



**A CORPUS-BASED STUDY OF NEAR-SYNONYMS:
ASSESS, APPRAISE, AND EVALUATE**

BY

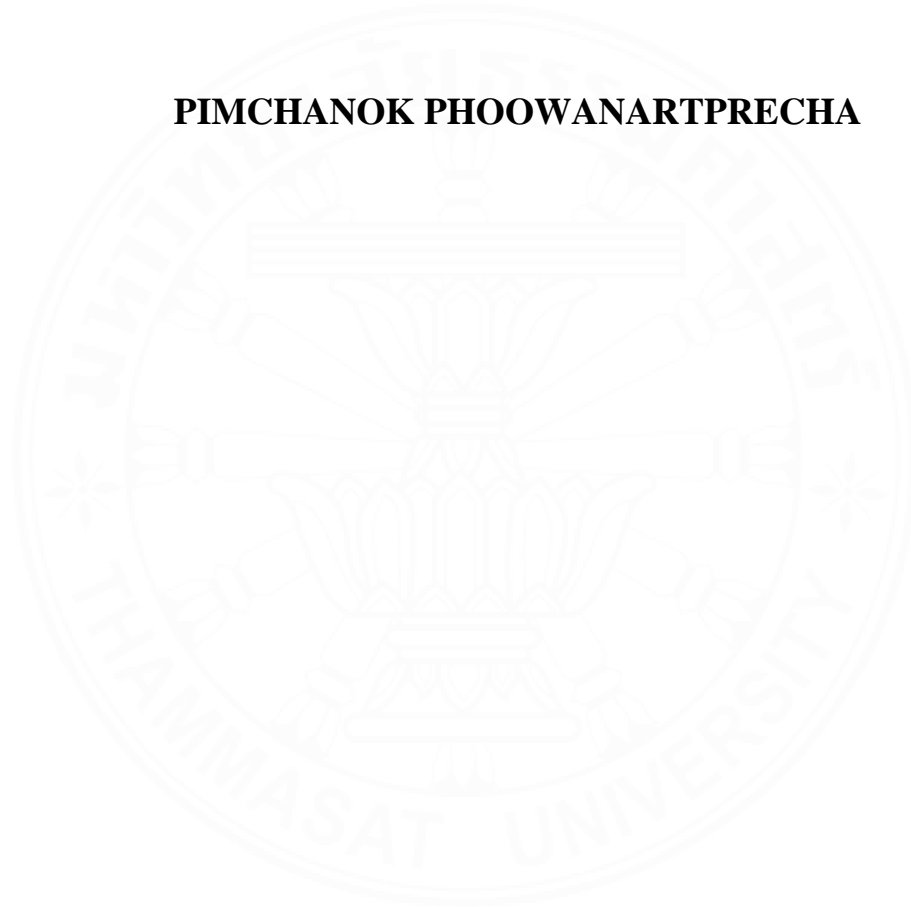
PIMCHANOK PHOOWANARTPRECHA

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

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the distinctions among the near-synonymous verbs 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate,' focusing on their frequency, distribution across genres, subject and object noun collocations, and semantic preferences using data from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). The analysis reveals these verbs are predominantly found in academic texts. Collocation analysis demonstrates minimal overlap in noun collocates and semantic preferences among the three verbs. 'Appraise' pertains to evaluating assets, 'assess' and 'evaluate' are associated with structured evaluation processes in academic and professional contexts, particularly within medical and educational fields. The differences between 'assess' and 'evaluate' are that 'appraise' has a wider range of object noun collocates and 'evaluate' tends to occur with object noun collocates relevant to the quality or attribute of something. The study highlights the distinctions between these verbs, emphasizing their importance for precise language use.

Keywords: Near-synonyms, Noun collocations, Semantic preferences, Corpus-based study

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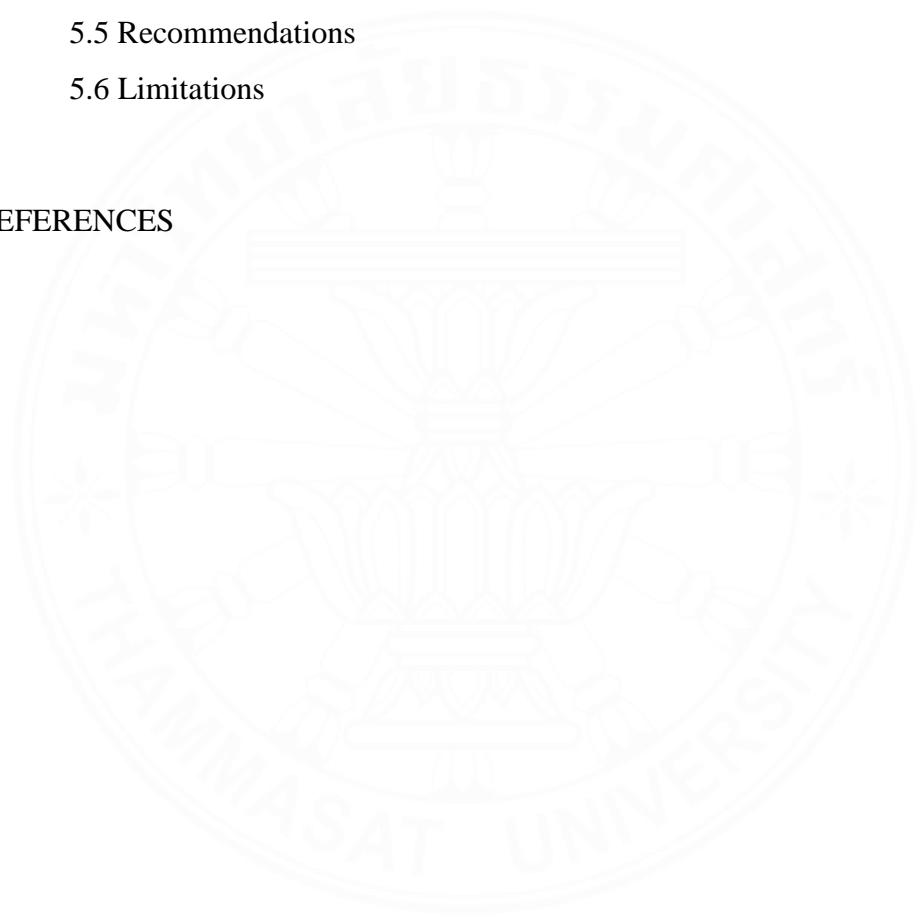
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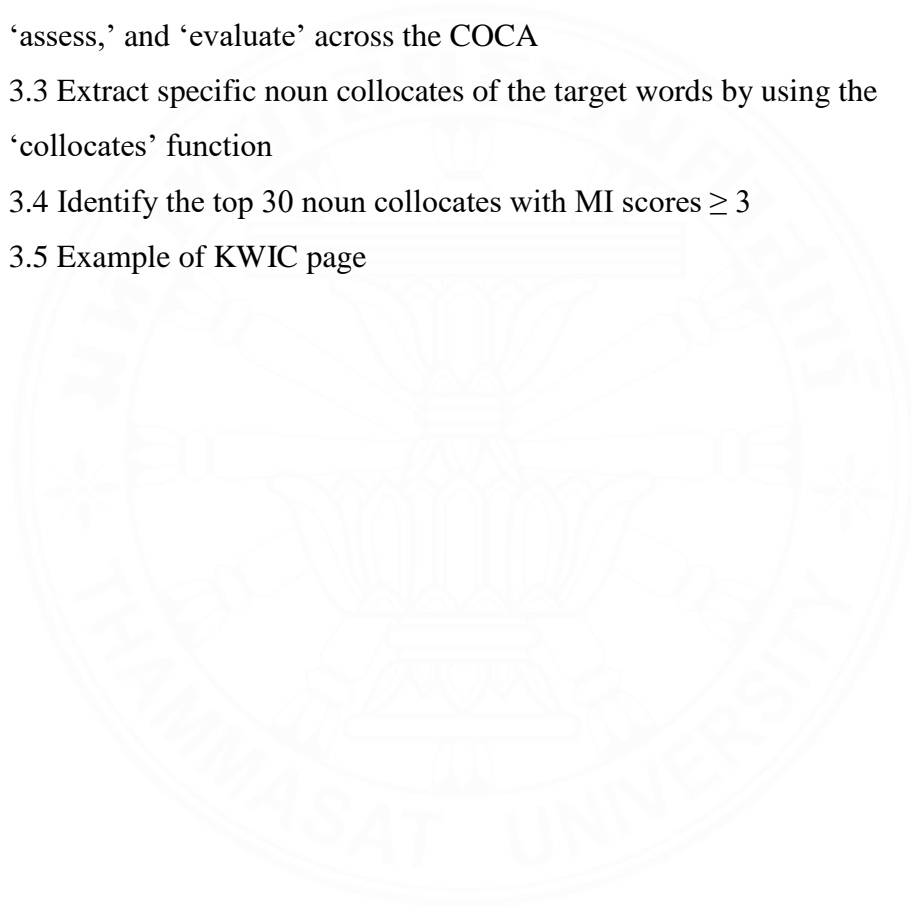


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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

According to Trakulkasemsuk (2012), English holds a significant status in Thailand as a foreign language (EFL), playing a crucial role in various aspects of Thai society. Being proficient in English is regarded as a privilege as the English language is globally used in international communication in every industry. It also enhances opportunities for higher education, leading to better career prospects and professional development. Therefore, the English language is necessary for Thais.

Many Thai learners struggle through English language learning, particularly in acquiring vocabulary, which plays a crucial role in overcoming linguistic barriers, one of the challenges Thai EFL learners face according to Phetsangkhad (2023). Vocabulary acquisition is an endless process, and during the learning journey, learners may have to go through many vocabulary learning problems, and inadequate knowledge of the subtle differences among near-synonyms is one of them (Abrar et al., 2018; Al-Jamal & Al-Jamal, 2014; Hibatullah, 2019; Keong et al., 2015). This issue can lead to confusion and misuse of words, making effective communication in English more difficult. As a result, addressing the problem of near-synonym differentiation is essential for improving Thai learners' overall English proficiency and ensuring they can use vocabulary accurately and appropriately.

Near-synonyms are pairs or groups of lexemes with similarities in denotational meaning but they cannot be used interchangeably. They are considered one of the most common word selection problems in second language learning due to their slight differences, such as in grammatical patterns, collocations, and semantics. These subtle differences can lead to awkwardness and hinder effective communication in English. Hence, EFL learners must improve their knowledge and proficiency in near synonyms so they can enhance their communication abilities (Lee & Liu, 2009) Further, researchers pointed out that the ability to employ word selection accurately is crucial for language learning. Johnson (2000, as cited in Yeh et al., 2007, p.132) believes writers must use words precisely to convey the intended message. Especially for EFL

learners, Engber (1995) and Santos (1988, as cited in Yeh et al., 2007, p.132) found that lexical misuse is one of the most critical issues in teaching and learning language because it not only obstructs message delivery but also affects reader judgment. Santos (1988) added that the most concerning point is that learners had to spend much time selecting the appropriate words, but they still failed at communication eventually. To solve these problems and be successful in communication, Ham and Rundell (2004) suggested that EFL learners should be trained to use words with a higher degree of specificity. EFL learners should be taught to use words precisely and appropriately according to the intended message and the context.

Teachers' precision and clarity in communication are pivotal for the realm of English language teaching as they play a critical role in the success of education. Their effectiveness is determined by their knowledge of the subject matter, its application in the classroom, and their ability to convey this knowledge to students (Thamrin, 2020). Therefore, to effectively guide students in understanding near-synonyms, teachers must comprehend the subtle differences between these terms and be able to communicate them effectively in the classroom. Among the many groups of near-synonyms, the verbs 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' hold particular significance due to their nuanced and overlapping meanings, according to the Oxford Advanced American Dictionary for Learners of English (Oxford University Press, 2011), as demonstrated below:

- appraise - to form an opinion about how valuable, successful, or effective someone or something is.
- assess - to make a judgment about the nature or quality of someone or something.
- to calculate the amount or value of something
- evaluate - to form an opinion of the amount, value, or quality of something after thinking about it carefully.

According to the dictionary definitions, we understand that the near-synonyms 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' are used to judge or to form an opinion on something or someone. However, their specific common usages differ, as shown in the following extracted examples of three near-synonyms (Collins, n.d.):

Common	Uncommon
1) This is the item Horatio invited you down here to <i>appraise</i> .	1) This is the item Horatio invited you down here to <i>assess</i> .
2) The doctors will <i>assess</i> him over the next few days.	2) The doctors will <i>evaluate</i> him over the next few days.
3) I do not know either man, and cannot <i>evaluate</i> the reliability of their claims.	3) I do not know either man, and cannot <i>appraise</i> the reliability of their claims.

As demonstrated, these three near-synonyms are not interchangeable due to their specific contextual meanings. 'Appraise' is used for estimating the value or quality of tangible items. 'Assess' involves a thorough medical examination while 'evaluate' is used to evaluate the value or effectiveness. These nuances mean that using one term in place of another can result in inappropriate communication. Beyond their distinct usages, another crucial reason to study these terms is their differing CEFR levels: 'assess' and 'evaluate' are at the B2 level, while "appraise" is at the C1 level. This implies that for English learners and language users aiming to reach an advanced proficiency, it is essential to use these words accurately and appropriately. Consequently, English language teachers must comprehend these near-synonyms and be capable of guiding their students in understanding the nuanced differences between them. The distinction between 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' holds significant weight because their similarities may hinder effective communication. Notably, existing literature has not thoroughly explored the nuances between these near-synonyms (Ajmal et al., 2022; Al-Sayyed et al., 2019; Ammari & al Ahmad, 2023; Aroonmanakun, 2015; Imsa-ard, 2021; Kruawong & Phoocharoensil, 2022; Muangmeeka & Monthon, 2023; Sittironnarit et al., 2022), prompting the researcher to investigate these terms. This study aims to fill this gap by conducting a thorough analysis of these terms, and by examining these verbs' distribution and frequency across the corpus, common subject-object noun collocations, and semantic preferences.

In this study, distribution and frequency analysis of near-synonyms entails examining the occurrence and contexts in which specific words appear within a corpus. By analyzing the frequency and distribution of 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' across a corpus, it is possible to discern patterns of usage that differentiate these near-

synonyms. For instance, Kruawongsa and Phoocharoensil (2022) studied the differences between ‘teach’, ‘instruct’, and ‘educate’ regarding their degree of formality, as the study indicates genres are associated with the degree of formality. The distribution patterns across various genres show that ‘teach’ is used much more extensively and broadly than ‘educate’ and ‘instruct’, with its frequency surpassing the others across all eight genres. Additionally, the frequency data indicates that all three synonyms are preferred in formal contexts, such as academic texts, rather than in spoken language, because they have low frequencies in informal genres like spoken discourse, fiction, and TV/Movies. This analysis facilitates an understanding of the typical environments in which each word is used, thereby offering insights into their contextual appropriateness.

Collocations are pairs or groups of words that often co-occur together which is crucial for English language teaching and learning (Lewis 2000; Nation 2001; Thornbury 2002 as cited in Shamsudin et al., 2013, page 1295). There are grammatical and lexical collocations (Benson et al., 1997). Grammatical collocation refers to words that frequently appear together according to grammatical rules, noun and preposition, noun and to-infinitive, preposition and noun combinations for example. Lexical collocation, on the other hand, refers to words that occur together because of their meaning and usage, such as adjective-noun, verb-noun, noun-noun, etc. Collocations can be used to distinguish near-synonyms (Cruse, 1986; Phoocharoensil, 2010, as cited in Lertcharoenwanich & Phoocharoensil, 2022, p. 151). For example, a corpus-based study of English near-synonyms: join, attend, and participate found that the target near-synonyms can be distinguished by grammatical patterns (Muangmeeka & Kanokpermpoon, 2023). Sittironnarit et al. (2022) studied the pair of near-synonyms ‘acquire’ and ‘obtain’ regarding their collocations and found that they shared some similar noun collocates but ‘acquire’ tends to occur with things, and ‘obtain’ tends to occur with rights or authority. Therefore, collocations can help distinguish near-synonyms and suggest proper usage of words to English language learners. The present study incorporated a corpus-based approach to examine common collocates of the verbs ‘appraise,’ ‘assess,’ and ‘evaluate,’ Since the three near-synonyms are transitive verbs that can occur together with subject and object nouns, the present study aims to provide insight into precision in usage by studying lexical collocations, both subject–object

noun collocates. Subject and object noun collocates are important in understanding the precise usage of transitive verbs like 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' because these verbs typically occur with specific nouns that serve as their subjects or objects. Identifying common subject nouns that pair with these verbs helps us understand who usually performs these actions, while analyzing object noun collocates reveals what is typically appraised, assessed, or evaluated, indicating common objects. By examining subject-object noun collocates of these near-synonyms in a corpus-based study, we can uncover patterns of usage that reflect native speaker preferences and nuances.

Semantic preference refers to the tendency of certain words to appear together based on their meanings (Partington, 2004). It is the inclination of one word to be chosen over others in a specific situation due to its semantic relationship with another word. This concept helps explain why some word combinations are more common or natural than others. Lertcharoenwanich & Phoocharoensil (2022) conducted a corpus-based study of the near-synonyms 'purpose,' 'goal,' and 'objective' and found that even though these near-synonyms have similar meanings they only share a few semantically related semantic preferences. This differentiation emphasizes that understanding semantic preferences is essential for differentiating near-synonyms because it highlights the typical contexts and meanings associated with each word. By studying these preferences, we can gain deeper insights into the subtle distinctions between near-synonyms, leading to more precise language use and better comprehension for English language learners.

According to Ajmal et al. (2022), common methods to study synonyms include the use of dictionaries and thesauri. However, the traditional vocabulary learning method does not provide the detailed contexts or differences of these target words (Al-Sayyed et al., 2019), which can lead to a kind of repetition or circularity in how they define these words (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001, as cited in Lee & Liu, 2009, p.205). Likewise, some studies (e.g. Imsa-ard & Phoocharoensil (2022) and Phoocharoensil (2020)) found that learning dictionaries alone might not be able to provide comprehensive usage of each synonym in natural language. There is another effective approach to near-synonym study—a corpus-based approach. Kongcharoen & Thummanuruk (2023) conducted a corpus-based study on the adjectives 'perfect' 'flawless,' and 'impeccable,' revealing distinct details and contextual nuances that

differentiate these near-synonyms. Their research highlighted variations in collocations and grammatical usage among these adjectives, indicating that their application can vary significantly based on context and collocational preferences. For instance, 'perfect' is versatile across various contexts. The adjective 'impeccable' is predominantly employed in discussions related to hospitality, whereas 'flawless' is particularly used when describing appearance or personal attributes. Thus, the corpus-based study can provide insight showing the choice among these adjectives depends on the specific context and intended meaning. In the field of linguistics and language studies, corpus-based analysis is widely accepted as a methodology for linguistic research. It involves studying language patterns and usage by analyzing extensive collections of texts, known as corpora. Corpora are carefully compiled, structured collections of texts that serve as a representative sample of a particular language or language variety. Scholars in corpus-based studies emphasize the importance of using corpora to understand language in context and to identify patterns that can help inform linguistic theory and language teaching. For example, according to McEnery and Hardie (2011), corpus linguistics provides a systematic way to study language, enabling researchers to examine language use across different contexts and genres. Biber et al. (1998) highlight how corpora enable researchers to investigate language variation and change, providing insights into how language is used in different social and cultural contexts. Therefore, the present study uses a corpus-based approach to demonstrate an alternative way of obtaining authentic teaching materials while acknowledging the significance of teaching development and course design. This corpus-based study examines how 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' are used differently in authentic contexts and reveals subtle differences in usage that might not be apparent through traditional methods.

The chosen corpus for this study is the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), a widely utilized corpus representing contemporary American English (Imsa-ard & Phoocharoensil, 2022; Phoocharoensil, 2020; Kongcharoen & Thummanuruk, 2023). It provides a diverse and extensive collection of texts, making it well-suited for examining the usage of English in varied contexts (Davies, 2008). Through the utilization of COCA, the study aimed to present a comprehensive analysis of the near-synonyms 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' in the context of student assessment, thereby offering valuable insights for English language teachers and upper-

intermediate English learners. This selection was made based on the specific requirement to focus on a particular variety of English and the availability of associated resources

In conclusion, this study aims to examine the frequency and distribution of the near-synonyms ‘appraise,’ ‘assess,’ and ‘evaluate’ across a corpus, along with identifying their common subject–object noun collocates and conducting a semantic preference analysis to categorize subject–object noun collocates. The focus is to enrich the existing literature by providing insight regarding differences between the target near-synonyms English so that language teachers can comprehend the differences among these synonymous action words, leading to a good foundation for teaching English language learners. Additionally, upper-intermediate English learners will be able to distinguish these synonymous verbs and use them appropriately, while course designers will also have the opportunity to learn the differences between the target near-synonyms and incorporate this knowledge in their course and material designing. It is important to note that the findings of this study may only be partially applicable to other varieties of English outside of contemporary American English.

1.2 Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this study are to:

- 1) Examine the frequency and distribution of the near-synonyms ‘appraise,’ ‘assess,’ and ‘evaluate’ across the COCA.
- 2) Identify common subject–object noun collocates of ‘appraise,’ ‘assess,’ and ‘evaluate.’
- 3) Investigate semantic preferences of common subject–object noun collocates of ‘appraise,’ ‘assess,’ and ‘evaluate’ and group them according to their semantic preferences.

1.3 Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) How often do the near-synonyms ‘appraise,’ ‘assess,’ and ‘evaluate’ frequently occur across the COCA?
- 2) What are common subject–object noun collocates of ‘appraise,’ ‘assess,’ and

‘evaluate’?

3) What are the semantic preferences of the near-synonyms ‘appraise,’ ‘assess,’ and ‘evaluate’?

1.4 Definitions of Key Terms

For clarity, key terms such as near-synonyms, collocation, and semantic preference will be defined to ensure a common understanding within the context of this study.

1.4.1 Near-Synonyms

Near-synonyms refer to lexical pairs or sets that share very similar cognitive or denotational meanings. They have similar meanings but are not completely interchangeable in most contexts without changing some semantic or pragmatic aspect of the message; instead, they differ in their variations of dialect, denotation, connotation, collocations, degree of formality, and semantic preferences.

1.4.2 Collocation

Collocation refers to the habitual co-occurrence of certain words together. It can be a group of two or more words used together in a way that produces natural-sounding language. For example, "strong coffee," "heavy rain," and "make a decision," where the adjectives "strong" collocate with "coffee," "heavy" collocates with "rain," and the verb "make" collocates with "decision." These collocations are so ingrained in the language that alternative combinations like "powerful coffee" or "intense rain" would sound unnatural to native speakers.

1.4.3 Semantic Preference

Semantic preference, as defined in "Utterly content in each other's company": Semantic prosody and semantic preference (Partington, 2004), refers to the statistical tendency of words to co-occur based on their meanings. It reflects the likelihood of one word being chosen over others in a specific context due to its semantic relationship with another word. This concept is closely related to collocations, as words that have similar meanings or semantic relationships are more likely to collocate with each other.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This research specifically examines the near-synonyms ‘appraise,’ ‘assess,’ and ‘evaluate’ through eight genres of COCA corpus, which are representative of contemporary American English: spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, academic texts, television and movie subtitles, blogs, and web pages. The study aims to analyze the frequency and distribution of these terms, identify their common subject–object noun collocates, and explore their semantic preferences to provide insights into their differences. Other aspects in terms of collocations, like adverb collocates, are not explored in this study. It is important to note that while this study aims to provide a thorough analysis, it might not encompass all possible nuances or contexts of these near-synonyms in the English language.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The insight provided in this study offers a better understanding of the subtle differences between the three near-synonyms of ‘appraise,’ ‘assess,’ and ‘evaluate’ to English language teachers, learners, and course designers, so they can use these words accurately and bring insight to the table for English language learners. To illustrate, scholars like Liu & Jiang (2009) and Lee & Lee (2010) encourage teachers to incorporate corpus-based study into teaching near-synonyms, as it offers several advantages. The corpus-based study not only benefits English language teachers but also enhances learners' awareness of collocation and semantic preferences as it provides concrete examples of how near-synonyms are used in authentic contexts. By analyzing real-world language data, students gain insights into the subtle nuances in usage, improving their ability to use these terms accurately and appropriately in various situations. This approach helps students develop a deeper understanding of lexicogrammar and collocation, facilitating more effective communication in English. For course designers, implementing a corpus-based approach similar to the one used in the study can help in developing English language courses that explain the differences and proper usage of ‘appraise,’ ‘assess,’ and ‘evaluate.’

1.7 Organization of the Study

This corpus-based study of near-synonym words: appraise, assess, and evaluate is divided into five chapters.

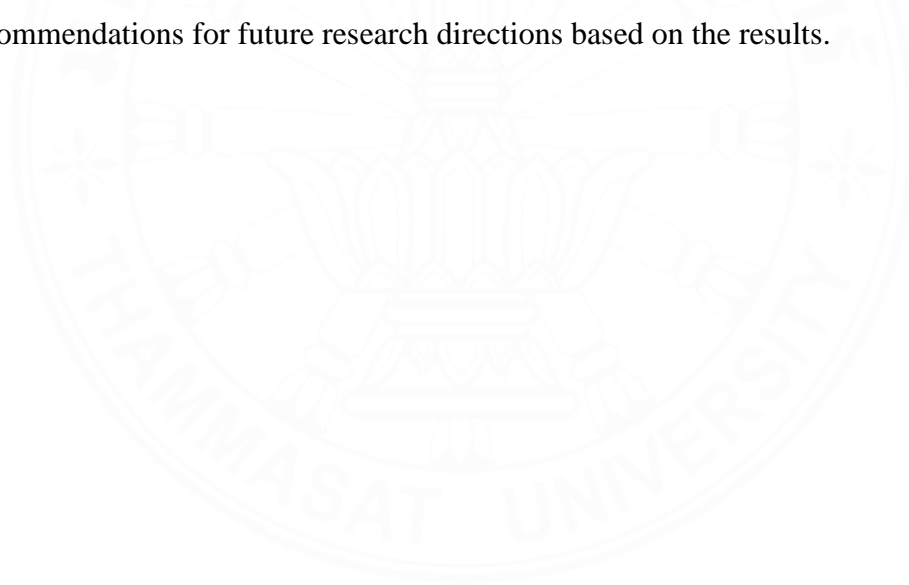
Chapter 1 introduces the study's background, objectives, research questions, problem statement, key term definitions, scope, significance, and organizational structure.

Chapter 2 contains a review of academic literature on relevant key terms and related studies to provide a theoretical context for the research

Chapter 3 outlines the study's methodology, including the selection of target synonyms and materials, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques.

Chapter 4 presents findings related to the distribution and frequency, subject and object noun collocates, and semantic preferences of the target near-synonyms.

Chapter 5 offers conclusions drawn from the study's findings and provides recommendations for future research directions based on the results.



CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter provides a detailed review of the existing literature regarding terms, studies, and theories related to a corpus-based study of near-synonyms. First, this chapter will define key terms relevant to this corpus-based analysis, such as vocabulary knowledge and language learning, synonyms and near-synonyms, corpus and corpus-based approach, word frequency, collocations, and semantic preferences. Subsequently, the review delves into corpus-based studies that have investigated near-synonyms distinctions with varied methods. By synthesizing insights from prior research, this literature review aims to clarify the definitions, tools, sources, and scope of the study of the target near-synonyms.

