

Metaphorical Potential of Lexical Collocations: the Case of the Noun *Prilika*

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V prispevku obravnavamo značilnosti kolokacijske povezanosti znotraj leksikalnih kolokacij, pri čemer je vsaj ena komponenta metaforična. Z uporabo hrvaškega spletnega korpusa hrWaC in orodja *SketchEngine* (funkcija *WordSketch*) sistematično preučujemo najbolj tipične kolokacije in besedne kombinacije, ki vključujejo polisemantični abstraktni samostalnik *prilika*. Na podlagi analize tako morfosintaktičnih kot semantičnih procesov znotraj kolokacijske povezave ugotavljamo, da ti procesi prispevajo h koheziji med kolokatorjem in osnovo, kar posledično krepi povezovanje leksemov v leksikalno kolokacijo.

This paper examines the nature of collocational bonds within lexical collocations where at least one component is metaphorical. Using the Croatian web corpus *hrWaC* and the *SketchEngine* (*WordSketch* function), we systematically investigate the most typical collocations and word combinations involving the polysemous abstract noun 'prilika'. Based on the analysis of both morphosyntactic and semantic processes within the collocational bond, we conclude that these processes contribute to the cohesion between the collocate and base, thereby strengthening the bonding of lexemes into a lexical collocation.

Ključne besede: metaforične kolokacije, konceptualizacija, leksikalizacija, semantične omejitve

Key words: metaphorical collocations, conceptualization, lexicalization, semantic restrictions

1 Introduction

The collocational bonds between two or more lexical units at the syntagmatic level are subject to certain semantic restrictions resulting in a specific word combination usually referred to as a *lexical collocation* (Benson 1993: 10).¹

¹ Benson (1993: 9–11) distinguishes between grammatical and lexical collocations. Grammatical collocations are considered to be words consisting of an autosemantic

This is commonly defined as a combination of words that occur in the same construction with a frequency that is not left to chance (Biber et al. 1999). Numerous linguistic studies have attempted to explain the semantic restrictions influencing collocations, however challenges remain as to providing a comprehensive answer to this question. Up to now, there has been no uniform definition of collocation due to different approaches leading to varied definitions. Previous research on collocation, nevertheless, has provided two approaches, namely the narrow one and the broad one. In the broad view, collocation is seen as any combination of words that are both syntactically and semantically compatible. A criterion for determining collocation hereby is frequency of occurrence. This perspective is associated with J. R. Firth (1957: 10) and contextualism, emphasizing the concept's similarity to co-occurrence. The narrow approach, too, considers frequency of occurrence but defines collocations as typical, conventional, and recursive lexical combinations (Caro Cedillo 2004: 97). It introduces a semantic aspect, stating that collocations have a phraseological meaning in the broadest sense (Fleischer 1997; Burger 1998). In effect, this approach addresses the challenge of distinguishing free word combinations from collocations and collocations from idioms. Especially in lexicography, this approach is considered crucial as it distinguishes between different types of multiword expressions (MWEs),² which is essential for lemmatization (Kosem et al., 2020: 2–3; Hudeček and Mihaljević, 2020: 81–84). In this regard, hybrid methods that combine data processing with other criteria, such as evaluations by native speakers and contrastive approaches, have been reported as helpful in defining collocations for lexicographical purposes (Orlandi and Giacomini, 2016: 10–11). Regarding the phraseological approach, the distinction between collocations and free word combinations on the one hand, and between collocations and idioms on the other, is based on the degree of stability and idiomaticity, acknowledging the flexible boundaries between certain types of combinations (Reder, 2006). Petrović (2008: 589) defines collocations by emphasizing their firmer and more restrictive cohesive character compared to free word combinations. Collocations have a very limited or non-existent possibility of substituting constituents due to the restricted choice of potential constituents that can enter into a syntagmatic relationship with the other constituent of the collocation. Replacing one constituent of a collocation can lead to the creation of new collocations with entirely new meanings. This underscores the sensitivity and intricacy of collocational relationships. The

word (verb, noun or adjective) and a synsemantic word (preposition), e.g. *to be fond of*. Lexical collocations consist of two autosemantic words (for example verb + noun, adjective + noun, adverb + verb), such as *to come to an agreement*, *weak tea*, *affect deeply*.

² As to the expression of MWE, it is useful to consider the results of a project UniDive COST Action (Universality, Diversity and Idiosyncrasy in Language Technology, <https://unidive.lisn.upsaclay.fr/doku.php?id=wg1:wg1>) where the approach to MWE includes a range of linguistic phenomena with the common property of idiomaticity (Savary et al. 2023).

narrow approach to defining collocations is for this reason based on semantic criteria. It involves a hierarchical relationship between the constituents of the collocation, where one constituent represents the base (semantically autonomous and cognitively superior), while the other constituent (collocate) is semantically dependent and cognitively subordinate to the former constituent, defining specific features, circumstances, or actions associated with the base (Hausmann 1984: 118). The meaning of the base is specified through its co-occurrence with the collocate, which is crucial for the realization of a collocation (Blagus Bartolec 2014: 93). According to relevant literature, the base in a collocation is frequently represented by a noun. For example, in the Croatian collocation *okorjeli neženja* ('confirmed bachelor'), *neženja* (bachelor) is the base expressing the basic meaning, and the adjective *okorjeli* ('hardened') functions as the collocate (Hausmann 2007: 226). This example also illustrates the idiosyncratic nature of collocational relations. In the Croatian collocation, the collocate is *kora* ('bark'), whereas in the German equivalent, it is *eingefleischt* ('carved into flesh'). The different collocates convey distinct images, showing the language-specific and arbitrary nature of collocational choices. The example further demonstrates that, despite different linguistic expressions, the basic meaning ('long-time bachelor') is described through features related to spatial dimensions, such as thickness, depth, or protrusion in space (Geld and Stanojević 2018: 41). The variation in lexicalization between languages, as seen in the Croatian and German examples, suggests arbitrariness in the way languages express the same extra-linguistic reality (Stojić 2019). According to Konecny (2010: 1217), different conceptualizations, representing various cognitive accesses to the same reality, play a pivotal role in the divergences observed in collocations. The mechanism of combining the base and collocate in a bond leads to a restriction where the collocate is selected to express a particular meaning depending on the base. In collocational bonds, the base retains its usual meaning, while the meaning of the collocate is diverted in favor of the meaning of the base. This leads to a predetermined and conventionalized choice of words in established collocations. The speaker's choice of words in collocations is influenced by how they conceptualize the extralinguistic reality. The choice is not arbitrary, especially in the case of conventionalized collocations. The example of *crno vino* ('black wine') in Croatian illustrates how a color metaphor influences collocational choices. Despite the possibility of using "red" wine, the conventional term is *crno vino* due to a color metaphor associating 'dark' with 'black'. This leads us to conclude that the process of collocation formation adheres to a pattern in which extralinguistic reality is lexicalized through the use of metaphors that motivate meaning, thereby contributing to the bonding of words to form a collocation. This would mean that collocation is not an arbitrary connection; rather, metaphor has played a significant role in establishing connections between words. This connection is viewed as a synchronic result of the development of meaning.

