Collocations of Intensifiers:

severe, *utter*, and *extreme*

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1   Introduction

The description of words' meanings have bothered many linguists.   And the study of meaning is still one of the main interests to them.   It is too difficult to capture all of the frameworks approaching the meanings.   There are four main established theories.

The first one is based on the idea that the meaning of the sentence comes from the conditions in the world that would have to be met for the sentence to be true.   This is called truth-conditional theory.

The second is the set of conceptual theories that say a meaning of a word is a structured idea or 'concept' in the mind of the person using that expression.   Conceptual theories take various forms, especially about the following question.   If meanings are concepts or ideas, where do those ideas come from, how are they acquired?   The empirical position proposes that our complex ideas are built up from the basic ideas derived from experience.   The other position is rationalists'.   Their view is that the very simple concepts are a natural or innate property of the human mind.

On the contrary, there are some people who think that the meaning comes from the abstract relationships between expressions, existing independently of speakers, hearers, and actual speech acts.   This view is the third approach that is known as the Platonist theory.   As its modern version, Jerrold Katz (1981) insists that meanings are abstract entities, existing somehow outside the mind.[1]

Finally, the structuralist theory of meaning suggests that the meaning of any word is actually constituted by the totality of the relationship that a word has with the other words in the language.   The famous method of structuralists is componential analysis, but it has turned out unsuccessful by itself.

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[1] See Katz (1981).

In this paper, I will show a method based on the empirical position of the second set of theories to give an account of a word.   I will propose that consideration of the collocation is very available to describe the word's meanings.   If meanings are ideas people build up through interactions in the world, fixed expressions, say, collocations may be regarded as sets of experiences that imply the views that belong to people who are in the same speech community.   Because collocation is, according to Crystal, "…the habitual co-occurrence of individual lexical items".[2]   People have to follow habits more or less when they express and interpret something.   From the macro view, habits are considered as syntactic rules. From the micro view, they are seen as the relations between lexemes and meanings in language.   I suggest that collocations lie on the middle.

Lyons (1994) uses the notion of collocational range of an expression to tell the difference of synonymy.   He says, "it might be thought that the collocational range of an expression is wholly determined by its meaning, so that synonyms must of necessity have the same colocational range…there must be some subtle difference of lexical meanings which accounts for the collocational differences, such that it is not synonymy, but near-synonymy , that is involved. Very often, undoubtedly, collocational differences can be satisfactorily explained, in terms of independently ascertainable differences of meaning".[3]

I agree with him, so I propose studying collocation can help us distinguish the meanings of words.   In this article, I will focus on the collocation of three intensifiers: *severe, utter* and *extreme.*

2.1. Intensifiers

The term *intensifier* has been used for certain adverbs and adjectives.   These have some effects to heighten the force of the verbs and the nouns.   I investigate three adjective intensifiers, *severe , utter,* and *extreme* for my study.   They all refer to degrees that things are very great.   They seem to be very similar at first glance.   But, some of them can connect to the same nouns while others cannot.   What I focus on is that they differently modify the different nouns.   In this case, the restriction of connecting words might depend on the meanings of both intensifiers and the collocates.   I will show these intensifiers' preference. To do so, I examine which of the meanings of intensifiers determine to modify what nouns

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[2] Crystal (1991).

[3] Lyons (1994).

and what elements of the selected nouns are the keys to collocate with the suitable intensifiers in this study.

I use the Cobuild Direct corpus to gather data of collocation.   It is divided into eleven subcorpora and text-type categories.   I used all the subcorpora which involved 51.3 million words, and which included several kinds of English variations such as spoken or written in England, the U.S.A, and Australia.

2.1.1. Severe

First of all, I list twenty segments of sentences that have *severe* in the center.   These are the results of a search by the text type categories of the Cobuild corpus called KWIC (Key-Word In Context), which can draw out all sentences that contain *severe* in this corpus.   The search word is in the middle and surrounding text to the left and to the right.   The results of *severe* by KWIC amounts to 1957 sentences.   I selected a few samples from the whole data at random for study. The words underlined are the collocates.

(1)   obviously prevent--present some *severe* problems. Wertheimer: Do the

(2)   out, these patients are at a known *severe* risk for cancer already.

