



**A CORPUS-BASED STUDY OF ENGLISH SYNONYMS:
POSSIBLE, PROBABLE, AND LIKELY**

BY

MISS FIRADOW NISANI

**AN INDEPENDENT STUDY PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH FOR CAREERS
LANGUAGE INSTITUTE
THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC YEAR 2015
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ENTITLED

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the degree of Master of Arts in English for Careers

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ABSTRACT

This study examines three synonyms in English, *possible*, *probable*, and *likely*, concentrating on their meaning, grammatical pattern, noun collocation, and degree of formality. Two online dictionaries (the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary and Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English) were used in comparison to the corpus-based data (the Corpus of Contemporary American English) via five hundred concordance lines for exploring the similarities and differences between the synonyms.

The study discovered that these three adjective synonyms cannot be substituted in all contexts although they share the same core meaning. They have some differences in meaning, grammatical pattern, noun collocation and stylistic information. Furthermore, the corpora provide additional linguistic information not existent in the dictionaries, e.g. grammatical pattern, collocation, and stylistic information, etc.

Keywords: Synonyms, Adjective, Corpus, Corpora, Corpus-based data, Learners' dictionaries.

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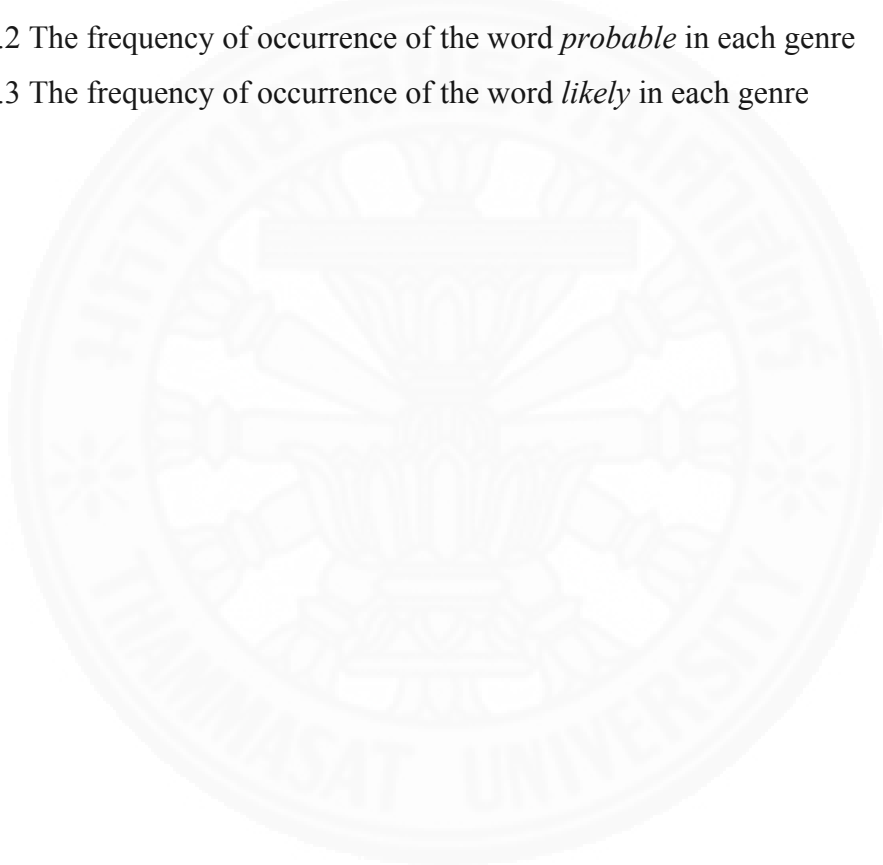
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Symbols/Abbreviations	Terms
Adj.	Adjective
Adv.	Adverb
AmE	American English
BrE	British English
BNC	British National Corpus
COCA	Corpus of Contemporary American English
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
KWIC	Keyword in context
L2	Second language
LDOCE	Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English
Linking V.	Linking Verb
N.	Noun
OALD	Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary
POS	Part of speech
S.	Subject
sb	somebody
sth	something
V.inf	Verb infinitive

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter consists of seven sections: (1) background to the study, (2) research questions, (3) research objectives, (4) scope of the study, (5) limitations of the study, (6) definitions of the relevant terms, and (7) significance of the study.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Undeniably, English is among one of the most crucial languages because it plays a crucial role in international communication such as education, business, and entertainment as a global lingua franca. In other words, English is probably the only language that truly connects the world together. Due to the fact that English is one of the languages with a long history and its global expansion, it is not surprising that the language tends to have a large number of words (Crystal, 2007). In order to master English vocabulary, English learners should be aware of how to use the synonyms correctly. For example, when writing an essay, varied word choice can help learners avoid repeating the same words in their writing. Notably, there are a number of synonyms that basically express similar senses of meaning e.g. *quick* and *fast*.

One major difficulty in English vocabulary learning is to understand the similarities and differences in meanings and usage of synonyms. Liu (2010) stated that synonymy is a common yet complex linguistic phenomenon. Since the past decade, the synonym has become an interesting phenomenon in linguistics. According to several studies, researchers have agreed that, in fact, synonyms have similar meaning, but they differ in context and/or different perspectives and cannot be entirely interchangeable (Harley, 2006). Commonly, English learners may consult dictionaries in order to understand and use words correctly. Meanwhile, explanations in English dictionaries may overlap and are not always interchangeable in all contexts (Aroonmanakun, 2015). For instance, the words *quick* and *fast* are synonyms. *Quick* means “lasting for or taking only a short time” (The online Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 2014), while *fast* means “moving or able to move quickly” (The online Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 2014). As can be seen in

the definitions of these two words, they have similar senses of meaning. Moreover, learners are prone to use the synonyms incorrectly due to a lack of L2 English proficiency. In addition, despite the fact that learners may know many synonymous words, they cannot use them in a grammatically correct way (Phoocharoensil, 2010). Therefore, learners are expected to observe the similarities and differences in meanings and usages of synonyms.

The obvious problem may be tackled via a corpus-based analysis of synonyms. With the help of computer science, a corpus which stores naturally-occurring language samples, was born and has proved to be one of the most effective ways to distinguish synonyms through authentic data. For the reasons mentioned above, research is needed to shed light on this intriguing linguistic phenomenon. The present study examines the semantic and usage differences among three near synonymous adjectives: *possible*, *probable* and *likely*, which are often confusing for English learners. However, consulting a dictionary usually provides only the senses of each word without showing the usage differences among those word. For example, the online Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2014), defines the word *possible* as “If something is possible, it can be done or achieved” while the definition of *probable* accompanies with *likely* “something that is likely will probably happen or is probably true”. The information shown in the dictionary may not help learners to distinguish synonyms or learn when and why to use these words. To fill in the gap, the rationales for examining this set of synonyms are fourfold: (i) to describe distinctive definitions between those synonyms, (ii) to investigate the possible collocates and identify similarities and differences of these synonyms, (iii) to explore the grammatical patterns of the synonyms *possible*, *probable*, and *likely* (iv) to examine the degree of formality of these synonyms in which examples are taken from both spoken and written data. In order to achieve the goals, similarities and differences in all the above mentioned aspects of these synonyms need to be examined. Authentic language data will be derived from online dictionaries and corpora in exploring the usage of these synonyms.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.2.1 What are the similarities and differences in meanings between the three adjective synonyms: *possible*, *probable*, and *likely*?

1.2.2 What are the grammatical patterns of the adjective synonyms: *possible*, *probable*, and *likely*?

1.2.3 What are common nouns that collocate with the adjective synonyms: *possible*, *probable*, and *likely*?

1.2.4 What is the degree of formality of the adjective synonyms: *possible*, *probable*, and *likely*?

1.2.5 What are the similarities and differences when comparing and contrasting the information on the three synonyms provided in the dictionaries and the language data presented from concordance lines?

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1.3.1 To compare and contrast the definitions of the three adjective synonyms: *possible*, *probable*, and *likely*.

1.3.2 To explore common nouns that collocate with these adjective synonyms: *possible*, *probable*, and *likely*.

1.3.3 To investigate the grammatical patterns of these adjectives synonyms: *possible*, *probable*, and *likely*.

1.3.4 To examine the degree of formality of these adjective synonyms: *possible*, *probable*, and *likely*.

1.3.5 To observe the information given in the dictionaries with the language data presented in the form of concordance lines.

1.4 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study focused on the synonymous adjectives: *possible*, *probable*, and *likely*. An exploration of authentic data from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) was employed to distinguish the similarities and differences of the adjective synonyms. The examples of each word were derived from 500 concordance lines. Also they were taken from both spoken and written texts. In terms of collocations, the search was limited to the noun collocates following *possible*, *probable*, and *likely*. The two main online dictionaries, Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2014) and Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2015), were applied in the study in order to define the general meaning of these three adjectives.

1.5 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The limitation that needs to be acknowledged and addressed in this study is concerns related to comparing the data of a dictionary and a corpus. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary provides the information based on British English (BrE), while the corpus-based data as COCA supplies the information based on American English (AmE).

1.6 DEFINITION OF THE RELEVANT TERMS

The following are specific key terms used in this study.

1.6.1 Corpus or corpora (plural): a collection of authentic texts composed of both written and spoken language, which is stored with large amounts of text on a computer that can be systematically retrieved and analyzed using corpus analysis software.

1.6.2 The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA): the largest freely available corpus of English which is representative of American English. The corpus contains more than 520 million words of update text collected from 1990-2015, equally divided among spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, and academic texts.

- 1.6.3 Concordance line:** the result from query information from COCA which is known as keyword in context (KWIC).
- 1.6.4 Synonym:** a word or phrase that means exactly or nearly the same as another word or phrase in the same language.
- 1.6.5 Collocation:** a criterion to distinguish synonyms, which refers to words statistically co-occurring together or appearing more frequently than by chance, e.g. *hate mail* not **hate letter*.
- 1.6.6 Degree of formality:** a criterion to classify synonyms which refers to words that tend to occur in formal or informal context.
- 1.6.7 Grammatical pattern:** a criterion to distinguish synonyms, which refers to the structure of the words when constructing a sentence or clause. For example, in the phrase, *it is possible to do sth* as in *from the hilltop it was possible to see the sea* (Longman Collocations Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2013), as opposed to **it is possible doing sth*.

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As synonyms seem to pose problems for Thai learners of English, the findings will enable them to use the adjective synonyms *possible*, *probable*, and *likely* more effectively. In terms of pedagogy, examining the similarities and differences of the three synonyms will help reduce learners' confusion over the usage of them. A corpus-based study seems to give helpful information as it provides additional information absent in dictionaries. Learners can search for more sample sentences of synonyms from corpora so that they will be able to have access to some subtle meanings.

Additionally, the results can allow teachers to provide information for their students regarding the authentic use of these close synonyms. In other words, the results may enhance the English proficiency of EFL or L2 users/learners to use these synonyms correctly and naturally.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The chapter begins with general definitions of synonyms followed by type of the synonymy, adjective, and criteria for distinguishing synonyms. This chapter presents the previous studies with a summary of related corpus-based studies of synonyms.

2.1 SYNONYMS

2.1.1 Definition of Synonym

Synonymy is a basic concept in lexicology. The term *synonymy* originated from the Greek word *sunonumon*, which means “having the same name” (online Etymology Dictionary, 2016). Many dictionaries contain different definitions of the word synonym. The online Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (2015) defines synonym as “a word or expression that has the same or nearly the same meaning as another word or phrase in the same language”. For example, *high* and *tall* are synonyms. The online Longman Dictionary (2014) provides the definition as “a word with same meaning as another word in the same language”.

Synonyms can be found pervasively in everyday words, textbooks, and academic terms. The varieties of synonyms allow English learners to make choices about appropriate vocabulary, and contribute to the richness of a language (Sakulratanacharoen, 2012).

However, some differences in meaning are often found within a pair or a group of synonyms. Consequently, most studies in linguistics reveal that there are no exact synonyms; they almost always differ from a semantic, syntactic, or pragmatic point of view (Taylor, 2002). This leads to the widely-held perception that ‘true synonymy’ is extremely rare or that it may not exist at all (Chalker & Weiner, 1998).

2.1.2 Types of Synonym

There are many types of synonyms. The present study focuses on two major types, strict and loose synonyms.

Strict and Loose of Synonyms

Synonyms can be divided into two main types: strict (absolute) and loose synonyms (relative). For *strict synonymy*, similar words that are considered strict synonyms have to be interchangeable in all aspects or context, including meaning as well as style and connotation must not be changed. Linguistics notes that the existence of these types of synonyms are very rare and seem to not exist. In cases when two strict synonyms appear at the same time, one of them usually changes the meaning, or disappears from the language since strict synonyms are redundant and finally become a cliché word (Phoochareonsil, 2010). For example, the word *spirit* is a borrowed word while *ghost* is a native English word. The meanings of these words are the same but now *spirit* uses a general meaning while *ghost* refers to ‘disembodied spirit’. Apart from that, according to Jackson & Amvela (2000) *drop* has been replaced by *village*, and *divers* has been replaced by *various*. As for loose synonyms, these are the most commonly found. Usually, when we speak of synonymy, we mean ‘loose’ or ‘relative’ synonymy (Jackson & Amvela, 2000, p. 109). The reason is that “where we identify not only a significant overlap in meaning between two words, but also some contexts at least where they cannot substitute for each other” (Jackson & Amvela, 2000, p. 109).