1.1 *Metaphorical collocations*

Several recent scholarly works (Deignan 2005; Philipp 2011; McCarthy and O'Dell 2017; Goutraux 2017; Dai, Wu and Xu 2019 and others) have recognized the presence of collocations with one component expressing a metaphor. Such word combinations are referred to as metaphorical collocations, however clear definitions or tacit assumptions as to what is meant by them are not given in these works (Patekar 2022). Only a few authors (Reder 2006; Volungevičienė 2008; Konecny 2010; Stojić and Košuta 2022) consider collocations with a metaphorical component a subtype of collocations and provide a detailed description of them. Reder (2006: 161) asserts that a component used in the figurative sense in a metaphorical collocation is used in the literal sense in a free word combination. The distinction between literal and transferred meaning is context-dependent, based on a similarity relation. Volungevičienė (2008: 295) suggests that metaphorical collocations are often based on dead metaphors, which are no longer perceived as metaphors from a synchronic point of view. These metaphors are fully lexicalized and conventionalized. Konecny (2010: 602) identifies two types of semantic relation in collocations based on conceptual relation: the contiguity relation (metonymy) illustrated by examples such as *pay on hand*, where the transfer occurs within the same extra-linguistic semantic frame, and the similarity relation (metaphor) exemplified by collocations such as *time flies*, linking concepts from different extra-linguistic semantic frames. Konecny's explanation (2010: 294) derives from the Conceptual Metaphor Theory by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) who define metaphors as the understanding and experiencing of one thing in terms of another, involving an abstract meaning becoming concrete through metaphorization. Lakoff (2008) suggests that metaphors structure thoughts and actions, which is reflected not only in one-word metaphors but also in lexicalized fixed word combinations, exemplified by expressions like *argue to win*, *knock down the opponent*, *defend positions*, *use strategies* in the concept ARGUING IS WAR. Metonymic expressions, like metaphors, structure language, thought, and action, with metonymy using one entity to refer to another (Lakoff and Johnson 2003: 51). An example is *to give someone a hand*, where the figurative meaning is based on the association of workers using their hands. Konecny (2010) concludes that the conveyed meaning of the collocate is realized only in the collocation, depending on co-occurrence with a specific base. The collocate precisely determines the meaning in semantic terms. Consequently, ambiguity, as discussed by Stojić and Košuta (2021: 88), is not just contextual but is inherent in the language system and is part of conventional knowledge. Lexicalized metaphor strengthens the semantic cohesion (interdependence) between the components of the bond, making it easier to grasp the meaning of the collocation quicker. The lexicalized nature of metaphors may contribute to the perception of collocations as inconspicuous idiosyncratic linguistic phenomena (Stojić and Košuta 2020: 153).

1.2 Hypothesis and goal

The assumption that conducting a semantic and pragmatic analysis of metaphorical collocations could yield new insights into both the processes of collocation formation and the regularities of selective combination has led the extended research project entitled “Metaphorical Collocations – Syntagmatic Word Combinations between Semantics and Pragmatics,” carried out by the Croatian Science Foundation, to make precisely this their main goal. The research project is guided by the hypothesis that the analysis of collocational profiles will reveal recurrent patterns of collocations that can explain the established association of words into collocation. The validation of this hypothesis require extensive corpus research carried out to identify and describe metaphorical collocations in the Croatian language. The *hrWaC*³ network corpus, comprising texts from the Croatian Internet domain, serves as the primary source for this investigation. The research utilizes the *SketchEngine*⁴ computer tool (Ljubešić and Klubička, 2014), which facilitates empirical access to authentic data, enabling the extraction and analysis of collocational data. This approach allows for the testing of hypotheses and has the potential to yield new theoretical insights into the principles of collocation formation. The overarching goal of the research project is to contribute to the development of a theory of metaphorical collocations, drawing on empirical findings and theoretical insights derived from the analysis.

While previous observations primarily focused on the semantic role of the collocate in determining the meaning of the base, this article redirects attention to examining the behavior of collocates when they co-occur with a polysemous and abstract base that has undergone metaphorization. To this extend, the noun *prilika* has been chosen for more detailed analysis as the examination of collocational profiles in the Croatian corpus *hrWaC* has shown that the noun *prilika* exhibits specific features derived from its metaphorical meaning. The findings suggest the possibility of the abstract meaning of the base, particularly the metaphorical meaning, playing a crucial role in collocation formation. This implies that the metaphorical aspect of the base significantly contributes to the cohesion and relationships observed within collocations. The analysis aims to explore and understand how the metaphorical meaning of an abstract base, in this case the noun *prilika*, influences and contributes to the bonding and relationships within collocations.

³ The web corpus likely contains a diverse range of language use from the Croatian web, providing a rich dataset for linguistic analysis.

⁴ *SketchEngine* is a tool used for corpus linguistics that allows researchers to explore and analyze patterns of word use in large bodies of text.

