

Phraseology

An interdisciplinary perspective

Edited by

Sylviane Granger

Université catholique de Louvain

Fanny Meunier

Université catholique de Louvain

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The Good Lord and his works

A corpus-driven study of collocational resonance

Geoffrey C. Williams

The idiom principle outlined by John Sinclair has shown how much language consists of reused formulae of a collocational and colligational nature. Resonance seeks to look at the usage of words and expressions that have retained strong semantic prosodies from earlier usage, prosodies of which the current user may not necessarily be aware. It appears here as a very diffuse form of intertextuality with an initial move from contextual to restricted collocation followed by a gradual move to the purely formulaic. This chapter illustrates this by exploring certain key words from the New Testament to see how they have been used in the works of Shakespeare, the other most cited source in the English language, and finally how these expressions are used in the British National Corpus. Although having become almost purely formulaic, these expressions seem to retain sufficient religious resonance to give them their force.

1. Introduction

Intertextuality is essentially a literary tool seeking to see how the influence of an author may be found in later texts. It deals with elements that are largely what might be termed quotable, that is to say relatively large formulae that can be traced back through earlier works and assigned to an author. In addition to these intertextual elements, language also has a large share of other clearly identifiable items such as idioms and proverbs, but, as Sinclair (1991) has amply shown, the idiom principle is a dominant factor in our language output, which can only mean that a plethora of other reusable units exist.

The idiom principle covers a variety of repeatable forms, including what Moon (1998) has termed 'Fixed Expressions and Idioms' (FEIs). Of the FEIs, collocations are particularly insidious as they pervade language, but remain on a cline from free to restricted combinations and are far from easy to tie down. This is because collocation may take two forms: the restricted collocations that can be classified and put into dictionaries, and the contextual collocations which demonstrate thematic relationships within language. The two obviously overlap, the restricted collocation does not appear *ex nihilo*, but is formed by usage, the contextual collocation may be the source of restricted collocations later consecrated by usage, or remain purely thematic. Whilst

restricted collocations form variable units of language, contextual collocations can be seen to form networks of relations, collocational networks (Williams 1998) that display the essence of a text or corpus. Given that these networks illustrate a meaning environment it may be surmised that they will help in elucidating another form of intertextuality, collocational resonance.

Resonance may be defined as the reuse of lexical items or units of language in other contexts with a subconscious carry-over of meaning from an earlier collocational environment to another. The idea of resonance is that a particularly strong concept, expressed in a single word or a word complex, may enter the sub-conscious to such an extent that it becomes part of our repertoire of daily language without our realising it. We call the phenomenon 'resonance' because the initial word or unit can be seen within a collocational network that echoes through a widening lexical network of words and concepts, in which the inner node will influence its outer satellites. The semantic weight of the node will echo through the widening circles like a stone thrown into a pool with spreading ripples of meaning until the effect wears off at the outer limits. When the central node is found in another context it will retain some of its original contextual meanings, but the wider contextual environment will obviously change, thereby altering the value of both the node and its co-occurrences. An example of this can be seen with the following statement.

A bat's hooked teeth are thought to be specifically designed to provide the young with a secure attachment while the mother is in flight. (Scott 2005: 112–113)

The writer is a known zoologist who, like most modern scientists, works in a neo-Darwinian framework wherein evolution occurs through some form of selection. Normally a scientist defending a Darwinian view of evolution would be careful to use the verb 'evolve' rather than 'design', a creationist term. It is not that Scott has turned creationist, it is simply that in the UK the creation-evolution debate is a dead one and that Scott is simply unaware of the resonance carried over from a biblical reading of creation.

Although the main thrust of this ongoing research is into the nature of resonance within essentially scientific texts, the above quotation shows that a study of the text which is fundamental to western civilisation, the Bible, may well be of interest. Boswell (1791: 476) quotes an avowed atheist as saying that 'I was born in the wilds of Christianity, and the briars and thorns still hang about me'. In other words, the biblical resonance continues to affect his speech, even when in contradiction with his desired meaning. This then is the stuff of resonance,¹ the briars and thorns of our subconscious.

