A Corpus-Based Study of English Synonyms: Chance and Opportunity

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Article Information	Abstract
	The study aims to investigate differences and similarities of two synonymous nouns, chance and opportunity. The sources of data were from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and online dictionaries. The study applied both quantitative and qualitative methodology. Throughout the five text types of COCA (i.e. spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, and academic journals), opportunity was used most frequently in academic texts and was found least often in fiction. On the other hand, chance occurred least in the genre of academic texts and most often in the spoken genre. The claim that opportunity tends to be used more often in formal style than its near synonym was supported by a number of academic words in the list of its collocates. Although a wider range of meanings of chance reflects its polysemous status, chance and its collocates have fewer semantic preferences than those of opportunity. The findings also suggest that near-synonyms may behave differently in terms of collocation and semantic prosody although they share similar meanings.

INTRODUCTION

Relatively few research studies have been conducted on English nominal synonyms, particularly corpus-based studies focusing on the differences between near synonymous nouns. This has drawn attention to the need for more investigation on this topic. The authors found a pair of problematic near-synonyms, *chance* and *opportunity*, worth examining. The present study is based on the assumption that many L2 learners might overuse the noun *chance* in the meaning of 'opportunity' in written texts. This could result from an assumption that the noun *opportunity* has a higher degree of formality than *chance*. Both *chance* and *opportunity* have multiple meanings, but they are both often used to mean 'opportunity.'

The study aims to determine the differing frequency of the patterns of *chance* and *opportunity* in the five genres (i.e. spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, and academic journals) in the Corpus of Contemporary American English (henceforth COCA) and to identify the two synonyms' verb and adjective collocates. In addition, the study seeks to emphasize the importance of teaching vocabulary in context and/or giving specific examples to present the precise use of vocabulary. The results of the study can be useful for any word-list compilers

who wish to create vocabulary teaching materials. The implications of this study can be applied by ESP students to learn how to use near-synonyms, taking into account their similarities and differences, which will result in more effective word choice in their language production. The insights of the study can also benefit anyone wishing to explore corpora to learn more about words' behaviors and their collocations in different contexts and genres.

To analyze the synonymous status of *chance* and *opportunity*, their collocations, and similarities and differences are taken into account, leading to the following research questions and scope:

1. What are the frequency differences of *chance* and *opportunity* and their patterns of distribution across the genres in COCA?
2. What are collocation patterns of *chance* and *opportunity*?
3. What are the similarities and differences of the two synonyms in terms of meanings and collocations?

Corpus-based methodology includes both quantitative and qualitative aspects. The first research question covers the quantitative aspect of word usage referring to the distribution patterns of the two nouns. The second and third questions involve qualitative analysis aimed at elaborating the ways in which the two synonyms can be distinguished.

Section 2 provides details of English synonymy and synonymous classification, including explanations of corpus linguistics and the elements involved in the methodology used in the analysis. In addition, a few previous corpus linguistic studies of synonyms are included. In Section 3, the methodology, research tools, and procedures are explained, and the results with answers to the research questions are discussed in Section 4. The conclusion and pedagogical implications appear in Section 5.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides theoretical concepts that can be used to distinguish synonyms. Relevant previous studies within the scope of the present study are also discussed.

Synonymy

The word *synonym* comes from the Greek roots *syn* 'alike' and *onym* 'name' and together as one word, these roots refer to words having the same meaning (Murphy, 2010). However, only in rare cases can words be substituted without any change in meaning.

In general, synonyms can be divided into two main types: absolute/strict synonyms and near/loose synonyms. However, a third classification – 'sense synonyms' – has been discussed by well-known scholars such as Kearns (2006) and Murphy (2010).

- *Absolute synonyms* are interchangeable in any context without changing any aspects of meaning such as *everybody* and *everyone* (the examples were given by Kearns,

2006). **The substitutability test** can be used to investigate synonyms. Murphy (2010) provides an example as shown below in (1) and (2).

> (1) My tummy feels a bit *funny* (= peculiar, ≠ comical) whenever I eat fish.
> (2) Anna told a hilariously *funny* (≠ peculiar, = comical) joke.

Funny and *peculiar* are synonyms and *funny* is also a synonym of *comical*. *Funny* can substitute for *peculiar* in some contexts, but it may not be replaced by *comical* in some cases. Because they share one sense of meaning, which is 'strange,' they are **sense synonyms** not absolute ones.

- *Loose/near-synonyms* are not absolute in meanings, but they do share looser similarities of sense. Murphy (2010) presents an example of this type: *obtain* and *acquire*. Both have the same sense of 'get,' but they are not interchangeable in the same context, as illustrated in (3) and (4).
  > (3) Ian *obtained/acquired* three diplomas.
  > (4) a. Ian *obtained* permission to land. (? acquire)
  >   b. Ian *acquired* a British accent. (≠ obtained)

Moreover, McEnery and Xiao (2006) reviewed near-synonyms from other scholars' perspectives such as Partington (1998), Conzett (1997) and Tognini-Bonelli (2001). Despite similarities in denotational meanings, near-synonyms may or may not share collocates and semantic prosodies. According to Halliday's observation (1976), although *strong* and *powerful* have similar meanings, the former is often used to describe 'tea" while the latter is likely to be found describing 'car' (as cited in McEnery & Xiao, 2006).

In the case of the selected synonymous nouns in this study, *chance* and *opportunity* are near-synonyms because they share similar senses, but they cannot be used interchangeably in every register.

Corpus linguistics and English synonyms

Corpus linguistics can assist the study of synonyms. As a method, it allows for the study of the real usage of languages (Lindquist, 2009 as cited in Petcharat & Phoocharoensil, 2017). A corpus, as a combination of naturally-occurring texts, can provide data for researchers to investigate the natural use of linguistic features (e.g. grammar and lexis) and linguistic variations (i.e. selection of alternative linguistic features according to the constrained contexts in which they appear). A salient characteristic of corpus linguistics is its combination of quantitative and qualitative perspectives to describe authentic language use (Biber et al., 1998).

In terms of quantitative analysis, corpus linguistics allows an investigation of the frequency of distribution patterns of, for example, lexical items or phrases, in different genres of texts such as fiction, spoken language, and academic journals. One interesting phenomenon unveiled in corpus-based studies is the "co-selection" of words. Sinclair (2004) provides four types of lexical co-occurrence: collocation, colligation, semantic preference and semantic prosody, in order to account for the usage profile of a lexical item.

1. **Collocation** is the natural co-occurrence of words. Hoey (1991, p. 7) defines collocations as "the readership a lexical item has with items that appear with greater than random probability in its (textual) context." In other words, lexical items are likely to constitute dependent selections of collocates (Sinclair & Carter, 2004). The noun 'collocate' refers to words or phrases commonly used with other words or phrases. For example, with the collocations "*general* trend, *general* perception, *general* drift, *general* opinion, *general* consent," the adjective '*general*' does not add a clear meaning to the nouns but it underlines part of their meanings. It can be said that these nouns in collocation with the adjective *general* are connected syntagmatically (Sinclair & Carter, 2004, p. 22).

2. **Colligation**, according to Firth (1957b), is "the co-occurrence of grammatical choices" (as cited in Sinclair & Carter, 2004, p. 32). Sinclair (2004) provides an example of this concept, where the phrase '*naked eye*' colligates with a grammatical class – prepositions, which are *with* and *by*. This example clearly shows that colligation involves co-occurrence between a search word and grammatical choices.

3. **Semantic preference** is defined by Stubbs (2001, p. 65) as the relation between a word and lexical items sharing the same semantic properties and by Partington (2004, p. 150) as "a phenomenon whereby, a particular item x collocates frequently, not with another item y, but with a series of items belonging to a semantic set." For example, adjectives found with the phrase '*naked eye*' such as *apparent*, *obvious* and *undetectable* share the same semantic feature of 'visibility' (Sinclair & Carter, 2004).

4. When words or phrases co-occur with other lexical units that have a negative or positive meaning, they can have a negative or positive **semantic prosody** (McEnery & Hardie, 2012). Therefore, semantic prosody needs to be analyzed at the pragmatic level by investigating a concordance (Louw, 1993). This can be used to address the difference between two debatable terms, *connotation* and semantic prosody. The former can be judged by intuition while the latter is beyond the semantic level. Moreover, semantic prosody can be distinguished from semantic preference. Semantic prosody is involved with positive or negative evaluation while semantic preference refers to the relation between the node and other words in its context (McEnery & Hardie, 2012).

These concepts can give insights into the analysis of synonyms. The different co- occurrences of lexical items can identify words' behavior and their usage. Moreover, these concepts help set the scope of the present study and can be used with criteria such as distribution patterns and grammatical patterns (two types of patterns that are co-selected: grammar [syntax or structure] and lexis [semantics], e.g. the pattern of the adjective *capable* requires a prepositional phrase headed by of) to differentiate *chance* and *opportunity*.

Previous corpus-based studies on English synonyms

Many corpus-based studies have discussed both similarities and differences of synonyms. Some of these studies are briefly presented in this part, starting with Chung (2011) and Gu (2017) who studied synonymous verbs.

