

Lexical Nucleology Of Evaluative Phraseology in Present Day English Usage

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Abstract: The article examines how recurrent evaluative lexemes organize stable phraseological combinations in present day English. The study combines nucleological selection, contextual sampling and lexicographic verification. The analysis shows that a limited set of central adjectives and adverbs forms productive zones of judgment, intensity, certainty and stance. These combinations are significant for English lexicology, phraseology, translation and university teaching.

Keywords: Lexical nucleology, English phraseology, evaluative vocabulary, collocation, formulaic language, lexical core, parametric analysis, adjective semantics, multiword units, lexicography, English usage.

Introduction: Lexical nucleology has been described as a specific branch of comparative lexicology, and this definition is methodologically useful when the researcher is interested not in the whole vocabulary, but in its stable and organizing centre. In English, evaluative meaning is very often conveyed not by isolated words, but by recurring combinations such as strong evidence, deep concern, highly unlikely, widely accepted and bad faith. Phraseology remains central here because ready made combinations compress judgment, preserve normatively accepted compatibility, and guide interpretation before the sentence is completed.

The present article studies evaluative phraseology as a zone where lexical nucleus and combinatory stability meet most clearly. The problem is not simply that English contains many set expressions. The more important issue is that a relatively small group of evaluative lexemes repeatedly attracts the same semantic partners, while other formally possible combinations remain marginal, stylistically marked, or lexicographically weak. This is why the analysis focuses on recurrent adjective noun, adverb adjective and

adjective participle patterns, verified against contemporary English reference resources and large language databases.

METHODS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The material was selected from contemporary English reference resources, above all COCA, BNC-based online material and the Oxford English Dictionary, with further verification through lexicographic and phraseological studies. The procedure combined parametric selection of recurrent evaluative lexemes, semantic grouping, contextual observation, distributional comparison and lexicographic checking of combinatory preferences. This design follows the nucleological principle of concentrating on a visible and stable lexical centre, as well as the parametric tradition associated with quantitative lexicology and dictionary based lexical analysis. The COCA platform describes its English databases as balanced and very large, including 1 billion words for COCA and 100 million words for BNC, while the OED presents itself as a guide to the meaning, history and usage of more than 500.000 words and phrases.

The scholarly basis of the study rests on eleven sources. I.A.Merkulova formulates the conceptual status of lexical nucleology and later develops the idea of the lexical core and featured words. V.T.Titov provides the quantitative and parametric foundation. L.Lipka, A.P.Cowie, A.Wray, M.Benson, J.Sinclair, R.Carter and M.McCarthy describe English lexicology, phraseology, formulaic language, collocation and vocabulary structure from complementary positions. Taken together, these works make it possible to connect lexical centre, collocational preference, lexicographic norm and actual English usage within one analytical frame.

RESULTS

The analysis shows that evaluative phraseology in English is organized around a compact set of nuclear lexemes. The most productive among them are good, bad, strong, weak, high, low, deep, sharp, hard, soft, heavy and light. Their importance lies not only in frequency, but in the ability to generate stable phraseological extensions across several semantic zones. Thus, strong tends to combine with evidence, argument, support, reaction and preference. High prefers risk, probability, demand, priority, and standards. Deep attracts concern, regret, division, recession, and distrust. Sharp favours contrast, decline, criticism, rise, and turn. Even before full contextual expansion, such combinations already contain a compressed evaluative instruction for the reader.

Nuclear lexeme	Recurrent pattern	Typical combinations	Main evaluative function
good	adjective plus noun	good reason, good practice, good sign, good faith	positive judgment
bad	adjective plus noun	bad news, bad habit, bad luck, bad faith	negative judgment
strong	adjective plus noun	strong evidence, strong argument, strong support, strong reaction	force and certainty
weak	adjective plus noun	weak argument, weak evidence, weak signal, weak position	reduced force
high	adjective plus noun	high risk, high demand, high probability, high priority	degree and scale
low	adjective plus noun	low confidence, low priority, low visibility, low quality	reduced degree
deep	adjective plus noun	deep concern, deep regret, deep division, deep crisis	affective intensity

