



**A CORPUS-BASED STUDY OF TWO SYNONYMS:
SEEK AND SEARCH (FOR)**

BY

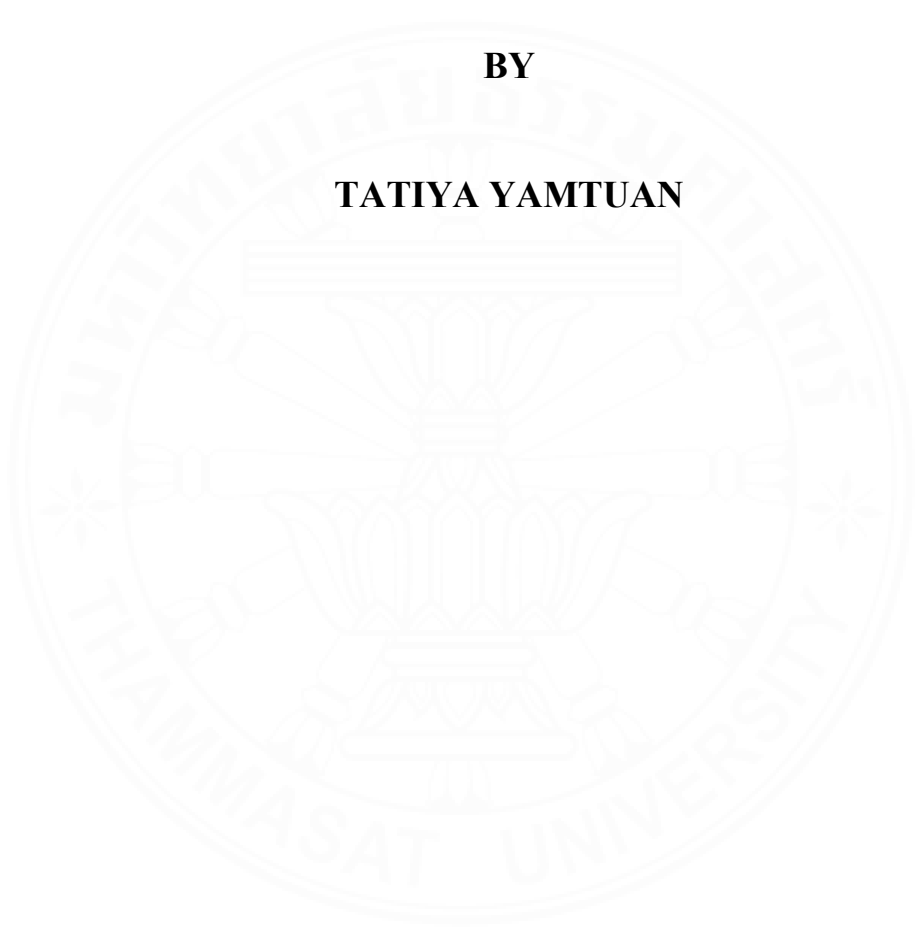
TATIYA YAMTUAN

**AN INDEPENDENT STUDY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF MASTER OF ARTS IN CAREER ENGLISH FOR
INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION
LANGUAGE INSTITUTE
THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC YEAR 2024**

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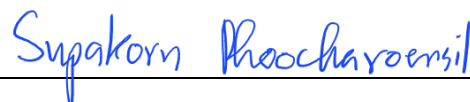
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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the similarities and differences between the synonymous verbs *seek* and *search (for)* in terms of meaning and collocation. Data were collected from two major learners' dictionaries: Oxford Dictionary (2005) and Longman Dictionary (2014) to compare the meaning of the verbs. Additionally, the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) was utilized to analyze the collocations. Collocates were selected based on frequency and a Mutual Information (MI) score of 3 or higher and divided by topic based on semantic preferences. The findings indicate that *seek* and *search (for)* cannot be used interchangeably. While both share a core meaning of looking for something, they exhibit subtle differences in detailed usage. Despite sharing some adverb collocates and themes, the verbs show distinct differences in their noun collocates. Most noun collocates of *seek* are associated with the theme of Support, such as *help*, *advice*, and *assistance*, whereas those of *search (for)* relate to Recovery, including *survivor*, *wreckage*, and *remains*. Additionally, both verbs relate to the theme of Place, but differ in type: *seek* is linked to places of safety such as *shelter*, *refuge* and *asylum*, while *search (for)* connects to housing-related places such as *apartment*, *listing*. The study concludes that a deeper understanding of distinctions, supported by corpus-based evidence, can enhance English learners' ability to select appropriate vocabulary, thereby improving precision in communication.

Keywords: Synonyms, Corpus-based study, Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), Language learning, Semantic preference, Collocation.



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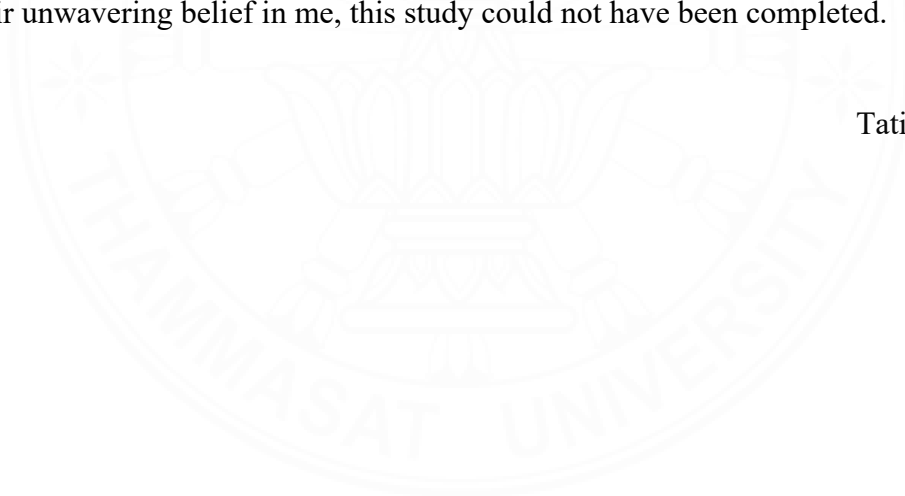


