

## Learning collocations in English as a foreign language: a didactic proposal for level B1

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**Resumen:** Quien estudia una lengua extranjera se pregunta qué es lo que puede hacer para mejorar su fluidez, tanto en el hablado como en el escrito. Una de las respuestas es aprender unidades fraseológicas. Por ello, en este trabajo nos centraremos en los procesos de enseñanza y aprendizaje de colocaciones de la lengua inglesa. Se tratarán, concretamente, colocaciones *sustantivo + sustantivo* y *verbo + sustantivo*, debido a sus numerosas unidades. Se presentará el Enfoque Léxico de Lewis (1993) y su repercusión en la enseñanza del léxico de la lengua inglesa. A continuación, se abordará el concepto de colocación y se delinearán las diferentes tipologías según el esquema propuesto por Corpas Pastor (1996). Por último, se presentarán cuatro actividades originales sobre algunas colocaciones de la lengua inglesa, para facilitar la enseñanza y aprendizaje de este tipo de unidades en el aula del inglés LE.

**Palabras clave:** colocaciones, enseñanza, aprendizaje, EFL, léxico, nivel intermedio.

### Ejercicios de colocaciones en lengua inglesa para el nivel B1

**Abstract:** Anyone studying a foreign language wonders what they can do to improve their fluency, both in spoken and written form. One of the answers is to learn phraseological units. Therefore, in this paper we will focus on the processes of teaching and learning English language collocations. We will deal, specifically, with noun + noun and verb + noun collocations, due to their numerous units. Lewis' Lexical Approach (1993) and its impact on the teaching of the English language lexicon will be presented. The concept of collocations will then be addressed and the different typologies will be outlined according to the scheme proposed by Corpas Pastor (1996). Finally, four original activities will be presented on some English language collocations, in order to facilitate the teaching and learning of this type of units in the English LE classroom.

**Key words:** collocations, learning, teaching, EFL, vocabulary, intermediate level.

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## 1. Introduction

For many years, vocabulary has been the “poor relation” of language teaching (Carter 1987: 145), considered to be a less important element in learning a second language by most teachers. In contrast, Wilkins (1972: 111-112) affirms that “while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed” underlining its importance in the processes of learning and teaching a foreign language.

There is no doubt that learning the lexicon of a foreign language is a rather complicated task, especially if reference is made to the English language. If we stop to think about the vocabulary of our language, we will realize that most of the structures and words we use are prefabricated combinations of all kinds, which makes teachers of a foreign language wonder about how to teach most efficiently the language stored in our brain. That is, if native speakers are able to store an enormous amount of prefabricated combinations, what is the methodology to be employed to help our students build the mental lexicons in which to store these chunks? It is obvious that learners need to acquire a large mental lexicon, because what is acknowledged is that the difference between intermediate and advanced learners is not complex grammar, but the great vocabulary they have stored in their long-term memory (Lewis 2000: 8). However, over the years, language teaching has been based on mastering a grammar system and memorising many isolated words. It is undeniable that students have acquired a great vocabulary and are able to name many objects; however, so much of the effective language is actually made of prefabricated chunks. These lexical combinations, among which we can find collocations, have a function that goes beyond the simple fact of naming objects; they have a pragmatic feature (Lewis 2000: 15). For instance, how can we explain the verb to get in the classroom if we do not name the words it collocates with? This verb is most commonly used in fixed expressions, such as *to get married*, *to get wet*, *to get annoyed*, and so on. It is hard not to find this verb in combination with other words.

Our job, as teachers, is to improve our students' linguistic competence and performance in order to reach a good vocabulary level so as to communicate more fluently and precisely. Many students, as mentioned previously, already know a lot of words, but perhaps, they are not conscious of the collocations that those words can have. Many teachers may believe it is only another way of introducing vocabulary in the classroom; however, if we stopped to think about how language is organised, we would realise that most of the lexicon is made up of collocations.

Therefore, in this piece of work we will survey the nature and characteristics of collocations and we will focus our attention on their application in the teaching of the English language. We will discuss the importance of the Lexical Approach (Lewis 1993) in the process of learning new vocabulary and focus on those collocations at level B1. In addition to this, a series of four didactic activities will be presented to improve the learning of level B1 collocations in an amusing and entertaining way.

