



Research Paper

A Comparative Study on the Semantic Prosody of ACKNOWLEDGE, ADMIT, RECOGNIZE Based on Corpus

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Abstract: *Semantic prosody is an important research topic in contemporary corpus linguistics. This paper makes a comparative study of the frequency, collocation nouns and semantic prosody of ACKNOWLEDGE, ADMIT and RECOGNIZE in written languages based on the Chinese Learner English Corpus (CLEC) and the Freiburg- LOB Corpus of British English(FLOB). By revealing the usage characteristics of the three words in the two types of corpora, then the differences between English learners in China and native English speakers in the use of the three words are analyzed.*

Key words: *Synonym; Semantic prosody; Corpus; AntConc*

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I. Introduction

Synonym has always been a hot topic in second language vocabulary teaching and research. Lyons (1981) once elaborated the basic concept of synonyms, arguing that synonyms are words that are similar but identical in meaning. However, with the continuous deepening and development of the research on synonyms, relevant scholars believe that synonyms are words with high similarity in conceptual meaning or referential meaning, but different in word collocation and semantic prosody based on the perspective of corpus (Xiao et al., 2006). For second language learners, distinguishing synonyms is a stumbling block to proficiency in second language. Especially in the process of English learning, synonyms occupy a large proportion, and learners often make various mistakes in oral and writing expressions without fully mastering the difference between synonyms (Wang Chunyan, 2009). It is true that the dictionary of synonyms lists a multitude of examples, which can help second language learners distinguish the use of synonyms, but indistinctly blurring and weakening the uniqueness of individual word collocation, so that learners are not so easy to learn from.

Furthermore, the study of semantic prosody provides a new perspective for the discrimination of synonyms and enables us to deeply understand the semantic features and collocation behaviors of synonyms (Yu Jiangling and Ma Wulin, 2022), so as to help second language learners clear away the obstacles in the learning process. Semantic prosody first evolved from the word "prosody", which mainly refers to the phonological phenomenon in which the syncopated elements in speech flow are supersyncopated (Firth,1957). Sinclair (1991) further points out that prosody exists not only in phonetics, but also at the lexical level. However, the two scholars did not explicitly propose the term semantic prosody until Louw (1993), inspired by Firth's relevant studies, defined semantic prosody as "the phenomenon that a lexical item tends to co-appear with other lexical items of a certain semantic category and habitarily attracts a certain class of lexical items with the same or similar semantic characteristics". In recent years, with the continuous development of corpus linguistics, lots of scholars at home and abroad have carried out a lot of quantitative studies on the usage of synonyms, the context and register of synonyms based on corpus (Biber, 2000; Kennedy, 2000; Thomas, 2001; Wei Naixing, 2002; Wang Rui, Jiang Xue, 2016), which gives us many quantitative research enlightenment. Based on the semantic and rhyming exploration of synonyms on the basis of corpus, the real corpus is used to summarize and analyze the rules of language use from a macro perspective, which lays a foundation for us to explore the semantic and rhyming differences of synonyms with the help of lexical collocation behavior. In view of this, this study explores the usage of synonyms "ACKNOWLEDGE, ADMIT, RECOGNIZE" between English learners in China and native English speakers by using the corpus research method, and investigates the semantic and rhyming correspondence between synonyms from the perspective of cross-language. With the purpose of providing guidance and

reference for the second language teaching and acquisition of synonyms and translation of English and Chinese synonyms.

II. Literature Review

Throughout the research on semantic prosody at home and abroad, the research topics mainly focus on the definition of semantic rhymes, research methods, research objects, second language teaching and acquisition (Sinclair, 1996; Partington, 1998; Wei Naixing, 2011; Li Wenzhong, 2019; Pu Jianzhong, 2020; Jiang Yuechun, Wang Lifei; Zhang Yu, Wei Naixing, 2021).