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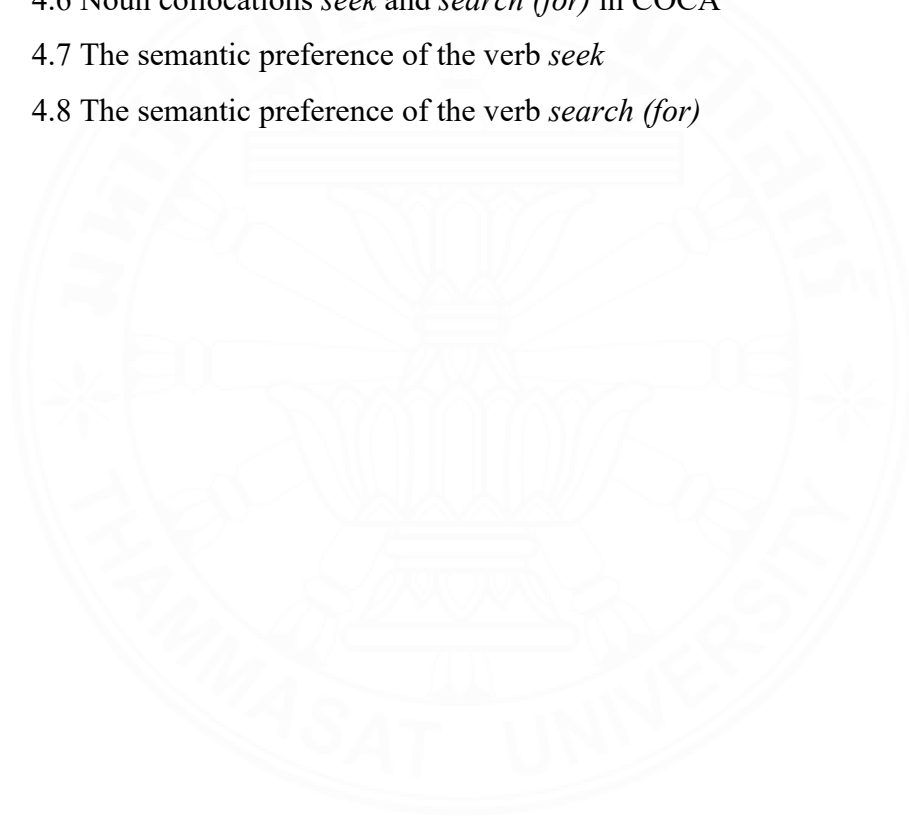
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Linguists and methodologists have emphasized that vocabulary is important in learning a language. Nickel argued that communication uses vocabulary more than grammar (Nickel, 1973, p. 27). Therefore, understanding English vocabulary well is essential. It will help us use English better in areas such as speaking, writing, reading, and listening.

Vocabulary can be expanded with knowledge of synonyms. According to Thornbury (2002), synonyms have the same core meaning but are not always interchangeable. Their usage depends on the context, as some words are suitable in certain situations while others are not. For example, *seek* and *search (for)* have the same meaning, meaning looking for or trying to find something, but the method of use and context may be different.

Among the numerous synonyms, the words *seek*, and *search (for)* particularly capture research interest. Both terms are among the top 3,000 most frequently used words, according to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2005). Most people are unable to distinguish between the words *seek* and *search (for)*. Synonyms are essential for language learners because they help expand vocabulary, improve comprehension and develop communication skills, and adapt language use to different contexts. For example, knowing several words with similar meanings helps one choose the most appropriate word for a formal or informal situation. I am an English learner and I want to improve my understanding of vocabulary for use in study and work.

Corpora provides valuable insights into real-life language use by collecting and analyzing authentic communication Sinclair (1991, p.170). They help verify linguistic assumptions, support language learning, and assist in translation and language training (Hunston, 2006). In particular, corpora are useful for learning synonyms, as they reveal subtle differences in meaning, frequency, and collocation. By analyzing real-world usage patterns, learners can better understand how synonyms are used in different contexts, leading to more natural and accurate language use (Hunston, 2006).

In this research, I will use the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2005), the online version of the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) to examine *seek* and *search (for)*. The results of this research will help those who still do not understand the words *seek* and *search (for)* to fully comprehend their meanings and learn how to use them across various contexts.

1.2 Research Objective

1. To study similarities and differences between *seek* and *search (for)* in terms of meaning.
2. To investigate similarities and differences between *seek* and *search for* in terms of collocation.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the similarities and differences between *seek* and *search (for)* in terms of meaning?
2. What are the similarities and differences between *seek* and *search for* in terms of collocation?

1.4 Definition of Terms

1.4.1 Synonym

Synonyms are a collection of words that share similar meanings but cannot completely replace each other in every circumstance. (Harley, 2006, p. 146). Despite sharing a common core meaning, this collection of words can be identified by specific linguistic criteria because they do not share all the same linguistic features: languages, collocation, connotation, and meanings. (Jackson & Amvela, 2000)

1.4.2. Corpus or Corpora

A corpus is a collection of texts. They are utilized as linguistic objects for lexical research and electronically saved on digital data sources (Lindquist, H. 2018), and can be searched using the data warehouse analysis database.

1.4.3. The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)

The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), compiled from over a billion words collected between 1990 and 2020 from various sources, is one of the largest collections of American English. It includes texts from magazines, websites, conversations, and other mediums, making it a valuable resource for studying linguistic trends across different registers and genres. In other words, the corpus's wide variety of texts allows researchers to understand language use in many different contexts. (Davies, M. 2010)

1.4.4 Collocation

Collocations refer to words that frequently appear together in a language more often than by chance. They form natural word combinations, including various noun, adjective, verb, and adverb pairings. According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2005), collocations are word combinations that commonly occur together in a language.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study was limited to analyzing English synonyms using a corpus, with a particular focus on the verbs seek and search (for). The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and two well-known learners' dictionaries, the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary and the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, were the sources of the data. Verb collocations and the meanings connected to these two verbs are the focus of the analysis.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Understanding synonyms is essential for mastering English as a second language. Choosing the right words and applying them appropriately in various contexts, such as academic, linguistic, and communicative settings, is a critical skill. This study examines the terms seek and search (for), aiming to benefit English learners, translators, and teachers by enhancing linguistic accuracy for effective communication. The goal is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the meanings and usage of these two terms, demonstrate their proper usage in various contexts, and clarify their subtle differences.

Additionally, the study highlights that second-language researchers can leverage data analysis tools like the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). Furthermore, this research promotes semantic or lexical knowledge by explaining distinctions between related terms. Understanding the correct use of seek and search (for) not only prevents misunderstandings but also enhances clarity in communication.

