

## 20 “Bachelor Means Nothing Without Husband and Father”<sup>1</sup> : What Collocations Reveal about a Cognitive Category

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### 1. Introduction

This study combines recent insights into the interpretation of language in cognitive linguistics with the examination of syntagmatic patterns, or collocations, in English language use. The focus is on collocations involving the English lexeme *bachelor*. To further our science, the aim must be to try to integrate information from different theoretical perspectives to get as comprehensive and profound a view as possible of semantic questions (cf. Alm-Arvius 1999). It is hardly possible to discuss meaning in natural human languages without making use of such basic notions as reference, denotation, sense, and syntagmatic and paradigmatic sense relations. Significantly enough, different versions of the cognitive semantic school have in many respects developed through critical reactions to these earlier semantic paradigms.

The sense or senses of the lexeme *bachelor* have been described in different ways, and often the sense descriptions given are straightforwardly connected with the theoretical standpoint of the linguist(s) producing them regarding semantic questions in general. In particular we can note that cognitive semantics has been critical of what it calls classical categorization. In short, it insists that classical categorization overlooks certain crucial observations concerning how speakers of English really understand and use, for instance, the noun *bachelor*. In this study I shall look into the semantics of this English lexeme, and

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<sup>1</sup> From the *British National Corpus*.

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use it as a touchstone as well as a steppingstone for gaining insight into general semantic questions and the contributions that different types of theories can be expected to give to linguistic semantics in general. The empirical material consists of *bachelor* occurrences in *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* 1995 and examples in the *British National Corpus*. Below, *T* and *ST* are abbreviations of *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* respectively, and *BNC* is short for the *British National Corpus*.<sup>2</sup>

The discussion will consider certain explanatory models within the cognitive linguistic paradigm, examining their usefulness and descriptive validity when trying to explain the meaning(s) conveyed by *bachelor*.

Cognitive science is the result of work in a number of related disciplines, including linguistics and philosophy, but in many ways it has been particularly influenced by findings in cognitive psychology and, more recently, neurobiology (see e.g. Lakoff 1987; Lakoff & Johnson 1999). More specifically, the concept of prototype is a central one in cognitive semantics. It was introduced by Eleanor Rosch and her co-workers in the 1970s in their studies into the nature of ordinary human categorization (Rosch 1978, 1977, 1975; Rosch & Mervis 1975).

Fillmore's notion of frames has proved quite influential in cognitively oriented research on language meaning(s). It is somewhat loose and open to partly variant understandings. Sometimes it must be taken to stand for a fairly specific type of situation, not unlike the propositional structures outlined by a predicator and its argument(s) in predicate logic. However, there are also said to be complex frames, a more comprehensive scenario supposed to constitute a common ground for the more specific conceptual figures represented by individual words. This is reminiscent of lexical fields or sense relations in structuralist semantics, but according to Fillmore and other adherents of the frame theory it is the conceptual frames which are basic, and words are only understood and related to each other via their grounding in such experiential schematizations (Fillmore 1985).

A fundamental fact about lexical words in English is that they are used together in linear sequences according to more general and

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<sup>2</sup> Even if the *bachelor* occurrences in these British texts cannot be taken to exemplify the average way of using *bachelor* in English at large, they nonetheless show how native speakers of the language can use the word for different kinds of communicative purposes.

recursive syntactic patterns. Lexical co-occurrence is however restricted not only by the syntactic properties of words but also by more specific lexico-semantic selectional tendencies. Some syntagmatic connections are quite fixed or “frozen” constructions (idioms) whose meanings are sometimes idiosyncratic and not calculable from the individual words used in them. On the whole, it seems however more common that lexical items occur together in more variable combinations or collocations. These are also idiomatic or language specific in a great many cases and often constitute difficulties both for language learners and in translation work. Prototype analyses of lexical senses have not paid much attention to the collocational behaviour of individual lexemes like *bachelor*.

## 2. The lexicon and the grammar

Examining *bachelor* allows exploration of how cognition, in a wider sense, and structural conventions in the English language are important for how it can be used and understood in syntagmatic sequences. The relationship between the lexicon and the grammar of a human language is a central question in linguistics. It concerns the character of lexemes, word formation, collocations, and syntactic structures, and their relationships.