Chung (2011) investigated the similarities and differences between *create* and *produce* based on their meanings and the semantic features of their noun collocates (i.e. PRODUCTS). The data were drawn from three corpora, the Brown Corpus and the Frown Corpus (from ICAME) and the British National Corpus (BNC). Two meanings of the synonymous verbs were found to be overlapping, i.e. 'to cause to exist/happen' and to create/manufacture a man-made product.' Moreover, it is worth noting that the semantic features of the types of objects seem to determine the selection between the two verbs, for example, 'quantity.' *Produce* is more likely to be involved with objects denoting a large quantity (e.g. goods and machines).

While Chung (2011) focused on the meanings and semantic features of products, Gu (2017) established a set of criteria (i.e. genres, colligation, collocation and semantic prosody) to distinguish the synonymous verbs *obtain* and *gain*. The data came from three online corpora: *Sketch Engine*, *BNC* and *Just the word*. Regarding semantic prosody, the two verbs seem to be evaluated based on their noun collocates' connotative meanings. *Obtain* may have mixed semantic prosodies (i.e. neutral, positive and negative) based on the variety of connotations of its noun collocates. *Gain*, however, often collocates with nouns that have a positive denotation, so it is more likely to have a positive semantic prosody.

Hoffman (2014) examined six adjectives, *nice, kind, lovely, friendly, gorgeous* and *pleasant* to determine their semantic and usage differences. The researcher first compared their definitions in these three dictionaries: The Macmillan Dictionary, The Collins American Dictionary and The Merriam Webster Dictionary. The results showed that some of the adjectives can be used interchangeably in some contexts but not all of them are explicitly interchangeable. Then nominal collocates of the six adjectives were taken from COCA and categorized into lexical groups. The distribution pattern of those nominal collocates were examined to find the formality degree of the adjectives based on the genres in which they appeared. The results both challenged the generalization of the definitions given by the three dictionaries and suggested improvements on the description of near-synonyms.

Hu (2015) compared the semantic preference and semantic prosody of three pairs of synonymous adjectives from A New Academic Vocabulary List (AVL) by Gardner & Davies (2013). The source of data was the genre of academic texts in COCA. The three pairs of synonymous adjectives were *initial/preliminary, following/subsequent* and *sufficient/adequate*. The first two pairs were often found to co-occur with items having neutral meaning and seem to be used in neutral contexts. As for the last pair, in both neutral and negative contexts, *sufficient* was found to collocate frequently with verbs while its noun collocates expressing quantity can be measured (e.g. *numbers* and *cause*). *Adequate* tends to collocate more often with nouns than with verbs and they mostly occur in neutral contexts. The analyses of the study suggest that a word can take more than one group of semantic features, which can lead to different prosodies.

Petcharat and Phoocharoensil (2017) investigated three synonymous adjectives, i.e. *appropriate, proper* and *suitable* focusing on their meanings, degree of formality, collocations, and grammatical patterns. They compared the synonyms' meanings in three dictionaries: Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 6th edition (2014), Longman Advanced American Dictionary 3rd edition (2013), and Macmillan Collocations Dictionary (2010). They found that the three

synonyms share the same core meaning but cannot be used interchangeably in all contexts. Data concerning their collocations were taken from the three dictionaries and COCA to compare noun and adverb collocates of the three adjectives. The three synonyms were shown to share some common noun and adverb collocates, but not all collocates can be used with the three of them. Since they are synonyms sharing the same core meaning and some collocates, it was found that they do have similar grammatical structures.

Compared to synonymous adjectives, corpus-based studies on synonymous nouns seem to be more limited in the field. One study examining the differences between the two synonyms *problem* and *trouble* was conducted by Jirananthiporn (2018). The study concentrated on differences between the two words' frequencies, distribution of patterns across genres in a corpus, and verb and adjective collocations. Data used in the study were drawn from COCA for both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Based on the overall frequencies and distribution of the two words, *problem* appears to be more common than *trouble* and is often used in communication. While *problem* occurs more frequently in the academic genre, *trouble* is mostly found in the genres of fiction and spoken language. It can be said that *problem* is more formal than *trouble*.

Sandström (2005) conducted a study on English synonyms, focusing on semantic and syntactic aspects of the three nouns: *opportunity, possibility* and *chance*. The problem addressed was that Swedes tend to overuse the English word 'possibility' to translate the Swedish word 'möjlighet.' The study then aimed to find whether the three synonymous nouns are interchangeable, to what extent they can be considered synonyms, and what their connotations are. The data were drawn from five dictionaries (i.e. Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Oxford English Dictionary, Webster's Online Dictionary and Oxford Reference Online), and the British National Corpus (BNC). Five English native speakers were also asked to complete a questionnaire to discuss the matter.

According to the five dictionaries, the three nouns can be both countable and uncountable, and this can result in different meanings and collocations. *Chance* and *opportunity* were found to share some verb collocates. This suggests that they are more similar in terms of meaning and usage compared to *possibility*. The results from the BNC show that verb collocates of possibility tend to have scientific connotations. This noun was found to be used more often in neutral contexts because it was not found to collocate with words in comparative and superlative forms. *Opportunity* commonly co-occurs with active verbs (e.g. take, provide and give), and its adjective collocates seem to have positive connotations. Verb collocates of *chance* tend to explain a way to handle the 'chance.' Its adjective collocates seem to be more varied and were rarely found in superlative forms. Because of its various meanings, *chance* covers a larger semantic domain than the other two synonyms.

To conclude, *opportunity, possibility* and *chance* are synonyms and can be used interchangeably in some contexts. Nevertheless, it is possible that their substitution for one another can change their connotative meanings.

From the related previous studies, it can be seen that there is still some room for a corpus-

based study of nominal synonyms to investigate the concept of semantic prosody. In order to differentiate synonyms despite their similarity of meanings, criteria need to be established. The set of criteria used in the present study includes distribution pattern, collocation, grammatical pattern, semantic preference, and semantic prosody to analyze *chance* and *opportunity*.

Although the selected target synonymous nouns in this study are similar to Sandström (2005), the authors still see potential to find additional insights into the two synonyms from different approaches and objectives. The concept of distribution pattern can provide information about the two synonyms' behavior across the five genres in the COCA (i.e. spoken, newspaper, magazine, fiction and academic journals) and identify their degree of formality. Collocation analysis can contribute to semantic preference, which leads to semantic prosody at the pragmatic level. The concept of grammatical patterns is also worth investigating although the two nouns share similar meanings.

METHODOLOGY

This section describes the research tools used in this study and the procedures of data collection and analysis.

Research tools

The primary source of data is COCA; several online dictionaries were consulted regarding definitions, collocations and grammatical structures of the two target nouns.

The COCA was built as a compensation for the limitations of two previous corpora, the British National Corpus (BNC), built in the early 1990s, and the American National Corpus (ANC), created in the late 1990s (Davies, 2009). Creator Mark Davies launched COCA online in 2008. More than 380 million words were collected between 1990 and 2008, balanced between the five genres of spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspaper and academic journals. Moreover, approximately 20 million words have been added to the corpus each year.

The BNC was selected as a source of data in Sandström (2005), before the launch of COCA. The researchers of the present study chose COCA over BNC because of its larger size, representativeness and constant updating. The latest addition of texts from 2018-2019 was completed in January 2020. COCA is composed of approximately 600 million words from over 275,476 texts from the period between 1990 and 2019. The texts in the five genres come from a variety of sources, which can account for its representativeness. Another advantage of COCA is that it is freely accessible online and has user-friendly search tools.

However, it should be noted that the COCA used in the present study was the edition available before its latest update in March 2020. Three more genres: blogs, other web pages, and TV and movie subtitles, have since been added to the corpus. The size of COCA has consequently been increased to one billion words, but the three genres recently added are not included in the present study.

The other source is online dictionaries. *The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE)* and *The Cambridge Dictionary (CD)* were mainly used for meanings and grammatical pattern confirmation. The complementary information these dictionaries provide allows information to be compared to gain various perspectives. In terms of research procedures, some words were checked in other dictionaries as well, for example, *The Merriam-Webster (MW)*, since some idioms and/or expressions were not found in the first two dictionaries.

It can be seen that the present study used a mixed methods approach where corpus data, information on meanings and grammatical patterns of the target nouns provided in dictionaries, and existing word lists were triangulated to explain the synonyms. The authors see benefits of each method and believe that they can offer complementary insights into studying the two synonymous nouns. The major objective of dictionaries is to define words and provide different explanations focusing on common meanings. However, they still include the polysemous properties of words. One dictionary may not offer all the meanings of words while another does. The CD provides an additional meaning of *chance* (i.e. risk) that was not found in LDOCE, but the latter offers word lists such as common spoken and written words, which served as another method in the present study. According to previous corpus-based studies on English synonyms, information from dictionaries can support data from corpora, providing both quantitative and qualitative perspectives to examine synonyms.

Procedures

After accessing the data of COCA, the functions of COMPARE and CHART were used to obtain information about pattern distributions across the five genres of *spoken, fiction, magazine, newspaper* and *academic*, and adjective and verb collocates of the two synonyms.