1.7 Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One presents the introduction, outlining the study's background, objectives, research questions, definitions of key terms, scope, significance, and overall structure. Chapter Two offers a review of the literature, covering topics such as synonyms, the criteria used to differentiate them, the role of corpora, and relevant previous studies. Chapter Three details the materials used, the process of data collection, and the methods of data analysis. Chapter Four presents the study's findings along with a discussion of the results. Finally, Chapter Five summarizes the conclusions and offers suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The chapter consists of 4 sections. It includes 2.1) Synonyms, 2.2) Criteria for Distinguishing Synonyms, 2.3) Corpus or Corpora, 2.4) Previous Related Studies.

2.1 Synonyms

2.1.1 Definition of Synonyms

A synonym is a word or phrase that has the same or nearly the same meaning as another. For instance, according to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD, 2005), big and large are synonyms because they convey the same idea. Similarly, the Cambridge Dictionary (online version) identifies small and little as synonyms. Understanding synonyms is fundamental to building vocabulary, as it helps individuals expand their word bank and use language more effectively across different situations.

2.1.2 Strict Synonyms

Strict synonyms are two words that can be used interchangeably in any context. In choosing strict synonyms, the two words having the same meaning will not affect the meaning, form, or connotation. Strict synonyms create linguistic confusion.

Strict synonyms require the two words to compete so that the other word changes meaning or is never used again. For example, *sky* is borrowed from Old Norse. According to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE), *sky* refers to "the space above the Earth where clouds, the Sun, and stars appear." In contrast, *heaven*, a native English word, is defined as "the place where God is believed to reside and where good people are thought to go after they die." These two words are often seen as competing with each other, with *sky* representing the physical aspect and *heaven* symbolizing the spiritual aspect (Jackson & Amvela, 2000, p. 93).

This distinction supports the idea that true synonyms do not exist. Within the same language, synonyms often do not share identical meanings and cannot always be used interchangeably in all contexts (Palmer, 1997, p. 60).

Two words often cannot share the same linguistic characteristics entirely, such as the range of syntactic occurrences or semantic implications. When two words appear in the same context, it can lead to confusion and give the impression of an overly abundant vocabulary (Kreidler, 1998, p. 97).

2.1.3 Near Synonyms

Near synonyms are words that have similar or closely related meanings in certain contexts but differ in meaning in some aspects. Therefore, they cannot be used interchangeably in every context. As Jackson & Amvela (2000) explained, words with similar or closely related meanings cannot always be substituted for one another in all situations. This is because most synonyms are near synonyms rather than strict synonyms. For example, mad and insane both mean angry, but they have different grammatical patterns. The word mad is used with at (mad + at), whereas insane is not followed by at (Phoocharoensil, 2010). Another example can be observed with *inscribe* and *write*. Merriam-Webster's online thesaurus lists *inscribe* as a synonym of *write*. However, the usage and meaning of these words are not the same. Saying it is a novel inscription might sound odd, whereas to write a novel is more appropriate (Harley, 2006, p. 146)

2.2 Criteria for Distinguishing Synonyms

The criteria for distinguishing synonyms presented in this section include collocation, degree of formality, grammatical patterns, and meaning. However, the present study focuses exclusively on meaning and collocation.

2.2.1 Collocation

Collocations refer to words that frequently co-occur more often than by chance. Sinclair (1996, p.70) Collocation is the occurrence of two or more words in a text. Bennette (2010, p.8) describes it as the statistical tendency of words to appear together, meaning that when one word is used, certain words are likely to follow. (Lewis, M. (1997) further explains that collocation occurs naturally and significantly in language use.

The words *quick* and *fast* share a similar meaning, but they cannot always be used interchangeably. For instance, we might say quick meal rather than fast meal, although many people might not commonly use the phrase quick meal. On the other hand, "fast food" is widely recognized and accepted (Aroonmanakun, 2015).

2.2.2 Degree of Formality

The level of formality in language plays a crucial role in distinguishing near-synonyms. When two words share similar meanings, one may be associated with a more formal or informal context than the other (Phoocharoensil, 2010).

Additionally, the degree of formality influences word choice in communication. Some synonyms are suitable for formal settings, while others are more common in informal or spoken language. In certain cases, one word may be considered slang, whereas the other serves as a standard term (Jackson & Amvela, 2000).

2.2.3 Grammatical Patterns

Grammatical patterns serve as a key criterion for distinguishing between English synonyms, as words with similar meanings often follow different syntactic structures. According to (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2008), grammar comprises the fixed rules governing spoken and written language. Even when synonyms convey the same meaning, their grammatical usage can vary.

For instance, the verbs *give* and *provide* both imply offering something, yet they follow different syntactic patterns:

Give + [someone] + [something] : *She gave Jane a cake.*

Provide + [someone] + with + [something] : *She provided Jane with a cake.*

Similarly, adjectives such as "keen" and "interested", which express motivation or enthusiasm, require different prepositions:

Be keen on [something]: *She is keen on this story.*

Be interested in [something]: *She is interested in this story.*

These distinctions highlight the importance of grammatical structures in synonym selection, reinforcing the notion that meaning alone does not determine word usage.

2.2.4 Meaning

Although it is difficult to quantify the degree of synonymy or determine a precise threshold beyond which synonyms lose their semantic equivalence, it is widely acknowledged that synonyms can overlap in meaning to varying extents (Jackson & Amvela, 2000). A critical aspect of vocabulary acquisition involves recognizing that many English words possess multiple meanings. Learners typically acquire the most frequent or dominant sense of a word first, followed by less common or more specialized senses (Schmitt, 2010). However, developing a more comprehensive understanding of vocabulary also necessitates familiarity with low-frequency definitions. A well-defined word provides a full representation of its meaning, distinguishing it clearly from other lexemes by specifying its defining features, contextual range, and conceptual boundaries. Learner's dictionaries often support this by offering both basic and more nuanced definitions of words. Consequently, several studies have examined and compared the core and detailed meanings of synonymous words across various learner's dictionaries—such as the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2015) and the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (2014). When dealing with polysemous words, instructors may decide which sense to teach based on several factors, including grammatical function, semantic relationships, potential conflicts in meaning, pedagogical usefulness, and frequency of use.

