

# Deriving Vocabulary Frames to Improve Fluency and Accuracy

James THOMAS  
Department of English and American Studies  
Faculty of Arts  
Masaryk University  
Brno, Czech Republic  
thomas@phil.muni.cz

A Vocabulary Frame (VF) is a type of multi-word unit (MWU) reflecting the full valency of a word with its elements expressed as semantic types. Less fixed than chunks, bundles, etc. VFs are the result of a combination of corpus analysis and human interpretation, and so appeal because they have the psychological integrity of being both syntactically intact and semantically whole. They express the proposition of a clause (cf. Sinclair & Mauranen, 2006), and reflect the distilled immediate context of lexical words, combining collocation and colligation. For these reasons, the frame of a vocabulary item is the most important thing that a student needs to learn in order to have active use of it.

The following example demonstrates this: the most frequent use of the verb *to spoil* as it appears in the CPA (corpus pattern analysis) database (Hanks, 2012). This tells us that a limited range (or ‘constrained set’) of subject types makes a limited range of objects unsatisfactory or unenjoyable. This is by far the most frequent frame of this word.

55% [[Eventuality 1 | Human]] spoil [[Eventuality 2]]  
[[Eventuality 1 | Human]] causes [[Eventuality 2]] to be unsatisfactory or unenjoyable

Our current research involves analysing corpora of non-native speaker writing (e.g., ICLE and VOICE) to identify the errors that could be attributed to mislearned or misapplied frames. Another line of research involves developing an awareness of frames among teacher trainees so as to improve their teaching of vocabulary and enrich their learners’ experience. The trainees are creating topic-based corpora from which they derive frames and add to a database of frames in various collaborative, online activities.

The process of deriving frames from the full texts that students work with invokes guided discovery (e.g. Lewis, 1993), and its related data-driven learning (Johns 1991), double processing (e.g. Johns & Davies, 1983) and focus on form (e.g. Long, 1997; Ellis, 2001). By then ascertaining the significance of the frames based on native speaker corpus data (Hoey, 2005), we aim to create a playground in which a number of linguistic and pedagogical areas can do learning activities together.

We aim to show that language learners derive considerably more than the following advantages from learning vocabulary items in their full frames.

- colligation (complementation – *ing*, *to* inf, *that*, *wh...* clauses, prepositions)
- collocation – both new vocabulary and recycled
- the kernel of the syntax of a complete semantic clause

- a new way of recording and studying vocabulary
- the significance of frequency

In current approaches to language teaching, there are numerous interactive and constructivist activities, for example, in which the application of vocabulary frames has the potential to develop students' fluency, accuracy and idiomaticity. In this presentation, some of our own discovery learning in this endeavour will be demonstrated.

## References

- Ellis, R. (2001). 'Investigating form-focused instruction.' *Language Learning* 51: 1-41.
- Granger, S., Dagneaux, E. & Meunier, F. (2002). *The International Corpus of Learner English, Handbook and CD-ROM*. Louvain-la-Neuve: Presses Universitaires de Louvain.
- Hoey, M. (2005). *Lexical Priming. A New Theory of Words and Language*. London: Routledge.
- Hanks, P. (2012). 'How people use words to make meanings: semantic types meet valences.' In: Thomas, J. & Boulton A. (eds). *Input, Process and Product: Developments in Teaching and Language Corpora*. Brno: Masaryk University Press.
- Johns, T. (1991). 'Should you be persuaded -- Two Examples of Data-Driven Learning Materials.' *English Language Research Journal* 4: 1-16.
- Johns, T. & Davies, F. (1983). 'Text as a Vehicle for Information: the Classroom Use of Written Texts in Teaching Reading in a Foreign Language.' *Reading in a Foreign Language* 1: 1-19.
- Lewis, M. (1993). *The Lexical Approach*. Hove: Language Teaching Publications.
- Long, M. H. (1997). 'Focus on Form in Task-Based Language Teaching.' *Fourth Annual McGraw-Hill Satellite Teleconference*. Available from: <http://www.mhhe.com/socscience/foreignlang/top.htm>
- Seidlhofer, B. (2011). *Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE); Version 1.1* Available from: <http://www.univie.ac.at/voice> [May 2011]
- Sinclair, J.M. & Mauranen, A. (2006). *Linear Unit Grammar*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins