

Using Corpora in Semantic Studies of English Adjectives

Authors : Oxana Lukoshus

Abstract : The methods of corpus linguistics, a well-established field of research, are being increasingly applied in cognitive linguistics. Corpora data are especially useful for different quantitative studies of grammatical and other aspects of language. The main objective of this paper is to demonstrate how present-day corpora can be applied in semantic studies in general and in semantic studies of adjectives in particular. Polysemantic adjectives have been the subject of numerous studies. But most of them have been carried out on dictionaries. Undoubtedly, dictionaries are viewed as one of the basic data sources, but only at the initial steps of a research. The author usually starts with the analysis of the lexicographic data after which s/he comes up with a hypothesis. In the research conducted three polysemantic synonyms true, loyal, faithful have been analyzed in terms of differences and similarities in their semantic structure. A corpus-based approach in the study of the above-mentioned adjectives involves the following. After the analysis of the dictionary data there was the reference to the following corpora to study the distributional patterns of the words under study - the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). These corpora are continually updated and contain thousands of examples of the words under research which make them a useful and convenient data source. For the purpose of this study there were no special needs regarding genre, mode or time of the texts included in the corpora. Out of the range of possibilities offered by corpus-analysis software (e.g. word lists, statistics of word frequencies, etc.), the most useful tool for the semantic analysis was the extracting a list of co-occurrence for the given search words. Searching by lemmas, e.g. true, true to, and grouping the results by lemmas have proved to be the most efficient corpora feature for the adjectives under the study. Following the search process, the corpora provided a list of co-occurrences, which were then to be analyzed and classified. Not every co-occurrence was relevant for the analysis. For example, the phrases like An enormous sense of responsibility to protect the minds and hearts of the faithful from incursions by the state was perceived to be the basic duty of the church leaders or 'True,' said Phoebe, 'but I'd probably get to be a Union Official immediately were left out as in the first example the faithful is a substantivized adjective and in the second example true is used alone with no other parts of speech. The subsequent analysis of the corpora data gave the grounds for the distribution groups of the adjectives under the study which were then investigated with the help of a semantic experiment. To sum it up, the corpora-based approach has proved to be a powerful, reliable and convenient tool to get the data for the further semantic study.

Keywords : corpora, corpus-based approach, polysemantic adjectives, semantic studies

Conference Title : ICALP 2016 : International Conference on Applied Linguistics and Psycholinguistics

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : May 23-24, 2016