2.1 Importance of Vocabulary and Vocabulary Problems

Vocabulary plays a crucial role in learning a foreign language, as an extensive vocabulary enables students to master the four primary skills of English: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Asyiah, 2017). Research by Cunningham and Stanovich (1997) and Nagy and Scott (2000), as cited in Al-Mutairi (2024, p.3), demonstrates a strong correlation between a rich vocabulary and both language proficiency and academic success. This link underscores the importance of vocabulary acquisition in achieving overall language competency. Graves (2006) and Nation (2001), as cited in Al-Mutairi (2024, p.3), have highlighted that vocabulary knowledge is a critical predictor of reading comprehension and writing skills. A well-developed vocabulary enhances students' ability to decode and comprehend texts, facilitating a deeper understanding of the material. This comprehension is not limited to basic texts but extends to more complex academic and professional materials, thereby broadening the learner's scope of engagement with the language. Furthermore, Beck et al. (2002) suggest that a diverse vocabulary is essential for language learners to effectively understand and interact with a variety of texts and genres. This includes everyday conversations, which require familiarity with colloquial expressions and idiomatic phrases, as well as academic texts and

professional discourse, which often involve specialized terminology and complex structures. By acquiring a broad vocabulary, learners can navigate different contexts more confidently and competently, leading to better communication and greater academic and professional opportunities. The acquisition of a rich and varied vocabulary is foundational to mastering English as a foreign language. It not only aids in the development of the four primary language skills but also correlates with higher academic achievement and greater language proficiency. Therefore, vocabulary development should be a central focus in language education to ensure students can fully engage with and benefit from their language learning experiences.

However, according to Al-Jamal & Al-Jamal (2014), as cited in Hibatullah (2019, p. 92), vocabulary is one of the most crucial problems in language learning which is shared among all EFL students. Scholars have stated that students' lack of vocabulary knowledge prevented them from expressing their ideas or arguing about any topic (Keong et al., 2015; Omar, 2023). Importantly, Abrar et al. (2018) proved that the greatest challenge of learning English vocabulary is selecting appropriate words despite having limited word knowledge, whereas Hibatullah (2019) also pinpointed that a lack of vocabulary knowledge influenced EFL learners' ability to speak, especially in terms of finding proper words.

As mentioned above, scholars consistently highlighted how a lack of vocabulary impedes students' ability to express themselves. The ability to choose words correctly is crucial in enhancing communication proficiency. Therefore, understanding synonyms might expand one's lexicon knowledge and enable language users to use words more appropriately, leading to better communication.

2.2 Synonyms and Near Synonyms

A synonym is a word that has a similar meaning to another word in the same language. According to Lyons (1977), synonyms play an important role in language learning and communication because they provide learners with a wider range of vocabulary choices, allowing them to express themselves more precisely and effectively. By understanding synonyms, learners can avoid being awkward, expressing undesirable implications, and repetition in their speech and writing, so they can make their language more engaging and sophisticated (Inkpen & Hirst,

2006).

There are two types of synonyms: absolute synonyms and near-synonyms (Cruse, 1986). According to Lyons (1981, as cited in Cruse, 1986, p.292), absolute synonyms are expressions that are fully, totally, and completely synonymous, meaning they can be used interchangeably in all contexts. Absolute synonyms are extremely rare in natural languages (Lyons, 1977).

On the other hand, near- synonyms are more common and are used to express complexity in meaning or to avoid repetition (Crystal, 2003). Near synonyms, as defined by Lyons (1981), are words that are similar but cannot be used interchangeably in all contexts. This means that while near synonyms share similarities, they also have differences that distinguish them from each other.

Near-synonyms can be differentiated in many criteria, for example, collocational patterns, semantic preferences, dialect, denotation, connotation, and degree of formality (Palmer, 1981; Cruse, 1986; Jackson & Amvela, 2000; Edmonds and Hirst, 2002; Inkpen & Hirst, 2006; Phoocharoensil, 2010; Flowerdew, 2012). In this study, the near-synonyms ‘appraise,’ ‘assess,’ and ‘evaluate’ were differentiated based on collocations and semantic preferences.

Near-synonyms can be distinguished by collocation (Cruse, 1986; Phoocharoensil, 2010, as cited in Lertcharoenwanich & Phoocharoensil, 2022, p. 151). According to O’Dell and McCarthy (2008), a collocation is a pair or group of words that often co-occur together. EFL learners must expose and adopt those combinations to make the language sound natural and avoid confusion because some collocations are fixed, for example, “fast food” and “quick glance”, not “quick food” and “fast glance”. Collocates play a vital role in distinguishing near-synonyms by offering contextual cues on their practical usage. Analyzing collocations helps to identify the precise domains and contexts where these words are most appropriately used, as illustrated in Gu’s study (2017). Gu (2017) investigated the differences between the synonyms ‘obtain’ and ‘gain’ in terms of collocation and found that ‘obtain’ is significantly associated with law and business while ‘gain’ is frequently used in commerce, economy, politics, and social science.

Further, whereas collocational pattern concerns relations of a group of words, there is a concept related to collocation that concerns the relation between individual

words and the semantic environment, so-called semantic preference (Flowerdew, 2012, as cited in Lertcharoenwanich & Phoocharoensil, 2022, p. 151). This concept is also used to distinguish near-synonyms. Edmonds and Hirst (2002, as cited in Lertcharoenwanich & Phoocharoensil, 2022, p. 151-152) gave an example of a pair of synonyms “die” and “pass away” pointing out that “pass away” is usually used with people while “die” is used with animals or plants. Applying this concept to the present study, the near-synonyms 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate,' semantic preference involved looking at the kinds of subjects and objects these verbs commonly pair with and the semantic fields these pairs belong to. This helps in clarifying how each of these verbs is used in specific contexts

Another way used to differentiate near-synonyms is the variation of different geographical use at intranational and international levels, according to scholars (Cruse, 1986; Palmer, 1981; Kachru, 1995; Widdowson, 1997 as cited in Lertcharoenwanich & Phoocharoensil, 2022, p. 151). For instance, the geographical difference in vocabulary between “pop”, “soda”, and “coke” at the intranational level (across the United States) (Harden, 2022), and “vacation” (American English) and “holiday” (British English) at the international level. Regarding the connotational, expressive, or attitudinal variation, near-synonyms can convey different manners or attitudes of the speaker toward an entity in the situation. Attitudes can be negative (pejorative), neutral, or positive (Cruse, 1986; Inkpen & Hirst, 2006). For example, according to Choose the Right Word (Hayakawa, 1994, as cited in Inkpen & Hirst 2006, p. 2), “skinny”, “thin”, and “slim” have the same meaning, but they convey negative (pejorative), neutral, and positive attitudes respectively (Edmonds & Hirst, 2002, as cited in Lertcharoenwanich & Phoocharoensil, 2022, p. 151).

Synonyms play a crucial role in language learning and communication by giving learners broader vocabulary choices and allowing for more precise and effective expression. The present study intends to focus on near-synonyms, which are commonly found and cause confusion because of subtle differences in meaning or usage compared to absolute synonyms. Throughout the literature review, the near-synonyms were differentiated based on various criteria, including dialect, denotation or connotation, collocational patterns, and semantic preferences, but in this study, the near-synonyms

‘appraise,’ ‘assess,’ and ‘evaluate’ will be differentiated based only on collocations and semantic preferences.

2.3 Collocations

Collocations are word combinations that frequently occur together (Lewis, 2000; O’Dell & McCarthy, 2008). Benson et al (1997) divide collocations into two types: grammatical and lexical collocations. Grammatical collocation consists of eight types (Benson et al., 1997).

- 1) *Noun + preposition*
- 2) *Noun + to-infinitive*
- 3) *Noun + that-clause*
- 4) *Preposition + noun*
- 5) *Adjective + preposition*
- 6) *Adjective + to-infinitive*
- 7) *Adjective + that-clause*
- 8) *Verb + to-infinitive*

According to Bahns (1993, as cited in Moehkardi & Moehkardi, 2002, page 54), grammatical collocations are combinations of words such as a noun, an adjective, or a verb with a particle like a preposition, adverb, or grammatical structure like an infinitive, gerund, or clause. For example, “fill in,” “at night,” and “walk through.” On the other hand, lexical collocations are combinations of words that comprise only content words such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs., "strong coffee," "fast food," and "heavy rain," for example. Benson et al. (1997) categorize six types of lexical collocations.

- 1) *Verb + noun*
- 2) *Verb + adverb*
- 3) *Noun + verb*
- 4) *Noun + noun*
- 5) *Adverb + adjective*
- 6) *Adjective + noun*

This research employs a corpus-based analysis to investigate the frequent subject-object noun collocates associated with the near-synonyms ‘appraise,’ ‘assess,’

and "evaluate." The focus is on studying the lexical collocations to gain a comprehensive understanding of the contexts of these terms.

2.4 Semantic Preferences

Collocational patterns involve grammar and vocabulary restrictions, but the use of words is also influenced by their semantic contexts. In Partington's (2004) view, semantic preference refers to the statistical inclination of words to appear together due to their meanings. It demonstrates the probability of selecting one word over others in a particular context because of its semantic connection with another word. For example, Lertcharoenwanich & Phoocharoensil (2022) conducted a corpus-based study and found that 'purpose,' 'goal,' and 'objective' share some similar semantic preferences, namely importance, type, and condition. 'Purpose' collocates with the adjective collocates in technical fields like medicinal and lawful while the adjectives which collocate with 'goal' seem to have a wider range: degree of possibility in achievement, intention and ambition, and time frame. For 'objective', its verb collocates tend to express time-bound context and measurement. Partington (2004, as cited in Lertcharoenwanich, 2023, p. 369-370) discovered that when "cause" is followed by one object, it is often linked to a disease like cancer or heart disease, but when followed by two objects, the second object usually signifies a negative emotion, such as discomfort in the phrase "causes them discomfort." Understanding these semantic preferences helps clarify how each synonym is appropriately employed in different contexts, aiding English language learners in precise and effective communication. Hence, semantic preference analysis usually comes together with collocation analysis as it involves examining the words that tend to occur in the context of a particular word or a pair of words, revealing its semantic preferences. Sinclair (1991) highlighted the importance of collocations in language learning, as they can reveal underlying meanings and semantic preferences of words. This understanding can benefit English language teachers, learners, and course designers to see the differences between the near-synonyms and identify appropriate contexts suggested by the semantic preference.

2.5 Corpus and Corpus-Based Approach

A corpus is a large and structured collection of texts that serves as a representative sample of a particular language or language variety (McEnery & Hardie, 2011). It provides a valuable resource for linguistic analysis, enabling researchers to study language usage, frequency, and patterns systematically and empirically (Biber et al., 1998). Examples of well-known corpora include the British National Corpus (BNC), which is a 100-million-word collection of samples of written and spoken English from a wide range of sources, representing British English from the late 20th century (Burnard, 2007). The BNC encompasses diverse genres such as newspapers, fiction, academic texts, and spoken conversations, making it a comprehensive resource for studying British English. Another significant corpus is the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). It is a 1.6-billion-word collection that contains texts from a variety of genres, such as spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, and academic journals, representing American English from 1990 to the present (Ramayanti et al., 2022). COCA is regularly updated and is one of the most widely used corpora for linguistic research on American English (Davies, 2008). Additionally, the Hansard Corpus was designed by Professor Marc Alexander of Glasgow University. It contains 1.6 billion words of British Parliamentary Speeches from 1803-2005, offering a rich resource for studying political language. Therefore, it is valuable for research on parliamentary discourse and political rhetoric (Davies, 2015).

Corpus is essential for linguistic research as it provides a systematic and empirical basis for analyzing language, allowing researchers to study language patterns, frequencies, and usage in different contexts (McEnery & Wilson, 2001). In the 21st-century era, computer technology plays an increasingly crucial role in foreign language instruction, with technologies such as the internet, multimedia, hypermedia, and data-driven tools being integrated into English Language Learning and Teaching (ELLT) to facilitate the language learning process (Yunus, 2017). One of the by-products of this technology is corpus linguistics, which involves the systematic data-driven analysis of actual language production and the creation of large collections of authentic texts known as corpora.

Corpora can be applied in various ways to enhance students' language proficiency in language teaching and learning. Li (2024) studied corpus linguistics for

English language teaching. As corpora provide extensive and authentic resources, Li (2024) proposes several applications of corpus linguistics in English teaching, including vocabulary teaching, syllabus design, and the preparation of teaching materials. For example, teachers can use corpora to identify the most frequently used words and phrases in different contexts, helping students learn vocabulary that is both relevant and commonly used as suggested by Chen (2023). Chen (2023) created a self-compiled business English textbook corpus (BETC) to teach semi-technical vocabulary, which is considered a challenging area of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction. This paper utilizes the result to design a corpus-based language pedagogy (CBLP) lesson, providing strategies for ELT professionals in the field of ESP disciplines. Additionally, corpora can be used to raise students' awareness of language variation and help them develop strategies for effective communication in different situations (O'Keeffe et al., 2007).

The corpus-based approach has been integrated into ELT in several ways. Foomani and Khalaji (2016), for example, investigated the effectiveness of corpus-based verb-noun collocation learning compared to traditional learning among Iranian EFL learners, finding that corpus-based learning can improve students' knowledge and application of collocations. This approach offers a more nuanced understanding of near-synonymy than traditional methods, as it provides more empirical knowledge of language use (Yunus, 2017). It is particularly useful for teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, allowing teachers to create authentic materials for ESP learners studying specialized languages in disciplines such as medicine, law, and biology.

