

A Corpus-Based Study of the Synonyms: *Perfect, Flawless, Impeccable*

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Abstract

This research investigated three synonymous adjectives *perfect*, *flawless*, and *impeccable* in terms of meaning, degree of formality, collocations, and grammatical patterns. The three synonymous adjectives were scrutinized through the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). The findings suggested that these three synonymous adjectives share some similarities; however, they cannot be used interchangeably in every context. In hotel contexts, there seemed to be a preference for *impeccable* compared with the other two.

Keywords: Corpus-based instruction, near-synonyms, synonymous words

Introduction

A synonym is known as a term or expression in the same language that has the same or nearly the same meaning as another (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, n.d.). Synonyms can be classified as absolute synonyms and loose synonyms. Absolute synonyms, also known as perfect synonyms, refer to the words which have identical meanings and can be used interchangeably in all contexts without affecting meaning, connotation or style (Cruse, 1986; Edmonds & Hirst, 2002, as cited in Lertcharoenwanich & Phoocharoensil, 2022). On the other hand, loose synonyms, also called near synonyms, refer to words which are close in meaning but not identical and are not interchangeable in every context (Harley, 2006; Lertcharoenwanich & Phoocharoensil, 2022).

Most of the synonyms in English are loose or near synonyms, which means they are not completely interchangeable. Despite having a similar core meaning, these words do not always share linguistic features, and thus can be distinguished by their particular linguistic features (Jackson & Amvela, 2007). Selecting synonyms can be difficult. Thus, learning them is essential for everyone looking to enhance their English (Phoocharoensil, 2010). This research focuses on three synonymous

adjectives *perfect*, *flawless*, and *impeccable* that appear in announcements, ads, notices, and leaflets. Below are some examples of the three adjectives in hotel leaflets available on the Internet.

The villas exude immaculate luxury, privacy and comfort, a **perfect** place to unwind with family or friends. (*Hotel brochure*, n.d.)

The “Grand” in the hotel’s name could refer to its stunning outdoor infinity pool that serves as a foreground to the city; its high-quality restaurants presided over by award-winning chefs; its **flawless** service from every member of staff; and, its well-equipped gym facing the throbbing city. (*Best Bangkok hotels*, n.d.)

For a truly **flawless** experience, tables are specially decorated and **impeccable** Anantara service can be expected as standard. (*Anantara*, n.d.)

Moreover, as seen in the classroom course pack material of English for Hotel Business, the words *perfect*, *flawless*, and *impeccable* are used to describe the condition or atmosphere of a hotel. The examples are as follows:

The bedroom is beautifully designed and it is charming with a comfort bed. The bed and some parts of the ceiling are made from wood. The green color of the chairs and the curtains is refreshing. The bedroom is **perfect** for relaxing. It is quiet and restful, a luxurious and comfortable place to stay when traveling for business or pleasure. (Chinsethagij, 2021, p. 36)

Five Star Hotels: These exceptional properties provide a memorable experience through virtually **flawless** service and the finest of amenities. The staff are intuitive, engaging and passionate, and eagerly deliver service above and beyond the guests’ expectations. (Chinsethagij, 2021, p. 3)

Five Diamond Hotels: Ultimate luxury, sophistication and comfort with extraordinary physical attributes, meticulous personalized service, extensive amenities, and **impeccable** standards of excellence. (Chinsethagij, 2021, p. 2)

Based on the examples above mentioned, these three synonymous adjectives are really used in the hotel-related contexts and it is therefore worth learning them. Explanations of word usage normally rely only on the intuition of native speakers (Kruawong & Phoocharoensil, 2022), which is certainly not sufficient to provide a solid explanation. Moreover, dictionaries alone do not clearly explain how

these words should be used. Therefore, finding solid answers to explain to students how to use these words correctly is essential.

Purposes of the Study

This research aims to find solid answers for how to use the adjectives *perfect*, *flawless*, and *impeccable* correctly.

Research Question

What are the similarities and differences between the adjectives *perfect*, *flawless*, and *impeccable* in terms of meaning, degree of formality, collocations, and grammatical patterns?

