

M.M. Vakhotskyi

Senior teacher

Department of Foreign Languages

Bukovinian State Medical University

COLLOCATIONAL COMPETENCE OF MEDICAL STUDENTS IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

A collocation is a pair or group of words that are often used together. These combinations sound natural to native speakers, but students of English have to make a specific effort to learn them because they are often difficult to guess. Some combinations just sound “wrong” to native speakers of English. For example, the adjective “*difficult*” collocates with “task”, but not with “*disease*”, so your students must be taught the collocation “*severe disease*”.

Learning collocations is an important part of learning the vocabulary of English. Some collocations are fixed, or very strong, for example, “*strip to the waist*” where no word other than strip collocates with “*to the waist*” to give the same meaning. Some collocations are more open, where several different words may be used to give the same meaning, for example, “*take the temperature/check the temperature*”.

Here are some examples of medical collocations: *medical aid, premature fetus, blood test, upset stomach, admitted to hospital, prescribe treatment, adjust the dosage* and many others.

In medical English all these collocations are specific for that type of language though they may be understood by people, who don't practice medicine. However, there are some strong combinations of words which are only clear to medical professionals, like “*grumbling appendix*”.

The collocations may refer to any kind of typical word combination, for example verb+noun (*have an operation*), adverb+adjective (*absolutely vital*), noun+noun (*lack of energy*), adjective+noun (*streaming cold*) etc.

An appreciation of collocations will help medical students to:

- use the words they know more accurately. They will *make* (not *do*) fewer mistakes;
- sound more natural when they speak and write. By saying, for example, “*respond well to treatment*”, rather than “*react to treatment*”, you won’t just be understood, you will sound like a fluent user of English;
- vary your speech, helping avoid repetitions;

Some tips for teaching:

We can ask our students to use, for example, the verb “*prescribe*” with other nouns: *prescribe drugs*, *prescribe antibiotics* etc. Or we can ask them to create their own sentences, using the new combinations, or creating short dialogues, that might include these collocations. The students should use them in different grammar forms. For example, the collocation “*losing weight*” may be included into different sentences as follows: *he lost weight*, *she has lost weight*, *I hope I will lose weight* and so on.

Collocational competence of medical students is of great importance, therefore, English teachers should not neglect this part of vocabulary, they should pay it a lot of attention.

References

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