COLLOCATIONS IN SCIENTIFIC AND LEGAL TEXTS – TEACHING ASPECTS

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ABSTRACT. Collocations in Scientific and Legal Texts – Teaching Aspects. This paper gives an overview of collocations in general, followed by a more elaborate reference to the use of collocations in the specific fields of science and law. The article also presents the results of a case study developed on law students and offers examples of possible activities meant to raise awareness and practice collocations that are characteristic to scientific and legal English.

Keywords: collocation, scientific text, legal text, case study, practice activities, translation, confused words.

Introduction
Vocabulary acquisition has been given a more important role in the recent theories of second language teaching. Good communication requires solid lexical knowledge and making learners aware of collocations is a positive approach. Numerous theorists agree now that collocations, rather than single words learnt in isolation, are more important in the process of lexical acquisition in particular and language proficiency in general. Specific professional domains

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contain their own specialized vocabulary where collocations figure prominently as they facilitate communication and condense information for a more plastic expression. Students, ESP students in our case, are often reluctant to speak and participate in conversation tasks in class. The reason is their low level of lexical knowledge. Knowing those “chunks” of language, especially those specific to their field of study, enhances their confidence and encourages them to speak and express themselves.

What is a collocation?

The major dictionaries generally agree that a collocation is a group of two or more words that are more frequently used together and their occurrence as such sounds natural: “the habitual juxtaposition of a particular word with another word or words with a frequency greater than chance,” “the way in which some words are often used together, or a particular combination of words used in this way,” or “the combination of words formed when two or more words are frequently used together in a way that sounds natural.”

The term “collocation” was introduced by J.R. Firth in 1951 “to designate characteristic word combinations which have developed an idiomatic semantic relationship based on their frequent co-occurrence” (Bussmann 2006: 200). Various other theorists such as Halliday (1966) or Sinclair (1966) continued Firth’s tradition and analysis of collocations. The term is rather loose and overlaps other notions such as idioms or phrasal verbs. Michael Lewis summarizes the complicated nature of lexicon: “In one sense all collocation is idiomatic and all idioms and phrasal verbs are collocations – predictable combinations of different kinds” (2000: 50). However, he defines collocations as “a predictable combination of words: get lost, make up for lost time, speak your mind” (2000: 51) and offers as more helpful and frequent the following formulas for which we supplied examples from the legal and scientific register (Table 1):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formula</th>
<th>SCIENCE</th>
<th>LAW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>adjective + noun</td>
<td>environmental pollution</td>
<td>criminal justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun + noun</td>
<td>head injury</td>
<td>court hearing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verb + adjective + noun</td>
<td>carry out extensive research</td>
<td>launch a detailed investigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verb + adverb</td>
<td>reproduce sexually</td>
<td>judge fairly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adverb + verb</td>
<td>fully digest</td>
<td>unlawfully imprison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adverb + adjective</td>
<td>heavily polluted</td>
<td>wrongfully accused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phrases</td>
<td>in full bloom</td>
<td>law and order</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 We consulted the online versions of the following dictionaries: Oxford, Longman and Cambridge. The quotations that follow are in this order. Please see selective bibliography for their details.
Why teach collocations?

Regardless of theory and definitions, the most important element for the learner is how and when to use collocations. It is important to make students aware of such combinations and the need to know and recognize them. They use collocations without knowing, and some of these collocations are so basic that they are not even aware of them. For example, students learn from their first English lessons about the combinations of the verbs make and do. Thus, they are taught to say “I do my homework” and “I make mistakes” and not vice-versa. Using collocations, whether they are simple or complex, will ensure better communication and understanding in conversations with native speakers.

By not teaching collocations, the teachers ignore “a large set of items which express often complex ideas very simply and precisely” (Lewis 2000: 16). Thus, the students are forced to use longer expressions and grammaticalise more which results in clumsy expression. “The more collocations learners have at their disposal, the less they need to grammaticalise” (Lewis 2000: 16). For everyday communication, common collocations make the conversation more fluent, improve and ease understanding by exploiting the great plasticity of the English language and its capacity to condense meaning in short phrases.