## 2. The Lexical Approach

Lewis (1993: 2) states: "An approach is an integrated set of theoretical and practical beliefs, embodying both syllabus and method and it involves principles which reflect the nature of language itself and the nature of learning".

The Lexical Approach focuses on the globality of language and not on what, until then, used to be the focus of foreign language manuals: isolated phrases, grammar and unattractive and unmotivating activities. In this regard, Lewis (1993: 8) argues: "Grammar is normally equated with structures, sentence patterns, different verb forms (the tenses), prepositions and those other supposedly generative bits of the language which are practised in grammar exercises". However, many of these bits of languages that Lewis speaks of are not formed by a single word, such as *by the way*, *the day after tomorrow* (Lewis 1993: 8) and learners tend to translate literally word by word, running the risk of making lexical errors. Lewis asserts that knowledge of grammatical rules is essential, but grammatical notions will not be acquired, but stored in the short-term memory (1993: 35). Instead, his new approach envisages that the student will be able to use words in their context and cotext.

Lexicon, and especially its learning and teaching, is a very complex aspect of language. All types of vocabulary do not make sense outside a specific context. Words do not usually appear alone in a sentence and are

not combined with all words, only with some (Lewis 1993: 116); for example, we say *turn off the light* and not *close the light*. What the linguist proposes in his new approach is the learning and teaching of vocabulary through linguistic chunks, which would facilitate the memorization of vocabulary and improve the fluency of the learners. In other words, introducing the idea of chunks and providing students with appropriate materials to facilitate their identification should be one of the central activities of language teaching (Lewis 1993: 122).

Lewis (1993) structures the vocabulary of a language into four different types of lexical units, from which their combinations are formed: *word – polyword / collocation / institutionalised utterances / sentences frames or heads*.

In order to recognize chunks, it is first important to recognize their structure and formation. It is a conscious learning process that can favour language acquisition.

From a didactic perspective, Lewis (1993: 119-120) proposes several activities to recognize and memorize collocations. Let's look at an example:

<b>Verbs</b> _____	<b>Adjectives</b> _____	<b>Book</b>
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What he proposes is that students are able to find adjectives and verbs that have something to do with the noun *book*.

Taking as an example the English language (Lewis's target language), it is more comfortable and advisable to deal with verbs from a combinatorial point of view. An example is the auxiliary verb *to have*, whose main meaning is possession, but if it is not considered in its lexicalized form, it can assume different meanings, such as *to have a shower*, *to have breakfast*, *to have fun*, depending on the situational context in which it is used. This study methodology allows to improve communicative competence when actually interacting with natives of the studied language.

In addition to this, Lewis maintains that it is important to introduce these units and identify them from the initial level of the language, so that, once an advanced level has been reached, the student will be able to distinguish these combinations, separate them and use their components to

form more units. For this reason, Lewis states that greater attention should be given to the presentation of the lexicon in combination in foreign language classes, so that students can recognize words and their combinatorial limitations. Therefore, a lexical approach in language teaching reflects a belief in the centrality of the lexicon to language structure, in particular to multi-word lexical units or chunks that are learned and used as single items (Richards and Rodgers 2014: 215).

On balance, in the Lexical Approach, language does not consist of traditional grammar and vocabulary, but it is often made up of multi-word prefabricated chunks, which are lexical units rather than grammatical structures. These units consist of collocations and fixed phrases (Richards and Rodgers 2014: 215).

The Lexical Approach underlines the idea that chunks are a central element of naturalistic language use. It cannot be denied that there are advantages in producing utterances from prefabricated chunks rather than from isolated lexical items, as this contributes to make the speech fluent (Richards and Rodgers 2014: 217). The main purpose is to develop learners' awareness and use of these chunks so as to improve their naturalistic language use.

Because of obvious practical reasons, in this paper we will focus exclusively on the learning and teaching of collocations and not on other phraseological units of the English language.