Wei Naixing (2011) points out that the definition of semantic prosody has undergone the evolution of "semantic contagion theory", "connotation meaning theory" and "function theory". According to the theory of semantic contagion, semantic prosody is caused by the frequent co-occurrence of node words with certain kinds of words, which makes the former subject to semantic infiltration of the latter (Lou, 1993). "Connotative meaning theory" regards semantic prosody as the connotative meaning of lexical item itself, further concretifies semantic prosody from collocation forms, and mentions the connotative meaning transmission of cross-boundary words (Partington, 1998). The "functional theory" represented by Sinclair defines semantic rhyme as pragmatic function and the speaker's purpose (Sinclair, 2004). The above three viewpoints define the concept of semantic prosody from different angles, with different emphasis and complement each other. In terms of the research methods of semantic prosody, the academic scholars mainly focused on empirical studies and non-empirical studies of semantic prosody (Gao Yihong, 1999). The empirical research mainly focuses on systematic and detailed analysis of the collected texts, while non-empirical research focuses on the definition and exploration of semantic prosody as mentioned above. After nearly two decades of continuous development, the academic scholars has gradually shifted its research focus from the non-empirical study of semantic prosody to the empirical study of semantic prosody (Dai Jianchun, 2018). Early foreign scholars mainly explored the semantic prosody of a single word item based on corpora, and described the attitudinal meaning or pragmatic function of text word items (Stubbs, 1995; Hunston, 2002; Sinclair, 2004), but did not delve into the differences in pragmatic functional or attitudinal meaning of textual lexical items. At the same time, domestic scholars such as Wei Naixing, Wang Haihua, Wang Tongshun, Qin Pingxin, etc. analyzed collocation behavior of words with the help of computer and other auxiliary tools, which set off the first upsurge of semantic rhyme research in China (Wang Haihua, Wang Tongshun, 2005; Wei Naixing, 2006; Qin Pingxin, 2009), laying the foundation for future generations to carry out relevant research. With the continuous diversification of research topics, the research on semantic rhymes at home and abroad presents a colorful situation. Local semantic prosody, phrases and pragmatic attributes of semantic prosody, semantic prosody in foreign language teaching and second language acquisition, and semantic prosody in translated texts have become hot topics in semantic prosody research at home and abroad in the past decade (Guo et al., 2011; McGee, 2012; Gong Rong, Guo Xiuyan, 2009; Wang Pingxing, 2013; Zhai Meng, Wei Naixing, 2015; Yang Xiaolin, Cheng Le, 2016; Zhang Yu, Wei Naixing, 2021).

To sum up, although the study of lexical semantic prosody has become a hot topic for domestic and foreign scholars at the early stage of the research, most scholars only stay at a relatively superficial level in the discussion of lexical semantic prosody, and few scholars compare and analyze the semantic prosody of synonyms verbs between English learners in China and English native speakers from a cross-language perspective. Moreover, there are few researches on the semantic prosody of "ACKNOWLEDGE, ADMIT, RECOGNIZE", which mean the same meaning. Therefore, based on a comprehensive corpus, this study compares and analyzes the differences of the above near-sense verbs in terms of frequency, collocation nouns and semantic rhyme, and further explores the influence of semantic prosody research on foreign language teaching and second language acquisition, dictionary compilation and translation of English-Chinese near-sense verbs, so as to boost the development and deepening of domestic researches on semantic prosody.

Corpus and Research Design

This study is based on data from two English corpora: the Chinese Learner English Corpus (CLEC) and the Freiburg Corpus (FLOB). Both of them are recognized as the most representative corpus in the academic world, and the corpus data cover thousands of contents, and they are often used for comparative studies. The research tool mainly uses AntConc to analyze the near-meaning verbs "ACKNOWLEDGE, ADMIT, RECOGNIZE" in the database. The research questions mainly include: (1) What are the differences in the usage frequency of these three verbs respectively in the corpus of English learners in China and English native speakers? (2) What are the similarities and differences between these three verbs and nouns in the two corpora mentioned above? Considering that in the Chinese Learner English Corpus (CLEC), verb + noun collocation errors rank first, this study chooses noun collocation after such verbs as the observation point. (3) What are the differences in the semantic prosody of these three verbs?

III. Results and Analysis

3.1 Frequency variance

English verbs will have different morphological changes in the process of use, so this study adopts the regular expression, which is also known as the regular representation. By means of this method, the target words can be accurately extracted and the retrieval effect can be improved. Before the formal search, first enter the inflected forms of the near-sense verbs "ACKNOWLEDGE, ADMIT, RECOGNIZE" separately in the AntConc3.2.4w "Concordance", add the affix "(-s) (-ed) (-ing)" after the verb. Secondly, the above verbs are selected as node words and searched in CLEC and FLOB corpora to obtain the index lines. Thirdly, the "Save Out to Text File" function of AntConc3.2.4w software is used to store the obtained index lines in the form of files in the computer. Finally, after manual screening, the index lines that do not meet the meaning are deleted, and the frequency of near-sense verbs "ACKNOWLEDGE, ADMIT, RECOGNIZE" in CLEC and FLOB corpora are counted respectively. Since the total capacity of the two corpora is different, the observation frequency needs to be converted into the standardized frequency. Furthermore, the likelihood value is used to further explore the differences between English learners in China and British native speakers in the use of near-meaning verbs "ACKNOWLEDGE, ADMIT, RECOGNIZE", as shown in Table 1.

