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ABSTRACT

A number of "language" matters that students of English as a second language need to learn about are not treated in textbooks at all. Many of these are partly linguistic in nature and partly non-linguistic, involving other aspects of culture. One such matter is the cliche. For the native speaker of any language, a cliche is an expression which has lost its original freshness and force through repeated use and familiarity. The native speaker does not need to "learn" cliches or practice using them. The student learning a foreign language, however, should seek to master cliches just as he seeks to master the structural patterns and vocabulary of the language--learning the commonly used forms and everyday expressions before he attempts to go on to more exceptional usages. Presented here is a fill-in-the-blank exercise in word association with samples of pairs with "and" ("husband and wife"); pairs with "or" ("same or different"); triplets with "and" ("red, white, and blue"); similes with "as" ("blind as a bat"); and similes with "like" ("growls like a bear"). (AMM)

Some Co-occurrences in American Clichés

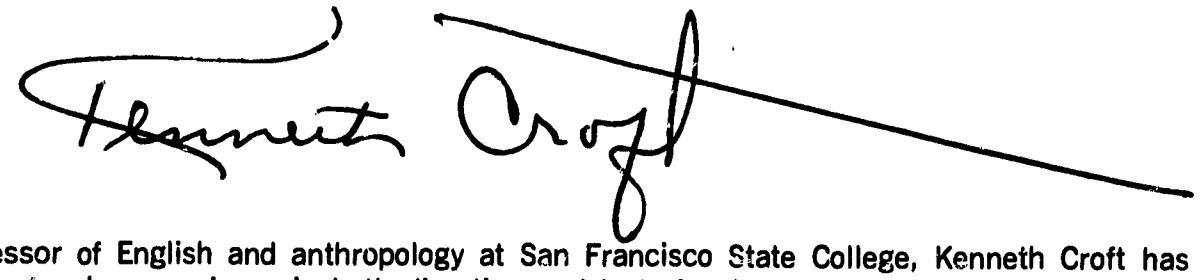
KENNETH CROFT, *San Francisco State College*

QUITE A NUMBER of "language" matters that students of English as a second language need to learn about are not treated in textbooks at all. Many of these are partly linguistic in nature and partly non-linguistic, that is, "cultural"—involving other aspects of culture. Actually, hardly anything in the language-learning situation can be said to be purely linguistic, divorced completely from the "cultural" side. Most of the time there seems to be simply a stronger tendency in one direction or the other—more toward the linguistic on the one hand or more toward the "cultural" on the other; but sometimes these matters appear to lie pretty much on "middle ground."

One such matter I've been occupied with recently is our habit of associating pairs and groups of words together in clichés. We usually think of the following, for example, in sets of two: *salt* and *pepper, cup* and *saucer, bread* and *butter, hands* and *feet, doors* and *windows; sink* or *swim, sooner* or *later, heads* or *tails.* If we give a native speaker of American English the first member of the set, he will ordinarily respond with the second. Not long ago some of my colleagues and I made a list of over 200 of these pairs. Sets of three are fairly common, too, but not as numerous as the pairs: *food, clothing,* and *shelter; hop, skip,* and *jump; stop, look,* and *listen; good, bad,* or *indifferent; beg, borrow,* or *steal.* Here, the first two automatically evoke the third. These pairs and triplets appear to have a fixed order, however: as a rule, *left and . . .* will evoke *right,* whereas *right and . . .* will evoke *wrong.*

Another pairing device is the simile, with the word *as* or *like: light* as *a feather, fit* as *a fiddle, happy* as *a lark, fresh* as *a daisy; kicks* like *a mule, sleeps* like *a log, grows* like *a weed, cries* like *a baby.* Many of these and many of the previously mentioned pairs have what we might call a "tight" association; they are universal, so to speak—used consistently throughout the entire United States. Others have a "looser" association; they vary geographically and also, perhaps, socially. *Black as . . .*, for example, may evoke *night* or *coal* or *pitch.* A situational variation also occurs in some instances: *eats like . . .*, depending on the situation, may evoke *a horse* or *a bird* or even some other heavy or light eater.

It's my guess that relatively few students of English (or teachers, either) realize how extensive our use of pairs



Professor of English and anthropology at San Francisco State College, Kenneth Croft has had extensive experience in both directing and lecturing in programs for teaching English to speakers of other languages, in the United States and abroad. A former associate director of the American Language Institute of Georgetown University, in Washington, D.C., Professor Croft is especially interested in the use of linguistic data for teaching English as a second or foreign language. Among his major publications are *Reading and Word Study for Students of English as a Second Language* (Prentice-Hall, 1960) and *A Practical Course in English for Foreign Students* (English Language Services, 1962).

and triplets in these ways actually is. To show a little more of this proliferation, I'm noting below some additional examples of each type (sets of two and three). But rather than give a straight list of items as they seem most natural to me or to someone else, I ask you to complete them yourself by filling in the blanks. Then you can check your responses with those given at the end of this article. If you are a native speaker of American English or have spent many years in the United States, your responses and the ones given will match very well—perhaps exactly. On the other hand, if you are a non-native speaker and your contact with Americans has been somewhat limited, your response and those given will probably not match very well.

This is an exercise in word association, not idea association—an exercise on how Americans put words (and sometimes phrases) together by twos and threes without conscious thought. The term "co-occurrence" has come into fairly general use during the past decade; it applies to sentence elements that occur together. The items presented here are all co-occurrences in American clichés, the co-occurrence range in each case being extremely limited.