## 1. What are collocations?

Collocations are free phraseological units that are generated from linguistic norms and that present a certain degree of combinatorial restriction dictated by use (Corpas 1996: 53). In addition, they cannot be considered acts of speech, since they need a context and cotext for them to take on meaning.

The term collocation was first used by Firth (1957) in *Papers of Linguistics*. According to his theory, the meaning of a word depends on the others with which it is combined. For example, one of the meanings of the noun *night* is due to its placability with the adjective *dark* (Firth 1957: 196) and vice versa.

Many linguists have discussed Firth's definition of collocation. Halliday (1961: 276) asserts that a collocation is a syntagmatic association of lexical units, quantifiable as the possibility that it occurs in  $n$  intervals from an  $x$  unit.

Likewise, the phenomenon of collocations is reduced to the frequent co-appearance of lexical words in speech. In addition, Halliday (1966: 148) argues that lexical theory does not belong to grammar, although it complements it, and that the co-occurrence of lexical units should be dealt with at the lexical level, and not at the grammatical level. For example, grammar is not able to explain why the adjective *strong* is used, and not any other synonym, with the noun *argument* (Halliday 1966: 151).

Sinclair (1966: 415) proposed studying the co-occurrence of lexical units through the use of extensive corpora and introduced new terms such as node (nucleus), span (distance) and collocates (place). In his words:

We may use the term node to refer to an item whose collocations we are studying, and we may define a span as the number of lexical items on each side of a node that we consider relevant to that node. Items in the environment set by the span we will call collocates.

According to his theory, a collocation is the co-occurrence of two or more words found in a short space within a text (Sinclair 1991: 170). Together with S. Jones (1974), he considers as significant collocations those formed by two lexical elements whose coappearance frequency is greater than could be deduced from the individual frequency of each of the elements (Jones and Sinclair 1974: 19). Sinclair adopted the formal criterion: frequency of co-occurrence and positional distance of four words but does not take into account semantic or syntactic aspects of the collocations (Corpas 1996: 57). As Alonso Ramos (1993: 147) stated, the frequent co-occurrence of two lexical units does not necessarily imply the presence of a collocation, and not always the positional distance is four words.

Coseriu (1967) speaks of “lexical solidarities” and distinguishes between unilateral and multilateral. The former function only syntagmatically, like *biting - teeth*, do not constitute collocations because their components do not usually appear in the discourse. On the other hand, the units of the second group, such as *barking - dog*, could be considered collocations, since both terms can appear within the discourse.

Mel'čuk (1981) also delves into the concept of lexical co-occurrence, which is the capacity of lexemes to combine in syntagmas to express different meanings.

Hausmann (1985) asserts that the structure of collocations consists of a determinant element called *base* and a determined one called *collocative*. In noun + verb collocations, the noun performs the base function, while the verb is the collocative. The set of all the collocatives that can be combined

with a base is called “positional radius”, while the positional field is the set of all the terms, generally synonyms, that has a positional potential similar to the base. In the example of *to contract a debt*, the noun *debt* performs the function of base and the verb *to contract* that of collocative. The positional radius of *debt* is composed of the verbs *to owe* and *to repay* while the synonyms of *debt*, such as *credit* and *debit*, form the positional field (Koike 2001: 63).

From the point of view of the system, collocations are no different from free syntagmas. On the other hand, at the normative level, there are some differences, since collocations enjoy a certain degree of combinatorial restriction of their components imposed by use (Corpas 1996: 76).

It may be quite complicated to distinguish a collocation from a locution. Koike (2001) affirms that a collocation is more flexible than a locution, more rigid at a combinatorial level. Moreover, locutions express an idiomatic sense and do not allow modifications at the syntactic level, such as nominalization, adjective modification, transformation into passive (Koike 2001: 31). The locution is less transparent, at a semantic level, than the collocation; however, there are cases in which idiomatic collocations are found (Escandell Vidal 2004: 30-32). For example, if we analyze the verb *to have* in its lexicalized form, its meaning is possession. On the other hand, if we combine it with the noun *breakfast*, the same verb loses its lexical form and acquires a metaphorical meaning.