2 Corpus and Methodology

The Croatian web corpus *hrWaC* is used as the data source for collecting and analyzing collocations. The analysis is conducted using the *SketchEngine* application, relying specifically on the *WordSketch* function which is designed to display the most typical collocations and word combinations based on a given corpus. Results are classified into categories of grammatical relations, such as words serving as the object or subject of a verb, adjectives modifying the word, and others. These categories help organize and analyze the relationships between words in collocations. The current study serves as an extension of a prior in-depth analysis focusing on the most frequent noun in the Croatian corpus, *godina* ('year'), as outlined in the work by Stojić and Košuta in 2022. The former study identified six grammatical relations that are pertinent to the ongoing investigation: “kakav?” ('modifiers of x'), “n-koga-čega” ('nouns modified by x'), “koga-što” ('verbs with x as object'), “subjekt_od” ('verbs with x as subject'), “particip” ('participle as modifiers of x'), “biti_kakav?” ('adjective predicates of x'). The collocational profiles obtained are in the present study analyzed manually using concordances, allowing for a detailed examination of its usage. The analysis involves identifying text passages that answer questions about variables in the pre-meaning of emerging metaphorical collocations. This process helps uncover the semantic nuances and contextual variations in the use of *prilika* in different collocational contexts. The corpus analysis is conducted qualitatively, however, with complementary consideration of recurrence frequency when interpreting the results. This approach allows for a systematic examination of linguistic patterns and metaphorical expressions in the given corpus.

3 Results and Interpretation

The *WordSketch* results for the search item *prilika* in *hrWaC* show a total of 371,842 hits. Figure 1 presents a visualization of the obtained collocates, displaying both their frequency and typicality score (*logdice-score*).⁵ The typicality score reflects the strength of the collocation, with a higher score indicating a stronger collocation.

⁵ *LogDice* can be thought of as “typicality”. A high score means that the collocate is frequently found with the base and there are not many other bases with which the collocate is combined. In this case, it is a strong collocation. A low score means that the collocate tends to combine not only with that specific base, but with many other words. In this case, it is a weak collocation.



Figure 1. Visualization of the collocates of the noun *prilika* (provided by Sketch Engine)

In the visualization, the font size, together with the size of the circle, represents the frequency of the collocate in combination with the noun *prilika* in the corpus. The proximity to the lemma *prilika* in the center of the visualization indicates the *logdice-score*, where a higher score suggests a stronger collocation. For instance, the combination with *imati* (‘to have’) is the most frequent in the corpus, while the combination with *iskoristiti* (‘to use’) is the most typical. The two most frequent grammatical relations in forming collocations with the noun *prilika* are the relation “koga-što” (‘verbs with x as object’) with a total of 189,983 hits (marked in pink), followed by the relation “kakov?” (‘modifiers of x’) with a total of 100,422 hits (marked in light green). Other relevant relations, such as “subjekt_od” (‘verbs with x as subject,’ marked in turquoise), “particip” (‘participle as modifiers of x,’ marked in light green), and “biti_kakov?” (‘adjective predicates of x,’ marked in yellow), show a lower degree of productivity.

The analysis of the obtained collocational profiles revealed a prevalence of collocations with the noun *prilika* in four syntactic relations:

- (1) Adjective + *prilika*, represented by the grammatical relation “kakov?” (‘modifiers of x’) (95 out of 158 lemmas, i.e., 60.13%),
- (2) Verb + *prilika* as the object, represented by the grammatical relation “koga-što” (36 out of 199 lemmas, i.e., 18.09%),
- (3) *Prilika* as the subject + verb, represented by the grammatical relation “subjekt_od” (15 out of 50 lemmas, i.e., 30%), and
- (4) Nouns modified by *prilika*, represented by the grammatical relation “n-koga-čega” (22 out of 75 lemmas, i.e., 29.3%).

The latter relation also includes 21 deverbal nouns already discovered in the relation “koga-što,” which is why they are not included in the statistics of point 4. These examples, along with the examples from the grammatical relations

“biti_kakav?” (‘adjective predicates of x’) and “particip” (‘participle as modifiers of x’), which also represent modified forms, are reduced to the common basic form given in the grammatical relation “koga-što” (‘verbs with x as an object’).

Regarding the meaning of the noun *prilika*, the analysis of the collocational profiles shows that it is used as the base in collocations with four main meanings: 1. “situacija” (‘situation’), 2. “okolnost” (‘circumstance’), 3. “mogućnost” (‘possibility’), and 4. “šansa” (‘chance’). Additionally, the meaning of “šansa” (‘chance’) can be used metonymically, e.g., “on/ona je prilika” (‘he/she is a good catch’). Furthermore, two collocations – *svečana prilika* (‘festive occasion’) and *posebna prilika* (‘special occasion’) – could be interpreted as having meanings similar to “povod” (‘motive’). However, we cannot confirm this interpretation as definitive, since these examples appear to result from a blending of the meanings ‘motive’ (“povod”) and ‘occasion’ (“okolnost”), with the latter being more prevalent in contemporary usage. This interpretation is supported by statistical data from our corpus study: among 87 lemmas, 42 primarily convey the meaning ‘occasion’ in their collocations.

The analysis of the collocational profiles also revealed specific morphological and semantic features, as well as relevant semantic processes in the four most frequent syntactic structures mentioned above. They are presented in the following paragraphs.

3.1 “Kakav?” (‘modifiers of x’)

3.1.1 Morphological and semantic features

This grammatical relation provides six different types of collocation regarding morphological and semantic features:

- (1) *izgledna prilika* (‘probable opportunity/chance’),
- (2) *dobra prilika* (‘great chance, good opportunity; (good) catch’),
- (3) *povoljna prilika* (‘favorable opportunity; favorable chance’),
- (4) *posebna prilika* (‘special occasion’),
- (5) *vremenske prilike* (‘weather conditions’),
- (6) *nepovoljne prilike* (‘unfavorable circumstances’).

