



**A CORPUS-BASED STUDY OF ENGLISH SYNONYMS:
CALM, PEACEFUL, SOOTHING**

BY

BUTSAYAMAS SAELOR

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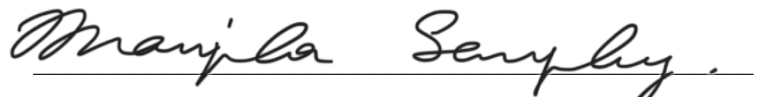
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ABSTRACT

This study explores the semantic similarities and differences among the English adjectives *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing* through a corpus-based analysis. The research draws on data from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and definitions from two widely used online learner dictionaries: the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English and the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary. The aim is to gain a clearer understanding of how these near-synonyms differ in meaning and usage despite sharing a core sense related to tranquility. The analysis begins with a comparison of dictionary definitions and usage notes to establish the basic semantic properties of each adjective. It then examines their noun and adverb collocations, as found in COCA, to uncover patterns of use in authentic language. The results show that *calm* is frequently associated with emotional states and behavior, *peaceful* tends to describe external settings or the absence of conflict, and *soothing* is often linked to effects that provide comfort or relief. These findings illustrate how the three adjectives function differently in context and highlight the importance of collocational behavior in distinguishing near-synonymous words. This research offers valuable insights into the nature of synonymy in English and provides practical implications for vocabulary learning, language teaching, and lexicography.

Keywords: synonymy, corpus linguistics, collocation, semantic distinction, learner dictionaries, COCA



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The English language is renowned for its vast lexicon, with synonyms playing a crucial role in offering speakers a range of choices for expressing similar concepts. While synonyms often overlap in meaning, subtle differences in their usage can significantly affect communication. This is particularly true for adjectives, which have the power to modify nouns and shape perceptions of people, places, or situations (Biber, Conrad, & Reppen, 2009; Aarts & McMahon, 2021). Understanding these nuances is vital for various domains such as language teaching, translation, and linguistic research.

Adjectives like *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing* are often treated as near-synonyms because they describe similar qualities of tranquility or serenity. However, their meanings, collocations, and contextual appropriateness can vary significantly. Despite being frequently used in similar contexts, these adjectives are not always interchangeable. For instance, while *calm* may describe an absence of agitation, *peaceful* often connotes a deeper or more enduring state of tranquility, and *soothing* tends to suggest a quality that brings comfort or relief. These distinctions, though subtle, are important for precise communication.

The study of synonymy in linguistics has evolved from traditional semantic theories, which largely relied on theoretical or dictionary definitions, to more empirical, corpus-based approaches that examine actual language use in context. Corpus linguistics has become a powerful tool for investigating word meaning and usage patterns. By analyzing large collections of real-world texts, corpus studies reveal how words function in authentic communication, providing insights into their frequency, co-occurrence, and collocational behavior (McEnery & Hardie, 2012). For example, a corpus-based approach can reveal the syntactic structures or noun collocations that commonly accompany *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing*, shedding light on the precise contexts in which these adjectives are used.

As modern linguistic research continues to focus on the dynamic, context-driven nature of meaning, examining synonyms through a corpus-based lens offers a

deeper understanding of how seemingly interchangeable words might differ in their real-world usage. The motivation for this study, therefore, lies in the desire to explore how *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing* are used across different genres and contexts. By combining traditional lexicographic approaches with corpus data, this study aims to clarify the specific roles these adjectives play in communication and the ways in which their meanings are shaped by context.

Recent corpus studies have demonstrated how corpus-based methods can help identify not just the literal meaning of words, but also the social, cultural, and emotional undertones they carry (O’Keeffe, McCarthy, & Carter, 2007). In this study, *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing* are analyzed not only through their dictionary definitions but also through their use in natural language, providing a comprehensive view of how these adjectives contribute to the richness and subtlety of the English lexicon.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To examine the dictionary definitions of *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing* in order to identify their similarities and differences.
2. To investigate the common noun collocations of each adjective using corpus data.
3. To investigate the common adverb collocations of each adjective using corpus data.

1.3 Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the similarities and differences in the dictionary definitions of *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing*?
2. What are the common noun collocations of the adjectives *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing*?
3. What are the common adverb collocations of the adjectives *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing*?

1.4 Definition of Key Terms

1.4.1 Synonyms

Synonyms are words that have the same or nearly the same meaning but may vary in nuance, tone, or context. In this study, *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing* are treated as near-synonyms, with attention paid to their semantic distinctions (Cruse, 2000).

1.4.2 Adjectives

Adjectives are words that describe or modify nouns, providing information about qualities or attributes. This study focuses on adjectives used to describe emotional, environmental, or sensory states (Quirk et al., 1985).

1.4.3 Collocations

Collocations refer to combinations of words that frequently occur together in natural language use. These may be grammatical (e.g., deep sleep) or lexical (e.g., strong coffee). This study focuses on typical noun and adverb collocations of the adjectives *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing* (Firth, 1957; Sinclair, 1991).

1.4.4 Corpus-Based Study

A corpus-based study involves the analysis of authentic language data drawn from a corpus (a large collection of texts) to examine how language is used in context. This method is employed in the present study to explore the usage patterns of the target adjectives (McEnery & Hardie, 2012).

1.4.5 Contextual Usage

Contextual usage refers to the way in which words are used in specific linguistic and situational contexts. Analyzing contextual usage helps to clarify the precise meanings and connotations of the target adjectives (Biber et al., 1999).

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study adopts a corpus-based approach to analyze the adjectives *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing*, using a combination of dictionary definitions and corpus data. The primary sources of data for this research include the Longman Dictionary of

Contemporary English (LDOCE) and the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD), which will be used to compare the lexical descriptions of the target words. Additionally, the study will utilize the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) as the main corpus for analyzing the usage of these words. COCA is one of the most comprehensive and widely used corpora, encompassing over one billion words from various genres, including spoken language, fiction, magazines, newspapers, and academic texts (Davies, 2008). The focus of this research is on contemporary American English, although the findings may have implications for British English, they are not the primary emphasis. Moreover, this study does not delve into the etymology or historical evolution of the words but concentrates on their current usage patterns in real-world contexts.

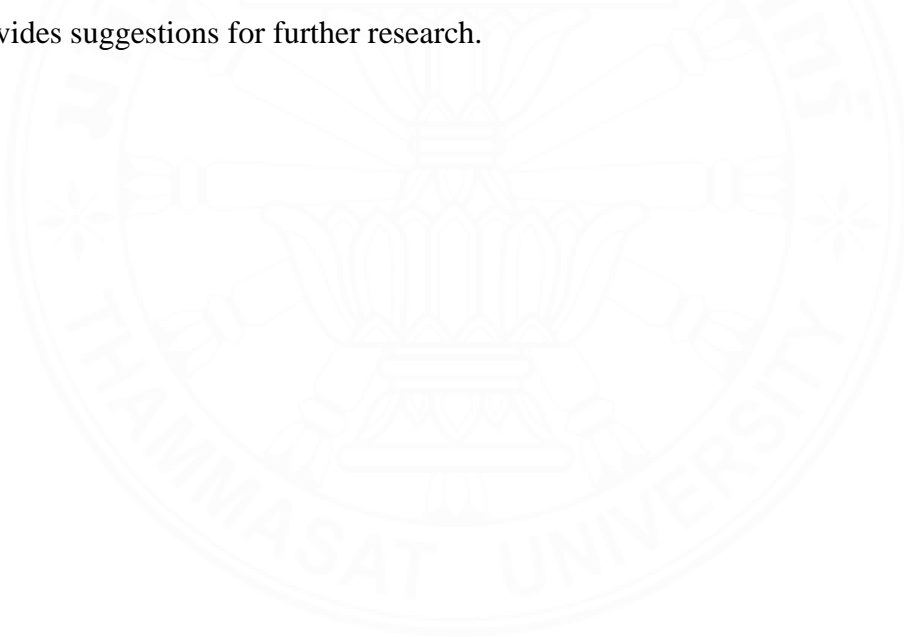
1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it provides a deeper understanding of the nuances between the adjectives *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing*. Although these adjectives are often considered synonyms, they convey subtly different meanings and are used in distinct contexts. By employing a corpus-based approach, this research moves beyond traditional dictionary definitions and investigates how these words function in authentic language use. This will contribute to a more precise understanding of their semantic differences and contextual appropriateness, offering a clearer picture of how these adjectives are applied in various communicative situations.

The findings of this study will be useful for anyone interested in how language works, especially those involved in teaching English, translating, or working with language technology. For example, knowing when and how to use *calm*, *peaceful*, or *soothing* correctly can help language learners improve their skills. It can also assist translators in choosing the best word for the situation. Additionally, understanding the differences between these words can help developers working with natural language processing (NLP) technologies to create more accurate language models. Overall, this study emphasizes how important context is in language and shows how small differences in meaning can change the way we communicate.