### 3.1. Characteristics of collocations

Collocations have a certain degree of combinatorial restriction between their components. From the paradigmatic point of view, there are collocations that maintain a syntactic restriction, such as verb + noun and noun + adjective, for example, *to make friends*. In other cases, on the other hand, a variable restriction is found, for instance, from one type of collocation another one can be derived, such as *torrential rain – rain torrentially* (Corpas 1996: 77).

The collocational distance is the distance between the components of a collocation (Koike 2001: 146). However, the positional theory does not establish which is the one between the components of a collocation (Corpas 1996: 78). Jones and Sinclair (1974) affirmed that the distance between collocatives must be of four positions to the right or left of the nucleus.

### 3.2. Taxonomy of collocations

As mentioned above, the concept of collocation refers to that property of languages by which a speaker tends to produce certain combinations of words as opposed to other possible combinations. Likewise, collocations are defined as those phraseological units composed of two lexical units in syntactic relation, which do not constitute independent statements, since they need a linguistic context in order to be comprehensible. These are fixed combinations which present combinatorial restrictions dictated by their use, where the base chooses its collocative. Collocations can be composed in the following ways:

**noun (subject) + verb:** in these collocations the noun performs the function of subject of the verb, which denotes a characteristic action of the designated person or thing (Corpas 1996: 67). For example, *a rumor runs*, *a war breaks out*, *a ship sets sail*, etc. In this group it is possible to include also other types of collocations, e.g., *a fire breaks out*, *an epidemic breaks out*, and *a polemic breaks out*.

**verb + noun (object):** the collocations in which the noun performs the function of direct object complement are the most conspicuous group and, actually, it is the group we will work with throughout this paper. Verbs such as *to give*, *to have*, *to make*, *to do*, *to take* are found in this group and are considered delexical verbs, that is, verbs that abandon their lexical meaning to acquire another one according to the situational context in which they are used. Given their syntactic scheme, only transitive verbs can intervene in this type of collocations (Koike 2001: 48). Some examples include the following ones, *to play a role*, *a position* or *a function*, *to assume a responsibility*, *to make friends*. But also, *to make a decision* (Corpas 1996: 68-69). It is of capital importance to clarify that the nouns (direct complement) that indicate "a specific person" do not constitute collocations, because it is very difficult to establish a lexical co-occurrence between a transitive verb and a person who performs the function of direct complement (Koike 2001: 48).

**noun + adjective:** Corpas Pastor (1996: 71-72) calls this type of collocations *adjective + noun* because adjectives imply the base with which they can be combined. However, in this section, the denomination of Koike (2001: 49), *noun + adjective*, is preferred, since it shows the formal structure of these collocations are composed. In examples such as *a fierce enemy*, *blunder*, *brilliant success*, the adjective intensifies its base both positively and negatively. Many times, the collocative (adjective) can be combined with

several bases (nouns) that belong to the same semantic field; for example, *fine ear*, *view*, and *smell*.

**noun + preposition + noun:** in this type of collocations, the first noun constitutes the *collocative* and the second one the *base* of the combination. *A slice of bread*, *a bar of soap*, *a bar of chocolate*, *a clove of garlic*, are smaller entities, a portion or a unit of something. On the other hand, collocations such as *conference cycle*, *school of fish* and *flock of birds* are considered as the group to which a noun belongs. The combinatorial restriction between the components of the collocations can be fixed as in *school of fish* or variable as in *flock of birds*, *pigeons*, *insects*, where a collocative can be combined with several bases (Koike 2001: 51).

**verb + adverb:** the collocations that make up this group are composed of a verb and an adverb that ends in *-ly*. Manuel Seco (1972: 175) states that adverbs of mode, intensity, place and time form these collocations. Some examples are: *to desire fervently*, *to pray earnestly*, *to fail miserably*, *to prohibit utterly*, *to face/fight fiercely*, *to rain torrentially*, *to oppose categorically*, *to strike mortally*, *to try uselessly*, etc. These collocations seem to be related, at a lexical level, to other collocations, such as those of noun + adjective, for example, *fervent desire*, *strict prohibition*, *torrential rain* (Koike 2001: 53).