The CHART function was applied to obtain the statistics for words' distributions including frequency, size and word per million of the two nouns across the five genres from 1990-2019. To apply the COMPARE function of COCA, the criteria of the search for collocations of *chance* and *opportunity* were established as follows:

- Two left-span of the node to find **verb collocates** of *chance* and *opportunity*
- One left-span of the node to search for **adjective collocates** of the two synonyms

The first criterion was set because the two target nouns can be both countable and uncountable nouns. Therefore, the span setting including the pattern of VERB + (DETERMINER) or MODIFIER + NOUN should cover other items that may come before the nouns such as determiners and prepositions as part of verb structures. Based on this structure, it can be implied that the two target nouns are an object of their verb collocates. Next, the second criterion was also suitable as a syntax query to find adjective collocations of the two synonyms.

The verb and adjective collocates of both nouns were selected from the first 100 words on each of the four lists (two lists of verb and adjective collocates for each noun). Some items in the four lists were excluded after consulting the dictionaries and examining the concordance lines. Explanations of the procedures are provided in the following section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents answers to the research questions and discusses salient points that can be drawn from the results and analysis. The contents of this section cover the overall frequency and distribution patterns of *chance* and *opportunity*, their verb and adjective collocates, and both similarities and differences.

1. Overall frequency and distribution patterns of *'chance'* and *'opportunity'*

To begin, the CHART function was employed to see the distribution of the target nouns in each genre. The statistical evidence is shown in Table 1 – distribution of *chance* and *opportunity* in the five genres in the COCA.

Table 1
Distribution of 'chance' and 'opportunity' in the five genres in COCA
(data accessed in January, 2020)

Text genre	Chance		Text genre	Opportunity	
	Frequency	**Per million**		**Frequency**	**Per million**
Spoken	19,894	156.41	**Academic**	35,194	286.90
Newspaper	18,599	145.61	**Newspaper**	20,186	158.04
Magazine	15,981	156.07	**Magazine**	18,889	184.47
Fiction	15,678	132.00	**Spoken**	18,371	144.44
Academic	6,426	52.38	**Fiction**	5,364	45.16
Total	**76,578**		**Total**	**98,004**	

The total number of tokens for *chance* is 76,578 and 98,004 for *opportunity* from the five genres combined. Table 1 shows that *opportunity* occurs more often than *chance*, but the numerical difference is insignificant. They both seem to be used commonly in communication based on their frequencies in the spoken genre. The most noticeable point from Table 1 is the considerable difference between the frequencies of the two nouns in the academic genre. *Opportunity* occurs more often in this genre, so it can be assumed that many academic disciplines prefer it to *chance*. The high rate of occurrence of *opportunity* in the academic genre and its low frequency in fiction can support the assumption that it has a higher degree of formality than the other target noun. In comparison to *opportunity, chance* can be used in different text types and in both formal and informal contexts, conveying meanings besides 'opportunity,' as can be seen from the frequency of 18,599 in the newspaper genre, which contains a variety of topics and registers. Both *chance* and *opportunity* were also found on the LDOCE lists of the top 1000 spoken and written words. This accounts for the high frequencies of *chance* in the genres of spoken, newspaper and magazine, and those of *opportunity* in all the genres except fiction. Since the two nouns are polysemous, it is necessary to summarize their meanings provided by the two main dictionaries used in the study.

2. Summary of definitions of *'chance'* and *'opportunity'* from the Cambridge Dictionary (CD) and Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE)

The meanings listed below in Tables 2 and 3 are to support the pattern distributions of the two nouns spread across the five genres in COCA.

Table 2

Meanings of 'chance' from the Cambridge Dictionary (CD) and Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE) (data accessed in December 2019)

Semantic domain	Dictionary	
	CD	LDOCE
1. POSSIBILITY [countable, uncountable]	The level of possibility that something will happen; likelihood	The possibility that something will happen
2. OPPORTUNITY [countable]	An occasion that allows something to be done	A time or situation which you can use to do something you want to
3. RISK [countable]	A possibility that something negative will happen	
4. LUCK [uncountable]	The happening of something without any known cause or reason for doing so	The way some things happen without being planned or caused by people

Table 3

Meanings of 'opportunity' from the Cambridge Dictionary (CD) and Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE) (data accessed in December 2019)

Semantic domain	Dictionary	
	CD	LDOCE
1. OPPORTUNITY [countable, uncountable]	An occasion or situation which makes it possible to do something that you want to do or have to do, or the possibility of doing something	A chance to do something or an occasion when it is easy for you to do something
2. JOB OPPORTUNITY [countable]	A chance to get a job	A chance to get a job or improve your situation at work

As Tables 2 and 3 show, the definitions from both dictionaries are similar, but the CD includes an additional definition of *chance*, which is RISK. This definition seems to focus on the possibility of negative things happening. As can be seen in Tables 2 and 3, *something* in the definitions can refer to both pleasant and unpleasant things. It is noticeable that the types of nouns, countable and uncountable, can be related to their meanings. The COMPARE results from COCA show that the use of *chance* and *opportunity* in various meanings depends on context and collocations, not just their substitution for the definition of 'opportunity,' which some students might be unaware of.

To prevent possible confusion in the next section regarding the terms 'opportunity' and *opportunity* when referring to the meaning OPPORTUNITY (i.e. an occasion or a time that allows something to happen or to be done (from Tables 2 and 3)), the form 'opportunity' is applied.

3. Analysis of verb and adjective collocates

This part reveals the most frequent verb and adjective collocates, taking into account only the first 100 tokens of each list: verb collocates of *chance* and *opportunity*, and their adjective collocates (four lists in total). Explanations for excluding items are provided with examples as well as the items included in the study. Moreover, the results show more collocates of the two nouns than provided by the CD and LDOCE.

3.1 Verb collocates

3.1.1 Grammatical perspective on verb collocates of 'chance' and 'opportunity'

According to the results, a number of verb collocates were found co-occurring with both nouns. However, the frequencies of the mutual collocations seem insignificant. All 100 verb collocates of *chance* and those of *opportunity* are lexical verbs including the auxiliaries *be* and *have* on the list of verb collocates of *chance* (see the full lists in Appendix 1). While the *'d, 's*, *has* and *was* occurred on the list of *chance*, they were not found on the list of *opportunity*. It is possible that those auxiliaries do occur since the search command in the COMPARE function was set two positions to the left before the node. Regarding syntax, auxiliaries are tagged as verbs. The span setting then allows both auxiliaries and lexical verbs to precede the target nouns.

After consulting the LDOCE, the verb collocates of *chance* tend to be one of those in the top 1000-3000 spoken and/or written word lists as part of the LDOCE, while 6 verbs in the list of verb collocates of *chance* (e.g. MINIMIZE and ASSESS) are on the academic word list, or AWL, of the LDOCE. On the other hand, its counterpart's verb collocates list contains 16 verbs found in the AWL such as EXPAND, SEEK, PROMOTE, RESTRICT, FACILITATE, GENERATE and IGNORE (data accessed in April 2020). The verb collocates of *chance* and *opportunity* are displayed in Table 4 and the academic words are in bold type.

Table 4
Verb lemmas collocating with 'chance' and 'opportunity'

Chance			Opportunity		
stand	damage	put	identify	lead	deny
hurt	cut	make	bring	use	include
decide	destroy	raise	open	recognize	buy
ruin	spoil	blow	pursue	grasp	find
kill	leave	deserve	provide	fill	embrace
lessen	reduce	want	expand	overlook	receive
lower	jeopardize	maximize	seek	develop	gain
double	increase	have	exploit	look	generate
win	get	eliminate	create	lack	repeat
improve	boost	diminish	afford	build	limit
decrease	take	risk	promote	extend	seize
minimize	affect	end	explore	capture	squander
assess			restrict	facilitate	ensure
			present	guarantee	equalize
			access	evaluate	experience
			foster	ignore	represent
			spot	become	
Total	37		**Total**	50	

An examination of the verb collocates list of *chance* found a total of 52 lemmas, but only 37 lemmas are included in the study. The auxiliaries found on the list were excluded because most of the succeeding items are the verb CHANCE, not the noun *chance*. For the verb BE, the grammatical structures frequently found are *there's, there is, it's a + NOUN, here's* and *now's.* The meaning seems to focus on what modifies the noun following the verb BE, not the verb itself. Therefore, they were also eliminated from the list. Next, some verbs are followed by the expression 'by chance' such as EXPECT and OCCUR, not the noun *chance*, while the others are parts of names (FIGHTING and TRUMP) and expressions (there GOES). These then were also excluded. The verbs THINK, SAY, KNOW and FIGURE tend to have the same structure of VERB (that) + (DETERMINER) + CHANCE, which can occur with many verbs other than the two synonyms and the meaning seems to have a focus on what follows the verb or the relative pronoun *that*. Since the span setting was set to two positions from the left, this implies that the two nouns are likely the verb's object, not a subject of clauses. As a result, these verbs were removed as well. LIKE was also found as part of the idiom 'like someone's chances' meaning 'to think someone has a good chance.' This piece of information was drawn from MW. Therefore, LIKE was also excluded.