Furthermore, corpus-based analysis is popular in studying near-synonyms. Song (2021) examined the effectiveness of the corpus-based approach in distinguishing near-synonyms like "damage" and "destroy," confirming its usefulness for learners at all levels. A Corpus-based Study on the Meanings, Distribution, Collocations, and Formality of 'Concentrate', 'Emphasize', and 'Focus' (Imsa-ard, 2021) used a corpus approach to differentiate three near-synonyms and found that corpus-based analysis clarifies the usage of each near-synonym and contributes to the effectiveness of language learning. According to Aroonmanakun's study (2015), adopting corpus-based analysis to near-synonym study not only helps differentiate near-synonyms but also

provides insightful contexts to help learners use words appropriately and enhance their ability to use collocations as well. In contrast to corpus-based analysis, traditional dictionaries, and language teaching methods often fail to provide information on the distribution, frequently used collocations, and subtle differences of words in various settings, leading to misuse of synonyms and awkwardness in language use (Song, 2021; Aroonmanakun, 2015). Therefore, promoting and generalizing corpus-based language teaching and learning can benefit course and material designers, teachers, and students alike.

Text corpora can be classified based on various features they possess, including language, time, and currentness. Within language corpora, there are three sub-categories. The first is a Monolingual Corpus, which contains texts in a single language, often tagged for parts of speech, and used for a range of tasks from practical usage checks to scientific analysis. The second is a Parallel or Multilingual Corpus, consisting of two or more monolingual corpora that are translations of each other, enabling users to compare translations of words or phrases. The third is a Comparable Corpus, a set of two or more monolingual corpora typically in different languages but constructed on similar principles, allowing for comparison of results between corpora (Lexical Computing, n.d.). Since this study focuses on the near-synonyms ‘appraise,’ ‘assess,’ and ‘evaluate’ in English, and due to limited time and resources, a monolingual language-based corpus will be utilized. The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) is one of the significant monolingual corpora in linguistic research due to its extensive collection of American English texts, which contains more than one billion words (latest source update 2019) in various genres including spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, academic texts, TV and movies subtitles, blogs, and web pages totaling over 560 million words (Davies, 2008). Serving as a reference corpus, COCA is instrumental in language analysis as it provides authentic language data for studying distributions, collocations, and semantic preferences across different genres (Phoocharoensil & Kanokpermpoon, 2021). Researchers (e.g. Phoocharoensil & Kanokpermpoon, 2021; Kruawonga & Phoocharoensi, 2022; Lertcharoenwanich, 2023) utilized COCA to analyze word frequencies, collocational patterns, and semantic preferences and found their target near-synonyms have different collocational patterns and semantic preferences. which contributes to a better understanding of how words are

used in contexts. Hence, COCA is one of the popular sources in corpus-based analysis which is beneficial for language learners and teachers aiming to enhance their comprehension of English language use in diverse real-world situations.

2.6 Previous Studies

Several previous studies have examined the use of near-synonyms by utilizing the corpus-based approach, which involves analyzing large collections of authentic language data from sources like the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). In recent studies, the corpus-based analysis allowed researchers to identify the distribution across genres, collocations, and semantic preference among near-synonyms in authentic settings, providing a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of how these words are used.

Aroonmanakun (2015) used the COCA to analyze the object noun collocations of 'quick' and 'fast'. The researcher listed the top hundred collocates of both words, with a Mutual Information (MI) score of at least 3, to be analyzed. The study shows that even 'quick' and 'fast' have similar meanings on their own and share some object noun collocates but they convey differently in terms of meaning. For example, a "quick learner" refers to someone who can learn something easily or with little effort. It emphasizes the ease or facility with which the person can grasp new concepts or skills. On the other hand, a "fast learner" refers to someone who learns something quickly or in a short amount of time. It emphasizes the speed or rate at which the person acquires new knowledge or skills. To conclude, a "quick learner" suggests ease of learning, while a "fast learner" suggests speed of learning. However, it does not matter whether it is 'quick' or 'fast', the meaning is not dramatically different.

In addition, Imsa-ard's (2021) corpus-based study on meanings, distribution, collocations, and formality of near-synonyms focusing on three words 'concentrate', 'emphasize', and 'focus' also used the COCA as a source of authentic spoken and written English language. The study examined the frequencies and distribution across eight genres, the noun and adverb collocations, the degree of formality (based on Bailey's (2015) and Leech and Svartvik's (2003) main features), and grammatical structures (using COCA and dictionaries) of the target words. It is found that the target near-

synonyms have identical meanings but they are different in terms of collocations and semantic preferences.

Another corpus-based analysis of near-synonym verbs was conducted by Kruawong and Phoocharoensil (2022). They aimed to study the distinction between 'teach', 'educate', and 'instruct' in terms of distribution across different genres and their noun collocates. This research adopted the criteria of the degree of formality proposed by Bailey (2015), Leech and Svartvik (2003), and Jackson and Amvela (2007) into the analysis of distribution related to the degree of formality. Regarding the sources, they used the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2021) and COCA. The research found that 'teach' is far more widely and commonly used than 'educate' and 'instruct', further, all three words are more frequently used in written genres than in spoken genres, and cannot be used interchangeably with some collocates.

Sittironnarit et al. (2022) investigated a pair of near-synonyms 'acquire' and 'obtain' regarding their genres, collocations, semantic preference, and semantic prosody utilizing the COCA. The researchers found that 'acquire' and 'obtain' tend to have a high degree of formality as they are found in written more than spoken genres. 'Obtain' is more frequently used than 'acquire'. They shared some similar noun collocates and some semantic preferences, but 'acquire' tends to occur with things, and 'obtain' tends to occur with rights or authority.

Muangmeeka and Monthon (2023) conducted a corpus-based study of English near-synonyms: join, attend, and participate to study the similarities and differences among the target synonyms considering formality, grammatical patterns, noun collocation, and semantic preferences in the context of American English. The analysis was conducted from two sources: the Oxford Advanced American Dictionary (OAAD) and the COCA. The study highlighted that even though these words have similarities in core meaning, they appear in different levels of formality, and grammatical patterns, and occur with different collocates. Regarding the semantic preferences, it appears that 'join' is related to the act of becoming a part of a group while 'attend' and 'participate' are not.

A corpus-based study of English synonyms: 'small', 'little', 'tiny', and 'petite' was conducted by Ammari & al Ahmad (2023) to examine the differences of the target near-synonyms in distribution across genres, grammatical patterns, and collocations.

The study utilized two corpora: COCA and the Open Cambridge Learner English Corpus (uncoded) or CLC as sources of the analysis. CLC is a written and academic collection compiled by Cambridge University Press and Cambridge English Language Assessment. When it came to the comparison between COCA and CLC's results, the researcher only compared the results of COCA academic genre and CLC. The study found that the near-synonyms 'small', 'little', 'tiny', and 'petite' cannot be used interchangeably in all contexts, and it appeared that 'small' and 'little' are significantly used in American English corpora while 'petite' is very rare in COCA and does not appear in CLC. Apparently, 'small' frequently co-occur with business, town, and number, on the other hand, 'little' tends to co-occur with people and uncountable nouns like 'time'. However, this study did not analyze the semantic preference of the target synonyms.

Al-Sayyed et al (2019) did a corpus-based analysis of eight English synonymous adjectives of 'fear' which are 'afraid', 'scared', 'frightened', 'terrified', 'startled', 'fearful', 'horrified' and 'petrified' for differentiating their core meanings, dialectal differences, frequency, and distribution across different genres. In this study, besides the meaning from dictionaries, the data was collected from two corpora, COCA and British National Corpus (BNC), to analyze the dialectal difference. Like other studies' results, the research showed that all eight synonyms have the same core meaning but cannot be used interchangeably. 'Afraid' is the most commonly used word among the two dialects. Importantly, the study suggests that COCA and BNC can reveal idiomatic expressions better than dictionaries.

A corpus-based analysis of the near-synonyms 'beautiful', 'handsome', and 'pretty' (Ajmal et al, 2022) studied similarities and differences among the target words regarding their core meaning, collocational patterns, object noun, and adverb collocates using the data collected from Longman dictionary of contemporary English (LDOCE) and BNC. The research selected 100 concordance lines for each synonym from the corpora to be analyzed. The findings revealed that while the core meanings of these synonyms are similar, they differ in their collocational patterns and common collocates. As usual, the results underscored that corpora provide supplementary information that is not typically found in dictionaries and that target words cannot always be used interchangeably across all contexts. Additionally, it is recommended that both teachers

and students utilize corpora alongside learners' dictionaries to gain a deeper understanding of synonym distinctions to enhance vocabulary acquisition.

The previous studies under review highlight the significance of corpus-based studies in examining near-synonyms. These studies, employing corpora such as the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and the British National Corpus (BNC), have enriched our comprehension of using near-synonyms in authentic contexts. Researchers studied various elements, including distribution across genres, collocations, semantic preferences, and levels of formality. Despite near-synonyms sharing fundamental meanings, corpus analyses have unveiled nuanced disparities in their employment, collocational patterns, and favored contexts. This literature review emphasizes the necessity of incorporating corpora and traditional dictionaries to understand near-synonyms in English thoroughly.

However, there is a notable gap in the research on the synonymous verbs 'appraise,' 'assess,' and "evaluate," as their dictionary definitions lack contextual information. This study aims to fill this gap by using a corpus-based approach to enhance understanding of differences among these near-synonyms.

In conclusion, the literature review has provided an extensive review of the literature pertinent to a corpus-based study of near-synonyms, focusing specifically on the verbs 'appraise,' 'assess,' and "evaluate." Key concepts such as vocabulary problems, synonyms and near-synonyms, collocations, semantic preferences, and corpus and corpus-based approaches have been defined and explored in depth. Through synthesizing insights from previous studies, this review has elucidated the definitions, methodologies, tools, and scope relevant to the differentiation of near-synonyms. By applying a corpus to analyze the distinct collocational patterns and semantic preferences of 'appraise,' 'assess,' and "evaluate," this study aims to contribute to a clearer understanding of their usage in varied contexts, thereby benefiting educators, language learners, and researchers seeking precise and effective communication in English language contexts.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodology employed in conducting a corpus-based study of the near-synonyms ‘appraise,’ ‘assess,’ and ‘evaluate’ and demonstrates the data collection and data analysis. This study aims to explore the distribution of the target words across a representative corpus, noun collocations, and semantic preferences.

The methodology involved using the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) to extract relevant data from a wide range of genres. The study was guided by three main objectives: (1) to examine the frequency and distribution of the near-synonyms ‘appraise,’ ‘assess,’ and ‘evaluate’ across the COCA, (2) to identify the subject and object nouns of these verbs, and (3) to categorize these collocations into semantic preference groups. By addressing these objectives, this study aimed to contribute to a better understanding of how these near-synonyms were different and used in authentic language.

The following sections detail the rationale behind selecting these near-synonyms, describe the COCA corpus and its suitability for this study, and explain the methods for data collection and analysis. Each section is supported by relevant scholarly literature to provide a theoretical framework for the study

3.1 Target Near-Synonyms

The selection of ‘appraise,’ ‘assess,’ and ‘evaluate’ was based on their common definitions as specified in the Oxford Advanced American Dictionary for Learners of English (Oxford University Press, 2011), their different applications in authentic contexts, and placement within the CEFR levels, highlighting their importance for upper-intermediate learners, as explained below.

These three words have nuanced and overlapping meanings according to the Oxford Advanced American Dictionary for Learners of English (Oxford University Press, 2011), as shown below.

Table 3.1

Meanings of 'Appraise,' 'Assess,' and 'Evaluate' Extracted from the Oxford Advanced American Dictionary for Learners of English (2011)

Words	Meaning
Appraise	– to form an opinion about how valuable, successful, or effective someone or something is.
Assess	– to make a judgment about the nature or quality of someone or something. – to calculate the amount or value of something
Evaluate	– to form an opinion of the amount, value, or quality of something after thinking about it carefully.

As shown in Table 1, according to the Oxford Advanced American Dictionary for Learners of English (Oxford University Press, 2011), all three terms involve forming an opinion or judgment about someone or something. Each requires a process of analysis to determine the subject's value, quality, or nature, whether in qualitative or quantitative terms. These shared features highlight their use in contexts requiring careful analysis and judgment and might often be found in professional, educational, or performance-related evaluations. Additionally, only 'evaluate' demands careful consideration before making a judgment. However, the dictionary definitions of 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' do not specify whether these terms are used with a person, object, or animal, or in what manner they should be applied. The definitions provided in the dictionary lack contextual clarity, compelling the researcher to seek further clarification through online dictionaries. The researcher found their specific usages differ, as shown in the following examples (Collins, n.d.):

Table 2.3

Examples of Usage of 'Appraise' 'Assess' and 'Evaluate' from the Collins Online Dictionary

Common	Uncommon
This is the item Horatio invited you down here to <i>appraise</i>.	This is the item Horatio invited you down here to <i>assess</i> .
The doctors will <i>assess</i> him over the next few	The doctors will <i>evaluate</i> him over the next

days.	few days.
I do not know either man, and cannot evaluate the reliability of their claims.	I do not know either man, and cannot <i>appraise</i> the reliability of their claims.

As demonstrated, these three near-synonyms are not interchangeable in some contexts, which possibly leads to confusion among English language learners. A significant reason to study these terms goes beyond their distinct usages; ‘assess’ and ‘evaluate’ are categorized at the B2 level, while "appraise" is classified at the C1 level in the CEFR. This difference underscores the importance of understanding their distinct levels of complexity and usage as learners advance in language proficiency. In addition, the researcher has an assumption that they may have close semantic relationships and frequent use in academic and professional settings because their CEFR levels are closely aligned at a high level (Xiao & McEnery, 2006). This implies that it is essential to use these words accurately and appropriately for English learners aiming to reach an advance proficiency.