In this chapter, the New Testament has been chosen as the point of departure as, although we consciously quote extracts that may be seen as intertextual in everyday life,

1. *Stuff* of is also a form of resonance linking back to Shakespeare's Prospero 'We are such stuff As dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep' (Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, 1.1.111). This contextual collocation is now formulaically frequent as in the *stuff* of dreams.

language in the forms of 'briars and thorns' of meaning is much more pervasive. The idea of this text will be to see whether examples of resonance can be found in another fundamental of British culture, the works of Shakespeare, and in the modern context of the British National Corpus (BNC).

Source corpora and textual resources

The Bible is not a corpus; it fulfils none of the criteria of either a linguistic or literary corpus in terms of homogeneity and authorship. However, its authority, size and the availability of electronic versions make it a tempting area of study. This is all the more true given that it is also one of the first works to have been studied through a concordance, albeit a manual one (Kennedy 1998). Nevertheless, the Bible has attained the status of a single work in the western collective conscience, its history and the history of its translations giving it a form of folk unity. It also has a unique position in our civilisation as being considered as much a literary work as a religious one. The edition used here is King James, or Authorised Version, as this is possibly the most read in the United Kingdom and, although better translations have been made since, this translation, and its style of language, remains very much a reference. The edition used in this study is the electronic one that can be downloaded freely from the University of Virginia electronic text archive (<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/>).

The second source is the works of Shakespeare. This is for two reasons: first, the works are another central corpus in British literary tradition and are much studied in schools, thereby creating an additional source of resonance, and second, at this time, religion played a very central role in society. It must be stressed here that the methodology adopted is a corpus-driven exploration of New Testament collocational resonance and not a study of the influence of the Bible on the works of Shakespeare. The intertextual aspects of biblical usage and Shakespearean texts are the subject of literary and historical studies, but here they represent only a stage in the changing resonance values between an English translation of the Bible and current usage. The electronic version used here comes from the Oxford Text archive and is supplied with the BNC Baby² which, like the full BNC, can be obtained from the Oxford University website (<http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/>).

The third source used here is a genuine reference corpus, that is to say one that has been built using clearly defined criteria. The British National Corpus is a representative sample of modern British usage of English. It has been thoroughly classified so that concordance lines can be traced to different registers and genres.

2. The BNC Baby is a subset of the full corpus and consists of four sub-corpora, each of 1 million words in size. The subcorpora concern fiction, newspapers, academic discourse and spoken conversation.

The three 'corpora' have been analysed using three tools: WordSmith Tools, a suite of corpus analysis programmes developed by Mike Scott; SARA, the SGML-aware corpus exploration tool developed for the BNC; and XAIRA, the current XML aware concordancer used with the BNC and other XML marked up corpora.

3. Collocational resonance

Resonance draws on two theories of collocation; the lexical priming of Hoey (2005) and the collocational networks of Williams (1998). Lexical priming is described as the pervasive and subversive aspect of collocation in that our knowledge of words develops with the cumulative effects of encounters with other words to create expectancies that can shift over time.

Collocational networks show those encounters *in situ* in corpora such that the use of one word in a given context leads to expectations as to the surrounding lexical field. In this contextual theory of collocation we no longer talk of base and collocate in a relation of domination as all the lexical words in a network influence each other so that we have a relationship of modified to modified. It is important to note that collocational networks draw on a contextual approach to collocation and are more concerned with the thematic environment than with the restricted collocation of dictionaries. Networks are built using statistical means to extract significant co-occurrence. In scientific texts, mutual information (MI) is used as it is the rarer terminological elements that are sought, in literary texts z-score or simple raw frequency are often more appropriate. This phenomenon can be illustrated with the word *God* in the BNC where the MI rating finds *offer* and *Turhan* as the most significant collocates. The former occurs only twice and the second five times representing *Offer the crocodile God* and *The Great God Turhan Bey*. Such rare forms are of little use here whereas the top-scoring z-score items of *sake* and *bless*, occurring respectively 424 and 99, are of more immediate phraseological use.