As for the verb collocates list of *opportunity*, out of the 100 collocates, the total lemmas were 61, but only 50 lemmas were included. No auxiliaries and modals were found on the list, but there are two copulas: LOOK and BECOME. However, after examining its concordance lines, LOOK turns out to be the phrasal verbs LOOK FOR and LOOK AT. The other phrasal verb found on the list is OPEN UP. Both main online dictionaries used provide the definitions of OPEN UP when used with *opportunity* as 'to create a new opportunity or a situation becomes an opportunity.' This phrasal verb often occurs in the newspaper and magazine genres, which can contain both formal and informal language. However, it also frequently appears in the academic genre with *opportunity*. Next, most of the verb collocates excluded from the list function as a modifier of the noun *opportunity*. The verb collocate LIE is part of the idiom 'therein lies' and therefore was eliminated from the list. After reviewing the concordance lines, it was found that the verb collocates FILL and AFFORD often co-occur with *opportunity* in the passive form, especially the former.

Most of the verb collocates of both synonyms are transitive verbs which have the pattern of VERB + OBJECT. Although their grammatical patterns are similar, the two nouns do not share the same verb collocates. However, after examining concordance lines, both target nouns were often found with the prepositions *of, for* and *to*. It can be assumed that each of these prepositions co-occurs with the two target nouns as an adjunct or a postmodifying prepositional phrase. The grammatical patterns of verb collocates of *chance* and *opportunity* can be VERB + (DETERMINER) OBJECT (*chance* and *opportunity*) (+PREPOSITION).

3.1.2 Semantic perspective on verb collocates of 'chance' and 'opportunity'

Classifying the verb collocates of both *chance* and *opportunity* was quite problematic because of their various meanings. However, after consulting the dictionaries and analyzing concordance lines, the researchers arrived at the categorizations of the verb collocates of the two nouns presented in Tables 5 and 6 below.

Regarding the verb collocates of *chance* from Table 4, 34 can be categorized into five groups according to their semantic preference when co-occurring with the noun. The categorization is shown in Table 5 and the numbers in the table refer to the list of semantic preference listed below.

1. To remove or take away a chance of something happening, or to cause a positive or negative result to the chance or possibility of something
2. To reduce the possibility of something or make something less likely to happen
3. To increase the possibility or opportunity of something
4. To obtain or have an opportunity or possibility of something or to do something
5. To judge or decide the possibility of something

Table 5
34 Verb (lemmas) collocates of 'chance' categorized by semantic preference

1	blow	end	eliminate	damage
	cut	destroy	spoil	
	make	ruin	hurt	
	risk	affect	kill	
2	lower	decrease	reduce	minimize
	lessen	diminish	jeopardize	
3	raise	maximize	double	improve
	boost	increase		
4	stand	have	win	get
	take	decide		
5	put	assess		

Out of the 37 lemmas in Table 4, 3 verbs seem unlikely to fall into any group of the meanings: LEAVE, DESERVE and WANT. They should then be placed into a miscellaneous group based on further analyses.

LEAVE, including the passive form, seems to have several meanings of 'put something at risk or possibility' and 'give something or someone an opportunity to do something' when co-occurring with *chance*. WANT co-occurring with *chance* means 'to wish or need it,' which is different from the meanings of the five groups above. Lastly, DESERVE may have a similar meaning as those in Group 4, but it has a condition. DESERVE, according to the CD, means 'to be given or to earn something because of particular actions or qualities.'

The verb collocates of *opportunity* in Table 4 can be grouped based on their semantic preference when co-occurring with the target noun. The list below contains the semantic preference of the members of each group illustrated in Table 6.

1. To create or increase or bring about an opportunity or possibility of something or occasion that will allow something to happen
2. To find or show that an opportunity or possibility exists
3. To take or have an opportunity or possibility

4. To use or experience an opportunity to do something or allow something to happen
5. Not to take or have or recognize an opportunity
6. To control or allow a particular number of opportunities of something happening
7. To make certain that an opportunity or possibility of something can happen

Table 6
46 Verb (lemmas) collocates of 'opportunity' categorized by semantic preference

1	create	promote	generate	foster
	develop	build	extend	expand
	bring	provide	open	present
	fill	include		
2	spot	seek	recognize	find
	explore	look	identify	lead
	pursue	represent		
3	seize	grasp	capture	gain
	embrace	buy	access	afford
	receive			
4	exploit	use	repeat	experience
5	overlook	ignore	deny	lack
	squander			
6	limit	restrict		
7	ensure	guarantee		

Out of the 50 verb collocates of *opportunity*, 4 verbs, i.e. BECOME, FACILITATE, EVALUATE and EQUALIZE, seem unlikely to fit in any group.

BECOME is a linking verb. When co-occurring with *opportunity*, BECOME connects the qualities of *opportunity* to a person or an object that acts as the subject of the verb in sentences. The meaning of FACILITATE may be similar to those in Group 1. However, when it co-occurs with *opportunity*, it tends to mean 'to make that opportunity possible or easier to happen.' As for EVALUATE and EQUALIZE, their meanings are not similar to the meanings in the seven groups. According to the CD, the former means 'to judge a quality of something' while the latter means 'to make things or people equal'. When they co-occur with *opportunity*, their semantic preference seems unlikely to fit into any group of meanings.

Some of the meanings of the verb collocates of *chance* and *opportunity* are overlapping such as 'to take/have and increase an opportunity or possibility of something/to do something'. Moreover, *something* in the meanings of verb collocates of *chance* can be pleasant and/or unpleasant as shown in the examples in Figure 1 from the concordance lines. On the other hand, *something* in the meanings of verb collocates of *opportunity* tend to be positive.

, whether as the cook or a guest. If you want to decrease *your* **chances** *of getting sick*, it all comes down to proper hand washing. Be sure

saturated from recent heavy storms and river levels are higher than normal -- increasing *the* **chances** *of flooding*. After a surprisingly wet August, storm systems will yield another heavy

his Jewishness as others elected to do, and during the purge, lost *all* **chances** *of advancement*. Even after his service to Communism, his imprisonment by the Iron

idea. It's a modest tax. Living in New York City creates *enormous* **opportunities** *for wealth*, and these people that are making at this sort of level of

.14 # Age # # # /TABLE # Approach # A qualitative study afforded *the* **opportunity** *to gather information in a question-answer process that yielded rich data* about the topic,

Figure 1: Examples of concordance lines illustrating 'something' positive and negative in the meanings of verb collocates of 'chance' and 'opportunity'

Regarding semantic prosody, it can be inferred that the semantic prosody of the two nouns can be both positive and negative. Even though the two nouns seem likely to be associated with something positive, their semantic prosodies still depend on their surroundings in context, not only their verb collocates. For example, if only *chance* in collocation with the verb DECREASE in the first concordance line in Figure 1 is considered in terms of connotation, they may contribute a negative meaning of reducing a possibility that something will happen. However, if their surroundings are taken into consideration with this verb in collocation with *chance,* they actually have a positive semantic prosody, which is 'to reduce the possibility of negative results.'

Overall, the meanings of the two synonyms are similar but the various meanings of *chance* reflect its polysemous properties, which entail the meanings of *opportunity*, i.e. 'possibility' and 'opportunity.' Despite their overlapping meanings, they do not share verb collocates as shown in Table 4. Although *chance* has a wider range of meanings than *opportunity* does, the latter in collocation with its verbs in Table 6 contributes more semantic preferences. It seems that the semantic preferences of *chance* and its verb collocates tend to involve 'possibility' of something while *opportunity* and its collocates engage in creating and making an opportunity certain to happen. Moreover, the semantic preferences of *opportunity* and its verb collocates are likely to have positive connotations while those of *chance* and its collocates seem to involve negative situations as part of 'possibility.'

3.2 Adjective collocates

The total numbers of adjective collocates in each list of *chance* and *opportunity* are 91 for the former and 100 for the latter (see Appendix 3 and 4). The difference is not statistically significant and therefore cannot reflect which target noun prefers adjectives. Nevertheless, the adjective collocates can be classified based on their semantic properties and discussed in a semantic perspective. The two lists of the adjective collocates of *chance* and *opportunity* can be seen in Appendix 5, including the academic words in the LDOCE's AWL, which appear in bold type (data accessed in April, 2020). Only 7 of chance's adjective collocates were found in the AWL while the rest tend to be found on the lists of the top 1000-3000 spoken/written words as part of the LDOCE. On the other hand, 26 adjective collocates of *opportunity* are on the AWL.

The items excluded from the two lists of the adjective collocates of *chance* and *opportunity* are also discussed briefly below.

The adjective collocates of *chance* total 91, but 6 of them: FAT, OFF, AVERAGE, JUST, SPORTING and OTHER, were excluded for the following reasons. FAT is part of the idiom 'fat chance,' which is used when something is unlikely to happen. OFF is structured in the prepositional phrase 'on the off chance' while SPORTING is part of the noun 'sporting chance.' Three of them can be found in both online dictionaries, CD and LDOCE, with examples. Next, AVERAGE is part of the other adjective collocate on the list – 'BETTER-THAN-AVERAGE.' JUST can be an adjective, but it tends to function as an adverb when co-occurring with *chance*. Similarly, OTHER can be an adjective, but it frequently precedes *chance* as a determiner. Therefore, they were excluded. Table 7 below shows the 85 adjective collocates of *chance* examined and grouped according to their semantic properties.