2.3 Corpus or Corpora

A corpus is a structured collection of authentic texts stored electronically, allowing researchers to analyze language patterns beyond intuition (Bennett, 2010, p.12). O'Keeffe, McCarthy, and Carter (2007) define a corpus as a compilation of written or spoken texts stored on a computer, as a systematically collected dataset for qualitative and quantitative analysis.

2.3.1 Benefit of Corpus Data

The benefit of corpora is that they collect information through human communication used in real life (Sinclair, 1996). Corpora are stored electronically and can be surveyed with special software (Hunston, 2002). Corpora are used to check linguistic assumptions and help to identify language usage. Corpora can also be applied to language usage, such as translation or language training. Corpora can enlighten users on language that is difficult to understand by other means (Hunston, 2002).

Corpora serves as valuable tools in linguistic research. Quantitative analysis can determine word frequency by counting occurrences in a corpus, while qualitative analysis examines how words or phrases function in different contexts through concordance lines. This method helps distinguish the usage of synonyms by providing contextual data from corpus software (O’Keeffe, McCarthy & Carter, 2017).

2.3.2 The Corpus of Contemporary American English.

One well-known corpus is the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), which contains over 450 million words from diverse sources such as spoken language, fiction, magazines, newspapers, and academic texts. COCA is recognized for its user-friendly interface and multifunctional search capabilities (Davies, 2020) COCA is a widely used and extensive linguistic database containing over one billion English words. Compiled between 1990 and 2019, it features content from diverse genres, including novels, newspapers, and magazines. Created by Mark Davies, professor of Corpus Linguistics at Brigham Young University. COCA includes a vast array of linguistic terms in its database. It allows users to sort data, view example sentences, and analyze word frequencies. Additionally, the corpus uses a KWIC (Key Word in Context) format, commonly employed in language research for lexical analysis.

2.4 Previous Related Studies

Researchers study synonyms using a corpus and examine synonyms and differences in meaning, formality, grammatical patterns, collocation. Additionally, information from dictionary databases was also examined.

Phoocharoensil and Kanokpermpoon (2021) analyzed the genres and collocational patterns of the high-frequency synonymous verbs *increase* and *rise*, using data from COCA. Their study examined the distribution of these verbs across eight genres and identified common noun and adverb collocates based on a Mutual Information (MI) value of ≥ 3 , which indicates strong collocational strength. The findings suggest that both verbs are predominantly associated with formal genres, particularly academic writing. However, *rise* appears slightly less formal than *increase*, as it is more frequently used in popular publications, likely due to its common usage in describing current trends in magazine columns. While the two verbs share some adverb collocates, such as *dramatically* and *substantially*, their collocational patterns exhibit slight differences. Additionally, a semantic analysis of *increase* identified five major themes, primarily related to high speed and/or amount, which largely overlapped with *rise*.

Kummerdchart (2013) examined the meanings and usage of three synonymous verbs: *Defend*, *protect*, and *safeguard*, focusing specifically on their past tense and past participle forms. The study analyzed the collocational patterns and meanings of these verbs using data from the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2015) and the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (2014), while also comparing the findings with data from COCA. This comprehensive approach provided insight into how these verbs are used in different contexts. The results indicated that while the three verbs share certain meanings and collocations, they also exhibit differences in usage depending on context. Although they can sometimes be used interchangeably, their distinct collocational patterns and semantic nuances influence their appropriateness in specific contexts. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the quantitative and qualitative differences between these synonyms, which is particularly useful for English learners seeking to use them accurately in various linguistic situations.

Petcharat and Phoocharoensil (2017). investigated the English synonymous verbs *Appropriate*, *proper*, and *suitable* by analyzing three key aspects: referential

meaning, grammatical patterns, and noun collocations. The study utilized two primary research tools: the online *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (LDOCE) and COCA. By comparing the results from both sources, the researcher identified distinctions in the semantic nuances, grammatical structures, and collocational patterns of the three verbs. While they share similar meanings, the findings indicate that they are not always interchangeable in every context due to their unique linguistic characteristics. This study highlights the importance of understanding these differences for precise and context-appropriate language use.

Phoocharoensil (2021) studied the genre distribution and collocational behavior of the synonymous verbs *persevere* and *persist*, which have cognitively similar meanings, in connection to prosody and semantic choice. The study used information from the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (6th Edition) for definitions, sentence examples, and usage comments, as well as data from the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA) to examine usage patterns in the actual world. The findings revealed that *persist* is often associated with words or phrases carrying negative connotations, whereas *persevere* typically occurs in contexts emphasizing determination and sustained effort in overcoming challenges. Additionally, while learner dictionaries generally classify *persist* as an intransitive verb, corpus data indicates that it can also function transitively in actual usage. These insights contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the distinct semantic and grammatical properties of these two verbs, which is particularly beneficial for language learners and educators.

Phitayakorn (2016) investigated the similarities and differences among the synonymous verbs *advise*, *recommend*, and *suggest*, focusing on their grammatical patterns and collocational usage. The study utilized data from the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (6th Edition, 2014) to analyze their real-world application. The findings indicated that while these three verbs share a common meaning to some extent, they are not fully interchangeable in all contexts due to differences in grammatical structures and collocational tendencies. Additionally, the study highlighted that dictionaries alone do not always provide comprehensive information on language patterns. As a result, it recommended that English learners consult concordance lines for a more in-depth understanding of synonym usage. This insight

emphasizes the importance of corpus-based learning in developing more accurate and natural language proficiency.

Kruawong and Phoocharoensil (2022) analyzed the synonyms *teach*, *educate*, and *instruct* to examine their collocational patterns and distribution across various genres. The study utilized data from the *Longman Dictionary* and COCA to explore their real-world usage. The findings revealed that *teach* had the broadest distribution across all eight genres in COCA and exhibited the highest frequency compared to *educate* and *instruct*. Additionally, all three verbs were more commonly used in formal genres, particularly in academic texts, rather than in spoken contexts. The analysis of noun collocations based on semantic preferences provided deeper insights into the authentic usage of each synonym. These findings emphasize the importance of corpus-based learning for EFL learners, offering more reliable language patterns than dictionary definitions or informal input from native speakers.

