches. We would like to draw attention to research undertaken by Siepmann (2005, 2006) which may be worth a more detailed presentation, because not only does it offer a new, more encompassing definition of *collocation*, but it also argues for a revised classification of the collocational spectrum.

He, in fact, advocates an extension of the semantically-based approach “that will take account of strings of regular syntactic composition which form a sense unit with a relatively stable meaning” (Siepmann 2005: 411) based on a rigorously implemented study of the linguistic corpus. Siepmann suggests incorporating the findings of the cognitivist camp, but he also postulates loosening the definition of collocation so that it encompasses the concepts of usage norm and statistical significance on the one hand, and the holistic nature of the collocational unit on the other hand. In light of the fact that native speakers can ascribe meaning to general language collocations even if they lack their context, Siepmann claims that collocations may be considered as self-contained “wholes” (Siepmann 2005: 438).

Having adopted such a broad definition of collocation as the one presented by Siepmann, we may argue that collocations are an extremely widespread phenomenon in the language, and as such, they seem to dominate language use. Furthermore, being structurally complex units, collocations in this sense, and not just individual words, may be treated as linguistic signs on their own (Siepmann 2005: 438).

Additionally, the legal genre, with its extensive use of formulaic language, has not featured frequently in legal language studies, making this area an interesting and far from comprehensively explored ground for linguistic research. However, with the unprecedented boom in information and communication technology (ICT) and its availability, the situation is changing. The fast development of corpus linguistics and its

computer-based tools allows the harvesting of huge amounts of data, creating customised databases and conducting more in-depth analyses of corpora of a size and on a scale never seen before. According to Gózdź-Roszkowski and Pontrandolfo, current trends in corpus research into legal phraseology go along five main lines: (1) research into collocations, (2) research into routine formulae, (3) terminographically-oriented studies, (4) cross-linguistic studies of phraseology, including translation, and (5) semantics of legal patterns (2015: 133–134).

As research appears to confirm the importance and widespread use of collocations not only in general language, but also in the specialised legal English genre, in this paper we will make an attempt at reviewing the extent to which legal English textbooks incorporate phrase-focused exercises so as to help learners master this key linguistic feature.

2. Aims and methodology

The aim of this paper is to review how legal English textbooks explicitly discuss collocation, provide targeted exercises which specifically focus on them, and whether the format of the exercises follows pedagogical recommendations. These recommendations put emphasis on reduction of error rates (Baddeley & Wilson 1994; Warmington & Hitch 2014) on the one hand, while preserving a sufficient degree of cognitive commitment on the part of the learner (Stengers & Boers 2015) on the other hand. It is worth mentioning at this point that in the case of legal English, we may come across recommendations regarding the approach to error correction that are somewhat contrary to the general English teaching methodologies mentioned above. Specialist ELP writers put a strong emphasis on accuracy, and, consequently, on grammar, term error correction and the student's ability to reflect on their deep-rooted mistakes, advocating the view that a lawyer needs not only to devise documents, but also to correct the text so that it conveys a clear standardised legal message (Mason & Atkins 2007, book cover). Though these recommendations are definitely worthwhile, according to Nesselhauf (2005: 252), “the starting point for teaching collocations is to make learners aware of the phenomenon” as, in the first place, they may not realise that collocations are usually transparent but combinatory-restricted expressions and have to be learned consciously with some cognitive effort so that they can be recalled later. We believe that such an overview of textbooks in terms of their phrase-focus approach may raise ELP teachers' awareness of the importance of teaching collocations, and it may prove useful when deciding on course materials.

The methodology adopted for this study included the following steps: (1) extracting from *Perspektywy Ranking* the top 16 higher education institutions offering law degrees; (2) sending inquiries to the institutions regarding the coursebooks used; (3) analysing received information and selecting the most popular textbooks used in legal English

courses; (4) manually screening the most popular textbooks for collocation-focused exercises; (5) categorising formats of extracted collocation-focused exercises; and (6) evaluating the exercise formats against pedagogical recommendations regarding teaching phraseology. A more detailed presentation of the steps involved in the study may be found below.