Type (1) is a combination with the noun *prilika* meaning ‘opportunity’, both singular and plural.

Type (2) is combined with the noun *prilika* which is polysemous as a whole and requires a larger context to disambiguate the specific meaning:

- (a) *To je **dobra prilika** za nekog sretnog.* (‘This is a good opportunity for someone lucky.’)

- (b) *On bi bio **dobra prilika**, zar ne?* ('He'd be a good catch, wouldn't he?')
- (c) *Mogla bi to biti **dobra prilika** da nešto učinim.* ('It would (or could?) be a great chance for me to do something.')

Collocation (3) *povoljna prilika* can be used a) in the singular and plural in the meaning of favorable opportunity and b) as a plural tantum in a triple collocation in the meaning of favorable weather conditions (often accompanied by a preposition):

- (a) *Sjevernoameričku će činiti Kanada i SAD, a kad bude **povoljna prilika** uvest će i svoju valutu – amero koja je već danas javna tajna.*⁶ (Source: vecernji.hr)
*A kasno sam se ja možda i sjetio, prije je bilo i **povoljnih prilika** za početak igre ali ja bio u danima žalosti.*⁷ (Source: index.hr)
- (b) *Uz **povoljne vremenske prilike**, proizvođači duhana će do 20. svibnja obaviti sadnju duhana u optimalnim agrotehničkim rokovima, ali i uz znatno veće ovogodišnje troškove.*⁸ (Source: tdr.hr).

The corpus also shows cases, (4) *posebna prilika* ('a special occasion'), in which a) a preposition (*za*, *u*) appears as an obligatory constituent alongside two autosemantic words forming a triple collocation with a plural tantum in the meaning of 'on special occasions', while b) the singular *posebna prilika* is used without a preposition in the meaning of 'special occasion':

- (a) *Obukao se i odlučio staviti malo onog parfema koji čuva **za posebne prilike**.*⁹
- (b) *Punđe su praktične u toplijim danima jer ništa ne pada po licu i vratu, a jako su elegantne i profinjene pa ako uskoro imate neku **posebnu priliku**, priuštite si malo elegancije.*¹⁰ (Source: femina.hr)

Type (5) *vremenske prilike* ('weather conditions') and (6) *nepovoljne prilike* ('unfavorable circumstances') are pluralia tantum. The latter one appears in three meanings, all three, as already mentioned, in the form of pluralia tantum: a) 'unfavorable occasions', b) 'circumstances' – with an obligatory third component forming a triple collocation, and c) 'conditions':

⁶ (Translation by the authors): North America will consist of Canada and the United States, and when a favorable opportunity arises, they will introduce their own currency – the Amero, which is already an open secret today.

⁷ (Translation by the authors): And late I may have remembered that there used to be favorable opportunities to start the game but I was in the days of mourning.

⁸ (Translation by the authors): With favorable weather conditions, tobacco growers will plant tobacco by May 20 within the optimal agrotechnical deadlines, but also with significantly higher costs this year.

⁹ (Translation by the authors): He got dressed and decided to put on some of the perfume he kept for special occasions.

¹⁰ (Translation by the authors): Buns are practical on warmer days because nothing falls on your face and neck, and they are very elegant and refined, so if you have a special occasion coming up, treat yourself to a little elegance.

- (a) *I ove godine, kao i prethodnih, slušamo o nepovoljnim prilikama, o krizama i teškoćama koje stvaraju napetosti u društvu, prelijevajući se od gospodarskih na politička i općevrijednosna pitanja.*¹¹ (Source: david-udruga.hr)
- (b) *Postoje za to povoljnija i manje povoljna razdoblja, kao što Hrvati najbolje znaju jer su zbog nepovoljnih povijesnih i geopolitičkih prilika relativno kasno to uspjeli postići.*¹² (Source: hkv.hr)
- (c) *U dnevnim novinama, na internetu, radiju i televiziji svakodnevno možemo čuti i vidjeti informacije koje nas upozoravaju da se period nepovoljnih biometeoroloških prilika nastavlja.*¹³ (Source: zdravobudi.hr)

The singular form *povoljna prilika* ('a good deal') is less frequent in the corpus and is in fact a contamination with the collocation *povoljna cijena* 'fair price'.

The corpus also contains several synsemantic collocates: *svaka* ('every'), *mnoge* ('many') and *sav* ('all'). While lexical collocations by definition consist of two autosemantic words, synsemantic words may be part of the collocation, but they have a grammatical function. Our opinion, however, is that these particular word combinations are metaphorical collocations, since according to Lakoff (1999) this type of combination grounds on the conceptual metaphor OPPORTUNITY IS AN OBJECT. This conceptualization makes the quantifying of the abstract noun *prilika* possible, which is confirmed by the examples from the corpus. Moreover, when the above-mentioned pronouns co-occur with the noun *prilika*, they exhibit specific semantic and morphological constraints that are close to lexical bonding:

- (a) *Svaka prilika* ('every occasion') is singular tantum. The plural form derives from another synsemantic word, namely *sav* ('all'), making the collocation *svaka prilika* countable, e.g. *haljina za svaku priliku* ('dress for every occasion') – *haljina za sve prilike* ('a dress for all occasions').
- (b) The combination *mnoge prilike* is polysemous and can refer to both opportunities and occasions, depending on the context. In the sense of 'opportunities', the collocate can be expressed with either the adjective *mnogi* or the adverb *mnogo*, both meaning 'many'. The meaning of 'occasion' is typically used with prepositions like *u* ('in') or *za* ('for'), e.g. *On je u mnogim prilikama/u mnogo prilika pokazao da je pametan čovjek* ('On many occasions he has shown that he is a smart person') / *cipele za mnoge prilike/za mnogo prilika* ('shoes for many occasions').

¹¹ (Translation by the authors): This year, as in previous years, we hear about unfavorable opportunities, crises and difficulties that lead to tensions in society that spill over from economic to political and general value issues.

