

## Cognitive and Cultural Differences as Reflected in English and Chinese Collocations: A Case Study of 'Beauty'

The importance of lexical collocation is widely recognized among language teachers and lexicographers, yet despite the publication of several dictionaries of English collocations and a gradual increase in the number of collocations found in learner's dictionaries, there has been no real breakthrough in theoretical study of collocations, nor has an effective method been proposed for teaching collocations in the classroom. One of the most important factors that hinder the development of collocation studies is a lack of proper definition of collocation. In the present study a construction is defined as two words that combine to form a unit, and a collocation in one language is defined in terms of a corresponding construction in another language:

A. When a construction in one language has two corresponding words in another language whose meanings match those of the two source-language words respectively, this construction is a free combination.

B. When a free combination has a high degree of mutual expectancy, it is a habitual combination.

C. When a construction in one language has two corresponding words in another language, of which one matches one of the two source-language words in meaning while the other does not match the other source-language word in meaning, this construction is a collocation.

D. When a construction in one language has two or more corresponding words in another language, of which none matches one of the two source-language words in meaning, this construction is an idiom.

Applying this definition to the study of the collocations of the English words *beautiful*, *beautifully* and *beauty* and those of the Chinese counterparts *měi*, *měilì*, *pì'oliang*, etc., this paper compares the definitions and collocations of the English words in two advanced learner's dictionaries of English and two English collocation dictionaries with the definitions and sub-entries of *měi* in *The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary* (2002). A number of interesting cognitive and cultural differences emerge between English and Chinese in their encoding of beauty. In English, beauty is in the eye of the beholder, the ear of the listener and the action of the actor; whereas in Chinese, beauty not only is in the eye of the beholder and the ear of the listener, but also the tongue of the taster, yet in the action of the actor is found only prettiness. Besides, in English beauty is an advantage or benefit while in Chinese being beautiful equals being good.

### References

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