Arguably, syntagmatic sense relations are more basic than paradigmatic or substitutional ones; language is usually realized in compositional linear strings moulded on recurring, and thus conventionalized, constructional patterns. The collocations of lexical items within syntactic structures are in principle variable, even if they are also restricted. In fact, the intuitions among proficient speakers concerning lexical co-occurrence potentials are often intricate, as they involve, for instance, the possibility for creative figurative extensions of lexical senses. As a result, it has in many cases proved difficult to unravel them analytically and describe them in a satisfactory way (cf. Cruse 2000: 229–234).

The combination of a premodifier and a nominal head, as in *eligible bachelor*, *poor bachelor* and *wealthy spinster*, is a two-lexeme collocation and part of a noun phrase, but lexical words – or rather specific morphosyntactic forms of lexical words – are of course usually strung together in longer and more complex syntagms which often also include function words. An example of this would be the

combination of words in the main declarative clause *A poor bachelor wants to marry a wealthy spinster.*

As I exemplify below, *bachelor* can either be treated as a kind of civil legal term or as a general language word. In the first function it has a well-defined sense distinguishing it from other terms within the terminological field dealing with marriage or being single like *husband*, *wife*, *spinster*, and *divorcee*. Its use in the general language overlaps ordinarily with this technical application to a considerable extent, but it is more variable and open to changes as to what associations are foregrounded on a particular occasion of use.

### 3. Collocations: co-occurrence potentials of words in syntactic strings

The term *collocation* was introduced by J R Firth (1957: 194–196). It concerns the semantic significance of the co-occurrence of words within language sequences. Firth does not provide a more exact description of this concept, however.

“Meaning by collocation is an abstraction at the syntagmatic level and is not directly concerned with the conceptual or idea approach to the meaning of words. One of the meanings of *night* is its collocability with *dark*, and of *dark*, of course, collocation with *night*. This kind of mutuality may be paralleled in most languages and has resulted in similarities of poetic diction in literatures sharing common classical sources.” (1957: 196)

In the passage quoted above, which occurs towards the end of his brief outline of the notion of collocation, Firth appears, firstly, to distinguish between the conceptual meaning of a word and its collocability. The former is presumably the meaning it has also when it is uttered quite on its own, without the company of other words in a composite syntactic string. A word’s collocability with another word is said to be a separable kind of meaning, or perhaps we should rather take it to be another aspect of its meaning. At any rate, Firth can be taken to claim that the

collocability of a word is not directly reflected in, or does not straightforwardly follow from, its conceptual content.<sup>3</sup>

Quite generally speaking, collocability seems to be connected with semantic compatibility. More specifically, empirical observations of collocates in syntactic strings suggest that they can occur together

- i) because they represent **conceptual contents** that **intersect** to a certain degree
- ii) and often also because of established habits within the speech community.

In other words, words’ collocational behaviour is part of the **idiomaticity** of the language, and this would appear to account for the perceived arbitrariness of certain collocational preferences and restrictions – also in factually oriented descriptions. Why are for instance both *a high building* and *a tall building* possible – and synonymous – while we only talk of *a tall man*?

### 3.1 Collocations involving bachelor

We can note that the extent to which the sense of a possible collocate is integrated into the sense of a lexeme apparently varies. A potential collocate is not reflected so directly in the general understanding of a word, but all the same it can be said to specify the character of a property that will be found in the members of a given sense category. *Be of a certain age* is an inalienable characteristic of material phenomena, including living creatures like human beings. Since the

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<sup>3</sup> Cruse (2000: 221f) suggests two types of co-occurrence preferences in language: selectional preferences which inescapably follow from the propositional content of a string, and collocational preferences which do not have the same kind of inescapable logico-factual basis, and that violation of selectional preferences is more serious. It will result in a paradox or even outright incongruity. Instead I would suggest that the terms **collocability** or **collocational restrictions** and **preferences** are used in a broad sense about syntagmatic co-occurrence in general between the words in various actual or conceivable phrases, clauses, and sentences within a given language system. In English we can, for instance, both *ride a horse* and *ride a bicycle/motorcycle*, but the Swedish cognate verb *rida* is only used in the translation of the first predication: *rida en häst*, while another verb must be used in collocation with *cykel* and *motorcykel*, the translation equivalents of *bicycle* and *motorcycle*: *åka cykell/motorcykel* – in spite of the obvious etymological relation between these Swedish and English words. Similarly, drivers or passengers can *ride in a vehicle* like *a bus/a cab/a car/a limousine/a taxi* in English, but *rida* would again not be possible in the corresponding Swedish expressions: *åka bil/buss/limousin/taxi*.