Once a network has been extracted, the pairings of node and collocate are then explored for compounds, collocations and phraseological units which are used to explore the textual reality of the network, and can be entered in a glossary or dictionary depending on the needs of the project.

A collocational network is the first stage in analysing resonance as it shows the spreading influence of the node within a single-corpus environment. In resonance studies, the weight of the node is such that its meaning will be felt beyond immediate relationships, retaining some of its initial meaning even when expressed in very different contexts. It is thus necessary to look at the node, and some of the collocational units it forms, in other corpora so as to see the effect of these on other textual environments.

In the original studies on collocational networks, these were analysed in scientific texts and used for lexical extraction and the sub-categorisation (Williams 2002). The current work is part of ongoing studies that apply this approach to other types

of texts and seeks to see how contextual meaning in an authoritative text can influence meanings in other texts, with the user often unaware of the fact. This form of resonance pervades language and can even be felt in straightforward terminological practice where, within a given topic-specific discourse community, scientists from different disciplines will disagree over meanings. Such resonance may also, through more subtle forces of educational background, carry over meanings that are largely unconscious in all our language use.

3.1 New Testament resonance

In order to see the effects of resonance of New Testament formulae, we shall start with the central node of *God*. The first stage is to build a collocational network for a key or high frequency word, in this case *God*. Figure 1 shows the collocates of what is, unsurprisingly, the most frequent lexical unit in the New Testament.

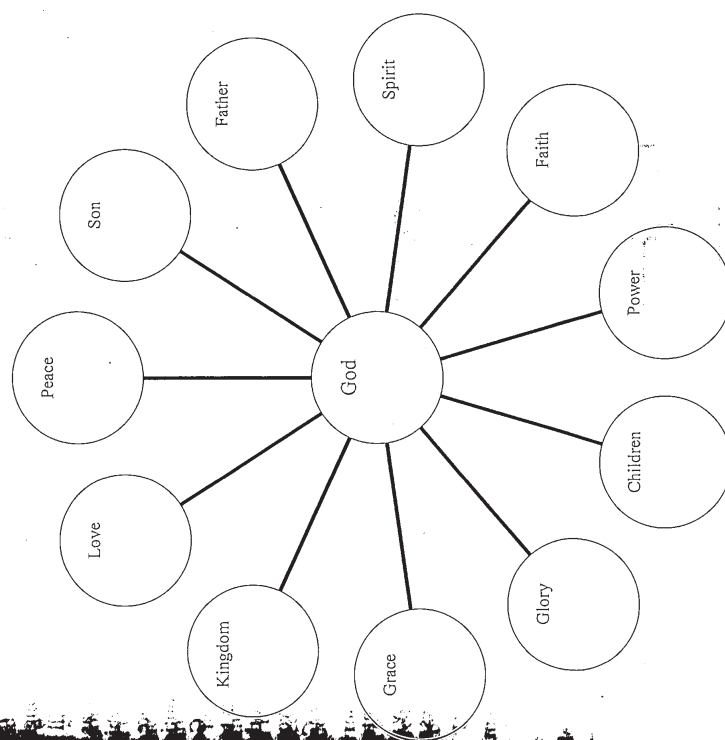


Figure 1. Immediate collocational network for *God* in the New Testament

Table 1. Possible categorisation of immediate collocates of 'God' in the New Testament

Gifts	Relationships	Authority	Spirituality
Peace	Father	Kingdom	Spirit
Love	Son	Power	Glory
Grace	Children		Faith

A thematic analysis can be carried out by categorising the lexical relationships between the central node and its contextual collocates. In this way we could, for instance, establish a categorisation on the attributes of God or the relationship with his son. This analysis gives us the thematic environment that is necessary to understand resonance. The results can be categorised in various ways to show, for example, important themes such as the gifts of God, relationships between God and others, his authority and notions of spirituality (Table 1).