Lexical items	CLEC		FLOB	
	Observation frequency	Standardized frequency	Observation frequency	Standardized frequency
ACKNOWLEDGE	11	10.07	52	50.38
ADMIT	44	42.73	71	68.64
RECOGNIZE	59	56.54	50	49.87

(Table 1 Comparison of the frequencies in ACKNOWLEDGE, ADMIT and RECOGNIZE used by English learners in China and British native speakers)

Based on Table 1, it can be seen that English learners in China use ACKNOWLEDGE and ADMIT less frequently than their British native speakers, while RECOGNIZE more frequently than their British native speakers. ACKNOWLEDGE is the verb with a greater gap in its use. British speakers use it five times as often as Chinese learners. These figures show that English learners in China do not fully understand and grasp the usage of ACKNOWLEDGE, and their use of these words is relatively insufficient.

In order to present the significant differences between English learners in China and British native speakers in using the above three verbs more objectively, the author calculated the logarithm likelihood ratio (LL-value) with the help of the tool, Log-Likelihood Calculator based on the statistical research method. On the basis of the principle of statistics, the cardinal value "+" indicates that the usage frequency of node words in the corpus of English learners in China is higher than that of British native speakers, that is, the word is relatively overused. If cardinal value shows "-", it means that the use frequency of node words in Chinese learners' corpus is lower than that of native English speakers, that is, the word is relatively insufficient. P value is the significant level corresponding to cardinal value. When P value is less than 0.05, cardinal value is greater than 3.84, the difference is significant, and the data confidence is 95%. When P value is less than 0.01, cardinal value is more than 6.63, the difference is significant, and the data confidence is 99%. When P value is less than 0.001, cardinal value is greater than 10.83 and data confidence is 99.9%, the difference is even more significant.

With Log-likelihood tool, the total capacity of Chinese learner English corpus and British native speakers was input to "corpus size" below corpus1 and corpus2. Then enter the corresponding standardized frequencies of "ACKNOWLEDGE, ADMIT and RECOGNIZE" in CLEC and FLOB corpora respectively into the toolbar of "frequency of word" of Log-likelihood Calculator. Click the function key "Calculate LL" to get the cardinal values of three words that correspond to CLEC and FLOB corpora, as shown in Table 2.

Lexical items	Cardinal values
ACKNOWLEDGE	+23.44
ADMIT	+3.12
RECOGNIZE	+2.59

(Table 2 Cardinal values of ACKNOWLEDGE, ADMIT, RECOGNIZE)

In Table 2, ACKNOWLEDGE has a corresponding cardinal value of +23.44 in the Chinese Learner English Corpus and the Freiburg-LOB Corpus of British English (FLOB), which is greater than the zero cut-off value 10.83, indicating that the value is meaningful at the significance level of 0.001, that is, the two values involved in the comparison have significant differences. It also shows that English learners in China use

ACKNOWLEDGE much less frequently than native British speakers.

ADMIT, RECOGNIZE the corresponding cardinal values in Chinese learner English corpus and British native language corpus are +3.12 and +2.59 respectively, which are obviously less than the zero bound value 10.83, that is, the difference between the two values participating in the comparison is not significant. This shows that English learners in China do not differ much from native English speakers in the use frequency of ADMIT, RECOGNIZE.

3.2 Differences in collocation nouns

The extraction of word collocation is closely related to the selection of span length. Therefore, the selection of appropriate span length is essential in the study of corpus word collocation, and it is also a means to effectively improve the efficiency of the study of word collocation. Existing studies have proved that within the span of -4/+4, that is to say, four words are taken as the context around the node words, and the distribution of collocation words is closely related to the grammatical structure, while the attractiveness of node words is no longer significant after the position of -4/+4 (Jones & Sinclair, 1974). Therefore, this study draws on the research of Jones and Sinclair (1974) and uses the -4/+4 span to explore the differences in the collocation of synonyms "ACKNOWLEDGE, ADMIT, RECOGNIZE".

This study extracts the synonyms "ACKNOWLEDGE, ADMIT, RECOGNIZE" from the Chinese Learner English Corpus and the Freiburg- LOB Corpus of British English, selects them with the help of AntConc 3.2.4w, and selects the nouns with an MI value greater than or equal to two times to get Table 3.