(3)   presents the most striking and most *severe* conflict between work and family

(4)   to a specialist after six months of *severe* back pain.   A lump was

(5)   should have faced a far more *severe* sanction The former minister

(6)   We have been told there will be *severe* cuts and the council is reeling

(7)   shortages have `got worse", with `*severe* and persistent" shortages in some

(8)   calmly underwater. It is a *severe* disappointment.   It was an

(9)   Perhaps the damage is less *severe* in many places, because schools are

(10)   right hip, a broken left femur and *severe* muscle injuries to both legs

(11)   same period." Low interest rates, a *severe* shortage of rented accommodation

(12)   could be out for 10 weeks with *severe* ankle ligament damage.   Gynn

(13)   brawl which ended with him receiving *severe* facial injuries.   Coventry boss

(14)   to six months' jail yesterday.   *Severe* wounds on his animals could only

(15)   Bardot had recently been under *severe* stress.   She was depressed and

(16)   Chelsea defender Paul Elliott with a *severe* knee injury.   If the decision

(17)   never work again, and suffers *severe* bouts of depression. On more than

(18)   can now handle myself under the most *severe* mental pressure. Monty

(19)   in Scotland today, was left with *severe* bruises. But East Anglian

(20)   Thaiwona Washington, 17, suffered *severe* and permanent bodily injuries"

As you can see, a salient characteristic of *severe* is very the common co-occurrence with *injury* and *disease*, which occupy about forty percent of all collocates. Concurrently, *pain* often appears with *severe*. I classified the collocates into six categories according to their meanings.

(1) *Pain and injury*

    damage / injury / cut / wound / impairment / bruise / pain / ache / distress / sting
    illness / headache / cold / stomach / cramp / disease / morbidity /dent / blister

   The "Pain and injury" group must be twice as large as the above if proper names of diseases, such as bronchial, are included.

(2) *Disturbance*

    problem / pressure / stress / crisis / difficulty / hardship / danger / handicap
    conflict / disturbance / hindrance /setback / persecution / obstacle / risk / trouble

   The "Disturbance" group is about some words that express what prevents you from doing something. It involves both mental obstacles and physical ones.

(3) *Punishment*

    penalty / punishment / sanction / correction / discipline

(4) *Decrease*

    decline / depletion /deterioration / reduction / downturn / recession
    debilitating /shortage / deficiency / famine / lack / exhaustion

   The "Decrease" group is constructed by the words that make or become smaller or fewer in size, amount, or degree. It may not be strict to include *shortage* or *deficiency* and so on, but it is appropriate because these are the results of decrease.

(5) *Negative feelings*

    depression / shock / reprimand / discomfort / embarrassment / turbulence /
    anxiety / disappointment doubt / fluctuation / jolt / nausea / tantrum / temper / threat

(6) *Natural phenomenon*

    storm / frost / thunderstorm / gale / heat / drought / earthquake / flood /
    thunder / wind

In general, all collocates are unpleasant, undesirable, or unwelcome things (though there are some exceptional cases). *Severe* never collocates with positive things. Indeed, all words of the "Natural phenomenon" group do not imply a positive condition. *Severe* does not restrict to modify noun according to physical condition like slim or round. It is easy to collocate with undesirable things that do harm to us or that cause disturbance.

2.1.2 Utter

Next, I examine the collocations of *utter*. The results of KWIC are so large that I cannot devote space to show all of the examples. Instead of it, for reference, I list a part of the result of a search, which shows the frequency of the collocates.

Table 2 : The frequency of the collocates of *utter*

The collocates	The independent frequency of the collocates	The frequency co-occurred with utter	The T-score
nonsense	910	15	3.871522
rubbish	1020	12	3.462271
lack	4170	7	2.635952
astonishment	176	5	2.235579
chaos	1036	5	2.233187
confusion	1065	5	2.233107
madness	582	5	2.23445
silence	2093	5	2.230248
contempt	512	4	1.998408
conviction	897	4	1.997211
destruction	1092	4	1.996605
disbelief	282	4	1.999123
disregard	186	4	1.999422
humiliation	412	4	1.998719
bollocks	96	3	1.731706
dedication	359	3	1.730762
despair	891	3	1.728852
devastation	158	3	1.731484
disgrace	479	3	1.730331
stillness	84	3	1.731749

I searched what nouns adjoin to *utter* on the immediate right side by using a collocaional tool of the Cobuild corpus.   This list is lined words in order of frequency.   The first column shows the collocates.   The second shows the independent frequency of them, which are the number of its appearance in the Cobuild corpus.   The next is frequency with which *utter* and the collocates appear.   And the fourth column shows the t-score values for the various combinations.

