



**A CORPUS-BASED STUDY OF ENGLISH SYNONYMS:
CONVINCE AND PERSUADE**

BY

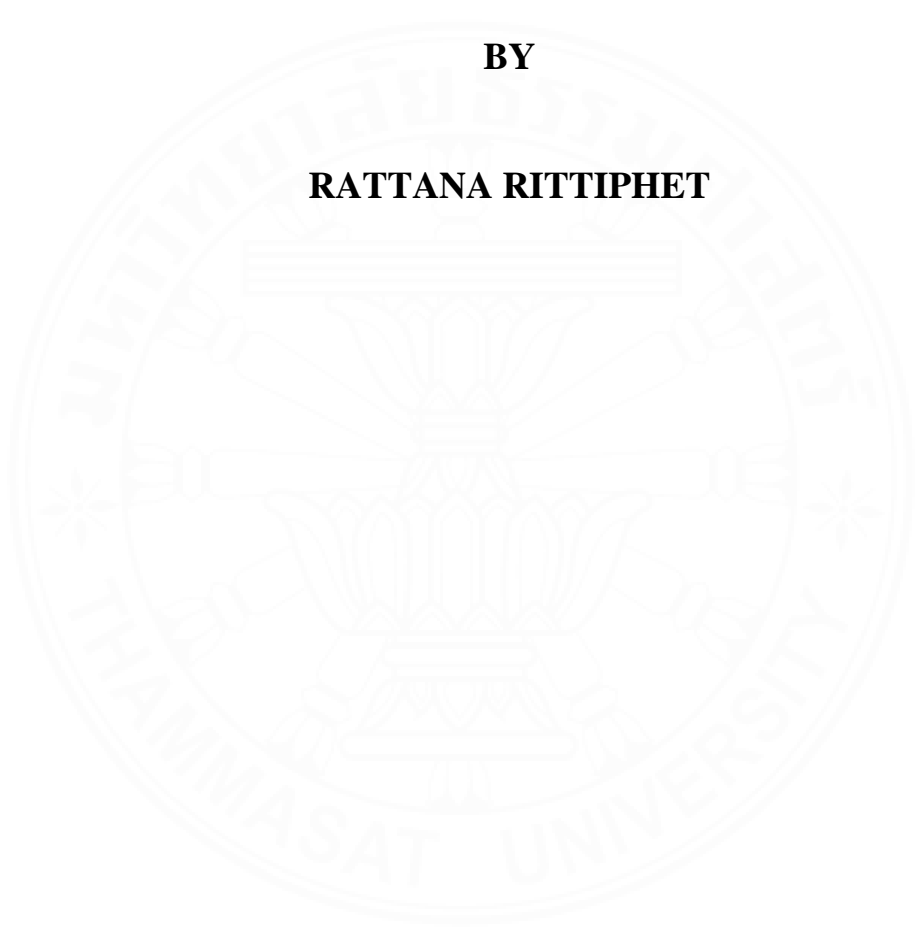
RATTANA RITTIPHET

**AN INDEPENDENT STUDY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING
LANGUAGE INSTITUTE
THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY
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ENTITLED

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was approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts in English Language Teaching

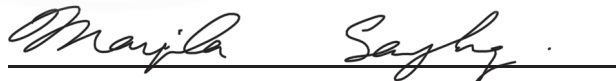
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ABSTRACT

This study investigates two synonymous verbs, "convince" and "persuade," focusing on their similarities and differences in terms of definitions, distribution across genres in relation to frequency of occurrence and degree of formality, noun collocations in relation to semantic preference, and grammatical patterns. To review their definitions and usage examples, three online dictionaries were consulted. The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) was utilized to explore distribution across genres, noun collocations, and grammatical patterns. The findings of this study indicate that "convince" and "persuade" share similar core meanings but have subtle differences in their definitions. In terms of distribution across genres, "persuade" is predominantly used in formal contexts, such as newspapers, magazines, and academic texts, while "convince" is more prevalent in non-formal contexts like blogs, web pages, and spoken genres. Based on these results, it can be concluded that "persuade" exhibits a stronger degree of formality compared to "convince." Additionally, both verbs commonly collocate with object nouns and share similar noun collocates and semantic preference themes. Regarding grammatical patterns, these two synonyms display similarities; however, there is a significant difference in the frequency of occurrence. "Convince" is more frequently used with "that clauses," while "persuade" is typically found with "to" infinitives. Therefore, while "convince" and "persuade" are near-synonyms, they cannot be used interchangeably in all contexts. The results of this research will be beneficial

for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, enabling them to utilize these synonyms effectively for communication purposes.

Keywords: COCA, Collocations, Semantic preference, Synonym



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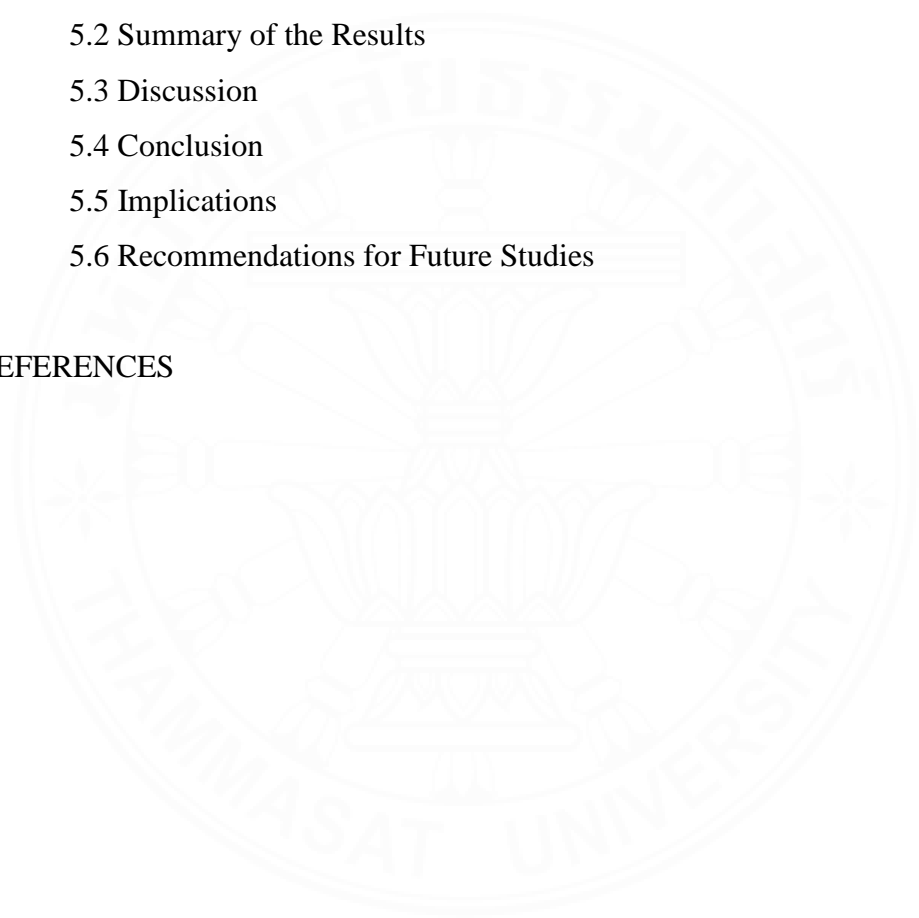
Rattana Rittiphet