primary sense of *bachelor* denotes *unmarried adult human males*, the adjectives *old* and *young* are both natural collocates: *an old/a young bachelor*. Similarly, we can talk about, for instance, *an aged* or *ageing bachelor*, *a forty-year-old bachelor*, or *a bachelor in his early thirties* (cf. Cruse 1986: 214ff). Indeed, *bachelor* is comparatively frequently found in collocation with words that say something about how long a man has been a bachelor. This is connected with the fact that a man's bachelor days are over as soon as he marries. Comparing the antonyms *bachelor* and *husband*, the sense relation between them tends to involve a temporal aspect: a man is typically a bachelor before he becomes a husband, although some remain bachelors all their lives. Consequently, it is hardly surprising that the sentential formulation *X remained a bachelor* is often seen in obituaries, sometimes with minor variations. Instances of this kind of formulaic sentence occur in *The Times* and *The Sunday*. *Still a bachelor* is another idiomatic expression that is linked with the temporal aspect of bachelor status in these newspaper texts. They also contain instances of the collocation *lifelong bachelor*.

- (1) He remained a bachelor. (T11/10,19), (T1/9,19), (T31/8,17)
- (2) Tubby Broomhall remained a bachelor all his life. (T17/1,19)
- (3) Having remained a bachelor until he was well into his seventies, Cramrose married in 1986 Princess Joan Aly Khan. (T16/2,21)
- (4) Still a bachelor, he is content with doting on his nephews in Scotland and has little interest in having children of his own. (ST29/10,SP/4)
- (5) Anyone who's been a bachelor for as long as me, and there are very few of those around who aren't gay, can knock up the odd this and that. (ST22/10,9/15)

To sum up, observations indicate that the collocational potential of a lexical item typically reflects both the conceptual intersection between the senses of collocates and established idiomatic practices in the language in question. This means that collocations tend to be the result of **language specific** combinatory relations between word senses, idiosyncratic conventions within a particular speech community. When translated into other languages, they must commonly be translated as wholes and be calculated in a more global way, involving idiomatic constructional patterns and

stylistic norms by language (for instance, consider the common English collocation *eligible bachelor* vs. a Swedish translation equivalent).<sup>4</sup>

It is clear that collocations cannot generally be explained by referring to factual or general conceptual knowledge. From a strictly informative point of view *marriageable bachelor* would appear an appropriate collocation, but it is not a normal collocational choice in English. *Eligible bachelor* is, on the other hand, an idiomatic collocation conveying the same sort of meaning. Collocations are thus commonly habitual or idiomatic combinations of words, and there is no strict distinction between what should be considered a compound or a multi-word expression/idiom and an idiomatic collocation.

Furthermore, regarding collocation and syntactic structure, lexical words are necessarily integrated in the grammar of a language and predisposed to function in particular syntactic slots. As a result, it is arguable that co-occurrence relations between words – be they lexical or grammatical – are limited to items which are syntactically related in a string.

### 3.2 Types of collocational connections

It is possible – or even necessary in some cases – to distinguish between different types of collocational connections, depending on what kind of syntactic relation exists between a ‘collocational focus’ and its collocate(s). In a noun phrase the head appears to be the collocational focus, while the modifiers are dependent collocates, adding specifying information about it. Similarly, the subject will be the collocational focus in a clause in relation to predicative items like a verb predicator or a subject complement, and a transitive verb will be collocationally dependent on both its subject and its object(s). In other words, a collocational

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<sup>4</sup> Strings that deal with hypothetical situations – or combinations or blends of situational scenarios that are at least partly hypothetical – as well as strings which simply negate or question a description of the real world may contain lexical collocations that would appear anomalous in an affirmative assertion describing some event or circumstance in the real world (cf. Alm-Arvius 1993: 26–28; Fauconnier 1997: 14–18, 99ff, 93f, 156ff).

- (1) \*Bachelors are married/female.
- (2) If bachelors were married/female ...
- (3) Are bachelors married/female?
- (4) Bachelors are not married/female.

focus typically has a more independent and weightier denotational or referential status compared to its collocates(s). It tends to be the referential hub in such a combination, a basic link with the extralinguistic thing described. As a result, its meaning will be more directly influenced by the things referred to, and the reading of a collocate will in its turn be adjusted to the understanding of the focus. Accordingly, the distinction between a collocational focus and its collocates(s) is important for the direction of ‘collocational tailoring’, as the interpretation of a dependent collocate is commonly adjusted to fit the character of a collocational focus rather than the other way round.