1.7 Organization of the Study

This independent study is structured into five chapters. Chapter One, Introduction, provides an overview of the study, including the background, statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, scope, and significance. Chapter Two, Literature Review, discusses theoretical perspectives on synonymy, previous corpus-based studies on lexical semantics, and the role of collocations in distinguishing near-synonyms. Chapter Three, Methodology, outlines the research design, data sources, corpus tools, data collection procedures, and analytical techniques employed in the study. Chapter Four, Data Analysis and Findings, presents the results of the corpus analysis, including frequency patterns, collocational analysis, and interpretations of the findings. Finally, Chapter Five, Conclusion and Recommendations, summarizes the main findings, discusses their implications, and provides suggestions for further research.



CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the existing literature in four main areas: 1) The Concept and Definition of Synonyms, 2) Corpora as a Resource Tool for Vocabulary Learning, 3) Dictionaries as a Resource Tool for Vocabulary Learning, and 4) Previous Related Studies.

2.1 The Concept and Definition of Synonyms

The notion of synonymy has been a subject of extensive discussion in linguistic research for decades. Synonyms are traditionally defined as words that share the same or similar meanings (Cruse, 2000; Murphy, 2010). However, the concept of synonymy is more complex than this simple definition suggests. Linguists have established various classifications of synonyms based on the degree of meaning overlap. According to Palmer (1981), synonyms can be categorized into absolute synonyms, cognitive synonyms, and near-synonyms. Absolute synonyms demonstrate complete identity in meaning and are extremely rare in natural language, while cognitive synonyms and near-synonyms show varying degrees of semantic overlap.

Lyons (1995) offers a more nuanced approach by introducing the concepts of absolute, complete, and total synonymy. For two lexical items to be considered absolutely synonymous, they must be identical in all semantic properties. Complete synonymy requires lexical items to be synonymous in all contexts, while total synonymy demands that they be synonymous across all dimensions of meaning.

Cruse (2000) further refines this understanding by suggesting that absolute synonymy is virtually non-existent due to the principle of economic motivation in language evolution. He argues that languages tend to eliminate redundancy over time, making it unlikely for two words to maintain identical meaning indefinitely. Instead, Cruse proposes that most synonymous relationships fall into the category of "propositional synonymy" or "cognitive synonymy," where words share the same central meaning but differ in terms of emphasis, connotation, or register.

Murphy (2003) approaches synonymy from a cognitive perspective, proposing the Relation by Contrast (RC) model. This model suggests that synonymy is a semantic relation based on minimal difference—words are synonyms when they share all contextually relevant properties except for form. This view aligns with Taylor's (2003) perspective from cognitive linguistics, which considers synonymy as a matter of construal rather than objective semantic properties. Words become synonymous in specific contexts when speakers construe them as semantically equivalent.

In previous corpus-based studies, Divjak (2010) argues that synonymy should be considered a scalar phenomenon rather than a categorical one. Her research demonstrates that so-called synonyms typically exhibit preference patterns in terms of their distribution and collocational behavior. This view is supported by Liu (2010), who emphasizes that near-synonyms often display distinct syntactic behaviors and collocational preferences, making them functionally distinctive despite their semantic similarities.

The adjectives *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing* represent an interesting case of near-synonymy in English. While they all describe a state of tranquility or lack of disturbance, they exhibit subtle differences in usage patterns. *Calm* typically describes an absence of agitation or strong emotion, *peaceful* suggests harmony and freedom from conflict, and *soothing* implies an active quality that reduces stress or agitation (Oxford English Dictionary, 2022). As Xiao and McEnery (2006) note, such differences often become apparent only through corpus-based analysis of actual language use.

2.2 Corpora as a Resource Tool for Vocabulary Learning

Corpora have revolutionized the study of vocabulary and language learning by providing empirical evidence of how words are actually used in authentic contexts. A corpus is a large, principled collection of naturally occurring texts stored in electronic format (McEnery & Wilson, 2001; Sinclair, 2004). Corpus linguistics employs these collections to analyze patterns of language use, including collocational behavior, frequency, and contextual preferences of lexical items.

Sinclair (1991), a pioneer in corpus linguistics, emphasizes the value of corpora in revealing usage patterns that may not be apparent through intuition alone. His "idiom principle" suggests that language users have available to them a large number of semi-

preconstructed phrases that constitute single choices in the mental lexicon. This principle has significant implications for understanding synonymy, as near-synonyms often participate in different phraseological patterns.

For vocabulary learning, especially for understanding synonyms, corpora provide several advantages. According to Schmitt (2010), corpus data allows learners to observe actual usage patterns rather than relying on definitions alone. This empirical approach helps learners grasp the subtle differences between near-synonyms that dictionaries may not fully capture. As Biber et al. (1998) note, corpus analysis reveals patterns of association between words, grammatical features, and situational contexts that are essential for appropriate word choice.

The development of learner-friendly corpus tools has further enhanced the utility of corpora for vocabulary learning. Cobb's (2003) Compleat Lexical Tutor and Davies' (2008) Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) interface have made corpus data more accessible to language learners. These tools allow students to explore collocational patterns and contextual preferences of synonyms like *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing* through concordance lines, collocational statistics, and frequency data across different genres.

Römer (2011) argues that corpus-informed pedagogy helps learners develop a more nuanced understanding of lexical items by exposing them to authentic examples of usage. This approach is particularly valuable for teaching synonyms, as it enables learners to observe how seemingly similar words behave differently in real contexts. Flowerdew (2015) supports this view, suggesting that data-driven learning approaches using corpora help students discover for themselves the subtle distinctions between near-synonyms.

In the context of synonymous adjectives, Stubbs (2002) demonstrates how corpus analysis reveals differences in semantic prosody—the consistent aura of meaning with which a form is imbued by its collocates. For example, while *calm* frequently collocates with words related to emotional states (remain *calm*, stay *calm*), *peaceful* more often appears in contexts related to environments or political situations (*peaceful* neighborhood, *peaceful* solution). Such distinctions, revealed through corpus analysis, are crucial for appropriate use of near-synonyms.

Recent research by Chen and Baker (2016) highlights the effectiveness of corpus-based learning for helping students distinguish between near-synonyms. Their study shows that students who engaged with corpus data developed more accurate intuitions about word usage than those who relied solely on dictionary definitions. Similarly, Webb and Kagimoto (2011) found that presenting collocational information extracted from corpora significantly improved learners' ability to use near-synonyms appropriately in production tasks.

2.3 Dictionaries as a Resource Tool for Vocabulary Learning

Dictionaries remain a fundamental resource for vocabulary learning, serving as systematic catalogs of lexical information. According to Nesi (2014), dictionaries provide various types of information about words, including definitions, pronunciation, etymology, grammatical behavior, and usage notes. For synonyms, dictionaries often offer comparative information that helps users distinguish between words with similar meanings.

Traditional print dictionaries have evolved significantly with the advent of corpus linguistics. As Atkins and Rundell (2008) note, modern lexicography is heavily informed by corpus data, leading to more accurate descriptions of word usage. Contemporary dictionaries like the Oxford English Dictionary and Collins COBUILD English Dictionary base their entries on evidence from large language corpora, providing definitions and examples that reflect actual usage patterns rather than prescriptive judgments.

Learner dictionaries, in particular, have embraced corpus-informed approaches to help language learners understand synonymous relationships. Dictionaries such as the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English and the Macmillan English Dictionary include specific features designed to clarify differences between near-synonyms. These features include synonym boxes, usage notes, and examples drawn from corpus data (Bogaards & van der Kloot, 2002). Such resources help learners navigate the subtle distinctions between adjectives like *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing* by highlighting their typical contexts and collocational preferences.

However, dictionaries have limitations when it comes to conveying the full complexity of synonymous relationships. As Frankenberg-Garcia (2012) observes,

dictionary definitions and examples cannot capture all the nuances of word usage across different contexts. This limitation is particularly relevant for near-synonyms, which may share core meanings but differ in terms of collocational behavior, register, or semantic prosody.

To address these limitations, some modern dictionaries have incorporated more sophisticated approaches to describing synonymy. The Macmillan Collocations Dictionary and the Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English focus specifically on word combinations, helping learners understand how near-synonyms behave differently in terms of their collocational profiles (McIntosh et al., 2009). Similarly, specialized resources like the Oxford Learner's Thesaurus and the Longman Language Activator group synonyms together and explicitly contrast their meanings and usage patterns. Electronic dictionaries offer additional advantages for understanding synonymy. According to Lew and de Schryver (2014), digital formats allow for more flexible presentation of information, including multimedia content, hyperlinked cross-references, and integrated corpus examples. Online dictionaries like Wordnik and vocabulary.com combine traditional dictionary information with corpus examples, making it easier for learners to grasp the contextual preferences of near-synonyms.

Tono (2001) emphasizes that effective dictionary use for vocabulary learning requires specific skills that need to be taught explicitly. His research shows that learners often struggle to extract relevant information about synonymous relationships from dictionary entries, suggesting the need for dictionary training as part of vocabulary instruction. This view is supported by Nation (2013), who argues that dictionary skills should be integrated into vocabulary learning strategies, particularly for understanding nuanced relationships like those between near-synonyms.