Lin and Chung (2021) examined the frequency patterns, subject animacy, and grammatical characteristics of the near synonyms *propose* and *suggest*. Examining these verbs' syntactic and semantic settings was the goal of the study. Using data from the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA). The findings revealed that while the preferred usage patterns of *propose* and *suggest* were identical, differences emerged in the distribution of animate and inanimate subjects, as well as in the syntactic properties of their most frequent patterns. This study provides valuable insights into the distinct linguistic behaviors of these synonyms, contributing to a more precise understanding of their usage in different contexts.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research methodology. It is presented as follows:

3.1) Target Words, 3.2) Materials, and 3.3) Data Collection and Data Analysis

3.1 Target Words

In this study, the target words were two synonymous verbs: *seek* and *search (for)*. These words were selected due to learners' difficulty in distinguishing between them. Furthermore, their significance is evident from their frequency of usage. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2005) in the Oxford 3000 Word List, both *seek* and *search* are high-frequency words. Additionally, Longman Dictionary classifies *seek* with a frequency rating of S2 W1, indicating that it is commonly used in both spoken and written English, while *search* has a rating of W3, meaning it appears frequently in written texts but less so in speech. Given their similarities in meaning, *seek* and *search (for)* are often used interchangeably. However, differences exist in their usage, collocations, and grammatical patterns. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the similarities and differences between these two verbs using a corpus-based approach.

3.2 Materials

3.2.1 Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 6th edition (2014) and Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary

Dictionaries are the primary source of information for finding information about words with similar meanings. These two dictionaries are very reliable with definitions, pronunciations, and example sentences. The words and meanings that appear in the dictionaries can be verified. This is the reason why I chose these two dictionaries for my research. Moreover, these two dictionaries have a long history because they are tools for finding information about the meaning of words in English. And these two dictionaries will help you identify the similarities and differences between the words *seek* and *search (for)* very well.

3.2.2 *The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)*

For this study, the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) served as the primary resource. It offered a consistency index to analyze the similarities and differences between the words *seek* and *search*. Various COCA functions were utilized to conduct this study comprehensively.

COCA was selected as the primary data source for this study because it is the largest and most reliable corpus of authentic American English. COCA provides balanced and comprehensive data by covering eight genres, including both spoken and written texts. This ensures an accurate analysis of language patterns. It is the largest and freely accessible corpus available.

COCA is a valuable tool for identifying words or phrases as they are used in real-life contexts and is frequently utilized in research. Its accessibility makes it especially useful for English language learners. COCA provides insights into sentence structure and the formality of words across various sources, such as newspapers, magazines, and webpages.

3.3 Data Collection and Data Analysis

I have collected and analyzed information from three key sources: Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE), Oxford Learners' Dictionaries (OALD), and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). These tools were utilized as part of the research methodology.

First, I used the online versions of Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE) and Oxford Learners' Dictionaries (OALD) to explore the meanings and usage examples of the terms *seek* and *search*. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE) and the Oxford Dictionary (OALD) were analyzed. While the dictionaries offered both similar and distinct definitions for the two terms, these similarities and differences were examined to better understand the subtle distinctions between *seek* and *search*.

To further analyze the collocations of these two synonyms, I collected data from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). I used COCA to analyze the common collocations of the target synonyms. As the focus was on verbs, the analysis concentrated on identifying the most frequently paired words with *seek* and *search*.

Hence, 20 noun and adverb collocates that commonly co-occur with the synonymous verbs seek and search were identified. Collocations were selected based on their frequency and Mutual Information (MI) scores exceeding 3.

The identified collocates were then grouped according to their semantic preferences and categorized into related themes, providing meaningful groupings. This semantic categorization revealed the similarities and differences between the synonyms, particularly in their collocational patterns and the contexts in which they are used.



CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter explores and discusses the similarities and differences between the two synonyms *seek* and *search (for)*. The findings are organized into two main sections: meaning and collocations. Data were collected from three sources—the Oxford Learner’s Dictionary, the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA).

4.1 The Similarities and Differences Between the Synonyms *Seek and Search (For)* in Term of Meanings

Table 4.1

Meaning of Seek and Search (For) From the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary.

| Word | Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (OALD 2005) | Example |
|---------------------|---|---|
| <i>Seek</i> | 1. To look for something/somebody. 2. To ask somebody for something; to try to obtain or achieve something. 3. Seek to do something to try to do something. | 1. Drivers are advised to <u>seek</u> alternative routes. 2. They <u>seek</u> refuge in the mountain villages. 3. He <u>seeks</u> to establish himself as a writer. |
| <i>Search (for)</i> | 1. To look carefully for something/somebody. 2. To look for information on a computer or on the internet. 3. (especially of the police) to examine somebody’s clothes, their pockets, etc. in order to find | 1. Police <u>searched</u> for clues in the area. 2. You can <u>search</u> for any word or phrase in the text. 3. The youths were arrested and <u>searched</u> for anything that would incriminate them. |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | <p>something that they may be hiding.</p> <p>4. To think carefully about something, especially in order to find the answer to a problem.</p> | <p>4. We are continually <u>searching</u> for ways to cut costs.</p> |
|--|--|--|

Table 4.2

Meaning of Seek and Search (For) From the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English.

| Word | Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE 2009) | Example |
|---------------------|---|--|
| <i>Seek</i> | <p>1. <i>Formal</i> to try to achieve or get something.</p> <p>2. <i>written</i> to look for someone or something.</p> <p>3. to move naturally towards something or into a particular position.</p> | <p>1. Do you think the president will <u>seek</u> re-election?</p> <p>2. Attractive woman, 27, <u>seeks</u> male, 25-35, for fun and friendship.</p> <p>3. Water <u>seeks</u> its own level.</p> |
| <i>Search (for)</i> | <p>1. To try to find someone or something by looking very carefully.</p> <p>2. To try to find an explanation or solution.</p> | <p>1. An RAF plane <u>searched</u> for the missing men.</p> <p>2. Scientists are still <u>searching</u> for a cure.</p> |

Although the verbs *search for* and *seek* both mean to look for something, they differ in the level of focus and attention involved, as well as in the manner in which the action is carried out. While *seek* tends to convey a broader or more general attempt to find something, *search for* often suggests a more careful, deliberate, and detailed process. In addition, *search for* appears to involve the attempt to find something more

concrete and physical—namely, to locate a person, object, or specific piece of information.

4.2 Collocations

In response to the second research question, the findings are presented through the collocations commonly associated with the synonyms, along with the semantic preferences of those collocations.

4.2.1 Adverb Collocates of *Seek* and *Search (For)*

This section addresses the second question by examining the adverb collocates of the verbs *seek* and *search (for)*. It presents and discusses adverbs that frequently co-occur with these target verbs, based on the top 20 frequency list in COCA. Each selected adverb must have a minimum Mutual Information (MI) value of 3.