Interestingly enough, the direction of collocational selection seems largely the opposite. A modifier, for instance, links on to or selects a phrasal head because, as it were, the contents of this head provide it with an adequate carrier of the characteristic that it represents. In the collocation *old bachelor* the noun head *bachelor* will stand for a person that exhibits the quality described by *old*.

#### 4. Regular vs. occasional features of *bachelor*

##### 4.1 Regularly incorporated aspects of the meaning of *bachelor*

So-called analytic sentences tell us something about our experience of the world and how cognitive categories are represented. Analytic sentences contain a specific, more unusual type of collocation, as they spell out sense relations between lexical units which are regularly incorporated within the sense of the semantically defined subject constituent, a *bachelor*, such as a *bachelor* being *human*, *male*, *adult*, and *unmarried*. If we make the sentences synthetic in (6) through (9) by replacing an initial indefinite article with the definite article or a demonstrative pronoun, these strings appear odd – it is difficult to think of a communicative situation in which they occur. There is usually no need explicitly to add meaning aspects to an instance of a lexical item by means of a collocate if these qualities are already regularly incorporated in its sense – unless one wants to explain the sense in question by using an analytic sentence.

- (6) ?The/This/That *bachelor* is (a) *human*
- (7) ?The/This/That *bachelor* is (a) *male*.
- (8) ?The/This/That *bachelor* is (an) *adult*.
- (9) ?The/This/That *bachelor* is *unmarried*.

Admittedly, it is often difficult to decide whether a general sentential description of the contents of word – or part of it – is strictly speaking

an analytic sentence or whether it is instead largely synthetic. Clearly, the difficulty to draw an absolute boundary between analytic and synthetic sentences is directly related to the often cumbersome distinction between what can be said to be strictly entailed by a propositional statement and meaning features that seem merely to be regularly presupposed or even just commonly expected in the use of certain lexical and grammatical constructs.

Arguably, the following two statements, which essentially express the same claim, are not unconditional analytic sentences, because even if they would be true of most men who can be included in the primary sense of *bachelor* category, they need not be true of all of them. In other words, being a bachelor does not entail living in circumstances that make it possible to enter into the state of matrimony. Instead this quality is just **expected** in most cases, although it need not be part of the characterization of each and every bachelor.

- (10) A bachelor can marry.
- (11) If a man is a bachelor, he is free to marry.

Such observations directly support a **prototype**-centred analysis of lexical senses. Indeed, individual bachelors necessarily exhibit a host of characteristics which are not regularly or even commonly shared by all the members of this category. This is directly relevant for the impression that this sense category – like most others – does not have strict conceptual boundaries. Bachelors come in many different shapes or forms, as it were. They are men that are old enough to marry, but each of them also has a great many other qualities, and they all participate in a considerable range of social scenarios, although some of them are more associated with the status of bachelorhood than others. These unavoidable experiential facts cannot be disregarded when we consider and try to describe how users of English understand this term within or even out of specific language contexts.

Cognitive semantics allows us to consider also such merely occasional characteristics of, for instance, bachelors. By comparison, earlier – or classical – types of sense analyses normally aimed at identifying a skeletal and finite set of supposedly necessary or at least criterial features, but this proved difficult in many cases for a number of reasons. Our general experience of what can be included in a category like *bachelor* is many-sided and even partly variable, and our cognitive grasp of word senses also allows imaginative, unpredictable variations, many of which are logically and factually impossible. All the same, they occur

and provide food for speculative thought as well as for figurative extensions of sense categories (cf. Alm-Arvius 1999). In addition, language habits sometimes impose arbitrary-like preferences or even restrictions on the use of lexical items or longer expressions, for instance as regards what words or word forms can naturally collocate in a given language (cf. Cruse 1986: 281f).

#### 4.2 Occasional collocates of bachelor

Examining the semantic relation between a lexical item like *bachelor* and its lexical collocates or collocational foci, we can first observe that generally recognized analytic sentences, used to explain the primary sense of bachelor, are exceptional in containing collocates that only stand for senses that are just regularly incorporated parts of this other, typically more specific, lexical sense – or cognitive category, if we instead use the terminology of cognitive semantics. But if the purpose of the utterance is not to explain this particular word sense, such a collocation will appear tautological or pleonastic (cf. Cruse 2000: 45, 223f, 227–229). Importantly enough, this appears to be true of constructions that contain the entailed predicative quality *unmarried* as well as those that explicitly attribute the regularly presupposed features *human*, *male*, and *adult* to the referent of a particular *bachelor* instance.

The following two examples show that *male* and *unmarried* have been used as premodifying collocates of *bachelor* also in non-analytic constructions. These two premodifiers might have been added to these particular examples of *bachelor* functioning as noun phrase heads as semantic emphasis markers.