2.4 Previous Related Studies

2.4.1 Corpus-Based Studies on English Synonyms

In recent years, corpus-based approaches have dominated research on English synonyms, providing empirical evidence of usage patterns and contextual preferences. This shift toward data-driven analysis has yielded valuable insights into the behavior of near-synonyms across different genres and contexts.

One influential study in this area is Liu's (2010) investigation of near-synonymous adverbs. Using the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), Liu examined the syntactic positions, collocational patterns, and register distribution of adverbs like *actually*, "in fact," and "indeed." His findings revealed significant differences in how these seemingly similar items behave in authentic contexts, highlighting the value of corpus data for understanding synonymy.

Similarly, Liu and Espino (2012) conducted a corpus-based analysis of synonymous adjectives describing importance (important, essential, crucial, vital). Their study demonstrated that these adjectives differ substantially in terms of their frequency across registers, preferred syntactic patterns, and collocational profiles. These differences suggest that what traditional resources might present as simple synonyms actually fulfill distinct communicative functions.

A particularly relevant study by Iwane-Salovaara (2012) examined the near-synonymous adjectives "smart" and "intelligent" using corpus data. This research provided a detailed analysis of how these adjectives differ in terms of their collocational behavior and semantic prosody. Iwane-Salovaara found that "smart" more frequently collocates with words related to appearance and practical abilities, while "intelligent" tends to appear in contexts related to cognitive capabilities and academic performance. The study also revealed differences in genre distribution, with "intelligent" appearing more frequently in academic contexts and "smart" in informal genres.

Building on this approach, Phoocharoensil (2022) investigated three synonymous adjectives: "primary," "main," and "major." Using corpus data, the study examined their distribution across genres and collocational patterns. The findings indicated that while these adjectives share a core meaning related to importance or prominence, they differ significantly in their preferred collocates and typical contexts of use. For instance, "primary" frequently collocates with words related to education and basic needs, while "major" shows a stronger association with issues and problems. This research demonstrates how corpus analysis can reveal functional differences between near-synonyms that might not be apparent from dictionary definitions alone.

More recently, Sridhanyarat and Phoocharoensil (2023) conducted a corpus-based investigation of the verbs "assess," "evaluate," and "measure." Their analysis, which examined these near-synonyms across different genres established by COCA,

revealed distinct collocational patterns. The study found that each verb tends to co-occur with different types of objects and appears in different syntactic constructions, suggesting that they serve specific communicative functions despite their semantic overlap. This research highlights the importance of considering both semantic and syntactic behavior when analyzing synonymous relationships.

In the context of adjectives describing emotional states, Zhang (2019) examined the near-synonyms "happy," "pleased," and "delighted" using the British National Corpus. The study revealed that while these adjectives all express positive feelings, they differ in intensity, with "delighted" expressing stronger emotion than "pleased" or "happy." Additionally, each adjective showed distinct collocational preferences and syntactic patterns, with "happy" being more versatile in its grammatical behavior than the others.

2.4.2 Studies on Semantic Prosody and Collocation

Semantic prosody—the tendency of words to co-occur with items of certain semantic classes—has emerged as a crucial concept for understanding synonymy. Louw (1993) first described semantic prosody as a form of meaning that is established through the "collocational profile" of a word. This concept has significant implications for the study of near-synonyms, as words with similar denotative meanings may carry different semantic prosodies.

Stubbs (2002) expanded on this concept, demonstrating how seemingly synonymous words often differ in their semantic prosody. His analysis of "cause" and "provide" showed that while "cause" typically collocates with negative outcomes ("cause problems," "cause damage"), "provide" tends to appear with positive or neutral items ("provide support," "provide information"). Such differences in semantic prosody can be crucial for distinguishing between near-synonyms like *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing*.

Partington (2004) further developed the concept of semantic prosody by introducing the notion of "semantic preference"—the tendency of a word to co-occur with items from a particular semantic field. His research demonstrated that near-synonyms often differ in their semantic preferences, which contributes to their distinctive usage patterns. This perspective has been valuable for understanding how

synonymous adjectives like *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing* may be associated with different semantic domains.

Xiao and McEnery (2006) conducted a cross-linguistic study of semantic prosody, comparing near-synonyms in English and Chinese. Their findings suggest that awareness of semantic prosody is essential for appropriate word choice, particularly in translation contexts. They argue that semantic prosody represents a significant challenge for language learners, as it is largely unconscious for native speakers and rarely explicitly taught in language classrooms.

In a study directly relevant to English adjectives, Bednarek (2008) examined the semantic prosody of evaluative adjectives, including those expressing calmness and tranquility. Her research revealed how apparently similar adjectives carry different evaluative meanings based on their typical collocates and contexts. This work provides a methodological framework for analyzing the semantic prosody of adjectives like *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing*.

The concept of lexical priming, developed by Hoey (2005), offers a psychological explanation for collocational behavior and semantic prosody. According to this theory, words become "primed" for use in particular contexts through repeated exposure. This priming affects not only which words tend to co-occur but also their grammatical patterns, semantic associations, and pragmatic functions. For synonyms, this means that despite sharing similar denotative meanings, words become primed for different contexts and uses through repeated exposure in specific environments.

2.4.3 Pedagogical Applications of Corpus-Based Synonym Studies

Research on the pedagogical applications of corpus-based synonym studies has demonstrated the effectiveness of data-driven approaches for vocabulary instruction. Kaur and Hegelheimer (2005) found that providing learners with corpus examples of near-synonyms significantly improved their ability to use these words appropriately in writing tasks. Their study suggests that exposure to authentic usage patterns helps learners develop more nuanced understanding of synonymous relationships.

Frankenberg-Garcia (2012) investigated how different types of dictionaries and corpus information affect learners' comprehension and production of near-synonyms. Her research indicated that while dictionary definitions help with comprehension,

corpus examples are more beneficial for productive use. This finding highlights the complementary roles of dictionaries and corpora in vocabulary learning, particularly for understanding subtle distinctions between near-synonyms.

In a study focused specifically on adjectives, Liu (2013) examined how corpus-based instruction affects learners' understanding of synonymous descriptive adjectives. The research demonstrated that explicit instruction in corpus consultation strategies, combined with guided exploration of concordance lines, helped learners identify patterns of usage that distinguish between near-synonyms. These findings suggest that corpus-based approaches can be particularly effective for teaching semantically related adjectives like *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing*.

A comprehensive study by Chen and Baker (2016) compared the effectiveness of dictionary-based and corpus-based approaches for teaching English synonyms. Their research showed that while dictionary definitions provided a foundation for understanding core meanings, corpus data helped learners grasp the contextual preferences and collocational behavior that distinguish near-synonyms in actual use. They concluded that an integrated approach, combining dictionary information with corpus examples, yields the best results for teaching synonymous relationships.

More recently, Phoocharoensil (2022) reported on the implementation of corpus-based materials for teaching synonymous adjectives to university students. The study found that students who engaged with corpus-derived examples developed more accurate intuitions about the usage patterns of near-synonyms compared to those who received traditional instruction. Particularly effective was the use of parallel concordance lines that allowed students to directly compare how different synonyms behave in similar contexts.

This literature review has explored the concept of synonymy, the role of corpora and dictionaries in vocabulary learning, and previous corpus-based studies on English synonyms. The research suggests that while synonymous words share core meanings, they typically differ in terms of their collocational behavior, semantic prosody, and contextual preferences. These differences can be effectively investigated through corpus analysis, which reveals patterns of usage that may not be apparent through intuition alone.

For adjectives like *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing*, corpus-based analysis offers a promising approach for understanding their distinctive characteristics. Previous studies on synonymous adjectives, such as Iwane-Salovaara's (2012) investigation of "smart" and "intelligent" and Phoocharoensil's (2022) study of "primary," "main," and "major," provide methodological frameworks that can be applied to this set of emotional adjectives. Similarly, research on semantic prosody and collocation offers valuable perspectives for analyzing how these adjectives function in authentic contexts.

The pedagogical implications of this research are significant. Both corpora and dictionaries serve as valuable resources for vocabulary learning, particularly when used in complementary ways. Corpus-based approaches, which expose learners to authentic examples of usage, appear especially effective for helping students grasp the subtle distinctions between near-synonyms. As language teaching continues to embrace data-driven methodologies, corpus-informed instruction of synonymous adjectives like *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing* represents a promising direction for vocabulary pedagogy.