In the theory of collocational networks, it is necessary to go beyond the immediate collocates to build a bigger thematic picture. The diagram in Figure 2 shows how this second degree of collocates reinforces and develops the themes found through a categorisation of the immediate collocates. It is obvious that at this level there will be linkage between categories, but at the same time we find enlargement of themes as in the addition of the gift of mercy and a reinforcement of the notion of identity which leads to a new level of authority. The *son of God* is also the *son of David*, therefore in the terrestrial line of the Kings of Israel. Similarly *Kingdom* takes us beyond the notion of authority to a place which may be entered. Through *spirit* we name the son of God and give the authority of *Lord*. This complexification of the categorisation leads to a more complete picture of the meaning environment that must then be traced in other texts. The exploration of the relationships between lexical units also takes us beyond the contextual environment leading to the discovery of multi-word units such as *God the Father* or *Son of God*.

To understand these it is not sufficient to just list them, they must be put into a textual environment so as to see how they are being used rather than just that they are used. As we shall see later, the development of collocation means that in some cases we

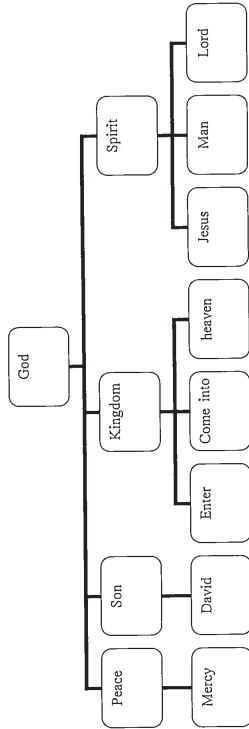


Figure 2. Diagram showing a development of four immediate collocates of God

shall also find that contextual collocates have developed into restricted collocates **with** the change of cultural environment.

Let us start, as in other contexts, with the local network for *God* in Shakespeare, **followed** by that of the British National Corpus.

3.2. Shakespearean resonance

Shakespeare may not have read the King James Version, but he certainly had access to the Bible in English. Britain was, by then, a thoroughly protestant country with preaching in the vernacular. Protestant Christianity was the religion of the state, but by this time the absolute fear of hell and damnation had given way to a slightly more relaxed view of religion: to be an atheist would have been dangerous, but the Lord's name could be taken more in vain than in earlier periods. This means that a Shakespearean viewpoint of resonance will be of interest before moving towards contemporary usage.

The immediate network for *God* (Figure 3) already shows differences with that found in the New Testament. If we try and categorise these collocates (Table 2) we find only one adjective, the rest consists of verbs for which it is not the actions of God that are described, but more invocations of the deity. The adjective is a title of *God* reinforcing the power of the deity, an idea present in the New Testament collocates with the formula *Lord God Almighty*. Looking at the concordances shows that whereas in the Bible the collocational environment could be expanded, it is not the case here; we are already in the use of formulae.

Table 3 shows how the resonance has decreased in some cases, but remains stable in others. Compared to their New Testament usage, in Shakespearean texts, there is a clear move from a request for direct intervention to an invocation of God as assistance, protection or as witness. God is directly present in the New Testament; in Shakespeare the deity represents an external force. God is still present, but the resonance is weaker. The most used formulae are much closer to what we might see as modern usage; *thank God* is an expression of relief that something has or has not happened, *God forbid* is a desire that something will not happen. How exactly these are used in modern parlance will be seen later.

The same move away from direct involvement of God may be seen if we look at the main collocates from the New Testament shown in Table 4.