- (12) How, then, can this zeitgeisty little lifestyle development for the heterosexual male bachelor be on the way out, ... (ST23/4,9/4)
- (13) ... a revenge drama about an unmarried bachelor who likes to razor off people's ears to avenge his deaf brother. (ST8/1,10/49)

However, normally the collocates of a lexical item with a particular sense like *bachelor* add merely **occasional** features to it. This is in fact why they are informative. The premodifiers *posh*, *young*, *kindly*, *old*, *taciturn*, *painfully shy*, *American*, *millionaire*<sup>5</sup>, and *middle-aged*, as well

<sup>5</sup> *American millionaire* in (18) could well be regarded as one composite modifier consisting of a phrase in which *millionaire* is the head and *American* is a premodifier.

as the postmodifiers *in his fifties* and *farming alone* ... in the examples below are all possible but by no means regular features of members of the *bachelor* category. In other words, these senses are compatible with the primary sense of *bachelor*, but not regularly incorporated in it.

- (14) ... a posh young bachelor ... (T<sub>31/3,2</sub>)
- (15) ... the kindly old bachelor ... (ST<sub>26/11,7/7</sub>)
- (16) Mr Cassidy, a taciturn bachelor, ... (T<sub>6/11,4</sub>)
- (17) ... the duke, a painfully shy bachelor, ... (T<sub>24/7,15</sub>)
- (18) ... , American millionaire bachelor, ... (BNC,AP<sub>7(762)</sub>)
- (19) ... a bachelor in his fifties ... (BNC,AFC<sub>(1644)</sub>)
- (20) ... a middle-aged bachelor farming alone after his mother dies, ... (BNC,A<sub>36(270)</sub>)

The observation that the dependent collocates of a particular lexical word typically add occasional but by no means regular features to its collocational focus helps us to understand the character of lexical senses or categories. It shows us that they are semantically flexible, as they have the potential to take on certain additional meaning aspects temporarily, in specific language sequences and as a result of the actual or would-be referents or reference situations described by particular uses of a lexical sense. Indeed this observation agrees well with prototype analysis of lexical meanings.

Even quite common collocates of, for instance, *bachelor* which occur in synthetic sentences rather than in analytic ones – like *eligible*, *confirmed*, or phrases and words that say something about the age of a bachelor – represent additional, non-core features of their collocational focus. Common collocations like *eligible bachelor* and *confirmed bachelor* ought to have some kind of lexical status, even if they cannot be considered compounds (cf. ALD 1989: 72; Longman 1987: 63). This kind of linguistic mental imprint must, however, be quite intricate and involve possible variations in the realizations of a collocational pattern. When used in actual syntactic structures in utterances, these collocations must accordingly be realized as parts of whole noun phrases. *Eligible* in *eligible bachelor* is then often, but not necessarily, found in its superlative form, *most eligible*, with a preceding geographical term in the genitive case. In addition, such a noun phrase appears often to be the complement of the preposition *of* in a partitive construction: *one of X's most eligible bachelors*.

The regular features of a lexical sense constitute its core, while the occasional features added by dependent collocates are merely various

kinds of conceivable but not generally incorporated sense attributes. In other words, in the case of *bachelor* collocational meaning additions will be semantic aspects that are quite compatible with being a bachelor, even if a man can also very well be a bachelor without being associated with them either just transiently or more permanently. Most importantly, it is clear that in addition to shared, regular features of this category (see above), every bachelor must also have a host of other, either more stable or just incidental, or even just potential characteristics. Speakers of English are naturally aware of this, and it is debatable whether they ever think of bachelors as simply having the skeletal set of attributes that I have called regular, incorporated sense features. Instead it seems likely that their conceptions of bachelors tend to be both richer and somewhat variable through the inclusion of merely occasional sense attributes.

More specifically, occasional attributes with *bachelor* understandings in actual language use can clearly be placed along a continuum from usually **expected** ones over those that are just **possible** but not ordinarily expected to more unique, **individual** qualities of particular bachelors like *farming alone* ... in (20) (cf. Cruse 1986).

Continuum of **occasional** features of *bachelor*:  
**expected** ----- **possible** ----- **individual**

It seems somewhat problematic to try to sketch a general prototype of the primary sense of *bachelor* without considering special types of circumstances or language contexts, but it appears reasonable to suggest that the **regular** and typically **expected** features of bachelors together form a loose kind of prototypical conception of the sense category we speak of as *bachelor*. In particular, it should be noted that this explanatory model of the semantics of this lexical item makes a distinction between regularly presupposed and usually expected qualities. Only the former will be felt to be criterial enough to be regularly incorporated in the primary sense of *bachelor*.