For these reasons, the selection of ‘appraise,’ ‘assess,’ and ‘evaluate’ in this study was grounded in their nuanced definitions from the Oxford Advanced American Dictionary for Learners of English (2011) and their distinct applications in real-world contexts, particularly their alignment with CEFR proficiency levels suited for upper-intermediate learners. As demonstrated in the dictionary definitions, these terms share the fundamental characteristic of forming judgments or opinions about subjects. Despite their similarities, their specific uses vary significantly, which can pose challenges for English language learners aiming for precision in communication. Thus, understanding the distinctions between ‘appraise,’ ‘assess,’ and ‘evaluate’ not only clarifies their proper usage but also supports effective communication in diverse contexts for learners striving to achieve upper-intermediate proficiency in English.

3.2 COCA for Data Collection

In this study, data collection involved using the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) to gather information on the distribution and collocates of each target synonym across eight genres: spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, and academic texts. Including these genres allowed the study to capture a

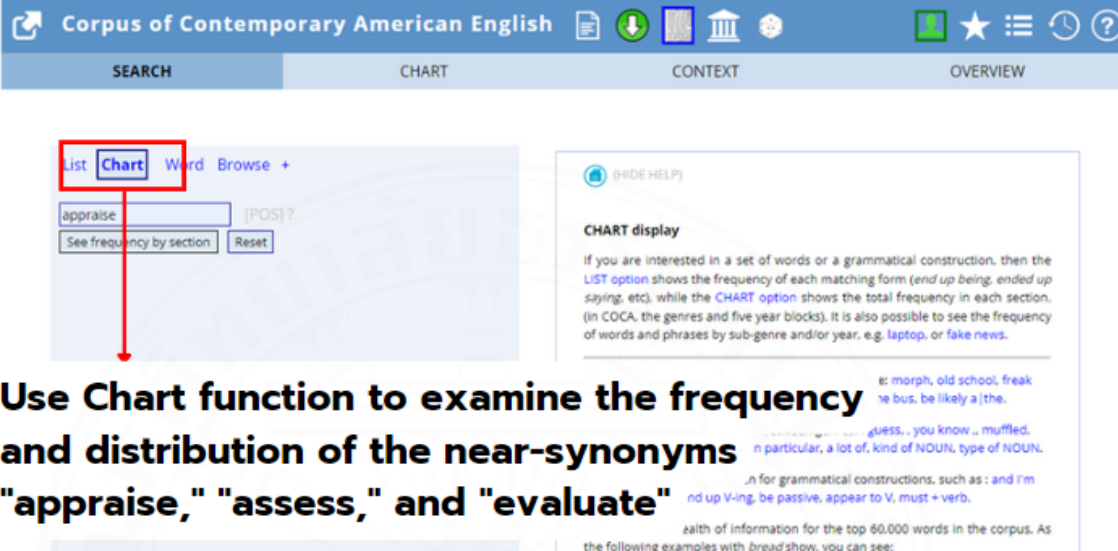
wide range of language use in American English, making the findings more applicable to real-world contexts. COCA was chosen due to its size, representativeness of American English, variety of genres, and up-to-date nature, making it suitable for investigating the use of the target near-synonyms across different contexts in natural language use (Davies, 2008; Kruawong & Phoocharoensil, 2022). COCA contains over 560 million words from a wide range of sources, including spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, and academic texts. According to Google Analytics, updated in April 2024, COCA, in English-Corpora.org, was used by 74,000 unique people each month. This statistical number indicates that COCA is widely used and may be the most widely used corpus of English. Moreover, COCA is widely and easily accessible for everyone. Meanwhile, British National Corpus (BNC), also representative of a standard English dialect, only contains 100 million. Hence, scholars such as McEnery and Wilson (2001), who advocate for corpus-based research in providing empirical evidence for language study, support COCA's suitability for linguistic analysis.

3.3 Methodology

Regarding the first objective of the study, the researcher examined the frequency and distribution of the near-synonyms 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' across the COCA using the 'Chart' function. The distribution and frequency of the target words were manually reviewed and compared to identify similarities and differences, aiming to understand how they distribute across all eight genres available in COCA, including spoken language, fiction, TV and movie subtitles, magazines, newspapers, academic texts, blogs, and webpages. By examining their frequency and distribution, the study aims to clarify their distinctions in different genres and answer research question No. 1, as demonstrated in Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.1

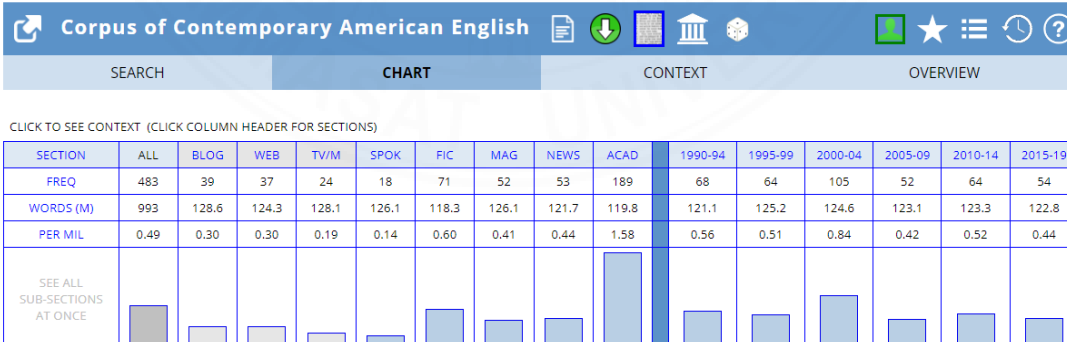
Examine the Frequency and Distribution of the Near-Synonyms 'Appraise,' 'Assess,' and 'Evaluate' Across the COCA with the 'Chart' Function.



The screenshot shows the COCA search interface. The 'SEARCH' tab is active, and the word 'appraise' is entered in the search box. The 'Chart' option is selected, and a red box highlights the 'Chart' button. A red arrow points from the 'Chart' button to the search results area. The search results area shows the word 'appraise' and a 'See frequency by section' button. A 'CHART display' box is visible on the right, explaining the 'CHART display' function. Below the search results, there is a large text overlay: "Use Chart function to examine the frequency and distribution of the near-synonyms 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate'".

Figure 3.2

Frequency and Distribution of the Near-Synonyms 'Appraise,' 'Assess,' and 'Evaluate' Across the COCA



The screenshot shows the COCA search interface with the 'CHART' tab selected. The search results are displayed in a table format. The table has columns for 'SECTION', 'ALL', 'BLOG', 'WEB', 'TV/M', 'SPOK', 'FIC', 'MAG', 'NEWS', 'ACAD', and years from 1990-94 to 2015-19. The 'ACAD' column is highlighted. Below the table, there is a bar chart showing the frequency of the word 'appraise' across different sections and years.

SECTION	ALL	BLOG	WEB	TV/M	SPOK	FIC	MAG	NEWS	ACAD	1990-94	1995-99	2000-04	2005-09	2010-14	2015-19
FREQ	483	39	37	24	18	71	52	53	189	68	64	105	52	64	54
WORDS (M)	993	128.6	124.3	128.1	126.1	118.3	126.1	121.7	119.8	121.1	125.2	124.6	123.1	123.3	122.8
PER MIL	0.49	0.30	0.30	0.19	0.14	0.60	0.41	0.44	1.58	0.56	0.51	0.84	0.42	0.52	0.44

As seen in Figure 3.3, the COCA search tool was set up to extract specific subject and object noun collocates of the target words using the 'Collocates' function, identifying the top 30 frequently co-occurring subject and object noun collocates along with their Mutual Information (MI) scores, addressing the second objective of this

study. According to Cheng (2011, as cited in Kruawong & Phoocharoensil, 2022, p. 82), the MI score quantifies the strength of association between the target words and their collocates, aiding in identifying semantic preferences. These collocates, being nouns that commonly appear with the target near-synonyms, are crucial for answering research question No. 2 and for further analysis to answer research question No. 3.

Figure 3.3

Extract Specific Noun Collocates of the Target Words by Using the ‘Collocates’ Function



Use the Collocates function to extract 30 subject and object noun collocates.

Use the dropdown list to the left (POS or _pos) to input tags for "parts of speech" (PoS, e.g. nouns or verbs) into your search string.

By default, it will add the PoS as a "full word", as in the searches `strong NOUN` or `ADJ eyes`.

You can also have the PoS added as a "tag" on the end of a word, to limit the word to that PoS, as in the searches `strike_n` or `find_v`.

To make it insert PoS tags after words, click on `.pos`. To change it back to PoS as a separate "word", click on `POS`.

You can find a wealth of information for the top 60,000 words in the corpus. As the following examples with `bread` show, you can see:

However, some collocates with very high MI scores could have low frequency, failing to serve as representative examples. Considering Schmitt's (2010) statement, Kruawong and Phoocharoensil (2022) adopted frequency and MI scores with a minimum frequency threshold of ≥ 3 scores. This study followed the specified procedure to efficiently collect the data, demonstrated in Figure 3.4. Studying both subject and object noun collocates is crucial because the synonymous verbs are transitive, requiring an understanding of how they interact with both subject and object nouns to convey full meaning. This approach helps uncover usage patterns and tendencies, clarifying which nouns typically serve as subjects and which nouns predominantly function as objects. The researcher aimed to determine whether the identified nodes predominantly function as subject or object nouns by using the KWIC (Key Word in Context) function and analyzing up to 200 lines, or fewer if insufficient lines were available, as illustrated in Figure 3.5.

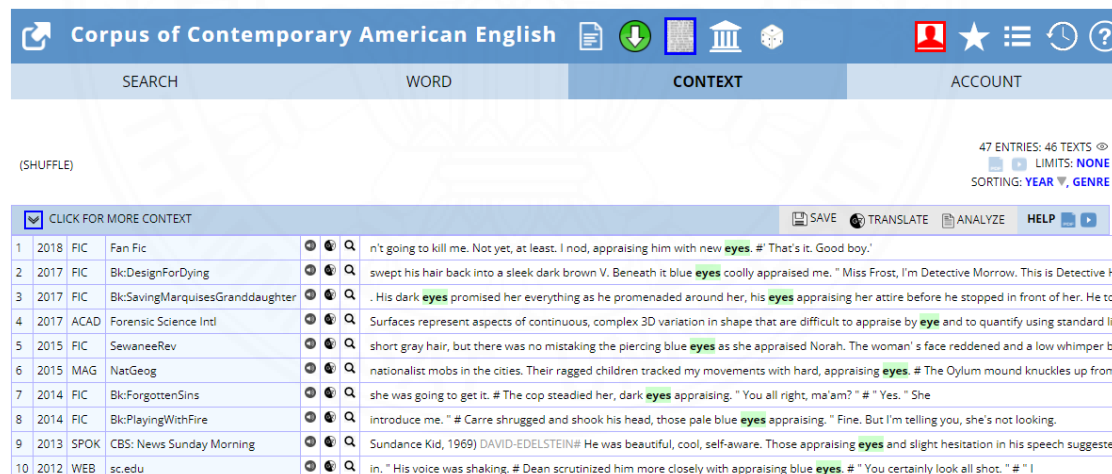
Figure 3.4

Identify the top 30 Noun Collocates with MI Scores ≥ 3



Figure 3.5

Example of KWIC Page



As per the last objective of this study, frequently co-occurring collocates are then manually grouped according to semantic preferences to study the distinction of the three target near-synonyms in terms of their semantic preferences. In categorizing words with semantic preference, the definition given by Parington (2004) will be used. Noun collocates that co-occur with the target synonymous verbs based on their associated meanings will be categorized into groups. This methodology aims to provide

a comprehensive analysis of the near-synonyms 'assess,' "evaluate," and "appraise" in American English, contributing to our understanding of their usage in different contexts.

In conclusion, a comprehensive methodology was employed for conducting a corpus-based study of the near-synonyms 'appraise,' 'assess,' and "evaluate." By utilizing the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and focusing on their frequency and distribution across genres, noun collocations, and semantic preferences, this study aimed to shed light on the detailed distinctions between these verbs. The selection of these near-synonyms was grounded in their similar core meanings and their CEFR level, making them intriguing subjects for linguistic analysis. This methodology, supported by relevant scholarly literature, set the stage for a detailed examination of these near-synonyms in authentic language use, ultimately benefiting English language teachers, course designers, and upper-intermediate English learners by providing insights into their usage in different contexts.



CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter presents a detailed analysis of the near-synonyms ‘appraise,’ ‘assess,’ and ‘evaluate’ using data from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). The analysis includes examining the frequency and distribution of these synonymous words across eight genres in the corpus, identifying common subject and object noun collocates, and exploring their semantic preferences. This investigation aims to clarify the subtle distinctions and overlaps among these terms, enhancing our understanding of their usage in contemporary American English.

4.1 Frequency and Distribution of ‘Appraise,’ ‘Assess,’ and ‘Evaluate’ Across Genres in COCA

To answer research question no.1 ‘How often do the near-synonyms ‘appraise,’ ‘assess,’ and ‘evaluate’ frequently occur across the COCA?’, the frequency and distribution analysis was conducted. As seen in Table 3, the verb ‘assess’ occurs with the greatest frequency (19,550 tokens) followed by the verb ‘evaluate’ which is roughly less than ‘assess’ by around 3,000 tokens (16,364 tokens). Surprisingly, ‘appraise’ rarely occurs, having the lowest number of 483 tokens in the COCA. The token numbers of ‘assess’ and ‘evaluate’ are higher than ‘appraise’ in every genre. These findings indicate that ‘assess’ and ‘evaluate’ are used more frequently than ‘appraise’.