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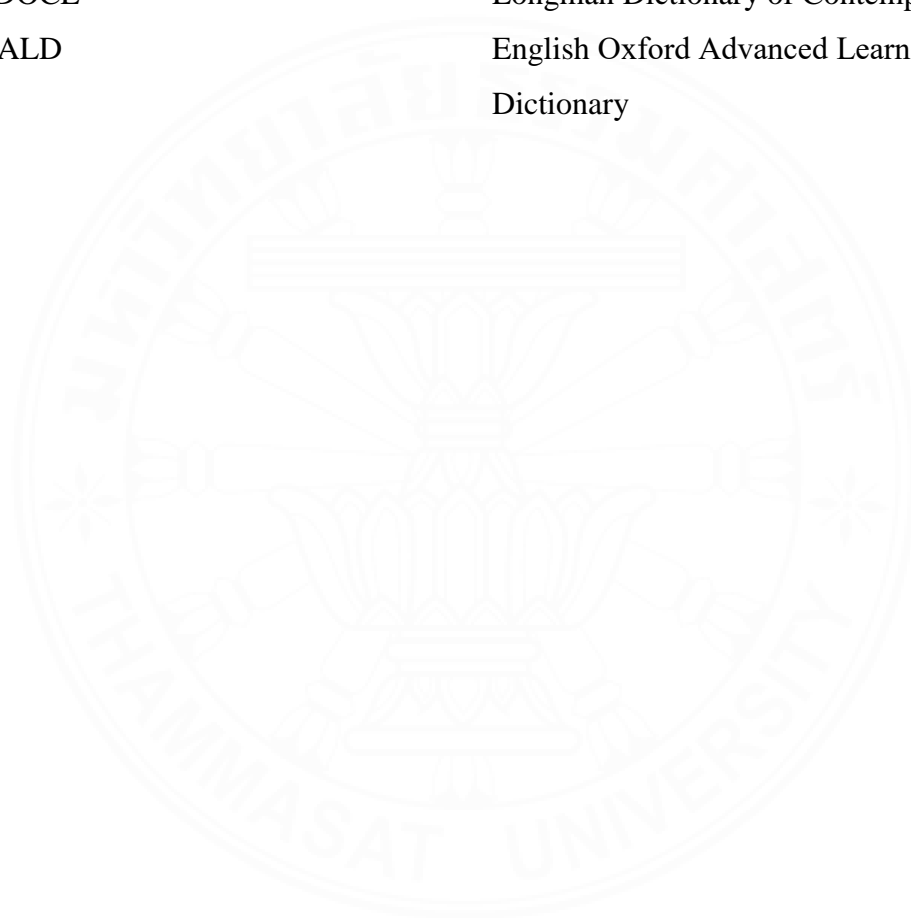
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Symbols/Abbreviations	Terms
BNC	British National Corpus
COCA	Corpus of Contemporary American English
LDOCE	Longman Dictionary of Contemporary
OALD	English Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In today's world, English is undoubtedly playing an important role as a lingua franca. It is the language of business, education, science and entertainment. As such, it is useful and even necessary for many to understand English. Nowadays, people are dedicating more time to studying English as a second language. Many countries also include English in their syllabuses, and children are starting to learn English at a younger age.

There are three elements of language learning: pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar; vocabulary is the most essential of these three elements (Bai, 2018). In order to be able to use English effectively, language learners need to learn and understand adequate vocabulary as it is a fundamental step. One of the challenging areas of learning vocabulary is synonyms because of the variations in their meaning and different usages (Shahzadi, et al. 2019). Several learners may not be aware of using near-synonyms in appropriate contexts; however, they assume that synonyms can be used interchangeably in meaning and structure (Phoocharoensil, 2021). The ability to know where a word fits within its own meaning system and being able to use it properly is a key achievement in word learning in the long term (Corson, 1997).

A number of research studies have investigated the similarities and differences of English synonyms; however, the synonyms *persuade* and *convince* have yet to be investigated. These two synonyms were selected because they are common words that are found in top 3,000 words both in spoken and written texts according to Oxford Learner's Dictionary online. Studying the similarities and differences of these synonyms will offer benefits to learners, enabling them to use these words in the proper contexts. In this study, the similarities and differences in terms of definition, distribution across genres in relation of their frequency of occurrence and degree of formality, noun collocations in relation to semantic preference, and grammatical patterns will be examined. The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) will be employed to investigate the synonyms.

1.2 Research Objectives

- 1) To study the definition of *convince* and *persuade* in terms of similarities and differences.
- 2) To study the context in which *convince* and *persuade* are distributed across genres in relation of their frequency of occurrence and degree of formality.
- 3) To study the noun collocations of *convince* and *persuade* in relation to the semantic preference of synonyms.
- 4) To study the syntactic information in terms of the grammatical patterns of *convince* and *persuade*.

1.3 Research Questions

- 1) What are the similarities and differences in the definition of *convince* and *persuade*?
- 2) In what way do the synonyms *convince* and *persuade* differ across genres in relation of their frequency of occurrence and degree of formality?
- 3) What are the common noun collocations in relation to the semantic preference of the synonyms *convince* and *persuade*?
- 4) What are the common grammatical patterns of the two synonyms *convince* and *persuade*?

1.4 Definition of Key Terms

- 1) Corpora /Corpus: A collection of written or spoken materials stored on a computer.
- 2) COCA: Corpus of Contemporary American English
- 3) Synonym: A word or expression that has the same or nearly the same meaning as another word in the same language (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionaries).
- 4) Collocation: A combination of words that usually co-occur with the most frequent specialized vocabulary items.
- 5) Degree of formality: a criterion to classify synonyms which refers to words that tend to occur in formal or informal context.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study prefers to study two synonymous verbs: *convince* and *persuade*. Three online dictionaries will be used to review their definitions. COCA was employed to investigate the distribution across genres, including reviewing the degrees of formality and collocations. The top twenty noun collocations for each target synonym with the highest frequency were selected and a minimum MI score of 3. The 100 concordance lines for each verb were used to analyze the grammatical patterns. The data was gathered in March 2023.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The results of this study will enable learners to better comprehend the verbs, *convince* and *persuade*, in terms of their definition, the way they can be used in proper contexts, and their collocations and grammatical patterns. In addition, the results will be beneficial for teachers in classrooms in terms of applying synonyms in classroom teaching.

1.7 Organization of the Study

This corpus-based study consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 includes the background of the study, the research objectives, research questions, definitions of key terms, scope of the study, significance of the study, and organization of the study. Chapter 2 contains the review of literature, consisting of the definition of synonym, criteria for distinguishing synonyms, corpus, semantic preference and previous studies. Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the study, the instrument, the data collection, the procedure and the data analysis. Chapter 4 is comprised of the results of the study. Lastly, Chapter 5 contains a summary of the study, a summary of the results, the discussion, the conclusion, the implications and the recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the literature in five main areas: 1) definition of synonym; 2) criteria for distinguishing synonyms; 3) corpus; 4) semantic preference; and 5) previous studies.

2.1 Definition of Synonym

According to Cambridge Dictionary, a synonym is a word or phrase that has the same or nearly the same meaning as another word or phrase in the same language. In other word, it is a relationship of resemblance of meaning between two or more words. Synonyms are normally grouped into two main types: absolute synonyms and near-synonyms.

2.1.1 Absolute Synonyms

Absolute synonyms refer to words that are interchangeable in all possible contexts of use without any effect on the original meaning, style and connotation. According to this definition, it is rare to find strict synonyms because a language allowing for this would result in redundancy. In reality, strict synonymy is disregarded since it leads to excessiveness in a language (Phoocharoensil, 2010).

2.1.2 Near-Synonyms

The definition of near-synonym is a word whose meanings is close to another word and for which a significant overlap in meaning is identifiable between them. Near-synonyms can never replace one another perfectly in terms of use. Near-synonyms can be distinguished based on their dialects, degrees of formality, connotations, collocations and grammatical patterns. For example, Kruawong and Phoocharoensil (2022) studied the near-synonyms *teach*, *educate* and *instruct*. According to the study, *teach*, *educate* and *instruct* differ in terms of formality; *teach* was found with a higher frequency of occurrence, and to be more generally and widely used than the others.

2.2 Criteria for Distinguishing Synonyms

Synonyms in English can be distinguished according to the following criteria:

2.2.1 Dialect

Various English dialects have different terms for the same person, object, or concept e.g., chemist and drugstore, chips and crisps and football and soccer. These are example of British and American near-synonyms.

2.2.2 Degree of formality

In English, one word often occurs in a formal context, whereas its synonym is used in a more common context, e.g., the words “child”, “initiate” and “comprehend” are more formal than “kid”, “start” and “understand” respectively. In addition, written contexts, such as books, newspapers and magazines, tend to use a higher degree of formality.

2.2.3 Connotations

This refers to the wide array of positive and negative associations that most words naturally carry with them. For example, affordable and cheap have similar meanings. Consider “it is a cheap cloth” compared to “it is an affordable cloth”. Even though these two sentences have the same core meaning, using “affordable” has a more positive connotation since “cheap” can also imply low quality.