2.4.4 Studies on Adverb Collocation

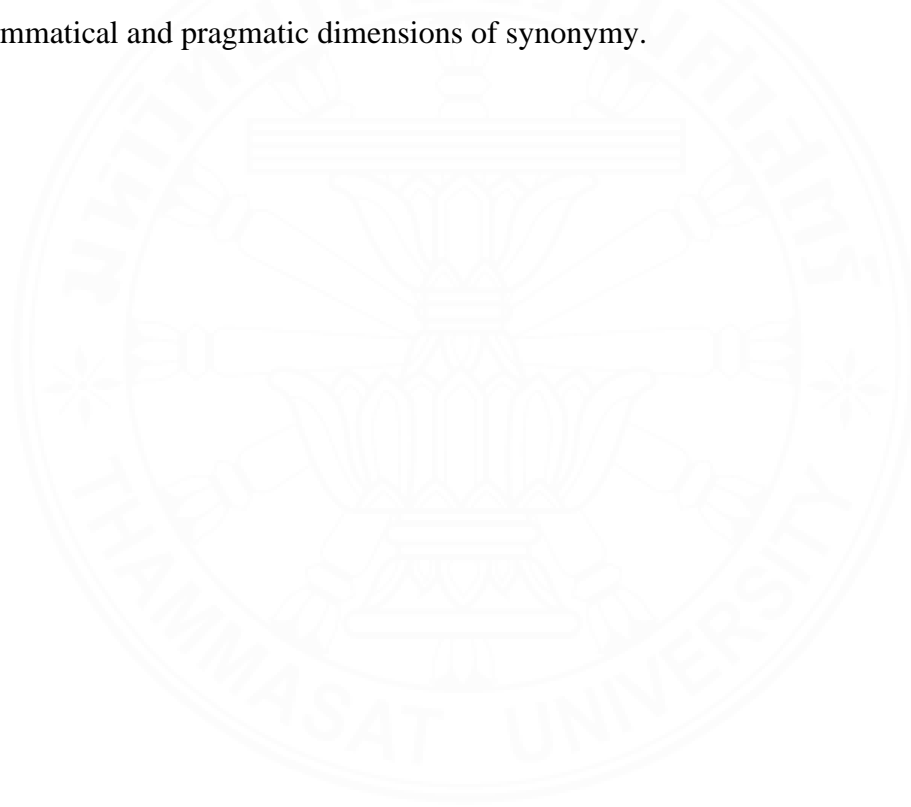
Collocation studies in corpus linguistics often focus on adjective-noun or verb-object pairings; however, adjective-adverb collocations have also received increasing attention, particularly for their role in refining meaning and conveying evaluative nuance. Adverb collocations help specify the degree, manner, or frequency of the quality expressed by an adjective and are essential for understanding how meaning is modulated in natural discourse (Biber et al., 1999).

Kennedy (1991) notes that adverbial modification plays a critical role in distinguishing near-synonyms, as different adverbs often collocate with adjectives based on register, intensity, and pragmatic function. For instance, "deeply concerned" and "slightly concerned" reflect different degrees of emotional intensity, and such adverbial patterns may not apply equally to all near-synonymous adjectives.

Liu (2010), in the study of adverbial collocations of English synonyms, emphasizes that even adjectives with highly similar meanings tend to differ in their collocational profiles, particularly with intensifying or mitigating adverbs. This distinction is further supported by Yamazaki (2015), who examined English emotion adjectives and found that collocating adverbs not only modulate intensity but also

influence the perceived connotation of adjectives. For example, *perfectly calm* suggests a state of ideal composure, whereas *relatively calm* implies moderation and comparison.

In the context of the present study, identifying the adverb collocations of *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing* provides insight into how these adjectives function in real-world usage. As Xiao and McEnery (2006) argue, examining collocational behavior at the adverbial level enables researchers to uncover nuanced patterns that contribute to the semantic and functional distinctiveness of near-synonyms. This approach complements previous studies on semantic prosody and expands the analytical lens to include grammatical and pragmatic dimensions of synonymy.



CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodology employed in the present study, which investigates the semantic similarities and differences among the adjectives *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing*. The chapter is organized into three main sections: (1) Target Words, (2) Research Instruments, and (3) Data Analysis. The research methodology was designed to address the three research objectives and corresponding research questions concerning the definitions, collocational patterns, and semantic preferences of the selected adjectives.

3.1 Target Words

The target words of this study consist of three English adjectives: *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing*. These adjectives were selected based on their semantic similarity and frequent use in contemporary English. While all three share a core meaning related to tranquility or the absence of disturbance, each exhibits subtle semantic differences that this study aims to uncover through corpus-based analysis. The target words were initially examined using two major online learner dictionaries: the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE) and the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD). These online dictionaries were chosen because they are up to date, widely accessible, and specifically designed for learners of English. They provide clear definitions, detailed usage notes, and authentic example sentences that reflect current language use. This preliminary lexicographical analysis laid the foundation for understanding the basic semantic properties and usage patterns of each adjective prior to conducting the corpus-based investigation.

3.2 Research Instruments

This study relied on three main research instruments: two online learner dictionaries and one large, contemporary English corpus.

3.2.1 Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE)

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English was used as the primary lexicographical reference. As an online learner's dictionary, LDOCE provides user-friendly definitions, sample sentences, and usage notes that highlight subtle semantic and grammatical features. It also offers detailed information on register, collocations, and typical contexts of use. This resource served as a foundational tool for understanding each adjective's core meaning and function prior to corpus-based investigation.

3.2.2 Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD)

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary was used to supplement the findings from LDOCE. This dictionary provided alternative definitions, collocational notes, and contextual examples that contributed to a broader understanding of the target adjectives. The OALD was particularly useful for identifying additional nuances in British English usage and for validating or contrasting definitions and examples from LDOCE. Together, the two dictionaries helped clarify the semantic boundaries and potential overlaps among the three synonyms.

3.2.3 Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)

The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) was the principal corpus employed in this study. COCA is a large, balanced, and continuously updated corpus containing over one billion words of American English from five genres: spoken, fiction, magazines, newspapers, and academic texts. This corpus was selected due to its extensive coverage, genre diversity, and user-friendly interface, which facilitates frequency and collocation analysis. Its up-to-date language data provides an accurate reflection of present-day usage patterns, which is essential for the objectives of this study.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis was structured to address the following research questions:

1. What are the similarities and differences in the definitions of *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing*?

2. What are the common noun collocations of the adjective synonyms *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing*?
3. What are the common adverb collocations of the adjectives *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing*?

To answer these questions, four stages of analysis were conducted: lexicographical analysis, noun collocation analysis, adverb collocation analysis, and comparative analysis.

3.3.1 Lexicographical Analysis

To address the first research question, a detailed lexicographical analysis was conducted using two authoritative online dictionaries: the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE) and the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD). The definitions, usage notes, and example sentences of each adjective were extracted and analyzed. Particular attention was given to identifying semantic overlap, subtle distinctions in meaning, and stylistic or register-based differences. This dictionary-based investigation established the foundational semantic profiles of the target words prior to corpus-based comparison.

3.3.2 Noun Collocation Analysis

To answer the second research question regarding common noun collocations, data was retrieved from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). For each adjective, the top twenty noun collocations were extracted based on frequency and statistical significance, using a Mutual Information (MI) score threshold of ≥ 3 , which indicates a strong lexical association (Cheng, 2012). These collocations were then categorized into semantic fields in order to reveal the typical conceptual domains each adjective modifies. The analysis helped identify patterns of semantic preference and degrees of overlap or distinction in how the three adjectives are used with nouns in natural language.

3.3.3 Adverb Collocation Analysis

To address the third research question, a similar procedure was followed to identify adverb collocations. Using COCA, adverbs frequently and significantly

collocating with each target adjective were extracted, again based on MI scores ≥ 3 and frequency of occurrence. The analysis focused on identifying intensifying, mitigating, or stylistically relevant adverbs, such as *very*, *remarkably*, or *somewhat*, which provide insight into the evaluative and expressive function of each adjective. These adverbs were classified by function and frequency to determine typical patterns and stylistic tendencies associated with each adjective.

3.3.4 Comparative Collocation Analysis

Finally, a comparative analysis was conducted across both noun and adverb collocational datasets. This step identified three main types of collocational relationships: (1) shared collocations used with all three adjectives, (2) partially overlapping collocations used with two adjectives, and (3) exclusive collocations unique to only one adjective. This comparative approach enabled a systematic exploration of the similarities and differences in collocational behavior, contributing to a clearer understanding of the semantic distinctions and overlaps among *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing*.

Through these analyses, the study aims to provide a corpus-based account of how the three adjectives differ and overlap in meaning and usage, particularly in relation to their typical noun and adverb collocations, thereby offering a more nuanced understanding of their semantic and collocational behavior.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings of the study, organized according to the research questions and objectives outlined in Chapter One. The results are divided into four sections: (1) dictionary definitions, (2) noun collocations, (3) adverb collocations of the adjectives *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing*, and (4) summary of key findings.

4.1 Dictionary Definitions

Research Question 1: What are the similarities and differences in the dictionary definitions of *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing*?

To address this question, the definitions of the three adjectives were collected from the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE) and the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD). These definitions are summarized in the table below.

Table 4.1

Dictionary Definitions of Calm, Peaceful, and Soothing from Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE) and Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD)

Synonyms	LDOCE Definition	OALD Definition
Calm	1. relaxed and quiet, not angry, nervous, or upset e.g.: - I tried to stay <i>calm</i> and just ignore him. 2. if a place, period of time, or situation is <i>calm</i> , there is less activity, trouble etc than there sometimes is, or than there has been recently e.g.:	1. not excited, nervous or upset e.g.: - It is important to keep <i>calm</i> in an emergency. 2. (of the sea) without large waves e.g.: - The sea was flat <i>calm</i> (= with no waves at all).