However, the teaching of vocabulary has usually observed the tradition of decoding, namely, expressions and phrases were dissected into the separate words and learners were encouraged to memorize single words in isolation. Until recently we followed the general trend and taught isolated words. We were confident that if they have the pieces, they can always easily build the puzzle, that is, if they know separate words, they can just make the right combinations with practice and constant access to authentic materials. And that is fine but proficiency requires something more. Therefore, our approach has changed because natural sciences, as well as law, have numerous terms that can combine in a variety of collocations and we have come to the conclusion that it is easier for students to learn collocations that can be easily employed in spoken or written production. Moreover, the use of many of these collocations is compulsory in certain highly specialized contexts. Without them, the utterance becomes sloppy, laborious and unprofessional.

It is common knowledge that "legalese" is far from being a communicative type of language. In fact, it is designed to work as an instrumental code for the exchange of shared information between experts of the same field. That is the reason why legal language is considered a language for specific purposes and its syntactic, stylistic and lexical features that distinguish it from general language represent as many challenges to both teachers and students.

Law students need to get to grips with legal language issues and teachers of legal English should make sure they use the necessary tools to build on
language skills in a professional context through familiarization with realistic legal materials so that when graduating they have acquired the required skills necessary for conducting legal work in English. One of the dangers that students should be made aware of is that of learning individual lexical units in isolation.

**Case study**

However, before we started our new approach, we needed some evidence that our endeavour is justified. Thus, we did a case study to see exactly how easy it was for students to recognize and memorize collocations if special attention had not been drawn to them before that moment.

In this section, we will discuss the problems raised by the specialist vocabulary encountered in legal English texts, by specifically choosing to test students’ familiarity with the legal collocations. In terms of the terminology employed (e.g. *patterns of collocations, collocational range, strength of collocations, register-specific collocations*), we are deeply indebted to Mona Baker’s study *In other Words. A coursebook on translation* (1992, 2006).

**Profile of the research participants**

Participants for this research were 2nd year law students of “Ovidius” University of Constanta, Romania. Among the 30 research participants, 20 were upper-intermediate and 10 were intermediate-level learners of English. The two criteria considered for this selection were: 1. The level of English – the students were supposed to have a reasonable good grasp of SL and 2. The level of expertise in the TL – the research participants were comfortable with the general subject area as they were Law Major. We hoped that by focusing on such a group, we would be able to see interesting patterns of collocational use in the field of English for Legal Purposes. These patterns, we envisaged, could inform an adequate syllabus for students of legal English, one which should place an important focus on teaching collocations.

**Expected test outcomes**

The test goals were:

- to make students aware of the range of items with which one word may be compatible
- to develop students’ ability of identifying broader / narrower collocational ranges;
- to preview some theoretical aspects concerning the types of collocation and their strength by focusing on the Verb + Noun type;
- to improve students’ command of English;
- to equip students with specialist knowledge related to legal issues;
• to expose students to authentic legal texts in the SL;
• to develop students’ ability of using specialist terminology correctly;
• to develop students’ autonomy and research skills.

Selection of assessment material and activities

The test included four types of vocabulary exercises, all of them selected from the first unit of *English for Legal Purposes. Part II* (2001), International Law, “Section A: Jurisdiction”, pp. 6-8 and “Section B: Diplomatic Immunity”, pp. 9-10. Thus, the first test item was a reading exercise, A.3.3: the students were required to scan the text in order to identify the three verbs that the noun *jurisdiction* can combine with. In B.1.1, three of the verbs, *to afford, to waive* and *to benefit*, requested students’ attention in order to get acquainted with their possible uses.

After this warming-up activity, exercise B.1.2 asked the students to form as many possible combinations between a set of eight verbs and a set of eleven nouns / noun phrases. Finally, as a follow-up exercise, in B.1.3 the students had to fill in five gaps using five of the Verb + Noun collocations from the patterns they had already formed in the previous exercise.