Explicit examples of loose synonyms in English are the words *quick* and *fast*, both of which generally mean “doing something in a short time”. They are interchangeable in such a context as ‘a *quick* action’ and ‘a *fast* action’ as in “his *quick/fast* action in the gym saved her lives” (Aroonmanakun, 2015, pp. 57-58) while the word ‘*quick*’ collocates with the word ‘*meal*’ as in ‘*quick meal*’ but not ‘**fast meal*’.

Therefore, the examples above indicate that synonyms can sometimes be interchangeably used in some contexts.

2.2 ADJECTIVE

The online Oxford dictionary defines an adjective as “a word that describes a noun, giving extra information about it”. Adjectives can be notable when they come immediately before a noun, or particularly when they appear between an article (a, an, the), a possessive adjective (my, his, her, its, their, etc.), a demonstrative (this, that, these, those), or a quantifier (some, most, all, a few, etc.) and a noun (“What is an Adjective?” n.d.). Altenberg and Vago (2010) defined an adjective as “a word that refers to a characteristic of a noun” (p. 58). In addition, an adjective can be put between an article and a noun (p. 59).

Sinclair (1991) stated that adjectives could be divided into two main types: qualitative adjectives and classifying adjectives. Qualitative adjectives are used to identify a quality that someone or something has, for example, ‘*sad* story’, ‘*pretty* girl’, ‘*small* child’ etc. Classifying adjectives are used for identifying the particular class that something belongs to. For instance, ‘financial help’, the adjective ‘financial’ is used to distinguish the noun ‘help’ from many other different kinds of help.

2.3 CRITERIA FOR DISTINGUISHING SYNONYMS

2.3.1 Collocation

The online Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (2015) gives a definition of collocations as “a combination of words in a language that happens very often and more frequently than would happen by chance”. One typical definition of collocations from Lewis (2000) is “collocations are not words that are ‘put together’, but they are the phenomenon that certain words naturally and statistically significantly co-occur in texts than random frequency” (p. 132). For instance, the adjective *auburn* has a tendency to co-occur with the noun *hair* (but not **auburn car*), and *rancid* often co-occurs with *butter* (but not **rancid bread*) (McCarthy, O’Keeffe, & Walsh, 2010). According to Hill (2000), collocations can be divided into four categories: unique

collocations, strong collocations, weak collocations, and medium-strength collocations, as follows.

2.3.1.1 Unique Collocations are collocations that are unique or fixed together e.g. '*foot the bill*' cannot be replaced by '**foot the invoice*'.

2.3.1.2 Strong Collocations are collocations whose neighboring words almost never co-occur separately, for example '*rancid oil*'.

2.3.1.3 Weak Collocations involve words that can co-occur easily with many other words e.g. *long*, *short* or different kinds of colors. Most weak collocations have literal meanings for example, '*red shirt*', as both '*red*' and '*shirt*' can easily co-occur in other collocations because many other things can be red, and shirts can be in many colors.

2.3.1.4 Medium-strength Collocations are recommended by Hill (2000) as the main learning aid for all language users because these collocations play a crucial role in speaking and writing. For example, most learners know the meanings of *hold* and *meeting*, but they may not be aware of the collocation pattern '*hold a meeting*'.

2.3.2 Grammatical Patterns

Another interesting criterion which is found in many research studies to distinguish synonyms in English is grammatical pattern. A grammatical pattern means the rule one has to know in order to construct a sentence or clause correctly (McCarthy, O'Keeffe, & Walsh, 2010). In other words, it refers to a model for describing the syntactic structures of words. Despite the fact that synonyms may share a similar meaning, they have different grammatical patterns. For example, as mentioned by Phoocharoensil (2010, p. 5), the adjectives *able* and *capable*, both of which mean having the qualities and ability needed to do something, have different grammatical patterns. The word *able* requires the infinitive marker *to*, as in a:

- a. Jonathan is *able to* fly Concorde,

By contrast, the word *capable* takes a prepositional phrase beginning with *of*, as in b.

b. Jonathan is *capable of* flying Concorde.

However, ‘*of*’ cannot follow ‘*able*’, whereas ‘*to*’ does not co-occur with *capable* interchangeably which will bring about ungrammaticality in English, as in c. and d.

c. *Jonathan is *able of* flying Concorde.

d. *Jonathan is *capable to* fly Concorde.

2.3.3 The Style or Formality of the Context

Some dictionaries do not identify degree of formality of words. Not all English words have the same degree of formality. In general, formal words often occur in formal contexts such as academic articles, textbooks, journals, etc., and informal words evidently occur in contexts such as everyday conversation and personal letters (Jackson & Amvela, 2000). When comparing a pair of synonyms, one tends to occur in a more formal context than the other (Phoochareonsil, 2010). For example, the list below gives pairs of words, one of which is formal and the other is less formal.

Formal	Informal
pulchritude	beauty
endeavor	try
missive	letter
gratitude	thanks
commence	start

(Jackson & Amvela, 2000, p. 95)

2.4 RELEVANT RESEARCH

As shown in several previous studies, perfect synonyms do not seem to exist. They cannot be used completely interchangeably in all contexts, but instead share only some shade of meaning. A number of studies have shown that more definitions,

grammatical patterns, collocations and formality degrees are found in corpora than in dictionaries, due to the limited page space in dictionaries (Shen, 2010). Some of those pieces of research are worth being discussed here:

Phoocharoensil (2010) conducted corpus-based research on the five English synonyms *ask*, *beg*, *plead*, *request*, and *appeal*, concentrating on lexical, syntactic, and stylistic information. The procedure of the study is systematic by comparing basic information from three dictionaries, namely, the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2005), the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2009), and the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2009). Then, through Wordsmith Tools 3.0, a corpus of Time (1995) provided the data for analysis. The findings revealed that the five synonyms shared a similar core meaning in terms of *asking someone to do something*. However, when *beg*, *plead*, *request*, and *appeal* were compared to *ask*, the in-depth meanings were different. *Beg* suggests urgency on the part of the speaker. *Plead* means what one says is very important, which is stronger than *ask*. *Request* demonstrates the politeness and formality of the speaker. Finally, *appeal* shows seriousness, urgency and formality and is often used in legal texts. By studying the concordance lines of the word *request*, it was found that some facts are not presented in these three dictionaries. For example, another possible pattern of *request* is *request + that + S + V.inf.*, the word *request* and the modal *should* can be used simultaneously, and examples of *request* in the three learner's dictionaries showed only an active form, while some examples in the concordance lines are in both active and passive voices.

Shen (2010) also conducted research on synonyms of adjectives. Shen was interested in synonym errors made by EFL learners. Shen conducted a case study of *glad* and *happy* and compared the result based on FLOB (The Freiburg - LOB Corpus of British English). Shen stated that *glad* and *happy* are overused because the two adjectives are part of basic English vocabulary. The differences between Chinese EFL learners and native speakers in terms of the frequency of the use of *glad* and *happy* were investigated. The regularity of the employment of the word *glad* (169) by Chinese EFL learners is over three times that of native speakers, and the rate of

occurrences of the word *happy* (812) is more than five times higher among Chinese EFL students. The Keyness value of *glad* and *happy* (71.2 and 507.9) means that these two words occur much more often than would be expected. In other words, Chinese EFL learners tend to overuse *glad* and *happy*. Shen found that printed dictionaries, although they suffer from limitations of space, put some effort into building semantic networks with synonyms. However, electronic dictionaries like the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE) and the Oxford Advance Learners's Dictionary (OALD) do not contain adequate examples of sentence patterns, modifiers, or collocations for EFL students.

Cai (2012) conducted a study on *great* and its near synonyms, *awesome*, *excellent*, *fabulous*, *fantastic*, *terrific*, and *wonderful* were examined. The study needs to identify the differences among the seven near-synonyms. The denotations or connotations, and usage in collocation were pointed out and analyzed by COCA in both spoken and written data which cover different genres to search for frequencies, collocation and description in subtle meaning. The findings can be summarized that the seven near-synonyms are used mainly in spoken language. Regarding the overall frequencies, *great* is used most frequently among the near-synonyms. It also found that *fabulous*, *fantastic*, *great*, *terrific*, and *wonderful* tend to occur more often in the spoken genre. Meanwhile, *awesome* and *excellent* are widespread in magazines. About collocation analysis, most of the near synonyms were used in modifying abstract nouns in order to describe concepts/ideas and *wonderful* is used most frequently, while *excellent* tends to be used for movement/events. Considerably, the nouns modified by those adjectives and the collocation adverbs still overlap. For example, the noun 'job' appears in highest frequency with *excellent*, *fabulous*, *fantastic*, and *terrific*. Moreover, differences among the connotations presented that *great* is more neutral than the other words, while *fabulous*, *fantastic*, *terrific* and *awesome* are extremely positive. *Fabulous* and especially *fantastic* have a sense of being almost unbelievable. Notably, this study did not mention using any dictionary instead of consultation with native English speakers. However, in conclusion, the study claimed that "there are usually differences in the meanings and uses of apparent synonyms, and that lexical item tend not to be completely interchangeable".

Chanchotphatthana (2012) also carried out a study on English synonyms of the adjectives *different*, *diverse*, and *various*. The study compared and contrasted the information of these synonyms by using the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (8th Edition International Student's Edition, 2010) and the British National Corpus (BNC). The results revealed that *different*, *diverse*, and *various* cannot be interchangeable in all contexts because of their dialects, formality, collocations, and grammatical patterns. Additionally, some patterns appear in the dictionary but are not found from the 300 concordance lines. It is possible to say that if a researcher studies more than 300 concordance lines, the pattern might be found. Linking verbs, adverbs, prepositions and nouns are the main collocates of those three synonyms. According to the results, *various* has only two grammatical patterns, while the others have more. Moreover, corpora can provide more information than a dictionary does. In other words, corpora provide more linguistic information than Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary does, e.g. grammatical patterns, collocations, etc.

This corpus-based study is similar to the present study in some of the targeted words. Ozaki (2012) provides definitions of five synonymous adverbs that express uncertainty: *maybe*, *perhaps*, *possibly*, *probably*, and *likely*. The study closely examined semantic, stylistic, pragmatic, and syntactic points of view which were taken from 178 examples in the spoken and written corpora. The results revealed different means of using these five hedging adverbs. Speakers or writers use *maybe* in casual context and in informal writing, in order to present uncertainty. Sometimes, *maybe* can refer to encouragement, sympathy, jokes, or sarcasm. *Perhaps* is also used when the speaker seems not to be confident in their statement. *Perhaps* sounds more formal than *maybe* in spoken English. *Possibly* is employed less often as a pragmatic marker than *perhaps*, *maybe*, and *probably*. *Probably* shows the uncertainty of speakers or writers in spoken and written English; moreover, *probably* is used in the same way as *maybe* and *perhaps* in pragmatics. Finally, *likely* is used when the speakers or writers say that something is possible, without assurance, but often accompanied with good reasons or evidence. It is usually used to refer to non-human matters, in a similar way to *possibly* and *probably*. As shown in the study, the adverbs, *possibly*, *probably*, *likely* seem to overlap in usage.

Katharina (2014) analyzed the six synonymously used adjectives *nice*, *kind*, *lovely*, *friendly*, *gorgeous*, and *pleasant* by concentrating on definition, nominal collocation (type of nouns which are modified by the set of near-synonyms), and the stylistic variation. The method applied in this research was systematic. First of all, the definitions of these near-synonyms were drawn from three online available dictionaries, namely, Macmillan Dictionary, Collins American Dictionary, and Merriam Webster Dictionary. Then, the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) was used to measure the nominal collocation by raw frequencies and MI-score as quantitative analysis. Furthermore, the stylistic variation was examined by five different genres in the COCA of both spoken and written data (spoken, fiction, magazine, newspaper, and academic writing). The results revealed that existing dictionary definitions are common and insufficient to explain the differences in meaning between the six adjectives. Therefore, the researcher distinguished the set of near-synonyms by searching for the nominal collocations. The statistical analysis indicated that some of the adjective near-synonyms have specific nominal collocation but some share the same collocates. For instance, *nice*, *kind* and *friendly* share one nominal collocation, i.e. 'people'. *Nice* has high frequency with 'guy' by raw frequencies. *Kind* is frequently used in fixed collocations as in *kind eyes* and *kind words*. *Lovely* and *gorgeous* share the same most frequent nominal collocation 'women'. Hence, *lovely* occurs with the highest frequency with 'women', 'girl', and 'lady' which imply that *lovely* modifies nouns denoting female human beings. *Friendly* is frequently used to describe a relationship between human beings. *Pleasant* and *lovely* can be interchangeable when used with the noun 'face' with the word *lovely*. Moreover, it found that all the near-synonyms are rarely used in formal contexts but the results only indicated that *kind* was the least formal of those near-synonyms, whereas *pleasant* most frequently occurred between those words in formal register of academic writing. However, as the results showed, there is overlap between these six near-synonyms, and the differences may not be clear-cut. The study needs more criteria to distinguish this set of adjective near-synonyms, e.g. grammatical patterns, for clearer understanding of researchers.