2.2.4 Collocations

According to Online Cambridge Dictionary, collocation is “a word or phrase that is often used with another word or phrase, in a way that sounds correct to people who have spoken the language all their lives, but might not be expected from the meaning”. According to this definition, observing as many collocational patterns as possible will help English learners to optimize their English skills.

2.2.5 Grammatical Patterns

This is another criterion that is used to distinguish synonyms. It helps to identify what phrases or clauses are used with a given adjective, noun or verb. Below are examples for verb patterns:

1) Simple patterns: The verb is followed by one noun or adjective phrase, or by a clause. Or the verb that does not require a direct object (intransitive verb); for example, 1) bake a cake (V n), 2) Feel sad (V adj), 3) Walk (V).

2) In complex patterns with prepositions and adverbs, the verb goes with a noun phrase and followed by a prepositional phrase or adverb; for example, 1) inform her about the result (V n about n), 2) surprised him in the situation (V n in n)

In addition, there is a connection between lexis and grammar; however, words with a similar meaning may not have the same possible grammatical patterns. For example, Shahzadi et al. (2019) analyzed the synonymous verbs *reach* and *arrive*; in terms of grammatical patterns, these two synonyms share a similarity in that they are frequently used with the subject on the right and the preposition on the left. However, some grammatical features are different for these two synonyms.

2.3 Corpus

A corpus is a collection of written or spoken material stored on a computer and used to find out how language is used. According to Timmis (2015), corpus refers to a collection of used language which has occurred under circumstances in which the speaker was known to be doing something more than demonstrating the way the system works. According to this definition, a key part of corpus is naturally occurring. Corpus-based studies are useful since dictionaries cannot provide information on certain aspects (Gu, 2017). Corpus have gained popularity, especially modern corpus in which computers are allowed to store a large database, making it possible to identify and analyze complex patterns of language use (Mukherjee, 2006). Corpus has also influenced language teaching as it obviously feeds into language teaching materials, such as providing evidence for semantics and grammar. For example, teachers can choose some concordance lines of target words to demonstrate how language is used in natural settings.

2.4 Semantic Preference

Semantic preference is the propensity of lexical items to be restricted in specific semantic circumstances (Cheng 2012). In other words, semantic preference is a context in which vocabulary items commonly occur. In an example from Phoocharoensil (2021), the verb “cause” is frequently found with illness objects, e.g., *cancer*, *heart disease*, or often expresses unpleasant feeling or emotion, e.g., the noun *convenience* in *causes them inconvenience*. Semantic preference has been thoroughly examined in corpus linguistics in recent years.

And for synonym study, it is often investigated together with collocations (Lertcharoenwanich & Phoocharoensil, 2022).

2.5 Previous Studies

Bai (2018) studied strategies of English vocabulary learning and found that learning vocabulary involves more than just memorizing words or phrases; it also includes the ability to use vocabulary correctly. Vocabulary is the key to language learning. Language learners should find the proper methods that help them learn vocabulary and improve their English level. In addition, teachers should select teaching strategies that are applicable to various learning situations to ensure that they meet students' learning needs.

Mukherjee (2006) investigated using corpora for ELT. It is found that corpora can be used for various ends in language pedagogy, e.g., as a database and tools in the classroom. The benefits of using corpus-based activities were evaluated under real-time conditions from both teachers and learners. The results showed that when learners become familiar with corpora they tend to be more active and find corpus work more interesting and beneficial to their language learning.

Lertcharoenwanich and Phoocharoensil (2022) analyzed the three near-synonymous nouns of *purpose*, *goal* and *objective*. The results stated that the three synonymous nouns are near-synonyms, with *goal* occurring with the highest frequency, followed by *purpose* and *objective*, respectively. All of them have similar patterns across genre and most frequently found in academic texts. In addition, *objective* and *goal* are more closely related because they share more overlapping semantically related

themes and collocations. However, these synonyms also co-occur with particular verbs or adjectives. Hence, they cannot be interchangeably substituted for each other.

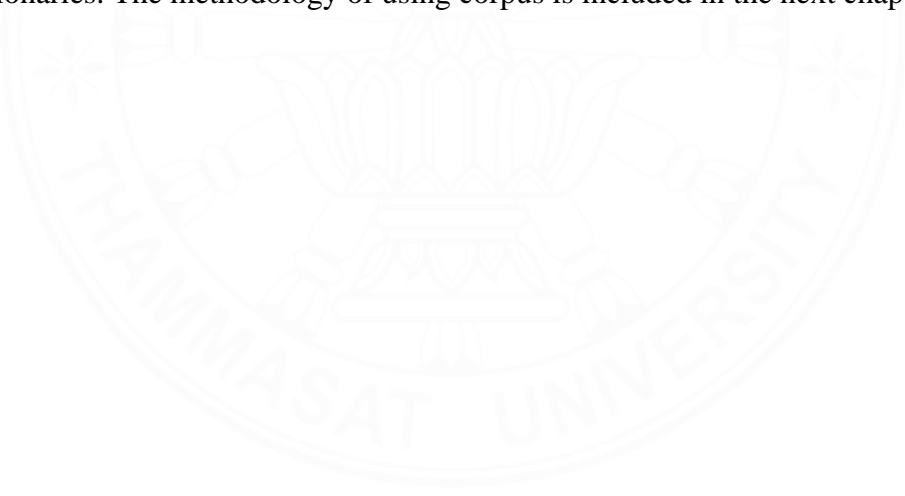
Sumonsriworakun (2022) investigated three synonyms — *disadvantage*, *downside* and *drawback* — using data from COCA. The findings showed that *disadvantage* has the highest frequency and is more prevalent in academic texts, while *downside* and *drawback* are less formal and mostly found in magazines. The researcher also analyzed verb and adjective collocations with these synonyms. The verb collocations revealed two common themes: *consider* and *deal with*. As for their adjective collocates, these three synonyms are frequently found with adjectives under the theme *extent*.

Phoocharoensil (2021) investigated two synonymous verbs — *persist* and *persevere* — to clarify the confusion between them. The results, based on the Corpus of Contemporary American English, showed that *persist* and *persevere* appear most frequently in academic publications and websites, respectively. Although the two synonyms have similarities in cognitive meanings, they co-select different sets of collocations. The analysis of semantic prosody revealed that while *persist* frequently co-occurs with words or phrases associated with negative meaning and unpleasant situations, the collocations around *persevere* refer to strong determination and a great attempt to complete a difficult task. Moreover, while in a learner dictionary *persevere* is only used as an intransitive verb, corpus data showed that this verb can also be used transitively. According to this observation, using dictionaries along with corpus data is recommended, since language corpora tend to provide more authentic usage of vocabulary in regard to collocational and grammatical patterns.

Shahzadi et al. (2019) analyzed the synonymous verbs, *reach* and *arrive*, using the Sketch Engine (SkE) tool to review the collocations, concordances, word sketches and sketch differences of the synonyms in the British National Corpus (BNC). It was found that *reach* occurs more often than *arrive*. In terms of grammatical patterns, these two synonyms share a similarity in that they are frequently used with the subject on the right and the preposition on the left. However, some grammatical features are different for these two synonyms and they also have considerable differences in terms of the syntactic patterns of their colligations.

Gu (2017) investigated two synonyms: *obtain* and *gain*. The online tools, as Sketch Engine, BNC Web, and Just the Word, were used in this study. The results showed that concrete nouns more often collocate with *obtain* than *gain*, especially in pure and practical science. *Gain* is collocated with abstract nouns, and most of them carried positive semantic prosody. This word is often used in commerce, economic and political texts. For grammatical patterns, this pair of synonyms is widely used in the passive voice. In addition, the study also showed the interesting finding that Oxford Dictionary failed to add semantic prosody and omitted frequently used collocations, such as “obtained by presence”. The study also provided guidance for translating English into Chinese based on language usage.

According to these studies, near-synonyms might have close meanings, but they can be differentiated in terms of semantic preference, degree of formality, grammatical patterns, and collocations. In addition, dictionaries might not include some of a word’s usage or their meaning. Hence, corpus data is recommended for use along with dictionaries. The methodology of using corpus is included in the next chapter.



CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes: 1) target synonyms; 2) research instrument; 3) research procedures; and 4) the data analysis.

3.1 Target Synonyms

In this study, the near-synonymous verbs *convince* and *persuade* were analyzed. Three dictionaries were used to review the definitions, and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) was employed to review their distribution across genres, noun collocations, the semantic preference and grammatical patterns from the selected concordance lines.