**adverb + adjective:** Corpas (1996: 75) calls this type of collocations adjective + adverb. The adverbs that form these phraseological units are of mode and intensity, as *firmly convinced*, *madly in love*, *highly reliable*, *closely related*, *visibly affected*, etc. (Koike 2001: 54). The collocative (the adverb) has the function of intensifying the base (the adjective).

In some cases a correspondence can be established with other types of collocations, such as: *deeply asleep* - *sleep deeply* - *deep sleep* (Koike 2001: 54).

**verb + adjective:** the collocations verb + adjective are not many. However, they must be considered as collocations because they have the typical characteristics of these phraseological units: frequent co-occurrence and combinatorial restriction imposed by use. Among the most common are the following ones: *to leave unharmed*, *to rest assured*, *to walk bundled*, etc. (Koike 2001: 55).

**simple lexical unit + locution:** the combinatorial restriction established between two simple lexical units, as noun + adjective or verb + noun, also exists between a simple lexical unit and a locution (Koike 2001: 55). This type of co-occurrence bears the name of *complex collocation*,

since one of the components of collocation is a lexical unit, a locution. The semi-idiomatic expressions of Zuluaga (1980: 134-136), such as *to receive with open arms*, *to sleep like a trunk*, *to be stubborn like a mule*, etc., can be considered complex collocations, as their constituent elements are a simple lexical unit and a locution. Following Zuluaga, there are several types of complex collocations as, for example:

**verb + nominal locution:** *to raise castles in the air*; verbal locution + noun: *give rise to suspicions*; noun + adjectival locution: *health of iron*; verb + adverbial locution: *to do to the letter*; adverbial locution + adjective: *deaf like a wall*.

#### 4. Teaching Collocations in an EFL Classroom

The collocational aspect is essential in the process of acquiring a language, second or foreign, since the lack of knowledge of the combinatorial restrictions of words in a language differentiates the native speaker from the non-native speaker. Castillo Carballo (2001) states that collocations are very complicated to learn since they are combinations of words that are characterized by semantic precision. Through collocations it is possible to determine the degree of knowledge that a speaker possesses and, therefore, their teaching should not be limited to intermediate and advanced levels, but should begin at elementary levels (Higuera García 2006: 29).

When we speak a language, we do not always construct our phrases word by word, but we resort to prefabricated segments that we have memorised in our mental lexicon. In addition, knowing collocations helps to distinguish synonyms and therefore favors the creation of word associations that often appear together.

Collocations are combinations of words, in most cases, transparent. Because of this characteristic and because the elements that compose them are words known to the speaker, they go unnoticed by the student (Higuera García 2006: 30). It is really important for students to be aware of collocations, since they must broaden their knowledge of words that already belong to their mental lexicon so that they can combine them with each other to form lexical collocations.

Teaching collocations in an EFL classroom can be exciting and entertaining but, sometimes, frustrating too. As mentioned previously, collocations are linguistic chunks that native speakers use frequently in their

daily language. As teachers, it is our duty to introduce these types of word combinations to our students so that their fluency and lexical background approximates the vocabulary used by native speakers.

In order to teach collocations appropriately, we have to give them the same importance as other aspects of language, such as grammar, phonetics, pronunciation or intonation. Collocation is not an added feature which we pay attention to once students have reached an advanced level of language. Collocation should play an important part in our teaching from the first lesson because students need to store these chunks little by little (Lewis 2000: 58). Moreover, teaching collocations is not such a difficult task, as in the same way that we teach vocabulary, isolated words, we should teach these peculiar phraseological units. For instance, when we point out some important words to our students, we might, at the same time, present their collocations in the contexts where they belong, so that students may understand them in as a simple way as possible. As Lewis (2000: 60) says:

At a higher level, when students are learning less common vocabulary, we must be aware that some words are used in a very restricted number of collocations. There is no point in knowing the meaning of the words *impetuous* or *initiative* unless you also know the collocations: *impetuous behaviour*, *to take the initiative*, etc.

According to this theory, teachers should never teach isolated words but always try and give a few collocations. For example, if we are teaching the auxiliary verb *to have*, we should add that it may combine with some nouns, such as: *Have (lunch, dinner, fun, a relation with)*.