Aroonmanakun (2015) examined two English adjective synonyms *quick* and *fast*, applying a corpus in the study of both synonyms. This study used COCA as the source to investigate the similarities and differences between the two synonyms. Systematically, the basic definitions of two near synonyms were compared using the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English. Then the noun collocations were extracted to explain why and how the synonyms are similar or different. The findings in this research show that corpora can provide the information which is absent from the dictionary. When comparing the basic definition of both words, some of these definitions seem to be overlapped. For example, *quick* refers to *moving of doing something fast* and *fast* means *moving to move quickly*. The study mention that only looking at dictionaries may not help learners understand why and how to use these words as effectively as is explained via corpus data. However, the corpus revealed that when noticing the list of noun collocation and sample text in concordance lines, they are different and similar in some context with can be explained. *Quick* seems to focus on “*the quality of action*”, while *fast* focuses on “*the manner of the action or motion*”. For example, *a quick learner* is someone who has an ability to learn very easily, while *a fast learner* is someone who learns something in a short time. They are not perfectly interchangeable.

Thus, reviewing the literature, these studies provide different methodologies of studies of synonyms. Therefore, the researcher can choose the method to fit the goals of the study. This research study mainly applied Phoocharoensil’s and Aroonmanakun’s studies, concentrating on semantics, grammatical patterns, and noun collocations including formality or style of contexts. The analysis must be meticulous, because accurate results of the study will provide a better understanding of how specific synonyms work in terms of meaning through usage patterns.

The chapter begins with general definitions of synonyms followed by types of synonymy, adjective, and criteria for distinguishing synonyms. This chapter presents the previous studies with a summary of corpus-based studies related to synonyms.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is qualitative research which was conducted to observe and distinguish English near synonyms. This chapter explains the method used in this study commencing with the overview of subjects and sample size, and then the details of the instrument, data collection, and data analysis, respectively.

3.1 TARGET WORDS

The study focused on three adjectives sharing similar meanings: *possible*, *probable*, and *likely*. These adjectives were chosen for this study according to their frequency. The frequent adjectives *possible*, *probable* and *likely* are ranked in 460th, 399th, and 625th place respectively among 2,000 words. The sample size to distinguish the words was 500 concordance lines of the three English adjective synonyms in the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). The concordance lines were used to observe lexical, structural, and semantic information about the keywords searched. In other words, they present not only senses of the words, but also the contexts in which the words are used. Consequently, concordance lines are a core tool in corpus linguistics as they provide more reliable language data than manual observation.

3.2 MATERIALS

The two major research instruments in the study were online dictionaries and a corpus. Two online dictionaries, namely Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE) (<http://www.ldoceonline.com>), and Oxford Advanced Learners's Dictionary (OALD) (<http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com>) were chosen because they are convenient and reliable tools. Moreover, they provide considerable information, such as distinct senses, clear definitions, and example sentences. Then, the information from the two dictionaries was compared. In addition to the dictionaries, COCA was selected because it is the largest freely-access and balanced corpus of American English. Also this corpus contains more than 450 million words

of text which is updated regularly, includes 20 million words each year from 1990-2015, and is equally divided among genres: spoken, fiction, magazines, newspapers, and academic texts. COCA has various functions: frequency, exact word, phrases, wildcards, lemmas, part of speech (POS), keywords in context (KWIC), or any combinations, all of which can be used to support language research.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

In carrying out this study, the data were elicited and analyzed for the research based on the following steps:

Firstly, the basic information on the three adjective synonyms were drawn from the two online dictionaries as mentioned above in order to compare the information of each word as shown in Table 1.

Secondly, each synonym was typed in the “WORD(S)” search box of the COCA website. In Figure 1, only base form of the word was typed in the search box. For greater accuracy, the search is specified as in Figure 1 especially, in order to search for only the adjective *likely*, used as `likely.[j*]`. LIST option was selected as a function method to analyze the data from 500 concordance lines in COCA. Then, words were sorted by use frequency. The search results for each synonym represent a total frequency of 500 sentence examples in the corpora. The researcher focused on three criteria for distinguishing synonyms, collocations, grammatical patterns, and formality.

Thirdly, based on the findings from previous studies that collocations are useful in showing the differences between synonyms, the list was extracted and ranked by frequency in AntConc software as shown in figure 2. The search is limited to noun immediately following the synonyms.

Lastly, the grammatical patterns and formality were analyzed via concordance lines and context of each targeted words. In addition, the information obtained from the dictionaries were compared and contrasted with the five hundred concordance lines of each synonym.

Table 1 The comparing the definitions of *possible*, *probable*, and *likely* from online dictionaries OALD and LDOCE.

	Definitions from OALD	Definitions from LDOCE
Possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) that can be done or achieved b) that might exist or happen but is not certain to c) reasonable or acceptable in a particular situation d) to emphasize that sth is the best, worst, etc. of its type e) the benefits of two or more completely different situations that you can enjoy at the same time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) if something is possible, it can be done or achieved b) as soon/quickly/much etc. as possible as soon, quickly etc. as you can c) a possible answer, cause etc. might be true d) a possible event or thing might happen or exist e) the best/biggest/fastest etc. possible the best etc. that can exist or be achieved
Probable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) likely to happen, to exist or to be true b) that may be expected to happen or to be so; likely 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) likely to exist, happen, or be true
Likely	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) such as well might happen or be true; probable b) that seems suitable for a purpose c) used to show that you do not believe what somebody has said 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) sth that is likely will probably happen or is probably true b) suitable for a particular purpose

Figure 1 Searching for *likely* as an adjective from COCA

CORPUS OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN ENGLISH
 520 MILLION WORDS, 1990-2015 [DOWNLOAD ALL 190,000 TEXTS]

SEARCH STRING: likely,*

WORD(S): likely,*

POS LIST: RANDOM SEARCH RESET

SECTIONS: SHOW

1 IGNORE SPOKEN FICTION MAGAZINE NEWSPAPER ACADEMIC

2 IGNORE SPOKEN FICTION MAGAZINE NEWSPAPER ACADEMIC

SEE CONTEXT: CLICK ON WORD OR SELECT WORDS + [CONTEXT] [HELP...]

	CONTEXT	FREQ
1	LIKELY	84058

0.844 seconds

KEYWORD IN CONTEXT DISPLAY

SECTION: NO LIMITS

PAGE: << < 1 / 841 > >>
 SAMPLE: 100 200 500 1000

CLICK FOR MORE CONTEXT [?]

1	2015	ACAD	DeltaKappaGamma	A	B	C	the objective tools being used. With this cycle of steps, teachers are more likely to find success in creating a pr
2	2015	ACAD	JAdolAdultLiteracy	A	B	C	in two areas. First, because I offered participants no compensation, the interviews likely attracted participants v
3	2015	ACAD	JAdolAdultLiteracy	A	B	C	reading (Ipsos MORI, 2003, p. 7), with boys in particular likely to view book reading related to being a " nerd "
4	2015	ACAD	JAdolAdultLiteracy	A	B	C	that " in most countries, students who read fiction for enjoyment are much more likely to be good readers " (p.
5	2015	ACAD	JAdolAdultLiteracy	A	B	C	2012). Hughes-Hassell (2008) found that self-defined " readers " were more likely to have friends they believed
6	2015	ACAD	JAdolAdultLiteracy	A	B	C	not encourage them to read " (p. 7). Girls may be more likely than boys to receive encouragement to read and
7	2015	ACAD	JAdolAdultLiteracy	A	B	C	have friends who read (Klauda, 2008). Boys may also be less likely to share reading with friends or family (Mille
8	2015	ACAD	JAdolAdultLiteracy	A	B	C), which suggests that adolescents who perceived reading as " uncool " were less likely to read in their free time
9	2015	ACAD	JAdolAdultLiteracy	A	B	C), which suggests that adolescents who view reading as " uncool " were less likely to enjoy the practice. This re
10	2015	ACAD	JAdolAdultLiteracy	A	B	C	11% of boys. Although this finding suggested that girls were more than twice as likely to receive encouragement
11	2015	ACAD	JAdolAdultLiteracy	A	B	C	with only 8% of reluctant readers. Avid readers were more than three times more likely to have friend encourag
12	2015	ACAD	JAdolAdultLiteracy	A	B	C	. # The findings that adolescents who deemed books to be socially unacceptable were less likely to read books i

Figure 2 Presentation through Antconc, searching *likely* as an adjective that collocates immediately with a noun

AntConc 3.4.3m (Macintosh OS X) 2014

Corpus Files: likely.txt

Concordance Concordance Plot File View Clusters/N-Grams Collocates Word List Keyword List

Total No. of Collocate Types: 68

Total No. of Collocate Tokens: 531

Rank	Freq	Freq(L)	Freq(R)	Stat	Collocate
1	1	0	1	4.75035	wishes
2	1	0	1	4.75035	veto
3	1	0	1	4.75035	unhealthy
4	1	0	1	4.75035	suspects
5	20	0	20	4.75035	scenario
6	1	0	1	4.75035	repeated
7	1	0	1	4.75035	possibility
8	1	0	1	4.75035	pitcher
9	1	0	1	4.75035	paths
10	1	0	1	4.75035	occurrence
11	1	0	1	4.75035	nor
12	1	0	1	4.75035	mirrors
13	1	0	1	4.75035	migratory
14	1	0	1	4.75035	malignant
15	2	0	2	4.75035	locations
16	1	0	1	4.75035	location
17	1	0	1	4.75035	gun
18	1	0	1	4.75035	explanations
19	1	0	1	4.75035	dead
20	1	0	1	4.75035	culprits
21	1	0	1	4.75035	career
22	1	0	1	4.75035	ammunition
23	11	0	11	4.62482	explanation
24	12	0	12	4.52796	candidate
25	10	0	10	4.48733	outcome

Search Term: Words Case Regex

Window Span: Same

likely From... 1R To... 1R

Start Stop Sort

Min. Collocate Frequency: 1

Sort by: Invert Order

Sort by Stat

Total No. Files Processed: 1

Clone Results

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results of the data analysis. The data was processed in response to the research questions stated in Chapter 1. The results showed similarities and differences between two dictionaries and COCA database. The complete findings discussion will be made in the following chapter which is divided into four sections as following.

- 1) The meanings of the three adjective synonyms provided in the two online dictionaries along with the corpus database.
- 2) The grammatical patterns of each adjective synonym.
- 3) The top five noun collocates of each adjective synonym.
- 4) The degree of formality of each adjective synonym.

4.1 THE MEANING FROM DICTIONARIES

In terms of meanings, three synonyms were collected from online Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary (OALD) and online Longman Dictionary of contemporary English (LDOCE) through COCA database to display the definitions among these three adjective synonyms. The information of each adjective is presented below.

4.1.1 Possible

The definitions of *possible* from online OALD (2015) are as follows:

- a) that can be done or achieved
e.g. It is possible to get there by bus
- b) that might exist or happen but is not certain to
e.g. It's just possible that I gave them the wrong directions.
- c) reasonable or acceptable in a particular situation
e.g. There are several possible explanations.
- d) to emphasize that sth is the best, worst, etc. of its type
e.g. It was the best possible surprise anyone could have given me.

- e) the benefits of two or more completely different situations that you can enjoy at the same time
e.g. If you enjoy the coast and the country, you'll get the best of both worlds on this walk.

The definitions of *possible* from online LDOCE (2014) are as follows:

- a) if something is possible, it can be done or achieved
e.g. Computer technology makes it possible for many people to work from home.
- b) as soon/quickly/much etc. as possible as soon, quickly etc. as you can e.g. I need the money as soon as possible.
- c) a possible answer, cause etc. might be true
e.g. There seem to be only two possible explanations.
- d) a possible event or thing might happen or exist
e.g. Heavy rain is possible later in the day.
- e) the best/biggest/fastest etc. that can exist or be achieved
e.g. Try to get the best possible price.

After consulting two online dictionaries, some meanings from OALD are similar to the meanings from LDOCE as can be compared in Table 1. Therefore, the word *possible* can have the five usages which also were compared with corpus database as shown below.

