

A Corpus-Based Study on Synonym Usage Differences of English Adjectives “Good” “Wonderful” and “Outstanding”

Xue Tang

Education college, China West Normal University, Sichuan Nanchong 637001

Abstract: In the process of learning English, the importance of vocabulary is obvious, but the existence of a large number of synonyms in English has brought difficult challenges to teachers and students. In this paper, it takes some adjectives in English as an example, and uses several words with increased relative difficulty, specifically “good”, “wonderful” and “outstanding”. Based on the perspective of corpus, through the English corpus LOCNESS and Chinese English learner corpus CLEC, it aims at analyze the different use of Chinese English learners and English speakers, and to attempt to bring new inspiration and suggestions for vocabulary teaching in China.

Keywords: Synonyms; Good; Wonderful; Outstanding

1. Introduction

English, as a language with a huge vocabulary, according to statistics, accounts for about 60% of its total vocabulary.^[1] Words, or vocabulary, are the basis of English learning and teaching. All other English language knowledge and ability are based on vocabulary. If separated from vocabulary, it is like a mirage. The study of vocabulary knowledge can be carried out in both depth and breadth. Breadth is mainly the size of vocabulary, and it is a study of vocabulary “quantity”, which includes all words having the same concept and different concepts; vocabulary depth is the “quality” investigation of vocabulary, which is based on the understanding of vocabulary meaning and form.^[2] So the existence of synonyms is difficult for vocabulary learning, it is not the “quantity” problem, but a “quality” problem, one who cannot grasp the concept of synonyms will affect the vocabulary “quantity”, and if one cannot distinguish synonyms and find a concept of more advanced expression, he has the “quality” problem. It can often be found that students’ inaccurate discrimination and use of synonyms, for example, many students misuse “wish” and “hope”, can’t tell the difference between “as to” and “as regards” and so on, even more prominently, in the writing, many students face the problem of lack of vocabulary, and inability to find advanced vocabulary, such as when expressing the “important”, most students like to use “important” but did not think of “essential” and “significant”; When expressing “difficult”, many only think of using “difficult” and ignore “complicated” and “arduous”..... Based on this phenomenon, taking the English adjectives “good” wonderful and outstanding as examples, in the application of LOCNESS and CLEC, this paper analyzes the difference of these synonyms between Chinese English learners and native English speakers, wanting to figure out the development and changes in the use of synonyms between Chinese students at different levels of students.

2. Research Methods

2.1 Research Questions

- (1) What is the difference between the use of related adjectives by Chinese English learners and that of native English speakers?
- (2) What are the use characteristics of students at different levels?

2.2 Research Subjects

Selected research objects in this paper are the English adjective synonyms --“good”, “wonderful” and “outstanding”, the main reason is that in English writing, about these adjectives use high frequency, and Chinese students are much inclined to use the word “good”, therefore, they are more typical and representative.

2.3 Corpus

Using the corpus to carry out the synonym teaching can not only provide the quantitative characteristics that the traditional word discrimination method cannot provide, but also make the qualitative analysis of the language phenomena based on the quantitative analysis, so as to make the discrimination more realistic and credible.^[3] The corpus makes the study of language an empirical study, the

results more reliable and effective. The two written corpora selected in this paper are CLEC and LOCNESS.

2.3.1 CLEC

The full name is “Chinese Learners English Database (Chinese Learner English Corpus)”, published by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press and led by two famous applied linguists Professor Du Shichun and Professor Yang Huizhong, which is an important part of “Analysis of Chinese learners' English mistakes according to the corpus” (Corpus-based Analysis of Chinese Learner English) in the 95 Program project of the National Social Science Fund. The CLEC corpus contains several parts: middle school [ST2], College English Level 4 [ST3], College English Level 6 [ST4], college major English junior [ST5], college English senior [ST6], with a total number of words of about 1 million.^[4]

2.3.2 LOCNESS

LOCNESS (The Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays), led by Professor Sylviane Granger of Louvain University in Belgium, contains three parts: the composition of British primary and middle school students; argumentation of British college students; and argumentation of American college students, with a total number of words of 324,304.^[5]

2.4 Study Tools and Data Acquisition

Using the retrieval tool AntConc to search good, wonderful and outstanding in LOCNESS and CLEC corpora. The usage situation of the relevant words is obtained from the frequency, and on the basis of quantitative, chart, analysis statistical data, and then make qualitative conclusions.

