

## Semantic Preference, Prosody and Distribution of Synonymous Adjectives in COCA

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### ABSTRACT

Synonymous word pairs often become an obstacle on the road to favourable result in composing academic texts because semantic prosody and semantic preference of these words are neglected. The current study examined the concordance lines with synonymous adjectives *succinct & concise*, *coherent & cohesive*, *precise & accurate* in the academic texts of Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and identified semantics of co-occurring collocates, interchangeability of synonyms and their distribution across nine academic disciplines. The research describes the semantic arrangement of collocations with synonymous pairs of words and encourages persons with academic pursuits rely on corpus data based tools to improve knowledge of semantic prosody and preference of words with similar meanings. The study showed that near synonyms *succinct & concise*, *coherent & cohesive*, *precise & accurate* have different semantic preference and distribution across registers which should be taken into consideration while building collocations with these words. However, semantic prosody tendencies of these synonyms are similar. The analysed synonyms cannot be used interchangeably in all contexts. They are also unevenly scattered across registers. The current study will help to improve learning, teaching, and research of English academic vocabulary in its many contexts.

**Keywords:** Semantic Preference; Semantic Prosody; Collocates; Synonymous Words; COCA

### INTRODUCTION

As far as researchers are under constant pressure to read and publish academic texts of considerable size, research in semantic prosody and semantic preference becomes of crucial importance. Predominantly the medium of academic texts is the English language. The choice of English academic words and collocations proper for the very specific linguistic environment usually does not cause a great difficulty for native speakers. However, it is not a case for non-native ones. Non-native speakers, students, secondary or tertiary level teachers, scientists often struggle with the choice of the correct word suitable for texts written in different academic fields. Synonymous word pairs often are a stumbling block on the road to favourable result in composing academic texts because semantic prosody and semantic preference of these words are neglected.

The research describes the semantic arrangement of collocations with synonymous pairs of words and encourages persons with academic pursuits rely on corpus data based tools to improve knowledge of semantic prosody and preference of words with similar meanings.

In the context of collocation learning, near-synonyms particularly pose a difficulty for most foreign language learners due to their similar denotational meanings but un-interchangeable semantic prosody (Hu, 2015, p. 117). Semantic prosody has an essential role in selecting correct equivalents, especially in case of near-synonyms when synonyms have identical or similar denotational meaning but usually differ in their collocational behaviours and semantic prosodies (Zhang, 2010).

Recent research into semantic prosody and semantic preference is not extensive and the range of its practical application in academic studies and academic work is rather narrow. Besides, there are only some research works on semantic prosody and semantic preference in which target items are singled out from the Academic Vocabulary List (AVL) (Gardner & Davies, 2014). Studies on academic vocabulary cover its various aspects but leave aside semantic prosody and semantic preference.

The study carried out by Pecoraria, Shaw, Malmström (2019) focus on materials for testing academic vocabulary and the approaches used to assess the validity and equivalence of the two forms of the test of academic vocabulary. Green's study describes the subset of academic vocabulary associated with particular grammatical patterns (Green, 2019). Crosson, McKeown and Ward focus on a vocabulary assessment that gauges students' depth of knowledge of academic words (Crosson, McKeown & Ward, 2019).

Wang in his study points out that "Corpus-based studies on semantic prosody of synonyms provide a new lens to teaching and learning synonyms in English. However, using corpus-based approach to facilitate teaching and learning English synonyms is still in its infancy [...]" (Wang, 2019, 1). Research into semantic prosody and preference of the academic vocabulary is not consistent. The research is defragmented inasmuch only single items from Academic Word List are analysed with reference to the corpus (Hu, 2015; Li, 2019). A number of researchers focused on single items (words) of non-academic vocabulary (Nugroho, 2018; Wang & Zou, 2019; Bi, 2019).

To fill this gap and complement to the studies on the importance of semantic preference and prosody in building collocations the current research focuses on semantic preference, semantic prosody and frequentative distribution across registers of synonymous pairs *concise & succinct, coherent & cohesive, precise & accurate* and examines the concordance lines with these synonyms in the academic texts from COCA. The selection of these pairs is predetermined by the fact that the words *concise, succinct, coherent, cohesive, precise, accurate* are included in AVL because they are a part of academic vocabulary. In COCA, they are shown with a highest frequency of their occurrence, meaning that they are highly used by the English language users and learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). The choice of these words is also predetermined by their complex functional and syntactic usage patterns and neglected co-occurrence peculiarities in building collocations. These words are also used in a vocabulary section of EFL textbooks as words which are confused by learners when characterising language and speech. The chosen words can serve as samples for investigation of other synonymic pairs to show that corpus-assisted approach is more effective, objective and reliable in distinguishing synonyms and a number of implications can be concluded in English language teaching, learning, testing and research.

The aim of the research is to identify the differences and similarities in semantic prosody, preference and distribution of collocates of *concise & succinct, coherent & cohesive, precise & accurate* across different academic fields in COCA and to identify possibility of interchangeable use of synonyms within each synonymic pair as an illustration of the importance of semantic prosody and preference in academic writing.

To achieve the aim of the research the following objectives are set:

- 1) To extract concordance lines with collocates of *concise & succinct, coherent & cohesive, precise & accurate* from Corpus of Contemporary American English and examine them;
- 2) To identify the most frequent collocates (raw and relative frequencies) of each synonym in the pairs of synonyms under analysis and delineate semantic characteristics of these collocates;
- 3) To describe semantic prosody and preference of collocates;

- 4) To identify raw frequencies of distribution of synonymous pairs across different academic disciplines.

The research approaches employed in the current study are qualitative and quantitative. From the qualitative perspective the node words *concise & succinct, coherent & cohesive, precise & accurate* and their collocates were subjected to the analysis using descriptive method and the KWIC (Keyword in Context) method through the concordance lines. Quantitative approach was realised through identification of raw and relative frequency of collocates of the node words and their distribution raw frequency across academic fields using quantification instrument provided by COCA.

### SEMANTIC PROSODY AND SEMANTIC PREFERENCE

Semantic prosody has been in the focus of researchers in the course of the recent three decades. Notwithstanding that the notion of semantic prosody remains “a problematic concept, mainly because it has been used to speak of such different things as connotation, evaluation, appraisal, pragmatic force, irony and insincerity, all of which are kinds of secondary meaning, and none of which is the same as the others” (Philip, 2011, p. 58). The problematic character of semantic prosody first of all lies in different approaches to semantic prosody itself adapted in the literature. The second reason is the absence of clear cut division between semantic prosody and lexical environment. Semantic prosody is inescapably dependent on habitual lexical environment. However, such a link with lexical environment is not unique only for semantic prosody. As an example of such interdependence could be relationship between connotations of the words and lexical environment. Still, connotation of the word can be collocational and non-collocational while semantic prosody can only be collocational.