Synonyms	LDOCE Definition	OALD Definition
	<p>- The financial markets are <i>calm</i> at the moment.</p> <p>3. a sea, lake etc that is <i>calm</i> is smooth or has only gentle waves</p> <p>e.g.:</p> <p>- The seas were dead <i>calm</i>.</p>	<p>3. (of the weather) without wind</p> <p>e.g.:</p> <p>- The weather was <i>calm</i> and dry.</p>
Peaceful	<p>1. a peaceful time, place, or situation is quiet and calm without any worry or excitement</p> <p>e.g.:</p> <p>- We had a <i>peaceful</i> afternoon without the children.</p> <p>2. not involving war, fighting, or violence e.g.:</p> <p>- We must try to find a <i>peaceful</i> solution to the conflict.</p> <p>3. peaceful people do not like violence and do not behave in a violent way e.g.:</p> <p>- a noisy but <i>peaceful</i> group of demonstrators</p>	<p>1. not involving a war, violence or argument e.g.:</p> <p>- The only way ahead was via diplomatic and <i>peaceful</i> means.</p> <p>2. quiet and calm; not worried or upset in any way e.g.:</p> <p>- It's so <i>peaceful</i> out here in the country.</p> <p>3. trying to create peace or to live in peace; not liking violence or argument e.g.:</p> <p>- The aims of the organization are wholly <i>peaceful</i>.</p>
Soothing	<p>1. making someone feel calmer and less anxious, upset, or angry</p> <p>e.g.:</p> <p>- <i>soothing</i> music</p>	<p>1. that makes somebody who is anxious, upset, etc. feel calmer</p> <p>e.g.:</p> <p>- a <i>soothing</i> voice</p> <p>2. that makes a tense or painful part of your body feel more</p>

Synonyms	LDOCE Definition	OALD Definition
		comfortable e.g.: - a <i>soothing</i> lotion

The adjectives *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing* share a central semantic association with tranquility and the absence of disturbance. These words are frequently used in positive contexts to describe desirable emotional states or environments, such as mental composure, serene surroundings, or comforting experiences. Each adjective demonstrates flexibility in usage and can be employed both literally and metaphorically depending on the context. For instance, expressions such as “a *calm* sea,” “a *peaceful* protest,” and “*soothing* music” illustrate the broad range of meanings these adjectives can convey.

As shown in Table 4.2, although these words are united by a common theme of serenity, they differ in terms of focus, usage, and connotation. The adjective *calm* generally refers to a state of emotional or environmental stillness and is often associated with the absence of agitation or excitement. It can describe a person’s internal condition, a specific setting, or elements in nature such as the sea or weather. *Peaceful* places more emphasis on the presence of harmony and the absence of conflict, and it is commonly used in reference to social, political, or environmental situations. In contrast, *soothing* highlights a functional quality, referring to the process of reducing discomfort, tension, or distress. It is typically used to describe stimuli that have a calming or relaxing effect, particularly in emotional or physical contexts.

The range of applications for each adjective also varies. *Calm* is suitable for describing individuals, physical conditions, or situations. *Peaceful* is often associated with broader contexts such as communities, events, or atmospheres that are free from violence or unrest. *Soothing* is most commonly used to describe agents or experiences that help reduce discomfort, such as a *soothing* voice, music, or lotion. In terms of connotation, *calm* may suggest emotional restraint or self-control, *peaceful* implies a sense of moral or interpersonal harmony, and *soothing* evokes feelings of comfort, care, and relief from pain or anxiety.

Table 4.2

Comparison of Dictionary Definitions of Calm, Peaceful, and Soothing from Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE) and Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD)

Adjective	Core Meaning	Focus	Typical Contexts	Example
<i>Calm</i>	Free from agitation or excitement	Emotional or environmental stillness	People, nature, situations	<i>She remained calm during the interview.</i>
<i>Peaceful</i>	Free from conflict or violence	Social or moral harmony	Communities, protests, atmospheres	<i>They held a peaceful demonstration.</i>
<i>Soothing</i>	Providing relief or comfort	Active calming effect	Sounds, voices, treatments	<i>The soothing music helped me relax.</i>

In summary, while *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing* all relate to the idea of tranquility, each term possesses distinct characteristics that reflect different aspects of this concept. These differences include variations in the focus of meaning, the typical contexts in which they are used, and the connotations they carry.

4.2 Noun Collocations

Research Question 2: What are the common noun collocations of the adjectives *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing*?

To address this research question, the top 30 noun collocations for each adjective were retrieved from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) using a Mutual Information (MI) score of 3 or higher to ensure statistically significant associations. These noun collocations were then grouped into semantic domains to highlight the typical contexts in which each adjective appears.

The following table presents the top 30 noun collocations associated with the adjectives *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing*, based on data retrieved from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). These collocations were selected to highlight the typical noun patterns that co-occur with each adjective and to shed light on their semantic associations and usage contexts. In cases where collocations included offensive or irrelevant terms, such items were excluded and replaced by the next most frequent, contextually appropriate nouns to ensure the analysis remains academically appropriate and focused on relevant language use.

Table 4.3

Noun Collocations of Calm, Peaceful, and Soothing

Rank	Calm			Peaceful			Soothing		
	Noun Collocate	Frequency	MI Value	Noun Collocate	Frequency	MI Value	Noun Collocate	Frequency	MI Value
1	nerve	380	6.58	protest	654	7.28	voice	293	5.74
2	fear	230	3.85	solution	485	5.37	sound	173	5.59
3	mind	169	2.10	resolution	428	6.37	music	166	4.63
4	breath	155	4.05	coexistence	341	10.83	word	108	3.15
5	situation	135	2.14	place	326	2.23	tone	97	6.40
6	honey	99	3.33	mean	288	4.95	effect	69	3.39
7	storm	87	3.01	demonstration	283	6.75	water	68	2.72
8	traffic	79	3.11	transition	282	5.82	tea	44	4.94

9	sea	66	2.09	power	276	2.52	color	41	3.09
10	breathing	61	4.81	purpose	254	4.18	balm	40	9.72
11	anxiety	55	3.37	settlement	243	5.88	noise	37	4.90
12	attempt	53	2.04	change	179	2.26	massage	32	7.31
13	ma'am	50	3.81	protester	173	6.57	skin	28	3.49
14	tesion	41	2.93	revolution	159	4.86	bath	27	5.83
15	dude	41	2.61	use	159	2.42	background	26	3.81
16	stomach	39	2.90	relation	142	4.02	baby	26	2.05
17	emotion	35	2.29	society	134	2.56	touch	25	4.49
18	sweetie	29	3.93	nation	124	2.18	light	24	2.10
19	pill	26	2.67	conflict	117	3.67	presence	22	3.46
20	panic	24	3.18	transfer	112	4.95	oil	21	2.21
21	temper	20	3.98	energy	110	2.29	warmth	20	6.00
22	medication	18	2.03	reunification	103	8.73	cream	20	4.12
23	pulse	18	2.81	democracy	102	3.90	calm	20	6.17
24	chaos	16	2.33	environment	97	2.81	nature	20	2.35
25	worry	16	2.50	manner	86	3.73	rhythm	20	5.24
26	beast	16	2.16	future	84	2.05	song	19	2.28
27	meditation	14	3.23	sleep	80	3.61	wall	19	2.14
28	down	13	2.14	religion	76	2.91	melody	17	6.03
29	crying	13	2.69	demonstrator	76	6.93	feeling	16	2.23
30	relaxation	13	4.19	valley	75	3.58	lullaby	16	8.86

Note. Offensive or profane collocations (e.g. vulgar slang) were excluded from the final list of analyzed collocations, as they do not align with the semantic or stylistic focus of

this study. The next most frequent collocations were selected in their place to maintain a consistent sample size.

4.2.1 Noun Collocations of Calm

Table 4.4

Top 30 Noun Collocations of Calm Categorized by Semantic Domain

Semantic Domain	Frequent Collocations
Emotional and Internal Condition	<i>nerve, mind, fear, breath, anxiety, tension, emotion, pulse, panic, temper, meditation</i>
Environmental and Situational Context	<i>situation, storm, traffic, sea, weather, atmosphere, climate, conditions</i>
Physiological and Medical Domain	<i>breathing, stomach, pill, medication</i>

The adjective *calm* frequently collocations with nouns related to internal emotional states and physiological responses, such as nerve, anxiety, pulse, and panic. This aligns with its core meaning as a personal and psychological state of tranquility. It also appears with nouns referring to external or environmental conditions, including storm, traffic, and sea, illustrating its usage in describing physical stillness or reduced activity in natural or situational contexts. Additionally, collocations like breathing, medication, and pill suggest therapeutic or health-related contexts, where calmness is induced or restored.