The study was based on legal English textbooks used in specialised legal English courses in Polish universities offering law degrees. In order to obtain information regarding specific publications used for legal English courses enquiry emails were sent to the top 16 universities listed in the *Perspektywy* ranking list (*Perspektywy Ranking 2021*). Ten institutions replied providing details of the textbooks used. Based on the received information, we came up with a list of the top four textbooks used, i.e., Lawyer's English Language Coursebook by Catherine Mason, *Introduction to International Legal English* by Amy Krois-Lindner and Matt Firth (used in 4 institutions), *International Legal English (ILE)* by Amy Krois-Linder (used in 3 institutions), and *Legal English. Niezbędnik przyszłego prawnika* by Halina Sierocka (used in 3 institutions). While the first three publications target the international markets, the latter one is aimed at Polish students of legal English. Some of the university language centres teaching legal English used several textbooks depending on the level of the class offered.

The next step was to manually screen the textbooks for exercises with a focus on collocations in general. At this point it may be worthwhile to clarify what kinds of phrases are included in the term collocation. As mentioned in section 1, the literature on the subject presents several competing approaches which are used to tackle the problem, and the textbooks under review generally do not provide a formal definition of their own, perhaps except for Mason and Atkins (2007: 23), who make an attempt to clarify the term, arguing that “collocations are words that form natural partnerships in English”. The working definition offered by Mason and Atkins (2007) seems to be rather more phraseological than frequency based in its scope, i.e., refers to a type of word combination and not specifically to a co-occurrence of words in a certain span. For the purposes of this study we adopted a relatively broad definition based on Siepmann (2005: 411), who argues that collocations are “strings of regular syntactic composition which form a sense unit with a relatively stable meaning”. This definition is broad enough to cover various types of word combinations which are included in foreign language teaching and, consequently, they are expected to appear in textbooks. We did not focus on any specific type of collocations but instead concentrated on exercises dealing with various types of word strings that naturally go together. So as to be included in the inventory of phrase-based exercises, the exercises needed to indicate the focus on multi-word items either by explicitly carrying a label such as “collocations/expressions/phrases” or the focus could be assumed from the type of expressions students are asked

to provide. The terms *phrase-based* or *collocation-based exercise* are used interchangeably to refer to the type of task which has been described above.

The next step was to categorise phrase-focused exercise formats. This was done based on the type of action required on the part of a student. The gap-filling category subsumes sentence-level or phrase-level exercises, in most cases based on the material provided in previous tasks or collocation and preposition banks. The matching category subsumes exercises where a student is asked either to combine sentence or phrase parts or to indicate their choice in a multiple choice exercise. The dividing line between these two categories, at times, seemed rather blurry as gap filling also included some kind of matching; one clear difference, however, being that matching could be done by just drawing a line in order to join compatible sentence or phrase parts or circling the correct choice, whereas gap-filling required the actual writing in of a correct option (See also Boers et al. 2016: 15). As long as these collocation-focused tasks are integrated in all of the textbooks that we analysed, they may be placed in various unit sections. In some cases, these types of exercises follow the reading comprehension tasks they are based on. Alternatively, they may be placed in a consolidation section at the end of a unit or in collocation banks closing the unit, or a combination of some or all of these approaches is used.

3. Collocations in teaching legal English

According to Sierocka (2012: 5), some researchers advocate the view that Legal English may be looked at from two perspectives (Bloor & Bloor 1986; Pieńkos 1999; Coxhead & Nation 2001), i.e., (1) all languages are learnt in a context, (2) studying specialised languages requires learners to acquire the basic core of the general language (grammar and structures) before they move on to studying a variety of the language, i.e., LSP. When it comes to legal English, we may distinguish a number of features characterising this genre, including accuracy, ambiguity, specialisation, conservatism and complexity (Jopek-Bosiacka 2008). When teaching legal English we do not only need to take these features into account, but we also need to bear in mind the fact that this community discourse is strongly affected by the history, religion or philosophy of a given nation (Sierocka 2012: 6; see also Badger 2003; Wagner 2003). And obviously, these historical, religious or philosophical influences will vary from country to country, making the comparison of the legal systems, their phraseology or finding term equivalents, often a painstaking task.