Literature Review

Synonyms

Synonyms can be categorized into two major types: strict or absolute synonyms and loose or near synonyms. Strict synonyms can be defined as words that can replace each other in all contexts. This replacement does not create any changes in meaning, style, or connotation of the message (Jackson & Amvela, 2007). Besides that, strict or absolute synonyms are rare and hard to find. According to Palmer (1997), absolute synonyms are non-existent because it is almost impossible that words with the exact same meaning would still be in use. Likewise, Kreidler (1998) stated that no two words have exactly the same linguistic features; therefore, having two words that can perfectly replace each other in all cases would be useless. On the other hand, loose or near synonyms are words that have a similar meaning but cannot always be used interchangeably in all contexts (Jackson & Amvela, 2007). Linguists often refer to this type when speaking of synonyms.

There are several criteria that are used in classifying synonyms, e.g., dictionaries, dialect, degree of formality, collocation, and grammar pattern (Petcharat & Phoocharoensil, 2017). To elucidate terms used in discussing synonyms, degree of formality, collocation, and grammatical patterns are explored in order to distinguish the synonyms *perfect*, *flawless*, and *impeccable* in this research.

Dictionaries

Dictionaries are regarded as the first source when looking for the meaning of any words. In this study, the words *perfect*, *flawless*, and *impeccable* were examined through three online English dictionaries: the Macmillan Dictionary, the Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, and the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English. The three dictionaries were selected to find the similarities and differences of meaning of each word. Moreover, these three dictionaries are widely used, so examining the meaning

of the three adjectives in these three dictionaries is of importance in regard to comparing their meaning and usage.

The results of examining the three English dictionaries, namely the Macmillan Dictionary, the Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, and the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English were as follows:

Table 1

Results from Dictionaries

	Macmillan Dictionary	Oxford Learner's Dictionaries	Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English
<i>Perfect</i>	1. as good, correct, or accurate as it is possible to be <i>- Her English was perfect.</i> 2. completely suitable or right for someone <i>- It seems like the perfect gift.</i> (A) perfect for: <i>- Their house is absolutely perfect for parties and barbecues.</i> 3. with no parts missing, damaged, or spoiled <i>- The equipment was in perfect condition.</i> (Only before noun) 4. used for emphasizing how much someone has of a particular quality <i>- He behaved like the perfect gentleman all evening.</i> 5. used for emphasis generally	1. having everything that is necessary; complete and without faults or weaknesses <i>- He smiled, revealing a perfect set of teeth.</i> 2. completely correct; exact and accurate <i>- She speaks perfect English.</i> 3. the best of its kind <i>- a perfect example of the painter's early style</i> <i>- the perfect crime (= one in which the criminal is never discovered)</i> 4. excellent; very good <i>- The weather was perfect.</i> 6. exactly right for somebody/something <i>- Hawaii is the perfect place for a honeymoon.</i> 7. [only before noun] total; complete <i>- I don't know him. He's a perfect stranger.</i> 8. (grammar) connected with the form of a verb that consists of part of the verb <i>have</i> with the past participle of the main verb, used to express actions completed by	1. not having any mistakes, faults, or damage ANTONYM imperfect <i>- His English was perfect.</i> 2. as good as possible, or the best of its kind <i>- The weather was perfect the whole week.</i> <i>perfect timing</i> (used when something happens at exactly the right time) <i>- Good, you're home. Perfect timing. Dinner's on the table.</i> 3. exactly what is needed for a particular purpose, situation, or person <i>- Crusty bread is the perfect accompaniment to this soup.</i> <i>Perfect for</i> <i>- The land is perfect for sheep farming.</i> <i>Perfect way/place/time etc. to do something</i> <i>- She thought she'd found the perfect place to live.</i> <i>Perfect day/place/person etc. for something</i> <i>- a perfect day for a picnic</i>