The originators of semantic prosody are considered to be Sinclair (1991) and Louw (1993). Louw, a close associate of Sinclair, publicly coined the term “semantic prosody” in his 1993 work which remains the most often cited source when dealing with issues of semantic prosody. Firth’s theory related to prosody in phonological terms lead to the coinage of the term “semantic prosody”. In phonology prosody refers to the phenomenon when preceding and following sounds define the realization of a particular phoneme. Stubbs gave his own point of view towards Sinclair’s concept of semantic prosody and called it as ‘discourse prosody’ acknowledging semantic relations between node and collocates. Stubbs distinguished three categories – positive, negative and neutral – into which discourse prosody can fall (Stubbs, 2002, p. 225).

Ideas of semantic prosody further have been developed by ‘semantic preference’, which is closely related to semantic prosody and “refers to the semantic categories shared by the frequent collocates of a specific node item” (Partington, 2004). One obvious difference between semantic prosody and semantic preference is that “semantic preference may be in favour of any definable semantic field, but semantic prosody is always either for positive or for negative evaluation” (McEnery & Hardie, 2011, p. 137). Positive prosody expresses the speaker’s approval and negative prosody expresses the speakers’ disapproval. In other words, semantic prosody defines how the utterance has to be interpreted functionally in the text. However, these two phenomena, i.e. semantic preference and semantic prosody, are either used as the same phenomenon or they are interpreted as different but closely related.

Hoey considers semantic prosody as embracing two different concepts and chooses to split semantic prosody into “semantic associations” for the connotative and evaluative meanings, and “pragmatic associations” for the discourse function (Hoey, 2005). Hunston (2007) interprets semantic prosody as it is restricted by Sinclair referring to it as the discourse function of a unit of meaning, and suggests that the term ‘semantic preference’ has to “refer to

the frequent co-occurrence of a lexical item with items expressing a particular evaluative meaning” (Hunston, 2007, p. 266). Begagić draws a dividing line between these terms stating that “semantic preference can be defined as the relation between a word form and set of semantically related words, whereas the concept of semantic prosody of a given word or phrase occurs in the context of that particular lexical item with other words or phrases” (Begagić, 2013, p. 403).

The scope of semantic preference and semantic prosody is different. Preference is realised at the level of semantic set while semantic prosody affects wider stretches of text. Semantic preference is affected by collocates of the node contrary to semantic prosody which is the feature of the node word. According to Partington, semantic prosody dictates the general environment which constrains the preferential choices of the node item, and “semantic preference contributes powerfully to building semantic prosody” (Partington, 2004, p. 151). According to Essimaje (2014), semantic preference restricts regular co-occurrence to items that share a semantic feature. It implies the identification of similarity of meaning across word boundaries. Thus, semantic preference is the likelihood that words that share meaning domains will co-occur.

Philip (2009) proposes that Hoey’s term ‘semantic association’ should be introduced as an intermediate stage between semantic preference and semantic prosody. According to Philip, this additional category covers “connotative, expressive and evaluative meanings associated with lexical items” (Philip, 2011, p. 61). It allows ‘semantic prosody’ to be used for the discourse function and to keep with the idea that “semantics [...] deals with meaning, and prosody [...] typically ranges over combinations of words in an utterance rather than being attached just to one” (Sinclair, 2003, p. 17).

Semantic prosody and semantic preference is closely related to collocations. Collocation is most commonly associated with the name of J. R. Firth. Collocations are based on mutual expectancy of the collocates and on their co-occurrence frequencies. The meaning that words convey in text is a product of collocation, which is different from meaning in the mind. As Philip puts it, “collocations can be viewed as co-creating meaning (in Firth) or as modifying meaning (in the Russian tradition). [...] Collocation may also sharpen the focus of the constituents meaning” (Philip, 2011, p. 42), as in the case of the collocate *dark night* when the word *dark* reinforces the element of darkness which is already in the word *night*.

Corpus linguistics gave theoretical grounds and instrument of an exhaustive research of semantic prosody and semantic preference through investigation of collocations in different corpora with the help of computer software. Philip also advocated the importance of corpus linguistics because “collocation lies at the heart of corpus query software applications and the analysis of concordances” (Philip, 2011, p. 43). As Begagić puts it, “There are almost no works on semantic preference and semantic prosody outside the scope of corpus linguistics, as empirical data used from corpora enable the linguist to make statements that are objective and based on natural language” (Begagić, 2013, p. 403).

In corpus linguistics collocates are those pairings of words that occur recurrently in the corpus and semantic prosody. The most significant merit of the usage of computer software to the study of collocations are quantification and retrievability because corpus query software can extract all instances of a node and with all its attested co-texts. Co-occurrence need not be contiguous nor need its sequencing be fixed, but “the collocates are expected to occur within five words left or right of each other, and the closer they are, the more significant their relationship” (Sinclair & Teubert, 2004 as cited in Philip, 2011, p. 43)

Semantic prosody determines the meaning of the whole lexical item, expressing its function and showing how the remaining part of the item has to be interpreted. The choice of the wrong word might lie in neglecting semantic prosody features of the word. Studies of semantic prosody are deeply tied to the phenomenon of collocational sequence of words that

often are found together in a particular semantic environment where words collocate could be positive, neutral or negative (Elahi & Rahbar, 2018).

A number of studies emerged from the perspective of using semantic preference or semantic prosody as the framework of analysis. Li (2019) drew upon Sinclair's model of extended lexical units and employed a corpus-assisted approach to the study of synonyms *preserve* and *conserve*, summarising the semantic preference and semantic prosody by examining the collocations with these words. A Corpus-based contrastive study on semantic prosody of English near synonyms *motive* and *motivation* was conducted by Wang (2019). Nugroho (2018) used the framework of semantic prosody and preference studying two near-synonymous words *rich* and *wealthy*. Hu (2015) carried out the research on semantic prosody of three adjective synonymous pairs *initial/preliminary*, *following/subsequent*, and *sufficient/adequate*.

### ACADEMIC VOCABULARY LIST

The analysis of collocations presupposes the awareness of differences in collocations with near synonyms. As far as the current research focuses on semantic prosody and semantic preference of near synonyms in AVL, the current literature review also zeroes in on AVL history.