Table 7
85 Adjective collocates of 'chance' categorized by semantic property

Subject	statistical	presidential	electoral	political	legitimate
Temporal details	random	final	rare	lost	missed
	outside	real	once-in-a-lifetime	unprecedented	actual
	early				
Extent	slim	remote	remotest	poor	slightest
	slight	tiny	small	low	high
	higher	decent	better-than-even	lower	fair
	little	big	better-than-average	greater	greatest
	large	extra	possible	bigger	increased
	biggest	great	huge	multiple	ample
	increasing	limited	numerous		
Quality/characteristic	pure	lucky	blind	sheer	unnecessary
	sure	odd	wild	realistic	serious
	solid	good	happy	reasonable	best
	unlikely	better	excellent	new	golden
	strong	fresh	improved	perfect	wonderful
Generality/specificity	even	main	mere	only	overall
	single	significant	major	equal	historic
	unique				

As Table 7 shows, the group having the majority of adjective collocates is **'extent.'** After a closer look at the concordance lines, the members in the 'extent' group can reflect the preferred use of *chance* with the meaning of 'possibility.' Evidence from the concordance lines is provided in Figure 2 below.

> 4177141 Just how slim was Leicester City's slim **chance** of winning the English Premier League? # Leicester City players celebrate winning the Premier
>
> Outlook: The Jets, 6-2 on the road last season, have a great **chance** for their first road win of 2007. Giants' pass rush showed signs of

Figure 2: Examples of concordance lines illustrating the preferred meaning 'possibility' of the members of the group of 'extent' in collocation with 'chance'

The group of **'subject'** (e.g. STATISTICAL and LEGITIMATE) often precedes *chance* in the meaning of 'opportunity.' Next, the group of **'temporal details'** (e.g. RARE and FINAL) contains the members followed by *chance* with the primary meaning of 'opportunity' as well. Evidence is shown in the concordance lines in Figures 3 and 4.

> , if any, action should be taken, much is made of the statistical **chances** of such a calamity occurring. During your lifetime, say panel members, the
>
> in its financial support over the years, backing only candidates it thinks have legitimate **chances** of winning. It steered more than $6 million toward Cruz in 2012 but dismissed

Figure 3: Examples of concordance lines illustrating the meaning 'opportunity' of the group of 'subject' in collocation with 'chance'

> by the city has dropped by 40 percent, the city has had a rare **chance** to do what it has been promising to do since the late 1990's:
>
> 242248 TED-KOPPEL: voice-over The President gives Iraq one final **chance**. Pres. GEORGE BUSH: The coalition will give Saddam Hussein until noon Saturday to

Figure 4: Examples of concordance lines illustrating the meaning 'opportunity' of the group of 'temporal details' in collocation with 'chance'

Next, the group of **'quality/characteristic'** seems to have meaning distributions across all four meanings of *chance*, especially 'possibility' and 'luck' (see Table 2). Most members of the group of **'generality/specificity'** also precede *chance* with the meaning 'possibility.' The following concordance lines in Figures 5 and 6 show the preferred meanings of these last two groups respectively.

> that it was intact. (Photo-of-chain-lin) MORRISON: (Voiceover) And then -- this was pure **chance**, really -- the deputy spotted the SUV just down the road and pulled it
>
> . # While it still might be a little early, there's a good **chance** that the laptop industry has caught 5G fever, too, and we may already

Figure 5: Examples of concordance lines illustrating the meanings 'luck' and 'possibility' of the group of 'quality/ characteristic' in collocation with 'chance'

ground. Soon the camera could even travel along with a politician on the mere **chance** that something might happen. In 1910, William Warnecke succeeded in capturing New York

the Indian Supreme Court will make up the bench. There is certainly a significant **chance** that the Court would agree to set aside the settlement and reopen the proceedings.

Figure 6: Examples of concordance lines illustrating the meaning 'possibility' of the group of 'generality/specificity' in collocation with 'chance'

As for semantic prosody, Louw (1993) states that this concept needs to be explored at the pragmatic level. Not only can the search word and its collocates contribute to their semantic prosody; other surroundings in the context can as well (Sinclair & Carter, 2004). For example, when BETTER and GREATER in the group **'quality/characteristic'** collocate with *chance*, they convey the meaning of 'something that is more likely to happen.' When the phrases co-occur with the verb HAVE, they mean 'to obtain or have an opportunity or possibility of something that is more likely to happen.' When considering their surroundings in context, their semantic prosody is more likely to be positive as illustrated in Figure 7.

our chances of success are? In my opinion, we'd have a better **chance** of selling sun glasses to coal miners. " # To give credit where it

least likely to marry, thus suggesting that couples with higher incomes may have greater **chances** of marital success, along with lesser vulnerability to domestic violence. 26 # In other

Figure 7: Examples of concordance lines illustrating the semantic prosody of the adjectives BETTER and GREATER in collocation with 'chance'

Even though this analysis cannot ensure whether *chance* is 'mainly' used with the meaning of 'possibility,' evidence from the concordance lines seems to show a tendency that *chance* is often used in contexts with the meanings of 'possibility' and 'opportunity.' The majority of adjective collocates of *chance*, according to the LDOCE, are found in the top 1000-3000 spoken word list, and a few such as ODD belongs to the AWL. This is in line with the overall frequencies of this noun according to the results shown in Table 1. It occurs the most in the spoken genre and the least in the academic genre.

With regards to *opportunity*, the 98 adjective collocates of the target noun from the results of the COMPARE function are taken into account except CONSERVATIVE and MISSING. The former is part of an organization name – 'Conservative Opportunity Society' while the latter is the verb 'miss' in the present participle verb form. The remaining collocates (98 items) can be grouped based on the same semantic properties as those of *chance*, except 'generality/ specificity.' The categorization of the adjective collocates of *opportunity* is shown in Table 8 below.

Table 8
98 Adjective collocates of 'opportunity' categorized by semantic property

Subject	economic	financial	instructional	athletic	mating
	educational	photographic	social	global	sexual
	recreational	entrepreneurial	local	digital	technological
	commercial	professional	promotional	occupational	collaborative
	postsecondary	service-learning	cultural	vocational	individual
	musical	international	acting	illegitimate	
Temporal details	available	natural	earliest	present	regular
	ongoing	emerging	everyday	obvious	
Extent	rich	endless	limitless	tremendous	enormous
	abundant	adequate	vast	restricted	varied
	massive	sufficient	plentiful	various	expanding
	expanded	ample	additional	extensive	wider
Quality/ characteristic	exciting	critical	unparalleled	convenient	invaluable
	lucrative	interesting	unusual	alternative	challenging
	amazing	fantastic	exceptional	attractive	seizing
	valuable	fabulous	extraordinary	money-making	creative
	strategic	positive	right	profitable	incredible
	relevant	promising	awesome	appropriate	authentic
	structured	unique	untapped	important	compelling
	marvelous	favorable	wonderful	special	formal

After consulting the LDOCE, many adjective collocates of *opportunity* belong to the AWL and the top 1000-2000 written words. This reflects the high frequency of *opportunity* in the academic genre and in the other written genre – newspapers, which contains both formal and informal language. As seen in Table 8, the first group consists of the adjective collocates with the semantic property of **'subject'** and those subjects seem to be associated with the academic and newspaper genres. The largest group is **'quality/characteristic'** describing opportunities and occasions that allow positive things to happen. On examination of the concordance lines, it was found that *opportunity* tends to involve something positive rather than negative, as supported by the presence of positive adjectives in the last group. The following concordance lines in Figure 8 illustrate *opportunity* which collocates with adjectives whose connotative meanings tend to be positive.

MACI cohort a group of students who journey together through the degree or certificate program offered valuable **opportunities** for students to get to know each other and to build a sense of community

... # As a new Member of the U.S. Senate, you have a unique **opportunity** to dramatically increase diversity among top staff. Hiring just one African American top staffer

tone controls opportunity in America to a very, very great extent. Without extraordinary **opportunity**, there is no way for people to move forward, especially young children.

Figure 8: Examples of concordance lines illustrating 'opportunity' in collocation with positive adjectives

Another noticeable difference between *chance* and *opportunity* is the number of semantic properties of their adjective collocates. The adjective collocates of *chance* can be categorized into more semantic properties than those of *opportunity*. This can reflect *chance*'s polysemous status. In Table 7, the adjective collocates of *chance* in the group 'extent,' which is the largest group, seem to have mixed positive and negative connotative meanings. This may reflect the core meanings of *chance*, which are 'possibility' and 'opportunity.' The meaning of 'possibility' can refer to something positive or negative while the meaning of 'opportunity' is often associated with something positive. On the other hand, most of the adjective collocates of *opportunity* in the group 'extent' in Table 8 seem to have positive connotations. This can reflect the semantic prosody of these nouns which tends to be involved in positive situations. Besides the semantic property of 'extent,' most of the adjective collocates of *opportunity* in the group of 'quality/characteristic' can also underline the positive association of this noun while those of *chance* seem to have mixed connotative meanings, reflecting its wider range of meanings.

CONCLUSION

The primary objective of the study is to investigate differences and similarities of a pair synonymous nouns, *chance* and *opportunity.* According to the analysis and evidence provided in this study, the two target nouns can be problematic synonyms because of their various meanings. Despite their overlapping meanings, the two synonyms cannot be used interchangeably in all contexts.