Based on the growing research in the area of phraseology (e.g., Polio 2012; Sinclair 1991; Wray 2002), we may argue that this dimension of language is of considerable relevance for foreign language learners (e.g., Boers & Lindstromberg 2009; Nattinger & DeCarrico 1992; Wood 2010). The knowledge of strings of words that naturally come together, labelled in literature in many various ways, e.g., as multiword units, lexical

phrases, formulaic expressions, idioms, prefabricated chunks, collocations or colligations, to name just a few, helps learners to achieve a command of language close to that of a native speaker (Boers et al. 2006; Crossley et al. 2015), as well as indicate receptive fluency (Ellis et al. 2008; Sonbul 2015). However, to achieve this mastery one needs to be frequently and intensively exposed to the target language, which is rarely the case in the learning context. Otherwise, the process of students acquiring fixed phrases appears to be somewhat slow (Li & Schmitt 2010)³.

When it comes to specialised languages, with the dominance of term-based research, specialised phraseology seems to be a relatively unknown area that requires further exploration. This may be due to the fact that phraseology seemed to focus on exploring phraseological phenomena in the general language rather than in Language for Special Purposes (LSP), and in ELP constituting part of it. Another reason hindering research in this area is the fact that the study of collocations in ELP also requires advanced field-knowledge. Thus, studies focused on specialised phraseology are rather rare, with such notable exceptions as Picht (1987), Martin (1992), Meyer & Mackintosh (1994), Glenhill (2000), L'Homme (2000), Heid (2001), Michta (2007), Ward (2007), and Michta & Mroczyńska (2022). When it comes to legal English, research by Kjaer (1990a, 1990b, 2007) and Biel (2012, 2014) deserves particular attention due to its comprehensive character.

Growing interest and subsequent recent developments in the field of legal phraseology helped to establish the theoretical foundations of this subdiscipline. Still, there seem to be a number of competing approaches regarding the definition and classification of legal phrasemes (Wronka 2021: 362; see also Biel 2014, 2018) such as those offered by Kjær (2007) and later extended by Biel (2014b), for example.

While analysing word combinations in legal language, Kjær (1990: 25–26) advocates a theory that they are dependent on the non-linguistic world of law, i.e., the environment in which they are used. Her theory of context-conditioned word combinations in legal language is based on the observation that these combinations are typically reproduced in certain recurrent contexts which make them relatively stable. This is also due to the fact that legal language, i.e., wording, that needs to be used in a given situation may be prescribed by law (e.g., codes, statutes and regulations), and specific formulation may be required by law for a document to be valid. According to Kjær (1990: 28–29), such relatively rare circumstances are situated at the extreme on a scale of non-linguistic conditioning of word combinations and indicate the highest degree of conditioning, precisely because “prefabricated word combinations” that need to be used are the effect of the direct influence of the law on a lawyer’s word choices. She also distinguishes three other types of word combinations in legal language, i.e., (1) those which are only

3 Cf. Nesselhauf 2005: 2004 where she argues that neither an increase of the length of exposure alone, nor the number of years learners were taught English have a positive effect on collocation use.

indirectly prescribed by law, (2) those whose use is recommended to avoid ambiguity, and (3) routine phrases that are reproduced out of habit as opposed to those prescribed by law or recommended indirectly. It seems that the findings of her research may have some implications for legal language teaching, i.e., these word combinations deserve to be the focus of attention because their appropriate use conditions produce effective communication in the field of law, and also it should be stressed that legal language and consequently permitted word combinations are inextricably intertwined with a particular legal system (Kjær 2007: 508)⁴.

Having combined the approaches presented by Kjær (1990, 2007) with the functional approach of Gózdź-Roszkowski (2011), Biel (2014: 36) presents the concept of a “phraseological legal continuum” which includes text-structuring patterns, grammatical patterns, term-forming patterns, term-embedding collocations, and, last but not least, lexical collocations. She claims that all of these classes of word combinations, appearing at the macrostructural or microstructural level of the text, provide a kind of stable matrix which may serve as a starting point to be filled with context specific details. In terms of legal language teaching, this view also leads to the conclusion that word combinations are a key component of legal language and, as such, should be the centre of attention in legal textbooks.

Having established the theoretical background both in the area of teaching methodology and in the area of legal phraseology, we can move on to the next stage of our analysis, i.e., the review of selected legal English textbooks.