Table 4.3

Adverb Collocates Seek and Search (For) in COCA

| Rank | Seek (V) | Freq. | MI Scores | Search for (V) | Freq | MI Scores |
|------|----------------|-------|-----------|----------------|------|-----------|
| 1 | Actively | 906 | 5.79 | Frantically | 236 | 7.37 |
| 2 | Desperately | 379 | 4.87 | Desperately | 225 | 5.35 |
| 3 | Elsewhere | 270 | 3.02 | Everywhere | 198 | 3.32 |
| 4 | Aggressively | 149 | 4.41 | Constantly | 125 | 3.1 |
| 5 | Eagerly | 114 | 4.59 | Actively | 105 | 3.91 |
| 6 | Unsuccessfully | 95 | 5.36 | Thoroughly | 104 | 4.08 |
| 7 | Diligently | 61 | 4.95 | Diligently | 41 | 5.61 |
| 8 | Earnestly | 57 | 5.27 | Manually | 28 | 4.16 |
| 9 | Consciously | 56 | 3.55 | Unsuccessfully | 23 | 4.55 |
| 10 | Urgently | 32 | 3.74 | Vainly | 20 | 6.73 |
| 11 | Instinctively | 28 | 3.09 | Fruitlessly | 17 | 7.77 |
| 12 | Vainly | 27 | 5.93 | Instinctively | 13 | 3.22 |
| 13 | Avidly | 22 | 5.35 | Intently | 13 | 3.33 |

| | | | | | | |
|----|---------------|----|------|-------------|----|------|
| 14 | Unconsciously | 18 | 3.02 | Aimlessly | 10 | 4.64 |
| 15 | Ardently | 14 | 4.9 | Earnestly | 7 | 3.48 |
| 16 | Humbly | 12 | 3.05 | Avidly | 6 | 4.71 |
| 17 | Persistently | 13 | 3.32 | Unlawfully | 6 | 4.37 |
| 18 | Assiduously | 12 | 4.5 | Tirelessly | 6 | 3.39 |
| 19 | Tirelessly | 12 | 3.15 | Greedily | 3 | 3.88 |
| 20 | Restlessly | 8 | 3.91 | Assiduously | 3 | 3.74 |

In the following section, the adverb collocations are grouped according to their semantic preferences and categorized into related themes.

4.2.2 Semantic Preference

The verb of *seek* and *search (for)* collocates with following adverb:

Table 4.4

The Semantic Preference of the Verb Seek

| Name Group | Seek (V) |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 1. Mental State / Intensity | Desperately, Earnestly, Avidly, Vainly, Instinctively, Ardently, Eagerly, Urgently, Aggressively, Persistently, Restlessly |
| 2. Method / Style of Action | Actively, Diligently, Assiduously, Tirelessly, Humbly |
| 3. Failure / Futility | Unsuccessfully |
| 4. Location / Direction | Elsewhere |
| 5. Cognition / Focus | Consciously, Unconsciously |

Table 4.4 presents adverbs that frequently co-occur with the verb *seek*, organized by semantic preference. These adverbs fall into five thematic groups. The group with the majority of collocates is Mental State/ Intensity, such as Desperately,

Earnestly, Avidly, Vainly, Instinctively, Ardently, Eagerly, Urgently, Aggressively, and Persistently.

Table 4.5

The Semantic Preference of the Verb Search (For)

| Name Group | Search (V) |
|-----------------------------|--|
| 1. Mental State / Intensity | Desperately, Earnestly, Avidly, Vainly, Instinctively, Greedy, Frantically, Intently, Constantly |
| 2. Method / Style of Action | Actively, Thoroughly, Diligently, Unlawfully, Assiduously, Tirelessly, Manually |
| 3. Failure / Futility | Unsuccessfully, Fruitlessly, Aimlessly |
| 4. Location / Direction | Everywhere |

Table 4.5 presents adverbs that commonly co-occur with the verb *search (for)*, categorized by semantic preference. These adverbs are grouped into four categories, with the largest group being Mental State / Intensity, such as Desperately, Earnestly, Avidly, Vainly, Instinctively, Greedy, Frantically, Intently, and Constantly.

The semantic preference of the verbs *seek* and *search (for)* based on the adverbs that most often appear with them. The adverbs are grouped according to their meaning to illustrate the specific uses of the two verbs in different contexts. The adverbs in bold in table 4.4 and table 4.5 represent shared adverbs while the adverbs that are not in bold are unique words. There are overlapping themes/semantic categories i.e. intensity, method, failure and location while only *seek* is associated with the theme of cognition/focus. For both *seek* and *search for*, the majority of the collocates fall into the mental state/intensity theme.

4.2.3 Noun Collocations of Seek and Search (For)

This section responds to the second question by analyzing the noun collocations of the verbs *seek* and *search (for)*. It identifies and discusses the nouns that most frequently occur with these target verbs, based on the top 20 most frequent collocations of the word *seek* and the 14 most frequent collocations of the word *search (for)* from

the COCA corpus. It includes only nouns with a Mutual Information (MI) value of at least 3 are included.

Table 4.6

Noun Collocations Seek and Search (For) in COCA

| Rank | <i>Seek (V)</i> | Freq. | MI Scores | <i>Search for (V)</i> | Freq | MI Scores |
|------|-----------------|-------|-----------|-----------------------|------|-----------|
| 1 | Help | 3416 | 4.75 | Answer | 562 | 3.29 |
| 2 | Advice | 1447 | 4.52 | Apartment | 310 | 3.42 |
| 3 | Treatment | 1168 | 3.27 | Warrant | 301 | 5.83 |
| 4 | Refuge | 926 | 6.48 | Clue | 251 | 4.53 |
| 5 | Re-election | 709 | 5.78 | Keyword | 182 | 5.76 |
| 6 | Approval | 698 | 4.57 | Suspect | 130 | 3.42 |
| 7 | Assistance | 660 | 4.1 | Survivor | 129 | 3.6 |
| 8 | Damage | 586 | 3.23 | Treasure | 62 | 3.19 |
| 9 | Shelter | 584 | 4.51 | Cure | 58 | 3.3 |
| 10 | Asylum | 571 | 6.26 | Remains | 46 | 3.51 |
| 11 | Revenge | 533 | 5.33 | Wreckage | 37 | 4.58 |
| 12 | Relief | 509 | 3.65 | Belongings | 37 | 4.49 |
| 13 | Employment | 478 | 3.81 | Luggage | 37 | 3.9 |
| 14 | Penalty | 450 | 3.9 | Listing | 36 | 3.16 |
| 15 | Permission | 431 | 4.12 | - | - | - |
| 16 | Abortion | 394 | 3.05 | - | - | - |
| 17 | Counsel | 377 | 4.31 | - | - | - |
| 18 | Lawsuit | 371 | 3.64 | - | - | - |
| 19 | Guidance | 360 | 4.18 | - | - | - |
| 20 | Nomination | 358 | 4.07 | - | - | - |

In the next section, the noun collocations are grouped according to their semantic preferences and categorized into related themes.