¹² (Translation by the authors): There are more favorable and less favorable times for this, as the Croats know best, because due to unfavorable historical and geopolitical circumstances, they managed to achieve this relatively late.

¹³ (Translation by the authors): Every day in the daily newspapers, on the Internet, on the radio and on television we can hear and see information warning us that the period of unfavorable biometeorological conditions is continuing.

- (c) The combination *po svoj prilici* is singular tantum and means ‘very likely; probably’, so it is used in the adverbial syntactic function: *Otac mu se zvao Velfin i bio je po svoj prilici mjesni načelnik*.¹⁴ (Source: omis.hr)

Examples a) and b) could be classified as lexical collocations, since the prototypical meaning of the indefinite quantification of the pronouns *svaki* and *mnogi* is conveyed when they co-occur with the noun *prilika*, i.e., the syntagma as a whole has lexical meaning. Example c), on the other hand, is more likely to be considered an idiom, since all the constituents of the word combination *po svoj prilici* in its entirety have a new meaning in adverbial syntactic function, i.e. the meaning *very likely, probably*. Three-word combinations in the corpus with the ordinal number (d) and (e), as well as the cardinal number (f) as collocates show similarities with example (c):

- (d) *prvom prilikom* (‘at the first opportunity’),
(e) *drugom prilikom* (‘another time’, literally: ‘a second time’),
(f) *jednom prilikom* (‘at one time’).

All three combinations represent a petrified syntagma based on morphological and semantic restrictions, since they can be used only in the singular and in the grammatical case of the instrumental. When used in other cases, for example in the nominative or accusative (*prva prilika, prvu priliku; druga prilika, drugu priliku; jedna prilika, jednu priliku*), the numbers retain their prototypical meanings and can be substituted by any other number. This way they represent free word combinations without lexical restrictions. By contrast, the petrified word combination *prvom prilikom* has the idiomatic meaning ‘as soon as it is possible for someone to do something’ in adverbial syntactic function. The combination *drugom prilikom* suggests that an action can be carried out at some unspecified future time. Similarly, *jednom prilikom* carries dual meanings: ‘once’ referring to a specific past event, and ‘sometime’ indicating an indefinite or unknown future occasion. These combinations imply that the noun *prilika*, along with its ‘possibility’ meaning, also acquires a temporal dimension, blending the concepts of a moment in time and the event occurring at that moment. The meaning of ‘time’ is also contained in the combination (g):

- (g) *sljedećom prilikom* ‘next time’.

Together with (d), (e) and (f), *sljedećom prilikom* is a petrified adverbial singular tantum syntagma in the instrumental case. When used in another case (*sljedeća prilika, sljedeću priliku* etc.), it is a free word combination with the literal meaning of both the base and the collocate, i.e. it means ‘next chance’.

¹⁴ (Translation by the authors): His father’s name was Velfin and he was probably the local chief.

In the last four examples (d), (e), (f) and (g) the idiomatic shift is reinforced by grammatical features. This is also the case in example

(h) *u danoj prilici* ‘on the given occasion’.

The attribute *dana* (‘given’) derives from the verb *dati* (‘to give’) (*dan/dana/dano* is a passive participle in Croatian and has the morphological properties of an adjective). Together with the noun *prilika* it forms a metaphorical verbal collocation with the meaning ‘to give a chance’. However, when it occurs in the petrified locative case syntagma (*u danoj prilici*), *prilika* does not have the meaning of ‘chance’ and the whole syntagma has a new idiomatic meaning ‘in a certain situation’. The subsequent idiomatic shift when used in the locative case (‘in a certain situation’) showcases the intricate nature of these word combinations.

As demonstrated, semantic cohesion between the constituents of the collocation can be strengthened by interaction of morphosyntactic and semantic features. In the case of the analyzed category “kakav?” (‘modifiers of x’ type), however, we found that the constituents of the collocations mostly showcase a complete morphological paradigm in terms of Gender, Number and Case. Since this relation employs adjectives, the comparison according to the rules of the Croatian morphological system is also fully applicable, except for one adjective in the corpus: in the combination *čista prilika* (‘pure opportunity’), *čista* cannot be inflected (**čišća*, **najčišća prilika*).

3.1.2 Semantic processes

As regards semantic processes in combinations with the noun *prilika*, it is generally observed that adjectives in the syntactic function of the attribute determine the perspective from which the noun is to be viewed, while at the same time the noun limits the interpretation of the meaning of adjectives. Adjective and noun in collocations thus influence each other’s meaning. The collocate has the following functions in these processes:

- (1) Given the meaning *situacija* (‘occasion’), it is derived in the context of event. The collocate determines the meaning of event as something special, not ordinary or common (*svečana* ‘formal’, *posebna/specijalna* ‘special’). The word combination is based on the semantic process of metonymy: while *svečana* prototypically means ‘solemn’, it in combination with *prilika* means ‘formal’; while *posebna/specijalna* prototypically mean ‘separate’, they in combination with *prilika* acquire the specific meaning of ‘what is different from others, what is not usual or ordinary’.
- (2) The meaning of *okolnost* ‘circumstance’ is the most stratified of all the meanings the corpus offers for the noun *prilika*. As mentioned earlier, this meaning only occurs as plural tantum. A wide range of collocates can be

classified according to the nature of the circumstance: a. Circumstances referring to natural, social and economic phenomena, b. Qualifying circumstances as relates to their effect on the individual and c. Circumstances that refer to time and space.

Natural, Social, and Economic Circumstances:

(a) In specifying natural (*meteorološke* ‘meteorological’, *hidrološke* ‘hydrological’, *vremenske* ‘weather’, *klimatske* ‘climate’), social (*crkvene* ‘ecclesiastical’, *političke* ‘political’, *socijalne* ‘social’, *povijesne* ‘historical’) and economic (*financijske* ‘financial’, *materijalne* ‘material’, *tržišne* ‘market’) circumstances, the collocate/attribute is a relative denominal adjective. The basic function of the collocate is to precisely define the meaning by including only a part of the entity to which the noun referent belongs. This leads to decomposition resulting in terms such as ‘economic situation’ instead of ‘economy’, ‘weather conditions’ instead of ‘weather’ etc..

