

BOOK REVIEW

Macmillan Collocations Dictionary for Learners of English

Michael Rundell (Editor-in-Chief)

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Reviewed by **Pedro A. Fuertes-Olivera**

pedro@tita.emp.uva.es

Universidad de Valladolid, Spain

1. INTRODUCTION

The *Macmillan Collocations Dictionary for Learners of English* (MCD) is a monolingual print dictionary aimed primarily at helping upper-intermediate to advanced students in productive use situations, such as taking English exams (especially the IELTS exams) and working in academic or professional environments. It has over 121,000 collocational phrases, a figure that leads Coffey to claim that the MCD attaches more collocates to each headword than competing dictionaries, for example, the *Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English* (OCD) (Coffey 2011: 329). A review of the dictionary cover, the introduction and the outer text “Using the Dictionary in IELTS”, written by Sam McCarter, makes it possible to summarise some of the main lexicographical characteristics of this dictionary as follows:

- It is a dictionary of common word combinations that has been compiled using leading-edge collocation-finding software and a 2-billion word corpus of modern English.
- It focuses on students’ productive needs, with collocations for over 4,500 carefully-selected key words. The term ‘collocation’ used in this dictionary refers to the “property of language whereby two or more words seem to appear frequently in each other’s company” (Hoey, cited in the Introduction, p. vii). McCarter summarises the frequently-stated view that collocations are very useful for production by indicating that there is a direct correlation between frequency and coverage, and between frequency and collocation. The rationale for both

assumptions stems from the often-quoted assumption that maintains that a wordlist of around 2,500 headwords should account for around 80% of all texts, and 7,500 accounting for 90% (p. ix).

- The dictionary divides up the collocations according to the meaning(s) they express, i.e., collocations are grouped in semantic sets within each entry.
- The examples included are authentic and show how collocations are used in context.
- The dictionary offers an easy-to-use layout with all headwords printed in red, as well as grey and pink usage boxes with grammatical notes, synonyms and alternative expressions. Grey boxes are used “when there is a common way of expressing the same idea using a phrase rather than a collocation” (p. xii). And pink usage notes are used “when a collocation needs to be used in a particular way, for example when a verb is often in the passive or a noun usually in the plural” (p. xiii).

2. HEADWORDS

The headwords in the MCD are nouns, adjectives or verbs. Coffey (2011: 329) indicates that the figures for nouns, adjectives and verbs are 55%, 24%, and 21% of the headwords respectively, that almost all headwords in the MCD are single words (the only exceptions being compound nouns such as *credit card*), that verbs can be single-item words or phrasal verbs (in the usual linguistic sense of the term) and that there are “no semantic divisions of homographs at headword level, except where they constitute different parts of speech”. For example, there is one entry for the noun *crash*, with subentries for *crash* (accident) and *crash* (noise), but separate entries for the verb *cough* and the noun *cough* (example 1):

cough V

to make a sudden noise by forcing air up through your throat

(...)

cough N

the action of coughing or an illness in which you cough

Example (1). The treatment of homographs in the MCD.

3. LEXICOGRAPHICAL DATA AND TYPOGRAPHICAL REPRESENTATIONS

A sample page from the dictionary is reproduced in Appendix I. As with other Macmillan learners' dictionaries, headwords and circular and triangular symbols are in red. Headwords are followed by an indication of the part of speech. On the line below, there is a brief definition of the headword worded in an easy-to-decode phrase-like style (for example, *employ* is defined as “use something for a particular purpose”). Red circular dots signal the beginning of each lexico-grammatical group (for example, adj + **N** for *employee*), whereas the red triangular symbol begins a new line and indicates a new semantic set in the same grammatical group. For instance, the lexico-grammatical structure adj + **N** in *employee* has two semantic sets, each labelled “working for a particular time” and “in the past/present/future” respectively. Then a new red circular dot precedes the lexico-grammatical structure **N** + n of *employee*, which is followed by a list of eight collocates in bold and an example in italics (e.g. **N** + n **benefits, contributions, involvement, morale, productivity, relations, representative, satisfaction** *Are your pension costs affecting your ability to offer other employee benefits?*). When the lexico-grammatical structure has only one semantic set, this is not preceded by a semantic label, as shown in the lexico-grammatical structure for *employee* (**N** + n) above.

Coffey (2011: 333) summarises the main structural patterns, i.e., lexico-grammatical structures, in the MCD (Table 1).