3. Research Results and Discussion

3.1 Overall Characteristics and Differences in Good, Wonderful, and Outstanding Use in Locness and Clec

There are obvious differences in the total word capacity of LOCNESS and CLEC. In order to make the extracted data comparable and more reliable, the frequency of these words is standardized in units per 10,000 words. “Good”, “wonderful” and “outstanding” in LOCNESS as shown in Table 1:

Table 1 Frequency in LOCNESS and CLEC

words	LOCNESS		CLEC	
	Observed frequency	Standard frequency	Observed frequency	Standard frequency
good	316	9.74	3376	277
wonderful	11	0.33	224	1.84
outstanding	3	0.09	19	0.16

From the figure, the word “good” has the highest frequency in both LOCNESS and CLEC, with 316 and 3376 times, respectively, and the corresponding standard frequency is also the highest. Later, “wonderful” has 11 intermediate frequencies in LOCNESS and 224 in CLEC; finally, outstanding has 3 frequencies in LOCNESS and the lowest usage in CLEC with only 19 frequencies. From a vertical perspective, whether LOCNESS corpus or CLEC corpus, the frequency and standard frequency of “good”, “wonderful” and “outstanding” are constantly decreasing, indicating that the word “good” is easier to master and used by students, while “wonderful” and “outstanding” have more difficulty for students, which is consistent with our usual cognition. Horizontally, whether “good”, “wonderful” or “outstanding”, the observed frequencies and standard frequencies in the CLEC corpus are lower than those in the LOCNESS corpus.

3.2 Overall Characteristics of “Good”, “Wonderful”, and “Outstanding” Used by Students at Different Levels in Clec

The CLEC corpus contains writing materials from students of different levels, including middle school [ST2], College English Level 4 [ST3], College English Level 6 [ST4], junior major English [ST5], and senior major English [ST6]. Using AntConc, search in the corpus of students at different levels, and the results are shown in Table 2:

Table 2 Frequency of different level students in CLEC

words	St2		St3		St4		St5		St6	
	Observed frequency	Standard frequency	Observed frequency	Standard frequency	Observed frequency	Standard frequency	Observed frequency	Standard frequency	Observed frequency	Standard frequency

		ncy	cy	cy	cy	cy	cy			
good	813	33.85	950	38.56	532	21.09	650	27.44	431	17.74
wonderful	110	4.85	22	0.89	20	0.79	59	2.49	13	0.54
outstanding	4	0.17	1	0.04	2	0.08	2	0.08	10	0.41

Vertically speaking, in the writing of the same type of students, “good” still has the highest usage of these three words. And the use of “wonderful” and “outstanding” decreases successively, this shows that students at the same level still have a better understanding and mastery of the “good”; Unable to clearly distinguish between CET 4 and CET 6 and lower professional English and senior professional English, so from the horizontal view, we compare college level 4 with CET-6, compare the lower grades with the senior grades. From level 4 to level 6, both “good” and “wonderful” have a decreasing frequency, and the frequency of the word “outstanding” exceeds level 4 in level 6; For lower professional English students and senior professional English students, Standard frequency for both “good” and “wonderful”, “outstanding” are on the rise, and the standard frequencies are 0.08 and 0.41, respectively. This shows that both English and non-English majors get the improvement of words usage for their continuous learning, gradually reduce the use of “good” and begin to try and pursue more advanced and diversified expressions.

4. Conclusion

The results show that the standardized frequency of “good”, “wonderful” and “outstanding” in Chinese English writing is higher than that of native English speakers. For different levels students, such as the university level 4 and 6, English majors between junior and senior, standard frequency of “good” and “wonderful” decline, while “outstanding” presents the characteristics of the rise, so with the promotion of grade, students in written language gradually reduce the use of common vocabulary of “good”, vocabulary volume gradually increase, began to try and the pursuit of more advanced, more diverse expressions.

References

- [1]Huang Wei. Investigation on the Use of English Dictionary for High School Students [D]. Central China Normal University, 2022.001860.
- [2]Ligang Liu, Haitao Miao. Theory and Measurement of Language Complexity [J]. *Foreign Language Education & Research*, 2018,35(01):52-55.
- [3]Jurei Song. Comparative Study of Overlapping Words in Chinese and English [D]. *Beijing Foreign Studies University*, 2022.
- [4]Yanling Wang. A Comparative Study of the Semantic Rhyme of “acquired” English Verbs [D]. Heilongjiang University, 2017.
- [5]Jing Yang. A Corpus-based Study of Synonyms Use of Chinese and English Learners [D]. Hebei University, 2013.