- a) that can be done or achieved or if something is possible, it can be done or achieved

Corpus data

- (1) "I want to do something good today. I feel like it's **possible**." "Have a coffee," she said. The shop was crowded
- b) a possible answer, cause etc. might be true (that is reasonable or acceptable)

Corpus data

- (2) in earlier ones. The reasons for this difference are difficult to identify. A **possible** explanation might be that at the time of the older studies the effect of aspirin
- c) a possible event or thing might happen or exist (may be not certain or probable)

Corpus data

- (3) Rain is also **possible** in the Northwest, chilly across the nation's midsection and the Northeast.
- d) to emphasize that sth is the best, worst, etc. of its type which can exist or be achieved

Corpus data

- (4) The best **possible** outcome is an agreement where there's parties in Iraq who can say, we
- e) the benefits of two or more completely different situations that you can enjoy at the same time

Corpus data

- (5) He put the diary page in his breast pocket. In the best of all **possible** worlds, he would have a chance to return it.

4.1.2 Probable

The definitions of *probable* from online OALD (2015) are in below:

- a) likely to happen, to exist or to be true
e.g. It is probable that the disease has a genetic element.
- b) that may be expected to happen or to be so; likely
e.g. Rain is possible but not probable this evening.

The definitions of *probable* from online LDOCE (2014) are in below:

- a) likely to exist, happen, or be true
e.g. Success is highly probable.

Through examination of the meaning from both dictionaries, it can be seen that the meanings from OALD are similar to the meanings from LDOCE as shown in Table 1. Hence, the word *probable* may have two definitions which also were compared with the corpus database as follows.

- a) that may be expected to happen

Corpus data

(6) “You begin to think that it's not only possible, but **probable**, that you too can make your first million by age 25,”

- b) likely to exist, happen, be true or be the case

Corpus data

(7) You know, the fact is, if there was evidence to support a **probable** cause finding on Tom, we would have arrested him.

4.1.3 Likely

The definitions of *likely* from online OALD (2015) are as follows:

- a) probable or expected
e.g. She is very likely that she will ring me tonight.
- b) that seems suitable for a purpose
e.g. She seems the most likely candidate for the job.
- c) (informal, ironic) used to show that you do not believe what somebody has said
e.g. You just found it lying in the street? A likely story!

The definitions of *likely* from online LDOCE (2014) are as follows:

- a) something that is likely will probably happen or is probably true
e.g. Children who live in the country's rural areas are very likely to be poor.
- b) suitable for a particular purpose
e.g. One likely source of energy is wind power

After consulting two online dictionaries, the meanings shared the same core meaning as can be compared in Table 1. As a result, the word *likely* may have three definitions which also were compared with corpus database in below.

- a) something that is likely will probably happen or is probably true

Corpus data

(8) we see the drop in accident rates now that enforcement of these new standards is **likely** to increase, as Mr. Bond said in his statement on Wednesday?

- b) that seems suitable for a particular purpose

Corpus data

(9) Development Services, Shirley Patterson, a Democratic district leader, was seen as the **likely** nominee. But she was sidelined when a perennial candidate,

- c) used to show that you do not believe what somebody has said

Corpus data

(10) “I must have been talking in my sleep.” Glen smiles.
“**Likely** story.”

Table 1 The comparison of definitions of *possible*, *probable*, and *likely* from online dictionaries OALD and LDOCE.

	Definitions from OALD	Definitions from LDOCE
Possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) that can be done or achieved b) that might exist or happen but is not certain to c) reasonable or acceptable in a particular situation d) to emphasize that sth is the best, worst, etc. of its type e) the benefits of two or more completely different situations that you can enjoy at the same time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) if something is possible, it can be done or achieved b) as soon/quickly/much etc. as possible as soon, quickly etc. as you can c) a possible answer, cause etc. might be true d) a possible event or thing might happen or exist e) the best/biggest/fastest etc. possible the best etc. that can exist or be achieved
Probable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) likely to happen, to exist or to be true b) that may be expected to happen or to be so; likely 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) likely to exist, happen, or be true
Likely	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) such as well might happen or be true; probable b) that seems suitable for a purpose c) used to show that you do not believe what somebody has said 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) sth that is likely will probably happen or is probably true b) suitable for a particular purpose

As Taylor (2002) stated the synonyms almost always differ in many aspects including the meaning point of view.

In terms of meanings of the adjective synonyms *possible*, *probable*, and *likely*, the findings reveal that they share the same core meaning as “*that can be done, achieved, or expected to exist, happen or be true*”. Since all these words were investigated in detail, there was not only a significant overlap in meaning, but also some context at least where they cannot substitute for each other. Therefore, they can be considered as loose or relative synonymy. For example, “*To come in, **if possible**. To convince you to let me in*” The context does not allow interchangeabilities with the words *if probable* or *if likely*.

As stated earlier, the result showed that the word *possible* is commonly used in the meaning of “*that can be done or achieved but might be not certain*” while generally the meaning of *probable* is *that may be expected to exist, happen, or be true with the evidence*” and *likely* is commonly used to mean “*that might happen or be true with the reason*”. But there are some slight differences in the meaning which might depend on their usage pattern. For example, the word, *possible*, “*He put the diary page in his breast pocket. **In the best of all possible worlds**, he would have a chance to return it. Adam and Eve scenarios.*” OALD stated that ***in the best of all possible worlds*** means “*the benefits of two or more completely different situations that you can enjoy at the same time*”. Moreover, the word *likely*, when it is used as in ***a likely story***, may be used in the sense of ironically telling someone you do not believe what they have just said (LDOCE) as in “*I must have been talking in my sleep.*” *Glen smiled. **“Likely story”**.*

To support this finding, Ozaki (2012) examined fuller definitions of five adverbs including *possibly*, *probably* and *likely*. Even though it is different from this study focusing on the adjectives, its results are worth being discussed. Ozaki says that *possibly* refers to matters that do not have much chance to be true because of being controlled by factors. This result shows the same finding in that the word *possible* may be used in the sense of uncertain happening. In other words, it is more hypothetical but less practical. For example, *At the end, it's not easy, but it is **possible***. While the words *probable* and *likely* might be close in meaning in the sense of uncertainty based on reasons or evidence. *Likely* is used when people cannot

guarantee the truth and back it up with reason and evidence (Ozaki, 2012). For example, *Samsung is highly **likely** to update this model to Android 4.3 since it shares almost all of its specs.*

Moreover, the results from concordance lines showed vivid examples that the word, *probable*, has a meaning of greater certainty than the word, *possible*, as in “*you begin to think that it's not only possible, but **probable**, that you too can make your first million by age 25.*” and “*It's possible,*” I said. “*But it's not **probable**.*”

Therefore, it can be seen that the three synonyms have some common meanings and some different meanings in use as an adjective.

4.2 GRAMMATICAL PATTERN

Apart from the definitions of each word given earlier, the possible grammatical patterns are also obtained from dictionaries and concordance lines. According to OALD, LDOCE and the corpus data, each word is found to be used in the following patterns.

4.2.1 Possible

According to the two online dictionaries, OALD and LDCE, and concordance lines the following show the grammatical patterns of *possible*:

- | | |
|---|------------------|
| a. it is possible (for sb) to do sth | as in (11), (12) |
| b. make it possible (for sb) to do sth | as in (13), (14) |
| c. if (at all) possible | as in (14), (15) |
| d. where/whenever/wherever possible | as in (16) |
| e. do everything possible | as in (17) |
| f. adv. + possible | as in (18), (19) |
| g. it is possible (that) | as in (20) |
| h. would it be possible (for sb) to do sth? | as in (21) |
| i. as + adv./adj. + as + possible | as in (22), (23) |
| j. superlative adj. + possible | as in (24) |

k. possible + n.	as in (25)
l. (in) every possible way	as in (26)
m. linking v. + possible	as in (27), (28)

Patterns a. to i., which are not usually occurring before nouns, mean “*that can be done or achieved*” but they are slightly different when grammatical patterns change. For pattern c. (if (at all) possible), means “*if it is possible to do it*”. Pattern d. (where/whenever/wherever possible), means “*every time you have an opportunity*”. Pattern f. (adv. + possible) for example, *humanly possible*, means “*possible for anyone*”. Pattern h. (would it be possible (for sb) to do sth?), is used in spoken language when asking politely if you can do or have something. In the comparative form, *possible* may use pattern i. (as + adv./adj. + as + possible). When *possible* is used after adjectives it is intended to emphasize something that is the best or etc. that can exist or achieve as in pattern j. (superlative adj. + possible). Moreover, when *possible* appears before nouns, it may mean, something that might be true, happen or exist, as in pattern k. For pattern l. ((in) every possible way), which could be only found in concordance lines, but LDOCE mentioned this pattern as ((in) every way possible), which could not be found in 500 concordance lines. For the last pattern m. (linking v. + possible), that is a general pattern found in concordance lines which was not mentioned in the dictionaries.

Corpus data

- (11) “He's not yet out of the woods” “Is it **possible** for me to see him?”
- (12) Elite 89 Award. I had a 5.0 GPA, so I knew it was **possible** to achieve it.
- (13) we were a couple and I'd amassed enough savings to make his dream **possible**.
- (14) “Then what do you want?” “To come in, if **possible**. To convince you to let me in.”
- (15) that the violence usually is stigmatized as something that should be avoided if at all **possible**. That was not always the case.
- (16) I have nothing against babies or pregnant women, and I offer my support whenever **possible**. That may mean choosing the perfect gift

- (17) You can't fault him for wanting to do everything that he can **possible**.
That's just the type of person he is.
- (18) that accident wasn't extremely awful, I mean, just as awful as humanly
possible, then there would be no movie because it's never
- (19) limelight. Perhaps he once lived in Beverly Hills after all. It was
theoretically **possible** since he was one of a group of Chihuahuas who had
been flown up to
- (20) DNA transfers in case work. In your expert opinion then, it's **possible** that
the killer picked up a towel that had been used by the suspect,
- (21) "You say that this woman is in Madrid. Would it be **possible** for me to
see her?" I was hoping you would ask
- (22) and they sit down on the back steps. "We want as little as **possible** to be
lost.
- (23) prosecute its war on terror. The goal is to make it as realistic as **possible**,
so pilots can avoid mistakes when in battle. They should be checking
- (24) I'll give you this. "He always had to have the best **possible** deal.
Eventually he and the salesman would get to a number they both could
- (25) Of course I believe him. He's not a thief. He had no **possible** reason to
take that necklace. Except for the fact that it
- (26) I had no idea where I was. I felt sick in every **possible** way.
- (27) question in the affirmative when he was four. "I suppose anything's
possible. You and Mom are certainly good role models.
- (28) got covered in sand, " she said. " That doesn't even seem **possible**." The
winds of this hurricane, like time, beat everything down,

Table 2 presents the frequency of the grammatical patterns of the word *possible*. The form (possible + n.), in pattern k, was shown in highest frequency, 133 concordance lines (26.6%), followed by pattern i. (as + adv./adj. + as + possible), for 92 concordance lines (18.4%), and pattern g. (it is possible (that)), for 69 concordance lines (13.8%). The rest of the grammatical patterns are pattern l. (linking v. + possible), for 54 concordance lines (10.8%), pattern a, (it is possible (for sb) to do sth), 47 concordance lines (9.4%), pattern b. (make it possible (for sb) to do sth), for

39 concordance lines (7.8%), pattern c. (if (at all) possible), for 21 concordance lines (4.2%), pattern f. (adv. + possible), was equally used with pattern j. (superlative adj. + possible), for 11 concordance lines (2.2%), followed by pattern d. (where/whenever/wherever possible), for 9 concordance lines (1.8%), finally, pattern e. (do everything possible), and pattern h (would it be possible (for sb) to do sth?), were equally used for 7 concordance lines (1.4%).

Table 2 The frequency of grammatical pattern using of the word *possible*

Possible Grammatical Pattern	Frequency	%
possible + n.	123	24.6
as + adv./adj. + as + possible	92	18.4
it is possible (that)	69	13.8
linking v. + possible	54	10.8
it is possible (for sb) to do sth	47	9.4
make it possible (for sb) to do sth	39	7.8
if (at all) possible	21	4.2
adv. + possible	11	2.2
superlative adj. + possible	11	2.2
(in) every possible way	10	2
where/whenever/wherever possible	9	1.8
do everything possible	7	1.4
would it be possible (for sb) to do sth?	7	1.4

4.2.2 Probable

According to the two online dictionaries, OALD and LDOCE, and concordance lines the following shows the grammatical pattern of *probable*:

- a. it is probable (that) as in (29)
- b. probable + n. as in (30)
- c. adv. + probable as in (31)
- d. linking v. + probable as in (32)
- e. be + (not, less) possible + even, or, and, but + probable as in (33)

All patterns mean “*likely to exist, happen, or be true*”. With regard to pattern c. (adv. + probable), for example *highly probable*, it may mean “*very likely to exist, happen to be true*” which emphasizes the degree of likelihood. In pattern c, (adv. + probable) tends to be used in order to express the degree of probability, for example, *quite/highly probable*, means “*very probable*”. Pattern d. (linking v. + probable), can be found in corpus data but it was not mentioned in dictionaries. Also, pattern e. (be (not, less) possible + even, or, and, but + probable), tends to be used in order to emphasize events or causes that will almost certainly happen.