3.2 Research Instruments

3.2.1 Dictionary

The online versions of three dictionaries — Cambridge Dictionary (2023), Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2018) and Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionaries (2023) — were used to review the fundamental definitions of the target words to answer the first research question. These three dictionaries were chosen since they provide useful information, including definition,, distinct senses and example sentences.

3.2.2 The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)

COCA was used to analyze frequency across genres and the collations of synonyms. COCA was used in this study because of three reasons. First, COCA is one of a largest corpus, as it is composed of one billion words (Prior, 2021), and the number of words is constantly growing. Secondly, its contents are fairly divided by register into eight different genres, which consist of blogs, websites, TV/movie subtitles, spoken texts, fiction, magazines, newspapers and academic texts. Lastly, COCA is an up-to-date corpus with new texts that have been added from each year since it was first

generated in 1990 (Sumonsriworakun, 2022). Generalizations made based on COCA data should be adequately reliable for research objectives.

3.3 Research Procedures

To address the first research question, the similarities and differences of definitions of the synonyms, *convince* and *persuade*, were examined using three online dictionaries — Cambridge Dictionary (2023), Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2018) and Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionaries (2023) — to review the similarities and differences.

COCA was employed to distinguish the synonyms *convince* and *persuade* to analyze the genre distribution, noun collocations, semantic preference and grammatical patterns. To answer the second research question, the frequency and distribution patterns were collected in eight genres so that the degree of formality of each word could also be examined.

To address the third research question, the frequent noun collocates of *convince* and *persuade* were investigated. Since the target words are verbs, the noun collocates were focused on. These noun collocates were selected based on two conditions: the frequency of occurrence and the Mutual Information (MI) score. According to Gablasova et al. (2017), the MI score is a measure of strength related to the tightness, coherence and appropriateness of word combinations. However, an MI score alone cannot provide a clear indication of collocational strength since some collocations with high MI scores can actually be low in frequency. Therefore, Schmitt (2010), as cited by Phoocharoensil (2021), warns that an MI score should be used carefully in combination with a minimum frequency threshold. In this study, the top-twenty noun collocates in a frequency list with MI scores of more than three were investigated, which can be considered as the significance level for collocational association (Cheng 2011, as cited by Kruawong and Phoocharoensil, 2022).

Further study on these synonyms was undertaken to answer the fourth research question relating to grammatical patterns. One hundred concordance lines for each word were collected, and then their structures and grammatical patterns were reviewed

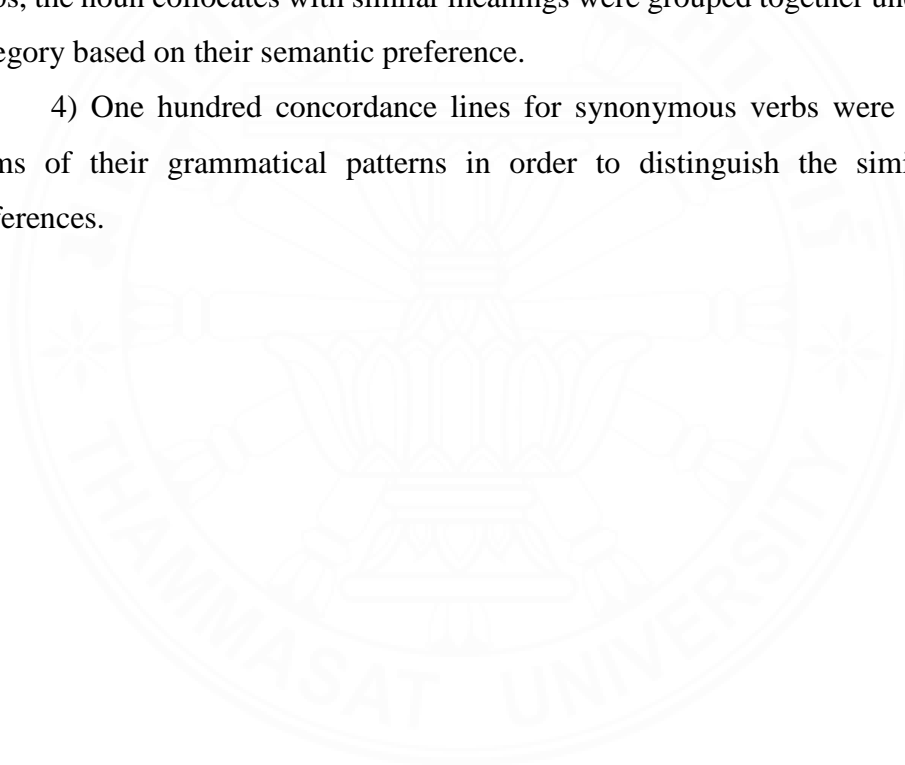
3.4 Data Analysis

1) The definitions of the synonyms from the three online dictionaries were reviewed and examined to determine the similarities and differences of their meanings.

2) The data concerning distribution across genres was investigated by using the overall frequency and the frequency of each genre, including blogs, websites, TV/movie subtitles, spoken texts, fiction, magazines, newspapers and academic texts. The degree of formality was also reviewed.

3) The top twenty common noun collocates for *convince* and *persuade* were selected by using the frequency and an MI score value of more than three. In the next steps, the noun collocates with similar meanings were grouped together under the same category based on their semantic preference.

4) One hundred concordance lines for synonymous verbs were reviewed in terms of their grammatical patterns in order to distinguish the similarities and differences.



CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter consists of 1) the similarities and differences in the definitions; 2) the frequency, degree of formality and distribution of the synonyms across genres; 3) noun collocates; 4) grammatical patterns

4.1 The Similarities and Differences of the Definitions

4.1.1 Definition of Convince from Cambridge Dictionary, LDOCE and OALD

The table below shows the definitions of the word “*Convince*” as a verb.

Table 4.1

Definitions of “Convince”

Dictionary	Cambridge	LDOCE	OALD
Definition	1. To <i>persuade</i> someone or make someone certain. 2. To cause someone to believe something or to do something.	1. To make someone feel certain that something is true. 2. To <i>persuade</i> someone to do something	1. To make somebody/yourself believe that something is true. 2. To <i>persuade</i> somebody to do something.
Example	1. He managed to <i>convince</i> the jury of his innocence. 2. It's useless trying to <i>convince</i> her (that) she doesn't need to lose any weight.	1. The officials were eager to <i>convince</i> us of the safety of the nuclear reactors. 2. I've been trying to <i>convince</i> Jean to come with me.	1. I'd <i>convinced</i> myself that I was right. 2. I've been trying to <i>convince</i> him to see a doctor.

The table above shows two definitions from each dictionary. All of them share the same meaning, which define *convince* as “to *persuade* someone to do something” and “to cause/make someone to believe/do something.

4.1.2 Definitions of Persuade from Cambridge Dictionary, LDOCE and OALD

The table below shows the definitions of the word “*persuade*” as a verb.

Table 4.2

Definitions of “*Persuade*”

Dictionary	Cambridge	LDOCE	OALD
Definition	<p>1. To make someone do or believe something by giving them a good reason to do it or by talking to that person and making them believe it.</p> <p>2. To cause people to do or believe something esp. by explaining why they should.</p>	<p>1. To make someone decide to do something, especially by giving them reasons why they should do it, or asking them many times to do it.</p> <p>2. To make someone believe something or feel sure about something.</p>	<p>1. To make somebody do something by giving them good reasons for doing it.</p> <p>2. To make somebody believe that something is true.</p>
Example	<p>1. The first priority is to <i>persuade</i> the management of the urgency of this matter.</p> <p>2. The government is trying to <i>persuade</i> consumers to save more.</p>	<p>1. I finally managed to <i>persuade</i> her to go out for a drink with me.</p> <p>2. I am not <i>persuaded</i> by these arguments.</p>	<p>1. My sister <i>persuaded</i> me out of dying my hair.</p> <p>2. She had <i>persuaded</i> herself that life was not worth living.</p>

According to Table 4.2, all the selected dictionaries provide two definitions for *persuade*. The similarity between these online dictionaries are “To make somebody do or believe something by giving them good reasons for doing it” and “To make somebody believe in something”.

In the next section, the frequency, degree of formality and distribution of the synonyms across genres is investigated.