Table 1. Collocation patterns in the MCD (Coffey 2011: 333).

NOUN-BASED PATTERNS	EXAMPLES
adjective + NOUN	strong desire
noun + NOUN	city centre
NOUN + noun	design concept
verb + NOUN	express a desire
NOUN + verb	counsel argued
NOUN + prep. + noun	advance in design, immunity against infection
noun + prep + NOUN	issue of gender , countries across the globe
verb + prep. + NOUN	arise from desire , collapse into giggles
coordinated NOUNS	alcohol and gambling, goods or services

VERB-BASED PATTERNS

adverb + VERB	fully deserve , peer about
VERB + noun	deserve applause
noun + VERB	injuries heal
VERB + adjective	gleam white
verb + VERB	seek to illustrate
VERB + prep. + noun	disagree with a conclusion, act on advice
coordinated VERBS	relax and unwind, inspire and motivate

ADJECTIVE-BASED PATTERNS

adverb + ADJECTIVE	eminently desirable
Verb + ADJECTIVE	become desirable
ADJECTIVE + noun	desirable attribute
ADJECTIVE + infinitive	glad to hear
adjective + ADJECTIVE	pale green
ADJECTIVE + prep. + noun	grateful for assistance, generous with time
coordinated ADJECTIVES ,	desolate and lonely,
ADJECTIVES used together	cosy little, glossy black

The Guide to the Dictionary (pp. xii-xiii) informs potential users that the lexicogrammatical structures above show a grammatical relationship between headwords and collocates. For instance, ‘adjective + **NOUN**’, which is coded as ‘adj. + **N**’ in the dictionary, means the noun (**N**) **employee** often occurs with the adjectives listed: full-time, part-time, permanent and temporary. And ‘verb + **NOUN**’, which is coded as ‘v + **N**’, means the noun **employment** is often the object of the verbs listed in five semantic sets: (i) look for and seek; (ii) find, gain, get, obtain and secure; (iii) terminate; (iv) give up and leave; (v) create, generate, guarantee, increase, promote and provide. The Guide to the Dictionary also indicates that when a word has more than one meaning, each meaning is shown by a number (**empire** has two meanings “**1** a number of countries ruled by one government” and “**2** a group of companies controlled by one company”). In a similar manner, it also points out that when a word is often followed by a particular preposition, the dictionary highlights this using bold type in the example

(e.g. *the programme also provides the opportunity to study part-time while **in** full-time employment*).

4. LEXICAL COVERAGE

Coffey (2011: 336) claims that the MCD is a ‘general collocations dictionary’, a dictionary with a wide lexical coverage, particularly by giving prominence to some areas of meaning and types of communication. One broad area given priority is that of academic and professional writing. In the Introductory text “Using the Dictionary in IELTS” (pp. ix-xi), Sam McCarter writes that the purpose of IELTS is to test students’ competence in using English and therefore the MCD aims primarily at covering the kinds of combinations that fluent speakers would produce naturally in, say, an academic and professional context. Coffey (2011: 336-338), for example, examines whether the academic and professional vocabulary included in the MCD agrees with Coxhead’s (2000) Academic Word List (AWL), a list that includes relatively high-frequency words in academic texts. Coffey’s analysis reports that 16.2% of the MCD headwords are in the AWL, a proportion that is higher than in the case of the OCD, which stands at 13.5%. The analysis also adds that the proportion would rise to 40-45% if the examination were extended to cover impressionistic data, for instance, the whole entry and not only the headword.

Following suit, I have carried out an empirical analysis of the lexicographical treatment of the academic and professional words used in business included in the MCD. By extracting 20 business words from Nelson’s (2000) business word list, it was possible to assess whether the above claim on coverage of academic and professional words merits respect or not. The analysis focuses on ten nouns, five verbs, and five adjectives, i.e., here the percentages reported by Coffey (see Introduction, above) were followed, with the aim of evaluating both the number of frequent business words included and their lexicographical treatment, especially their lexico-grammatical structures, and number of meanings for each structure (Table 2). The 20 words were chosen at random.

Table 2. Business Collocational Patterns in the MCD.