	- <i>What he said was perfect nonsense.</i>	the present or a particular point in the past or future - " <i>I have eaten</i> " is the present perfect tense of the verb "to eat", " <i>I had eaten</i> " is the past perfect and " <i>I will have eaten</i> " is the future perfect.	
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Flawless	1. without any mistakes, marks, or bad features - <i>a flawless skin</i> - <i>a flawless diamond</i>	1. without flaws and therefore perfect SYNONYM perfect - <i>a flawless complexion/performance</i> - <i>Her English is almost flawless.</i>	1. having no mistakes or marks, or not lacking anything SYNONYM perfect - <i>Adrian's flawless French</i>
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Impeccable	1. perfect in every way - <i>impeccable behavior</i> - <i>The standards of service are impeccable.</i>	1. without mistakes or faults SYNONYM perfect - <i>impeccable manners/taste</i> - <i>Her written English is impeccable.</i>	1. without any faults and impossible to criticize SYNONYM perfect - <i>She has taught her children impeccable manners.</i> - <i>a bar with impeccable service</i>
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Sources: Macmillan Dictionary, Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, and Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English

From Table 1, according to the three online English dictionaries, the word *perfect* can be used with different senses of meaning while the words *flawless* and *impeccable* share the same meanings in all three dictionaries. The Oxford Learner's Dictionaries and the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English even suggest the word *perfect* as a synonym of the words *flawless* and *impeccable*. The dictionaries show barely any differences among these three words. Consulting only dictionaries, however, is not adequate to indicate whether or not these three adjectives are similar or different. It is difficult for learners to distinguish these target synonyms with the help of dictionaries alone. Therefore, the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) was used in this research to extract the formality, collocation, and grammatical pattern since COCA is a large corpus of over one billion words in general American English (Davies, 2020).

Degree of Formality

Synonyms can share similar meaning, but they are different in terms of formality (Petcharat & Phoocharoensil, 2017). The degree of formality is one way to distinguish synonyms. Phoocharoensil (2010) supported the idea that in any pair of synonymous words, one tends to occur in a more formal

context than the other. In other words, words might share the same meaning but not always be used in the same context. Some words might be used in more formal ways, such as in the academic context. Other words with the same meaning might be used in a less formal context such as in normal conversation. In this study, the degree of formality was explored through COCA. Eight genres in COCA include TV/Movies, Spoken, Magazines, Fiction, Blogs, Webs, News, and Academic. COCA (2020) identifies TV/Movies and Spoken as informal while Academic is defined as formal and Magazines, Fiction, Blogs, Webs, News are in between formal and informal. Hence, among the eight genres in COCA, the frequency of each adjective—*perfect*, *flawless*, *impeccable*—was scrutinized to identify its formality.

Collocation

Collocation might be explained as the phenomenon of particular words being more likely to appear in combination with other words in certain contexts (Baker et al., 2006). Collocation is another good criterion to identify the differences of synonyms. Researchers such as Aroonmanakun (2015), Cai (2012), Chalermsook (2014), Chung (2011), Gu (2017), Musikarn (2016), Panyapayatjati (2016), Petcharat & Phoocharoensil (2017), Pimjuntug (2015), Phoocharoensil (2020), Sirikan (2015), Srithanyarat (2016), Supachai (2014), Wongrat (2018), and Yang (2016) have used collocations as one criterion to distinguish synonyms. To comply with these researchers, in this study, noun collocation is examined through COCA.

Collocation which is classified as a strong collocate normally relies on the MI score, or mutual information score, which is calculated by the COCA program and which describes how far observed co-occurrence frequency deviates from expected frequency (Collins Wordbanks Online, 2008). Imsa-ard and Phoocharoensil (2022) suggested that a high MI score can signify strong association of that collocation. In congruent with Imsa-ard and Phoocharoensil (2022), MI scores lower than 3 were eliminated in this study since such scores indicate the collocation is not strong. Moreover, to provide more information for this study, noun collocations were explored.