Ranking	ACKNOWLEDGE				ADMIT				RECOGNIZE			
	CLEC		FLOB		CLEC		FLOB		CLEC		FLOB	
	Collocation words	MI-score	Collocation words	MI-score	Collocation words	MI-score	Collocation words	MI-score	Collocation words	MI-score	Collocation words	MI-score
1	contribution	12.32194	portrait	14.57965	knife	9.84389	fear	10.40973	worth	11.08619	god	9.39266
2	industry	10.74915	debt	11.84785	boy	8.62758	us	10.15407	wife	10.82587	whole	8.91679
3	one	7.90236	life	8.88916	game	8.61847	love	9.01321	sight	10.28233	both	7.61152
4	it	5.91536	time	7.75856	doctor	8.11118	means	8.87469	importance	9.22736	others	6.67368
5			one	6.82859	hand	6.37102	me	6.67240	law	8.37637	some	6.54432
6			quote	4.36881	one	4.61696	it	6.48632	others	7.53629	her	5.87279
7					us	4.61677	him	6.08119	communities	7.40564	this	
8					life	4.20386	you	5.91313	them	6.99442	quote	3.26927
9					people	3.99840			world	6.56955		
10					you	3.38591			society	6.46501		
11					it	3.36692			me	6.14759		
12									people	5.03588		
13									water	4.87905		
14									you	4.42338		

(Table 3 Noun comparison of ACKNOWLEDGE, ADMIT, RECOGNIZE)

As shown in Table 3, there are four words of ACKNOWLEDGE in CLEC, which are contribution, industry, one and it, while there are five in FLOB, the Freiburg- LOB Corpus of British English. They are portrait, debt, life, time, one and quote. Of these noun collocations, only one word belongs to the common collocation.

In the CLEC corpus, ADMIT has 11 noun collocations, including knife, boy, game, doctor, hand, one, us, life, people, you and it. In FLOB corpus, ADMIT has 8 noun collocations, including fear, us, love, means, me, it, him and you. These noun collocations are mainly lexical items that represent personal pronouns and other meanings, such as "I, he and it". In CLEC and FLOB, ADMIT has three collocation nouns, which are us, you and it. The corresponding MI values in CLEC are 4.61677, 3.38591 and 3.36692. In the English native speaker corpus, FLOB, the corresponding MI values are 10.15407, 5.91313 and 6.48632, respectively. Based on this, it can be seen that the MI value corresponding to ADMIT in CLEC corpus and FLOB corpus is not exactly the same, and the corresponding MI value in FLOB corpus is much higher than that in CLEC corpus. The reason may be that when English learners in China use ADMIT, they are mainly restricted by the context of the composition text. As a result, they did not consider the actual context when using ADMIT, which resulted in their incorrect use of noun

collocations. However, by careful observation of the noun collocations of ADMIT in the CLEC corpus, it is not difficult to find that although some nouns are improperly used, the later collocations also contain lexical items indicating the meaning of personal pronouns such as "I, he, it", which indicates that English learners in China have basically mastered the use of the noun collocations of ADMIT. In addition, ADMIT, its two noun collocation words "one and it" in CLEC corpus overlap with the other two noun collocation words of COMPLETE in CLEC corpus. In other words, English learners in China often use ADMIT and RECOGNIZE when they acknowledge an uncertain event and collocate "one and it" together.

In the Chinese Learner English Corpus, the noun collocation of RECOGNIZE has a total of 14, including worth, wife, sight, importance, law, others, commodities, them, world, society, me, people, water, you; In the British native language corpus, the noun collocation of RECOGNIZE has a total of 8, including god, whole, both, others, some, her, this and quote. By observing the RECOGNIZE noun collocation in CLEC and FLOB corpus, it is found that the noun collocation in Chinese Learner English Corpus is slightly higher than that in the Freiburg- LOB Corpus of British English. Thus, English learners in China utilize RECOGNIZE relatively frequently. However, by analyzing the common collocation nouns, it is found that there is only one word, "others," overlapping in the above two corpora, which indicates that English learners in China frequently use RECOGNIZE but do not fully grasp the correct usage of its noun collocation.