Just before explaining the verb, doing a brainstorming activity may help students understanding better the concept of collocations. Actually, what teachers should do is make their students aware of this linguistic phenomenon as an essential part of language learning and encourage students to think behind the isolated word and look for some combinations.

Another duty teachers have is to help their students extend the collocational knowledge of the words they already know, and not only teach new contextless words. For example, students who know 2,000 words and six collocations with each, know 12,000 expressions (Lewis 2000: 60).

But, how to memorise and remember all the collocations we learn? Well, there are a few suggestions students may follow. The first one is keeping a collocation notebook. When the teacher says a new collocation or when students find some in-reading exercises, they should write them down and look at them again and again, maybe adding some contextualised

examples in order to understand better their meaning. Lewis (2000: 60) suggests a simple division, for instance:

- Gramatically: section such as *noun + noun, adjective + noun, verb + noun, adverb + adjective*.
- By common key word: collocations with, *to do, to make, to take, to have, to get*, etc.
- By topic: collocations to talk about *holidays, travel, work*, etc.

This simple division may help students to distinguish collocations easily, since they can check them at any time. What is more, keeping collocations organised in a notebook is much better than not storing them. However, it is blatantly obvious that teachers should not teach every single collocation they come across because it may frustrate students. Therefore, it is better to draw students' attention to some of them, the most important ones according to their level and the topic treated in the classroom.

All things considered, in ELT we have always been told that the language we teach and learn is made up of rules and we could just learn them to speak fluently. This is blatantly incorrect, because teaching and learning a language implies more than that. It means focusing on both grammar and, especially, vocabulary. With respect to this, teachers must pay attention to words in combination, because the acquisition of individual items depends not on students using them 20 times in one lesson, but on encountering them, perhaps 10 times, in different contexts at different times (Lewis 2000: 68). Therefore, as Lewis (2000: 68) states: "Spending a lot of class time on traditional EFL grammar condemns learners to remaining on the intermediate plateau".

## 5. English Language Collocation Exercises

Throughout this paper, it has been mentioned that learning collocations lacks effective material for their teaching and, therefore, the task of the teacher is notably complicated when they have to teach and practise this type of phraseological units in class. For this reason, four phraseological activities on the learning and teaching of English language collocations are presented below. These activities can be used with A1, A2, B1 and even more advanced students as reinforcement and/or review activities. In addition to this, they are intended to be a help for both teachers and students, with the aim of facilitating the learning and teaching of English collocations. The exercises making up the four activities are attached as an

appendix in the Annex 1. All the images in the activities have been taken, free of charge, from the website: [www.canva.com](http://www.canva.com).

### 5.1. Activity 1: Let's Do some Shopping!

This activity is made up of four different exercises. In the first one, students are asked to match the words in the box to the words in the third column to produce the correct collocation. As an aid, they are suggested to use the images in the second column in case they need help. The ten collocations belong to the type *noun + preposition + noun*, for example, *a cup of coffee*, *a bottle of water*, *a packet of crisps*, *a tube of toothpaste*, *a jar of jam*, etc. In the second exercise, students are asked to find out which collocation is used in a metaphorical meaning and which means very easy. In the third one, after correcting the collocations with the teacher, students are asked to rewrite the sentence given using the new collocation. In the fourth exercise, students are asked to make a list of the products they need from the supermarket. In addition, they are recommended to use the vocabulary of the first exercise of this activity. The last exercise is devoted to the speaking skill, in which students must talk in pairs telling their classmates the products of their shopping lists. The whole activity will last approximately fifty minutes.

### 5.2. Activity 2: Be a Teacher!

The aim of this activity is to make students aware of collocations. The activity consists of three exercises. In the first one students become the teachers of the lesson. They are asked to read and analyse eight sentences, from A to H, in which there are eight mistakes in collocations. In small groups they have to read the sentences and find the mistake in the verb. The winner is the group who finds most errors. In the second exercise there are eight images and students have to write the correct collocation from exercise 1 according to the photos. The last exercise aims to improve the students' speaking skill; therefore, they have to choose some or all of the collocations from the previous exercises and create a dialogue with their partner. The whole activity will last approximately twenty minutes.