(b) Qualifying Circumstances:

The inclusion of adjectives such as *pogodne* (‘suitable’), *savršene* (‘perfect’), *povoljne* (‘favorable’), *nepovoljne* (‘unfavorable’), and *teške* (‘difficult’) highlights a shift toward metaphorical meaning when these adjectives co-occur with *prilika*. This metaphorical extension enriches the understanding of circumstances, going beyond their literal interpretations.

(c) Temporal and Spatial Circumstances:

The temporal and spatial classification involving adjectives like *aktualne/trenutne* (‘current’), *novonastale* (‘new’), *današnje* (‘present’), *lokalne* (‘local’), *ovdašnje* (‘here’), and *tamošnje* (‘there’) shows the flexibility of *prilika* in associating with dimensions related to time and space. This is in alignment with cognitive linguistic concepts that identify temporal and spatial dimensions as fundamental in human perception.

(3) *Prilika* with the meaning of “*mogućnost*” (‘possibility’) sheds light on the anthropocentric evaluation associated with this semantic category. Adjectives like *izgledna* (‘probable’), *stopostotna* (‘100%’), *pogodna* (‘suitable’), *moguća* (‘possible’), and *konkretna* (‘concrete’) suggest the assessment of the probability of realization. The implicit evaluation of the quality of the possibility is noted, and this aligns with the broader concept of ‘possibility’. The evaluation of the availability of possibilities is highlighted through adjectives like *jedina* (‘only’), *posljednja/zadnja* (‘last’), and *nova* (‘new’). The explicit evaluation of the quality of the possibility becomes a topic, revealing the nuanced ways in which *prilika* is evaluated. It is interesting to note that the evaluation of possibility offered numerous synonymous collocations expressing the meaning of ‘possibility that gives rise to expectation of a favorable outcome’. The presence of 27 examples reflecting this meaning indicates a diverse range of ways to convey the idea of a positive expectation. The attribution of qualities such as ‘essential’, ‘significant’,

‘main’, and ‘important for life, for survival’ to the noun *prilika* via metonymy adds a layer of metaphorical meaning. This transfer of attributes from the human domain to an abstract noun enhances the characterization of the possibility, making it more vivid and relatable. The transfer of attributes from the speaker’s domain to the abstract noun *prilika* through metonymy maintains the attribution within the same domain. This is exemplified in the characterization of a possibility as ‘realistic and true’ based on human qualities like being serious.

- (4) In relation to the meaning of *šansa* (‘chance’), two collocations appear in the context of marriage and work (*dobra prilika* ‘a person suitable for marriage; a good catch’, *poslovna prilika* ‘business opportunity’). Both situations affect the speaker in a way that he/she is faced with a decision that is likely to affect his/her quality of life (success in marriage or work is associated with economic prosperity, well-being, etc.).

Examples in (3) may refer to possibility or chance, which necessitates a broader context to disambiguate the meaning. However, the senses of these two meanings – ‘possibility’ and ‘chance’ – overlap considerably, suggesting that the meaning of both can be conceived as a continuum without strict boundaries. This also suggests a growing metaphorical potential of the noun *prilika*. In addition, this could explain the largest number of collocations in this category as well as the numerous synonymous examples. It seems that the speaker feels the need through linguistic means to emphasize the importance of the possibility to convince himself/herself or his/her interlocutor of its value. This also shows the pragmatic value of the noun *prilika* in the sense of possibility or chance, which is used in negotiation, persuasion, advertising, etc. Word combinations with *prilika* in the negative sense, on the other hand, did not appear in the corpus. A random *Google* search yielded one example with the negative form of the verb *to be*, which together has a positive meaning, e.g. *nije loša prilika* (‘it is not a bad opportunity’).

3.2 “koga-što” (‘verbs with x as object’)

3.2.1 Morphological and semantic features

The analysis of the syntactic pattern involving the combination of a verb and the noun *prilika* reveals certain morphological and semantic characteristics. The syntactic pattern involving a verb + direct object (noun in the accusative case) with *prilika* is less variegated compared to the adjective + noun combinations. Verbs in this pattern are primarily in their canonical form, allowing for morphological derivations such as verbal aspect, past participle, and verbal nominalizations:

- (a) Verbal Aspect: Perfective and imperfective aspects, indicating actions as completed or ongoing (e.g., *iskoristiti* – perfective, *iskorištavati* – imperfective).
- (b) Past Participle: Formed from verbs, indicating past actions (e.g., *iskorištena* – used, *dobivena* – obtained).
- (c) Verbal Nominalizations: The process or result of the verb turned into a noun (e.g., *korištenje* – using, *dobivanje* – getting).

The direct object *prilika* in this pattern is associated with two main meanings: ‘chance’ and ‘circumstance’, ‘chance’ being the predominant interpretation in most recorded metaphorical collocations (38 out of 41 instances). The prevalence of the ‘chance’ meaning suggests that, combined with verbs, *prilika* is often conceptualized as an opportunity or possibility rather than a circumstance.

3.2.2 Semantic processes

The use of verbs as collocates in the syntactic pattern with *prilika* suggests a dynamic interaction. The inherent nature of verbs implies action, and this aligns with the idea that *prilika* is not a static entity but involves some form of dynamic engagement. The conceptual metaphor of hunting is a notable feature in the analyzed examples. Verbs such as *promašiti* (‘to miss’), *uhvatiti/uloviti* (‘to catch’), *ugrabiti/zgrabiti* (‘to grab’), and *vrebat* (‘to prey’) evoke the imagery of pursuit and capture. Such metaphorical framing adds a layer of nuance to the understanding of how speakers conceptualize their relationship with opportunities or chances. Actions related to reaching and possession, such as *dati/pružiti* (‘to give’), *nuditi* (‘to offer’), *prihvatiti* (‘to accept’), *stvoriti* (‘to create’), *imati* (‘to have’), and others, emphasize the speaker’s engagement with opportunities. These actions convey a sense of active involvement in acquiring, accepting, or having opportunities. The analysis revealed a lesser representation of circumstances in this syntactic pattern. When circumstances are involved, verbs such as *pratiti* (‘to follow’), *poznavati* (‘to know’), and *promatrati* (‘to observe’) highlight an action-oriented perspective toward these circumstances. The separation from the speaker underscores the observational or knowledge-based nature of the interaction with circumstances. The examples suggest that the choice of verbs reflects the speaker’s perspective and action toward *prilika* or its action toward the speaker. This implies an active engagement with opportunities rather than passive observation. The identified conceptual metaphor and the selection of specific verbs show the metaphorical richness of language, where abstract concepts like opportunities are articulated through vivid and action-oriented imagery.

