

The Importance of a Corpus-Based Study in Revealing the Precise Meaning of the Collocation Make Mistake

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ABSTRACT

Previous corpus-based studies have shown that semantic preference and semantic prosody can be of crucial importance in identifying the meaning of various lexical items (Sinclair, 1996; Partington 2004; Begagić, 2013). Since such research would be impossible without the advent of computers as well as specialized programs used for searching million-word corpora, the lexical items are examined within the scope of corpus linguistics.

This study presents a corpus-based analysis of the meaning of one of the most common V-N collocations in the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) in two different registers, the newspaper and the academic one. In order to make the study as objective as possible, every second occurrence, of the first 100 randomly selected occurrences, is examined and all the word forms of the collocation make mistake are included, i.e. make mistake, makes mistake, made mistake and making mistake. All the word forms are carefully observed in the span of ten.

The OALD does not offer any definition under the both entries, make and mistake, however there are several examples of its usage under the entry of mistake, implying the existence of collocation. The present study indicates that at least two definitions should be placed under the entry of make mistake. The results also suggest that the meaning of the collocation is contingent upon the registers in which it is used. Moreover, the pivotal role of semantic preference and semantic prosody in identifying the meaning of make mistake is pointed out as well as the fact that million-word corpora are the only true sources that provide accurate and objective information about natural language.