The test form is listed below in Figure 1:

### The territorial principle

This is the favoured basis for the exercise of state jurisdiction. Events occurring within a state’s territorial boundaries and persons within that territory, albeit their presence is temporary, are as a rule subject to the application of local law. An offence may not however, be entirely committed within the territory of one state. A crime may be commenced in one state and consummated in another. The subjective territorial principle allows the exercise of jurisdiction in the state where a crime is commenced. The objective territorial principle gives jurisdiction to the state in which the crime has been completed and has effect — the forum of injury. Both states may claim jurisdiction and both may do so legitimately. The one which will actually exercise jurisdiction will most probably be the one which has custody of the alleged offender. There is no rule of international law which gives a state where a crime is completed exclusive jurisdiction. The state in which the crime was initiated is, in other words, not restricted from exercising jurisdiction. Such a state may bring preparatory criminal acts within the ambit of its criminal law. See for example, in the U.K., the Criminal Justice Act 1993 which permits English courts to exercise jurisdiction over specific crimes where a particular aspect of the crime occurs on U.K. soil although the effects are felt outside U.K. territory. There is "no rule of comity to prevent Parliament from prohibiting under pain of punishment persons who are present in the United Kingdom, and so owe local obedience to our law, from doing physical acts in England, notwithstanding that the consequences of those acts take effect outside the United Kingdom" nor is there anything; "in precedent, comity or good sense that should inhibit the common law from regarding as justiciable in England inchoate crimes committed abroad which were intended to result in the commission of criminal offences in England; therefore conspiracies abroad to commit offences in England constituted offences in English law even though no overt acts pursuant thereto took place in England." More controversial has been the exercise of jurisdiction based on the effects principles so as to regulate the affairs of foreign nationals abroad, because such activities have an economic impact – ELP/6 – in the regulating state. The most frequent application of this principle which is essentially an extension of the objective territorial...
principle has been by the United States for example, anti-trust legislation, but certain European states have invoked the principle and the European Communities have affirmed that what is relevant in the application of EEC competition rules is the place where the agreement is implemented. The response of those critical of the principle has resulted in the American courts modifying their approach by introducing "reasonableness" and a balancing of the interests when considering the potential application of its jurisdiction. In 1996 President Clinton's administration was severely criticized for the D'Amato Bill which attempted to impose world-wide sanctions on foreign companies making new investments of 26 million pounds or more in oil or gas projects in Iran or Libya. The Bill was targeted at these states as the alleged principal proponents of international terrorism. The international community condemned the legislation as a "clear violation of the principle of extra-territoriality." Similarly, the OAS conclude that the U.S. Helms-Burton Act1996 did not conform with the "applicable norms of international law in respect of the exercise of jurisdiction of States and its limits on such exercise."

A.3.3 The word jurisdiction appears in several combinations in the text above. Identify three verbs that the word can collocate with: jurisdiction

1. to ................................
2. to ................................
3. to ................................

B.1.1 Look at the meanings of the following words and the contexts in which they are used:

1. To afford
   - to have enough time/money to do something
   e.g. Only the bigger companies can afford the enormous fees.
   - (formal) to provide something or allow something to happen
   e.g. The receiving state is under a duty to afford a high level of protection to the diplomatic mission.

2. To waive
   - to give up
   e.g. He waived his claim to the estate.
   - to remove the conditions (of a rule)
   e.g. He waived the tuition fee.

3. To benefit
   - (transitive) to bring advantages to someone or improve their lives e.g. This trade agreement will greatly benefit the developing world.
   - (+ preposition from/by something) to be helped by something
   e.g. Not all the staff of a foreign mission benefit from the same immunity rights.