4.2 Frequency, Degree of formality and Distribution of the Synonyms across Genres

The results from COCA show the frequency across genres for the synonyms as follows:

Table 4.3

Distribution of the Target Synonyms across Genres

Convince			Persuade		
<i>Genre</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per million</i>	<i>Genre</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per million</i>
Blogs	4,124	32.07	Newspapers	1,671	13.73
Webpages	3,499	28.16	Magazines	1,185	9.40
Spoken texts	3,370	26.72	Academic texts	1,172	9.78
TV/Movies	3,015	23.54	Webpages	1,116	8.98
Fiction	2,633	22.25	Spoken texts	1,033	8.19
Magazines	2,389	18.95	Blogs	937	7.29
Newspapers	2,166	17.79	Fiction	919	7.77
Academic texts	1,513	12.63	TV/Movies	509	3.97
Total	22,709	22.76	Total	8,542	8.60

Table 4.3 shows that in COCA, *convince* has a higher frequency than *persuade* by almost three times with 22,709 tokens to 8,542 tokens. With respect to genre, *persuade* appears to be more formal than *convince* as it is in the top three in terms of frequency in the written genres of newspapers (1,671 tokens), magazines (1,185 tokens) and academic texts (1,172 tokens). The three genres in which *persuade* is found less

frequently are blogs (937 tokens), fiction (919 tokens) and TV/movie subtitles (509 tokens), respectively. In contrast, *convince* frequently occurs in blogs (4,124 tokens), webpages (3,499 tokens), spoken texts (3,370 tokens), followed by TV/movies and fiction. *Convince* was found to occur less frequently in written texts such as magazines (2,389 tokens), newspapers (2,166 tokens), and academic texts (1,513 tokens).

The percentage of the distribution of *convince* and *persuade* in different genres is illustrated in Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.1

Percentage of Distribution of “Convince” in Different Genres

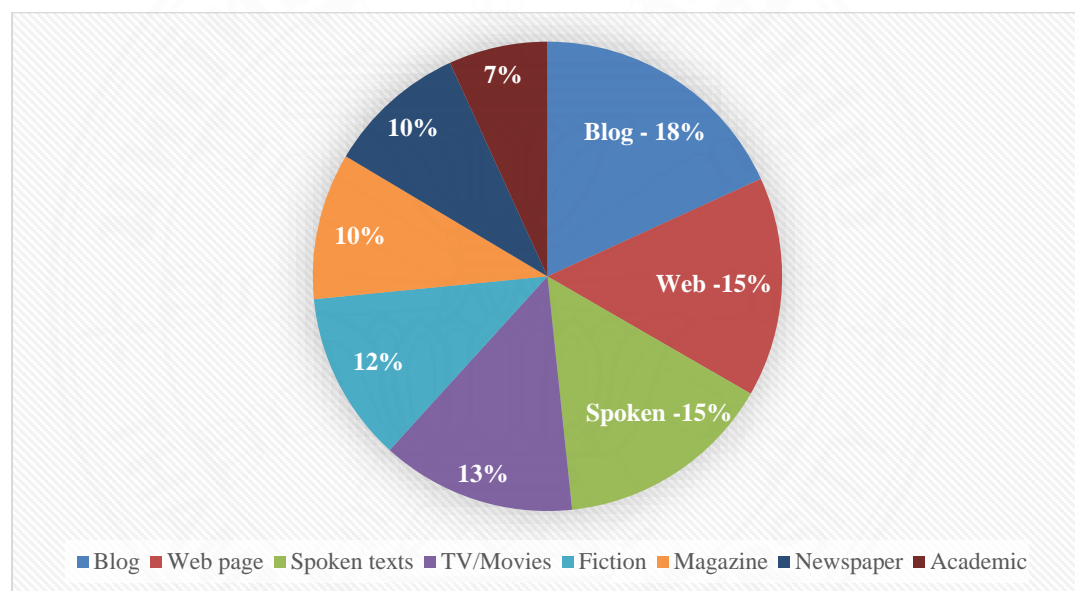


Figure 4.1 shows the percentage of distribution of *convince* across genres. The word *convince* appears most frequently in blogs (18%), webpages (15%), spoken texts (15%) and TV/movies (13%). This is followed by fiction (12%), magazines and newspapers (10%), and, lastly, academic texts (7%).

Figure 4.2

Percentage of Distribution of “Persuade” in Different Genres

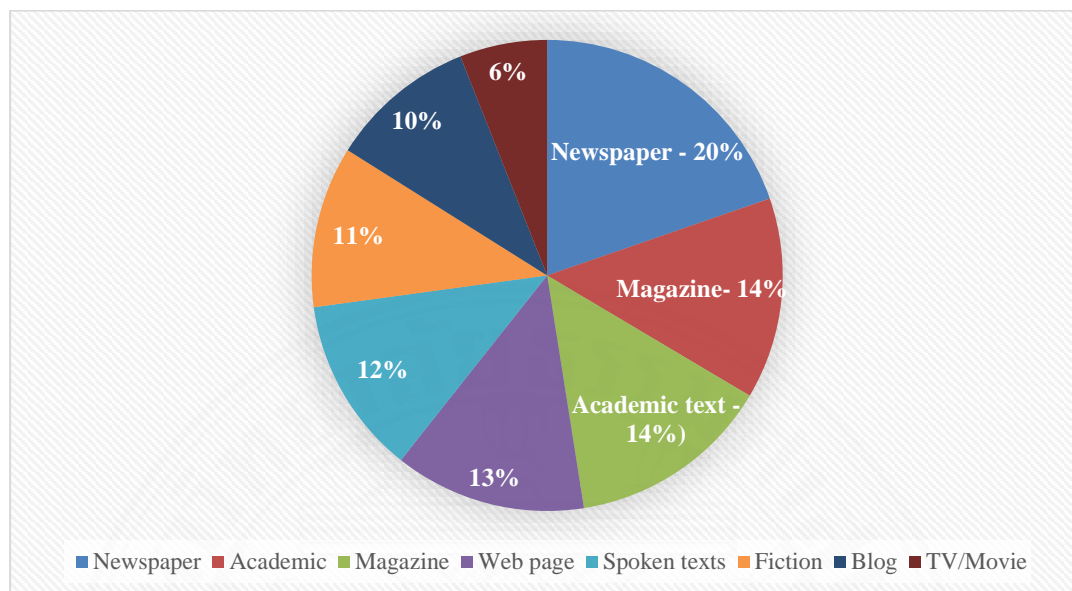


Figure 4.2 illustrates the percentage of distribution of *persuade* is across genres. The word *persuade* appears most frequently in newspapers (20%), magazines and academic texts (14%) and webpages (13%), followed by spoken texts (12%), fiction (11%), blogs (10%) and TV/movies only 6%.

The next section addresses the noun collocates of *convince* and *persuade*.

4.3 Noun Collocates

This section investigates the noun collocates that usually co-occur with synonyms in COCA. According to the data, the top-twenty on the frequency list with a minimum MI score of 3 are investigated.

4.3.1 Analysis of Noun Collocates of Convince and Persuade

Table 4.4

Noun Collocates of “Convince” and “Persuade” in COCA

No.	Convince			Persuade		
	Collocates	Freq.	MI	Collocates	Freq.	MI
1	jury	486	4.95	voter	221	4.16
2	voter	384	3.63	judge	143	3.66

3	public	380	3.50	argument	116	3.07
4	judge	267	3.24	public	111	3.04
5	juror	102	4.45	jury	93	3.89
6	skeptic	58	4.72	colleague	63	3.18
7	legislator	46	3.48	lawmaker	54	4.55
8	electorate	30	3.62	legislature	53	4.09
9	policymaker	21	3.24	ally	50	3.45
10	persuasion	16	3.66	legislator	38	4.53
11	doubter	15	5.65	juror	32	4.10
12	superior	13	3.34	parliament	18	3.00
13	populace	12	3.51	banker	15	3.06
14	sincerity	11	3.43	regulator	15	3.22
15	gatekeeper	10	3.97	lobbyist	12	3.19
16	countryman	9	3.53	policymaker	11	3.63
17	decision-	9	3.96	lobbying	11	4.13
18	interrogator	8	4.09	creditor	10	3.61
19	captor	6	3.15	shopper	9	3.10
20	non-believer	6	4.84	skeptic	9	3.35

Table 4.4 shows that the most frequent noun collocates of the verb *convince* and *persuade* often co-occur in two environments. Firstly, both of them are followed by a group of people e.g. *jury*, *voter* and *judge*. Another one is used with situations such as an *argument and persuasion*.