The collocates are divided into the following six groups.   The top two words, *nonsense* and next *rubbish* are included in the first group.   These words mean foolishness are very easy to collocate with *utter*.   Many near-synonymous are found as a result.

(1)   *Foolishness*

nonsense / rubbish / foolishness / prat / rot / tosh / bastards / farce / fatuity / folly / fool / incompetence / contempt insignificance / rudeness / stupidity / travesty / trivialities / twaddle / wanker / worthlessness / daftness

The t-score sum of these words is about 30.7 points which is the highest among the six groups excepting the "*Emotions*" group.

The third word, *lack* is a central meaning of the second group.   The collocates are fewer than that of the other groups, but it is a very important concept to analyze the common points among collocates.

(2)   *Lack*

exhaustion / failure / absence / disregard / neglect / silence / stillness / quiet / poverty

I put *disregard* and *neglect* into this group because their meanings can be considered as a kind of lacking close observation although it may be a very rough classification.   For the same reason, a lack of sound*, silence, stillness* and *quiet* are members of this group.   Also, *poverty* as a lack of wealth.

(3)   *Insincerity*

disbelief / claptrap / disgrace / fabrication / fraud / disloyalty /

The "*Insincerity*" group is constructed by nouns that express a lack of faith.

(4)   *Confusion*

    chaos / confusion / madness /destruction/ devastation / desolation / bollocks

    shambles / disaster/catastrophe / extirpation / doom / evil /mess /

    panic /waste/ / lunatic /

Strictly speaking, the meaning of words, such as *disaster, desolation* and *doom* seem to be apart from the meaning of *confusion*.   However these words are causes and effects of disorder, therefore it is possible for these words to have a close relationship to disorder.

(5)   *Emotions*

    astonishment / amazement / surprise / shock / despair / frustration /

    disappointment / disgust / hatred /distaste /weariness / dejection / depression

    bore / tedium / dreariness / humiliation / disdain/ loneliness /

    indifference /dismay / embarrassment / dread / horror / threats /

    shame / torture / contentment /adoration / love / joy / pleasure / enchantment

The "*Emotions*" category is the biggest.   It is the obvious feature in this group that negative terms are six times as many as positive terms.

There seems to be neither relationships nor similarities between *rubbish* and *lack*. However, a common point is found among the collocates through the process of classifying words into groups and to abstract the common elements.   The common point of the "*Foolishness*" group and the "*Insincerity*" group is to lack something.   In other words, it is one requirement that enables nouns to connect to *utter*.   Something that had been lacked is different in each group.   The group of "Foolishness" is regarded as lack of intellect.   The group of "*Lack*" is the very thing.   The group of "*Insincerity*", means no truth.   The group of "*Disorder*" can be considered as a state of lost peace or order.   The last group of "*Emotions*" is built up of different sorts of feelings, such as *astonishment, despair,* and *disgust*.   It is true that all collocates have no consistency, but 40 percent of this group have prefixes that mean opposite, negative or removal, as *de-, dis-,* and *in-*.   It is not too much to say that the words which mean lost certain feelings occupy the greatest part of the "*Emotion*" group.

That is, *utter* is apt to collocate words that mean lack of something.   For this reason, I guess *utter* is difficult to modify natural phenomenon like *severe* or *extreme*.

2.1.3 Extreme

The result of *extreme* by the KWIC research reaches 1408 examples.　For want of space, I can only show the frequent collocates.　I chose ten percent of the entire material.

Table 3: The frequency of the collocates of *extreme*

The collocates	Independent frequency of the collocates	Frequency co-occurred with extreme	T- score
Caution	593	20	4.468619
Poverty	1366	14	3.731974
Cold	5636	13	3.564089
Pressure	7429	12	3.407217
Stress	3036	9	2.973157
Difficulty	1927	8	2.810356
Heat	3747	8	2.793288
sensitivity	580	8	2.822988
Anxiety	1375	7	2.631966
Care	11738	7	2.528072
Pain	4456	6	2.401237
Weather	3745	6	2.408936
Distress	727	4	1.990358
Doubt	5443	4	1.927812
Shortage	755	4	1.989987
Anguish	374	3	1.726323
Clarity	397	3	1.725971
Hunger	642	3	1.722219
importance	2380	3	1.695603
Risk	6165	3	1.637639
Tension	1728	3	1.705588
vulnerability	291	3	1.727594
Anger	2068	2	1.375407

I classified the collocates into nine categories.