B.1.2 Decide which of the verbs given in column A combine with the nouns given in column B. Remember that some of the verbs can combine with several nouns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to afford</td>
<td>asylum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to benefit</td>
<td>capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to enjoy</td>
<td>claim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to grant</td>
<td>immunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to impair</td>
<td>individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to take</td>
<td>payment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to terminate</td>
<td>privileges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to terminate</td>
<td>protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to terminate</td>
<td>steps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to terminate</td>
<td>somebody's function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to terminate</td>
<td>somebody's dignity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
B.1.3 Now fill in the gaps in the sentences below with suitable collocations from those you have found:

1. Representatives from Greek city states used to ........ for diplomatic reasons.
2. The receiving state must ........ to prevent any attack on the diplomatic agent, his freedom or dignity.
3. The purpose of diplomatic privileges and immunities is not ........ but to ensure the efficient performance of diplomatic missions as representatives of states.
4. If a member of a diplomatic mission is declared persona non grata the sending state is required to recall the person concerned or ........ .
5. An individual within an embassy will be ........ only in exceptional circumstances. (passive)

Evaluation of students’ performance

In our research, we first wanted to establish the extent to which learners can identify collocations of the type to be practised in the following activities (Verb + Noun). As the figures showed, nearly all students were able to accomplish the task (91.6 %). On the contrary, as far as exercises B.1.2 and B.1.3 were concerned, the results of the test indicated that the difference in score was clearly reflected in the level of English that the two sub-groups had. Thus, the number of the sets of collocates formed by the upper-intermediate students was visibly higher than the number of collocations pointed out by intermediate students. While 20% to 25% of the upper-intermediate students found all the correct nouns that can combine with the verbs to benefit, to grant and to impair, no student from the other group managed to accomplish this task in its entirety. Another illustrating example was provided by the set of collocates having at its centre the verb to afford: at the intermediate level, only 2 out of 10 students chose protection and payment compared with 9 out of 20 students from the second sub-group. What we found inexplicably disappointing was that although some contexts were provided for the students for the verbs to benefit and to waive, no intermediate-level student was capable to link the noun individuals to the first verb, which therefore had an extremely narrow range, and no upper-intermediate level student managed to find the entire collocational range of the second verb, formed of the nouns the right, claim, and payment, which had one of the most “generous” collocational ranges in the exercise.

Lastly, for the fourth task, it turned out that only 1 in 6 students that formed the collocation to enjoy diplomatic immunity, 4 of the 15 that matched to take with steps, 3 of the 4 that found the collocations to terminate somebody's function and to grant asylum correctly filled the gaps included in the sentences. As not expected, no acceptable solution was given for the third sentence where the key words were to benefit individuals. This analysis is valid only for the upper-

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4 All the figures in this article are created by the authors. References are given when outside material is used in Figures 1, 2 and 6.
intermediate group since the second sub-group was “positively discriminated” and the requirement for exercise B.1.3 was slightly but significantly changed: for these students I chose to write a randomized list of five collocations on the blackboard and they only had to find a match for each of the five contexts. Only in this way, was the outcome positive since, on average, 20% succeeded in providing all the right answers needed in order to solve this test item.

Conclusions

The test gave us an insight into the learners’ degree of awareness as far as the collocational range is concerned. Not surprisingly, we saw that students need to develop their ability of using specialist terminology correctly, with a particular focus on collocations. One of our main research interests was to see the extent to which the students were already equipped with specialist knowledge related to legal issues.

Improving students’ command of legal English is a goal that cannot be achieved unless adequate focus is placed on the way words change their meaning according to the contexts where they occur, as also noted by many researchers in the field of ESP. M. Baker, for instance, stresses not the arbitrariness that characterizes collocational patterns (2006: 47) but also their flexibility and transparency of meaning (63). On the other hand, B. Hatim and J. Munday require the need to pinpoint the strength of collocations so as these can be transferred from the ST into the TT (and we should add, the other way round) in an adequate manner (2004: 249).

It was not the purpose of the present research to prove the system-bound nature of the legal term, but we should emphasize the fact that this accounts for a substantial cognitive effort and significant amounts of time spent by the teacher, especially when he/she is neither a native speaker nor an expert in law, on preparation for the activities aimed at describing students’ own legal system as well as comparing and contrasting it to those of the UK or US. Moreover, in teaching legal English, as the present analysis of the students’ needs indicated, efficient development of basic communicative skills is supported by the skill of terminology translation.