### 5.3. Activity 3: *Be a Detective!*

The aim of this activity, made up of two exercises, is to make students able to identify collocations in a text and follow up with their use. As mentioned before, one of the most important factors in learning collocations is, actually, being able to identify them, in order to keep them in the long-term memory and reuse them in real conversations. For this reason, students are asked to read carefully a text so as to find five hidden collocations and help Detective Ross with his case. The collocations in the text belong to the group *verb + noun*. After completing the task, students are asked to continue the story using the collocations provided in the box. They must write from sixty to eighty words. This second exercise is very useful because it helps students to develop their imagination and use collocations in a real context or situation, since, as it has been said previously, it is essential to use these phraseological units in their context.

This exercise might be carried out both in class (in approximately twenty minutes), or as a homework assignment, depending on the teacher. If used in the classroom, the whole activity will last forty minutes; if autonomously or individually, twenty minutes.

### 5.4. Activity 4: *Escape Classroom!*

The aim of the activity is to motivate EFL students to learn collocations in an amusing and entertaining way, since they are considered to be one of the most difficult challenges while learning and teaching vocabulary. The activity is run in the following way. The students are locked in the classroom for half an hour. To leave the room they have to look for five images that represent five collocations *verb + noun*. To finish the game successfully, students have to find all of them. The teacher needs five objects where to hide the images and five clues to carry out the game. Before the activity, the teacher hides the photos in the classroom and leaves the first tip on the desk so that the students may start the game. When the students think they have found a collocation, they say it out loud. If the answer is correct, the teacher says *Correct*. If, alternatively, it is incorrect, the teacher says *Try again*. It is of utmost importance that students say the correct collocation without missing any of the elements that form it, since they are all characterised by collocational restriction.

## 6. Conclusion

Learning and teaching a foreign language is a rather difficult task, especially when it comes to acquiring phraseological units such as collocations.

Michael Lewis in *The Lexical Approach* (1993) focuses the teaching of the lexicon on the learning of linguistic chunks, which facilitate the memorization of the vocabulary and improve the fluidity of the learners, since the presence of a word implies the appearance of another, as in the collocation *dark night*. For this reason, learning collocations is of paramount importance because it improves students' linguistic, phraseological and communicative competences.

As previously discussed, collocations are expressions that are made up of two or more words that, by use and custom, form a single lexical phraseological unit that is not fixed but recognizable. In the English language there are thousands of collocations, some more frequent and common, others, however, belonging to specific languages or jargons. All the collocations are characterized by their quality of being recognizable as a lexical unit, which makes them a distinctive and characteristic type of element in the language (Tiberii 2012).

As stated above, there is often no logical link between the terms that form the elements of collocations, nor can the correct combinations be derived from a reasoning or a lexical rule: think, for example, of the collocations *to break a leg* and *to catch the flu*. In the first case, the meaning of the collocation is not deductible from the sum of the elements that make up the expression, but its meaning is metaphorical, as in the second case, where it is unimaginable *to catch the flu* literally.

Given the difficulty of these expressions, it is of utmost importance that students be made aware of the existence of collocations in order to recognize, learn and reuse them in an autonomous way. For this reason, the objective of this project is to focus on the learning and teaching of the *noun + noun* and *verb + noun* collocations at level B1. Teaching this type of collocations is a rather complicated task, especially if there is a lack of material to support their teaching. In this regard, this project presents four activities on learning *noun + preposition + noun* and *verb + noun* with the aim of being used by both students and teachers as reinforcement and practice in the classroom, or review exercises at the higher levels.

Collocations, like any other linguistic aspect, require a didactic sequence so that the student can master them and internalize that

knowledge. To achieve this, it is possible to opt for the classical didactic sequence of the three P's: presentation, practice and production, or to plan their teaching gradually, memorizing and practicing so that they pass into the long-term memory of the students. It is for this reason that the four activities proposed belong to level B1, because it is essential that these phraseological units be introduced from the intermediate levels, as only through gradual learning will it be possible to store the collocations in the long-term memory for its future reuse in everyday communication.