4.2.2 Noun Collocations of Peaceful

Table 4.5

Top 30 Noun Collocations of Peaceful Categorized by Semantic Domain

Semantic Domain	Frequent Collocations
Socio-political Context	<i>protest, solution, resolution, coexistence, demonstration, transition, settlement, protester, revolution, reunification, democracy, nation, society, conflict, transfer, demonstrator</i>
Setting and Environment	<i>place, valley, environment, future (less typical but can fit environmental context)</i>
Emotional and Personal Context	<i>sleep (strong emotional/personal context)</i>
Abstract and Others	<i>mean, power, purpose, use, relation, energy, manner, religion, change</i>

The noun collocations of *peaceful* retrieved from COCA predominantly cluster around four semantic domains. In socio-political contexts, words like protest, resolution, coexistence, and democracy highlight the adjective's role in describing nonviolent actions and harmonious political processes. The setting/environment domain is represented by nouns such as environment, place, and valley, reflecting

peaceful's frequent association with calm and harmonious physical surroundings. Emotional or personal contexts are illustrated by collocates like sleep, which convey tranquility in individual experience. Other nouns such as energy, power, and purpose appear less frequently and may indicate more abstract or varied uses of *peaceful*.



4.2.3 Noun Collocations of Soothing

Table 4.6

Top 30 Noun Collocations of Soothing Categorized by Semantic Domain

Semantic Domain	Frequent Collocations
Sensory and Therapeutic	<i>voice, sound, music, tone, noise, massage, touch, rhythm, balm, cream, bath, melody</i>
Emotional and Physical Relief	<i>effect, presence, warmth, feeling, calm, background, word, baby</i>
Commercial and Product-Based	<i>tea, oil, water, color, skin, light, nature, lullaby</i>
Aesthetic and Environmental	<i>color, light, wall, background, song</i>

Soothing frequently collocates with nouns in the sensory and therapeutic domain, such as voice, sound, music, massage, and bath. These collocations reflect the adjective's strong association with auditory and tactile experiences, conveying a sense of comfort, relaxation, and physical ease. In contexts of emotional and physical relief, collocates like effect, presence, warmth, and feeling highlight *soothing's* role in expressing the reduction of discomfort or distress. Furthermore, *soothing* often appears in commercial and wellness-related discourse, particularly in relation to self-care or natural remedies, such as *soothing* tea, *soothing* oil, and *soothing* cream. These uses

suggest a marketing emphasis on products that provide relaxation or healing. Lastly, the presence of terms like color, light, and background in aesthetic and environmental contexts shows that *soothing* can also describe visual softness or calm atmospheres. Together, these collocational patterns reinforce the view of *soothing* as an adjective that conveys multi-sensory calm, often linked to health, wellness, and emotional tranquility.

This section examined the noun collocations of the adjectives *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing* to address Research Question 2. The analysis was based on the top 30 noun collocations for each adjective retrieved from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), filtered using a Mutual Information (MI) score of 3 or higher to ensure meaningful collocational strength. These collocations were then categorized into semantic domains to reveal the typical contexts in which each adjective is most frequently used.

In summary, the collocational patterns of these three adjectives reflect distinct but occasionally overlapping semantic profiles. *Calm* tends to describe psychological states and natural phenomena, *peaceful* is often tied to social and political harmony, and *soothing* is primarily linked to sensory comfort and wellness. These findings provide insight into how each adjective functions within different lexical and contextual environments.

4.3 Adverb Collocations

Research Question 3: What are the common adverb collocations of the adjectives *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing*?

To address this research question, the top 30 adverb collocations of each target adjective were retrieved from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). An MI (Mutual Information) score threshold of 3 or higher was applied to ensure the statistical significance of the collocational strength. The identified adverb collocations were then categorized based on their grammatical and functional roles. This classification provides insight into how each adjective is typically modified in usage and helps to further clarify the distinct nuances conveyed by *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing* in various contexts.

The following table highlights the top 30 adverbial collocations commonly found with the adjectives *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing*, drawn from the Corpus of

Contemporary American English (COCA). These adverbs illustrate how speakers typically intensify or nuance the meaning of each adjective in everyday usage. To ensure the results are both relevant and appropriate for academic study, any adverbs deemed offensive or contextually unsuitable were excluded and replaced with the next most frequent, semantically fitting alternatives. The aim is to offer insights into the subtle ways these adjectives function in natural language through their most frequent adverbial modifiers.

Table 4.7

Adverb collocations of Calm, Peaceful, and Soothing

Rank	Calm			Peaceful			Soothing		
	Adverb Collocate	Frequency	MI Value	Adverb Collocate	Frequency	MI Value	Adverb Collocate	Frequency	MI Value
1	down	15452	6.72	more	754	2.14	very	171	2.56
2	okay	631	3.37	relatively	162	4.51	oddly	11	5.72
3	please	356	3.07	largely	83	3.72	strangely	10	5.73
4	bit	170	3.25	mostly	58	2.55	somehow	8	2.20
5	relatively	94	3.33	generally	44	2.11	softly	6	4.04
6	perfectly	63	3.21	otherwise	40	2.08	incredibly	6	3.11
7	alright	54	4.35	exclusively	31	4.13	deeply	6	2.44
8	strangely	51	5.51	entirely	30	2.15	gently	5	2.98
9	surprisingly	47	3.88	anything	24	4.05	naturally	5	2.61
10	remarkably	44	4.79	normally	22	2.43	beautifully	4	3.98
11	somewhat	36	2.32	purely	19	3.57	alternately	3	5.45
12	fairly	28	2.10	remarkably	17	3.81	wonderfully	3	4.57
13	eerily	27	6.46	solely	14	2.85	silently	3	3.56

14	outwardly	21	6.79	deceptively	9	5.97	emotionally	3	2.97
15	gradually	21	2.64	mutually	9	3.62	surprisingly	3	2.48
16	oddly	19	3.94	inherently	9	3.32	quietly	3	2.04
17	considerably	19	3.35	formerly	8	2.43	lovingly	2	4.95
18	anything	18	3.24	reasonably	8	2.35	psychologically	2	4.30
19	instantly	17	2.70	strangely	7	3.03	mildly	2	3.98
20	unusually	15	3.78	wholly	7	2.93	aloud	2	3.09
21	Preternaturally	12	8.39	violently	6	3.25	anything	2	2.64
22	amazingly	11	3.66	overwhelmingly	6	2.78	readily	2	2.30
23	utterly	10	2.29	wrongly	5	3.61	traditionally	2	2.26
24	unnaturally	8	5.98	ostensibly	5	3.32	mentally	2	2.25
25	visibly	6	3.41	unusually	5	2.58	instantly	2	2.19
26	wonderfully	6	2.99	someplace	5	2.34	inexpressibly	1	8.97
27	deceptively	5	4.73	Extraordinarily	4	2.60	deceitfully	1	8.85
28	throughout	5	2.80	oddly	4	2.08	soulfully	1	8.73
29	shockingly	4	3.87	serenely	3	5.44	enjoyably	1	8.51
30	Unsuccessfully	4	3.32	lovingly	3	3.35	medicinally	1	8.46

Note. Offensive or profane collocations (e.g. vulgar slang) were excluded from the final list of analyzed collocations, as they do not align with the semantic or stylistic focus of this study. The next most frequent collocations were selected in their place to maintain a consistent sample size.

4.3.1 Adverb Collocations of Calm

Table 4.8

Top 30 Adverb Collocations of Calm Categorized by Function

Function	Frequent Collocations
Intensification	perfectly, completely, totally, very, really, absolutely
Mitigators	relatively, fairly, somewhat, almost, kind of
Manner	deliberately, visibly, outwardly, apparently, naturally

Note. This table presents the most frequent adverb collocations of *calm* retrieved from COCA, grouped by their grammatical function to highlight patterns of use. The adverbs are classified into three categories: intensifiers, mitigators, and manner adverbs.

The adjective *calm* frequently co-occurs with intensifying adverbs such as perfectly, completely, and absolutely, indicating a strong emphasis on the degree of calmness conveyed. Mitigating adverbs like relatively, somewhat, and fairly suggest more moderate or qualified calmness, often in nuanced or contrastive contexts. Manner adverbs such as outwardly and deliberately highlight how calmness is expressed or perceived externally, often implying an intentional or superficial *calm*. These collocational patterns illustrate that *calm* is used flexibly to describe both genuine emotional states and externally projected composure.

4.3.2 Adverb Collocations of Peaceful

Table 4.9

Top 30 Adverb Collocations of Peaceful Categorized by Function

Function	Frequent Collocations
Degree and Quantity	<i>more, relatively, largely, mostly, generally, entirely, purely, wholly, reasonably, normally</i>

Evaluation and Attitude	<i>remarkably, deceptively, strangely, oddly, wrongly, ostensibly, mutually, inherently, otherwise, lovingly, serenely</i>
Exclusivity and Limitation	<i>exclusively, only, solely, anything</i>
Time and Context	<i>formerly, someplace, overwhelmingly, violently, extraordinarily</i>

Note. This table presents the most frequent adverb collocations of *peaceful* retrieved from COCA, grouped by their grammatical function to highlight patterns of use. The adverbs are classified into four categories: degree and quantity, manner or evaluative, exclusive or limiting, and temporal or contextual adverbs.