4. Representation of collocations in selected legal English textbooks

In this section we analyse selected legal English textbooks used in Polish higher educational institutions that offer law studies. The textbooks were screened for various types of phrase-focused exercises. After preliminary screening of the textbooks under review, it appeared that by far the most common type of action required was “gap-filling”, closely followed by “matching”. Together, gap-filling and matching definitely made up the majority of phrase-focused exercises (94%) in the legal English textbooks. Other task types were far less frequent and involved identifying collocations in a text, dictionary searches for collocates of words given, or error-correction. The detailed results of the screening are presented in Table 1.

The mean number of phrase-focused exercises per textbook is 43; however, the number of such exercises in individual textbooks varied from 19 to 71. We need to bear in mind the fact that the differences shown by these numbers may reflect not only the

4 Kjær (2007: 509–510) also offers another typology of word combinations used in legal language which distinguishes multi-word terms, collocations with a term, and formulaic expressions and standard phrases.

collocational focus of a given textbook, but also the scope of material covered and the size of the publication. The books will be discussed based on the order of how frequently they are used in the institutions surveyed, i.e., (1) *The Lawyer’s English Language Coursebook*, (2) *Introduction to International Legal English*, (3) *International Legal English*, and (4) *Legal English. Niezbędnik przyszłego prawnika*.

Table 1. Collocation-focused exercises in selected legal English textbooks

| Textbook | Matching | Gap-fill | Other | Total |
|--|----------|----------|-------|-------|
| The Lawyer’s English Language Coursebook (452 pages) | 8 | 60 | 3 | 71 |
| Introduction to International Legal English (160 pages) | 9 | 9 | 1 | 19 |
| International Legal English (320 pages) | 20 | 24 | 7 | 51 |
| Legal English Niezbędnik przyszłego prawnika (352 pages) | 10 | 20 | 0 | 30 |
| Total | 47 | 113 | 11 | 171 |
| % | 28% | 66% | 6% | 100% |

As shown in Table 1 above, of all the textbooks under review *The Lawyer’s English Language Coursebook* by Catherine Mason & Rosemary Atkins, comprising 10 units each divided into two parts (A—foundation level and B—higher level), provides students with the largest range of exercises testing collocations and phrases. The book also contains a separate section devoted to explaining the importance of collocations and prepositional phrases, and presenting their types. In this section the authors stress that “the key to learning accurate legal English is to have a good familiarity with collocations” (Mason & Atkins 2007: 23). Moreover, in each unit the authors include both a “*Collocation bank*” and a “*Preposition bank*” accompanied with the symbol “M” (memorise) to indicate items worth noting and remembering, as well as “*Collocation review*” and “*Preposition review*” sections, providing consolidation of the material introduced in a given unit. The review exercises explicitly refer back to the material/phrases students have seen. Out of a total of 71 tasks, the majority of exercises (60) are of the gap-filling type. The exercises are

assisted, i.e., they are either preceded by contextualized examples (e.g., collocations and prepositional phrases may be bolded in reading comprehension tasks) or by collocation and preposition banks containing phrases which need to be completed as part of the gap filling task. Apart from these types of tasks, the textbook also contains a number of matching or error correction exercises. It seems that the book under review offers the most comprehensive coverage of collocations and prepositional phrases. It also emphasises the importance of mastering these structures to achieve language proficiency.

The second textbook reviewed is *Introduction to International Legal English* by Amy Krois-Linder, Matt Firth & Translegis, intended as a course for classroom or self-study use; and, as the title suggests, the aim is to familiarise students with the basic concepts concerning law and justice. Offering an introduction to the legal system, the book is also the smallest in size, containing only 160 pages, presenting 10 units covering different areas of law. The book does not include a collocation or phrase bank to assist students in their acquisition process, though it offers a glossary of terms. Despite its limited content, it seems to provide a relatively large range of practice exercises dealing with collocations and phrases, of which 9 are gap-filling tasks, 9 require matching, and 1 task involves a dictionary search for collocates. Drawing students' attention to collocations present in texts, offering them opportunities to practise, as well as indicating the consulting of a reference source such as a dictionary, instils good learning habits and emphasises the role of collocations. The material tested in practice tasks is based on contextualised examples appearing in reading comprehension texts (where key words and expressions are bolded) or listening comprehension tasks (audio transcripts are provided at the back of the book). Interestingly, the authors do not often use the term collocation in exercise instructions, perhaps to avoid using jargon which may be overwhelming for students.

