

## Auctioning Collocations

<b>Level</b>	upper intermediate to advanced
<b>Materials</b>	copies of lists of collocations and non-collocations, hammer (optional)

### Preparation

Look through the unit you have just finished, the current unit and the following unit, and pull out twelve to fifteen strong collocations. Suppose you have picked out, for example:

- essential tools
- similar techniques
- to walk down a street
- virtual world

For half the collocations chosen, create parallel non-collocations. For example:

- like techniques
- to walk down a forest

Now you have fourteen real collocations from the units and seven or eight non-collocations.

- 1** Assume the role of a showman. Explain that this is a 'collocations auction', and the students are going bid in pairs. There are over twenty items on sale: some are genuine and some are fakes. Each pair of auction-goers has \$10,000 to bid with.
- 2** Pair the students. Give out copies of the list and ask the pairs to decide which phrases they want to buy.  
  
Run the auction with all the razzmatazz you can muster, using language like:  
  
... beautiful collocation, flows off the tongue, priceless, what am I bid for **virtual world**? Lady in blue there at the back, two hundred dollars ... two hundred and fifty! Gentleman in front here, two hundred and fifty ... Any advances on two hundred and fifty, on two hundred and fifty? Going ... going ... GONE! (hammer comes down)
- 3** After selling off an item, briefly tell the group whether it is genuine or fake. But be sure to sell off the fakes with as much conviction as the authentic items.
- 4** At the end, make sure that everybody knows which are the good collocations and which are false ones.

### Variations

- a** You can auction a mixture of correct and incorrect sentences from the students' homework, as suggested in *Grammar Games* (Rinvolutri M, Cambridge, 1984).
- b** After working on a given structure, for example, the present perfect, you can auction a mixture of sentences like this:
  - I am here for five days. (correct, if the reference is future)
  - I am here since five days. (incorrect)
  - I've been here for five days. (correct)
  - I am here from five days. (incorrect)
- c** To teach new vocabulary, give the students a list of bilingual vocabulary with some of the translations correct and some incorrect. Here is a Spanish versus English list:

#### Spanish

mermelada  
periódico  
cuaderno  
librería

#### English

marmalade (should be 'jam')  
newspaper  
exercise book  
library (should be 'bookshop')

In this auction, the students only buy the correct translations.

**Acknowledgement:** I found auctioning being used in 1970's values clarification work and adapted it for language work. I discovered the idea in *A Practical Guide to Values Clarification* (Smith M, University Associates, La Jolla, California, 1977).