Firstly, *caution* makes up one group.　Actually, this group has only three terms, *caution, care*, and *attention*.　In spite of this, I made this group independent because they are very frequent collocates.

(1)   *Caution*

   caution / care / attention

The second is a companion of poverty, the "Lack" group.   This is the same one as "*Lack*" which appeared in the *utter* section.   Things that had been lost are different in each words, for instance *wealth, ability,* and *food*.

(2)   *Lack*

   poverty / shortage / hunger / destitution / scarcity / disability

The third is *natural phenomenon*.

(3)   *Natural phenomenon*

   temperature / heat / drought / wind /blow

The fourth group is *crisis or difficulty*. This is alike to the "*Disturbance*" group in the *severe* section.

(4)   *Crisis and difficulty*

   difficulty / pressure / hardship / risk / crisis / danger / stress

Pain builds up the fifth group.   This is also a common category with *severe*.

(5)   *Pain*

   pain / anguish / soreness / damage / suffering / distress /

The sixth is *Anxiety*.   This, the next "*Hate*" group, and the eighth "*Anger*" can be brought together as negative emotions.   But I separate them on purpose because they are large enough to be independent.

(6)   *Anxiety*

   anxiety / doubt / discomfort / suspicion / agitation / turbulence / discomfort / fear

The seventh is "*Hate*" group.

(7) *Hate*

aversions / dislike / hatred / hostility / loathing / prejudice

Connectedly, *anger* is the eighth group.

(8) *Anger*

anger / indignation / irritation / exasperation / touchiness / wrath

Lastly, the ninth group is "*Criticism*". Although the words of this group have lower frequency to co-occur with extreme and it has only five words, it should be designated as a group since it seems not to be exceptions.

(9) *Criticism*

condemnation / culpability / blaming / indictment / vilification

What element links these nine groups to each other respecting *extreme*? I conclude the categories of *extreme* are built up a different system from the links of the categories of *severe* or *utter*. Each nine category of *extreme* collocates interrelates and interacts like a spider's web though the relations of the collocates in *severe* and *utter* are like petals of a flower which are tied to the centre. I explore the link of these nine categories.

(1)-(4)   *Crisis and difficulty* can become a factor of *caution*.
(2)-(4)   *Crisis and difficulty may* cause *lack,* while *lack* causes *crisis and difficulty* .
(4)-(5)   The relations between *crisis and difficulty* and *pain* can be a cause and effect each other.
(4), (2)-(6) *Crisis and difficulty*, and *lack* also might be the origin of *anxiety*.
(5)-(9)   *Pain* may cause *anger*.
(9)-(8)   *Anger* often involves *hate*.
(8), (9)-(7) *Hare* and *anger* might become an impelling of *criticism*.

Almost all chains, which connect these categories, are somehow tied around "Anger" and "Crisis and difficulty". Finally, the most difficult problem is still left. How *natural phenomenon* should be connected? The answer was hidden in the point that *extreme* had not collocated with *rain* or *frost*. *Extreme* is likely to modify *heat* and *wind*. Of course these words cannot have a direct relation with others. With association of these words, *natural phenomenon* can have the connection to the other categories. It will succeeded by

considering some metaphors.   I will explore this theory in detail later, so I only mention briefly here.

How do you express when you got angry?   "I was seething with anger." or "I blew my top." and so on.   Both sentences are very natural. According to Köveases and Layoff, "anger is heat".   As developed, "anger is the heat of a fluid in a container" and then "as pressure gets too intense…the container explodes".   The more someone gets angry, the more the heat raises.   It will explode after pressure is applied. *Heat* and *wind* of the "natural phenomenon" category must come from this metaphor.   That is, it seems to be natural that *heat* and *wind* sympathized with the metaphor of anger.

3.   Conclusion

In this study, I drew out the examples of three intensifiers from the Cobuild corpus and collected their collocates.   I classified them into some groups following three procedures: firstly, the meaning of the collocates seems to be similar.   Secondly, a group has several constituents.   Thirdly, otherwise, the frequency of the collocates are very high.

I find that there are some certain conditions or some preferences when a word connects to one through examination of the collocations.   It is I also see the underlying metaphors that never appear on the surface of the expression.   They are useful to understand the concept of value in the world.   In other words, we can realize a kind of ideology by such metaphors.

As a future theme, I will study the word, which seems to be more fastidious in connecting word such as *high*, *heavy*, and *deep*.   I am interested in the comparison of the collocations between English and Japanese.   I believe the distribution of the collocations shows us the different view of each language.

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