**regular features: entailed – presupposed**  
**occasional features: expected** ----- **possible** ----- **individual**

Furthermore, it seems as though it would normally be wrong to consider occasional collocates accidental or selectionally arbitrary, since apparently they can co-occur with, or select, the collocational focus because the two somehow share a semantic quality. This semantic affinity need not be the result of the actual character of the kind of phenomena represented by a collocational focus. It could just be a cultural and cognitive

construct, and thus an indication of how speakers of a given language, or a variety of it, conceive of something part of their life experience. Actually, also regular sense features can depend on cultural conceptions and conventions. This applies to the fourth core feature regardless of whether it can be paraphrased as (*a man who*) *has never been married* or just as (*an*) *unmarried (man)*. The institution of *marriage* is a cultural construct, and the sense of *bachelor* is directly dependent on it.

We have now discussed how the meaning of a collocational focus, *bachelor*, can be made more specific by in particular modifying collocates. However, *bachelor* appears also to be fairly frequently used itself as a dependent collocate, that is as an adjectivalized premodifier or as a predicative complement. In turning to such *bachelor* occurrences, it is relevant to recall that dependent collocates are often semantically tailored, that is adjusted, to the meaning of their collocational focus. In other words, the reading of a collocate can also be influenced by a collocational relationship, or sometimes perhaps mainly as a result of the extralinguistic character of the thing(s) described.

All the “*bachelor* plus noun” combinations exemplified below are used in my empirical material, and especially *bachelor pad* seems so common that it may be appropriate to consider it a compound noun rather than a collocation.<sup>6</sup>

- (21) The first time Mathias and Christa make love is in a cheesy bachelor pad, complete with mirrored ceiling. (*ST5/2,7/12*)

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<sup>6</sup> *Bachelor* appears also to be quite frequently used as the head of a noun phrase functioning as a subject complement. I would suggest that such an instance is typically not as closely integrated semantically with the subject element it adds information about as many premodifier instances of *bachelor* and their head nouns. A premodifier and its head are parts of the same noun phrase and will function together also semantically within such referring or predicative expressions. By comparison, a subject and its subject complement do not belong to the same syntactic phrase, just to the same clause. A complement makes up a phrase of its own, which is furthermore syntactically more directly related to the copular predicate verb than to the subject, as it is first tied to this verb through its complement status. It is then syntactically related to the subject through it, as an element of the predicate constituent. The syntactic relationship between a dependent collocate and its collocational focus appears to be relevant for how much the latter can dominate or mould the reading of the former.

(5) Charles had been a bachelor for thirty-two years. (*BNC,A7H(445)*)

(6) Gary Bond remained a bachelor. (*T14/10,23*)

(7) Fortunately, too, most of the men are bachelors and so are spared the withering remarks of bored spouses. (*T24/6,SP/2*)

- (22) I was pursuing a bachelor life with almost no downside. (ST15/10,9/13)
- (23) It was one of the first recipes that my husband attempted in his bachelor days. (BNC, ABB(864))
- (24) “You mean, he had them under the bed in his old bachelor flat in Wimbledon, ...” (ST24/2,5/7)
- (25) Heuston lived the life of a bachelor don with rooms in college for the next 15 years. (T27/12, 9)
- (26) She met Ernest Weekly, a bachelor lecturer from Nottingham University, when she was 18 and he was 33, and they embarked on a loveless, dessicated marriage, ... (ST25/6,7/3)
- (27) ... since Wendy and Tom Witherington had two young children upon whom their bachelor uncle doted. (BNC, AOD(2559))
- (28) Or, as he sang back in 1962, “until then I’ll be your bachelor boy and that’s the way I’ll stay, happy to be a bachelor boy until my dying day.” (ST18/6,3/2)

## 5. Two types of occasional features or collocates

Within the class of occasional *bachelor* attributes which occur as premodifying collocates of this noun we can in fact distinguish two different groups depending on what regular features in *bachelor* they can be used to comment on. The first group consists of premodifiers that can also be found with the superordinate *man*. Such *bachelor* instances can be replaced by *man* without affecting the reading of the premodifier, although such a noun phrase would of course have a less specific meaning, since *bachelor* contains the additional information that we can spell out as *has never been married* or *is unmarried*. The strings from (29) to (31) contain examples of such premodifying collocates of *bachelor*.