Grammatical Pattern

Grammatical pattern and colligation are of similar. Colligation is different from collocation in terms of pattern of word used. Collocation normally relies much on the lexical level whereas colligation relies on syntagmatic patterns. Flowerdew (2012) pointed out that colligation was the grammatical environment in which a word occurred. Phoocharoensil (2010) suggested that words with similar meanings do not have the same possible grammatical patterns. Many researchers have used this as a criterion to distinguish synonyms (Chaloemsook, 2015; Musikarn, 2016; Panyapayatjati, 2016; Petcharat & Phoocharoensil, 2017; Pimjuntug, 2015; Sirikan, 2015; Srithanyarat, 2016; Supachai, 2014; Tran, 2013). Pimjuntug (2015) found that the verbs *reply*, *respond*, and *answer* shared six

grammatical patterns and differed in four grammatical patterns. Petcharat and Phoocharoensil (2017) stated that the words *appropriate* and *proper* as well as the words *proper* and *suitable* shared eight grammatical structures while the words *appropriate* and *suitable* shared 14 grammatical structures. Srithanyarat (2016) also found that *to be sorry* and *to apologize* shared six grammatical patterns and differed in seven grammatical structures. This suggested that grammatical pattern can be another criterion for differentiating synonyms.

In this research, the grammatical pattern is explored through 200 concordance lines from COCA. The data can provide the frequent patterns that appear in the corpus. In order to identify the differences of the synonyms *perfect*, *flawless*, and *impeccable*, looking at grammatical patterns is another valid criterion.

Related Studies

Synonymous words have been explored over the years by numerous researchers. These studies have confirmed that most synonyms are near synonyms (Aroonmanakun, 2015; Chung, 2011; Gu, 2017; Imsa-ard & Phoocharoensil, 2022; Kruawong & Phoocharoensil, 2022; Lertcharoenwanich & Phoocharoensil, 2022; Petcharat & Phoocharoensil, 2017; Phoocharoensil, 2010; Phoocharoensil, 2020; Phoocharoensil, 2021; Phoocharoensil & Kanokpermpoon, 2021; Tran, 2013). Each set of synonyms was scrutinized using different methods and tools. However, corpora have been used as a tool to extract the similarities and differences for each set of synonyms. The table below shows the synonyms which were explored over the years.

Table 2 shows synonymous words that have been explored. Verbs are the most frequent synonyms explored by researchers, followed by adjectives while nouns appear to be the least frequent synonyms which were explored. The table also shows that adverb synonyms are never explored. However, the adjectives *perfect*, *flawless*, and *impeccable* have never been scrutinized by any researchers. These adjectives can be converted into adverbs *perfectly*, *flawlessly*, and *impeccably* as well. The main use of the adjectives and adverbs is crucial in terms of degree of formality. The result from this research can suggest how these three synonymous adjectives should be used in hotel context and every context. Therefore, examining how these three synonymous adjectives are used is necessary to facilitate students.

Phoocharoensil (2010) analyzed five synonyms in English, which were *ask*, *beg*, *plead*, *request*, and *appeal*, focusing on their lexical, syntactic, and stylistic information. The data were taken from three learners' dictionaries and compared to corpus data. The data showed that the linguistic descriptions of the words in those dictionaries were insufficient. The corpus-based data appeared to be helpful because they provided extra information that was not available in the dictionaries.