Going back to the 20<sup>th</sup> century 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> decades when corpus linguistics was at its initial phase and computing power was weak, academic word lists were compiled manually by scholars who based their lists on academic materials such as textbooks, research articles, etc. In 1984, one of the most popular academic word lists was compiled by Xue and Nation (Xue & Nation, 1984), which was in use for more than 15 years. A new academic word list was produced by Coxhead in 1998 based on wider application of corpora and it was in use for a decade as one of the flagship in the field (Coxhead, 2011).

Gardner and Davies new Academic Vocabulary List (AVL) is derived from a 120-million-word academic subcorpus of the 425-million-word Corpus of Contemporary American English. AVL makes a difference between academic texts and other materials. The list covers approximately 14% of academic texts in both COCA (120 million+ words) and the British National Corpus (33 million+ words). The list comprises nine scientific disciplines: 1) education, 2) humanities, 3) history, 4) social science, 5) philosophy, religion, psychology, 6) law and political science, 7) science and technology, 8) business and finance, 9) medicine and health. Originally, about three quarters of words come from academic journals. Later Gardner and Davies “decided to ‘soften’ the journal-heavy corpus by adding ~31.5 million words from academically oriented magazines for all disciplines except Humanities and Education, where there are few topic-specific magazines” (Gardner & Davies, 2014).

According to Gardner and Davies, “Almost without exception, experts are calling for more explicit instruction of academic vocabulary, including more focused lists of ‘core’ academic vocabulary”, as well as lists specific to certain disciplines of education (e.g. philosophy, political science, history, philosophy) (Gardner & Davies, 2014).

The studies in academic word list have developed in recent years. However, they were not related to insights into AVL semantic prosody and preference. Researchers concentrated on creating discipline-specific academic vocabulary lists. In 2016 a new medical academic word list was created (Lei, Liu, 2016). An attempt for creating English for Academic Purposes Word List (EAPWL) was made in 2017 (Khani, Saedi, 2017). A number of research articles were dedicated to the use of academic word list in educational process. McDonough, Neumann and Hubert-Smith carried out study on how accurately EAP students use academic words (McDonough, Neumann & Hubert-Smith, 2018). Others explored extent to which teachers used the Academic Vocabulary List working with their learners (Banister, 2016) or its use in doctoral thesis (Pathan, Memon, Memon, Shah, Magsi, 2018).

## METHODOLOGY: DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

The scope of the research is limited to three synonymous adjectival pairs: *concise & succinct*, *coherent & cohesive*, *precise & accurate*. The synonyms are taken from AVL (Gardner & Davies, 2014). It is the most current, comprehensive, precise list of core academic vocabulary in existence today and it is useful in completing a great number of academic tasks: analysing the level of text difficulty and richness, assessing the student's vocabulary knowledge and growth, determining the vocabulary components of academic curricula. AVL contains the standard high-frequency function words found in almost all other academic vocabulary lists.

In the research, the corpus tool employed to identify the most frequent synonyms of the key words was *Sketch Engine*. It is a corpus tool used by researchers and language teachers which allows the user to view word sketches. One of *Sketch Engine* core functions is *Thesaurus* enabling the researcher to identify the similarity of the chosen words and frequency of synonyms. Frequency here refers to the number of occurrences or hits. It is an absolute figure, and it is not calculated using a specific formula. Table 1 indicates the most frequent synonyms in synonymic groups.

TABLE 1. Frequencies of synonyms *concise & succinct*, *coherent & cohesive*, *precise & accurate*

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<keyword freq="87670" pos="-j"> <b>concise</b> </keyword>
<item freq="21253" score="0.584"> <b>succinct</b> </item>
<item freq="94487" score="0.507">insightful</item>
<item freq="235071" score="0.486">informative</item>

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<keyword freq="124685" pos="-j"> <b>coherent</b> </keyword>
<item freq="57889" score="0.508"> <b>cohesive</b> </item>
<item freq="1107931" score="0.480">comprehensive</item>
<item freq="151382" score="0.476">unified</item>

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<keyword freq="266046" pos="-j"> <b>precise</b> </keyword>
<item freq="603728" score="0.584"> <b>accurate</b> </item>
<item freq="428873" score="0.544">exact</item>
<item freq="996993" score="0.517">detailed</item>

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2000 concordance lines in COCA were selected for the analysis to define semantic prosody and semantic preference of the synonyms: *concise & succinct*, *coherent & cohesive*, *precise & accurate*: 100 concordance lines with most frequent 20 collocates of each synonym. Distinction between lemmas is not taken into consideration.

Behaviour of adjectival pairs was examined with reference to one of the largest freely available genre-balanced COCA developed by Davies. COCA offers unparalleled insight into variation in English. It is often compared with British National Corpus (BNC). The latter is 5 times smaller because it does not tend to provide lower-frequency constructions which are available in COCA. The BNC has a much wider range of spoken sub-genres, while COCA includes unscripted conversation on TV and radio shows. COCA contains more than 560 million words of text (20 million words each year 1990-2017) and it is equally divided between five registers: academic, fiction, spoken, magazines and newspapers journals. Besides, it gives distribution of the words inside academic register according to 9 academic fields such as history, education, sociology, law, humanities, philosophy, sciences, business, medicine. The corpus is continuously increasing. In 2020, COCA will be expanded with the three new genres which will be blogs, other web pages, and TV and movie subtitles. COCA suits well the aim of the current research as far as it allows the researcher to define crucial differences in

realisation of semantic preference and semantic prosody of particular lexical items in different registers.

Following Hu's methodology (Hu, 2015), the current study examined the concordance lines with synonymous adjectives in the academic texts from COCA and identified semantics of co-occurring collocates, interchangeability of synonyms and their distribution across different academic disciplines.

The research takes into consideration the following data about the word: definitions, relative frequency across different academic disciplines, the top collocates of the word, which provide useful insights into meaning, usage, and possibilities of collocations.

The AVL list was screened to find out whether the chosen synonyms are included in the core academic vocabulary. The meanings of *concise & succinct*, *coherent & cohesive*, *precise & accurate* were checked against 9<sup>th</sup> edition of Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD, 2015) to identify whether the words share denotative components and can be ascribed to near synonyms.

All selected words belong to the same part of speech and do not have homonyms of other parts of speech.

The analysis of the synonymous pairs is arranged in the following way:

- 1) semantic preference of collocates is described;
- 2) semantic prosody is identified;
- 3) distribution across 9 academic fields is presented.