- (29) Starkie, an American bachelor, regularly accompanies the duchess on charity trips to eastern Europe, ... (ST18/6,1/7)
- (30) He is Marc Andreessen, a large, loose-limbed 24-year-old bachelor from the Midwest, who appears to live for nothing but computers and junk food. (ST13/8,3/8)
- (31) He was an old, stooping, emaciated bachelor, aghast at the facts of life; he never smiled but glowered defensively at the world from under his eyebrows, ... (BNC, ABW(240))

The second group is illustrated below. The collocates *eligible*, *confirmed*, *incurable*, *entrenched*, and *lifelong* must be taken necessarily

to associate to the entailed *unmarried* feature of the head *bachelor*. In all these cases the combination of the premodifying collocate and *bachelor* is semantically quite cohesive, and an instance of *man* could not be substituted for *bachelor* in any these phrases, as the choice of these particular premodifiers would then no longer make sense, at least not in these specific contexts. Not even *unmarried man* would seem a possible alternative, because it is not normally used in collocation with these premodifying adjectives to convey the same sense as *bachelor*.

As I have outlined, *bachelor* seems to be associated with a rich and variable set of characteristics, and this is no doubt directly connected with its use in so many different collocations and wider contexts depicting scenarios involving bachelors and aspects of bachelorhood. There are likely to be differences between individual speakers as regards what occasional features tend to come to mind when they hear this lexical item mentioned, especially out of a specifying context, but speakers are prepared for variation in the use of the noun. This is presumably a result of their linguistic experience; the many times they have heard *bachelor* being used or used it themselves. Their extralinguistic experiences of bachelors and their way of life must, as usual, interact with their language competence and practices, for instance their recognition of both frequent and apparently conventionalized collocations and other collocations considered possible.

- (32) John Fitzgerald Kennedy, 34-year-old son of the slain President, is variously known as “the hunk”, “the sexiest man alive”, and America’s most eligible bachelor. (T12/9,15)
- (33) ... he had the slightly panicky look of a confirmed bachelor who has just walked into a maternity ward of bawling babies, ... (ST26/2,10/7)
- (34) He had long seemed an incorrigible bachelor but in 1971 he surprised his friends with marriage. (T2/10,23)
- (35) ... verses aimed at turning the thoughts of entrenched bachelors to the comforts of matrimony ... (ST12/2,5/7)
- (36) A lifelong bachelor, Paul Hogan leaves no survivors. (T18/3,21)
- (37) Often dubbed Britain’s most eligible bachelor, the late duke was linked with a series of glamorous women ... (T1/11,1)
- (38) One Fleet Street columnist after another claimed her wedding to one of the world’s most eligible bachelors was an appalling mistake. (ST19/11,1/5)
- (39) ... he was an international champion golfer and one of the most eligible young bachelors in the London society of the early 1930s. (BNC,K5J(2175))

- (40) As a youth Richard was red-haired, high, wide and handsome, and considered the most eligible bachelor in Christendom. (ST8/1,3/1)
- (41) Thus Andrew Davies has Mrs Bennet's initial announcement to her husband that an eligible bachelor has taken the tenancy of Netherfield Hall take place most incongruously as the family hurries home from church. (T6/10,39)
- (42) But while some women complain that eligible black bachelors are hard to find, others play solitaire by choice. (ST19/12,9/8)
- (43) Housman, a confirmed bachelor, was born in 1859 and had a stifling Victorian upbringing. (T23/9,5)
- (44) Sadly, most seem to be confirmed bachelors. (ST30/4,9/14)
- (45) ... a retired businessman and confirmed bachelor with bald head and circular spectacles, dressed in old-fashioned tights and gaiters. (BNC,Boy(981))

## 6. Figurative shifts and irregular features

As an interesting contrast, in the next two examples *bachelor* is used as a premodifier of the noun phrase heads *Mother* and *queen*. These collocational foci stand for women, and accordingly they force a suppression of the regular sense quality *male* in the primary sense of the collocate *bachelor*. This collocational tailoring of the both syntactically and semantically dependent item *bachelor* is necessary if they are to function together to convey the intended meaning.