In response to the first research question, the data show overall frequency and different distribution patterns of the target nouns. Both nouns seem common in conversation. However, the analysis of both verb and adjective collocates indicates that *opportunity* is preferred academically and is commonly used in more formal contexts. The occurrence of *opportunity* in the academic genre (i.e. 35,194) exceeds that of *chance* (i.e. 6,426). Based on the results, it can be said that many academic disciplines prefer the former noun to the latter. Moreover, the high frequency of *chance* in informal contexts such as the genre of fiction and spoken language can imply the difference in the degree of formality between the two nouns.

As for the second research question, the grammatical patterns of *chance* and *opportunity* are insignificantly different except for some items as discussed in Section 4. However, it was found that the two synonyms often co-occur with the prepositions *of, to* and *for*, which can be either an adjunct or part of a postmodifying prepositional phrase.

The last research question is concerned with the target nouns' similarities and differences in terms of meanings and collocations. In terms of meanings, both nouns were analyzed using the same criteria of semantic preference for verb collocates and semantic properties for adjective collocates. The overlapping meaning of both nouns is 'opportunity' which refers to a situation allowing something to happen or someone to do something. Based on the meanings provided by the CD and LDOCE, *chance* has more meanings than *opportunity*. The two dictionaries complement each other, demonstrating the benefits of using mixed approaches in the present study.

Chance has more varieties of meanings which entail the meanings of *opportunity*. Therefore, *opportunity* cannot substitute for its near-synonym in all contexts, while *chance* can be used instead of *opportunity* to refer to the meaning of 'opportunity' in some contexts. Moreover, the wider range of meanings of *chance* reflects its polysemous status, which makes it distinct from its near-synonym.

The verb collocates of the target nouns were found to have different semantic preferences, and the lists of verb collocates tend to involve the meanings of 'opportunity' and 'possibility.' Even though *chance* has more meanings than *opportunity*, the verb collocates of *chance* contribute more semantic preferences according to the results. One noticeable difference in their semantic preferences is that those of *opportunity* involve the situations of finding and ensuring that an opportunity exists. With regards to the semantic preferences of *chance*, they imply that this noun is likely to be used in the meaning of 'possibility' based on its semantic preferences of 'to reduce, increase and judge.' In addition, 16 out of 50 verb collocates of *opportunity* (or 8 per cent) were found in the AWL of the LDOCE, compared to 2 per cent of the verb collocates of *chance*.

As for the adjective collocates of *chance* and *opportunity*, their semantic properties were used to categorize the items in the two lists of adjective collocates. It is noticeable that most of the adjective collocates of *opportunity* are more formal than those of *chance*. After consulting the LDOCE, the authors found that many of them are in the AWL and the top 1000-2000 written word lists. Moreover, many adjective collocates of *opportunity* tend to be associated with something positive rather than negative. On the other hand, the adjective collocates of *chance* are more likely to convey mixed connotations than those co-occurring with *opportunity* because of *chance*'s polysemous properties. In addition, it can be inferred from the adjective collocates of *chance* that the noun may be preferred in the meaning of 'possibility,' which can involve both negative and positive situations.

Compared to the findings of Sandström (2005), the present study provided a more detailed analysis of the two nominal synonyms. Beyond the semantic level, the present study also analyzed the target nouns in light of the concept of semantic prosody. With the different sources of data, COCA can provide more collocations because it is larger than the BNC. Those verb and adjective collocates were categorized using the criteria of semantic preference and semantic property, respectively. Moreover, because of the CHART function, COCA offers information showing how the two nouns behave across different genres.

Despite the contributions of this study, some limitations need to be pointed out for future research. The findings of the present study do not identify whether the different collocates of *chance* are caused by specific meanings of 'opportunity' and 'possibility.' For example, many adjective collocates of *chance* in the group 'extent' tend to collocate with the noun in the meaning of 'possibility' rather than 'opportunity.' Further research then should focus on collocational analysis to investigate collocates of 'chance' that are associated with the two major meanings of this noun.

In terms of pedagogical implications, the present study emphasizes the importance of teaching

vocabulary within its contexts and giving specific examples to present the precise use of vocabulary. As suggested in Jirananthiporn (2018), different lexico-grammatical aspects should be underlined in teaching synonyms. It is also important for teachers to guide students to other possibilities of language use which can help them improve their English performance, especially their word choice. The two target nouns rarely share similar verb and adjective collocates, which means they yield different semantic preferences. *Chance* may be able to substitute for *opportunity* in some contexts, but *opportunity* cannot because of *chance*'s wider range of meanings. Since *chance* is polysemous, teachers can benefit from the study by underlining the fact that *chance* can mean something else other than 'opportunity.'

All in all, this corpus-based study emphasizes the benefits of using corpus as a tool to study and teach English. Corpus data can illustrate how a word behaves across different genres. Instead of focusing on whether a grammatical pattern is used *correctly* or *incorrectly*, corpus data give insightful information on how a grammatical pattern is *likely* to be used in different contexts.

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Appendix 1
Verb Collocates of CHANCE

WORD 1 (W1): **CHANCE** (0.98)

	WORD	W1	W2	W1/W2	SCORE
1	STAND	476	0	952.0	974.8
2	STOOD	133	1	133.0	136.2
3	STANDS	67	1	67.0	68.6
4	HURT	133	2	66.5	68.1
5	EXPECTED	56	1	56.0	57.3
6	RUINED	43	1	43.0	44.0
7	KILL	21	0	42.0	43.0
8	RUIN	40	1	40.0	41.0
9	KILLED	19	0	38.0	38.9
10	HURTING	18	0	36.0	36.9
11	LESSENS	18	0	36.0	36.9
12	OCCURRED	18	0	36.0	36.9
13	MET	30	1	30.0	30.7
14	DOUBLE	15	0	30.0	30.7
15	FIGHTING	15	0	30.0	30.7
16	LOWER	15	0	30.0	30.7
17	OCCUR	15	0	30.0	30.7
18	DECIDED	14	0	28.0	28.7
19	WON	14	0	28.0	28.7
20	DOUBLES	12	0	24.0	24.6
21	RUINING	23	1	23.0	23.6
22	LESSENING	11	0	22.0	22.5
23	HAPPENED	21	1	21.0	21.5
24	FIGURED	10	0	20.0	20.5
25	LOWERS	10	0	20.0	20.5
26	IMPROVES	37	2	18.5	18.9
27	LESSEN	53	3	17.7	18.1
28	DECREASE	74	5	14.8	15.2
29	GOES	13	1	13.0	13.3
30	DECREASING	13	1	13.0	13.3
31	LIKES	12	1	12.0	12.3
32	SPOIL	12	1	12.0	12.3
33	LEFT	114	10	11.4	11.7
34	IMPROVED	34	3	11.3	11.6
35	HAPPENS	11	1	11.0	11.3
36	REDUCES	114	11	10.4	10.6
37	DECREASES	20	2	10.0	10.2
38	REDUCE	300	33	9.1	9.3
39	CUT	26	3	8.7	8.9
40	JEOPARDIZE	23	3	7.7	7.9
41	HAPPEN	23	3	7.7	7.9
42	DAMAGE	15	2	7.5	7.7
43	BOOST	50	7	7.1	7.3
44	MINIMIZING	20	3	6.7	6.8
45	GOT	1620	246	6.6	6.7
46	INCREASES	236	37	6.4	6.5
47	'D	25	4	6.3	6.4
48	RAISES	12	2	6.0	6.1
49	ENDED	23	4	5.8	5.9
50	GETS	397	70	5.7	5.8
51	DESTROYED	17	3	5.7	5.8
52	DISCOVERED	11	2	5.5	5.6
53	KNOWS	11	2	5.5	5.6
54	TAKING	763	139	5.5	5.6
55	IMPROVE	278	51	5.5	5.6
56	MINIMIZE	90	17	5.3	5.4
57	GET	3149	613	5.1	5.3
58	END	10	2	5.0	5.1
59	CUTS	10	2	5.0	5.1
60	SAY	53	11	4.8	4.9
61	THOUGHT	37	8	4.6	4.7
62	ASSESS	22	5	4.4	4.5
63	PUT	21	5	4.2	4.3
64	KNEW	29	7	4.1	4.2
65	INCREASING	128	31	4.1	4.2
66	GOTTEN	86	22	3.9	4.0
67	INCREASE	485	130	3.7	3.8
68	ELIMINATED	11	3	3.7	3.8
69	MEET	11	3	3.7	3.8
70	TAKE	2363	652	3.6	3.7
71	THINK	168	48	3.5	3.6
72	MINIMIZES	16	5	3.2	3.3
73	BLOWN	27	9	3.0	3.1
74	DECREASED	12	4	3.0	3.1
75	MAKES	12	4	3.0	3.1
76	IMPROVING	34	12	2.8	2.9
77	DESTROY	22	8	2.8	2.8
78	INCREASED	71	26	2.7	2.8
79	BLEW	30	11	2.7	2.8
80	LIKED	19	7	2.7	2.8
81	SAID	52	20	2.6	2.7
82	LIKE	116	45	2.6	2.6
83	GETTING	264	112	2.4	2.4
84	REDUCING	65	29	2.2	2.3
85	TRUMP	11	5	2.2	2.3
86	WANTS	24	11	2.2	2.2
87	'S	1871	892	2.1	2.1
88	SCORING	35	17	2.1	2.1
89	DESERVES	72	35	2.1	2.1
90	REDUCED	37	18	2.1	2.1
91	HAS	1636	804	2.0	2.1
92	WAS	1464	721	2.0	2.1
93	MAXIMIZES	12	6	2.0	2.0
94	AFFECT	33	17	1.9	2.0
95	DIMINISH	21	11	1.9	2.0
96	WANTED	89	47	1.9	1.9
97	LEAVE	15	8	1.9	1.9
98	RISK	11	6	1.8	1.9
99	HAD	6360	3490	1.8	1.9
100	DESERVED	24	14	1.7	1.8

