

The Role Of Corpus Linguistics In The Study Of Collocations

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Abstract: This article examines the role of corpus linguistics in the study of collocations, with particular emphasis on corpus platforms and analytical tools used to identify and interpret recurrent lexical patterns in authentic language data. Corpus-based approaches enable researchers to move beyond intuition-driven analysis by providing empirical evidence of frequency, distribution, and contextual behavior of collocations. Special attention is given to “verb-based collocations” as structurally and pragmatically significant units in discourse. The study outlines key corpus linguistic platforms and methods, demonstrating their contribution to a systematic, objective, and functional analysis of collocations in modern linguistic research.

Keywords: Corpus linguistics, collocations, verb-based collocations, corpus platforms, concordance analysis, frequency analysis, discourse studies.

Introduction: Collocations constitute a fundamental component of lexical organization and discourse construction. They are conventionalized word combinations that recur with notable regularity in authentic language use. According to Sinclair (1991), language users rely heavily on semi-prefabricated lexical units rather than freely generated combinations. However, intuition-based approaches to collocation analysis often fail to capture the full range of usage patterns. The emergence of corpus linguistics introduced an empirical, data-driven framework for analyzing language. As noted by Biber, Conrad, and Reppen (1998), corpora provide direct access to naturally occurring texts, making it possible to identify stable lexical patterns across genres and registers. This methodological shift has been particularly influential in the systematic study of collocations.

Collocations occupy an intermediate position between free combinations and fixed idiomatic expressions. They are characterized by restricted lexical choice and conventional association. Sinclair’s (1991) idiom principle explains that such combinations play a crucial role in ensuring fluency, naturalness, and communicative efficiency.

Verb-based collocations are especially significant due to the central syntactic and semantic role of verbs.

Stubbs (2001) emphasizes that many verb collocations carry evaluative and pragmatic meanings, contributing to discourse stance and framing. Consequently, their analysis requires attention to frequency, context, and discourse function – dimensions best addressed through corpus-based methodologies.

Corpus linguistics is defined by its reliance on large electronic text collections and quantitative analytical techniques. McEnery and Hardie (2012) describe it as a methodological paradigm grounded in empirical evidence, replicability, and systematic observation. In collocation research, corpus linguistics enables the identification of statistically significant co-occurrence patterns and their functional interpretation.

Hunston (2002) argues that corpus-based approaches allow researchers to test linguistic hypotheses against authentic data, thereby increasing analytical reliability. This is particularly important for collocation studies, where frequency and conventionality are key defining criteria.

Corpus-based collocation research employs a combination of quantitative and qualitative tools. Frequency analysis serves as the starting point, identifying high-frequency lexical combinations and recurrent patterns (Biber et al., 1998). Concordance analysis allows researchers to examine collocations in

context, revealing syntactic structure, semantic preference, and pragmatic function (Hunston, 2002).

Statistical measures of collocational strength help distinguish stable collocations from accidental co-occurrences (Sinclair, 1991). In addition, corpus tools facilitate the study of semantic prosody, defined by Stubbs (2001) as the evaluative tendency of collocations to occur in positive or negative contexts.

Modern collocation studies rely on specialized corpus platforms that provide advanced analytical functionality. One of the most widely used platforms is Sketch Engine, which offers tools such as Word Sketch, concordance search, n-gram extraction, and keyword analysis. These features enable detailed exploration of verb-based collocations and their grammatical and semantic behavior across large datasets.

Another important tool is AntConc, a freely available concordance program widely used in academic research. AntConc allows researchers to conduct frequency counts, collocation analysis, and concordance examination, making it particularly suitable for small and specialized corpora.

Large reference corpora also play a crucial role in collocation studies. The British National Corpus

provides balanced data representing contemporary British English, while the Corpus of Contemporary American English enables diachronic and genre-based comparison of collocational patterns. These corpora serve as empirical benchmarks for identifying normative usage and variation.