Corpus data

- (29) it is **probable** that the number of men who exercise to gain muscle mass is increasing.
- (30) You know, the fact is, if there was evidence to support a **probable** cause finding on
- (31) He wasn't a straightforward character by any means, so it's highly **probable** he did give your daughter the impression he had no money.
- (32) A similar effect in humans is **probable** only in women who don't drink coffee regularly. If that's you,
- (33) subject to criticism, and as I've said, it's possible, even **probable**, by November even I might come in for a little criticism. Haven't

Apart from dictionaries, the corpus data were used to investigate the frequency of use of grammatical pattern.

Table 3 presents the frequency of grammatical pattern using the word *probable*. Form b. (probable + n.), was shown in highest frequency, 312 concordance lines (65.6%), followed by pattern a. (it is probable (that)), for 92 concordance lines (18.4%), and pattern c. (adv. + probable), for 43 concordance lines (8.6%). The rest of grammatical pattern were pattern d. (linking verb + probable), for 16 concordance lines (3.2%), finally followed by pattern e. as in the phrase (sth (not, less) possible + even, or, but + probable), for 17 concordance lines (3.4%).

Table 3 The frequency of grammatical pattern using the word *probable*

Possible Grammatical Pattern	Frequency	%
probable + n.	328	65.6
it is probable (that)	92	18.4
adv. + probable	43	8.6
linking v. + probable	21	4.2
sth (not,less) possible + even,or,but + probable	17	3.4

4.2.3 Likely

According to the two online dictionaries, OALD and LDOCE, and concordance lines the following show the grammatical pattern of *likely*:

- a. likely to do/be sth as in (34)
- b adv. + likely as in (35)
- c. likely + n. as in (36)
- d. it + linking v. + likely (that) as in (37)

For pattern a., c., d., (likely to do/be sth), (adv. + likely), (it is likely (that)), mean “*something that is likely will probably happen or true*”. For pattern b. (adv. + likely), tends to be used in comparative form, for example *more, most, less, least likely*, means “*very likely*” to “*not very likely*”. With regard to pattern c. (likely + n.), only before nouns, it may mean “*suitable for a particular purpose*”. As for pattern e. (it + linking verb + likely (that)), when *likely* is used with linking verbs, for example, *seem/appear likely*, it could be used in formal context.

Corpus data

- (34) you'll have to forget about following any sort of seasonal cycle. They are **likely** to flower in spring anyway, while still full of half-ripened fruit, but
- (35) compared with 20 or more elsewhere on your body. “Men are less **likely** to wear glosses and lipsticks, so their risk of lip cancer is three times
- (36) The evidence points to an explosion. The **likely** scenario is a bomb.

(37) collapse of Communism? While only a fool would hazard firm predictions, it is **likely** that the impact of Soviet events on China, though huge, will take time

Apart from dictionaries, the corpus data were investigated to see the frequency of use of grammatical pattern.

Table 4 presents the frequency of grammatical pattern using the word *likely*. Pattern a. (likely to do/be sth), was shown in highest frequency for 321 concordance lines (64.2%), followed by pattern c. (likely + n.), for 135 concordance lines (27%), and pattern e. (it + linking verb + likely (that)), for 24 concordance lines (4.8%). Finally pattern b. (adv. + likely) for 20 concordance lines (4%).

Table 4 The frequency of grammatical pattern using the word *likely*

Possible Grammatical Pattern	Frequency	%
likely to do/be sth	317	63.4
likely + n.	135	27
it + linking v. + likely (that)	25	5
adv. + likely	23	4.6

Another important criterion used to make a distinction between these synonyms is the grammatical patterns in which each of them tends to occur. As a result, the word *possible* appears in several more patterns than the others but commonly they shared grammatical patterns as in Table 5.

Table 5 The common grammatical pattern of the adjective synonyms; *possible*, *probable*, and *likely*

Synonyms	Possible Patterns	FQ	%
Possible	possible + n.	123	24.6
	it is possible (that)	69	13.8
	linking v. + possible	54	10.8
	adv. + possible	11	2.2
Probable	probable + n.	312	62.4
	it is probable (that)	92	18.4
	adv. + probable	43	8.6
	linking v. + probable	21	4.2
likely	likely + n.	135	27
	linking v.+ likely (that)	24	4.8
	adv. + likely	20	4

Concerning the frequency of the words, the findings show that more than half of them from the 500 concordance lines employ the pattern (possible, probable, likely + n.). It can be inferred that they are adjectives which are normally placed before nouns as the modifier. The result shows ‘adjective + noun’ as the most frequent in adjective words. As these words are regarded as loose synonyms paralleling results with Phoocharoensil’s study, they may not be used to replace one another in every context. For instance, *likely voter*, as in, *about 61% of likely voters say they plan to vote no this week*, means someone who may go out to vote. It may not be substituted in this context by other words as in *probable voter* or *possible voter*, at least they could not found in 500 concordance lines in corpus data.

As a result, different grammatical patterns in Table 6 showed that the word, *possible*, is different from other words in the same group of synonyms as it is shown in many specific patterns. With regard to the grammatical pattern of the word *possible*, it is interesting that when the data from dictionaries and concordance lines were compared, they are slightly different in the same pattern, (*in*) *every* + *possible* +

way occurred in corpus data while the grammatical pattern of this word in dictionaries is *(in) every + way + possible* which could not be found in 500 concordance lines,

e.g. *Our staff will help you **in every way possible**. (LDOCE)*

e.g. *It was easy. She was perfectly sweet to you **in every possible way**, but she never challenged you and you got bored. The thing about (COCA)*

It can be inferred that both of them were used by native speakers. The word *likely* tends to be used in high frequency as in *likely + to + do/be + sth*. Significantly, for the word, *probable*, the pattern was not mentioned in dictionaries but can be found in concordance lines; *be + (not, less) possible + even, or, and, but + probable* as in *it's possible, even probable, by November even I might come in for a little criticism*.

Table 6 The different grammatical pattern of the adjective synonyms; *possible*, *probable*, and *likely*

Synonyms	Possible Patterns	FQ	%
Possible	as + adv./adj. + as + possible	92	18.4
	it + is + possible (for sb) + to + do sth	47	9.4
	make + it + possible (for sb) + to + do sth	39	7.8
	if (at all) + possible	21	4.2
	(in) every + possible + way	10	2
	superlative adj. + possible	11	2.2
	where/whenever/wherever + possible	9	1.8
	do + everything + possible	7	1.4
would + it + be + possible (for sb) + to + do sth?	7	1.4	
Probable	be + (not, less) possible + even, or, and, but + probable	17	3.4
Likely	likely + to + do/be + sth	321	64.2

4.3 COLLOCATION

As all the word studied are adjectives, their main collocates are nouns. Even though they share the similar core meaning, all the words in reality differ in noun collocation. Since all the words studied are adjectives, their main collocations are nouns. Each synonym in relation to its noun collocates in both singular and plural forms found in the concordance lines and the dictionaries are presented below:

4.3.1 Possible

Table 7 Top five nouns collocate with adjective *possible*

Rank	Noun Collocates	Frequency	%
1	explanation (s)	33	6.6
2	way	22	4.4
3	reason (s)	17	3.4
4	solution (s)	16	3.2
5	worlds	9	1.8
5	causes	9	1.8

The first five most frequent noun collocates of the word *possible* are *explanation*, *way*, *reason*, *solution*, and *world* as in (38), (39), (40), (41), (42), (43) respectively.

Corpus data

- (38) no changes in the adults. That's (unintelligible) I was making a **possible** explanation. I see, all
- (39) information. And so how do we get students to use it in the best **possible** way? It's kind of pushed us to the next step of "
- (40) and some are not. And this wearing of uniforms cuts that out as a **possible** reason for peer pressure or bullying. " Hubbert said Clayton has not done research
- (41) available to the national background check system and instructed agencies to research the causes and **possible** solutions to gun violence.
- (42) He put the diary page in his breast pocket. In the best of all **possible** worlds, he would have a chance to return it. Adam and Eve scenarios
- (43) investigation of a private-aircraft crash but let's investigators determine the scope as they look at **possible** causes. "We need to make decisions based on the circumstances of the accident

From Table 7, the first rank of the collocates of *possible* is *explanation(s)* which co-occurs at the highest frequency (33 times). The second rank is *way* (22

times). The third rank is *reason(s)* (17 times), followed by *solution(s)* (16 times). In addition, the fifth rank are *worlds* and *causes* for equal frequencies (9 times).

4.3.2 Probable

Table 8 Top five nouns collocate with adjective *probable*

Rank	Noun Collocates	Frequency	%
1	cause (s)	84	16.8
2	consequence (s)	8	1.6
3	outcome (s)	8	1.6
4	reason (s)	8	1.6
5	effect (s)	6	1.2

The first five most frequent noun collocates of the word *probable* are *cause*, *consequence*, *outcome*, *reason*, and *effect* as in (44), (45), (46), (47), (48) respectively.

Corpus data

(44) by the remarks that I made that many years ago, but that with the

probable cause he, he, it wasn't that he felt that no criminality occurred

(45) suggested that while the level of damage described in the scenario was plausible, the **probable** consequences of a major earthquake would be worse than described.

(46) Predicting **probable** outcomes of the workings of the brain would be possible only if we were to

(47) One **probable** reason is that Martin Luther was an enthusiastic exponent of this truth.

(48) of criteria and evidence to justify policy. They would carefully evaluate claims of the **probable** effects of proposed policies. Finally, they would follow up on foreign policy actions

From Table 8, the first rank of the collocates of *probable* is *cause(s)* which co-occurs in the greatest frequency (84 times), followed by *consequence(s)*, *outcome(s)*, and *reason(s)* which are at equal frequency (8 times). In addition, the fifth rank is *effect(s)* (6 times).

4.3.3 Likely

Table 9 Top five nouns collocate with adjective *likely*

Rank	Noun Collocates	Frequency	%
1	voters	28	5.6
2	scenario	20	4
3	candidate	12	2.4
4	explanation (s)	12	2.4
5	outcome	10	2

The first five most frequent noun collocates of the word *likely* are *voters*, *scenario*, *candidate*, *explanation*, and *outcome* as in (49), (50), (51), (52), (53) respectively.

Corpus data

(49) hour. Just before the convention, Romney was the choice of 47 percent of

likely voters. That was a virtual tie with the president on 49 percent. And

(50) So everyone wants a quick fix. At the end of the day the **likely** scenario is nothing happens.

(51) in the revolution and a seat in parliament, Poroshenko is widely regarded as a **likely** candidate to be prime minister.

(52) ability to process information. Clerkson's solicitor, Thompsons, concluded that the most **likely** explanation for the accident was that in order to check his load,

(53) the most likely outcome, in Congress or what I hope to be the **likely** outcome is that Congress adopts a package of reforms,

From Table 9, the first rank of the collocates of *likely* is *voter(s)* which co-occurs in the greatest frequency (28 times). The second rank is *scenario* (20 times), followed by *candidate* and *explanation(s)* at equal frequencies (12 times). In addition, the fifth rank is *outcome* (10 times).

McCarten (2007, p.5) stated that collocation refers to the words which are used together and which co-occur frequently. With regard to the highest frequency of

noun collocation, the word *cause* collocates with the noun *probable*. It can be noticed that the word *cause* appears to be often used in the field of law. For instance,

There is ***probable cause*** to believe and we believe he killed her.,

There's some ***probable cause*** that there's a crime. So we assisted them getting records.,

American legal system They were arrested essentially at random, without any ***probable cause*** to believe they had terror connections. They were treated as guilty until proved

The finding, related to OALD, uses “in the good reason to think that a crime has been committed”

As seen from the collocates listed in Table 10, the three adjective synonyms, when modifying nouns, denote the slight different meaning of each adjective synonym. It can be observed that most of the noun collocates of *possible* convey the meaning of “*that can be done or achieved but might be not certain*”, i.e. *explanation(s), way, solution(s)*. The noun collocates of *probable* convey the meaning of “*that may be expected to exist, happen, or be true with the evidence*” focusing on the reason or evidence, i.e. *cause(s), consequence(s), reason(s), and effect(s)*. *Likely* commonly conveys the meaning of “*that might happen or be true with the reason*”, with the use of the noun collocates of *likely*, it conveys the meaning of “*suitable for a particular purpose*” focusing on people, i.e. *voters and candidate*.

However, in some cases, noun collocations convey a different meaning, the use of *possible* with noun collocates of *world* in the expression of “*in the best of all possible worlds*” refers to “*the benefits of two or more completely different situations that you can enjoy at the same time*” i.e. in the summer you can create the best of all *possible worlds*.