The concordance lines in COCA show examples of the shared noun collocates for the two synonymous verbs, as follows:

Example of Noun collocates for *Convince* in COCA:

- 1) I have to *convince the jury* that Will Caray was raped.
- 2) It wasn't hard to *convince voters* that you thought you were the smartest person in the room.
- 3) *The public* is *convinced* their money isn't well spent.

Example of Noun collocates for *Persuade* in COCA:

- 1) The defense attorney Jeff Kortez tried to *persuade the jury* to convict Popejoy of a lesser sentence.

- 2) He *persuaded voters* to approve a 10-cent per gallon gas tax this spring.
- 3) They could *persuade the public* that they are full of knowledge and wisdom.

The noun collocates of *convince* and *persuade* in Table 4.4 can be categorized into a theme based on their similarities in meaning to analyze the semantic preferences.

4.3.2 Semantic Preference

This part of the study examines the semantic preference of the two synonyms by categorizing their noun collocates into similar themes. Semantic preference refers to a context in which vocabulary items commonly occur. According to Hunston (2002), cited by Ly & Jung (2015), it is important to identify these semantic groups because they can highlight the various meanings of the node and reveal attitudinal meanings that are associated with the node item.

Table 4.5

Semantic Preferences of Noun Collocates of “Convince”

No.	Semantic preference	Noun collocates of Convince
1	Justice and Law	jury, judge, juror, interrogator, captor
2	Politics	public, voter, electorate, populace, legislator
3	Authorization	policymaker, superior, gatekeeper
4	Skeptic	skeptic, doubter, non-believer
5	Miscellaneous	countryman, sincerity, persuasion, decision-maker

Table 4.5 shows that there are four themes, with one unidentified theme of noun collocates for *convince*. The first theme is *Justice and law*, which includes *jury, judge, juror, interrogator* and *captor*. The next theme is *Politics*, which includes *public, voter, electorate, populace* and *legislator*. These two groups appeared with a high frequency. The third theme is *Authorization*, which refers to people who have the power to make a decision to do something. This group includes *policy maker, superior* and *gatekeeper*. Another group is *Skeptic*, which is a group of people inclined to question, such as

skeptics, doubters and *non-believers*. The rest are grouped as *Miscellaneous* because they do not belong to any major themes.

Table 4.6

Semantic Preferences of Noun Collocates of “Persuade”

No.	Semantic preference	Noun collocates of Persuade
1	Justice and Law	judge, jury, juror
2	Politics	voter, public, legislature, legislator, lawmaker, parliament, ally
3	Authorization	regulator, policymaker
4	Skeptic	skeptic
5	Business	colleague, banker, lobbyist, shopper, lobbying, creditor
6	Miscellaneous	argument

Table 4.6 reveals that there are six themes of noun collocates which emerged from the analysis of semantics preference of *persuade*, including one unidentified group. There are four themes overlapping with *convince*: *Justice & Law*, *Politics*, *Authorization* and *Skeptic*. They also shared a similar word list. The additional theme for *persuade* is *Business* since none of any words in this group appears in the noun collocates of *convince*.

The next step was to analyze the shared semantic preference themes and noun collocates of *convince* and *persuade*. These two synonyms also shared eight out of twenty noun collocates: *jury*, *voter*, *public*, *judge*, *juror*, *skeptic*, *legislator* and *policymaker*.

Table 4.7

Shared Noun Collocates of Semantic Preference Theme: Justice & Law

	Theme: Justice & Law	
	<i>Convince</i>	<i>Persuade</i>
Shared Collocates	judge	

	jury	
	juror	
Different Collocates	-	interrogator
	-	captor

Table 4.7 presents the noun collocates that are shared among *Justice and Law* theme. Three words, *judge*, *jury* and *juror*, which relate to the justice system have shared two synonyms among them, while the words, *interrogator* and *captor* were only found to occur with *persuade*. When the concordance lines were investigated, it showed that they refer to similar meanings when they appear in sentences, and both always take object nouns (people) in both active and passive sentences. The examples are as follows:

- 1) I *convinced* a *judge* to make me co-counsel, so I have all the benefits of...
- 2) A few *judges* were initially *persuaded* by your argument that your parents told you that...
- 3) And it seemed like that was what the *jury* was *convinced* to do in the case.
- 4) Other witnesses whose accounts might have *persuaded* a *jury* to find Mr. Atchison not guilty...
- 5) Prosecutors must *convince* *jurors* that Van Dyke, the only officer on the scene to fire his weapon.
- 6) His attorneys probably will try to *persuade* *jurors* that Khafra's death was an accident.

Table 4.8

Shared Noun Collocates of Semantic Preference Theme: Politics

	Theme: Politics	
	<i>Convince</i>	<i>Persuade</i>
Shared Collocates	public	
	voter	

	legislator	
Different Collocates	electorate	legislature
	populace	lawmaker
	-	parliament
	-	ally

Table 4.8 shows the noun collocates of the *Politics* category, with *convince* and *persuade* having three common noun collocates in this theme: *public*, *voter* and *legislator*.

The examples are as follows:

- 1) The *public* needs to be *convinced* of all this.
- 2) ...and not just hoping to *persuade* the *public* but hoping to persuade members...
- 3) It wasn't hard to *convince voters* that you thought you were the smartest person in the room.
- 4) He works to *persuade voters* that he is fit for the presidency.
- 5) Much of her battle is to *convince legislators* and the public that child marriage is an issue needing attention.
- 6) The gun rights movement has *persuaded legislators* in nine states to allow students and faculty with...

According to the examples above, that noun collocates for *convince* and *persuade* refer to a similar meaning when they appear in sentences.

Considering the various noun collocates in this particular context, it is observed that the terms "electorate" and "populace," which are often associated with the verb "convince," do not appear in the top twenty noun collocates of the verb "persuade." However, the verb "persuade" does include more words related to the parliamentary system, such as "legislature," "lawmaker," and "parliament." To examine the concordance lines in the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), it was found that most of them were present in news articles, magazines, web pages, and academic texts. This discovery aligns with the genre distribution, indicating that "persuade" tends to be more formal and is frequently encountered in written texts.

Table 4.9

Shared Noun Collocates of Semantic Preference Theme: Authorization

	Theme: Authorization	
	<i>Convince</i>	<i>Persuade</i>
Shared Collocates	policy maker	
Different Collocates	superior	regulator
	gatekeeper	-

Table 4.9 illustrates the shared and different noun collocates in the *Authorization* theme, which refers to a group of people who have the power to decide to do something. The two verbs co-occur with the noun collocate *policy maker*.

The examples are as follows:

- 1) The ex-military leaders worry that current *policymakers* have *convinced* themselves that drones can be used...
- 2) Like us, they had to *persuade* *policymakers* and justify the existence of music as an educational enterprise.

Table 4.10

Shared Noun Collocates of Semantic Preference Theme: Skeptic

	Theme: Skeptic	
	<i>Convince</i>	<i>Persuade</i>
Shared Collocates	skeptical	
Different Collocates	doubter	-
	non-believer	-

Table 4.10 shows that in *Skepticism* theme, one noun collocate is shared between *convince* and *persuade* as *skeptical*.

The examples are as follows:

- 1) He's got to really *convince* those *skeptics* that he wants to bring everybody together.
- 2) ...but *skeptics* were *persuaded* of the wheel's strength and safety only when...

Convince also includes other two different noun collocates as *doubter* and *non-believer*.

Table 4.11

Shared Noun Collocates of Semantic Preference Theme: Business

	Theme: Business	
	<i>Convince</i>	<i>Persuade</i>
Shared Collocates	-	
Different Collocates	-	colleague
	-	banker
	-	lobbyist
	-	shopper
	-	lobbying
	-	creditor

Table 4.11 shows the *Business* category, highlighting that there is no common noun collocate shared between *convince* and *persuade* in this theme. The theme includes the words *colleague*, *banker*, *lobbyist*, *shopper*, *lobbying* and *creditor*.