Appendix 2
Verb Collocates of OPPORTUNITY

WORD 2 (W2): **OPPORTUNITY** (1.02)

	WORD	W2	W1	W2/W1	SCORE
1	LEARNING	286	1	286.0	279.3
2	IDENTIFY	91	0	182.0	177.7
3	OPENS	45	0	90.0	87.9
4	PURSUE	81	1	81.0	79.1
5	PROVIDING	590	8	73.8	72.0
6	VOLUNTEER	33	0	66.0	64.5
7	EXPANDING	31	0	62.0	60.5
8	IDENTIFYING	31	0	62.0	60.5
9	EXPLOIT	59	1	59.0	57.6
10	SEEK	115	2	57.5	56.2
11	NETWORKING	57	1	57.0	55.7
12	HOUSING	27	0	54.0	52.7
13	OPENED	51	1	51.0	49.8
14	PURSUING	25	0	50.0	48.8
15	EXPAND	134	3	44.7	43.6
16	AFFORD	44	1	44.0	43.0
17	PROMOTE	40	1	40.0	39.1
18	EXPLORE	79	2	39.5	38.6
19	TEACHING	38	1	38.0	37.1
20	ACCESS	19	0	38.0	37.1
21	MARKET	19	0	38.0	37.1
22	CREATING	333	9	37.0	36.1
23	PRESENTED	72	2	36.0	35.2
24	EXPLOITING	18	0	36.0	35.2
25	LEAD	18	0	36.0	35.2
26	MENTORING	18	0	36.0	35.2
27	RESTRICT	18	0	36.0	35.2
28	USED	140	4	35.0	34.2
29	OPENING	35	1	35.0	34.2
30	PROVIDED	537	16	33.6	32.8
31	OPEN	66	2	33.0	32.2
32	RECOGNIZE	33	1	33.0	32.2
33	CREATES	227	7	32.4	31.7
34	PROVIDE	1667	54	30.9	30.1
35	GRASP	30	1	30.0	29.3
36	OVERLOOK	15	0	30.0	29.3
37	CREATE	606	21	28.9	28.2
38	LOOK	85	3	28.3	27.7
39	FILLED	14	0	28.0	27.3
40	PRESENTING	14	0	28.0	27.3
41	DEVELOP	27	1	27.0	26.4
42	USING	52	2	26.0	25.4
43	LACK	26	1	26.0	25.4
44	CAPTURE	13	0	26.0	25.4
45	EXPANDS	13	0	26.0	25.4
46	IDENTIFIES	13	0	26.0	25.4
47	LIES	13	0	26.0	25.4
48	PROMOTING	13	0	26.0	25.4
49	PRESENTS	173	7	24.7	24.1
50	EXTEND	24	1	24.0	23.4
51	FACILITATE	12	0	24.0	23.4
52	DENYING	12	0	24.0	23.4
53	BUILD	12	0	24.0	23.4
54	SEEKS	12	0	24.0	23.4
55	TRAVEL	12	0	24.0	23.4
56	BECAME	23	1	23.0	22.5
57	FINDS	11	0	22.0	21.5
58	EXPORT	11	0	22.0	21.5
59	IDENTIFIED	11	0	22.0	21.5
60	PURSUED	11	0	22.0	21.5
61	RESEARCH	11	0	22.0	21.5
62	USE	192	9	21.3	20.8
63	WORK	83	4	20.8	20.3
64	ENSURING	10	0	20.0	19.5
65	FOSTER	10	0	20.0	19.5
66	GUARANTEE	10	0	20.0	19.5
67	SPOTTING	10	0	20.0	19.5
68	RECEIVE	38	2	19.0	18.6
69	PROVIDES	864	48	18.0	17.6
70	BUYING	18	1	18.0	17.6
71	SEEKING	104	6	17.3	16.9
72	LOOKING	86	5	17.2	16.8
73	GAIN	17	1	17.0	16.6
74	FINDING	50	3	16.7	16.3
75	CREATED	233	14	16.6	16.3
76	EMBRACE	33	2	16.5	16.1
77	INCLUDE	81	5	16.2	15.8
78	BRING	48	3	16.0	15.6
79	BECOME	32	2	16.0	15.6
80	GENERATE	16	1	16.0	15.6
81	LIMITED	61	4	15.3	14.9
82	REPEATED	15	1	15.0	14.6
83	SOUGHT	29	2	14.5	14.2
84	AFFORDS	71	5	14.2	13.9
85	SQUANDER	28	2	14.0	13.7
86	EXPLORING	27	2	13.5	13.2
87	SEIZE	346	26	13.3	13.0
88	AFFORDED	116	9	12.9	12.6
89	PRESENT	88	7	12.6	12.3
90	ENSURE	25	2	12.5	12.2
91	EXPERIENCE	12	1	12.0	11.7
92	EQUALIZE	22	2	11.0	10.7
93	BECOMES	22	2	11.0	10.7
94	DENY	11	1	11.0	10.7
95	EVALUATE	11	1	11.0	10.7
96	EXPLOITED	11	1	11.0	10.7
97	EXTENDED	11	1	11.0	10.7
98	RECOGNIZING	11	1	11.0	10.7
99	IGNORE	10	1	10.0	9.8
100	REPRESENT	55	6	9.2	9.0

Appendix 3
Adjective Collocates of CHANCE

WORD 1 (W1): **CHANCE** (0.98)

	WORD	W1	W2	W1/W2	SCORE
1	FAT	210	0	420.0	430.1
2	OFF	151	0	302.0	309.2
3	SLIM	151	0	302.0	309.2
4	SLIGHT	102	0	204.0	208.9
5	HIGHER	75	0	150.0	153.6
6	EVEN	46	0	92.0	94.2
7	PURE	79	1	79.0	80.9
8	REMOTE	53	1	53.0	54.3
9	LUCKY	18	0	36.0	36.9
10	TINY	16	0	32.0	32.8
11	DECENT	121	4	30.3	31.0
12	BLIND	15	0	30.0	30.7
13	REMOTEST	15	0	30.0	30.7
14	SHEER	28	1	28.0	28.7
15	MAIN	26	1	26.0	26.6
16	UNNECESSARY	12	0	24.0	24.6
17	SMALL	139	6	23.2	23.7
18	STATISTICAL	22	1	22.0	22.5
19	SURE	11	0	22.0	22.5
20	BETTER-THAN-EVEN	11	0	22.0	22.5
21	BETTER-THAN-AVERAGE	11	0	22.0	22.5
22	ODD	11	0	22.0	22.5
23	MERE	40	2	20.0	20.5
24	WILD	10	0	20.0	20.5
25	AVERAGE	10	0	20.0	20.5
26	POOR	17	1	17.0	17.4
27	RANDOM	64	5	12.8	13.1
28	OUTSIDE	84	7	12.0	12.3
29	LOW	33	3	11.0	11.3
30	PRESIDENTIAL	11	1	11.0	11.3
31	LOWER	30	3	10.0	10.2
32	REALISTIC	93	11	8.5	8.7
33	SERIOUS	37	5	7.4	7.6
34	ONLY	680	105	6.5	6.6
35	SOLID	19	3	6.3	6.5
36	UNLIKELY	12	2	6.0	6.1
37	STRONG	94	17	5.5	5.7
38	JUST	22	4	5.5	5.6
39	ELECTORAL	16	3	5.3	5.5
40	GOOD	2397	462	5.2	5.3
41	BETTER	1635	327	5.0	5.1
42	SLIGHTEST	55	11	5.0	5.1
43	HAPPY	10	2	5.0	5.1
44	LEGITIMATE	58	12	4.8	4.9
45	HIGH	53	12	4.4	4.5
46	FAIR	275	69	4.0	4.1
47	REASONABLE	143	39	3.7	3.8
48	BEST	1413	407	3.5	3.6
49	OVERALL	10	4	2.5	2.6
50	LITTLE	185	79	2.3	2.4
51	LARGE	10	6	1.7	1.7
52	FINAL	84	51	1.6	1.7
53	SPORTING	22	15	1.5	1.5
54	ACTUAL	12	9	1.3	1.4
55	REAL	404	337	1.2	1.2
56	SINGLE	16	14	1.1	1.2
57	BIG	179	158	1.1	1.2
58	EXTRA	10	9	1.1	1.1
59	GREATER	287	281	1.0	1.0
60	BIGGER	17	17	1.0	1.0
61	EXCELLENT	159	230	0.7	0.7
62	IMPROVED	10	15	0.7	0.7
63	POSSIBLE	49	86	0.6	0.6
64	SIGNIFICANT	42	78	0.5	0.6
65	EARLY	11	21	0.5	0.5
66	GREATEST	54	120	0.5	0.5
67	FRESH	14	38	0.4	0.4
68	INCREASED	49	151	0.3	0.3
69	RARE	110	372	0.3	0.3
70	ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME	25	100	0.3	0.3
71	BIGGEST	10	43	0.2	0.2
72	INCREASING	12	64	0.2	0.2
73	MAJOR	13	72	0.2	0.2
74	OTHER	56	334	0.2	0.2
75	GREAT	197	1198	0.2	0.2
76	LIMITED	16	163	0.1	0.1
77	HUGE	14	155	0.1	0.1
78	NUMEROUS	10	111	0.1	0.1
79	EQUAL	116	1339	0.1	0.1
80	LOST	16	203	0.1	0.1
81	UNPRECEDENTED	10	128	0.1	0.1
82	NEW	90	1153	0.1	0.1
83	PERFECT	20	296	0.1	0.1
84	POLITICAL	11	163	0.1	0.1
85	MISSED	33	499	0.1	0.1
86	HISTORIC	12	183	0.1	0.1
87	GOLDEN	21	333	0.1	0.1
88	MULTIPLE	10	163	0.1	0.1
89	WONDERFUL	11	258	0.0	0.0
90	UNIQUE	28	674	0.0	0.0
91	AMPLE	10	445	0.0	0.0