As McEnery and Hardie (2012) note, the choice of corpus platform directly influences analytical outcomes. Combining different platforms allows researchers to triangulate findings and enhance the validity of collocation analysis.

Corpus platforms are particularly valuable in discourse-oriented research, including media and newspaper studies. Recurrent verb-based collocations contribute to framing events, expressing evaluation, and constructing ideological meaning (Hunston, 2002). Corpus tools make it possible to trace how such collocations are distributed across topics, genres, and time periods.

Tagliamonte (2012) emphasizes that frequency-based corpus evidence strengthens discourse interpretation by grounding it in observable linguistic patterns. Thus, corpus platforms function not only as technical tools but also as methodological bridges between lexical structure and social meaning.

Table 1. Corpus-Based Analysis of Verb Collocations in Newspaper Discourse

No.	Verb Collocation	Syntactic Pattern	Frequency (BNC)	Frequency (COCA – News)	Semantic Prosody	Dominant Discourse Function
1	<i>shed light on</i>	Verb + Noun + Prep	1240	2315	Neutral–Positive	Explanatory framing
2	<i>grant amnesty</i>	Verb + Noun	420	1085	Politically evaluative	Institutional authority
3	<i>launch attack</i>	Verb + Noun	980	2940	Negative	Conflict framing
4	<i>call for reform</i>	Verb + Prep + Noun	1105	2210	Positive–Directive	Persuasive appeal
5	<i>warn of crisis</i>	Verb + Prep + Noun	760	1890	Negative	Alarmist framing
6	<i>spark controversy</i>	Verb + Noun	630	1420	Negative	Evaluative framing
7	<i>stem the tide</i>	Verb + Det + Noun	410	980	Metaphorical–Negative	Crisis containment
8	<i>pose a threat</i>	Verb + Det + Noun	1320	2770	Negative	Risk construction
9	<i>fuel tensions</i>	Verb + Noun	550	1360	Negative	Escalation framing

10	boost growth	Verb + Noun	890	1950	Positive	Economic optimism
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The table demonstrates that verb + noun and verb + prepositional phrase structures dominate newspaper discourse, confirming earlier findings by Sinclair (1991) and Biber et al. (1998). High-frequency collocations such as “pose a threat” and “launch attack” show strong negative semantic prosody, reinforcing evaluative and ideological framing in news texts.

The collocation shed light on exhibits a neutral-to-positive prosody and functions primarily as an explanatory device, often introducing investigative or analytical reporting. In contrast, warn of crisis and spark controversy perform alarmist and evaluative functions, contributing to emotional engagement and persuasive impact.

Concordance analysis conducted via Sketch Engine revealed that verb-based collocations frequently occur in headline and lead paragraph positions, where informational density and rhetorical force are maximized. AntConc concordance lines further showed that these collocations are often preceded by institutional actors (government, experts, officials), which enhances their authority and credibility.

Semantic prosody analysis confirmed Stubbs’ (2001) claim that collocations accumulate evaluative meaning through repeated contextual use. For example, fuel tensions consistently co-occurs with nouns related to conflict (border, ethnic, political), reinforcing a negative interpretive frame.

The combined use of reference corpora and analytical platforms enabled triangulation of results. Sketch Engine provided statistically robust collocation scores and grammatical profiles, while AntConc allowed close qualitative inspection of contextual patterns. The BNC and COCA served as benchmarks for distinguishing general-language collocations from genre-specific newspaper constructions.

This multi-platform approach enhances the reliability and validity of collocation analysis, aligning with requirements for methodological transparency and empirical grounding. The corpus-based analysis confirms that verb-based collocations are not merely frequent lexical combinations but function as discursive mechanisms shaping evaluation, persuasion, and ideological meaning in newspaper discourse. Corpus linguistic platforms make it possible to identify these patterns systematically and interpret their communicative significance within authentic contexts.

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