Table 2

Near Synonyms Explored by Researchers

No.	Author(s)	Year	Synonyms	Part of Speech
1	Phoocharoensil	2010	ask/ beg/ plead/ request/ appeal	verb
2	Chung	2011	create/ produce	verb
3	Cai	2012	awesome/ excellent/ fabulous/ fantastic/ great/ terrific/ wonderful	adjective
4	Tran	2013	interesting/ nice	adjective
5	Chalermsook	2014	increase/raise	verb
6	Supachai	2014	deadly/ lethal/ fatal	adjective
7	Aroonmanakun	2015	quick/ fast	adjective
8	Hu	2015	initial/ preliminary, following/ subsequent, sufficient/ adequate	adjective
9	Sirikan	2015	appalling/ horrific/ horrible/ hideous	adjective
10	Pimjuntug	2015	respond/ reply/ answer	verb
11	Yang	2016	learn/ acquire	verb
12	Srithanyarat	2016	to be sorry/ apologize	verb
13	Panyapayatjati	2016	grieve/ mourn/ regret	verb
14	Musikarn	2016	subject/ expose	verb
15	Petcharat & Phoocharoensil	2017	appropriate/ proper/ suitable	adjective
16	Gu	2017	obtain/ gain	verb
17	Wongrat	2018	predict/ forecast	verb
18	Sukman & Namtachan	2019	alternative/ option	noun
19	Phoocharoensil	2020	consequence/ result/ outcome	noun
20	Phoocharoensil & Kanokpermpoon	2021	increase/ rise	verb
21	Phoocharoensil	2021	predict/ foresee	verb
22	Phoocharoensil	2021	persist/ persevere	verb
23	Lertcharoenwanich & Phoocharoensil	2022	purpose/ goal/ objective	noun
24	Kruawong & Phoocharoensil	2022	teach/ educate/ instruct	verb
25	Imsa-ard & Phoocharoensil	2022	whole/ entire/ total	adjective

Chung (2011) investigated the near synonyms *create* and *produce* and suggested that their similarities and differences be shown according to the denotation of the product types. The data obtained from two corpora, the Brown Corpus and the Frown Corpus (from ICAME), for the analysis were analyzed and compared to those from the British National Corpus (BNC) through the collocation application of the Sketch Engine.

Tran (2013) looked at the use of two near-synonymous evaluative adjectives, *interesting* and *nice*, in academic writing and in academic speech. For investigation of the grammatical and functional patterns, the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE), Google Books, and a mini-corpus made up of more than 50 conversations were used. Research result suggested that the adjectives *interesting* and *nice* are near synonyms that differ in grammatical behavior, collocation, and pragmatic function.

Aroonmanakun (2015) examined how corpora can contribute to the study of the words *quick* and *fast*, which are synonyms or near synonyms in English. Their similarities and differences were explored through COCA. Only the top 100 collocates of the words *quick* and *fast* with MI scores of at least 3 were extracted. The findings showed that some nouns only collocate with the word *quick* or *fast*, whereas others occur with both adjectives but typically concentrate on different aspects of meanings.

Petcharat and Phoocharoensil (2017) examined three synonyms in English, which were *appropriate*, *proper*, and *suitable*. Despite having similar core meanings, the three synonyms differed in terms of their detailed meanings, degrees of formality, collocations, and grammatical patterns.

Gu (2017) examined two verbal synonyms in English, which were *obtain* and *gain*, in terms of genre, colligation, collocation, and semantic prosody. Sketch Engine, BNC Web, and Just the Word were adopted. The differences of the two synonyms were as follows: The passive voice pattern with a preposition was more commonly used, and a noun was more frequently collocated with the verb *obtain*. The verb *gain* collocated with abstract nouns and most of them had positive semantic prosody. In addition, it was found that the Oxford Dictionary omitted the frequently used collocations such as “obtained through pretence” and neglected to add the semantic prosody.

Phoocharoensil (2020) analyzed genres and collocation patterns where the three English synonyms *consequence*, *result*, and *outcome* usually occur. The data were derived from COCA. The three synonyms occurred most frequently in academic texts, one of the eight genres currently available in COCA, while they appeared least frequently in informal genres. On the basis of the COCA frequency and the MI value (≥ 3), the word *consequence* was often used with verbs and adjectives expressing negative senses, and the typical collocates of the word *result* associated with research-oriented contexts. The collocates of the word *outcome* had the broadest variety of semantic properties; however, they were not directly related to any specific contexts.

Phoocharoensil and Kanokpermpoon (2021) examined the genres and collocations of two synonymous verbs, *increase* and *rise* appearing in American English through COCA. The result showed

that both of them were commonly found in formal written genres, with *increase* and *rise* being most frequent in academic texts and popular magazines, respectively. While most of the adverb collocates were shared by the target synonyms, there appeared to be a clear difference in the nouns that each collocated with. The meaning “go upward” of the word *rise* used with nouns describing a direction of a natural entity, as in the moon, the sun, or the sea, differentiates its usage from that of the word *increase*.