Pairs with AND

Example: husband and *wife*

1. comb and _____
2. shoes and _____
3. tables and _____
4. stop and _____
5. top and _____
6. arms and _____
7. up and _____
8. heel and _____
9. in and _____
10. thunder and _____
11. thick and _____
12. chills and _____
13. needle and _____
14. cops and _____
15. north and _____
16. fact and _____
17. lost and _____
18. sticks and _____
19. duke and _____
20. fame and _____
21. cowboys and _____
22. Greeks and _____
23. straight and _____
24. ladies and _____
25. prose and _____
26. far and _____
27. safe and _____
28. before and _____
29. off and _____
30. various and _____
31. brothers and _____
32. sweetness and _____
33. silver and _____
34. hit and _____
35. pure and _____
36. aches and _____
37. forgive and _____
38. judge and _____
39. supply and _____
40. do's and _____

Pairs with OR

Example: same or *different*

41. more or _____
42. trick or _____
43. win or _____
44. rain or _____
45. double or _____
46. better or _____
47. this or _____
48. heaven or _____
49. friend or _____
50. truth or _____

Triplets

Example: red, white, and *blue*

51. knife, fork, and _____
52. tall, dark, and _____
53. love, honor, and _____
54. eat, drink, and _____
55. blood, sweat, and _____
56. how, when, and _____
57. morning, noon, and _____
58. healthy, wealthy, and _____
59. friends, Romans, and _____
60. on land, on sea, and _____
61. ready, willing, and _____
62. solid, liquid, or _____
63. lost, strayed, or _____
64. win, lose, or _____

Similes with AS

Example: blind as *a bat*

65. busy as _____
66. cheap as _____
67. sick as _____
68. nutty as _____
69. cool as _____
70. stubborn as _____
71. flat as _____
72. slippery as _____
73. hairy as _____

74. dry as _____
75. straight as _____
76. stiff as _____
77. sober as _____
78. old as _____
79. scarce as _____
80. naked as _____
81. easy as _____
82. hard as _____
83. sharp as _____
84. heavy as _____

Similes with LIKE

Example: growls like *a bear*

85. roars like _____
86. shuts up like _____
87. drinks like _____
88. cracks like _____
89. spins like _____
90. climbs like _____
91. laughs like _____
92. goes out like _____
93. shakes like _____
94. leaps like _____
95. cuts like _____
96. multiplies like _____
97. bounces like _____
98. barks like _____
99. sells like _____
100. sticks (adheres) like _____

For the native speaker of any language, a cliché is an expression that, through repeated use and familiarity, has lost its original freshness and force. The native speaker does not need to "learn" clichés or practice using them. In fact, the careful user of the language, seeking to bring more impact and originality to his speech or writing, must seek new similes, new pairings or contrasts, in order to catch the attention of his audience. The student learning a foreign language, however, should seek to master clichés just as he seeks to master the structural patterns and vocabulary of the language—learning the commonly used forms and everyday expressions before he attempts to go on to more exceptional usages.

Typical native-speaker responses: **1** brush **2** socks **3** chairs **4** go **5** bottom **6** legs **7** down **8** toe **9** out **10** lightning **11** thin **12** fever **13** thread **14** robbers **15** south **16** fiction **17** found **18** stones **19** duchess **20** fortune **21** Indians **22** Romans **23** narrow **24** gentlemen **25** poetry **26** wide (near) **27** sound **28** after **29** on **30** sundry **31** sisters **32** light **33** gold **34** run **35** simple **36** pairs **37** forget **38** jury **39** demand **40** don't's **41** less **42** treat **43** lose **44** shine **45** nothing **46** worse **47** that **48** hell **49** foe (enemy) **50** consequences **51** spoon **52** handsome **53** obey (cherish) **54** be merry **55** tears **56** where **57** night **58** wise **59** countrymen **60** in the air **61** able **62** gas **63** stolen **64** draw **65** a bee **66** dirt **67** a dog **68** a fruitcake **69** a cucumber **70** a mule **71** a pancake **72** an eel **73** an ape **74** a bone **75** an arrow **76** a board **77** a judge **78** the hills (Methuselah) **79** hen's teeth **80** a jaybird (a new-born babe) **81** pie **82** nails (a rock) **83** a razor (a tack) **84** lead **85** a lion **86** a clam **87** a fish **88** a whip **89** a top **90** a monkey **91** a hyena **92** a light **93** a leaf **94** a frog **95** a knife **96** rabbits **97** a ball **98** a dog **99** hotcakes **100** glue

"Fallout" from the Moon Trip

The stamp pictured here (in slightly enlarged form), which was issued in Washington, D.C., on September 9, 1969, is unique in the world of philately: The master die that produced the oversize commemorative stamp made a preliminary trip to the moon with astronauts Armstrong, Aldrin, and Collins. In addition, an envelope bearing a "die proof" of the stamp went along on the *Apollo 11*—and was canceled by the astronauts on July 20, 1969, the day of the landing on the moon! This unique "first-day cover" is now part of a moon-landing exhibit that is touring the United States. The blue, yellow, and black stamp, with lettering in blue and red, measures 2 inches by 1¼ inches—making it about 50% larger than the standard USA stamp. Issued in quantity for regular domestic air-mail use, this 10¢ stamp will carry a letter weighing up to one ounce anywhere within the 3,615,211 square miles of the United States—which includes the trans-Pacific mail flights to Alaska and Hawaii.