sharp	adjective plus noun	sharp contrast, sharp decline, sharp criticism, sharp rise	abrupt evaluation
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Result concerns the unequal degree of phraseological consolidation. Some combinations remain relatively open, as in good idea, bad result, or high price. Others are semi fixed and display clear lexical preference, as in highly unlikely, deeply concerned, widely accepted, closely linked, strongly recommend, fully aware, and bitterly disappointed. In these cases, replacement by a near synonym often weakens idiomaticity or changes stylistic value. Highly unlikely sounds neutral and standard in academic or journalistic prose, whereas very unlikely is more general and less terminological. Deeply concerned carries institutional and public evaluative force, while very concerned is broader and less anchored in formal English usage. This confirms that evaluative phraseology is not reducible to free synonymy.

The behaviour of strong, heavy, high, deep, hard and soft is especially revealing because these lexemes show selective combinatory pressure. English normally prefers strong tea but not powerful tea, heavy rain but not strong rain in standard description, high probability but not tall probability, hard evidence but not difficult evidence, soft power but not gentle power and sharp criticism rather than pointed criticism in ordinary neutral usage. These preferences are not random lexical accidents. They indicate that the nucleus governs compatibility by distributing semantic work among a restricted set of preferred partners. The phraseological norm is therefore part of lexical meaning itself, not an external ornament added after the choice of the word.

Nuclear lexeme	Preferred English combination	Non preferred alternative	Comment
strong	strong tea	powerful tea	lexical norm favours habitual quality reading
heavy	heavy rain	strong rain	weather description prefers heavy
high	high probability	tall probability	abstract scale favours high
hard	hard evidence	difficult evidence	evidential value is lexicalized
soft	soft power	gentle power	political meaning is conventionalized
sharp	sharp criticism	pointed criticism	the first is broader and more neutral
deep	deep concern	strong concern	the first is more standard in public evaluation

A further pattern appears when the material is divided by functional sphere. In academic English, nuclear

evaluation is often expressed through combinations such as strong evidence, high validity, low reliability, highly significant, closely related and widely accepted. In journalistic writing, the dominant units include sharp rise, deep crisis, strong reaction, heavy losses, and high tension. In everyday usage, the combinations become simpler but remain stable, for example good idea, bad luck, hard time, strong coffee and deep trouble. The lexical centre therefore does not disappear when the sphere changes. It adapts its combinatory radius while preserving recognisable evaluative roles. The English material also demonstrates that evaluative nucleus is regularly extended by degree adverbs and participial patterns. Sequences such as utterly absurd, perfectly clear, painfully obvious, deeply divided, narrowly defined, broadly similar, fully justified and widely reported show how the nucleus expands into stable phraseological chains. Such chains are especially important in university writing and translation because they encode stance with a high degree of economy. They also help explain why many learner errors concern not single words, but the choice of the wrong lexical partner. A student may know clear, concern, or evidence separately, yet still produce combinations that sound structurally possible and idiomatically weak.

DISCUSSION

The results are consistent with the theoretical line that treats lexical nucleology as a specific branch of comparative lexicology. They also agree with the view that formulaic language is predictable in form and often stored in fixed, or semi-fixed, chunks. Cowie's remark that phraseology has become a major field remains fully relevant here, because evaluative English depends heavily on ready made combinations. Benson's observation about increased attention to collocations clarifies why dictionary evidence is indispensable and Conklin with Schmitt show that there is an advantage in processing formulaic language, which supports the cognitive plausibility of the patterns described above. Merkulova's expression lexical core of the language is therefore productive not only for comparative work, but also for the description of present day English evaluative usage. At the same time, the study has clear limits. It is restricted to evaluative phraseology and does not attempt a full description of verbal phraseological centres, diachronic change, or regional differentiation across all world varieties of

English. The analysis is also focused on lexicographic stability and recurrent usage rather than on experimental testing of speaker reaction.

CONCLUSION

Evaluative phraseology in present day English is structured around a limited lexical nucleus that controls semantic compatibility and stabilises recurrent multiword units. The most productive nuclei generate regular models of judgment, intensity, certainty, and stance. A nucleological description makes it possible to move from scattered examples to an ordered system, and this is useful for lexicology, phraseology, lexicography, translation practice, and advanced English teaching.

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