In conclusion, in spite of the difficulty that the learning of collocations could entail at level B1, its explicit presentation in class is of paramount importance to enhance fluency and to improve the linguistic skills of the students, both from a comprehensive and a productive point of view.

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## ANNEX 1

## Activity 1: Let's Do some Shopping!

1. Match the words below to the words in the third column to produce the correct collocation. Use the images in the second column for help!

coke water crisps jam bread cake  
chocolate wine coffee toothpaste

A CUP OF		
A BOTTLE OF		
A PACKET OF		
A TUBE OF		
A JAR OF		
A LOAF OF		
A PIECE OF		
A TIN OF		
A GLASS OF		
A BAR OF		

2. In the previous exercise there is one collocation which, in a metaphorical context, means “very easy”. A clue: It is something very sweet. Do you know the answer? Write it in the box.

Something easy to do: \_\_\_\_\_

3. As you already know the answer, rewrite the sentence changing *very easy* and using the new expression.
- John, I'm so happy, I've passed my English exam. It was very easy.
  - John, I'm so happy. I've passed my English exam. It was \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Now, let's go to the supermarket. Make a list of the products you need for your fridge. Use the vocabulary of exercise number 1. Then, tell your partner the products you need to get at the supermarket.

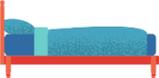


### Activity 2: Be a Teacher!

1. Each phrase contains a mistake in the verbs. In small groups, read the sentences and find the mistakes. The winner is the group who finds most errors. Write the correct verb in the right column. Let the search begin!

<b>A</b>	Paul wants to play sport because it's healthy.	
<b>B</b>	John likes to touch the guitar because he loves music.	
<b>C</b>	Anna loves doing basketball with her friends.	
<b>D</b>	Bob hates doing the bed every morning.	
<b>E</b>	Can you make a picture of me, please?	
<b>F</b>	Mum, I don't like making the washing-up!	
<b>G</b>	Saro is very sociable. He loves doing new friends.	
<b>H</b>	Nuria likes to hear to music in the afternoon.	

2. Look at the images and write an example using the correct collocation from exercise 1.

**3. Let's do some speaking! Talk in pairs. Choose some or all of the collocations from the previous exercises and create a dialogue with your partner.**

**STUDENT  
A**

**STUDENT  
B**

### Activity 3: Be a Detective!

1. Read carefully. In the text there are five hidden collocations *verb + noun*. Find them and help Detective Ross with his case. Write your answers in the box below.

The innocent woman.

*Yesterday I woke up at 7 o'clock. As usual, I had breakfast and then I went to the bus stop. I took the bus and when I arrived at my office and I opened the door I noticed something strange. I saw that my secretary, John, had been murdered. I was scared and shocked so that I called the police. When the police arrived, they asked me a lot of questions but I knew nothing. The problem was that they believed I had murdered John. Please, I am innocent! Help me!*

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

2. And now it is up to you! Continue the story using the following collocations. Write between 60 and 80 words. Let your imagination run wild!



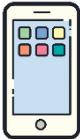
To make a mistake  
 To have a relationship with  
 To make money  
 To keep a promise  
 To keep a secret

Write the follow-up to your story here.



### Activity 4: Escape Classroom!

**Instructions for teachers. Hide the images of the collocations in the suggested places before the beginning of the class. Explain the rules of the game to your students. The activity lasts 30 minutes.**

You can find the first tip in an object full of words. Answer: <b>book</b> .		
Image inside a book.	 Key: to do the ironing.	Tip: you can find the next tip in an object that it's used for checking the time. Answer: <b>clock</b> .
Image behind a clock.	 Key: to have a party.	Tip: you can find the next tip in an object full of pens. Answer: <b>pencil case</b> .
Image behind a pencil case.	 Key: to make a call.	Tip: you can find the next tip in an object with days on it. Answer: <b>calendar</b> .
Image behind the calendar.	 Key: to do yoga.	Tip: you can find the next tip in an electronic object used for typing. Answer: <b>keyboard</b> .
Image behind the keyboard.	 Key: to have a haircut.	<p><b>Congratulations!!!</b></p> <p>This is the end of the game! You have escaped the room!</p>