Table 4.12

Shared Noun Collocates of Semantic Preference Theme: Miscellaneous

	Theme: Miscellaneous	
	<i>Convince</i>	<i>Persuade</i>
Different Collocates	countryman	argument
	sincerity	-
	persuasion	-
	decision-maker	

From the investigation of noun collocates, the results showed that there are five words that do not fit into the main categories: *countryman*, *sincerity*, *persuasion*, *decision-maker* and *argument*. Similar to the other five themes, *countryman* and

decision-maker also refer to people. However, the rest of the group refers to actions and the characteristics of people.

To acquire an in-depth understanding of the similarities and differences that *convince* and *persuade* express, 100 selected concordance lines of each near-synonym were analyzed for grammatical patterns.

4.4 Grammatical Patterns

In this research, the grammatical patterns of *convince* and *persuade* were investigated. The results presented below display the grammatical patterns of the two synonyms from 100 concordance lines from COCA.

4.4.1 Analysis of Grammatical Patterns of “Convince”

From the review of 100 concordance lines from COCA for the word “*Convince*”, there were five grammatical patterns found as follows:

1. *convince* + somebody + (that) + S + V (57 lines)
(include reduced relative clauses)

Example:

- Religious corporations will continue to attempt to *convince people that they provide* the one and only doorway to the holy and to salvation.
- He explains that he was able to *convince Nimmer that this position was* in error.
- It's as if Romney is trying to *convince himself that he made* the right vice- presidential choice.
- We see this when people like Gary Null try to *convince you that medicine kills* 600,000 people a year in the US.
- This time around, he's trying to *convince you that evidence-based medicine is* completely uncertain.
- Django tried to *convince me that he hadn't chewed up* the napkins.
- If they *can convince her that she has* been pregnant, that she's had a spontaneous abortion.
- Now he tries to *convince us the recent ugly fascist totalitarian streak of America is* just an illusion.

- So whatever they have to say to *convince you their intentions are honorable* they will.
- If only I can *convince my 10-year-old she doesn't need* new toys!
- But how do you *convince small children they have to do* something they neither want nor believe they can do.
- Kids whose parents don't meet the test have to *convince their parents it's worth* the money.

2. *convince* + somebody + to-V.inf (25 lines)

Example:

- To win, he has to *convince the Independents to vote* for him.
- How could you *convince anyone to believe* as you do when even you are unsure of their truth?
- If you decide to join and can *convince other person to join*, your account is now free.
- You might just *convince yourself to be* a naval architect first.
- They will *convince her to go* ahead and have a procedure she doesn't need that day.
- I'm trying to *convince my daughter to move* back from California to this country.

3. *convince* + somebody + preposition +something (10 lines)

(preposition found: of, in, about)

Example:

- They needed to *convince the hospital administration of the need for such a program*.
- How often have you tried to *convince a friend or a child of the obvious error of his ways*?
- But they do sell information and try to *convince people of their take on things*.
- Those people who crash on media reports about the TAM sexual policy controversy trying to *convince outsiders about how there is no problem*.

4. *convince* + somebody + otherwise (4 lines)

Example:

- So I contacted a friend who phoned the police department and was able to *convince them otherwise*.
- And I don't think you will *convince anyone otherwise*.

5. to convince + somebody (4 lines)

Example:

- We are talking about how best to *convince people*.
- We didn't talk to the Nazis and try to *convince them*.

4.4.2 Analysis of Grammatical Patterns of “Persuade”

From the review of 100 concordance lines from COCA for the word “*Persuade*”, there were five grammatical patterns found as follows:

1. *persuade* + somebody + to V.inf (59 lines)

Example:

- It's all part of the Palestinians' campaign to *persuade more Security Council members to support* the Palestinians' bid for full UN membership.
- But observers of Nigerian politics suggest that attempts to *persuade Kano to vaccinate* are headed for failure.
- And there was even a campaign to *persuade Domino's Pizza to add* a vegan option.
- But if I can *persuade Mr. Simsbury to cancel* the agreement.
- Philip Goldstein is trying to *persuade officials to allow* a multi-story building of offices and condos on property he owns off.
- She thought maybe I could *persuade you and Joe to sort of cooperate* in a little scheme.
- Roger has put up about trying to *persuade people to do* better treatment for teenagers recovering from cancer.
- Parents are trying to *persuade the school board to ban* the " Goosebumps " series from one elementary school library.

- And you think she can *persuade the musician to join* this court?
- Charlie tries to prove to Alan that he can *persuade her to go* on a date with him.
- Over the past couple of months, the candidates have tried to *persuade you and I to vote* for them.

2. to persuade + somebody (18 lines)

Example:

- What can I do to *persuade you*?
- Since you can't muster adequate information to *persuade anyone* here.
- You'll get bogged down with costs and with trying to *persuade people*.
- He could use lobbyists to *persuade* and pressure *House members*.
- Let people try to *persuade others*.

3. persuade + somebody + that + S + V (9 lines)

Example:

- Soon the Mayor was on the phone with Mrs. Shulman, attempting to *persuade her that Mr. Fernandez should be kept* on the job.
- They didn't *persuade people that the banks were sound*.
- If you can't *persuade the jury that you were home* with him at 9:30.
- But we ought to be able to *persuade non-Christians too that the present prison system is not working*.

4. persuade + somebody + preposition + something (8 lines)

(preposition found: of, with, from)

Example:

- Floyd says, and confident in his ability to *persuade people of what he wants to do*.
- He tried to *persuade Tomi with an exhaustive explanation*.
- And that person is going to have to *persuade leaders from more affluent countries that is their interest*.

5. N + to + *persuade* (4 lines)

- College presidents often maintain that their only power is *the power to persuade*.
- Leadership requires not just the power to destroy but also *the power to persuade*.
- *The power of the Index to persuade* is mentioned in a letter from Rourke to Glassgold.

6. *persuade* + preposition + something (2 lines)

(preposition found: through, toward)

- Sometimes, a doctrine may *persuade through arguments* which seem very much like the formal argumentation of logic.
- Except by Vickers, who reads it as a warning against using figures to *persuade toward evil ends*.

The review of 100 concordance lines of *convince* and *persuade* shows that these synonymous verbs have shared and different grammatical patterns, which will be discussed in the next section.

4.4.3 Analysis of the Shared and Different Grammatical Patterns of “Convince and Persuade”

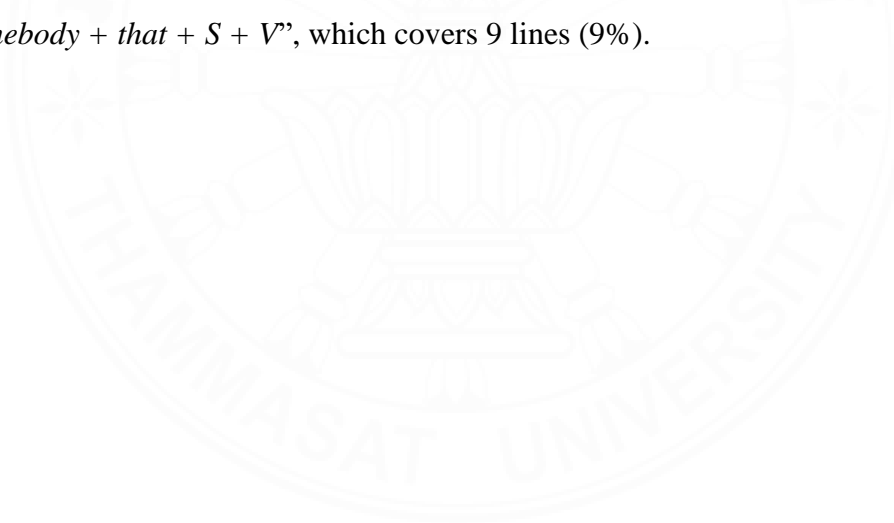
Table 4.13

Shared and Different Grammatical Patterns of “Convince” and “Persuade”

A. Shared Patterns	
<i>Convince</i>	<i>Persuade</i>
<i>convince + somebody + that + S + V</i>	<i>persuade + somebody + that + S + V</i>
<i>convince + somebody + to-V.inf</i>	<i>persuade + somebody + to V.inf</i>
<i>convince + somebody + preposition + something</i>	<i>persuade + somebody + preposition + something</i>
<i>to convince + somebody</i>	<i>to persuade + somebody</i>

B. Different Patterns	
<i>convince + somebody + otherwise</i>	<i>N + to + persuade</i>
	<i>persuade + preposition + something</i>

Table 4.13 demonstrates 100 selected concordance lines of *convince* and *persuade*, both of which have five and six grammatical patterns accordingly. And they share four similar patterns. These synonymous verbs are usually used in the same colligational patterns, namely *convince/persuade + somebody*. Although most of the grammatical patterns overlap, the number of lines in each pattern is different. For *convince*, the major pattern is “*convince + somebody + (that) + S + V*” which has 57 lines (57%), followed by “*convince + somebody + to V.inf*” 25 lines (25%) and “*convince + somebody + preposition + something*” 10 lines (10%), respectively. *Persuade* has the main patterns as “*persuade + somebody + to V.inf*” which covers 59 lines (59%), followed by “*to persuade + somebody*” 18 lines (18%) and “*persuade + somebody + that + S + V*”, which covers 9 lines (9%).



CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter consists of 1) summary of the study; 2) summary of the results; 3) discussion; 4) conclusion; 5) implications; 6) recommendations for future studies.

5.1 Summary of the Study

This corpus-based analysis explores the similarities and differences between two synonymous verbs: "*convince*" and "*persuade*". The study investigates four research questions, focusing on the comparison of their definitions, distribution across genres in terms of frequency and formality, common noun collocations and their semantic preferences, as well as common grammatical patterns. To examine their definitions and usage examples, three dictionaries were consulted. The distribution across genres, review frequency, and degrees of formality were explored using COCA. The top twenty noun collocations for each verb were selected based on their high frequency and MI score (>3), enabling a thorough review of the similarities and differences in noun collocates and their semantic preferences. For the analysis of grammatical patterns, 100 concordance lines were examined for each verb. The results of this analysis will be discussed in the following section.

5.2 Summary of the Results

The results to the answer the research questions can be summarized as follows:

1. According to the dictionaries, *convince* and *persuade* share the general cognitive and core definition of "To make somebody do or believe something". However, there is the slight difference that can be identified. The definition of *persuade* in all dictionaries includes additional meanings, such as "giving them reasons or good reasons", while *convince* does not include this.

2. From review of the distribution across genres of *convince* and *persuade* in COCA, the results showed that *convince* has a higher frequency than *persuade* by almost three times, with 22,709 tokens to 8,542 tokens. *Convince* most frequently occurs in blogs, webpages, spoken texts, followed by TV/movies and fiction. It was

found to occur less frequently in written texts, such as magazines, newspapers and academic texts. In contrast, *persuade* appears to be more formal than *convince* as it occurs with the top-three highest frequency in written genres, such as newspapers, magazines, and academic texts, followed by fiction, blogs, and TV/movies, respectively.

3. The results from the study of the noun collocates and their semantic preference themes show that *convince* and *persuade* share common noun collocates. And most of the object nouns that co-occur with both synonyms are people or groups of people, which are often found in *Justice and Law* contexts including *Politics*. The difference is that while noun collocates of *persuade* can be grouped in the *Business* category, *convince* does not have any noun collocate in this theme.

4. The two synonyms share four similar grammatical patterns. However, their frequency in each pattern is different. *Convince* is found more with “that clause’ and “prepositional phrase,” which refers to the definition “to make someone believe something,” while *persuade* is found often with “to” infinitives. Hence, it has a connotation to make someone believe and act on that belief.

5.3 Discussion

The discussion to answer the research questions follows:

1. *Convince* and *persuade* are near-synonyms, as they share the general definition of “To make somebody do or believe something”. The definition of *convince* from three dictionaries also includes the word “*persuade*” to explain their meanings. However, a distinction between them can be identified. The definition of *persuade* in all dictionaries includes an additional meaning as “giving them reasons or good reasons”. It shows that when something or someone *persuades* others to act, it might be by using reason or logic. However, *convince* does not include this meaning, which may refer to an unforced change of mind to proceed with an action.

The analysis of the definition of the synonymous verbs shows that they share a similar core meaning, but they also have a shade of differences in different contexts.

2. From the review of the distribution across genres, it can be concluded that *convince* has a higher frequency than *persuade*, especially in informal contexts, such as in blogs, webpage, spoken texts. However, *persuade* has a stronger degree of formality

since it is often used more in formal contexts, such as in newspapers, academic texts and magazines. This finding is consistent with previous studies, which showed that some near-synonyms occur in different contexts with different degrees of formality, e.g., *persist* and *preserve* (Phoocharoensil, 2021) and *disadvantage*, *downside*, *drawback* (Sumonsriworakun, 2022).

3. The findings from the analysis of noun collocates and their semantic preference groups show that *convince* and *persuade* share common noun collocates. And most of object nouns co-occurring with both synonyms are people or groups of people. Eight out of the twenty (40%) top noun collocates were shared among these two synonyms. In considering their semantic preference groups, they share similar words in four sets: *Justice and Law*, *Politics*, *Authorization* and *Skeptic*. The *Justice and Law* and *Politics* theme contains large common words, such as *judge*, *jury*, *juror and public*, *voter*, *legislator* respectively. According to the review of concordance lines, the noun collocates have the same function in sentence structure, such as “to *convince* or *persuade* someone to do or believe something”.

Interestingly, *persuade* has a large set of words in the *Business* category, such as *colleague*, *banker* and *lobbyist*. However, none of them were found in the top-twenty noun collocates of *convince*. This result agrees with previous studies, which found that the target pairs of synonyms differ in semantic preference despite having similar meanings. (Phoocharoensil, 2021).

4. According to Cambridge Dictionary, LDOCE and OALD, the definitions for *convince* and *persuade* are similar in core meanings:

Definition 1: To make someone believe something/ feel certain that something is true.

Definition 2: To make someone do something.

According to the results from the targeted concordance lines, *convince* is found more often with “that clause,” which tends to match with the first definition that “*convince*” means to make someone believe something, while the major grammatical pattern of *persuade* is “*persuade* + somebody + to V.inf”. This shows that *persuade* is frequently found with “to” infinitives. Hence, it tends to make someone believe something and act on that belief as well.

The findings from this section show that *convince* and *persuade* share four common grammatical patterns. However, from COCA's concordance lines, each of them has a greater frequency in different patterns, which shows that there are shades of differences in their meanings. This is in consonance with Phoocharoensil (2010), who concluded that since language corpora appear to give more realistic usage in terms of grammatical and collocational patterns, corpus-informed data is frequently preferable to information from dictionaries.

5.4 Conclusion

The study of the synonyms can indicate that *convince* and *persuade* are near-synonyms. The reason is that they share the same core meaning, noun collocations, and grammatical patterns. However, there are some slight differences between them in several aspects. First, for the definition, even though both of them share similar core meaning, *persuade* has an additional meaning of "giving reasons or good reasons". Secondly, *persuade* is found in more formal contexts compared to *convince*. Lastly, the frequency of occurrence in grammatical patterns is significantly different in terms of usage. While *convince* occurs more with "that clause", *persuade* is usually found with "to" infinitives. Hence, the two synonyms cannot be used interchangeably in all contexts.

5.5 Implications

The results of this present study can benefit English teachers in a number of ways as follows:

1. The results will provide students with a clear explanation of the major distinctions between *convince* and *persuade* in terms of their definitions, degrees of formality, noun collocations, semantic preference, and grammatical patterns. Hence, students should become more aware of the accurate usage of these two synonyms, increasing the effectiveness for their communication.

2. Teachers can develop teaching materials using corpus-based information, which will provide authentic usage of the synonyms. Students should be exposed to natural English in real contexts. Teachers can use examples of usage from COCA, and

ask students to observe the similarities and differences of synonyms usage, which will promote inductive learning.

5.6 Recommendations for Future Studies

Following are recommendations given for further research studies:

1. The data in this study are only generated and analyzed from COCA. Expanding the scope with other tools such as British National Corpus (BNC) will help to explore new areas, such as the similarities and differences of synonyms in usage by different English users.

2. The primary limitation of this study is that only 100 concordance lines were selected for each synonym to review the grammatical patterns. Expanding the number of concordance lines would increase the validity of the investigation in terms of the differences in usage.

3. Next studies should select other criteria to distinguish synonyms, such as other types of collocations apart from noun collocates, e.g., adverb and adjective collocates.

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