4.2.4 Semantic Preference

The verb of *seek* and *search (for)* collocates with following noun:

Table 4.7

The Semantic Preference of the Verb Seek

| Name Group | Seek (V) |
|------------------|---|
| 1. Support | Help, Assistance, Guidance, Counsel, Advice, Relief |
| 2. Place | Shelter, Refuge, Asylum |
| 3. Law | Lawsuit, Penalty, Damage |
| 4. Politics | Nomination, Re-election |
| 5. Authorization | Approval, Permission |
| 6. Medicine | Treatment, Abortion |
| 7. Miscellaneous | Employment, Revenge |

Table 4.7 presents noun collocate that frequently occur with the verb *seek*, categorized by semantic preference. These nouns fall into 7 thematic groups. The largest group is Support, such as Help, Assistance, Guidance, Counsel, Advice, Relief.

Table 4.8

The Semantic Preference of the Verb Search (For)

| Name Group | Search (V) |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Law | warrant, suspect |
| 2. Recovery | survivor, wreckage, remains |
| 3. Place | apartment, listing |
| 4. Personal property | belongings, luggage |
| 5. Discovery | clue, treasure |
| 6. Medicine | cure |
| 7. Information | keyword, answer |

Table 4.8 presents noun collocations that frequently occur with the verb *search (for)*, categorized by semantic preference. These nouns fall into 7 thematic groups. The largest group is Recovery, such as survivor, wreckage, and remains.

The semantic preferences of the verbs *seek* and *search (for)* are based on the nouns that commonly occur with each verb. These nouns are grouped by meaning. It is worth noting that there are no noun collocates shared between the two verbs. Although the noun collocates of *seek* and *search (for)* share similar themes/semantic categories i.e. law, place and medicine, the meanings within those groups can differ. For example, in the name group Place, the collocates of *seek* include shelter, refuge, and asylum, which refer to places of safety or protection. In contrast, the Place collocates of *search (for)* include apartment, listing which is often related to looking for housing or real estate, indicating a more practical or everyday context of searching for a place to live. Furthermore, each verb exhibits its own distinct themes. The verb *seek* tends to collocate with themes related to support, politics, and authorization. In contrast, the themes associated with *search (for)* include personal property, recovery and discovery, and information. The majority of the collocates for *seek* fall under the theme of support, whereas those for *search (for)* fall under the theme of recovery.

Regarding the verb *seek*, its common noun collocates are mostly related to abstract goals such as help, assistance, guidance, approval, and relief. These are intangible concepts that cannot be physically touched but represent desired outcomes that individuals strive for. In contrast, *search (for)* collocates predominantly with concrete, physical, and investigative targets, such as clue, suspect, keyword, and warrant. Additional collocates include tangible objects like treasure, remains, and belongings, highlighting its focus on physical searching activities.

In conclusion, these findings confirm that *seek* and *search (for)*, despite their shared core meaning of looking for something, are best classified as near-synonyms. Although *seek* and *search (for)* are considered synonyms in some contexts, they are not always interchangeable, because both *seek* and *search (for)* have different detailed meanings and collocations. Moreover, COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English) is very useful, because it provides more insight than a dictionary definition.

The current results are consistent with Kumnerdchart (2013) who concluded that dictionary-based definitions are insufficient to explain the full range of synonym usage. Incorporated corpus data to reveal patterns of actual usage that dictionaries may overlook. Although both examined (OALD and LDOCE) defined *seek* and *search (for)* with similar language, to look for something, the COCA data demonstrated clear

contextual and collocational divergence between the two, confirming that authentic usage is more nuanced than dictionary entries suggest.

These findings align with previous studies such as Petcharat and Phoocharoensil (2017), which emphasized that near-synonymous verbs like *Appropriate*, *proper*, and *suitable* differ not only in meaning but also in noun collocations. In a similar fashion, this study found that *seek* and *search (for)* share no overlapping noun collocations in COCA, indicating that the two verbs operate in distinctly different lexical environments.

Moreover, this study supports the observations of Phoocharoensil (2021), who found that synonymous verbs *persist* and *persevere* differ in semantic prosody and collocational behavior. His findings showed that *persist* often carries a negative or neutral tone, while *persevere* tends to imply a more positive and determined mindset. This mirrors the current study, in which use of corpus tools such as COCA allowed for a more objective, data-driven exploration of language use, contributing to our understanding of how near-synonyms function in authentic discourse. These tools were especially valuable for identifying collocational patterns that are often absent from dictionary explanations, providing deeper insights into the contextual preferences of each verb.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter consists of five primary sections: (1) Summary of the findings, (2) Conclusion, (3) Implications, (4) Limitations, and (5) Recommendations.

5.1 Summary of the Findings

Using the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and two dictionaries—the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD, 2005) and the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE, 2009). This corpus-based study sought to examine two near-synonyms: seek and search (for). The results pertaining to semantic preferences, adverb and noun collocational patterns, and meaning similarities and differences are compiled in the section that follows.

5.1.1 Meaning

The research examined the definitions of *seek* and *search (for)* using two well-established dictionaries: the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD, 2005) and the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE, 2009). The investigation revealed that both verbs share a similar core meaning of looking for something/somebody. However, they differ in the level of focus and the manner in which the action is performed. *Seek* is defined as to try to get or achieve something, indicating a broader or more general attempt to find something. In contrast, *search (for)* is defined as to look carefully for something/somebody and emphasizes a more deliberate, detailed, and thorough process. In addition, compared to *seek*, *search for* tends to involve the attempt to find something more concrete and physical.