Through the frequency and distribution analysis, all three near-synonyms are notably more prevalent in Academic texts, suggesting a strong association with academic discourse, and tend to be associated with other written sources¹ including Webpage, Magazine, Blogs, and Newspaper as they appear in the top ranks. However, ‘appraise’ shows a distinct preference for the Fiction genre compared to the other two verbs. All spoken sources including TV/Movie subtitles and Spoken genres appear in the bottom places of all three verbs.

¹ The finding provided here relates exclusively to the written mode and does not extend to the written language.

Table 4.1

Frequency and Distribution of 'Appraise,' 'Assess,' and 'Evaluate' Across Genres in COCA

Appraise			Assess			Evaluate		
Genre	Freq uency	Per Million	Genre	Freq uency	Per Million	Genre	Freq uency	Per Million
Academic texts	189	1.58	Academic texts	11034	92.11	Academic texts	8206	68.5
Fiction	71	0.6	Webpage	2175	17.5	Webpage	2289	18.42
Newspape r	53	0.44	Magazine	1731	13.73	Blogs	1893	14.72
Magazine	52	0.41	Blogs	1445	11.24	Magazine	1491	11.82
Blogs	39	0.3	Newspaper	1284	10.55	Newspaper	1288	10.58
Webpage	37	0.3	Spoken	1215	9.63	Spoken	724	5.74
TV/Movie subtitles	24	0.19	Fiction	369	3.12	TV/Movie subtitles	254	1.98
Spoken	18	0.14	TV/Movie subtitles	297	2.32	Fiction	219	1.85
Total	483	0.49	Total	19550	19.69	Total	16364	16.48

While the word frequency rankings for 'assess' and 'evaluate' are quite similar, 'appraise' exhibits a markedly different frequency ranking from the other two. This suggests that 'appraise' might have a weaker association with 'assess' and 'evaluate' despite their similar core meanings. The differences in distribution and frequency alone are insufficient for distinguishing between the target near-synonyms, as they do not provide contextual insights. Therefore, the researcher conducted a detailed collocation analysis examining subject and object noun collocates that frequently accompany these terms.

4.2 Common Subject and Object Noun Collocates of 'Appraise,' 'Assess,' and 'Evaluate' in COCA

The collocation analysis of the three verbs was then conducted to answer research question no.2, 'What are common subject–object noun collocates of 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate'?' Tables 4.2 and 4.3 present the thirty subject noun collocates

and object noun collocates respectively along with their frequencies and Mutual Information (MI) scores (≥ 3) following Schmitt's recommendation that MI scores of ≥ 3 indicate significant associations. It is important to note that while there are additional collocates shared by these three synonyms, those with an MI score lower than 3 were excluded. Therefore, the shared noun collocates are constrained to those presented in Tables 4.2 and 4.3.

4.2.1 Common Subject Noun Collocates of 'Appraise,' 'Assess,' and 'Evaluate' in COCA

Table 4.2 lists the subject noun collocates for 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate'. The only noun that appears as a shared collocate for all three verbs is 'criteria.' This shared collocate suggests that 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' are commonly used to judge or measure against specific standards or criteria. This finding indicates a slight similarity in their subject noun collocation.

Table 1.2

Common Subject Noun Collocates of 'Appraise,' 'Assess,' and 'Evaluate' in COCA

Appraise			Assess			Evaluate		
Noun collocates	Frequency	MI value	Noun collocates	Frequency	MI value	Noun collocates	Frequency	MI value
eye	47	3.41	study	1211	3.35	study	1316	3.65
expert	17	3.92	item	655	4.44	teacher	705	3.39
athlete	11	4.43	ability	572	3.84	test	424	3.26
criteria	8	4.36	measure	563	4.2	method	406	3.75
gaze	8	5.1	scale	464	4.39	criteria	298	5.08
female	6	3.54	test	461	3.2	ability	328	3.22
appraisal	6	6.65	method	451	3.72	researcher	188	3.1
evaluation	4	3.27	questionnaire	295	5.98	assessment	169	3.4
appraiser	4	8.33	instrument	278	4.37	procedure	165	3.28
glance	7	5.25	variable	239	4.02	framework	103	3.74
buyer	3	3.35	survey	207	3.22	objective	66	3.02
borrower	3	5.46	criteria	201	4.33	educator	66	3.05
stare	3	5.56	evaluation	136	3.69	respondent	66	3.17

stressor	3	6.38	subscale	100	5.84	parameter	61	3.73
jeweler	3	7.37	objective	89	3.27	guideline	58	3.03
practitioner	2	3.53	framework	88	3.33	questionnaire	57	3.79
lender	2	4.09	measurement	86	3.48	methodology	50	4.04
reviewer	2	4.35	regression	80	4.44	instructor	46	3.1
dealer	6	4.31	indicator	74	3.71	psychiatrist	35	3.78
knight	2	4.44	baseline	70	4.22	metrics	35	5.11
storyteller	1	4.6	methodology	63	4.2	rubric	35	5.76
midwife	1	4.71	benchmark	50	4.67	algorithm	33	3.33
realtor	1	4.78	inventory	48	3.45	baseline	31	3.23
meta-analysis	1	4.95	rubric	46	5.98	simulation	30	3.25
smirk	1	5.6	checklist	41	4.87	monitoring	28	3.17
comptroller	1	5.7	clinician	40	4.79	benchmark	25	3.86
revisionist	1	5.72	monitoring	39	3.46	reviewer	24	3.44
triplet	1	5.78	practitioner	38	3.1	checklist	20	4.01
bouncer	1	5.83	audit	31	3.35	t-test	19	5.76
evaluator	1	5.87	cohort	31	3.42	stakeholder	18	3.48

From the analysis, it is apparent that 'assess' and 'evaluate' share thirteen subject noun collocates, representing nearly half of the listed collocates. These shared collocates suggest a significant overlap in contexts where both verbs are applicable. The reasons behind this sharing could include the semantic similarity between 'assess' and 'evaluate' both involving the use of scientific tools and systemic methods to evaluate something as you can observe from the overlapping collocates like TEST, METHODOLOGY, QUESTIONNAIRE, etc.

4.2.2 Common Object Noun Collocates of 'Appraise,' 'Assess,' and 'Evaluate' in COCA

Table 4.3 illustrates that the object noun collocates for 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' include three common terms: 'performance,' 'quality,' and 'progress,' This indicates that these verbs are frequently used to evaluate various attributes across different contexts. 'Performance' refers to assessing how effectively something operates or performs. 'Quality' involves evaluating based on standards of excellence or sufficiency. 'Progress' entails evaluating advancements or developments over time.

These shared collocates, combined with their high frequency in academic settings, underscore the consistent use of 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' to critically analyze and measure aspects related to performance, quality, and progress in the academic context.

Table 4.3

Common Object Noun Collocates of 'Appraise,' 'Assess,' and 'Evaluate' in COCA

Appraise			Assess			Evaluate		
Noun collocates	Frequency	MI value	Noun collocates	Frequency	MI value	Noun collocates	Frequency	MI value
property	54	5.33	student	1623	3.24	performance	863	4.56
value	40	4.01	impact	868	4.66	effect	708	3.5
situation	38	4.13	risk	846	4.16	effectiveness	617	6.94
performance	18	3.48	effect	790	3.48	impact	418	3.79
item	17	3.85	situation	647	3.54	quality	416	3.59
collection	16	4.01	performance	603	3.86	intervention	285	4.22
antique	16	7.88	damage	600	4.93	outcome	258	3.9
collectibles	16	10.81	skill	510	3.78	progress	235	3.87
quality	14	3.2	quality	503	3.69	claim	185	3.07
stress	13	4.46	need	484	3.09	efficacy	172	6.23
progress	12	4.07	effectiveness	370	6.02	validity	133	5.13
learner	12	6.25	knowledge	368	3.29	extent	126	3.29
pupil	11	6.66	participant	332	3.65	potential	115	3.33
find	11	8.06	outcome	324	4.04	reliability	109	4.86
estate	9	4.04	extent	318	4.45	accuracy	102	4.4
diamond	9	5.03	perception	300	4.49	faculty	88	3.06
demand	7	3.12	learning	284	3.71	significance	78	3.64
mirror	6	3.59	progress	283	3.95	hypothesis	77	3.7
achievement	6	3.68	validity	239	5.79	merit	77	4.34
asset	5	3.31	attitude	229	3.43	integrity	48	3.01
jewelry	5	4.93	reliability	225	5.72	credibility	43	3.33
scholarship	4	3.89	penalty	216	4.51	applicant	42	3.7
lamp	4	4.49	status	207	3.07	usefulness	41	5.41
necklace	4	5.33	reading	181	3.09	consistency	39	3.64

coping	4	6.55	potential	162	3.65	attribute	37	3.18
significance	3	3.43	accuracy	152	4.8	appropriateness	36	6.31
portfolio	3	3.93	importance	145	3.12	adequacy	35	6.31
chin	3	4.02	achievement	143	3.58	feasibility	34	5.62
merit	3	4.15	exposure	142	3.51	collectibles	33	7.36
relevance	3	4.86	respondent	138	4.05	competence	31	3.58

Upon examination, 'assess' and 'evaluate' share eleven object noun collocates, indicating a significant overlap in their usage patterns compared to 'appraise'. The reason for this overlap may stem from their common involvement in scientific and objective evaluations aimed at determining the true nature of something. Terms such as VALIDITY, RELIABILITY, and ACCURACY highlight how both 'assess' and 'evaluate' are widely employed in contexts that require rigorous and impartial assessments. These verbs are employed to critically examine the quality of something, reflecting their systematic approach to evaluating factual or empirical aspects.

4.2.3 Common Subject and Object Noun Collocates of 'Appraise,' 'Assess,' and 'Evaluate' in COCA

As mentioned earlier, the collocation analysis showed that 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' share very few subject and object noun collocates. Specifically, there is only one subject noun collocate 'criteria' and three object noun collocates 'performance,' 'quality,' and 'progress' that overlap among these verbs. There are significantly overlapping features between 'assess' and 'evaluate' as summarized in Tables 4.4 and 4.5. 'Assess' and 'evaluate' have thirteen subject noun collocates and eleven object noun collocates. This limited overlap highlights the distinct usage patterns of these verbs, despite their similar meanings.

In analyzing both subject and object noun collocations, clear distinctions emerge among the verbs 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate'. 'Appraise' is predominantly associated with subjects involving people or expertise related to asset trading, underscoring its connection to individuals skilled in assessing the value of tangible assets. Correspondingly, its object noun collocates often pertain to valuable tangible items or assets, emphasizing its role in evaluating the worth or quality of specific objects. In contrast, 'assess' and 'evaluate' frequently co-occur with subject noun

collocates that are systemic or scientific in nature. This indicates their usage in evaluating processes, methodologies, or theoretical frameworks using structured, scientific tools, and empirical methods. Object noun collocates for both verbs reflect this systematic approach, involving items or qualities that require rigorous evaluation based on established criteria or methods.

These analyses illustrate how 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' are deployed in distinct contexts based on their subject and object noun collocates. 'Appraise' focuses on the appraisal of tangible assets and the expertise involved, while 'assess' and 'evaluate' are utilized in broader scientific or methodical assessments, each contributing unique nuances to their respective roles in evaluation and appraisal practices.

Table 4.4

Shared Common Subject Noun Collocates Among 'Appraise,' 'Assess,' and 'Evaluate'

Appraise, Assess, Evaluate	criteria
Appraise, Assess	criteria, evaluation, practitioner, study
Appraise, Evaluate	criteria
Assess, Evaluate	ability, baseline, benchmark, checklist, criteria, framework, method, methodology, monitoring, questionnaire, rubric, study, test

Table 4.5

Shared Common Object Noun Collocates Among 'Appraise,' 'Assess,' and 'Evaluate'

Appraise, Assess, Evaluate	performance, progress, quality
Appraise, Assess	achievement, performance, progress, quality, situation
Appraise, Evaluate	merit, performance, progress, quality
Assess, Evaluate	accuracy, effect, effectiveness, impact, outcome, performance, potential, progress, quality, reliability, validity

Further analysis is necessary to depict the exact differences in meaning between these verbs in various contexts. Therefore, a semantic preference analysis is needed to categorize the top thirty subject and object collocates of each word according to their meaning and context in the corpus.

4.3 Semantic Preferences of ‘Appraise,’ ‘Assess,’ and ‘Evaluate’

In Tables 4.6 to 4.11, the top thirty subject and object noun collocates of 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' were categorized according to their semantic preferences to answer research question no.3, ‘What are the semantic preferences of the near-synonyms ‘appraise,’ ‘assess,’ and ‘evaluate’?’. This grouping helps to illustrate how these verbs are commonly used with specific domains or contexts, as demonstrated in the following sections.

Additionally, the MISCELLANEOUS semantic preferences did not prominently feature in the analysis due to their noun collocates being ambiguous or less common semantic affiliations across semantic preferences in the same analysis, lacking a cohesive concentration that would indicate a strong thematic association. Similarly, when comparing these collocates across the analyses of the three near-synonyms (appraise, assess, and evaluate), they did not show a significant presence or distinct pattern that would suggest a consistent semantic preference for any one of the verbs. Therefore, the MISCELLANEOUS semantic preference did not contribute substantially to the overall findings of the semantic preference analysis.

4.3.1 Semantic Preferences of ‘Appraise,’ ‘Assess,’ and ‘Evaluate’ Through Subject Noun Collocations

The findings reveal significant patterns and insights based on an analysis of the subject noun collocates associated with 'appraise'. The subject noun collocates of ‘appraise’ were divided into five semantic preferences as demonstrated in Table 4.6. The largest semantic preference, PEOPLE AND OCCUPATION, contains twenty-one collocates, indicating that 'appraise' is commonly used in contexts involving a variety of roles and professions, mainly roles involving asset appraisal, including appraiser, expert, and dealer for instance (as shown in Example 1). The following semantic preference is PHYSICAL ACTION, which includes collocates like eye, gaze, glance, smirk, and stare, suggesting that 'appraise' involves physical acts of observation or assessment (as shown in Example 2). The last three semantic preferences contain a minimal number of subject noun collocates, which are five in total, suggesting a weak association with the semantic preferences: PROCESS OF MAKING JUDGMENT, TOOLS, and RESEARCH.