Table 10 Comparing the top five nouns collocation of adjective synonyms: *possible*, *probable*, *likely*

Possible			Probable			Likely		
	FQ	%		FQ	%		FQ	%
explanation (s)	33	6.6	cause (s)	84	16.8	voters	28	5.6
way	22	4.4	consequence (s)	8	1.6	scenerio	20	4
reason (s)	17	3.4	outcome (s)	8	1.6	candidate	24	4.8
solution (s)	16	3.2	reason (s)	8	1.6	explanation (s)	12	2.4
worlds	9	1.8	effect (s)	6	1.2	outcome	10	2
causes	9	1.8						

From Table 11, noticeably, are the nouns which tend to collocate in high frequency with the word *possible*, *probable*, and *likely* are *candidate*, *cause*, *effect*, *explanation*, *outcome*, *reason*, *scenerio*, and *solution*. The noun which can collocate with both *possible* and *likely* is *way*. The noun which can collocate with both *probable* and *likely* is *consequence*. Finally, the nouns which tend to collocate with specific words are *world* as in *possible world* and *voter* as in *likely voter*. The findings infer that the nouns, *candidate*, *cause*, *effect*, *explanation*, *outcome*, *reason* *scenerio*, *solution* are *weak collocations* which can co-occur with three synonyms *possible*, *probable*, and *likely*. Otherwise, some nouns e.g. *world* and *voter* appear with only one adjective. They may be considered as strong collocations of the adjective *possible* and *likely* as in *possible world* and *likely voter*

Table 11 The comparison of possibility of noun collocation in each word

Possible	Probable	Likely
candidate	candidate	candidate
cause	cause	cause
-	consequence	consequence
effect	effect	effect
explanation	explanation	explanation
outcome	outcome	outcome
reason	reason	reason
scenario	scenario	scenario
solution	solution	solution
way	-	way
world	-	-
-	-	voter

4.4 DEGREE OF FORMALITY

4.4.1 Possible

According to LDOCE, it is informal when *possible* occurs in this pattern, specifically in spoken language:

would it be possible (for sb) to do something?
--

The examples from concordance lines could emphasize that the word can be used in informal contexts as shown below.

Informal contexts:

(54) I included minor temporal effects in my estimate. Would it be **possible**, I asked,

(55) “You say that this woman is in Madrid. Would it be **possible** for me to see her?”

(56) laughing at her. Would it be **possible**, if she worked, to live on her own?

(57) I'm saying to Obama and to our president to make this **possible**.

(58) Let me understand this, is this **possible**? Go ahead Anahita, how about that?

While the dictionary does not mention if the word can be used in formal contexts or not, the concordance lines showed that *possible* could also be used in formal contexts.

Formal contexts:

(59) We now turn to the question of whether such an effort may be **possible** among the Gulf states, and between them and the United States.

(60) If such language reflects a strategic discourse of sustainability, it is **possible** that given diminishing resources the scope of the community college mission has become restricted and is perhaps

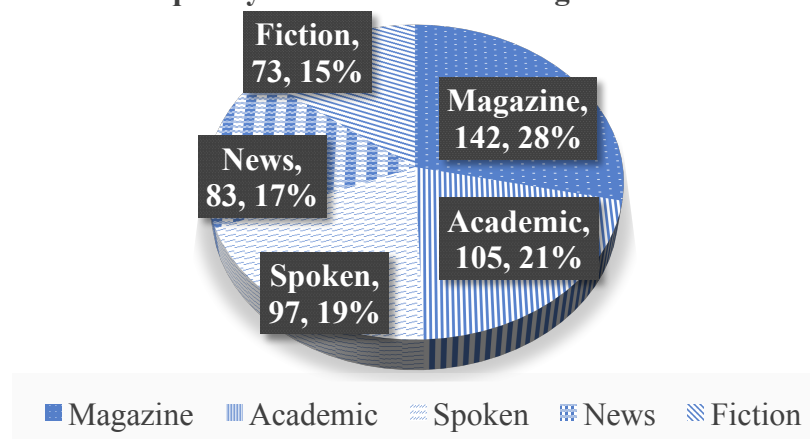
(61) what are the contributory environmental conditions, and is it **possible** for teachers to learn problem solving and confidence through university education programs?

Apart from the dictionaries, the concordance lines indicate the genre of the context of each verb from which can be distinguished the degree of formality. The data from COCA revealed that the word *possible* can be used in formal and informal language because it often occurs in magazines, academic works, spoken language, news and fiction respectively. The frequency of each genre is slightly different. However, the word *possible* tends to occur with more frequency in formal context as in academic and magazine genres than in spoken and fiction context as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 The frequency of occurrence of the word *possible* in each genre

4

The frequency of occurrence of each genre - Possible



4.4.2 Probable

The formality of *probable* was not indicated in the dictionary. However, the concordance lines show that all examples indicate it can be used both in formal and informal contexts.

Informal contexts:

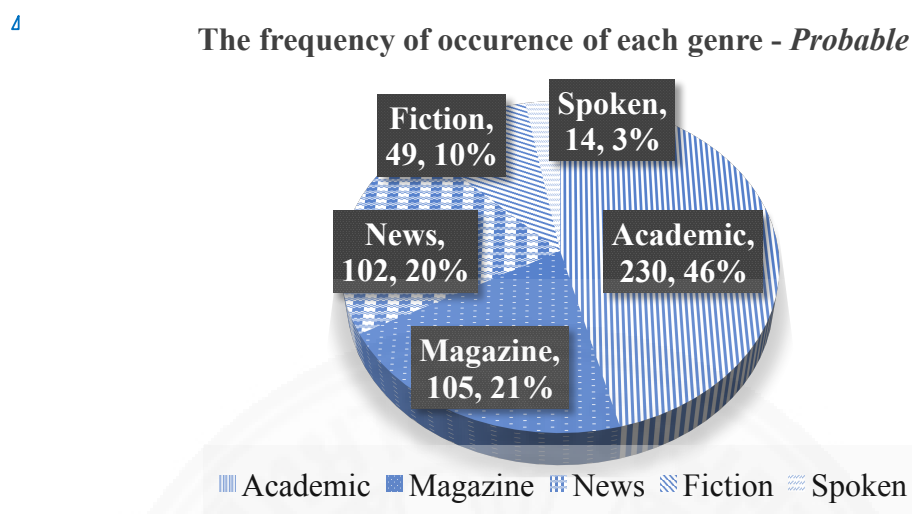
- (62) "Getting back to the big leagues wasn't **probable**, " Davis says, " so I'm going to
 (63) Given that there is **probable** cause to believe and we believe he killed her.
 (64) best and only made matters worse. "But he could not forget her **probable** fate
 (65) he had said he thought that more **probable**. He pictured her there.
 (66) he would be embarrassed. So duping delight is -- seems to be the most **probable** situation. GRACE: What is duping delight? BREHOVE: Duping delight is when people try

Formal contexts:

- (67) At this point, intensified competition between New Delhi and Islamabad in Afghanistan is **probable** no matter what policy the United States pursues. But so long as Washington maintains
 (68) inaccessibility of the continent's interior and the difficulty of photographing in humid climates were **probable** factors. However, there were also problems of representation for an industry primed to
 (69) to interact with each other. If these motivational climates are congruent, it is **probable** the particular orientation will be strengthened in the athlete. If the coach-initiated and parent-initiate

With regard to frequency of the genres where these synonyms occur, it is likely that the word *probable* is used in academic and magazine genres at highest frequency, which means that it tends to occur in the formal context such as medicine, science, technology, financial, education, economic and business fields. Therefore, the chart supports this fact since it is shown that the word *probable* often occurs in the academic genre as shown in Figure 2

Figure 2 The frequency of occurrence of the word *probable* in each genre



4.4.3 Likely

According to the dictionaries, LDOCE and OALD, it is informal when *likely* is used in this idiom:

A likely story is informal because the dictionaries indicate that it is spoken or ironically used to show that you do not believe what somebody has said. The same findings also appear in concordance lines indicating that the word can be used in informal contexts as shown below.

a likely story!

Informal contexts:

(70) " I must have been talking in my sleep. " Glen smiled. " **Likely** story. " " I remember making a speech before I passed out. Or

(71) tell us very much about how they're **likely** to go on this next question?

(72) poor young people are most **likely** to get stuck. Why is that? Well, we looked

(73) I do believe based on everything that I've seen so far, it is **likely** and probable that it crashed into the Indian Ocean.

(74) So, he is pretty **likely** to get it. the one thing that strikes me with these picks,

The dictionary does not mention the informal form of the word, while COCA shows many examples where it can be used both in formal and informal contexts.

Formal contexts:

(75) Students who receive special education and academically gifted education services are **likely** to encounter problems with some of the assessments

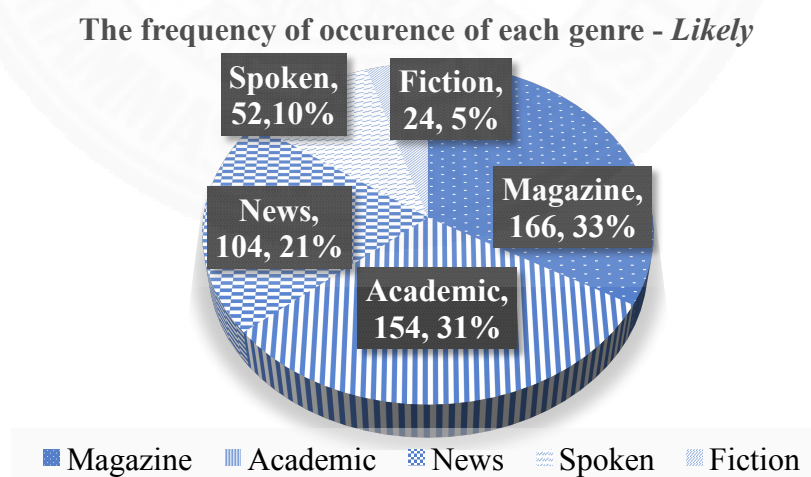
(76) analyses revealed that students scoring in the transitional and probable reader categories were highly **likely** to finish kindergarten with satisfactory reading skills based on our year-end criteria

(77) that problem-based pictures promoted use of more complex language forms and that these were more **likely** to contain errors. To explore this, we did a post hoc analysis

However, when the word was examined in detail by genre classification, the result showed that *likely*, was highly frequent in magazines, academic texts, and news respectively from which it can be inferred that it tends to be used in formal context. The rest, spoken and fiction, are usually in informal contexts. The results are shown in figure 3

Figure 3 The frequency of occurrence of the word *likely* in each genre

4



According to Liu (2010), the style or formality of the context is very important for language learners. Furthermore, Liu explains that “stylistic variation is one of the important semantic dimensions in which near-synonyms may differ”.

In terms of formality, the results show that all these words are used in both formal and informal contexts because they occur in every genre as presented in COCA data. In contrast, some of them may differ in occurrence depending on usage. *Probable* is the most formal as it is often used in academic context. Although Ozaki (2012) claimed that *probably*, as the adverb, tends to occur in speech, but it may not be very hard to find the word in writing. As for *possible* and *likely*, although they sound rather formal, *likely* seems to be preferred much more strongly in the formal context than *possible* as it is often used in magazines, academic text, and news, respectively. *Possible* seem to be used both in formal and informal context with a slight favor towards formal (21% and 19.4%, respectively). Consequently, when comparing the same genre for each word, *possible* tends to occur in informal context because of its high frequency in the genre of spoken language and fiction more than *probable* and *likely* as shown in Table 12.

Table 12 The comparison of formality in adjective synonyms: *possible*, *probable*, *likely*

Genres	Possible		Probable		Likely	
	FQ	%	FQ	%	FQ	%
ACADEMIC	105	21	230	46	154	30.8
MAGAZINE	142	28.4	105	21	166	33.2
NEWS	83	16.6	102	20.4	104	20.8
SPOKEN	97	19.4	14	2.8	52	10.4
FICTION	73	14.6	49	9.8	24	4.8

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the summaries of the present research study consisting of (1) a summary of the study, (2) a summary of the findings, (3) conclusions, and (4) recommendations for further research.

5.1 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

5.1.1 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to compare and contrast the information of the adjective synonyms *possible*, *probable*, and *likely* provided in two online dictionaries (Oxford Advances Learner's Dictionary and Longman Dictionary of Contemporary of English) and corpus data (Corpus of Contemporary American English), as well as using three criteria; grammatical patterns, noun collocations, and formalities to distinguish the synonyms.

5.1.2 Target Words, Materials, and Procedures

The target words of the study were three adjectives sharing a similar meaning and considered by high frequency of use; *possible*, *probable*, and *likely*.

The basic information of the three synonyms were drawn from two online dictionaries which were the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary and Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English. The concordance lines in the Corpus of Contemporary American English were also employed as the research instruments which was as the main corpus database for comparison. To increase accuracy, when analyzing the collocation of each word, AntConc was used as an effective helping tool.