3.3 “*subjekt_od*” (“verbs with *x* as subject”)

3.3.1 Morphological and semantic features

When combined with verbs, the noun *prilika* as subject exhibits three main meanings: ‘chance’, ‘possibility’, and ‘circumstance’. Combining *prilika* with reflexive verbs contributes to a sense of impersonality, akin to passive constructions: *prilike se redaju* (‘opportunities are lining up’), *prilike se ukazuju* (‘opportunities are arising’), *prilike se mijenjaju* (‘circumstances have changed’), *prilike se otvaraju* (‘opportunities open’). Examples such as *prilike se mijenjaju* could be interpreted both as an impersonal statement having opportunities change on their own accord, or as a passive construction with someone or something (unspecified) causing the change in opportunities. While these reflexive constructions allow for the interpretation of *prilika* as the agent (e.g., opportunities themselves bring about the change), they also permit an interpretation where *prilika* serves as the patient, concealing the real agent (e.g., someone or something initiating the change in opportunities).

3.3.2 Semantic processes

The collocates in this relation convey the feature of momentary appearance, suggesting the fleeting nature of the occasion. There’s an indication of the autonomous “life” of the occasion, where occasions change or play an active role without the direct involvement of the speaker. When *prilika* signifies ‘chance’, it is associated with verbs emphasizing immediacy and unpredictability, such as *ukazati se* (‘to appear’), *iskrsnuti* (‘to arise’), *ispadati* (‘to fall out’), and *propadati* (‘to perish’). In contexts where *prilika* means ‘possibility’, the verbs highlight the occurrence of a possibility as an event, illustrating the concept of possibilities succeeding each other, arriving, or remaining. When *prilika* denotes ‘circumstance’, the verbs imply that it behaves like an autonomous and independent force or power. Personification occurs, where *prilika* can force someone to do something, ‘rule’, ‘open’, ‘allow’, etc. Personification is facilitated by the conceptual metaphor OPPORTUNITY IS A FORCE, allowing the abstract noun *prilika* to be treated as a subject with verbal collocates denoting actions. The personification of *prilika* enables the bonding of the abstract noun with verbal collocates that are semantically incompatible under normal circumstances. The conceptual metaphor OPPORTUNITY IS A FORCE provides a cognitive framework for understanding the autonomous and influential nature of *prilika* in certain contexts.

3.4 “*n-koga-čega*” (“nouns modified by *x*”)

3.4.1 Morphological and semantic features

The analysis of the grammatical relation involving the genitive case of the noun *prilika* and another noun as an attribute provides valuable insight into the diversity of collocates and their semantic functions. Many collocates in this relation are derived from verbs listed in the grammatical relation “*koga-što*” (‘verbs with *x* as an object’). Additionally, there are deverbal nouns that do not appear in the mentioned grammatical relation, including examples like *stabilizacija/stabiliziranje* (‘stabilization’) *nepoznavanje* (‘not knowing’), *normalizacija* (‘normalization’), *viđenje* (‘seeing’), *poboljšanje* (‘improvement’) and *nedostatak* (‘lack’). Several collocates serve the semantic function of intensification by using nouns expressing indefinite quantification. Examples are: *bezbroj* (‘innumerable’), *mnoštvo* (‘quantity’), *hrpa* (‘bunch, pile, heap’), *obilje* (‘abundance’), *serija* (‘series’), and *sijaset* (‘a lot of’). The noun *milijun* (‘million’), typically expressing determinate quantification, combined with *prilika* conveys pragmatic meaning of indefinite quantification, as observed in *milijun prilika* (‘a million opportunities’). Two collocates represent English loan words in Croatian: *break* (‘a chance to score points or achieve success’) and *gol* (‘goal’). The syntactic structures *break prilika* and *gol prilika* deviate from typical Croatian structures, displaying a distinctive pattern. Two combinations, *silom prilika* (‘superior force’) and *stjecajem prilika* (‘due to circumstances’), fall into the category of idiomatic expressions. These combinations preserve morphological and semantic restrictions resulting from their status of phraseologized expressions.

3.4.2 Semantic processes

In addition to the process of phraseologization as noted in the above examples of *silom prilika* and *stjecajem prilika*, this grammatical relation also manifests metaphorization and metonymy. Metaphorization can be observed in connection with verbal nominalizations, such as *pružanje* (‘giving’), *propuštanje* (‘missing’), *čekanje* (‘waiting’), *sređivanje* (‘settling’), etc. Here, the nominalization process contributes to metaphorical extensions of the original verb meanings. Metaphorization is also manifested in the use of indefinite quantification as an intensifier. For example, in expressions like *bezbroj prilika* (‘countless opportunities’), the quantifier takes on a metaphorical role, emphasizing a large, uncountable number of opportunities. The expressions *break prilika* and *gol prilika* represent instances of metonymy. In these cases, the metonymic relationship is evident: having a ‘goal opportunity’ or ‘break opportunity’ means that the player has specific scoring chances in the game. The metonymy involves a part-whole relationship, where the player (part) stands in for the chance (whole)

within the context of the game. We observe that these semantic processes contribute to the richness and flexibility of the genitive case of *prilika* in forming collocations. Metaphorization extends the meaning of nominalized verbs, allowing for nuanced expressions, while metonymy enables the representation of complex concepts through associative relationships.