Appendix 4

Adjective Collocates of OPPORTUINITY

WORD 2 (W2): **OPPORTUNITY** (1.02)

	WORD	W2	W1	W2/W1	SCORE
1	ECONOMIC	1025	0	2,050.0	2,002.0
2	EDUCATIONAL	1021	3	340.3	332.4
3	RECREATIONAL	113	0	226.0	220.7
4	COMMERCIAL	79	0	158.0	154.3
5	RICH	57	0	114.0	111.3
6	EXPANDING	54	0	108.0	105.5
7	FINANCIAL	53	0	106.0	103.5
8	PHOTOGRAPHIC	53	0	106.0	103.5
9	AVAILABLE	50	0	100.0	97.7
10	EXCITING	88	1	88.0	85.9
11	ENTREPRENEURIAL	44	0	88.0	85.9
12	ENDLESS	44	0	88.0	85.9
13	EXPANDED	44	0	88.0	85.9
14	PROFESSIONAL	87	1	87.0	85.0
15	NATURAL	36	0	72.0	70.3
16	LUCRATIVE	35	0	70.0	68.4
17	AMAZING	67	1	67.0	65.4
18	VALUABLE	67	1	67.0	65.4
19	STRATEGIC	31	0	62.0	60.5
20	INSTRUCTIONAL	30	0	60.0	58.6
21	CRITICAL	30	0	60.0	58.6
22	INTERESTING	29	0	58.0	56.6
23	LIMITLESS	29	0	58.0	56.6
24	SOCIAL	111	2	55.5	54.2
25	TREMENDOUS	217	4	54.3	53.0
26	FANTASTIC	27	0	54.0	52.7
27	EARLIEST	53	1	53.0	51.8
28	ENORMOUS	104	2	52.0	50.8
29	ABUNDANT	26	0	52.0	50.8
30	LOCAL	26	0	52.0	50.8
31	PROMOTIONAL	26	0	52.0	50.8
32	CULTURAL	25	0	50.0	48.8
33	ATHLETIC	25	0	50.0	48.8
34	POSITIVE	25	0	50.0	48.8
35	PRESENT	25	0	50.0	48.8
36	UNPARALLELED	49	1	49.0	47.9
37	UNUSUAL	45	1	45.0	43.9
38	AMPLE	445	10	44.5	43.5
39	GLOBAL	22	0	44.0	43.0
40	DIGITAL	21	0	42.0	41.0
41	OCCUPATIONAL	21	0	42.0	41.0
42	REGULAR	21	0	42.0	41.0
43	ADEQUATE	41	1	41.0	40.0
44	EXCEPTIONAL	20	0	40.0	39.1
45	MATING	20	0	40.0	39.1
46	ONGOING	20	0	40.0	39.1
47	EXTRAORDINARY	119	3	39.7	38.7
48	EMERGING	19	0	38.0	37.1
49	SEXUAL	19	0	38.0	37.1
50	TECHNOLOGICAL	19	0	38.0	37.1
51	CONVENIENT	18	0	36.0	35.2
52	ALTERNATIVE	18	0	36.0	35.2
53	ATTRACTIVE	18	0	36.0	35.2
54	MONEY-MAKING	18	0	36.0	35.2

	WORD	W2	W1	W2/W1	SCORE
55	PROFITABLE	18	0	36.0	35.2
56	AWESOME	17	0	34.0	33.2
57	VAST	17	0	34.0	33.2
58	RIGHT	65	2	32.5	31.7
59	PROMISING	32	1	32.0	31.3
60	COLLABORATIVE	16	0	32.0	31.3
61	INVALUABLE	16	0	32.0	31.3
62	CHALLENGING	15	0	30.0	29.3
63	CONSERVATIVE	15	0	30.0	29.3
64	SEIZING	15	0	30.0	29.3
65	CREATIVE	28	1	28.0	27.3
66	ILLEGITIMATE	14	0	28.0	27.3
67	POSTSECONDARY	14	0	28.0	27.3
68	RESTRICTED	14	0	28.0	27.3
69	SERVICE-LEARNING	14	0	28.0	27.3
70	VARIED	14	0	28.0	27.3
71	MASSIVE	13	0	26.0	25.4
72	RELEVANT	13	0	26.0	25.4
73	STRUCTURED	13	0	26.0	25.4
74	VOCATIONAL	13	0	26.0	25.4
75	SUFFICIENT	50	2	25.0	24.4
76	INDIVIDUAL	25	1	25.0	24.4
77	MUSICAL	25	1	25.0	24.4
78	INCREDIBLE	99	4	24.8	24.2
79	ADDITIONAL	122	5	24.4	23.8
80	UNIQUE	674	28	24.1	23.5
81	FAVORABLE	12	0	24.0	23.4
82	EXTENSIVE	12	0	24.0	23.4
83	UNTAPPED	12	0	24.0	23.4
84	WONDERFUL	258	11	23.5	22.9
85	MARVELOUS	23	1	23.0	22.5
86	OBVIOUS	23	1	23.0	22.5
87	MISSING	22	1	22.0	21.5
88	PLENTIFUL	11	0	22.0	21.5
89	WIDER	11	0	22.0	21.5
90	APPROPRIATE	21	1	21.0	20.5
91	IMPORTANT	142	7	20.3	19.8
92	SPECIAL	80	4	20.0	19.5
93	INTERNATIONAL	20	1	20.0	19.5
94	VARIOUS	20	1	20.0	19.5
95	AUTHENTIC	10	0	20.0	19.5
96	ACTING	10	0	20.0	19.5
97	COMPELLING	10	0	20.0	19.5
98	FORMAL	10	0	20.0	19.5
99	FABULOUS	10	0	20.0	19.5
100	EVERYDAY	10	0	20.0	19.5

Appendix 5
Adjective lemmas collocating with *'chance'* and *'opportunity'*

Chance			Opportunity		
slim	serious	possible	**economic**	athletic	illegitimate
slight	only	**significant**	educational	**positive**	postsecondary
higher	solid	early	recreational	present	**restricted**
even	unlikely	greatest	commercial	**unparalleled**	service-learning
pure	strong	fresh	rich	unusual	**varied**
remote	electoral	increased	expanding	ample	massive
lucky	good	rare	**financial**	global	**relevant**
tiny	better	once-in-a-lifetime	photographic	digital	**structured**
decent	slightest	biggest	**available**	**occupational**	vocational
blind	happy	increasing	exciting	regular	**sufficient**
remotest	legitimate	**major**	entrepreneurial	**adequate**	**individual**
sheer	high	great	endless	exceptional	musical
main	fair	limited	expanded	mating	incredible
unnecessary	reasonable	huge	**professional**	**ongoing**	additional
small	best	numerous	natural	extraordinary	**unique**
statistical	overall	equal	lucrative	**emerging**	favorable
sure	little	lost	amazing	**sexual**	extensive
better-than-even	large	**unprecedented**	valuable	**technological**	untapped
better-than-average	**final**	new	**strategic**	convenient	wonderful
odd	actual	perfect	instructional	**alternative**	marvelous
mere	real	political	critical	attractive	**obvious**
wild	single	missed	interesting	money-making	plentiful
poor	big	historic	limitless	profitable	wider
random	extra	golden	social	awesome	**appropriate**
outside	greater	multiple	tremendous	vast	important
low	bigger	wonderful	fantastic	right	special
presidential	excellent	**unique**	earliest	promising	international
lower	improved	ample	**enormous**	collaborative	various
realistic			abundant	invaluable	authentic
			local	**challenging**	acting
			promotional	seizing	compelling
			cultural	creative	formal
			fabulous	everyday	
Total	85		**Total**	98	

Note: The items in bold type are academic words, according to AWL of LDOCE (data accessed in April, 2020).