The adverb collocations of *peaceful* can be grouped into four main functional categories. Adverbs in the category of Degree and Quantity, such as *more*, *largely*, *entirely*, and *reasonably*, describe the extent to which something is *peaceful*. They indicate how strong, partial, or typical the peacefulness is in a given context. The Evaluation and Attitude category includes adverbs like *remarkably*, *deceptively*, *serenely*, and *inherently*, which reflect subjective perspectives, emotional tone, or judgments about the nature of peacefulness. In the category of Exclusivity and Limitation, adverbs such as *only*, *solely*, and *exclusively* emphasize that peacefulness is the single or restricted quality being highlighted in contrast to other possible states. Finally, adverbs grouped under Time and Context, including *formerly*, *overwhelmingly*, and *violently*, provide information about when or under what conditions peacefulness occurs. These categories help illustrate the varied ways in which *peaceful* is modified in real usage, revealing its semantic flexibility and contextual sensitivity.

4.3.3 Adverb Collocations of Soothing

Table 4.10

Top 30 Adverb Collocations of Soothing Categorized by Function

Function	Frequent Collocations
Intensification	<i>very, incredibly, deeply, wonderfully, surprisingly</i>
Manner	<i>gently, softly, silently, beautifully, mildly, quietly, lovingly, aloud</i>
Evaluation and Attitude	<i>oddly, strangely, somehow, alternately, emotionally, psychologically, soulfully, medicinally, inexpressibly, deceitfully, enjoyably</i>
Immediacy and Readiness	<i>instantly, readily, traditionally</i>
Naturalness	<i>naturally</i>
Mental State	<i>mentally</i>

Note. This table presents the most frequent adverb collocations of *soothing* retrieved from COCA, grouped by their grammatical function to highlight patterns of use. The adverbs are classified into six categories: intensifiers, manner, attitudinal and evaluative, immediacy and readiness, naturalness, and mental state adverbs.

The adverb collocations of *soothing* in the corpus can be meaningfully categorized into six functional groups based on their semantic roles: Intensification, Manner, Evaluation and Attitude, Immediacy and Readiness, Naturalness, and Mental State. The most prominent category is Intensification, which includes adverbs such as *very* (171 occurrences), *incredibly*, and *deeply*. These emphasize the degree of emotional or sensory relief typically associated with the adjective. The Manner category, which includes adverbs like *gently*, *softly*, *silently*, *lovingly*, and *aloud*, highlights how *soothing* is often conveyed through gentle actions or sensory experiences. A more diverse range of adverbs falls under Evaluation and Attitude, including *psychologically*, *soulfully*, *emotionally*, and *medicinally*, reflecting

subjective perceptions and affective interpretations of *soothing*, especially in therapeutic or introspective contexts.

The category of Immediacy and Readiness, represented by adverbs such as instantly, readily, and traditionally, suggests that soothing is commonly linked with prompt, accessible, or customary forms of relief. Meanwhile, the adverb naturally aligns with the category of Naturalness, indicating that soothing is often perceived as an innate or instinctive process. Lastly, the adverb mentally falls under the Mental State category, pointing to the cognitive or psychological dimensions in which *soothing* may be experienced or applied. Together, these six categories illustrate the semantic complexity of *soothing* and its strong association with comfort, healing, and emotional or sensory care across a wide range of contexts.

4.4 Summary of Key Findings

For *calm*, the collocational data showed a strong association with emotional and internal states, including words such as nerve, anxiety, and panic. These collocations emphasize *calm*'s function in describing a tranquil psychological or emotional condition. The adjective also commonly appeared with nouns related to natural or situational environments, such as storm, traffic, and sea, highlighting its role in portraying physical stillness or a lack of disturbance. Additionally, a smaller group of medical or therapeutic collocates, such as pill and breathing, points to contexts where calmness is intentionally induced.

The noun collocations of *peaceful* were largely situated in socio-political discourse. Frequent collocates such as protest, resolution, and democracy suggest that *peaceful* is often used to describe nonviolent actions, cooperative political processes, or harmonious societal conditions. A secondary pattern was found in references to physical or environmental settings, with collocates like valley and place reflecting *peaceful*'s descriptive function in *calm* surroundings. Though less prominent, personal or emotional uses were noted through collocates such as sleep, while a group of more abstract terms, including purpose and energy, showed broader semantic flexibility.

In contrast, *soothing* showed a clear preference for sensory and therapeutic contexts. Common collocations such as voice, music, massage, and bath reflect a strong alignment with experiences that are physically comforting or calming to the senses.

Emotional and psychological relief was another key domain, with collocates like warmth, presence, and feeling emphasizing the adjective's role in reducing discomfort or distress. Moreover, *soothing* was frequently used in product-related or commercial contexts, especially those connected to wellness and self-care (e.g., tea, oil, cream). Aesthetic uses also emerged, with terms like light, color, and background suggesting applications in describing visually calming atmospheres.

A comparative analysis of the noun and adverb collocations of the adjectives *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing* revealed several important distinctions that underscore their semantic relatedness yet functional differentiation in contemporary English usage.

Firstly, all three adjectives share some collocates, such as voice and atmosphere, which commonly appear across contexts to describe auditory or environmental states imbued with a sense of tranquility. However, even within these shared collocates, subtle differences emerge in the connotations each adjective carries: *calm* often implies emotional or mental stillness, *peaceful* connotes social or environmental harmony, and *soothing* emphasizes sensory comfort or relief.

Secondly, there are partially shared collocates that appear with two of the adjectives but not all three. For example, mind is found predominantly with *calm* and *soothing*, highlighting their association with psychological states and comfort, while protest is a distinctive collocate for *peaceful*, reflecting its frequent usage in socio-political discourse related to nonviolence. Similarly, music collocates with both *peaceful* and *soothing*, linking these adjectives to auditory experiences that promote relaxation or healing.

Table 4.11*Shared and Partially Shared Noun Collocations*

Collocate	Adjectives	Interpretation
voice	calm, soothing, peaceful	Indicates common association with auditory stimuli or expression of calmness and comfort across all three adjectives, though <i>soothing</i> emphasizes sensory relief.
atmosphere	calm, soothing, peaceful	Reflects environmental calmness or ambiance relevant to all three, with nuances varying from emotional stillness (<i>calm</i>), harmonious environment (<i>peaceful</i>), to comforting background (<i>soothing</i>).
mind	calm, soothing	Suggests an internal psychological state, with <i>calm</i> focusing on emotional stillness and <i>soothing</i> on comforting or relieving mental tension.
protest	peaceful	Highlights <i>peaceful</i> 's strong tie to socio-political contexts emphasizing nonviolence and harmony.
music	peaceful, soothing	Links <i>music</i> to both <i>peaceful</i> social or emotional tranquility and <i>soothing</i> sensory or therapeutic comfort.

Lastly, each adjective exhibits exclusive collocates that reinforce their unique semantic domains. *Calm* commonly collocates with nouns such as nerves, demeanor, and waters, emphasizing emotional composure and physical stillness. In contrast, *peaceful* collocates like resolution, transition, and coexistence evoke social and interpersonal harmony, while *soothing* is closely linked to nouns such as balm, lotion, and effect, which foreground therapeutic and sensory comfort.

Table 4.12*Exclusive Noun Collocations*

Adjective	Exclusive Noun Collocations	Interpretation
Calm	nerves, demeanor, waters	Emphasizes emotional composure (<i>nerves, demeanor</i>) and physical stillness or natural calm (<i>waters</i>).
Peaceful	resolution, transition, coexistence	Reflects socio-political and interpersonal harmony, emphasizing absence of conflict and processes of reconciliation.
Soothing	balm, lotion, effect	Highlights sensory and therapeutic domains, where <i>soothing</i> denotes physical or emotional relief through treatments or products.

Regarding adverb collocations, the adjectives also display distinct patterns. *Calm* is frequently modified by intensifiers and manner adverbs like perfectly, somewhat, and outwardly, suggesting varying degrees and expressions of calmness. *Peaceful* is often paired with evaluative and temporal adverbs such as remarkably, exclusively, and formerly, which indicate subjective assessment and contextual nuances. Meanwhile, *soothing* tends to co-occur with intensifiers and attitudinal adverbs like very, gently, and emotionally, underscoring its role in conveying emotional intensity and immediate comfort.

Table 4.13

Shared, Partially Shared, and Exclusive Noun Collocations of Calm, Peaceful, and Soothing

Collocate Type	Collocations	Associated Adjectives	Interpretation
Shared	voice, atmosphere	Calm, Peaceful, Soothing	Common in tone/environment contexts; slight nuances: <i>calm voice</i> (controlled), <i>peaceful atmosphere</i> (harmonious), <i>soothing voice</i> (gentle/caring).
Partially Shared	mind	Calm, Soothing	Mental/emotional state: <i>calm mind</i> (composed), <i>soothing mind</i> (comforted or pacified).
	music	Peaceful, Soothing	Mood-inducing: <i>peaceful music</i> (serene), <i>soothing music</i> (comforting, therapeutic).
Exclusive	nerves, demeanor, waters	Calm	Emotional and physical stillness e.g.: <i>calm demeanor, calm the waters</i> .
	resolution, transition, coexistence, protest	Peaceful	Often in diplomatic or cooperative contexts e.g.: <i>peaceful resolution</i> . Socio-political usage: <i>peaceful protest</i> expresses non-violence; not applicable to calm/soothing.
	balm, lotion, effect	Soothing	Sensory and therapeutic associations e.g.: <i>soothing balm, soothing effect</i> .