Table 2. Categorisation of collocates of 'God' in the works of Shakespeare

Action of invoker	Actions of God	Naming Adjective
Thank	Defend	Almighty
Pray	Forbid	
	Knows	
	Bless	
	Save	

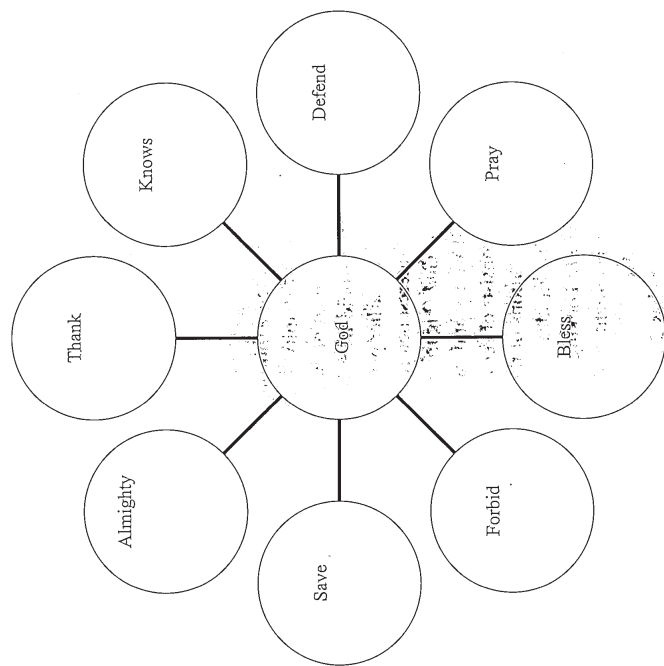
Figure 3. *God* in Shakespeare

Table 3. Comparison between the main formulae from Shakespearean use in the New Testament

	Bible	Sense	Shakespeare	Sense
Thank + God	I thank (my) God	Literal thanks	(I) thank God	Relief
Pray + God	I pray God (that)	Something will not happen	'Pray God'	Invoking God as witness
Defend + God	None		'God defend me'	Invoking God for protection
Forbid + God	God forbid (that)	May something not happen	'God forbid' (that)	May something not happen
Know(s) + God	Know not God	'We' know God	God knows	Invoking God as witness
Bless + God	Bless we God	'We' thank God	God bless (them)	Invoking blessing from God
Save + God	Save God	Save = except	God save (you/the King)	Invoking God for protection

Table 4. Comparison between the main formulae from the New Testament in Shakespeare

	Bible	Sense	Shakespeare	Sense
Peace + God	'peace from God'	Internal peace as a gift	Make peace with God	Settle your moral situation
Love + God	God loves us	Reciprocal love as affection	'For the love of God'	Imploping someone to do, or not do, sth.
	We love God			
Grace + God	'By the grace of God'	Gift	'by the grace of God'	Putting oneself at his mercy
Faith + God	Faith in God	Gift	Break faith to God	Revolt

Table 5. From contextual to restricted collocation in the New Testament and Shakespeare

Shakespeare	New Testament
God have mercy	Association of God as source of mercy 13x
God be thanked	Association of God as source of bounty 30x
God of love	Association of God and love of people for God and love of God for his people. 39x

As can be seen in Table 4, only four of the 11 collocates are to be found. These are far from frequent in Shakespearean texts, but once again God is simply invoked as an outside force, whereas in the biblical context we are more concerned with the gifts of God to man.

Another interesting factor in looking at the collocates in Shakespeare and the Bible is the move from the contextual to the restricted collocation. The latter are often treated as if created *ex nihilo*, whereas the former seems to be more a move from a strong contextual link to a semantic attraction between the two elements. In the case of resonance, this also seems to lead to a lessening of the original semantic strength of the individual elements and a move to the purely formulaic (Table 5).

In the case of *God be thanked* we are at the intermediary stage to the formula *thank God*, where the real reference to God as opposed to a simple expression of relief is well underway.

The works of Shakespeare, like the Bible, are not a corpus in the sense of corpus linguistics. We can only see how God is portrayed in Shakespeare, but have no means of knowing how the deity was spoken of in daily life. However, it is obvious that the usage found in Shakespeare was acceptable to his audience, and that we can therefore surmise that the formulae in daily use simply invoked God, with a more or less strong feeling of religiosity. To see whether we are moving to the purely formulaic we can turn to the British National Corpus.