As regards the procedures of the study, the data derived from the online dictionaries included the definition or meaning and usage pattern of each synonym. Then, the corpus data from the 500 concordance lines of these synonyms were

gathered to compare the information between online dictionaries and COCA. The data were systematically analyzed manually and with AntConc software. The frequency was used as statistics to achieve the results of this study.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The five synonyms can be distinguished systematically by the four major criteria mentioned earlier and the study can be summarized as follows:

5.2.1 Definitions or Meanings

With regard to the meaning of the words, it can be noted that *possible* is commonly used in the meaning of “*that can be done or achieved but might be not certain*”, it refers to matters that do not have much chance to be true because of being controlled by factors. While *probable* and *likely* are close in meaning, *probable* is commonly defined in “*that may be expected to exist, happen, or be true with the evidence.*”, and *likely* commonly conveys the meaning of “*that might happen or be true with the reason*”. The meaning of these two words refer to matters that may have a chance to be true with a reason or evidence. For example, from COCA, *At the end, it's not easy, but it is **possible**.*, *If there was evidence to support a **probable** cause finding on Tom, we would have arrested him.*, *Samsung is highly **likely** to update this model to Android 4.3 since it shares almost all of its specs.* Moreover, the word, ***probable***, has the meaning of greater certainty than the word, *possible*, as in “*It's possible,*” *I said. “But it's not **probable**.”* (COCA).

Therefore, the results of synonyms being compared show that they share the same core meaning as “*that can be done, achieved, or expected to exist, happen or be true*”.

However, when they were investigated in detail, there are some slight differences in their meanings depending on their usage pattern. The word *possible* can be used in the meaning of “*the useful of two or more situations that you can enjoy at the same time*”. For example, *He put the diary page in his breast pocket. In the best of all **possible** worlds, he would have a chance to return it.* The word *likely* also has

another meaning which is used in the sense of “*that seems suitable for a purpose*”. For example, *I was the least **likely** candidate for the job.* Also it can be used in an ironic sense to show that you do not believe what somebody has said. For example, “*I must have been talking in my sleep.*” *Glen smiled. “**Likely** story.”*

It can be seen that the senses of meanings of each verb are not absolutely the same.

5.2.2 Grammatical Pattern

Theoretically, the rule of grammar indicates that adjectives are normally placed before nouns as the modifier. Therefore, the findings show that the grammatical pattern which has the highest frequency for each synonym is “adjective + noun”. It shows that more than half of them from 500 concordances lines employ this pattern. It can be seen that the word *probable* tends to occur before nouns rather than using other patterns as in Table 1.

Table 1 The common patterns having the highest frequency

Synonyms	Possible Patterns	Frequency	%
Possible	possible + n.	123	24.6
Probable	probable + n.	312	62.4
Likely	likely + n.	135	27

Consequently, the findings show more common grammatical patterns of the adjective synonyms: *possible*, *probable*, and *likely* as follows.

- a. it is *possible*, *probable*, *likely* that
- b. adv. + *possible*, *probable*, *likely*
- c. linking v. + *possible*, *probable*, *likely*

Since these words are considered loose synonyms, they may share some grammatical patterns which means they may not be used to replace one another in every context. For example, *likely + n.*, as in ‘*likely voter*’, *About 61% of **likely** voters say they plan to vote no this week.* It may not be substituted in this context by other

words as in *probable voter* or *possible voter*, at least they could not be found in 500 concordance lines in corpus data.

However, in some context these adjective synonyms share the grammatical pattern in common patterns. For example, *it + linking v. + adj.*, as in *it is **likely** that it crashed into the Indian Ocean*. It can be substituted in this context by the word *possible* and *probable* as in *it is **possible/probable** that it crashed into the Indian Ocean*.

In contrast, when comparing the grammatical pattern of each synonym, there are some different uses which means they may not share the grammatical pattern in every context, the word *possible* employs the most varied grammatical patterns which infers that the word tends to be used more frequently than others.

Possible

- a. as + adv./adj. + as + *possible*
- b. it + is + *possible* (for sb) + to + do sth
- c. make + it + *possible* (for sb) + to + do sth
- d. if (at all) + *possible*
- e. (in) every + *possible* + way
- f. superlative adj. + *possible*
- g. where/whenever/wherever + *possible*
- h. do + everything + *possible*
- i. would + it + be + *possible* (for sb) + to + do sth?

Probable

- a. be + (not, less) *possible* + even, or, and, but + *probable*

Likely

- a. *likely* + to + do/be + sth

Regarding the frequency, the findings show that *possible* and *probable* tend to be used at highest frequency as adj. + n. while *likely* is mostly used in *likely* + to + do/be + sth

Moreover, the findings show that the corpora provided more grammatical patterns than the two online dictionaries OALD and LDOCE. The patterns not found in the dictionary are the following.

- a. (in) every + *possible* + way
- b. be + (not, less) *possible* + even, or, and, but + *probable*

It is interesting that when the data from the dictionaries and concordance lines were compared, they are slightly different, *(in) every + possible + way*, occurred in corpus data while the grammatical pattern presented in the dictionaries is *(in) every + way + possible* which could not be found in 500 concordance lines. However, both patterns are considered as they may be used actually by native speakers.

e.g. *Our staff will help you **in every way possible**.* (LDOCE)

e.g. *It was easy. She was perfectly sweet to you **in every possible way**, but she never challenged you and you got bored. The thing about* (COCA)

Significantly, from the word *probable*, the pattern that was not mentioned in dictionaries but can be found in concordance lines is *be + (not, less) possible + even, or, and, but + probable* as in ***it's possible, even probable**, by November even I might come in for a little criticism.*

5.2.3 Collocation

The grammatical patterns show that nouns are the main collocates of those three adjective synonyms. The findings show the top five list of each adjectives as follows.

Possible collocates with *explanation(s)*, *way*, *reason(s)*, *solution(s)*, *worlds*, and *causes*, respectively. The noun collocates commonly convey the meaning of “*that*

can be done or achieved but might be not certain". When it collocates with the word *worlds*, it refers to *"the benefits of two or more completely different situations that you can enjoy at the same time"*

Probable collocates with *cause(s)*, *consequence(s)*, *outcome(s)*, *reason(s)*, and *effect(s)* respectively. The noun collocates commonly convey the meaning of *"that may be expected to exist, happen, or be true with the evidence"* focusing on the reason or evidence. Significantly, the highest frequency of noun collocates, *cause(s)* are commonly use in the legal field in order to convey the meaning of *"in the good reason to think that a crime has been committed"*

Likely collocates with *voters*, *scenario*, *candidate*, *explanation(s)*, and *outcome* respectively. Commonly, it conveys the meaning of *"that might happen or be true with the reason"*. However, when it is used with the noun collocates, the meaning changes into *"suitable for a particular purpose"* focusing on people.

From the results, it can be inferred that the nouns *candidate*, *cause*, *effect*, *explanation*, *outcome*, *reason scenario*, *solution* are weak collocations which can co-occur in three synonyms *possible*, *probable*, and *likely*. Otherwise, some nouns e.g. *world* and *voter* appear with only one adjective. They may be considered as strong collocations of the adjective *possible* and *likely* as in *possible world* and *likely voter*.

5.2.4 Degree of Formality

With regard to the style or formality of the context where these synonyms occur, it is likely that the word *probable* is used in more formal context than *possible* and *likely*. *Probable* mostly tends to be used in the academic context. Moreover, the concordance lines support this fact in that it seems to co-occur with the words showing formality, such as *intensify*, *pursue*, *congruent*, *athlete*, and *the continent's interior*.

Likewise, the concordance lines show that *possible* and *likely* can be used in both formal and informal contexts. As they sound rather formal, *likely* seems to be preferred much more strongly in formal context than *possible*. Due to the fact that

likely is often used in magazines, academic text, and news respectively. The concordance lines support this fact that it tends to co-occur with words showing formality, such as, *encounter*, *analyses revealed*, and *problem-based*.

Possible tends to mostly occur in informal context because of its greater frequency in the genre of spoken language and fiction than *probable* and *likely*. The concordance lines support this fact in that it tends to co-occur with patterns expressing informal context, such as, *would it be possible (for somebody) to do something? make sth possible*, and *is this possible*.

5.3 CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions can be drawn from the discussion above.

5.3.1 The findings have shown that *possible*, *probable*, and *likely* share the same core meaning in some context. They cannot be absolutely interchangeable in all contexts depending on their meaning, grammatical patterns, collocation and formality.

5.3.2 In terms of grammatical patterns, they are considered as adjectives, commonly used with nouns. *Probable* provides the highest frequency of using this pattern. *Likely* mostly tends to use this pattern, *likely + to + do/be + sth*. *Possible* provides more varieties of patterns than others.

5.3.3 *Possible*, *probable* and *likely* are loose synonyms, not perfect or absolute synonyms in that they cannot substitute for each other in every context as can be seen in the aspects of meaning, grammatical pattern and formality.

5.3.4 Regarding collocation, the adjectives *possible* and *likely* as in *possible world* and *likely voter* may be considered as strong collocations.

5.3.5 In terms of formality they are used in both formal and informal contexts. However, they tend to be used in more formal than informal context. *Probable* tends to be used in the more formal context than the others. *Possible* and *likely* sound rather

formal, *likely* seems to be preferred much more strongly in the formal context than *possible*. *Possible* tends to occur in informal context more than *probable* and *likely*.

5.3.6 Consequently, it can be found that the use of corpora can provide information not included in two online dictionaries in terms of grammatical patterns, usage, noun collocation and degree of formality.

Therefore, the findings should be applied to English language learning, especially for EFL learners. As learners, we should point out these differences of the concept of synonyms in English in order to use them correctly or naturally. In addition, we should also use corpus data i.e. concordance lines, so that we will be able to see some further information other than that supplied in the dictionaries. Hopefully, the findings and discussion of the different meaning, usage and patterns may help the English learner or people who interested in enhancing their English acquisition.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTHER RESEARCH

This corpus-based study focused mainly on adjective synonyms. However, there are more criterion to distinguish the near synonyms which are not mentioned in this research. In order to deal with this gap, it is recommended that a thorough study be conducted of dialect and connotations. Future research should investigate more concordance lines so as to increase the chances of discovering associations of the adjectives in diverse registers in COCA. Alternatively, other well-known corpora such as the British National Corpus (BNC), the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA), or TIME Magazine Corpus can be used to compare the occurrences of adjectives, and adjective plus noun collocations.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

THE EXAMPLE CONCORDANCE LINES OF *POSSIBLE*

would be utopia. That, to me, would be the best of all	<u>possible</u>	worlds. "You're on Your Own"
the bulk of evidence seems to suggest that something is there. one	<u>possible</u>	explanation for the differing outcomes is this: contrasting social realities
by Voltaire in <i>Candide</i> -- "all is for the best in the best of all	<u>possible</u>	worlds. "As the good doctor said in a famous passage, which predated
Easter Sunday brings a chance of rain across the Plains. Rain is also	<u>possible</u>	in the Northwest, chilly across the nation's midsection and the Northeast.
One of the evolutionary implications of this work is the	<u>possible</u>	explanation of how humans have achieved greater body size variability
shrugged. "He's not yet out of the woods" "Is it	<u>possible</u>	for me to see him?" She studied the blue Unoleum beneath her feet
, just to be as comprehensive as	<u>possible</u>	, they are already sending back about 1,200 of them. So, look,
I can't blame him. Unless he gave out the story, which is	<u>possible</u>	-- probably he did. But he's working hard. He's doing a
the literature since first asked by Andress (1998). I offer these two	<u>possible</u>	reasons. Primarily, an in-depth study of music in Reggio-inspired schools
, it's lethal, and it's coming for us, until it's	<u>possible</u>	to demonstrate otherwise. We saw al Qaeda and what they did. This is
he says a Trump presidency is indeed	<u>possible</u>	, especially because Donald is not an establishment candidate.
won this year's TED Prize. That prize help to make the StoryCorps app	<u>possible</u>	. And you can find that app and the amazing StoryCorps podcast
Mars is just about half Earth's diameter and about one-tenth its mass. One	<u>possible</u>	explanation is that something prematurely robbed the nascent Red Planet of
United States people, and this is God's doing, that he is making	<u>possible</u>	this union. I'm saying to Obama and to our president to make this
heated debate this morning as well with a taxi driver who said how is it	<u>possible</u>	that after five years of austerity and the fact that it hasn't worked said
this historic moment. Now this is all being made	<u>possible</u>	after the governor of South Carolina signed a bill into law yesterday
Saturday Night. They tape the rehearsal show at eight o'clock, so it is	<u>possible</u>	that Trump will be taping the rehearsal show, the fallback show that the use
when Texas files their response. If the process too late, it's very	<u>possible</u>	that this process will be stretched and kicked until next year, so it would
at all the evidence, "she recalls, "and there was no other	<u>possible</u>	explanation for someone in police custody coming in looking one way,

this one. She fired off an email asking him to throw his weight and if with questioning the validity of her life's work. Asking her how it was He reached for his phone and tried to make his voice sound as normal as , designed and constructed in exactly the right way, could make it latest round of funded grants today at 10 a.m. sharp, with one of two Japanese are proud of all the wrong things. Is it and Taiwan filled the airwaves, - when I was a child, it was not my point, " I say. " My point is that the only , you will have to make room. But in general and where at all they jokingly called Park Place. They drove older cars, drove as little as still thinks she meant it when she said it. I mean, it's with withering disdain, for instance. She could pull it off. It was massed attacks, that was something I never thought humanly is it to maintain this kind of streak? Harder than winning! It's " Then what do you want? " " To come in, if Prioritizing spending the money for better-quality food, whenever I included minor temporal effects in my estimate. " " Would it be raise its internal temperature enough to make cooking east partly out of your own pocket, you can create the best of all DDR4 memory modules. We had to try one out. # What made this names and ages as well as the parents' names, address and, if Of course I believe him. He's not a thief. He had no a better life. Houska's mission, she says, is to do everything