Hu's methodology proved that to obtain reliable results 20 most frequent collocates within a span of 4 words to both the left and right in a concordance lines have to be taken (Hu, 2015, p. 120). The collocates of the synonyms under analysis and the number of their occurrences beginning with the most frequent one are presented in Tables 2-4. In Tables 2-4 collocates which are the same for both paired synonyms are marked in bold.

After defining semantic prosody and semantic preference, distribution of synonyms across different academic fields was analysed: history (HIS), education (EDU), sociology (SOC), law (LAW), humanities (HUM), philosophy (PHIL), sciences (SCI), medicine (MED) business (BUS). Distribution of the synonyms across different academic fields is presented in Figures 1-3.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research of the synonymous word *concise & succinct*, *coherent & cohesive*, *accurate & precise* yielded the following results.

### CONCISE & SUCCINCT

Table 2 presents 20 most frequent collocates co-occurring with the synonyms *concise & succinct* in COCA. Almost half of them coincide. Both synonyms collocate with the words *clear*, *statement*, *overview*, *summary*, *description*, *provide*, *definition*, *account*. However, their frequency is different.

In general, *concise* is twice more frequently used than the word *succinct*: correspondingly 347 and 174 co-occurrences in academic register. The most frequent collocate co-occurring with *succinct* is another adjective, i.e. *clear*: 75 occurrences (22% - relative frequency) of all cases. However, in terms of parts of speech the majority of 20 most frequent collocates of *concise & succinct* are nouns: *concise* goes with 13 nouns, and *succinct* has 14 noun collocates. Adjectival collocates are not frequent: *concise* goes with five adjectives, and *succinct* has two

adjectives. Two verbal collocates go with *concise*, and four cases of verbal collocates are found with *succinct*.

TABLE 2. Number of occurrences of 20 most frequent collocates with synonyms *concise* / *succinct* in COCA

No.	CONCISE		SUCCINCT	
	Collocate	Number of occurrences (relative frequency of 20 most frequent collocates)	Collocate	Number of occurrences (relative frequency of 20 most frequent collocates)
1.	CLEAR	75 (22%)	STATEMENT	13 (8%)
2.	HISTORY	23 (7%)	SUMMARY	12 (7%)
3.	STATEMENT	20 (6%)	DESCRIPTION	11 (6%)
4.	MANNER	17 (5%)	EXPLANATION	9 (5%)
5.	OVERVIEW	13 (4%)	PROVIDES	9 (5%)
6.	SUMMARY	13 (4%)	OFFERS	7 (4%)
7.	DESCRIPTION	13 (4%)	GAVE	7 (4%)
8.	PROVIDES	13 (4%)	CLEAR	7 (4%)
9.	DEFINITION	10 (3%)	ACCOUNT	6 (3%)
10.	ACCURATE	9 (3%)	OVERVIEW	5 (3%)
11.	DESCRIPTIONS	8 (2%)	ANSWER	5 (3%)
12.	ACCOUNT	8 (2%)	LETTER	4 (2%)
13.	SHORT	8 (2%)	DEFINITION	4 (2%)
14.	ENCYCLOPEDIA	7 (2%)	PROVIDED	4 (2%)
15.	DICTIONARY	7 (2%)	READABLE	3 (2%)
16.	COMPREHENSIVE	7 (2%)	PHRASE	3 (2%)
17.	SIMPLE	7 (2%)	FASHION	3 (2%)
18.	FORMAT	6 (2%)	PRESENTATION	3 (2%)
19.	GUIDE	6 (2%)	ACCOUNTS	3 (2%)
20.	OFFERS	6 (2%)	STATEMENTS	3 (2%)
	<b>TOTAL ALL</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>174</b>

Speaking about semantic preference, which restricts regular co-occurrence to items that share a semantic feature, the nouns which collocate with *concise* & *succinct* often denote a definite or clear expression, review or account of the situation in speech or writing.

The word *concise* also collocates with the types of books such as dictionary and encyclopaedia while the synonym *succinct* does not have such collocations. For example:

- (1) *In 1932 the Rockefeller Foundation and in 1935 the International African Institute sponsored Hans Melzian's A Concise Dictionary of the Bini Language (1937), [...].*
- (2) *These definitions are based on information in Randel, Don Michael, ed., The Harvard Concise Dictionary of Music and Musicians.*
- (3) *According to Merriam Webster's Concise Encyclopedia, dance is a " form of expression that uses bodily movements that are rhythmic, patterned (or sometimes improvised), and usually accompanied by music.*

The meanings of the verbs that collocate with *concise/succinct* have a marker (common seme) 'to provide', and the meanings of the adjectives which go with *concise/succinct* possess common component of meaning 'easily understood' and 'correct'. For example:

- (4) *By avoiding jargon, the dictionary offers concise and easily accessible information for users.*
- (5) *Criminal Law Essentials provides up-to-date, comprehensive and concise coverage of criminal law in Scotland.*



The majority of the twenty collocates of the synonyms *concise* & *succinct* are associated with any polarized semantic prosody, neither positive nor negative. If the collocates of the node words have neutral semantics in concordance lines they create neutral prosody. Neutral collocates are words not expressing emotions, unbiased, not denoting approval or disapproval. They do not have any emotional connotations that could relate them to negatively or positively charged words. Words having positive semantics are directly related to qualities or features that are good or useful. Negative semantics is associated with harmful, unpleasant or not wanted effects, consequences, things denoting collocates.

In the following collocations, collocates of the synonyms *concise* & *succinct* have neutral prosody. The collocates *statement*, *description*, *overview*, *summary* do not have any emotional connotations that could relate them to negatively or positively charged words. For example:

- (6) Perhaps the most **succinct statement** of Ruscha's project comes from a line in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* he has depicted multiple times: "Words without thoughts never to heaven go."
- (7) Hiron provides **a succinct description** of the three conventions that have been used historically for cataloging serials.
- (8) The present paper provides **a concise overview** of the "workaholic syndrome."
- (9) Table 1 provides **a concise summary** of the appropriate applications for the various types of thermal insulation.

The adjectives which have positive denotative meaning added before other words strengthen positive evaluation of the topic. The following adjectival collocates reinforce positive semantic prosody of the node word *concise*: *clear*, *accurate*, *comprehensive*, *simple*, *short*. For example:

- (10) It was the **simple and concise structure** of scripts, where operations are applied to whole maps without explicitly iterating over the cells, that made map algebra a popular language.
- (11) However, a straightforward, **short, concise feedback** form handed in at the end of each class session is appropriate and helpful in determining student reaction.