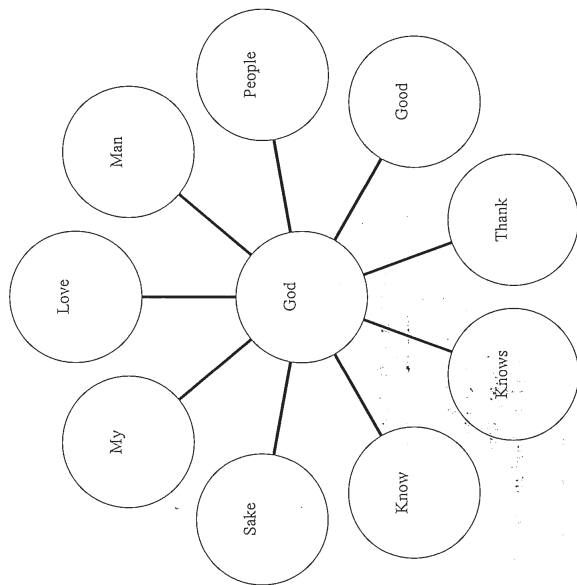


Figure 4. God in the BNC

3.3 God in the BNC

The BNC is a fully fledged reference corpus, which means that it is possible to sub-categorise to see not only how a formula is being used, but by whom. The immediate network for 'God' has however been calculated for the entire corpus (Figure 4).

What is immediately notable is the dominance of the formulaic; *Good God*, *My God*, *Thank God*. The other forms seem to be more contextual collocation in nature (Table 6).

The biblical context of these collocations is largely contextual; with the exception of *My God* there is little in the way of formulaic expression. With *good + God* we have a clear move from the contextual to restricted collocation, *good* moves from being an attribute or God or any act that is desirable to being a formula of surprise with little religious connotation. However, what is also clear is that we have two groups of collocation, those that remain collocational, *love*, *man*, *people*, and those, such as with *good*, *sake* and *thank*, which have developed into formulaic expressions. The former all retain a religious connotation in the BNC whereas the latter have little religious resonance.

We shall look in more detail at four formulae; two from the BNC context, *My God*, *Good God* and two that are shared by the New Testament and the Shakespearean context, *God forbid* and *thank God*.

Table 6. Collocates of God in the BNC

	Bible	Sense	BNC	Sense
Good God	He that doeth good is of God	Contextual. Do good or have good done	He had to burn them, Good God.	Expression of great surprise or relief
Know + God	They know God	Literal. Have knowledge and recognise.	God knows how/what...	Expression of inability to understand
Love + God	Love of God	Reciprocal love as affection	God's love, love of God	Predominantly religious context
Man + God	If any man love God	Relationship of man to God	Man of God, Man and God	Predominantly religious context
My + God	I thank my God	Relationship of man to God	Oh My God!	Expression of surprise, horror or complaint
People + God	People of God	Relationship of man to God	People of God	Predominantly religious context
Sake + God	For God/Jesus's sake	To act in the interest of God	For God's sake	Expression to show annoyance
Thank + God	I thank (my) God	Literal thanks	Thank God nothing more by me needs be said.	Expression to show relief

My God

"Oh, my God, Charlie she screamed"

My God is a frequent expression expressing surprise, horror or complaint. It is generally the negative aspect that dominates which collocates, pointing to problems of all types. This formula occurs 1136 times in the corpus as a whole with an even split between spoken and written contexts. The contexts are however invariably dialogue with the written sources being almost exclusively reported dialogue. The expression takes a thematic role.

Good God

"Good God" we said, Are you serious?"

Good God is far less frequent occurring only 335 times. Usage is evenly divided between spoken and written types. The sense is generally one of surprise, or great surprise with the addition of *almighty*. The situation is generally an undesirable one, but not in all cases. The spoken type is dialogue and in a majority of cases rhematic, the problem is outlined and the utterance ends with the expression. The written types are also dialogue, with an even mix of thematic and rhematic usage.