Nouns	MCD
<i>Customer</i> : one meaning and 23 semantic sets	1. adj + N: 10 semantic sets, e.g. delighted customer 2. v + N: 5 semantic sets, e.g. deal with a customer 3. N + n: 8 two semantic sets, e.g. customer satisfaction
<i>capitalisation</i>	Not found
<i>brokerage</i>	Not found
<i>CEO</i>	Not found
<i>seller</i>	Not found
<i>deregulation</i>	Not found
<i>Outlet</i> : one meaning and 7 semantic sets	1. V + N: 3 semantic sets, e.g. want an outlet 2. N + for: 4 semantic sets, e.g. outlet for our frustration
<i>Business</i> : 22 semantic sets in two senses: 1 to 5: the work of buying and selling things; 6 to 8: a commercial organization	1. adj + N: 3 semantic sets, e.g. big business 2. v + N: 4 semantic sets, e.g. attract business 3. N + v: 1 semantic set, e.g. business flourish 4. N + n: 4 semantic sets, e.g. business plan 5. v + in + N: 2 semantic sets, e.g. stay in business 6. adj + N: 3 semantic sets, e.g. family business 7. v + N: 3 semantic sets, e.g. develop a business 8. N + v: 2 semantic sets, e.g. business collapse
<i>Competitor</i> : one meaning and 5 semantic sets	1. adj + N: 3 semantic sets, e.g. important competitor 2. v + N: 2 semantic sets, e.g. overtake competitors
<i>Price</i> : one meaning and 24 semantic sets	1. adj + N: 13 semantic sets, e.g. good price 2. n + N: 1 semantic set, e.g. admission price 3. v + N: 9 semantic sets, e.g. offer a price 4. n + in + N: 1 semantic set, e.g. drop in price
Verbs	
<i>Incur</i> : 7 semantic sets in two senses: to have to pay something and experience something unpleasant as a result of your actions	1. V + n: 3 semantic sets, e.g. incur expenses (usually passive) 2. V + n: 4 semantic sets, e.g. incur a risk
<i>include</i>	Not found
<i>employ</i> : 1 semantic set	1. V + n: 1 semantic set, e.g. employ means
<i>downgrade</i>	Not found
<i>Earn</i> : 6 semantic sets	1. V + n: 6 semantic sets, e.g. earn a name
Adjectives	
<i>Global</i> : 14 semantic sets	1. adv + ADJ: 1 semantic set, e.g. truly global 2. ADJ + n: 12 semantic sets, e.g. global business 3. v + ADJ: 1 semantic set, e.g. go global
<i>overseas</i>	Not found
<i>leveraged</i>	Not found
<i>Financial</i> : 8 semantic sets	1. ADJ + n: 8 semantic sets, e.g. financial management
<i>domestic</i>	Not found

Table 2 shows that the dictionary contains frequent collocational patterns of typical academic and professional words used in business. The words not included are very specific business words and their absence can be considered congruent with the stated aim of the dictionary. Furthermore, the coverage of both lexico-grammatical structures and semantic sets must be considered adequate for production purposes.

5. OVERALL EVALUATION

I agree with Coffey (2011: 339-340) that the *Macmillan Collocations Dictionary* is a well-planned pedagogical dictionary which aims to help learners find suitable collocations. To this end, the “majority of collocating items have been grouped into semantic sets, each of which is preceded by an indication of meaning”. They are especially aimed at helping learners of general academic and professional English.

My main contention is that the structural labels, i.e., the grammatical codes, are not explained, which hinders its usability in some teaching/learning situations, e.g. Spanish universities, in which students are unfamiliar with grammar information. Coffey (2011: 338) also indicates a number of inaccuracies, mainly involving categorisation and labelling. For instance, **get across** should be presented as **V + n (get across facts)** instead of **V + across**. In spite of the above inaccuracies, I found that the MCD does a very good job and is a useful addition to the English learners’ collocation dictionary market, which is characterised by using the term *collocation* or referring either to a type of phraseological unit, e.g. a lexical collocation, or to an umbrella term for designing word combinations or multi-word expressions. Both views are connected with an interest in phraseology, s manifested in the publication of the MCD, which is greatly indebted to scholars from Russian and German traditions and to the distributional approach or frequency-based approach originated in the English tradition (see Cowie (1998) and Granger and Paquot (2008) for a review on phraseology; see also Fuertes-Olivera et al. (2012) for a different view of the term ‘collocation’).