International Legal English by Amy Krois-Linder, also intended as a course for classroom or self-study use, is a textbook for more advanced users (the author indicates upper intermediate and advanced levels), including law students and practising lawyers alike. In its 15 units, the book covers a wide range of more advanced and specific legal issues. The format of the book resembles the one used in the aforementioned *Introduction to International Legal English*, with reading comprehension texts containing bolded key terms and phrases. Also, at the back of the textbook there is a glossary and an index of terms appearing throughout the publication. The book includes a total of 51 phrase-focused practice exercises. Similarly to the books analysed above, the majority of tasks require gap-filling (24), followed by matching (20), and 7 exercises of other formats, including identifying collocations in a text. The bulk of the exercises are located in the Language Focus section which closes each of the units and is aimed at revision and consolidation of the material introduced.

Last but not least, another textbook which follows a similar pattern of presenting collocations is *Legal English. Niezbędnik przyszłego prawnika* by Halina Sierocka, the only publication in the reviewed pool that has been devised with Polish students of legal English in mind. The author claims the book is intended for 1st and 2nd year law students. The content comprises not only general legal issues, but also aspects specific to the Polish legal system. This may be an argument in favour of selecting this textbook for students in faculties of law in the institutions surveyed, because in their future professional career the students will probably need legal English mostly to navigate the meanderings and complexities of Polish legal regulations. The book contains 24 main units (plus Unit 25, English-Polish Glossary of terms), each of them closing with a “*Check Your Progress*” section and a “*Collocation and Preposition Bank*” offering students an opportunity to test and consolidate their knowledge of collocations and prepositional phrases. Practice exercises include gap-filling (20 tasks) and matching (10). Similarly to *The Lawyer’s English Language Coursebook*, the exercises are assisted, i.e., the phrases tested are previously presented in authentic reading materials, though often not explicitly; only occasionally do they appear among bolded words and phrases in the reading texts.

The first three publications, intended both for classroom use and self-study, contain an “*Answer Key*” which students may refer to for feedback. The Answer key is not included in Halina Sierocka’s *Legal English. Niezbędnik przyszłego prawnika*, probably because the book is designed specifically for classroom use and the author presumed that it is the teacher’s role to provide the necessary explanations as to which answers are right or wrong. Consequently, the answer key or teachers’ explanations offered after the exercise stage may be treated as corrective feedback.

However, we should be aware of the fact that in light of the findings of pedagogical research it is still better to design exercises that will provide errorless conditions in order to keep the rate of mistakes minimal rather than simply count on the corrective feedback. According to Boers et al. (2016: 16), pedagogical recommendations regarding the design and implementation of exercises dealing with multiword expressions (including collocations or prepositional phrases) emphasise the need for minimizing the rate of error (See Warmington & Hitch 2014) as well as for presenting these word strings as intact wholes (See Wray 2002). This holistic approach is suggested instead of asking students to re-assemble broken-up phrases or filling in components which are missing. Indeed, this is in keeping with the research findings which show that the acquisition of formulaic language in L1 is quite natural because users are frequently exposed to such phrases, which they encounter, process and then store in the memory as wholes rather than separate parts. The same type of approach may prove effective in the case of L2 learning, though, obviously, learners of L2 may need to deal with the problems created from a lack of massive exposure, which is achievable only in immersion contexts.

Bearing the above in mind, we will try and assess to what extent the types of phrase-focused exercises offered in the textbooks under review accord with these pedagogical recommendations. First, when it comes to minimising the rate of errors, it may be achieved by putting students in a learning context where they have been previously familiarised with the multiword units they need to deal with in exercises, or alternatively they are given a list of exemplars along with the exercise (e.g., in the form of collocation or preposition banks). In such circumstances students can avoid making mistakes which may linger in their memory and cause confusion. It seems to be more appropriate and effective to try and minimise the risk of error at the exercise stage rather than rely on the results from the corrective feedback offered at later stages (Boers et al. 2014).

Interestingly, in their effort to come up with a task format that reduces error rates and at the same time maintains cognitive involvement on the part of the student, Boers et al. (2016: 5, 12), while devising their experiment, in which they compared the effectiveness of phrase-focused exercises, decided to add an alternative format of exercises to the test, i.e., the provision of first-letter cues so as to aid the learners in completing the missing words. While reducing the risk of errors, this format succeeded in stimulating the engagement with the formal makeup of the phrase; however, as the researchers found, it proved to be less effective in stimulating the engagement with the actual meaning of the phrase. Surprisingly, the provision of the first-letter cues was not encountered in any of the legal English textbooks we analysed.