God forbid

"*God forbid that they should seek to exercise control over AMB*"

God forbid occurs only 66 times in the entire corpus. Its use may be rhematic to show that the situation described is potentially disastrous or thematic with the formula *God forbid that*. . . . Usage is both written and spoken, but the former represents the majority of cases in the BNC. Written usage is invariably to argue a case and to persuade the reader; the style of writing being closer to the spoken. The writer is clearly developing a dialogue with the reader.

Thank God

"*Thank God it's Saturday!*"

Thank God is a relatively frequent formula occurring some 560 times. The general sense is that there is relief that something untoward has not happened. The vast majority of examples are of spoken language-style, although the texts are mostly written sources. This would imply that, whilst *Thank God* is a largely spoken formula, it is widely seen as characteristic of current language and as such made use of in novels.

In all four situations *God* is invoked as a source of aid, but the contexts do not show any expectation of real assistance. We are in the realm of spontaneous or literary spontaneous speech with highly formulaic language. The degree of religious resonance is minimal in these forms, but remains strong in written-to-be-read sources. The Bible is still a much read and discussed text in contemporary English, resonance in its most basic forms comes through with the use of fixed formulae. Further research would be needed to locate the more subtle forms of the briars and thorns of resonance.

4. Diminishing resonance: Shakespeare and the BNC

In the New Testament the formula *God Almighty* is used only to name *God* in collocation with *Lord*. In Shakespeare, it has three uses: a call for assistance – *God Almighty help me* (*Henry VI, Part 2*), invoking the name of *God* – *He wills you, in the name of God Almighty* (*The Life of Henry V*) and a form of salutation, also in *The Life of Henry V* – *Good morrow, Brother Bedford, God Almighty*. It may well be that, apart from very precise situations, an Elizabethan playwright would refrain from invoking the name of *God*. This is not so in modern occurrences where it is purely an exclamation of surprise. If the surprise is great then *good* is added as in *Good God Almighty*. This is a serious loss of resonance leaving a largely empty spoken formula.

However, with *God forbid* we do not have so severe a loss of resonance, although the invocation of *God* may be purely formulaic. The formula is essentially thematic implying that something is so bad it should not be envisaged. The same thematic usage and connotation is found in all texts from the New Testament through to the BNC, it is simply that in more recent usage the contextual environment shows no real appeal

to *God*. In Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* the formula retains a real appeal to *God* as shown by the use of *heaven* in the co-text.

- (1) "From heaven! Alas, sir, I never came there: God forbid I should be so bold to press heaven in" (*Timon of Athens*).

In the BNC, we find the expression:

- (2) "God forbid anything should happen to their children, never mind their house or their car" (Book on Social Sciences)

The list of priorities is interesting. This textual environment has little religious connotation and the priorities are strictly earthly.

The last example is that of thanking *God*. This is an interesting move from a contextual collocation to a lexical unit. In the Bible the formula *Thank God* is rare, and does not appear at all in Shakespeare. In the Bible the literal meaning of giving thanks is carried by the pronouns *I* and *We*, someone is literally thanking for some blessing received. In Shakespeare we have *God, I thank*, but this occurs only once, in the *MERCHANT OF VENICE*. In the BNC however, the formula is frequent, but given that the degree of resonance is low, this is purely a formulaic expression of relief that something has or has not happened. Once again the nearest we get to the biblical sense is in the use of the personal pronoun, but even here the idea that it is *God* who is really being thanked is unlikely. The formula is largely empty; the resonance virtually zero.

Why has the religious resonance largely disappeared? Could it be that familiarity breeds contempt, and that this underlies the decline in religiosity? While it is true that there has been a decline in church attendance since 1945, it is also true that the underlying influence of protestant Christianity remains a factor in British identity (Weight 2002). It could then just be that the Bible and hymn singing have been part of Anglo-Saxon culture since the reformation, which means that there is no contempt, just familiarity. It could also be that a bigger corpus, such as the full BNC or the Bank of English, is needed. These are, however, tracks that I leave open for someone else to explore, someone, who, perhaps, wants to use resonance as a factor in the study of British civilisation.