To conclude, we should stress the idea that familiarity with collocations in the legal field is meant to increase a non-native law student’s efficiency at the levels of all the skills and, as a result, more attention should be paid to the time-slots and activity types included in the syllabus.

Types of activities

It is important to raise students’ awareness of collocations and enable them to recognize these combinations in a text. In the previous section, we
offered examples of such activities from the legal field. In what follows, the activities will relate to the scientific field.

The students are given a text to read about the types of renewable energy (Figure 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Renewable Energy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The United States currently relies heavily on coal, oil, and natural gas for its energy. Fossil fuels are non-renewable, that is, they draw on finite resources that will eventually dwindle, becoming too expensive or too environmentally damaging to retrieve. In contrast, the many types of renewable energy resources, such as wind and solar energy are constantly replenished and will never run out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most renewable energy comes either directly or indirectly from the sun. Sunlight, or solar energy, can be used directly for heating and lighting homes and other buildings, for generating electricity, and for hot water heating, solar cooling, and a variety of commercial and industrial uses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sun’s heat also drives the winds, whose energy is captured with wind turbines. Then, the winds and the sun’s heat cause water to evaporate. When this water vapor turns into rain or snow and flows downhill into rivers or streams, its energy can be captured using hydroelectric power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Along with the rain and snow, sunlight causes plants to grow. The organic matter that makes up those plants is known as biomass. Biomass can be used to produce electricity, transportation fuels, or chemicals. The use of biomass for any of these purposes is called bioenergy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hydrogen also can be found in many organic compounds, as well as water. It’s the most abundant element on the Earth. But it doesn’t occur naturally as a gas. It’s always combined with other elements, such as with oxygen to make water. Once separated from another element, hydrogen can be burned as a fuel or converted into electricity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not all renewable energy resources come from the sun. Geothermal energy taps the Earth’s internal heat for a variety of uses, including electric power production, and the heating and cooling of buildings. And the energy of the ocean’s tides come from the gravitational pull of the moon and the sun upon the Earth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In fact, ocean energy comes from a number of sources. In addition to tidal energy, there’s the energy of the ocean’s waves, which are driven by both the tides and the winds. The sun also warms the surface of the ocean more than the ocean depths, creating a temperature difference that can be used as an energy source. All these forms of ocean energy can be used to produce electricity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Text source**: http://www.renewableenergyworld.com/rea/tech/home

Figure 2.

The possibilities for activities stemming from this text are numerous. Here are some examples we propose:

**Activity 1**

**Recognition.** The students are asked to find in the text all the main types of renewable energy sources and give the Romanian equivalent. The solution to this activity is:
Wind energy = energie eoliană
Solar energy = energie solară
Hydroelectric power = energie hidroelectrică
Geothermal energy = energie geotermală
Ocean energy = energie oceanică
Tidal energy = energie mareică
Wave energy = energia valurilor

Activity 2

Matching. The students are asked to match two columns of words from the text and restore the pairs:

| a. environmentally | 1. damaging          |
| b. finite          | 2. difference       |
| c. fossil          | 3. fuels            |
| d. gravitational   | 4. gas              |
| e. industrial      | 5. heavily          |
| f. natural         | 6. matter           |
| g. occur           | 7. naturally        |
| h. organic         | 8. pull             |
| i. relies          | 9. resources        |
| j. temperature     | 10. turbines        |
| k. wind            | 11. uses            |

Solution: a-1; b-9; c-3; d-8; e-11; f-4; g-7; h-6; i-5; j-2; k-10

Activity 3

Matching. The students are asked to underline in the text all the adjectives that collocate with energy and power. The teacher completes this activity by offering all possible combinations (with adjectives that are not in the text) distinguishing between those used exclusively with each of the two given words and those that can be used with both. The result is an illustrative diagram (Figure 3):

![Diagram](image-url)
Activity 4

*Brainstorming.* The students are asked to give any possible combinations with verbs and nouns for the word *electricity*. The resulting diagram would look like the one illustrated in Figure 4.