Having reviewed the types of phrase-focused exercises offered by the legal English textbooks, we may notice that in a great majority of cases they are in line with the pedagogical recommendations presented above. The textbook that appears to direct the most attention to phrases is *The Lawyer's English Language Coursebook*, offering over 70 exercises which comprehensively deal with this issue. Unlike in other textbooks we analysed, this publication has each unit divided into two sections, i.e., section A at the foundation level and section B being at the higher level. It seems that section B addresses collocations and other fixed phrases more extensively as it includes the largest number of tasks of this type. Most of the tasks are of the gap-filling format, which seems to be stimulating and cognitively challenging enough to keep students interested as they are based on the material introduced in the unit. Successful completion of the exercises will probably require referencing back to the texts where collocations are presented in context. The matching format is used only in 8 analysed cases; it may be argued that students may find this type of task less engaging as it requires simply drawing a line or circling the correct alternative. We see it as an advantage that the book contains collocation and preposition banks that can be used as reference lists, helping students to complete the tasks and avoid making mistakes because the choices will not be based solely on student's language intuition, which may be misleading (due to interference for example). The banks cover a vast range of prepositional phrases (208 items) and collocations

(202 items), totalling 409 items. Moreover, prepositional phrases are accompanied by illustrative examples. The book includes a wide range of types and formats of exercises, which seems to be an advantage as it offers varied and stimulating material for students to deal with. Overall, while generally the format of tasks included in the book is in line with pedagogical recommendations, there are also some error-correction exercises which may be counter-effective as research shows⁵ and are better avoided.

The book containing the second-largest number of phrase-focused exercises is *International Legal English* (with over 50 tasks of this type). The majority of tasks requiring students to deal with collocations may be found in the Language Focus section at the end of each unit intended to consolidate the material. Here, there is almost an equal number of gap-filling and matching format exercises. As we mentioned above, gap-filling may be more engaging for students than simple matching, plus it involves an extra processing effort in the form of writing down a phrase or part of it. The book does not contain any collocation banks which students could refer to. Therefore, deciding on the correct alternative or coming up with the right word to complete a gap may require reading texts or audio scripts where the phrases appeared. Some of the other format tasks require students to identify collocations in the reading texts. This seems to be a good method to use because highlighting or underlying key phrases may help make them more visually salient and at the same time easier to acquire. The authors of the book try to minimize the risk of error and they do not include any error-correction format exercises, which is in line with the findings of language acquisition studies.

When it comes to *Legal English. Niezbędnik przyszłego prawnika*, the publication contains a total of 30 phrase-focused exercises, of which 20 are gap-filling and the other 10 matching formats, with most of the tasks being introduced in Check Your Progress and Extra Practice Corner sections devoted to revision, consolidation and extension of the material presented in the core of each unit. As compared to the size of the book, the number of exercises is rather modest. On the plus side, there are preposition and collocation banks after units 2–18, containing 175 phrases, which may be used as a reference list by students dealing with the tasks. Moreover, the authors provide learners with both adapted and authentic material abundant in fixed phrases and collocations (though the phrases are not made visually salient in any way which would facilitate memorising them). Thus, we assume that it may be the role of the teacher to explain and emphasise the importance of these word strings that naturally go together, and thereby attempt to form within students the habit of highlighting or underlining these types of expressions in texts as part of their self-study work. As mentioned previously, the number of phrase-focused tasks may not be impressive, but it should be admitted that they follow the

5 The superiority of the errorless learning approach to trial-and-error is discussed in Baddeley & Wilson (1994), Warmington et al. (2013) as well as in Warmington & Hitch (2014).

recommended pedagogical format. Tasks are generally assisted, i.e., they practice and recycle the expressions which students have come across in previous sections in the unit, and they may refer back in order to avoid making mistakes.