However, although we have diminishing resonance in many cases, it is apparent that the religious collocational value, and hence resonance, does remain; without it these locutions would have lost all value. There is however a clear diminishing of resonance over time. Is this a diachronic factor?

It would be presumptuous to say that as we move further in time from the missionary days of early Christianity the religious factor inevitably lessens. If a true diachronic study was carried out we would find, throughout time, periods of religious revival, and more secular periods. It is possible that our current comfortable world, in Western Europe, has led to a decline in religiosity, but it is also possible that a crisis could bring a return to these values. The only way to get a clear picture is to be able to control all the parameters, context of culture and context of situation, through a well-constructed diachronic corpus. This does not exist, and it is not even possible to build one as we

cannot go back in time to seek the lost lay texts and spoken data to complement that which we possess for modern corpora. We can of course do more in-depth studies in which we clarify the contexts as much as possible, but that is not the task I have set myself here. The important factor in this study is that we go beyond literary intertextuality to attempt to gain an insight into this very much more diffuse area of collocational resonance, where meanings are carried over time at both conscious and subconscious levels. In the same way that a well-constructed corpus can give access to 'langue' in the Saussurean sense (Tognini Bonelli 2001: 159), so a corpus can show our subconscious use of meanings, the strength and origins of which we may be unaware and which carry values to which we may not consciously subscribe.

However, in undertaking any corpus analysis, it is vital to bear in mind the nature of the corpora being used. As underlined earlier, the Bible is not a corpus, the works of Shakespeare, neither, only the BNC can be truly considered as a corpus in corpus linguistic terms. The other problem with this heterogeneous collection of sources is that we often lack the context of culture. Only a full knowledge of the conditions of creation and the environment of use will allow a complete understanding of a text, and consequently of any changes of meaning that may occur over time. In a true intertextual study such background research is generally carried out, what is generally missing is the corpus-driven analysis that will reveal aspects of lexico-grammatical usage that will not be clearly visible to the eye.

Corpus linguistics is not about purely quantitative studies, the qualitative element remains essential; there should be a constant movement between the corpus and the text so as to gain a fuller insight. In combining classical intertextuality with the corpus-driven notion of collocational resonance, we might have a tool that will open new vistas in understanding the link between language and collective memory.

The problem with collocation is its ordinariness. We have an acknowledged continuum from free to bound, the bound end is always studied, the middle is much discussed for dictionary and teaching use, but always with an emphasis on the most bound parts. This leaves the greater part of collocation as too ordinary for study; however, the commonplace may be too easily overlooked and contain important clues as to language use. Thus *God forbid* may be standard use in English, but why and how has it developed and what meaning content does it hold?

5. Conclusion

It is clear that the value given to the units varies over time and context of situation. The first fundamental difference with other contexts is that in the Bible we have the revelation of the relationship of God with his son, who is deemed literally present; in Shakespeare the invocation of God is through the mediation of Christianity. However, we also find that the invocation of the deity may already in some cases be purely mechanical. *God forbid*, for instance, can simply mean that something is not considered desirable. By the time we get to the BNC, these oral expressions are purely formulaic,

which does not necessarily mean that all religious meaning has gone, but that the ready invocation of a deity is no longer part of our current means of expression, at least in British English.

It must be borne in mind that this is ongoing research so the conclusions are far from definitive. However, it is clear that contextual collocation is an important factor in the organisation of language. Collocational knowledge can act as a stimulus for information retrieval, but with the value given to the collocational unit varying with factors of time and context. Collocational resonance does imply, though, that we may not always be aware of meanings that we carry over from earlier learnt contexts. This study has looked at a biblical source. It will be interesting to see what this influence had on the language of Darwin as a next step into the study of collocational resonance in science texts.

The final word however concerns the Bible, and must go to a child: 'A Christian charity is sending a film about the Christmas story to every primary school in Britain after hearing a young boy who asked why Mary and Joseph had named their baby after a swear word.'³ 'Out of the mouth of babes', but that is idiom, not resonance.

Acknowledgements

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Software

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 XAIRA: <http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/rts/xaira/>

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