![Verb + Electricity Diagram]

**Activity 5**

*Brainstorming.* The students are asked to give any possible combinations with adjectives for the word *resource*. The resulting diagram would look like the one illustrated in Figure 5.

![Adjective + Resource Diagram]
Activity 6

*Fill in the blanks.* The students are asked to use collocations discovered in the previous activities in order to fill in the blanks. The examples and solutions are given in Figure 6.

1. Wind and water are __________________ or __________________ resources.
2. These wind turbines are connected to the national electricity __________.
3. The bottom of the ocean still contains ________________ resources waiting to be exploited.
4. This plant ________________ enough electricity to illuminate half the country.
5. We did not pay the __________ last month, so the electricity was ____________.
6. We still have ____________ resources, if we only knew how to harness them.
7. Please, turn off that light and ____________ electricity. The ____________ have risen considerably lately.
8. We cannot survive without water, so it is considered a ____________ resource.
9. You have to repair the electricity ____________. There is no other light source here in the woods.
10. We need ____________ resources, if we are to spend another night in the wilderness.

Figure 6.

Activity 7

*Error correction.* The students are asked to correct the collocation errors. Here are a few examples and the solutions:

a. Our friends have a new sun heating system in their apartment.  
   **Correction:** solar heating system
b. Specialists are seeking alternative energy origins for houses and other buildings.  
   **Correction:** alternative energy sources
c. Solar power is an example of inexhaustible energy.  
   **Correction:** renewable energy

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5 For Activity 7 and Activity 8 we used examples from Felicity O’Dell’s *English Collocations in Use* (see selective bibliography for details).
Activity 8

Rewriting. The students are asked to rewrite the given sentences using collocations instead of long explanatory phrases. Here are a few examples and the solutions:

a. Fossil fuels have a very negative impact on the environment and long-lasting effects.
   Rewriting: are environmentally damaging
b. Wind energy is captured by means of special devices that convert the energy from the wind into electricity.
   Rewriting: wind turbines
c. Another type of renewable energy source is the one tapped from the Earth's internal heat.
   Rewriting: geothermal energy

To translate or not to translate?

Students have difficulties in recognizing and learning collocations for different reasons depending on culture and country. Some collocations make no sense to them because they may be related to cultural idiosyncrasies of a particular country, or they may contain words that cannot be found in the corresponding expression in the second language. That is why we normally employ translation in class. It is important to use the appropriate phrase correctly in both languages and be aware of their meaning. We insist on accurate translation of collocations and other expressions because, especially in professional fields, it is very important to know the exact expression in both languages. In law and science there is no room for error or confusion and this may easily happen simply because different cultures express differently similar ideas. Classic examples are the phrases to fall in love and rain cats and dogs.

There are very many examples of such possible confusions. In what follows, we will offer a few of them from science and law. They can be avoided by the simple act of offering, and even insisting on the Romanian correspondent and vice-versa.

dezvoltare durabilă = sustainable development
   NOT* durable development
ţesut conjunctiv = connective tissue
   NOT* conjunctive tissue

A particular example is the couple male / female which can be translated in three different ways into Romanian, depending on context, as illustrated below:
Conclusions

Over the past few years, teachers and theorists have developed more interest in vocabulary teaching and in elaborating more efficient methods in this regard. English for Specific Purposes is a field that relies heavily on specific lexicon and thus the interest in such methods is even greater in this domain. The highly specialized languages of science and law employ countless combinations of words and phrases which are specific to them and which may have a completely different meaning in common English. Thus, it is very important to raise students’ awareness of their existence and to induce inclination towards the study of such collocations as an important step in the direction of increased proficiency in communication and understanding in these two professional fields. Our paper made a few proposals in this regard suggesting types of activities developed especially for the scientific and legal register. We relied on our experience with natural sciences and law students and this taught us that making them aware of collocations and emphasizing their role in communication offers unexpectedly positive results and improves considerably their command of the English language in general, with direct consequences with regard to the specificity of their domain in particular.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


**ELECTRONIC SOURCES**