The word *succinct* has fewer collocates with positive prosody: *clear*, *readable*. For example:

- (12) For such readers, the book is **readable and succinct** in comprehensively examining sociopolitical issues in contemporary Mexico.

The synonyms *concise* & *succinct* often go together with the collocate *clear* which manifests positive semantic prosody. Semantics of the very word *clear* in a language as a system bears positive evaluation of a characterised phenomenon. The collocate *clear* is the most frequent (75 occurrences) with the word *concise*. For example:

- (13) By week 15, students were fairly comfortable explaining their ideas and business models in **clear and concise** terms.
- (14) [...] this Article focuses on this work because it is a **clear and succinct** statement of the Sources Thesis.

Figure 1 shows distribution of the words *concise* & *succinct* across different academic fields. It illustrates how differently in frequentative aspect two synonyms are used depending which field they function in.

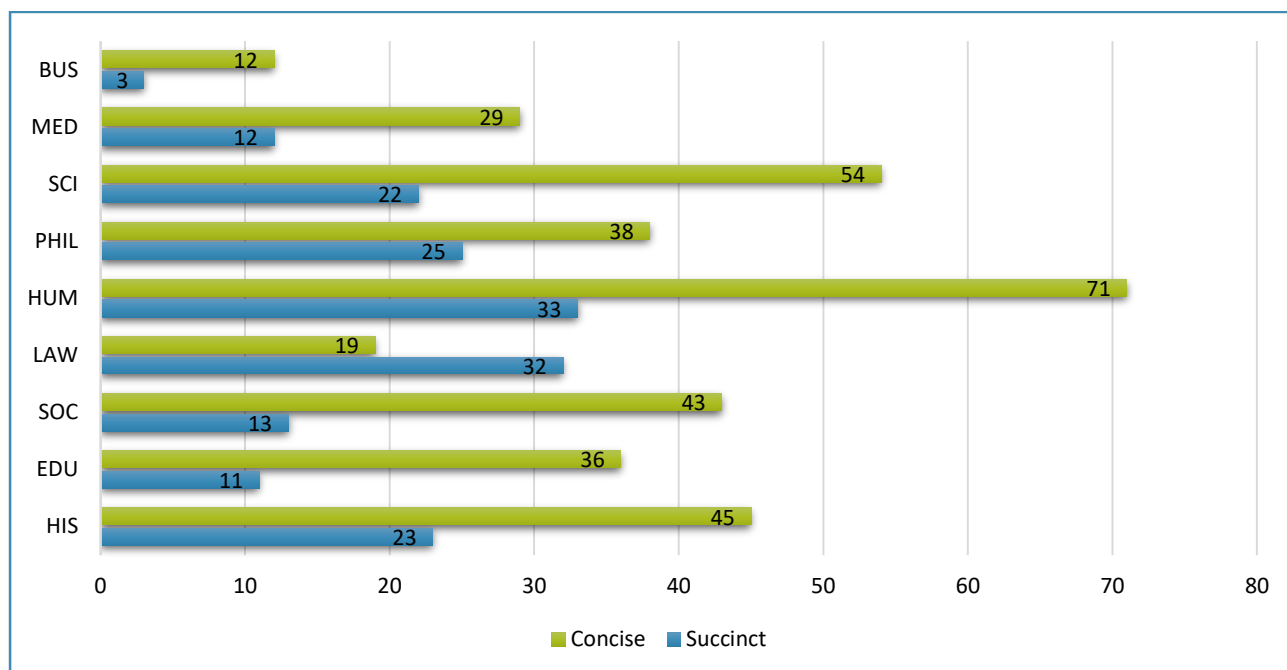


FIGURE 1. Distribution of *concise* & *succinct* across academic fields

It can be noticed that *concise* & *succinct* are more frequent in humanities, which can be explained by the fact that these words often collocate with the words denoting written or spoken types of texts: *chapter, notice, answer, telling, prose, instruction, text, statement*. Least frequent usage is noticed in academic fields of business and medicine. The biggest difference in usage of *concise* & *succinct* is in education texts: correspondingly 36 and 11 occurrences.

### COHERENT/COHESIVE

Both synonyms characterise something united as whole. The synonyms *coherent* & *cohesive* have only three common collocates: *whole, narrative, identity*. Although denotative meaning of both synonyms refers to the quality of being united, logically arranged as a whole they usually collocate with different words.

TABLE 3. Number of occurrences of 20 most frequent collocates with synonyms *coherent* & *cohesive* in COCA.

No.	COHERENT		COHESIVE	
	Collocate	Number of occurrences (relative frequency of 20 most frequent collocates)	Collocate	Number of occurrences (relative frequency of 20 most frequent collocates)
1.	POLICY	66 (3%)	GROUP	66 (11%)
2.	<b>WHOLE</b>	62 (3%)	UNIT	62 (11%)
3.	STRATEGY	53 (3%)	TEAM	57 (10%)
4.	FRAMEWORK	43 (2%)	COMMUNITY	45 (8%)
5.	THEORY	42 (2%)	FORCE	43 (8%)
6.	CLEAR	39 (2%)	<b>WHOLE</b>	43 (8%)
7.	CONSISTENT	36 (2%)	GROUPS	38 (7%)
8.	VISION	34 (2%)	CREATE	37 (7%)
9.	LACK	34 (2%)	TOGETHER	32 (6%)
10.	<b>NARRATIVE</b>	32 (2%)	FORM	30 (6%)
11.	<b>IDENTITY</b>	31 (2%)	<b>NARRATIVE</b>	25 (4%)
12.	CREATE	30 (2%)	SOCIETY	22 (4%)

13.	SINGLE	28 (1%)	POLICY	22 (4%)
14.	INTEGRATED	26 (1%)	STRONG	20 (3%)
15.	PRODUCE	21 (1%)	<b>IDENTITY</b>	16 (3%)
16.	UNIFIED	18 (1%)	COHERENT	15 (3%)
17.	CONSTRUCT	17 (1%)	UNITS	15 (3%)
18.	THEORETICAL	17 (1%)	RELATIVELY	15 (3%)
19.	PICTURE	17 (1%)	BUILD	15 (3%)
20.	QUANTUM	16 (1%)	TIES	14 (2%)
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1919</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>589</b>

The word *cohesive* most frequently collocates with collective nouns denoting a number of people: *group, unit, team, community, society*. Collocations with these words make up a half (51%) of most frequent cases. While the synonym *coherent* usually goes together with the words denoting a plan of actions for particular purpose, a set of ideas or description: *policy, strategy, framework, theory, vision, picture*. They make 13% of all collocates in academic register. For example:

- (15) *Einstein never achieved his goal of a unified theory to explain the natural world in a single, **coherent framework**.*
- (16) *The only way to avoid getting sucked into a costly fight over electronic records is to catalog them for easy retrieval and to have a regular, **coherent policy** for destroying documents.*
- (17) *In this new picture, we combine these two mythologies into one **coherent picture**: We have a constant genesis, or boiling of universes, in an ocean of cosmic nothing or Nirvana.*
- (18) *The application of increased military resources and a **coherent strategy** almost certainly will have an effect on the Afghan battlefield if given enough time to succeed and backed by a complimentary civilian strategy.*

*Coherent & cohesive* collocate with verbs which indicate the process of bringing something into existence. For example:

- (19) *Now is the perfect time to **produce concise** guidelines in the hope that a more succinct suite of guidance can reach a larger audience.*
- (20) *iAbacus helps leaders **create concise** and high impact plans they'll be proud to publish and confidently share with others.*
- (21) *Other technical specialists would be optimised as the ministry strives to **build cohesive, sustainable communities** across Guyana.*

Adjectival collocates are richer in their variety with *coherent* (six collocates) than with *cohesive* (two collocates) and usually have meaning of being linked and logical, thus reinforcing positive prosody. For example:

- (22) *The West needs a more **coherent strategy** toward the Black Sea region and those countries lying further eastward around the Caspian.*
- (23) *Having made the Afghan war the edifice of his struggle against violent extremism, President Obama has been struggling to shape a **coherent strategy**.*

Only two collocates with the word *cohesive* have positive prosody: *strong, cohesive*. For example:

- (24) *Stable hydrogen bonds also lead to the **strong cohesive** forces underlying the unusually high surface tension of water.*
- (25) *<...> it's important that a foreign policy has a **clear, consistent** and easily **coherent** following and that's the hallmark of many great foreign policy.*
- (26) *Sequencing in pretence appears to be a forerunner of the ability to think and reason in a **coherent and cohesive** manner.*
- (27) *They were able to portray a fairly **coherent and cohesive** picture to the public and present legitimate democratic alternatives to the Spanish electorate.*

As the examples (26) and (27) illustrate, positive prosody can be strengthened by the collocation built of the very synonyms *coherent* & *cohesive*: the word *cohesive* is always preceded by the word *coherent*.

If we speak about noun collocates, a scrutiny of the collocates of *coherent* & *cohesive* reveals that they co-occur most frequently with terms and thus exhibit neutral prosody. Only in the case of *lack* of something the collocate of the word *coherent* has negative prosody as far as *lack* denotes something in shortage which has negative emotional charge. Such collocations are usually found in the sentence related to the political affairs, war, fighting or threat of terrorism. For example:

(28) *The lack of countermeasures, lack of coherent policy, lack of intra-government cooperation, lack of international cooperation, make you ripe targets for terrorism.*

Regarding the distribution of *coherent* and *cohesive*, *coherent* appears more frequently than *cohesive* across varying academic fields.

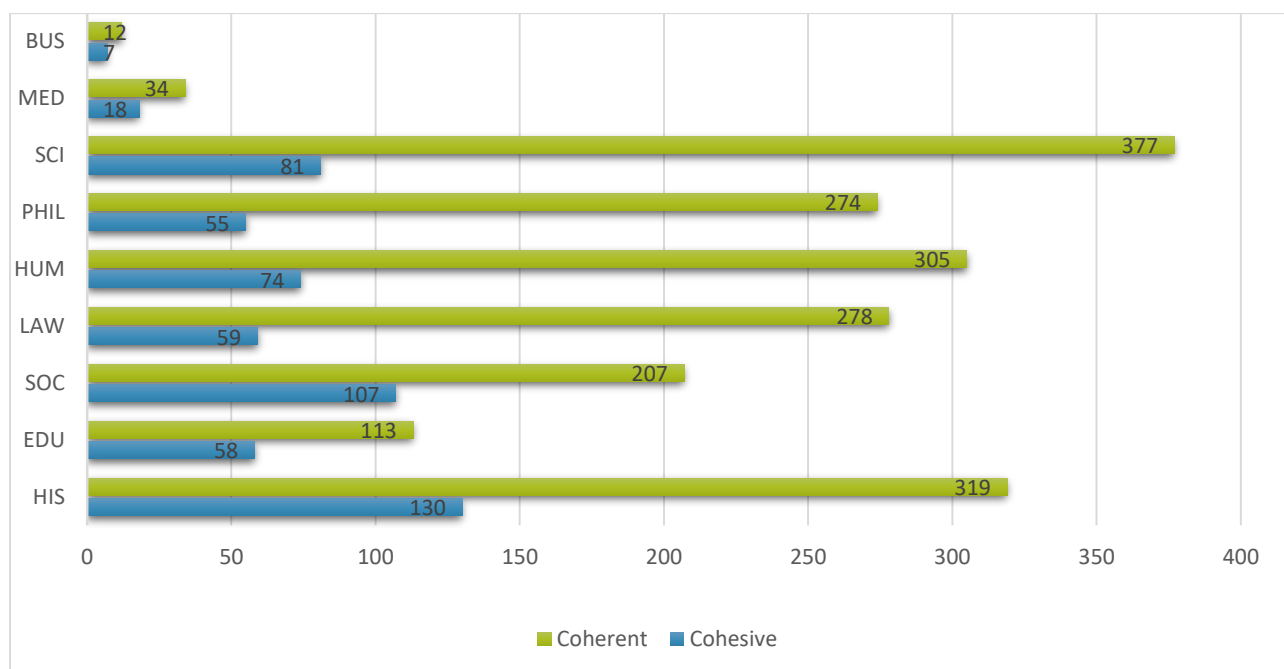


FIGURE 2. Distribution of *coherent* & *cohesive* across academic fields

The word *coherent* is most common in sciences, and the word *cohesive* in history field. The research revealed that *coherent* appears to be a word that is especially frequently used in sciences, humanities, historical, philosophical and law context. However, it is rather rare in business and medical context. Similar ratio of occurrence of the word *concise* is noticed across these academic fields.

### PRECISE & ACCURATE

Both synonyms are associated with qualities such as clear and correct.

After the observation of the concordance lines it is obvious that three collocates are overlapping for *precise & accurate*: *estimates, measurement, description*.