- (1) More than one *appraiser* may appraise the property
 a blindfolded *expert* can appraise the worth of unseen paintings
 you contact a reputable *dealer* to appraise and help you sell items
- (2) his *eyes* appraising her attire
 Her *gaze* appraised Naomi's improvised outfit
 I did not miss her *glance* appraising me

Table 4.6

Semantic Preference of 'Appraise' Through Subject Noun Collocates

Semantic preference	Noun collocates
1 PEOPLE AND OCCUPATION	appraiser, athlete, borrower, bouncer, buyer, comptroller, dealer, evaluator, expert, female, jeweler, knight, lender, midwife, practitioner, realtor, reviewer, revisionist, storyteller, stressor, triplet
2 PHYSICAL ACTION	eye, gaze, glance, smirk, stare
3 PROCESS OF MAKING JUDGMENT	appraisal, evaluation
4 TOOLS	criteria
5 RESEARCH	meta-analysis

Table 4.7 categorizes the subject noun collocates associated with 'assess' into six distinct semantic preferences. The predominant semantic preference, RESEARCH, comprises eleven collocates, highlighting 'assess' frequent involvement with research-related aspects such as methodology, instruments, and variables. This underscores its significant role in research contexts where thorough evaluation and methodical approaches are essential (as demonstrated in Example 3). The secondary semantic preference, TOOLS, includes seven collocates like baseline, benchmark, and criteria, emphasizing the systematic methods used in assessment, often employing standardized measures and benchmarks (as illustrated in Example 4). Together with the primary semantic preference, this indicates that 'assess' necessitates evaluation using specific tools or established standards. Additionally, the PEOPLE AND OCCUPATION

semantic preference, which features four collocates such as clinician, audit, and practitioner, suggests that 'assess' is also crucial in professional settings where expertise and judgment play a pivotal role (as exemplified in Example 5), particularly evident in medical contexts where 'clinician' is the most frequent collocate in this semantic preference. The MISCELLANEOUS category contains collocates characterized by ambiguous or less common semantic affiliations to other common subject noun collocates.

(3) there is a considerable need for *instruments* that will assess the developing environmental attitudes

The *survey* data will help assess the learning

the research *objective* is to assess the extent

(4) Such a profile would also provide excellent *baseline* data to assess how the characteristics

It should include (a) periodic *benchmarks* to assess progress

Develop a *rubric* that assesses both the student performance

(5) *Clinicians* should therefore assess cardiovascular

The *audit* could not assess the timeliness for callbacks

Mental health *practitioners* should routinely assess for sight and hearing difficulties

Table 4.7

Semantic Preference of 'Assess' Through Subject Noun Collocates

	Semantic preference	Noun collocates
1	RESEARCH	framework, instrument, method, methodology, objective, questionnaire, scale, subscale, survey, test, variable

2	TOOLS	baseline, benchmark, checklist, criteria, indicator, measure, rubric
3	PEOPLE AND OCCUPATION	audit, clinician, cohort, practitioner
4	PROCESS OF MAKING JUDGMENT	evaluation, measurement
5	ACADEMIC	study
6	MISCELLANEOUS	ability, inventory, item, monitoring, regression

Based on the examination of subject noun collocates associated with the verb 'evaluate' as presented in Table 4.8, these collocates were categorized into six semantic preferences. The primary semantic preference, RESEARCH, encompasses twelve collocates, indicating that 'evaluate' is frequently linked with fundamental aspects of research, such as methodology, questionnaire design, and test parameters. This suggests that 'evaluate' plays a significant role in research contexts where rigorous evaluation and adherence to methodological standards are critical (as demonstrated in Example 6). The secondary semantic preference, TOOLS, includes nine collocates like algorithm, baseline, and checklist, emphasizing the structured and systematic approach inherent in assessment practices, (as shown in Example 7). Together, these semantic preferences highlight the need for 'evaluate' to employ standardized tools and established methods for precise evaluation. Furthermore, the ACADEMIC semantic preference, which features four collocates such as instructor and educator, implies that 'evaluate' is also commonly used in educational environments to evaluate students and educational processes (as exemplified in Example 8). This semantic preference underscores the 'evaluate' role in assessing academic performance and learning outcomes. Overall, the analysis reveals the versatile use of 'evaluate' across research, educational, and professional settings (PEOPLE AND OCCUPATION semantic preference), emphasizing its diverse applications and the nuanced contexts in which it is employed. In the MISCELLANEOUS category, collocates demonstrate irregular semantic patterns that diverge from other established thematic groupings.

(6) This *test* evaluated the students' ability

Applications of a policy *framework* to evaluate and promote large-scale

change

Future *researchers* should evaluate peer mentorship programs

(7) these *guidelines* evaluate " expertise " will facilitate the extent

The 118-item *checklist* allows parents to evaluate the behavior of their children

The second *algorithm* evaluates how crowded atoms are

(8) *teachers* are also evaluating textbooks, creating lesson plans and meeting *educators* will evaluate with a rating scale

the *instructor* evaluated their work, providing feedback.

Table 4.8

Semantic Preference of 'Evaluate' Through Subject Noun Collocates

Semantic preference	Noun collocates
1 RESEARCH	methodology, questionnaire, parameter, test, researcher, method, respondent, t-test, objective, framework, procedure, study
2 TOOLS	algorithm, baseline, benchmark, checklist, criteria, guideline, indicator, metrics, rubric
3 ACADEMIC	instructor, teacher, educator
4 PEOPLE AND OCCUPATION	reviewer, psychiatrist
5 PROCESS OF MAKING JUDGMENT	assessment
6 MISCELLANEOUS	monitoring, ability, simulation

Based on the analysis of subject noun collocates associated with 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate,' three predominant semantic preferences emerge: TOOLS, PROCESS OF MAKING JUDGMENT, and PEOPLE AND OCCUPATION. The TOOLS semantic preference indicates that all three verbs involve the use of tools in their evaluation processes. However, 'assess' and 'evaluate' exhibit a higher number of collocates within this semantic preference and share several common tools-related terms, suggesting a stronger reliance on structured methodologies and instruments

compared to 'appraise,' In contrast, 'appraise' shows limited association with tools, indicating it may not primarily utilize specific tools in its evaluation processes. The PROCESS OF MAKING JUDGMENT semantic preference, while inherently tied to all three verbs as they involve making assessments and judgments by definition, does not yield distinct insights beyond confirming their evaluative nature. The PEOPLE AND OCCUPATION semantic preference suggests that these verbs are frequently used in professional contexts, albeit in different fields. 'Assess' and 'evaluate' are notably associated with medical contexts, as indicated by collocates like clinician and psychiatrist. In contrast, 'appraise' is commonly employed in contexts related to asset valuation and appraisal, as suggested by collocates such as appraiser and realtor, which are characteristic of industries involving property assessment. These findings underscore the nuanced distinctions in how 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' are employed based on their semantic preferences with subject noun collocates, highlighting their varied applications across professional domains and their differing levels of reliance on tools in the evaluation process.

Furthermore, the researcher's assumption, that these verbs may share close semantic relationships and are commonly used in academic and professional settings due to their high alignment in CEFR levels according to Xiao and McEnery (2006), is supported by the analysis. The verbs show high frequency in academic text genres during distribution and frequency analysis and share the PEOPLE AND OCCUPATION semantic preference, indicating their common usage across professional fields.

However, the study also reveals that 'appraise' demonstrates a weaker relationship compared to 'assess' and 'evaluate' because of their distinct distribution and frequency. Significantly, 'appraise' shares very few collocates and semantic preferences with the other two verbs, suggesting distinct patterns in usage and meaning. To delve deeper into these differences, an analysis of semantic preferences of 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' through object noun collocations was conducted to provide more detailed insights.

4.3.2 Semantic Preferences of ‘Appraise,’ ‘Assess,’ and ‘Evaluate’ Through Object Noun Collocations

As illustrated in Table 4.9, the object noun collocates of ‘appraise’ are categorized into six semantic preferences. The most prevalent semantic preferences with which ‘appraise’ frequently co-occurs are VALUABLES, CHARACTER, and ACADEMIC. The majority of object noun collocates are linked to VALUABLES, indicating that ‘appraise’ is often used to evaluate objects considered valuable, either monetarily or sentimentally, such as property, estate, diamond, jewelry, and antique (as shown in Example 10). The object noun collocates categorized under CHARACTER suggest that ‘appraise’ involves evaluating the character or quality of something, primarily abstract qualities (as shown in Example 11). Additionally, the object noun collocates related to ACADEMIC suggest that ‘appraise’ is also used to evaluate students and academic matters (as given in Example 12). Object noun collocates allocated to the MISCELLANEOUS semantic preference exhibit varied semantic profiles that necessitate a separate classification due to their less common semantic affiliations in this analysis.

(9) The *property* was appraised at \$1.6 million and he sold it to us for \$800,000.

Selling old *jewelry* requires time and effort, including getting your *items* appraised.

then have one of your *collectibles* appraised for an extra \$5.

(10) himself lift the glass and inspect the Scotch as if appraising its *value*.

To help users appraise the *quality* of online health information

If you think an image should be appraised for its *significance*

(11) Each evaluation entry pertaining to appraising the *learner*

This author is not qualified to appraise the new *scholarship*

How should *portfolios* be appraised

Table 4.92*Semantic Preference of 'Appraise' Through Object Noun Collocates*

Semantic preference	Noun collocates
1 VALUABLES	antique, asset, collectibles, collection, diamond, estate, item, jewelry, lamp, mirror, necklace, property
2 CHARACTER	merit, quality, relevance, significance, value
3 ACADEMIC	learner, portfolio, pupil, scholarship
4 SITUATIONAL DYNAMICS	performance, situation, progress
5 RESULT	achievement, find
6 Miscellaneous	chin, coping, demand, stress

As shown in Table 4.10, the object noun collocates of 'assess' are divided into seven semantic preferences. The most common semantic preferences that 'assess' is associated with are CHARACTER, RESULT, and SITUATIONAL DYNAMICS. The majority of object noun collocates are associated with CHARACTER, implying that 'assess' entails evaluating attributes such as effectiveness, quality, importance, etc. (as shown in Example 13). The object noun collocates categorized under RESULT indicate that 'assess' entails evaluating the outcomes or impacts of actions, such as effect, outcome, and impact (as shown in Example 14). The object noun collocates associated with SITUATIONAL DYNAMICS imply that 'assess' is also used to evaluate dynamic conditions and changes over time, such as situation, status, performance, and progress (as shown in Example 15). The MISCELLANEOUS semantic preference includes object noun collocates whose semantic affiliations are less typical across contexts.

- (12) To assess their *effectiveness* in preserving structural information undertaken to assess the *validity* of the measuring instrument but to assess the *reliability* of these items for the current study only
- (13) which will allow us to assess *effects* of actor sex
We assessed 2 *outcome* variables separately in our regression models.
NASA is still assessing *impacts* as a result of the shutdown
- (14) I was raised to think analytically and assess *situations* before panicking

Performance was assessed by the following questions
create a new spreadsheet to use for assessing *progress* during the
lesson

Table 4.10

Semantic Preference of 'Assess' Through Object Noun Collocates

	Semantic preference	Noun collocates
1	CHARACTER	effectiveness, quality, importance, validity, reliability, accuracy, potential
2	RESULT	effect, outcome, impact, damage, achievement
3	SITUATIONAL DYNAMICS	situation, status, performance, progress
4	ACADEMIC	knowledge, learning, student
5	RESEARCH	respondent, participant
6	OPINION	perception, attitude
7	MISCELLANEOUS	exposure, extent, need, penalty, reading, risk, skill

Table 4.11 shows the common object noun collocates associated with the verb 'evaluate' divided into seven semantic preferences and the most dominant semantic preference is CHARACTER followed by RESULT and RESEARCH. A large number of the nouns fall under the main semantic preference, CHARACTER, which has sixteen words. This suggests that these verbs are closely related to the act of evaluating various characteristics, qualities, and attributes of subjects, emphasizing its significance in determining aspects such as accuracy, reliability, and validity (as shown in Example 16). The following semantic preference is RESULT, with three words: 'effect', 'impact', and 'outcome,' This indicates that 'evaluate' is frequently used to determine the results or consequences of actions or events (as shown in Example 17). Another dominant semantic preference is RESEARCH containing three words: 'applicant,' 'claim,' and 'hypothesis,' This suggests a significant association of these verbs with academic and research contexts, where they are used to evaluate research claims, hypotheses, and applicants for example (as shown in Example 18). Since 'extent' and 'intervention' do

not associate with the concept of the main semantic preference categories, they were grouped into MISCELLANEOUS.