- (46) Notable among her films during the period were the comedy Bachelor Mother (1939), with David Niven, as a shop-girl who finds an abandoned baby, and the drama Kitty Foyle (1948), ... (T26/4,19)
- (47) Queen Christina, directed by Rouben Mamoulian, takes liberties with history, telling how Sweden's 17th-century bachelor queen abjures her love for the Spanish ambassador (John Gilbert) in the higher interests of the state. (T8/4,SP/4)

In short, such a figurative, or more specifically metaphorical shift in the reading of *bachelor* is connected with the introduction of an **irregular** feature in the understanding of this lexical item within a specific collocation, and I would suggest that this is commonly the case in figurative uses. A lexical word like *bachelor* can be semantically influenced by its companion. If *bachelor* is the collocational focus, its collocate can

decisively add a specifying feature to its semantic contents, but if it is itself a more dependent collocate, it can be collocationally tailored by the focus. The semantic characteristics that can explicitly be spelt out in a collocational companion are of three different, general types. **Regular** features are only added to a word in specific cases, usually to explain its meaning in an analytic sentence, while **occasional** semantic attributes highlight possible but not regular features of a particular lexicalized sense. Finally, **irregular** attributes trigger a figurative shift of some kind in the reading of a lexical item.

**regular** ----- **occasional** ----- **irregular**

However, *bachelor* instances like the two in (46) and (47) share other, both regular and merely occasional attributes of the sense category *bachelor*. Actually, more unstable but still common occasional *bachelor* features like *independent* or *fending for oneself* appear to be important for the use of *bachelor* in such cases. Obviously, *spinster* cannot be used to convey the complex meanings expressed by presumably incidental combinations like *bachelor mother* and *bachelor queen*, because it is not typically associated with such positive meaning aspects.<sup>7</sup>

Adding to the above, in the kind of similarly metaphorical *bachelor* application exemplified below, it is instead primarily the regular semantic attribute *human* in *bachelor* that is suppressed. And since animals do not marry, although the relations between the sexes among mammals and birds are similar to what we find in human societies, the *unmarried* or *has-not-married* feature cannot be taken at face value either in such contexts. Actually, this is a good example of the insistent impression that our interpretations of words and compositional verbal strings are typically many-sided, **holistic** complexes rather than some kind of simplistic adding-up of discrete sense aspects.

- (48) Any sedge warblers that are still singing at midsummer will be bachelors, just warbling on hopefully. (T29/4, WE/12)
- (49) A minority of the males accomplish most of the mating; and many males die bachelors. (BNC, GUB(2048))
- (50) Large groups of dolphins are mixed in age and sex, but smaller groups generally are of three types: a nuclear group, comprising a single adult male and female; a nursery group, with a number of adult females and young; and a bachelor group, with adult and young males. (BNC, ABC(440))

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<sup>7</sup> *Bachelor girl* seems, on the other hand, to be a lexicalised compound (ALD 1989: 72).

- (51) Gelada baboons often move in large herds; individual harems move separately and the ‘bachelor’ males are found in their own discrete and coherent social units. (BNC,AMG(1433))

Furthermore, there is probably a difference between the systematic status of the types of figurative *bachelor* uses exemplified above. The use of *bachelor* to denote animal males without a female partner can be regarded as a lexicalised secondary sense of this lexeme, while it is questionable whether the use of *bachelor* in combinations like *bachelor girl* and *bachelor queen* has the same more independent applicatory status. Both commonly occur as premodifying collocates, but *bachelor* as a synonym of *male animal without a female partner* can clearly also be used as a noun phrase head that on its own serves to pick out referents in the extralinguistic universe of discourse.

## 7. Conclusion

This study of the collocational range and the textual environment of the English lexeme *bachelor* suggests that its meaning potential is quite complex and variable. Even if we look just at the primary sense of *bachelor*, it is clear that its meaning potential is in certain respects far richer, or more multifaceted and variable, than what was assumed in different attempts at a classical kind of categorization, which would simply claim that the noun had a fixed and clearly delimited content that could be paraphrased as *unmarried man*, or *man who has never been married*. Together with ordinarily expected features like *able/free to marry*, the regular, incorporated features summed up in these paraphrases appear to make up a kind of general sense prototype for speakers of English. The collocational potential of *bachelor* makes it quite clear, however, that the understanding of this lexical item can be associated with a wide range of merely occasional but still possible meaning features. In other words, the more peripheral range of this sense category is variable and rich in possible associations or attributes. There are bachelors of many different sorts of personalities and characteristics, all with unique life stories, and speakers of English may differ as to how typical they feel that a given representative of the category *bachelor* is. We build up our understanding of words, including our assessment of their collocational potential in compositional grammatical string, through active interaction with our environment. In short, the experiences that help form our

conception of how a lexical item like *bachelor* can be used in English are both extralinguistic and verbal.

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