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, the Bureau's behind her request to unseal the file. # After that she dove to train people in a skill that had never been scientifically validated . In an hour, Lenny was on a train out of South Station to actually to see the way things were, to observe unobstructed the sacred cogs outcomes: 1) they've decided to fund her latest proposal, in which to be proud of who you are and hate it at the same time? to play games on the web, to go and see the latest movies from explanation for this fixation is that it's something instinctive. It's Darwinian. let the dead be. The sky gets light very slowly, it is hard for the sake of the environment. They had a cleaning service, so they she actually cared, at least in the moment, before she woke up the . " What if I threw you down, " he said, " and , men running against gunfire like that. I was twenty two years old and I for a player to win a tournament and not beat the field in all four . To convince you to let me in. " " How do you plan , may well help curb the growing problems of foodborne illnesses, obesity, " I asked, " to bring my wife and child along? " . We used plywood for the outer box for rigidity and durability, worlds. The summer earnings are available for spending and the Rot If you're wondering why we've been locked in at 64GB for so , a phone number. # Today is the deadline for requests. Tax-deductible reason to take that necklace. " # " Except for the fact that it to help those adults succeed. Learn more at <http://bit.ly/FASTadopt>.

APPENDIX B

THE EXAMPLE CONCORDANCE LINES OF *PROBABLE*

as sexual orientation, parenting, divorce, and abuse are discussed, it is	<u>probable</u>	that students benefit from hearing their peers views in conjunction
Of course, a nice touch, right? Given that there is	<u>probable</u>	cause to believe and we believe he killed her. But yes. There was
embarrassed. So duping delight is -- seems to be the most	<u>probable</u>	situation. GRACE: What is duping delight? BREHOVE: Duping delight
prove anything. At the very most, his demeanor doesn't even get you	<u>probable</u>	cause. It's just, you know, something that they're trying to
The speaker in the conference table came on. " Highly	<u>probable</u>	analysis of video and audio protocols completed, " said THOTH.
and with money to be made from their distribution, it still seems	<u>probable</u>	that within twenty years or so, it will be possible to download virtually any
of Iranian nuclear weapons an existential threat; it appears quite	<u>probable</u>	. that if diplomacy fails to alter the current trajectory of Iran's nuclear
The search algorithm directs the UAV toward the most	<u>probable</u>	target location, shown by certainty gradient lines. After the first pass
by the remarks that I made that many years ago, but that with the probable	<u>probable</u>	cause he, it wasn't that he felt that no criminality occurred
The Schlieffen plan always maintained that it was	<u>probable</u>	that the French would stop the Germans east of Paris, at which time it
" It's possible, " I said. " But it's not	<u>probable</u>	. " So far the equilibrium had held. Just. It didn't seem
Tick. Now he is. There was no way it could be seen as	<u>probable</u>	, or possible, unless you think of a blow between the eyes, a
need a warrant to come in here, Ted? TED Not if I have	<u>probable</u>	cause that a crime is being committed and Lord knows I have that! They
traditional story of the Trojan Horse cannot be ruled out, it seems more	<u>probable</u>	that, if the Horse did exist, it was empty. There were simpler
, 102 of type A and 100 of type B. If all pairings are equally	<u>probable</u>	, the mixture will typically form into 50 AB pairs, 26 AA pairs,
You know, the fact is, if there was evidence to support a	<u>probable</u>	cause finding on Tom, we would have arrested him.
by the remarks that I made that many years ago, but that with the	<u>probable</u>	cause he, he, it wasn't that he felt that no criminality occurred
, by lowering the standard for issuing a warrant from	<u>probable</u>	cause to " reasonable suspicion " for a " non-United States person. " But
As amended after 9/11, the law says the government needs	<u>probable</u>	cause, the constitutional gold standard, to believe the subject of the
, were in the past four years.) But Scholl says a more	<u>probable</u>	reason for the attacks is increasing numbers of people in the water, due in

The standard that judges use to sign Ramey warrants is the level of damage described in the scenario was plausible, the limited amount in order to find -- in order for the grand jury to find Given the testimony of several other participants it seems much more M. A., June 1, 2000. (n21) It is highly lower-level statistical fluctuations and of quantum uncertainty. Predicting long-wave ultraviolet (UV) lamp in the dark. The method gave the most Nicolas Sarkozy, the right-wing minister of the interior and beginning of a run, these values would all be the same: all equally shore (she loved to swim), he had said he thought that more one agenda: to hold accountable those it has him to comment. " The only agenda we have is when we have ; it was followed by 18 other states during the succeeding 20 years. The you look at all the variables, fragmentation isn't just possible, it's were computer-generated, " Richards said. " And it is highly " You begin to think that it's not only possible, but " A stable, democratic country in the foreseeable future in Iraq is not zin absentia and have concocted a possibly libelous but ultimately drowned. A few of the recruits must have reflected briefly on that ... The answer... who knows? " It seems It's possible to have only that much, but it's not lesson is learning to ask properly for help from store personnel. Various . Information from the original study is used to determine a distribution of

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cause to believe someone has committed a crime. It is the same standard consequences of a major earthquake would be worse than described. cause. At that point, at some point, the grand jury may well that while the command continued on its trek toward Old Man's Creek that if a tourist asked a Bocatorenean about their " typical " dances, they outcomes of the workings of the brain would be possible only if we were to numbers of total coliforms and E. coli per 100 mL of sample. Total candidate in the next presidential elections, called the " French Bush " by . At the conclusion of the program execution the register states with the . He pictured her there. She was leaping from rock to rock on a cause to believe have violated the law. But a controversial defense expert cause to believe somebody violated the law, they should be held reason for this movement was that local communities demanded . And as long as times stay hard for a good portion of them, that they were not generated by a typewriter vintage circa 1972. " , that you too can make your first million by age 25, " kamau , " said Shibley Telhami, an expert on Iraq at the Brookings Institution. scenario. The warm petal of Walter's thumbprint flares and then fades outcome, but a later inquiry found that none of them had thought out loud that the first torpedo sightings were real. After this, maybe some were real . So finding only a few hundred cc's is not something concrete, it situations are role played before the field trips are taken. This lesson is effect sizes. The sample size to be employed in the replication attempt is

APPENDIX C

THE EXAMPLE CONCORDANCE LINES OF *LIKELY*

high blood-sugar levels while she's pregnant, her children are more moves through the world and should therefore, at least in theory, be more not only at-risk-but destined-to end up in prison or to die a violent, most . " What The Heck Just Happened? " New poll from Rasmussen, among

Frankly, we don't have time for that right now. We're more and they are considering upgrading the technology they use to target

rulings by this court tell you, tell us very much about how they're example of a place where, frankly, young -- poor young people are most deep crevasses. He started climbing before dawn so that the ice was less

. Maria is slightly younger than Mary and has more children. She is less a household that on average earns less than Mary' s. Maria is also

and a seat in parliament, Poroshenko is widely regarded as a

As vaccine skeptics point out, healthier children are less

Up your investment game. Learn how to identify companies that are an architecture degree from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, had once seemed a you'll have to forget about following any sort of seasonal cycle. They are

helmet. Trys gave him a wan smile of gratitude, knowing it was more did nothing except " monitor " this piracy on the high seas, Tehran is platforms that will appeal to Indian youth. Cricket, movies, and music are

wants his privacy. If your kid stays on your plan, the insurer is

the Proposal 1 sales tax and road funding initiative. About 61% of

This isn't altogether clear, but some interesting models are emerging. It's see college affordability as a winning issue. More than 70 percent of

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to be overweight or obese, according to a study of almost 10,000 to control our daily life choices. But that's not how it works out gun-related, death. " We can look at children from a very young age voters asked this question. Which statement is closest to your own? to concern ourselves with the end of the year--or the end of the credit card voters in the hope of making further inroads in the heavily Democratic to go on this next question? Well, it's hard to say to get stuck. Why is that? NATHANIEL-HENDREN, Well, we looked to melt and crack and move. That morning was his seventh run through the to be working and is living in a household that on average earns less than to attend Spanish-language Masses. She is also more likely than Mary candidate to be prime minister. If Poroshenko is the CEO of the revolution, to suffer complications from vaccine-preventable diseases. Even so, to grow by joining an investment club, a group that researches stocks candidate to become the primary means of support in our family, to flower in spring anyway, while still full of half-ripened fruit, but it that he just wanted to flatter her into sleeping with him again. Not that to feel quite free to act as it pleases. Conservative victory is the significant to be the three cornerstones on which most of the Web will evolve. to send you, the policy-holder, an " explanation of benefits " form every voters say they plan to vote no this week, according to a Detroit Free that tissues where there is a lot of proliferation will be susceptible to voters support debt-free college, according to a January poll by GBA

the Ahklun Mountains, whose glaciers, researchers say, are taking unfair advantage of their daughter in their absence. This is Scientists have now identified at least nine worlds other than ours that tally showed that volunteers who received the vaccine were slightly more atmospheric phenomena and faraway events. So for now, the most zones are more malleable than the surrounding glacial ice and are less Pundits declared it was the wave of the future. " The present era is and comes out alive-not in politics! " // She smiled. Kate and most to be opposed, and opposed vigorously. In fact, one was more to do the bidding of their corporate supporters. Yet, even this is the junior Texas senator, Ted Cruz, also pose a threat because they are You know with Fort McHenry and the harbor so close, they're a Jeb-Hillary showdown for the White House next year is still the most the weaknesses of both Labour and the Tories, the Liberal Democrats are in the United Kingdom. Polls suggest that neither of their parties is of Republicans felt that way. And just before Election Day, 68 percent of crispy. That's a meal. " People who are food insecure are more but trauma is trauma. If that's how they feel, then it's name recognition usually enjoyed only by pop stars and presidents. It's suffering a mental health crisis, he said. " That's a lot more know where it will all lead, but we do know that these events are , say, 20 years ago. " People who feel interpersonally connected are less Mr. Duggan, who is white, will probably win by a landslide, as attitudes of those who have a positive opinion of alQaeda are as they have gone to a tighter screen where they only look at the secular. They go back to his having been convinced early on that the most to rejoin the Angels rotation. In the meantime, Drew Rucinski is the most

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to disappear by the end of the century. From the air, I see to breed resentment. It is no light thing, chrie, for a Catholic harbor warm inner oceans. Nearly 25 percent of the dwarf planet to become infected than were those who got dummy shots. place to make improvements is in fine-tuning short-term predictions, to crack when squeezed or pulled. Near Larsen C's edge is the to be known to history as the pneumatic age, " exulted the Washington Post everyone else in the room noted the glint of steel in her gray eyes, to read about discomfort on the Left at some of the mob tactics than about to change. Most politicians are cultural followers, not cultural leaders, and to shift the debate to issues, such as immigration and education, which turn to become targets. " // " Oh, it just sounds so dreadful, outcome of the tortuous primary season. And it is a prospect that both to be part of the next government no matter who is prime minister. Still to get much more than a third of the vote in Thursday's election, voters told pollsters that climate change was a " serious " or " very serious to be overweight and suffer from weight-related maladies. Foods high in to affect their lives. " " Every time you see me...' Katie that no other modern-day scientific instrument has stirred as many passions than someone who just stuck up a 7 Eleven, " Camper said. In to shape all of us and our region for a long time to come. to be anxious, " says Leahy. And just as our communities are becoming voters say they prefer him to 2 to 1 over Mr. Napoleon, who is to change dramatically as well. As it happens, we have proof of just voters, it has shifted a little more toward the Republican side again. The cause of rising carbon dioxide levels was the increased burning of fossil pitcher to get the start in Texas on April 14, the first time the

BIOGRAPHY

Name	Miss Firadow Nisani
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