- (15) Evaluating the *effectiveness* of NCAA concussion education guidelines
The first challenge is how to evaluate the *validity* of the model
That is, they evaluated *reliability* indices of the QABF among persons
- (16) The present work was aimed to evaluate *effects* of *Ferula gummosa* oleo-resin
A new method to evaluate the *impact* of therapies expectation
Lindblom stresses the need to evaluate *outcomes*
- (17) may be involved in evaluating an *applicant*
We evaluated each *claim* on a case-by-case basis
to evaluate the *hypotheses* that quality of relationships

Table 4.11

Semantic Preference of 'Evaluate' Through Object Noun Collocates

Semantic preference	Noun collocates
1 CHARACTER	accuracy, adequacy, appropriateness, attribute, consistency, credibility, effectiveness, efficacy, feasibility, integrity, merit, potential, quality, reliability, significance, usefulness, validity
2 RESULT	effect, impact, outcome
3 RESEARCH	applicant, claim, hypothesis
4 SITUATIONAL DYNAMICS	competence, performance, progress
5 ACADEMIC	faculty
6 VALUABLES	collectibles
7 MISCELLANEOUS	extent, intervention

The analysis of the semantic preferences of 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' through object noun collocates reveals four common semantic preferences: CHARACTER, ACADEMIC, SITUATIONAL DYNAMICS, and RESULT. The CHARACTER semantic preference indicates that these near-synonyms are employed

to assess the character or quality of things. The ACADEMIC semantic preference, supported by their high frequency in academic text genres, confirms that all three near-synonyms are prominently utilized in academic contexts, especially 'assess' and 'evaluate'. The SITUATIONAL DYNAMICS semantic preference suggests that these verbs are frequently used to evaluate dynamic situations such as competence, progress, and performance. The RESULT semantic preference implies that these verbs are often used to evaluate the outcomes or consequences of specific actions or events.

Aligning with the semantic preferences analysis of 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' through subject noun collocations, 'appraise' is distinctively associated with asset valuation, as evidenced by its collocation with object nouns in the VALUABLE semantic preference, which consists of twelve collocates. In contrast, 'assess' and 'evaluate' exhibit a stronger association with academic and research contexts than 'appraise,' Besides the ACADEMIC semantic preference, there is another significant overlapping semantic preference of 'RESEARCH' between 'assess' and 'evaluate' which suggests these two verbs are more strongly associated with research methodology, highlighting their use in academic and research contexts more than 'appraise,'

Despite their five overlapping categories of object noun collocates, an analysis of the semantic preferences of the verbs 'assess' and 'evaluate' reveals notable distinctions. The distribution of object noun collocates for 'assess' is more evenly spread across different groups, indicating that 'assess' is used to evaluate a broader and more diverse range of things. This balanced distribution suggests its versatility and general applicability in various contexts. In contrast, 'evaluate' shows a significant concentration of object noun collocates under the CHARACTER category, with seventeen collocates constituting more than half of its total list. This indicates that 'evaluate' is predominantly used to judge the character, quality, or attributes, reflecting a more specific use. These distinctions suggest that while 'assess' tends to be used for evaluating a wider range of things, 'evaluate' is primarily used to appraise the character or qualities, guiding English learners and professionals in choosing the appropriate verb depending on the context.

The semantic preference analysis concludes that, while 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' share core meanings related to evaluation, they have distinct uses. That is,

'appraise' is specifically linked to asset valuation, whereas 'assess' and 'evaluate' are more common in academic and research contexts. Notably, 'evaluate' is used more frequently to judge character or qualities, while 'assess' covers a broader range of objects. These nuanced differences highlight the importance of selecting the appropriate term based on the specific context and purpose of the evaluation.



CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides a summary of the key findings from the corpus-based study on the near-synonyms 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate.' The conclusions drawn from the analysis of the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) data are presented, along with a discussion of the significance of this study's findings and their potential implications on language teaching and learning. The chapter concludes with limitations and recommendations for future research that may benefit the ELT field and upper-intermediate learners in general.

5.1 Summary of the Findings

This study examined the three near-synonymous verbs, 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' focusing on their differences regarding frequency and distribution across genres, subject and object noun collocations, and semantic preferences. Using data from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), this research delves deeper than dictionary definitions to uncover subtle nuances among these verbs.

The frequency and distribution analysis was conducted to answer research question no.1 'How often do the near-synonyms 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' frequently occur across the COCA?'. It reveals that 'assess' occurs most frequently (19,550 tokens), followed by 'evaluate' with a relative frequency (16,364 tokens), and then 'appraise' with the lowest frequency (483 tokens). The token counts for 'assess' and 'evaluate' are consistently higher than for 'appraise' across all genres, indicating 'assess' and 'evaluate' are used more broadly and frequently than 'appraise,' The significantly lower token count for 'appraise' suggests its use is limited to specific contexts. Notably, all three near-synonyms show a significant association with academic texts compared to other genres. These verbs are predominantly found in written genres such as academic texts, newspapers, magazines, blogs, webpages, and fiction, while they appear less frequently in spoken language genres like TV/movie subtitles and spoken discourse. While the frequency rankings for 'assess' and 'evaluate' are quite similar, 'appraise' displays a markedly different frequency ranking from the

other two, suggesting a weaker association with 'assess' and 'evaluate' despite their similar core meanings.

The differences in distribution and frequency do not provide deeper contexts for a better understanding of these terms' usage in terms of semantics and pragmatics. Therefore, collocation analysis was conducted to answer research question no.2, 'What are common subject-object noun collocates of 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate'?' by focusing on frequently co-occurring subject and object noun collocates. The collocation analysis of 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' reveals notable distinctions in their usage patterns. 'Appraise' is predominantly associated with subjects involving people or expertise related to asset trading, underscoring its connection to individuals skilled in assessing the value of tangible assets. Correspondingly, its object noun collocates often pertain to valuable tangible items or assets, emphasizing its role in evaluating the worth or quality of specific objects. In contrast, 'assess' and 'evaluate' frequently co-occur with subject noun collocates that are systemic or scientific in nature. This indicates their usage in evaluating processes, methodologies, or theoretical frameworks using structured, scientific tools and empirical methods. Object noun collocates for both verbs reflect this systematic approach, involving items or qualities that require rigorous evaluation based on established criteria or methods. These analyses illustrate how 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' are deployed in distinct contexts based on their subject and object noun collocates. 'Appraise' focuses on the appraisal of tangible assets and the expertise involved, while 'assess' and 'evaluate' are utilized in broader scientific or methodical assessments, each contributing unique nuances to their respective roles in evaluation and appraisal practices.

Lastly, the semantic preference analysis was conducted to answer the research question no.3, 'What are the semantic preferences of the near-synonyms 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate'?. The examination reveals three main semantic preferences: TOOLS, PROCESS OF MAKING JUDGMENT, and PEOPLE AND OCCUPATION, were related to the three verbs studied. The TOOLS semantic preference suggests that all three verbs involve tools in their evaluation processes. However, 'assess' and 'evaluate' exhibit a higher number of collocates within this semantic preference and share several common tools-related terms, indicating a stronger reliance on structured methodologies compared to 'appraise,' which shows limited association with tools. The

PROCESS OF MAKING JUDGMENT semantic preference, while inherent to all three verbs due to their evaluative nature, does not provide distinct insights beyond confirming this evaluative aspect. The PEOPLE AND OCCUPATION semantic preference indicates that these verbs are frequently used in professional contexts, albeit in different fields. 'Assess' and 'evaluate' are notably associated with medical and academic contexts as they share RESEARCH semantic preferences with a great number of subject collocates, while 'appraise' is commonly used in asset valuation and appraisal contexts. A small number of overlapping collocates and semantic preferences, 'appraise' demonstrates a weaker relationship compared to 'assess' and 'evaluate' sharing fewer collocates and semantic preferences, suggesting distinct patterns in usage and meaning.

The analysis of semantic preferences through object noun collocates reveals four common semantic preferences: CHARACTER, ACADEMIC, SITUATIONAL DYNAMICS, and RESULT. The CHARACTER semantic preference indicates these near-synonyms assess the character or quality of things. The ACADEMIC semantic preference, supported by high frequency in academic texts genre, confirms their prominent use in academic contexts, especially for 'assess' and 'evaluate'. The SITUATIONAL DYNAMICS semantic preference suggests these verbs evaluate dynamic situations such as progress and performance, while the RESULT semantic preference implies they are used to evaluate outcomes or consequences of specific actions. Aligning with the subject noun collocation analysis, 'appraise' is distinctively associated with asset valuation, as shown by its collocation with object nouns in the VALUABLE semantic preference. In contrast, 'assess' and 'evaluate' are more strongly associated with academic and research contexts, supported by the overlapping RESEARCH semantic preference. Thus, while all three near-synonyms share similar core meanings, 'appraise' is primarily associated with assessing the value of tangible assets and the expertise involved in asset valuation. In contrast, 'assess' and 'evaluate' are commonly used in scientific or academic contexts often involving structured and empirical approaches. However, one key distinction is that 'evaluate' frequently assesses the character or qualities of things, as evidenced by more than half of its object noun collocates falling under the category of 'CHARACTER,' In contrast, 'assess' has only seven object noun collocates categorized under 'CHARACTER,'

5.2 Discussion

The collocation analysis of 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' reveals distinct patterns in their usage despite their shared meanings. This analysis underscores their nuanced differences, particularly in how they are paired with subject and object nouns. 'Appraise' shows minimal overlap with 'assess' and 'evaluate' in terms of noun collocates such as subject noun 'criteria' and object nouns like 'performance,' 'quality,' and 'progress.' 'Assess' and 'evaluate' exhibit significantly more shared collocates.

The semantic preference analysis through subject noun collocates further highlights their distinctions. All three verbs involve the use of tools in evaluation processes, yet 'assess' and 'evaluate' show a greater number of collocates related to structured methodologies and instruments compared to 'appraise,' which demonstrates limited association with tools. This implies that 'appraise' may not heavily rely on specific instruments in its evaluation processes. The analysis through subject noun collocates also reveals distinct professional contexts associated with each verb. 'Assess' and 'evaluate' are notably linked to medical contexts, reflected in collocates such as 'clinician' and 'psychiatrist.' In contrast, 'appraise' is predominantly used in industries related to asset valuation and appraisal, such as real estate, as indicated by terms like 'appraiser' and 'realtor.' Regarding the semantic preferences through object noun collocates, they are commonly used to evaluate the character or quality of things, with strong associations in academic contexts, particularly for 'assess' and 'evaluate.' These findings align with Xiao and McEnery's observation (2006) that vocabulary with higher CEFR levels is prevalent in academic and professional settings. Notably, 'evaluate' is prominently used to judge character or qualities, distinguishing it from 'assess' in terms of semantic usage.

Therefore, 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' are not interchangeable. 'Appraise' is distinct in its usage compared to 'assess' and 'evaluate.' While 'assess' and 'evaluate' share more subject and object noun collocates and semantic preferences, 'evaluate' is predominantly used to assess the character or qualities of things. Based on these findings, the research concludes that 'appraise' occupies a unique niche, whereas 'assess' and 'evaluate' exhibit more similarities in certain contexts but differ significantly in their application to objects in scientific, research, and academic settings. These findings align with previous studies such as Aroonmanakun (2015), Muangmeeka and Monthon

(2023), and Al-Sayyed et al. (2019) that despite being recognized as near-synonyms, these words cannot always be completely interchangeable. The distinctions among 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' highlighted in this study underscore the importance for English language teachers, students, and course designers to understand these differences and use these terms appropriately based on their pragmatic and semantic differences.

5.3 Conclusion

The differences among three near-synonymous verbs, 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' should be acknowledged and integrated into English language teaching practices, learning, and course development to address the subtle differences of near-synonyms effectively. Furthermore, data from corpora can provide additional details not found in dictionaries. This study demonstrates that corpora can be beneficial, serving as a valuable resource for language teaching and learning for English language teachers, course designers, and upper-intermediate learners in general.

5.4 Implications

This study explores the nuanced distinctions among the near-synonymous verbs 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' focusing on their usage patterns across various genres, collocation preferences, and semantic nuances. By analyzing data from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), this research goes beyond dictionary definitions to uncover how these verbs are employed in different linguistic contexts. Understanding these distinctions is crucial for English language educators, upper-intermediate students, and course designers alike, as it enhances language proficiency and facilitates more precise communication in academic and professional settings.

English language teachers can use this study to teach intermediate to upper-intermediate students how 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' differ in usage across genres. They should focus on explaining that 'assess' and 'evaluate' are more commonly used in academic writing and professional contexts, while 'appraise' is more specialized, and typically used in asset evaluation. Teachers can design exercises to help these groups of students practice using these verbs appropriately in different contexts by

giving a research writing exercise focusing on the use of synonymous words using the context from corpora to enhance their language proficiency and accuracy.

Upper-intermediate students can improve their vocabulary and language skills by understanding the specific contexts in which 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' are used. They should practice using these verbs in writing and speaking activities to grasp their nuanced meanings and applications. By studying the collocates and semantic preferences identified in the study, students can develop a deeper understanding of how to express evaluations effectively in both academic and professional settings.

Course designers can integrate the findings into curriculum planning to create meaningful learning experiences. They should design activities that emphasize the practical usage of 'appraise,' 'assess,' and 'evaluate' across different genres and contexts. By providing authentic examples and tasks aligned with real-world language use, course designers can enhance students' ability to communicate clearly and confidently in academic and professional environments.

Overall, incorporating the findings of this study into practice can lead to more effective English language learning and teaching, benefiting students' language proficiency and communication skills.

5.5 Recommendations

Throughout the analysis, we uncovered increasingly distinct differences among the target near-synonyms. This research encourages future studies to incorporate a variety of analytical approaches to better distinguish between these near-synonyms. Future research should broaden its scope by including additional corpora, such as the British National Corpus (BNC), to investigate dialectal variations. This expanded approach could entail examining texts related to self-collected student evaluations and English Language Teaching (ELT) materials, potentially offering insights into their application in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Given that the present study does not separately analyze subject-object noun collocates, future studies can improve on this aspect. Furthermore, future studies could enhance our understanding of the semantic preferences of these synonymous verbs by exploring their adverb collocates, which would be beneficial for general English speakers.

5.6 Limitations

One limitation of the current study is its reliance on a single corpus, the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), which may constrain the generalizability of the findings. By exclusively examining this corpus and its eight genres, the study may not fully capture the diverse spectrum of language usage and variations across different contexts. Additionally, the study's exploration which was limited to 200 lines or fewer in nodes with minimal content further restricts the depth of analysis in those specific areas. These factors collectively suggest that the findings should be interpreted within the context of these limitations.



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