

Frequent Collocates and Major Senses of two Prepositions in ESL and ENL Corpora

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ABSTRACT

This contribution assesses in quantitative terms frequent collocates and major senses of “between” and “through” in the corpus of Cameroonian English (CCE), the corpus of East-African (Kenya and Tanzania) English which is part of the International Corpus of English (ICE) project (ICE-EA), and the London Oslo/Bergen (LOB) corpus of British English. (The first two are ESL corpora and the third is an ENL corpus). The study reveals that formal (i.e. collocates) and functional (i.e. meaning) differences between these corpora with respect to the use of the two prepositions are more marked by preceding words, with the LOB corpus exhibiting a wider range of flexibility of word-types than the CCE and ICE-EA. This flexibility is further evident in the distribution of some of the major senses of “between” and “through.” Although there are certain collocational patterns that are only typical of the CCE and ICE-EA, the overall picture is that collocational preferences and major categories of meaning associated with these prepositions are relatively restricted here. In view of this tendency for “restriction,” the paper suggests that one way of broadening students’ horizon and critical awareness of lexico-grammatical patterns associated with the use of prepositions is to complement local-based teaching material (from a corpus) with texts from native English corpora.

Keywords: Prepositions, collocation, frequency, varieties of English, corpus linguistics

1. INTRODUCTION

Prepositions are among the most frequent words in English and unlike other words classes such as nouns and verbs, the nature and extent of regional influences and variations attributable to them usually relate to frequencies and stylistic values (cf. Görlach 1991: 25). For example,