Last but not least, *Introduction to International Legal English*, which as the title suggests is aimed at discussing some basic aspects of law, offers a modest 19 phrase-focused exercises. The authors offer mostly gap-filling and matching formats. 9 tasks of each type are included in the book, plus one task requiring students to search for fixed phrases in a reading text. The analysed exercises are mostly found in the Language Focus section, aimed at consolidation of knowledge introduced in the unit. No phrase bank is provided, so learners need to search through the reading texts or audio transcripts if they want to make sure that the options they want to use are correct. This may actually be beneficial as in such a situation students need to get more involved in the task as compared to simple copying from the list provided. What is more, as the book is intended both for classroom use and self-study, it offers an Answer key which learners may consult to get feedback. However, as Stengers and Boers (2015) argue, corrective feedback may not be as effective as the evidence suggests, and it remains of key importance to provide tasks which are challenging enough and minimise the risk of error.

Some of the textbooks use bold font for key terms and phrases introduced in some of the reading texts. This intervention is probably intended to accelerate phrase learning. It makes the selected phrases more visually prominent and, therefore, easier for students to remember (Boers et al. 2016; Sonbul & Schmitt 2013; Szudarski & Carter 2014). This technique is applied to some extent in all the books under review, with *The Lawyer's English Language Coursebook* taking the lead, followed by *Introduction to International Legal English* and *International Legal English*. However, this method is least visible in *Legal English. Niezbędnik przyszłego prawnika*.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

It seems that the importance of teaching collocations, as opposed to individual words, was widely recognised in General English first, and then the concept spread to LSP books, including those focusing on legal language. The view in which phraseology is placed at the centre of the learner's attention is supported by ELP researchers; and it is along these lines that Biel (2014: 42) claims that the conceptual structure and the systemic nature of legal terminology affects legal phraseology. Thus, phraseology, and collocations in particular, may act as a tool to express complex interrelations between legal concepts. Therefore, we believe collocations deserve to be a central part of the process of acquiring the legal English genre. Having reviewed selected legal English textbooks, it appears that their authors are fully aware of the importance of teaching word combinations. However, in each case they have individually decided to put more or less emphasis on this aspect, which is reflected in the varying number of

phrase-focused exercises included in each book. When it comes to following methodological recommendations, most of the exercise formats used in the textbooks under review follow the recommendations, the exception being the small number of error-correction tasks included in *The Lawyer's English Language Coursebook*.

Phraseology is of key importance in the process of ELP acquisition, and the more conscious the exposure, the better the chance of students acquiring the structures taught. It appears, in the first place, that consciousness-raising followed by explicit teaching of individual collocations, especially guided by a teacher, should be useful enough to ensure progress. Drawing students' attention to the collocation phenomenon in their mother tongue (L1) and juxtaposing these native language expressions with ones learned in a foreign language (L2) may also prove helpful as congruence in L2 and L1 cannot be necessarily assumed. An invaluable learning resource here may be dictionaries of various types, especially collocation ones, which offer guidelines on meaning and correct employment of phrases. Thus, learners should be taught dictionary skills so that they can make the best use of the resources available (Nesselhauf 2005: 253).

Learning collocations starts with raising awareness of the phenomenon, followed by conscious exposure to this type of vocabulary item, and should involve some repetition so that the phrases are remembered. Recently, in vocabulary learning in general and also in collocation learning, we witness the increasing role of rote learning (involving repetition, practise and memorisation), which has long been out of fashion in language education (See also Li 2004). Here, it may be worth pointing out that teaching a collocation should involve several aspects, such as the form of a collocation, but also its meaning and context for use. What is more, collocations in ELP need to be taught systematically, regarding not only collocations, but teaching vocabulary in general (Nesselhauf 2005: 264–269).

Bearing this fact in mind, it seems that both teachers and students may need more tasks focused directly on collocations, ideally collocations extracted from authentic language material. In trying to enrich their repertoire of materials used, teachers may want to resort to legal English collocation dictionaries or other reference publications of this type. Although reference books based on authentic legal English material may not be abundant, growing interest in legal phraseology also leads to bridging a gap in this area. Ideally, such reference books should come with a concise presentation of the theoretical framework and methodology used for extraction of terms included in the reference or dictionary section. Then each category of collocations included ought to be supplemented with authentic material, i.e., sample sentences culled from the corpus. Such books may be used for self-study purposes by students as well as by teachers, and as a base for the creation of phrase-focused classroom activities, thus strengthening the effectiveness of learning and teaching efforts.

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