4 Conclusion

The paper aims to explore the metaphorical potential of collocations involving the polysemous abstract noun *prilika* in Croatian, utilizing the *WordSketch* function of the *SketchEngine* tool. The empirical data confirm that both the base term *prilika* and its collocates mutually influence each other. This interaction often leads to metaphorical interpretations, i.e. the metaphorical potential of the base term is realized and enriched through its collocational relationships. Specific structures, such as attribute + noun (e.g. *čista prilika* ‘pure chance/clear shot’) and verb + direct object (e.g. *promašiti priliku* ‘to miss a chance’), exhibit metaphorical uses, which contribute to semantic cohesion between collocates, creating a more nuanced understanding of the term *prilika*. While metonymic processes have been identified in the analysis, not many examples have been found. Some of the examples are *prilika za brak* (‘boyfriend or girlfriend as preferred marriage partners’) and *gol prilika* (‘goal-scoring opportunity’).

The analysis reveals a prevalence of the positive meaning of *prilika* as chance, while the negative meaning is notably scarce. This is in line with the conceptualization of *prilika* as a rare and valuable phenomenon, emphasizing its positive connotations.

The interplay between morphosyntax and semantics is identified as a significant factor in the stability of collocations involving *prilika*. Morphological and syntactic petrification, influenced by factors like number, case construction, and morphosyntactic constraints, contributes to a higher degree of cohesion between collocates and the base. Processes such as restriction to singular tantum or plural tantum are observed, contributing to the stability of collocations. Restriction to a specific case construction, particularly instrumental and locative constructions in this study, is identified as a common petrification process. Morphologically and syntactically petrified constructions are situated on a continuum between non-petrified collocations and idioms. The continuum reflects different degrees of fixedness, indicating the evolving nature of these linguistic constructions and pointing to the dynamic nature of collocational relationships.

Relating to the role of collocates, the analysis revealed five key functions in collocations with *prilika*, including conceptualization of the abstract noun as a concrete object, decomposition to specify meanings or to achieve terminological precision, anthropocentric evaluation of the abstract noun, personification of the abstract noun (as autonomous and independent) and indefinite quantification.

Further research on different abstract bases could provide additional insights into collocation formation and potentially confirm or broaden the identified functions of collocates.

Finally, we observe that metaphorization and metonymy in collocations form a continuum, ranging from less cohesive combinations resembling free word combinations to tightly cohesive combinations resembling idiomatic expressions. This reinforces the pivotal role of metaphorization and metonymy, alongside morphological and syntactic constraints, in defining this continuum of metaphorical collocations. Based on the type of analysis proposed here, we hope that it will provide a model for approaching the analysis of other polysemic and abstract words from our corpus. Ultimately, this will lead to identification of possible regularities in collocation formation.

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METAFORIČNI POTENCIAL KOLOKACIJ: PRIMER SAMOSTALNIKA *PRILIKA*

Članek preučuje značilnosti kolokacijske povezanosti znotraj kolokacij, pri čemer je vsaj ena komponenta metaforična. Raziskava, izvedena z uporabo funkcije *WordSketch* v orodju *SketchEngine*, prepozna najbolj tipične kolokacije in besedne kombinacije s polisemantičnim abstraktnim samostalnikom *prilika* v hrvaškem spletnem korpusu *hrWaC*. Analiza potrjuje, da kolokator igra ključno vlogo pri pojasnitvi polisemantičnega pomena ‘prilike’ (‘priložnost’, ‘pogoj’, ‘dogodek’, ‘možnost’), ki je pojasnjen ali določen s povezavo s specifičnimi kolokatorji. Poleg pojasnitve je abstraktni pomen samostalnika okrepljen s sočasnim pojavljanjem modifikatorja, ki prispeva k celotnemu pomenu ‘prilike’ preko metaforičnega preslikavanja, kar povečuje razumevanje abstraktnega koncepta. Metaforizacija je še posebej potrjena v kombinaciji *glagol + samostalnik* (neposredni predmet), npr. *dobiti, pružiti, tražiti, stvoriti, iskoristiti priliku* (‘dobiti, ponuditi, iskati, ustvariti, izkoristiti priložnost’) in samostalnik (kot subjekt) + glagol, npr. *prilike vladaju, iskrsnule su, dolaze, natjerale su* (‘priložnosti vladajo, so se pojavile, prihajajo, so prisilile’). Metaforizacija in metonimija sta potrjeni v kombinaciji pridevnik + samostalnik, npr. *dobra ≠ loša prilika* (‘oseba, primerna/neprimerna za poroko’; ‘dober/zanič ulov’), *svečana prilika* (‘svečana priložnost’), *lijepa, ozbiljna prilika, teške prilike* (‘lepa, resna priložnost’, ‘težke priložnosti’) itn. Poleg tega morfološke razlike določajo uporabo samostalnika *prilika* v različnih kontekstih: *prilika* kot množinska samostalniška oblika se vedno nanaša na ‘vremenski pogoj’ (npr. *vremenske*,

meteorološke prilike 'vremenski, meteorološki pogoji') ali na posebne okoliščine, v katerih se nahajajo referenti (npr. *financijske, životne, društvene prilike* 'finančne, življenjske, družbene priložnosti'), medtem ko *prilika* kot števeni samostalnik pomeni 'priložnost' ali 'možnost' (npr. *životna/e, jedinstvena/e, velika/e prilika/e* 'življenjska/-e, edinstvena/-e, velika/-e priložnost/-i'). Izbira med množinsko obliko in števnim samostalnikom prispeva k natančnemu in kontekstualno primernemu izražanju izraza, kar odraža njegovo fleksibilnost in prilagodljivost pri posredovanju niansiranih pomenov. Sklepamo, da tako slovnični kot semantični procesi prispevajo h koheziji med kolokatorjem in osnovo, s čimer krepijo povezovanje leksemov v kolokacijo.