Phoocharoensil (2021) studied the near synonyms *predict* and *foresee*, focusing on genres, collocations, colligations, and semantic prosody. COCA was adopted. For the distribution of the target synonyms across genres as well as the top 20 noun collocates, an MI score of 3 or above was taken into consideration. The word *predict* had a far higher total frequency in the corpus than the word *foresee*. Neither target synonym was characteristic of colloquial English because their frequencies in speaking, fiction, and TV and movie subtitles were quite low. According to the data derived from COCA, the two near synonyms were common in written English, with the word *predict* being far higher in frequency.

Lertcharoenwanich and Phoocharoensil (2022) examined the nouns *purpose*, *goal*, and *objective* based on their distribution across genres by which their degree of formality was determined and carefully looked at their verb and adjective collocates in relation to semantic preference. The three target synonyms were analyzed by using data from COCA. According to the findings from the frequency of distribution across genres, the three target synonyms appear most frequently in formal contexts.

Kruawong and Phoocharoensil (2022) investigated three near synonyms, which were *teach*, *educate*, and *instruct*. The results from the investigation revealed that the word *teach* is far more widely and commonly used than the words *educate* and *instruct*, with the highest frequency among eight genres. The frequency data showed that in academic literature, which represents formal genres, all three synonyms were more common than in spoken conversation. The results also showed that categorizing noun collocates provided more insightful information about each target synonym's concurrent authentic use. This can be more useful to EFL learners than simply looking up a word in a dictionary or relying on the intuition of native speakers, which may be unreliable or untrustworthy.

Imsa-ard and Phoocharoensil (2022) examined three synonymous adjectives, *whole*, *entire*, and *total*, in terms of their collocations and strict sense of meaning. The data were derived from three English dictionaries: 1) the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (online version), 2) the Merriam-Webster Learner's Dictionary (online version), and 3) the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2014), and from COCA. The results from this investigation showed that the three adjectives can be considered near synonyms because they all have similar meanings. Although they may be used interchangeably in some contexts, the word *total* is more likely to be employed in formal contexts than in less formal ones. Concerning their common collocations, the words *whole* and *entire* have some noun

collocates in common, some of which are relevant to geographic vocabulary. However, the words *whole* and *total* do not share any typical noun collocates, while the words *entire* and *total* only have one strong noun collocate, which is the word *population*.

In the previous studies, there had not been any research on the adjectives *perfect*, *flawless*, and *impeccable*. Moreover, identifying the degree of formality of these three adjectives in hotel context is crucial since the degree of formality can be suggested to use in both adjectives and adverbs. Therefore, finding out more about how these adjectives are used would be useful in English language teaching, especially in English for Hotel Business. This would provide insightful information on how to explain the usage of these adjectives effectively.

Methodology

Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)

Besides the three online English dictionaries, COCA was used to extract the degree of formality, the collocations, and the grammatical patterns of the three synonymous adjectives *perfect*, *flawless*, and *impeccable*. Two hundred concordance lines are widely used by most researchers to extract the grammatical pattern (Panyapayatjati, 2016; Sukman & Namtachan, 2019; Wongrat, 2018). Therefore, 200 concordance lines from COCA were scrutinized in this research. The frequency of each adjective over eight genres which are TV/Movies, Spoken, Magazines, Fiction, Blogs, Webs, News, and Academic was examined to determine degree of formality. In COCA, TV/Movies and Spoken are identified as informal while Academic is defined as formal and Magazines, Fiction, Blogs, Webs, News are considered in between formal and informal. To determine which adjective is more formal, the frequency of each adjective over eight genres in COCA is explored.

Apart from frequency, the MI score in the collocation section in COCA was considered in determining the strength of adjective-noun collocations. Phoocharoensil (2021) suggested only collocations with MI scores equal to or greater than 3 be included. To accord with the suggestion of Phoocharoensil (2021), collocations having MI scores equal to or greater than 3 were considered to have strong association in collocation and so included in this research.

