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Word Combinations:
phenomena, methods of extraction, tools

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Introduction

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This issue of *Studi e Saggi Linguistici* includes five papers focused on the discussion of various types of word combinations. Word combinations – a much debated issue within today's linguistics – are interesting in several perspectives.

First of all, they are a point at issue for the general theory of language, more so since *Construction Grammar* has rediscovered (with a certain historical innocence) the very idea of 'combination'. Word combinations, in fact, have been studied and classified from the beginning of the 19th century in connection with classical languages: in such early studies it was already observed that words tend to form fixed patterns of various kinds, both containing a predication (periphrastic sentences, gerundive and passive constructions, etc.) and forming simple entries (the ones currently called 'multiword entries').

If we admit consequently that words combine according to fixed or semi-fixed patterns in languages, the very notions of 'word' and 'entry' (its lexicographic counterpart) have to be reconsidered in depth. Such a re-examination might also bring to get aware of a neglected and, on the whole, puzzling issue: what keeps the various types of combinations together is a *bond* of variable cohesive force. An inquiry on the nature of such a *cohesive force* might give some interesting surprises.

Other perspectives also focus on the word combination phenomenon. This volume puts forth some of them. Firstly, the lexicological perspective, with its obvious lexicographic consequences. The papers in this collection consider in particular those word combinations which form an *entry* (they are recorded as a single unit in the speakers' competence and in the architecture of the lexicon). The opening paper (Raffaele Simone and Valentina Piunno, *Combinazioni di parole che costituiscono entrata* "Word combinations forming entries") specifically investigates on this issue presenting a wide-ranging empirical research based on Italian newspaper language corpora. The investigation has brought to light a rich variety of combinatorial types and entries, both already recorded and totally unknown.

Interestingly, this discovery doesn't just concern combinatorial entries, but, more in particular, the variety of the *types* implemented by the entries. Such types seem to be, as regards Italian, several hundreds, most of which deserving a closer analysis. In particular a surprising amount of 'partially filled combinations' stands out, where some elements are fixed whereas one or more other vary over a list of alternatives. Simone and Piunno's paper also presents an innovative e-dictionary (*Combinet*) of the word combinations brought to light in this research. The dictionary is not yet achieved, but an expressive sample of it is available and its layout is full-fledged and remarkably accurate.

Word combinations are also relevant for computational linguistics. They have in fact to be recognized, evaluated and classified in terms of their cohesive force, distinguished from stable combinations and automatically extracted from corpora with an acceptable degree of reliability. The paper by Alessandro Lenci and co-authors (*How to harvest Word Combinations from corpora*), strictly linked with the previous one, presents the original computational procedures that have been worked out to get the goals just indicated. Various forms of validation of such procedures are discussed.

The third relevant perspective for word combinations is the typological one, that the papers in this issue just touch upon. It appears that some word combinations (to say it better: some *types* of combinations) occur *mutatis mutandis* cross-linguistically. They include for instance the small NP comprised of two nouns (a light and a full one) connected by a linking element (a preposition or, in the relevant languages, a case): for instance It. *colpo di fortuna* ("stroke of luck"), *attacco d'ira* ("red-hot rage", lit. "hit of wrath"), *messa in moto* ("starting", lit. "putting into start"; light nouns in first position). The following three articles discuss word combinations other than those forming entries in various languages. Lunella Mereu's paper (*La struttura argomentale in una prospettiva* usage-based "Argument structure in a usage-based approach"), for instance, studies the argument structure of some verbs (in particular those for 'selling' and 'buying') as it comes out from corpora analysis. The discussion focuses on the arguments typically associated with these verbs, with insightful cross-linguistic comparisons. Anna Pompei's paper (*Verbi complessi con struttura* [V + SP] *e verbi supporto* "Complex verbs with [V + SP] structure and support-verbs") discusses another classical type of word combination such as the support-verb structure, for which it proposes a set of tests analytically and descriptively operational. Finally, Marie-Sophie Pausé's paper (*Modelling French*

idioms in a lexical network) describes a wide-ranging electronic dictionary of French idioms. The paper also discusses tests for checking the internal structure of idioms and offers material for comparison with similar tools for other languages. Accordingly, it is possible to say that a cross-sectional topic among the papers presented here is precisely *cohesive force* as a feature for distinguishing word combinations from simple syntagmatic juxtapositions.

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