TABLE 4. Number of occurrences of 20 most frequent collocates with synonyms *precise* & *accurate* in COCA.

No.	PRECISE		ACCURATE	
	Collocate	Number of occurrences (relative frequency of 20 most frequent collocates)	Collocate	Number of occurrences (relative frequency of 20 most frequent collocates)
1.	DEFINITION	80 (2%)	MORE	1212 (20%)
2.	NATURE	76 (2%)	INFORMATION	443 (8%)
3.	MEANING	64 (2%)	PROVIDE	211 (4%)
4.	LOCATION	49 (1,5%)	ASSESSMENT	148 (3%)
5.	<b>ESTIMATES</b>	48 (1,5%)	DIAGNOSIS	114 (2%)
6.	MOMENT	41 (1%)	PICTURE	113 (2%)
7.	<b>MEASUREMENT</b>	40 (1%)	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	93 (1,5%)
8.	DETAILS	35 (1%)	<b>ESTIMATES</b>	92 (1,5%)
9.	<b>MEASUREMENTS</b>	31 (1%)	RELIABLE	90 (1,5%)
10.	ACCURATE	27 (1%)	<b>MEASUREMENT</b>	78 (1%)
11.	TIMING	25 (1%)	COMPLETE	78 (1%)
12.	DATE	24 (1%)	PREDICTIONS	75 (1%)
13.	ALLOWS	22 (0,5%)	REPRESENTATION	72 (1%)
14.	CONTOURS	21 (0,5%)	OBTAIN	65 (1%)
15.	DEFINITIONS	20 (0,5%)	TIMELY	61 (1%)
16.	MECHANISMS	20 (0,5%)	IDENTIFICATION	61 (1%)
17.	WHATEVER	20 (0,5%)	<b>MEASUREMENTS</b>	55 (1%)
18.	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	20 (0,5%)	REASONABLY	51 (1%)
19.	DETERMINING	17 (0,5%)	REFLECTION	46 (1%)
20.	MOVEMENTS	16 (0,5%)	EFFICIENT	40 (1%)
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3438</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5885</b>

The difference between usage of *precise* & *accurate* in COCA is also found. The word *precise* goes together with words related to expression of temporality and locality: *moment*, *date*, *timing*, *location*, *contours*. For example:

(29) Furthermore, although the **precise timing** of an invasion is impossible to forecast, the relative risk of invasion for various species can be estimated and prioritized from data on environmental conditions and changes in vector activity.

(30) The fourth edition of the *Small Landscapes* appeared at the **precise moment** when recent decades of positive growth and renewal intersected with the feared threat of continued violence and instability [...]

The word *accurate* shows preference for abstract nouns denoting proving, identification, discovering: *diagnosis*, *reflection*, *identification*, *presentation*, *picture*. For example:

(31) An **accurate picture** of the size and contours of illicit drug use is a prerequisite for informed public debate and policy making.

(32) In medical imaging, the **accurate diagnosis** of a disease depends on both image acquisition and image interpretation.

If we speak about verb collocates, *precise* frequently goes with the verb *allow*. *Accurate* collocates with the verbs *provide* and *obtain* which are antonyms. *Accurate* is the synonym which exhibits rare cases of occurring together with an adverb, i.e. *more* and *reasonably*. For example:

(33) The mixer truck has an onboard electronic scale that **allows precise** adjustments to be made to the compost mix.

(34) RT models generally require a large sample size to **obtain accurate** and stable item parameters.

(35) These were compared to experimental data to ensure that the calculations were **reasonably accurate**.

Prosody of the synonyms *precise* & *accurate* is mostly neutral because they usually go with collocates which do not express positive or negative emotions. However, the word *accurate* has more positive prosody collocates than *precise*, including such words as *reliable*, *complete*, *timely*, *efficient* which evaluate the topic in examples (36-39) in a positive way. For example:

- (36) *Regarding the quality of the documentation, the files were coded according to whether a participant's written diagnostic report included a complete battery of tests, which was defined objectively to allow **for reliable and accurate** coding.*
- (37) *In turn, all of these features impact the ability to develop a 'global' method yielding **accurate and reliable** results.*
- (38) *Moreover, additional funds could be used to better train IRS employees so that their responses would be more **timely and accurate**.*
- (39) *The OSC was created to provide **accurate and timely** information to stakeholders--school board members, employees, families, business leaders, community members, and the media.*

As the examples above illustrate the same collocates of the word *accurate* can take both postpositional and prepositional place in a concordance line.

It should be mentioned that there are cases when both synonyms *precise* & *accurate* are used in the same sentence. Juxtaposition of both synonyms in one sentence shows that shades of meanings of these words are different. For example:

- (40) *Audio taped interviews captured **precise and accurate** verbiage while field notes were taken to obtain the implicit and explicit details of the informant perceptions and perspective.*

Although number of occurrences of 20 most frequent collocates of the synonyms *precise* / *accurate* is different (3438 to 5885) in academic fields of sciences both synonyms have very similar number of occurrences (1770 of *precise* and 1748 of *accurate*) (see Figure 3). Both synonyms are also frequent in medicine and philosophy but the number of occurrences differs more than twice.

