

Collocation as the determinant of Wittgenstein's 'Picture' Theory of Meaning

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Abstract

Between 1921 and 1922 language study was, but for the signal absence of the computer, arguably closer to becoming its own instrumentation than at any other time during the analogue period of linguistics. Malinowski (1922) had just completed his *Corpus inscriptionum Kiriwiniensium*, which, crucially, was to lend impetus to the development of J. R. Firth's taxonomy for *context of situation*. A. A. Markov, who died in 1922, had invented stochastic processes and made a significant contribution to probability theory (see also Louw, 2003). Stochastic processes were already beginning to uncover Kjellmeresque (1984) forms of 'collocation' under Markov's direction. Wittgenstein (1922) had just published his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, written in the trenches during World War I. In its first few pages he set out his 'picture' theory of meaning. Of these scholars, only Firth and Malinowski collaborated to any significant degree. And yet, when the taxonomies of Firth and Wittgenstein are placed side by side they seem to invite integration. This paper attempts to demonstrate that collocation as described by Sinclair (1991) and, in particular, his nine-word-window of collocative power are indispensable to any such proposed integration. The paper will examine, *inter alia*, the manner in which even Wittgenstein was misled *simultaneously* into two courses of action. Firstly, he treated psychology as a harder science than that which would have been required for the task of exemplifying his theory (1953: 195). Secondly, he dismissed weak empiricism too readily as an improving method for finding the *logic* that governs states of affairs. Persevering with developments in empiricism might have put to flight the '...bewitchment of our intelligence by means of our language (PI: 109). The nine-word-window plainly has a substantial role in establishing contexts of situation (Sinclair, 2004: 198). This is accomplished both by means of *relexicalisation* and through the simultaneous exclusion in context of the perception of *delexical* collocates which are unrelated to that context (Louw, in Miller and Turci (eds) in press). Collocation allows us to demarcate the boundaries between states of affairs as well as contexts of situation and literary worlds. The logic of defective or thwarted states of affairs is more readily accessible by means of collocation and semantic prosody (Louw, 1993) than through a flawed empiricism that may have caused Wittgenstein (1953) to reject a valid model. Today, competing schools of thought may well present a more formidable challenge to the advent of digital instrumentation for meaning than the mere absence of the computer did in 1922.

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