Chapter 4
Collocation as Instrumentation for Meaning: A Scientific Fact

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ABSTRACT

Until fairly recently, linguistics has been classified as a ‘science’ by definition, averral, and ideology rather than because of the uniformity of its practices across its many schools of thought. It is seldom the case in any discipline that a particular phenomenon begins to question that discipline’s raison d’etre, withdraw the option and luxury of its often directionless and eclectic practices and proceed to force unwelcome and sweeping changes upon the discipline by beginning to dictate its method. This paper re-states its author’s earlier proofs as claims that collocation as instrumentation for meaning is a scientific fact. The burden of this proof has acquired renewed urgency of an interdisciplinary nature that makes this paper both timely and necessary. The claim for collocation as science is reinforced by a number of new discoveries: the fact that all devices are brought about by relexicalisation as a marked form rather than the purported markedness that is mentalist and hence, merely averred.

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INTRODUCTION

J.R. Firth wrote that scientific facts do not exist until they are claimed (in F.R. Palmer ed., 1968: 43) according to scientific criteria. This chapter sets out to claim scientific status for collocation as multi-purpose instrumentation for language. In doing so, it will demonstrate the power of collocation as a single, reliable form of instrumentation for language as: (1) the main linguistic source of empirical access to the context of situation and culture (Firth, 1957; Malinowski, 1935; Sinclair, 2006); (2) the primary empirical means for data-assisted reading in general, such as the detection of spin. This almost invariably involves the reading of suasive texts for what is missing from them physically but remains instantiated empirically and recoverably in their collocates (Louw, 2004; Mahlberg, (Chapter 7, in Hoey et al, 2007: 196). Corpus stylistics uses the same techniques (Louw, 2007a); (3) the determinant of verbal art (Louw, 2007b) and the sketcher of literary worlds (Louw, 2007b; 2008a); (4) the source of markedness (Enkvist, 1973) of all literary devices, including humour through relexicalisation (Louw, 2008a; 2008b), all other mentalist theories, such as that of lexical priming (Hoey, 2005) being only purportedly (Louw, 2007c) rather than recoverably marked; (5) semantic prosody (Louw, 1993; 2000); and (6) the means for automating or falsifying literary, linguistic and stylistic theories (Louw, 2008c; 2010, forthcoming).

The major concern of this paper will be to explain collocation as a scientifically respectable instrument and to demonstrate and integrate its use in the digital automation of deeper forms of reading, criticism, methodology and the automation or falsification of linguistic and stylistic theories.

SCIENCE, COLLOCATION AND THE QUESTION OF METHOD

Paradigm shifts in science invariably require for their successful occurrence either new discoveries or the irrational replacement of one paradigm with another as science begins to ‘prefer’ a new paradigm to an existing one (Bullock and Trombley, 2000: 755). But for the signal absence of the computer, the worlds of philosophy, linguistics and science might have been ready for momentous changes leading to linguistic instrumentation as early as 1921. However, the synergy created by the scholarship of Frege (1884), Wittgenstein (1922), Carnap, (1928), Russell (1946), Firth, (1957) Malinowski (1935) and Markoff (1913) has remained temporarily both analogue and end-stopped because of the absence of the computer at that time. The possibility of all factors necessary for a scientific revolution coming together has always fired the imagination of theorists. For example, Caspi (1998) speculates on the forms of deliberation that might have taken place between distinguished
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