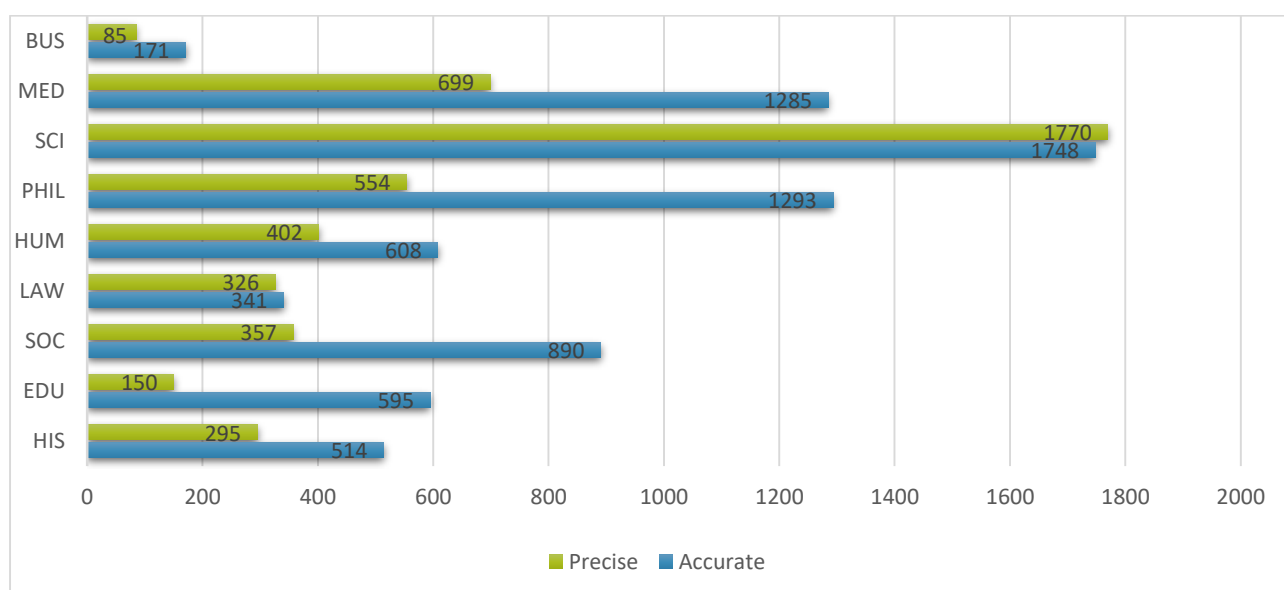


FIGURE 3. Distribution of *precise* & *accurate* across academic fields

After observing overall profiles of semantic preference and prosody of the three adjective pairs it was noticed that synonyms *succinct* & *concise* have more similarities in their semantic preference than other two pairs of synonyms. Almost a half of the most frequent collocates of the synonyms *concise* & *succinct* coincide and denote a definite or clear expression, review or account of the situation in speech or writing. Differently from the synonym *succinct*, the synonym *concise* shows semantic preference for books such as dictionary and encyclopaedia. In the majority of co-occurrence cases, both synonyms have neutral prosody. The frequency of *concise* in academic register is twice bigger than of the word *succinct*. Distribution across registers of both synonyms is very similar yielding the highest frequency for both synonyms in humanities. The biggest difference is noticed in law corpora where the word *succinct* is more frequently used than the word *concise* while in other academic disciplines the word *concise* is dominant.

The synonyms *coherent* & *cohesive* demonstrate different semantic preference: only three collocates are the same. The word *cohesive* tends to co-occur with collective nouns denoting a number of people: group, unit, team, community, society. The synonym *coherent* usually goes together with the words denoting a plan of actions for particular purpose, a set of ideas or description: policy, strategy, framework, theory, vision, picture. Semantic prosody of both words is predominantly neutral. Only three out of 20 observed most frequent collocates are common for both synonyms. Both synonyms most frequently function in academic fields of history. The word *coherent* is most common in sciences and history, and the word *cohesive* is common in history and sociology.

Similar to *coherent* & *cohesive*, the synonyms *precise* & *accurate* exhibit only three overlapping collocates. The word *precise* demonstrates strong preference to the words related to expression of temporality and locality: moment, date, timing, location, contours. While the word *accurate* often co-occurs with abstract nouns denoting proving, identification, discovering. The majority of collocates have neutral semantic prosody.

*Coherent* & *cohesive* are the most frequent of the three synonymous pairs in COCA: *concise* & *succinct* correspondingly have 347 and 174 occurrences, *coherent* & *cohesive* correspondingly are found in 1919 and 589 cases, while *precise* & *accurate* have 3438 and 5885 occurrences.

## CONCLUSION

The study showed that near synonyms *succinct* & *concise*, *coherent* & *cohesive*, *precise* & *accurate* have different semantic preference and distribution across registers which should be taken into consideration while building collocations with these words. The analysed synonyms cannot be used interchangeably in all contexts. Although they share similar meaning, their semantic preference in majority of cases is different and they are unevenly scattered across registers. The noun collocates of *concise* & *succinct* often denote a definite or clear expression, review or account of the situation in speech or writing. Only the word *concise* collocates with the types of books such as dictionary and encyclopaedia. The word *cohesive* most frequently collocates with collective nouns denoting a number of people, while the synonym *coherent* usually goes together with the words denoting a plan of actions, a set of ideas or description. The word *precise* usually goes together with words related to expression of temporality and locality, and the synonym *accurate* shows preference for abstract nouns denoting ‘proving’, ‘identification’, ‘discovering’. The words *accurate* and *coherent* demonstrated wider range of collocations with adjectives than the rest of the node words. Only the word *accurate* exhibited adverbs as collocates.

The particular semantic prosody of a node word cannot be accurately identified if its collocates are not analysed in the context. Semantic prosody of *succinct* & *concise*, *coherent*

& cohesive, precise & accurate contrary to semantic preference and distribution is similar. The research results justify a large percentage of neutral semantic prosody in the academic texts. Prevalence of neutral semantic prosody of all three pairs of adjectives is explained by the fact that they usually collocate with neutral terms. Another explanation of that is that academic register is devoid of strong emotional connotation and mostly present neutralized texts. The cases of positive semantic prosody are related to co-occurrence of two adjectival collocates which reinforce positive semantics. Negative prosody is observed within the collocations of the node words with nouns of negative semantics.

Different distribution of synonymic words across academic fields can be explained by specific character of collocations with the synonyms under the analysis which are common only for texts under a particular topic in a definite academic field. Different distribution across academic disciplines also could be related to the very semantics of synonymic pairs when the synonym having more general meaning is more frequent across all academic disciplines. Future studies could also examine in more specific details how each pair scatters across different academic disciplines.

Awareness of academic vocabulary is considered an obligatory component of academic reading and writing competences which can be directly related to the person's carrier prospects, academic achievements, economic well-being, and social status. The insufficient academic vocabulary knowledge causes difficulties in building academic texts at different levels of education. The findings of the research will help to those who write academic texts to distinguish subtle differences in usage of the synonyms in academic disciplines. It will also encourage researchers to use COCA naturally occurring concordance lines from authentic texts to improve awareness of the English language collocations and create natural flow of language in their academic texts.

It is obvious that the study and usage of synonyms in context has to be based on the corpus. Language users have not only to rely on their prior knowledge of collocations but to get habit of using corpus as a reliable tool against confusing of synonyms in academic contexts. The current study will help to improve the learning, teaching, and research of English academic vocabulary in its many contexts.

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Prof. Dr. Linas Selmistraitis’s scientific interests are semantics, lexicology, and morphology. He publishes articles in Lithuanian, English and Russian. Prof. Dr. Linas Selmistraitis has developed his professional qualification and delivered lectures in universities in Belarus, China, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, India, Kazakhstan, Poland, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, and Turkey. He was a member of 7 PhD defence committees.