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Appendix I

A sample page from the Macmillan Collocations Dictionary

empire N

1 a number of countries ruled by one government

- adj+N **far-flung, huge, large, mighty, sprawling, vast** *Under Charles V, Austria was part of a vast empire.*
- v+N increase the size of an empire **expand, extend** *At that time European powers fought brutal battles throughout Africa to expand their empires.*
- ▶ establish an empire **build, create, establish, forge, found** *Ur-Nammu founded the empire, which stretched into Iran.*
- ▶ rule an empire **control, govern, rule** *We are going to examine how Britain, a small country, came to rule a huge empire.*
- ▶ destroy an empire **destroy, dismantle, overthrow** *In the year 1532, the Inca empire was destroyed by the Spaniards.*
- N+v be destroyed **collapse, come to an end, crumble, decline, disintegrate, fall, fall apart** *The Western empire finally crumbled in the fifth century AD.*
- ▶ increase in size **expand, grew, spread** *The Russian empire expanded gradually.*
- ▶ continue for a particular distance **extend, reach, stretch** *They became intent on creating a new empire stretching from the Caucasus all the way to central Asia.*
- n+of+N **break-up, collapse, downfall, fall** *The gradual and messy collapse of the Empire is a complex story.*

2 a group of companies controlled by one company

- adj+N large **huge, large, vast** *Having built up a vast empire, he disposed of it to the US Steel Corporation in 1901.*
- ▶ types of empire **business, commercial, fashion, financial, industrial, media, newspaper, property, publishing, trading** *He then moved to the Bahamas, from where he controls his business empire.*
- v+N create an empire **build, build up, create, found** *I admire the way he has built his enormous media empire.*
- ▶ increase the size of an empire **expand, extend** *This profit will obviously increase their bank balance and enable them to progressively expand their empire.*
- ▶ control and organize an empire **control, rule, run** *She continues to run her empire from a home office.*

empirical ADJ

based on real experience or scientific experiments

- ADJ+n facts **data, evidence, findings** *I am struck by how little empirical evidence supports their claims.*
- ▶ study **analysis, investigation, observation, research, study** *These assertions have not been backed up by any large-scale empirical studies.*
- ▶ method **approach, method** *He contributed much to the development of empirical methods in the social sciences.*

employ V

use something for a particular purpose

- V+n **means, method, methodology, strategy, tactics, technique** *Different schools will employ different means to achieve the same result.*

employee N

someone who is paid regularly to work

- adj+N working for a particular time **full-time, part-time, permanent, temporary** *They now have 14 full-time employees.*
- ▶ in the past/present/future **existing, former, potential, prospective** *At present employees and prospective employees have protection against discrimination.*
- N+n **benefits, contributions, involvement, morale, productivity, relations, representative, satisfaction** *Are your pension costs affecting your ability to offer other employee benefits?*

employer N

a person or company that employs workers

- adj+N possibly going to employ someone **potential, prospective** *Your main aim is to convince a prospective employer that you have the skills, experience and enthusiasm to do the job.*
- ▶ past/present/future **current, former, future, previous** *He said that despite his sacking he had no hard feelings towards his former employers.*
- ▶ employing a particular number of people **large, major, small** *We are the third largest employer in the county.*

employment N

work that you are paid regularly for; a situation when a person or people have paid work

- adj+N for a particular time **casual, continuous, full-time, part-time, permanent, regular, secure, temporary** *The programme also provides the opportunity to study part time while in full-time employment.*
- ▶ past/present/future **current, future, previous** *Please give a description of your previous or current employment.*
- ▶ paid, or paid badly/well **gainful, low-paid, paid, salaried, well-paid** *We need to give young people opportunities to secure gainful employment.*
- v+N try to get employment **look for, seek** *How many recent graduates will decide to seek employment elsewhere?*
- ▶ get employment **find, gain, get, obtain, secure** *Other employees are being helped by various agencies to find alternative employment.*
- ▶ end someone's employment **terminate** *You will also be given a notice in writing terminating your employment.*
- ▶ leave employment **give up, leave** *She received a letter from his employer saying that he had left their employment on 16 August.*
- ▶ provide or increase employment **create, generate, guarantee, increase, promote, provide** *This new initiative will create employment in a very depressed area.*
- N+n legal matters **contract, law, legislation, rights, status, tribunal** *Employment legislation is extremely complicated.*
- ▶ opportunities **opportunities, options, possibilities, prospects** *We aim to ensure that local people benefit from the employment opportunities generated by construction work in the borough.*