Results and Discussion

Results from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)

As shown in Table 3, the word *perfect* (108,301 tokens or 109.06 w/m) had a much higher overall frequency than either the word *flawless* (2,770 tokens or 2.79 w/m) or the word *impeccable* (2,050 tokens or 2.06 w/m), while the words *flawless* and *impeccable* appeared close in frequency. Based on the number of words per million, the word *perfect* was used most frequently in the TV/movies

genre (178.26 w/m), which is considered spoken language, followed by the web genre (126.33 w/m), the blog genre (125.98 w/m), and the magazine genre (125.28 w/m). To the contrary, the word *flawless* was used most frequently in the fiction genre (5.05 w/m), followed by the magazine genre (586 tokens or 4.65 w/m), the web genre (2.93 w/m), and the blog genre (2.71 w/m), which are considered written language. Likewise, the highest uses of the word *impeccable* were in the genres of magazine (3.09 w/m), fiction (2.97 w/m), news (2.42 w/m), and web (2.16 w/m), respectively, which are also considered written language. The data provided by COCA indicated that the words *flawless* and *impeccable* were used in written language more frequently than the word *perfect*, which was used most frequently in spoken language. Therefore, when creating a piece of advertisement or leaflet for a hotel, the words *flawless* and *impeccable* are suggested to be used.

Table 3

Results from COCA

Genres	Total words in COCA (million)	<i>perfect</i>		<i>flawless</i>		<i>impeccable</i>	
		Frequency	Per million	Frequency	Per million	Frequency	Per million
Overall	993	108,301	109.06	2,770	2.79	2,050	2.06
Blog	128.6	16,203	125.98	349	2.71	229	1.78
Web	124.3	15,697	126.33	364	2.93	268	2.16
TV/Movies	128.1	22,831	178.26	306	2.39	247	1.93
Spoken	126.1	9,808	77.76	150	1.19	145	1.15
Fiction	118.3	14,057	118.80	598	5.05	351	2.97
Magazines	126.1	15,797	125.28	586	4.65	389	3.09
News	121.7	9,603	78.88	312	2.56	295	2.42
Academic	119.8	4,305	35.94	105	0.88	126	1.05

Table 4 shows the 20 noun collocates with the three adjectives, their raw frequencies, and their MI scores. The MI score can yield strong collocation among words (Imsa-ard & Phoocharoensil, 2022). Therefore, the MI score is suggested to be used together with the frequency. With respect to frequency, the adjective *perfect* seemed to have been used with noun collocates more often than the other two adjectives while the adjectives *flawless* and *impeccable* were used with almost equal frequency. Interestingly, according to COCA, only the word *timing* can be collocated with all three adjectives. The words *manner* and *accent* collocated with the adjectives *flawless* and *impeccable*, while no available data from COCA shows the collocation of these two words with the adjective *perfect*. Nonetheless, data from COCA suggested that the three adjectives had different noun collocations. These target adjectives have weak near synonym characteristics regarding collocation since they only share one collocate: *timing*. Therefore, these three adjectives can be used differently in terms of collocations.

Table 4

Noun Collocation with Raw Frequency and MI Score

Noun Collocates	<i>Perfect</i>		Noun Collocates	<i>Flawless</i>		Noun Collocates	<i>Impeccable</i>	
	Raw Frequency	MI Score		Raw Frequency	MI Score		Raw Frequency	MI Score
example	2208	4.37	skin	242	7.04	timing	138	8.83
sense	1145	3.26	performance	67	4.56	credential	135	10.08
storm	1102	4.43	face	58	3.29	taste	104	7.32
match	941	5.05	execution	51	7.27	<u>manner</u>	78	6.64
timing	924	5.88	complexion	50	9.66	service	67	3.61
gift	569	3.23	hair	43	3.74	record	60	4.28
balance	412	3.32	makeup	41	6.45	reputation	49	6.63
pitch	408	4.38	diamond	36	6.22	logic	33	6.35
weather	392	3.02	beauty	29	4.80	style	33	4.52
tooth	325	3.04	technique	26	4.33	suit	24	4.72
stranger	323	3.68	<u>accent</u>	19	5.86	skill	22	3.55
harmony	263	4.84	finish	19	5.62	character	21	3.10
ending	207	4.02	sky	19	3.62	source	21	3.00
complement	167	6.32	logic	15	4.78	integrity	20	5.87
fit	157	4.65	victory	14	3.43	design	20	3.45
blend	149	4.68	smile	11	3.14	quality	19	3.26
metaphor	130	3.36	perfection	10	5.86	pedigree	14	8.80
attendance	123	3.57	timing	10	4.61	technique	14	3.87
specimen	117	3.82	<u>manner</u>	9	3.09	posture	13	6.64
foil	116	4.56	routine	8	3.72	<u>accent</u>	13	5.75