5.1.2 Adverb Collocation

The investigation of adverb collocates and their semantic preferences for the two target verbs, *seek* and *search (for)*, revealed patterns that reflect their distinct usage in real-life contexts. For *seek*, a big group of adverb collocates is Mental State/

Intensity. Similarly, for search (for), the group with the majority of collocates is Mental State / Intensity. Out of 20 adverb collocates, the verbs share 10 adverb collocates, namely desperately, earnestly, avidly, vainly, instinctively, actively, diligently, assiduously, tirelessly, and unsuccessfully. These shared collocates represent general notions of intensity, method, and failure, applicable to both verbs in the context of striving and searching. However, the theme of cognition or focus is associated only with the verb *seek*.

5.1.3 Noun Collocation

The investigation of noun collocates and their semantic preferences for the two target verbs, *seek* and *search (for)*, revealed distinct patterns that reflect their specific functions in authentic language use. The verbs do not share any noun collocates. Additionally, although the noun collocates of *seek* and *search (for)* share similar themes/semantic categories such as Place, Law, and Medicine themes, the meanings within those groups can differ. For instance, for the theme of Place, the type of place differs: *seek* is linked to places of safety such as *shelter*, *refuge* and *asylum*, while *search (for)* connects to housing-related places such as *apartment*, *listing*. Furthermore, the verbs *seek* and *search (for)* differ in their semantic preferences, meaning they tend to occur with different types of nouns and convey different purposes. Each verb is associated with its own distinct thematic groups, reflecting how the action is understood in context. The majority of the collocates for *seek* and *search for* fall under different themes. The largest group of *seek* is Support, such as Help, Assistance, Guidance, Counsel, Advice, Relief. Whereas, the majority of *search (for)* is Recovery, such as survivor, wreckage, and remains. Additionally, the verb *seek*, its common noun collocates, is mostly related to abstract goals such as help, assistance, guidance, approval, and relief. These are intangible concepts that cannot be physically touched. On the other hand, *search (for)* collocates predominantly with concrete nouns such as clue, suspect, keyword, and warrant, focusing on physical searching activities. There are no shared nouns collocations between *seek* and *search (for)* in this analysis. This indicates that while the verbs may appear synonymous at a surface level, they function in distinct semantic environments.

5.2 Conclusion

This corpus-based study aimed to explore the similarities and differences between the verbs *seek* and *search (for)*. The investigation focused on their meanings and collocation, drawing on data from two major dictionaries (OALD 2005 and LDOCE 2009) as well as the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). The analysis revealed that while *seek* and *search (for)* share a fundamental meaning of looking for something/somebody. *Seek* tends to convey a broader or more general attempt to find something, whereas *search (for)* often a more careful, deliberate, and detailed process. This reveals different levels of attention, and manner of action between the two verbs. In addition, *search (for)* appears to involve the attempt to find something more concrete and physical. Collocates were selected based on frequency and a Mutual Information (MI) score of 3 or higher and categorized into themes based on semantic preference. Adverb collocates of both *seek* and *search (for)* represent shared adverb collocates and unique words. Although, there are overlapping themes/semantic categories, the theme of cognition or focus is associated only with the verb *seek*. As for noun collocates of *seek* and *search (for)*, they are clearly distinct, with no shared collocates. The majority of noun collocates of *seek* are associated with the theme of Support, whereas those of *search (for)* relate to Recovery. When the noun collocates of *seek* and *search (for)* fall into similar themes/semantic categories, their meanings within those themes/categories can vary. An example can be seen with the theme of Place. Furthermore, *seek* predominantly co-occurs with abstract concepts, whereas *search (for)* is more frequently used with concrete targets. These findings confirm that the two verbs, though similar in core meaning, are not fully interchangeable due to the different collocates with different semantic preferences and meanings. Thus, they are best classified as near-synonyms.

5.3 Limitations

This corpus-based study has several limitations. Firstly, the analysis focused only on the top-ranked noun and adverb collocates of *seek* and *search (for)*, based on frequency in COCA. As a result, other less frequent but potentially meaningful collocates were not included. Some context-specific or specialized usages might have been overlooked due to their lower frequency or Mutual Information (MI) scores, which were not considered in this study.

Secondly, while the study successfully categorized collocates into semantic preference groups, the analysis was limited to verb + noun and verb + adverb combinations. Other syntactic patterns, such as verb + prepositional phrases or complex clauses, were not examined. These structures might reveal additional differences in meaning and usage between the two verbs but were beyond the scope of this research.

Furthermore, the study relied solely on data from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). Since COCA primarily reflects American English, the results may not fully represent variations in other English varieties, such as British English or other regional forms, where the usage patterns of *seek* and *search (for)* might differ.

Another limitation is related to the selection of dictionary sources. The definitions of *seek* and *search (for)* were taken from the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2005) and the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2009). Although these are widely used and reliable references, they may not fully capture more recent developments in language use or colloquial expressions that have emerged in newer corpora.

It is also important to note that both *seek* and *search (for)* are included in the Oxford 3000 Word List, which comprises the most important and frequently used words in English. This suggests that while these verbs are common in general usage, the present study may not have fully captured all possible collocational patterns, particularly in spoken or informal contexts, due to their focus on selected data points.

5.4 Recommendations

This study primarily focused on investigating the similarities and differences between the near synonyms *seek* and *search (for)* in terms of meaning, collocation, and semantic preferences. The analysis was conducted using two authoritative online dictionaries, the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD) and the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE), alongside the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) as the primary analytical tool. COCA, as an extensive corpus of American English, provided valuable data from a wide range of written and spoken texts, enabling a detailed examination of real-world language usage.

However, it is important to recognize that the findings of this study are limited to American English contexts as represented in COCA. For future research, it is recommended to incorporate other major English corpora to achieve a broader perspective. One such resource is the British National Corpus (BNC), which includes a diverse collection of written and spoken texts from British English. By analyzing data from both COCA and BNC, researchers can compare the usage patterns of *seek* and *search (for)* across American and British English, thereby offering a more comprehensive cross-varietal analysis.

Additionally, future studies could expand the scope of analysis by examining other syntactic patterns beyond verb + noun and verb + adverb collocations. Investigating structures such as verb + prepositional phrases or phrasal verbs involving *seek* and *search (for)* would provide richer insights into their grammatical behavior and semantic nuances.

By incorporating multiple corpora and extending the range of syntactic patterns analyzed, future research can achieve a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the distinctions between these two near synonyms. Such efforts would not only enhance theoretical linguistic knowledge but also offer practical benefits for English language teaching and learning.

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