3.3 Semantic prosody comparison

Semantic prosody research has always been a hot topic in corpus linguistics. By analyzing collocation words co-occurring with node words, we can explore the corresponding semantic prosody situation of node words. If the co-occurrence collocation words of node words almost show the characteristics of negative semantic, it indicates that the node words have negative semantic prosody. If the co-occurrence collocation words of node words almost show positive semantic characteristics, it indicates that the node words have positive semantic prosody. If the semantic features of co-occurrence collocation words are neither negative nor positive, it indicates that the node word has neutral semantic prosody. If the co-occurrence collocation words of node words contain neutral collocation words in general, lexical items with obvious positive meaning, and many lexical items with strong negative meaning, it indicates that the node words have mixed semantic prosody. This study attempts to speculate and judge the semantic presence of ACKNOWLEDGE, ADMIT and RECOGNIZE by analyzing their co-occurrences in CLEC and FLOB.

ACKNOWLEDGE is understood as "to accept that sth is true" in English by the Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary. This definition has no negative or positive semantic characteristics. In Chinese Learners English Corpus CLEC and British native speakers corpus FLOB, the nouns frequently matched with ACKNOWLEDGE are contribution, industry, one and it, and then portraiture, debt, life, time and one, etc. These words all have neutral meaning, so it can be inferred that ACKNOWLEDGE has neutral semantic prosody in CLEC and FLOB.

ADMIT as "1.to agree, often unwillingly, that sth is true. 2.to say that you have done sth wrong or illegal". In these two cases, "unwillingly, wrong, illegal" and other appraisal words with negative semantic orientation appeared. In CLEC, the high-frequency collocation nouns ADMIT include terms such as knife and doctor which have obvious negative semantic characteristics. Thus, ADMIT presents the feature of negative semantic prosody in corpus CLEC. In FLOB, the collocation nouns of ADMIT also include words with negative semantic features such as fear and means, so ADMIT has negative semantic prosody in FLOB.

RECOGNIZE in the Oxford Advanced English-Chinese Dictionary as "1.to admit or to be aware that sth exists or is true. 2.to accept and approve of sb/sth officially. "has a neutral meaning, with no obvious positive or negative semantic implication. According to Table 3, it can be seen that the collocation words of high-frequency nouns recognized in CLEC corpus are worth, wife, sight, importance, law, world, etc., which are all neutral semantic lexical items. In the British native speaker corpus FLOB, RECOGNIZE high-frequency noun collocation words include god, whole, both, others, some, her, etc. These words are mostly nouns expressing pronoun meanings and all have neutral lexical terms. Thus, RECOGNIZE has a neutral semantic prosody in the FLOB corpus.

IV. Conclusion and Enlightenment

ACKNOWLEDGE, ADMIT and RECOGNIZE are synonyms frequently used in English. They all have the meaning of "recognize". A comparative analysis of the differences in frequency, collocation nouns and semantic rhymes of the above-mentioned near-sense verbs will further promote the influence of semantic prosody research on foreign language teaching and second language acquisition, dictionary compilation and translation of English-Chinese near-sense verbs, which will be conducive to advance the development of domestic research on semantic prosody of vocabulary.

According to the frequency statistics of ACKNOWLEDGE, ADMIT and RECOGNIZE in CLEC and FLOB respectively, English learners in China use ACKNOWLEDGE and ADMIT less frequently than British

native speakers, but use RECOGNIZE more often than native English speakers. ACKNOWLEDGE is the verb with a greater gap in its use. British speakers use it five times as often as Chinese learners. These figures show that English learners in China do not fully understand and grasp the usage of ACKNOWLEDGE, and their use of these words is relatively insufficient. CLEC contains the corpus of English learners of different language abilities. Those with higher language ability may fully understand and use ACKNOWLEDGE, while those with lower language ability do not fully understand ACKNOWLEDGE. This may be the main reason why ACKNOWLEDGE is far less frequently used than the corpus FLOB of British native speakers. From the noun collocations of ACKNOWLEDGE, ADMIT and RECOGNIZE in Chinese-English corpus, ACKNOWLEDGE and RECOGNIZE show a tendency of neutral semantic prosody, while ADMIT shows negative semantic features in the collocation nouns in Chinese-English corpus.

In conclusion, there is no semantic difference between English learners in China and British native speakers when they use ACKNOWLEDGE, RECOGNIZE and ADMIT. However, this phenomenon still needs to be further explored and verified, because this study only uses the seventh edition of the Oxford Advanced English-Chinese Dual Interpretation Dictionary for reference, and does not adopt the definition of other English dictionaries. In the future, we can further learn from the definitions of other English dictionaries and compare and analyze the differences in the use of semantic prosody in synonyms ACKNOWLEDGE, ADMIT and RECOGNIZE, so as to enrich the relevant research on semantic prosody in China and promote the in-depth development of semantic prosody research.

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