Table 4.14*Adverb Collocations Categories and Examples*

Adjective	Common Adverb Categories	Frequent Examples	Interpretation
Calm	Intensifiers, Mitigators, Manner	perfectly, somewhat, outwardly	Shows varying intensity of calmness — from absolute (<i>perfectly</i>) to moderate (<i>somewhat</i>) and external expressions of calm (<i>outwardly</i>).
Peaceful	Degree, Evaluative, Exclusive, Temporal	more, remarkably, exclusively, formerly	Highlights degree of peace (<i>more</i>), subjective evaluation (<i>remarkably</i>), limitation (<i>exclusively</i>), and contextual timing (<i>formerly</i>).
Soothing	Intensifiers, Manner, Attitudinal, Temporal	very, gently, emotionally, instantly	Reflects strong emotional intensity (<i>very</i>), sensory quality (<i>gently</i>), evaluative nuance (<i>emotionally</i>), and readiness or immediacy (<i>instantly</i>).

Together, these collocational distinctions confirm that while *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing* share overlapping semantic fields related to tranquility and comfort, they serve functionally distinct roles shaped by their unique lexical partnerships. Such nuanced differences are essential for understanding their appropriate usage in various communicative contexts.

To better understand how *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing* function in actual language use, a comparative analysis of their noun and adverb collocations was conducted. The results reveal both shared and unique lexical partnerships that reflect subtle but important differences in meaning and usage. Tables 4.11 and 4.13 present an overview of the most frequent noun and adverb collocations of each adjective. These are grouped into shared, partially shared, and exclusive categories. The patterns shown

help clarify the specific semantic and functional domains of each adjective within contemporary English.

Table 4.15

Shared, Partially Shared, and Exclusive Adverb Collocations of Calm, Peaceful, and Soothing

Collocate Type	Collocations	Associated Adjectives	Interpretation
Shared	very, remarkably, oddly	Calm, Peaceful, Soothing	General intensifiers highlighting degree or extent of the adjective's quality. "Oddly" suggests unexpected presence of the quality.
Partially Shared	deeply, genuinely	Calm, Peaceful	Often used in emotional or situational contexts e.g.: <i>deeply calm, genuinely peaceful</i> .
Exclusive	visibly, strangely, perfectly	Calm	Express emotional display or unusual calmness e.g.: <i>visibly calm, strangely calm</i> .
	relatively, extraordinarily	Peaceful	Modifiers for intensity, often comparative or surprising e.g.: <i>relatively peaceful region</i> .
	gently, pleasantly, incredibly, naturally, instantly	Soothing	Sensory/emotional enhancement e.g.: <i>gently soothing voice, pleasantly soothing music</i> . Related to therapeutic or product contexts e.g.: <i>instantly soothing relief, naturally soothing formula</i> .

This comparative collocational analysis shows that although *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing* share core meanings related to tranquility and comfort, each adjective functions within a distinct lexical environment that influences its specific usage. *Calm* often appears in contexts involving emotional control or physical stillness, frequently collocating with nouns such as nerves, demeanor, and waters, which reflect a composed or steady state. *Peaceful* is typically associated with social harmony, the absence of conflict, or natural quietness, as seen in its collocates like protest, resolution, and coexistence. *Soothing* is commonly used in contexts related to sensory relief and therapeutic effects, often appearing with nouns such as balm, lotion, and effect, particularly in wellness or emotional settings. These collocational patterns, both shared and exclusive, illustrate that while the adjectives are semantically related, they carry functionally different meanings depending on context. Recognizing these distinctions is important for understanding their precise use in contemporary English. The adverb collocations of *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing* reveal both shared and distinct usage patterns. Shared adverbs, such as *very* and *remarkably*, function as general intensifiers and are commonly used with all three adjectives. Also, the word “*oddly*” appears with all three adjectives in contexts where the described calmness, peacefulness, or soothing quality is unexpected or contrasts with surrounding circumstances, hence its classification as a shared collocate. Partially shared collocations like *deeply* and *genuinely* occur with *calm* and *peaceful*, especially in emotional or reflective contexts. Each adjective also has exclusive adverbs that highlight its unique semantic associations. *Calm* is modified by adverbs such as *visibly* and *strangely*, often expressing emotional display or unusual composure. *Peaceful* pairs exclusively with adverbs like *relatively* and *extraordinarily*, which convey degrees of comparison or unexpected tranquility. *Soothing* frequently collocates with sensory or product-related adverbs such as *gently*, *pleasantly*, *naturally*, and *instantly*, emphasizing comfort, relief, and therapeutic qualities. These patterns underscore the specific functions and domains in which each adjective tends to be used.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter consists of two main parts: (1) overall conclusions drawn from the analysis, and (2) recommendations for teaching and further research.

5.1 Overall Conclusions

This corpus-based study investigated the semantic similarities and differences among the adjectives *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing*. Employing both lexicographical resources and empirical corpus data, the study addressed three principal research questions: (1) What are the similarities and differences in the dictionary definitions of *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing*? (2) What are the common noun collocations of each adjective? (3) What are the common adverb collocations of each adjective?

The findings confirm that while *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing* share a core semantic field related to tranquility, they demonstrate distinct usage patterns and collocational behaviors that differentiate their semantic and functional roles in discourse.

The lexicographical analysis showed that *calm* is primarily associated with the absence of strong emotion or disturbance and is often used to describe emotional or behavioral states. In contrast, *peaceful* emphasizes harmony and the absence of conflict, frequently referring to environments or social conditions. Meanwhile, *soothing* conveys a more dynamic sense, implying an active effect of alleviating discomfort or stress, particularly in sensory or emotional contexts.

The noun collocation analysis based on COCA revealed that *calm* most commonly co-occurs with nouns denoting emotional or psychological states, such as voice, manner, and mind. *Peaceful* is predominantly associated with nouns related to external settings or sociopolitical contexts, such as environment, demonstration, and protest. *Soothing* frequently collocates with nouns related to sensory experiences and relief, including music, effect, and balm.

The adverb collocation analysis further underscored the functional distinctions of these adjectives. *Calm* is often intensified by adverbs such as remarkably and

perfectly, indicating an evaluative emphasis on emotional control. *Peaceful* collocates with adverbs like *relatively* and *entirely*, which typically indicate the degree of external peace or stability. *Soothing* is commonly modified by adverbs such as *gently* and *very*, reinforcing its active and comforting connotation.

These findings highlight the importance of collocational behavior in understanding and teaching near-synonyms. While traditional dictionaries provide essential semantic distinctions, corpus analysis reveals how contextual usage and lexical associations shape meaning in real communication. The differences in collocational profiles among the three adjectives illustrate that their interchangeability is limited and context-dependent.

Overall, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of synonymy in English by demonstrating how adjectives with superficially similar meanings can diverge in function, intensity, and context. Such insights are valuable for language learners, educators, translators, and anyone seeking to use English with greater precision.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed concerning pedagogical practice and further research.

5.2.1 Pedagogical Implications

First, it is recommended that English language educators integrate corpus-based tools into vocabulary teaching. Utilizing resources such as COCA allows learners to explore authentic collocational patterns of near-synonyms. Guided engagement with these tools can promote a deeper awareness of subtle distinctions in usage.

Second, teaching materials and curricula should place greater emphasis on collocational awareness, particularly in relation to synonyms. Learners often assume that synonymous adjectives are fully interchangeable; exposure to collocational data can help prevent inappropriate usage by illustrating contextual limitations.

Third, language instructors and learners are encouraged to combine the use of learner dictionaries with corpus data. While dictionaries provide foundational semantic

information, corpus evidence offers rich contextual examples that clarify nuanced differences and usage.

5.2.2 Recommendations for Further Research

Future studies could expand the investigation to include additional sets of near-synonymous adjectives, such as *anxious*, *nervous*, and *worried*. This would contribute to the development of broader corpus-informed frameworks for vocabulary teaching and lexical semantics.

Inclusion of learner corpus analysis is also recommended. Analyzing learner-produced data may reveal common patterns of misuse or overgeneralization of synonyms, informing more targeted pedagogical interventions.

Cross-variety and cross-linguistic studies may further enrich understanding by examining how synonyms like *calm*, *peaceful*, and *soothing* are used across different English varieties (e.g., British, Australian) or compared with equivalent adjectives in other languages. Such research can illuminate cultural or pragmatic influences on word choice.

Finally, given the diverse genres within COCA, further research could investigate genre-specific collocational patterns. This approach could determine whether the usage of these adjectives varies significantly across spoken versus written language or among academic, journalistic, and literary texts.

In conclusion, this study highlights the critical role of context, collocation, and corpus analysis in distinguishing the meanings and uses of near-synonyms. A corpus-based approach not only enriches our understanding of lexical variation but also offers practical benefits for language learners and educators seeking greater accuracy and expressiveness in English.

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