In terms of hotel discourse, the adjective *impeccable* collocates with nouns which are most related to hotel contexts, such as *impeccable taste*, *impeccable service*, *impeccable suit*, and *impeccable manner*. *Flawless* tends to be collocated with nouns which are related to appearance such as *flawless skin*, *flawless performance*, and *flawless face*. In the hotel context, the adjective *flawless* was found to be collocated with only the noun *manner*. Meanwhile, the adjective *perfect* tends to be collocated with a wide range of nouns which are not limited to any specific contexts. Hence, the adjective *impeccable* seems to be preferable in hotel context rather than the other two.

Grammatical Patterns

The data from COCA 200 concordance lines presents the following grammatical patterns for the adjectives *perfect*, *flawless* and *impeccable*. An attributive adjective precedes a noun and modifies that noun while a predicate adjective follows linking verbs and nouns are not required after it (Tran, 2013). As shown in Table 5, the majority of grammatical patterns of the three targeted adjectives in this study was attributive adjective (Adjective + Noun) followed by predicate adjective (Linking verb(s) + Adjective). The finding in this research is congruent with the finding in Tran's (2013) study of the synonyms *interesting* and *nice* that the attributive adjectives commonly appear in the research.

When looking at these three adjectives closely through the 200 concordance lines, *perfect time*, *perfect timing*, *perfect solution*, *perfect health*, *perfect food*, *perfect support*, and *perfect sense* were used widely. When considering the word *flawless*, *flawless performance*, *flawless technique*, *flawless face*, *flawless skin*, *flawless complexion*, and *flawless manners* were common, while with the word *impeccable*, *impeccable taste*, *impeccable politeness*, and *impeccable manners* were commonly used. The collocates for the word *perfect* were various while the word *flawless* was normally paired with nouns associated with appearance such as *skin*, *face*, and *complexion*. However, the collocates for the word *impeccable* such as *manner*, *taste*, and *politeness* are the most relatable to hotel contexts.

Table 5

Grammatical Patterns Extracted from COCA

	Patterns	<i>Perfect</i>	<i>Flawless</i>	<i>Impeccable</i>
1.	Adjective + Noun	121	106	137
2.	Linking verb(s) + Adjective	46	56	43
3.	Verb + Object + Adjective	4	2	2
4.	Preposition + Adjective	3	3	0
5.	Adjective (as exclamation)	6	7	6
6.	As/more/most + Adjective	0	6	1
7.	Adverb(s) + Adjective	2	7	3

Interestingly, according to COCA data, these three adjectives were used as exclamations quite often. Take these sentences as examples: “*Perfect, thanks!*”, “*Come on in, guys. Perfect!*”, “*Flawless!*”, “*Flawless. But not for long.*”, “*Does she have good taste? Impeccable!*”, “*I am as pure as the driven snow. Impeccable!*”. It can be observed that when the data were from spoken texts or conversation, these three adjectives can be used to convey exclamation. The concordance lines also show that these three adjectives are used as other parts of speech, such as the word *perfect* as a noun or as a verb. However, the focus of this study is only on their use as adjectives. Therefore, the words *perfect*, *flawless*, and *impeccable* which are not adjectives are not included in this study. Furthermore, “*make it*

perfect” is widely used according to COCA data. When considering Preposition + *perfect*, “*far from perfect*” is commonly used. Likewise, “*flawless in*”, “*impeccable in*”, and “*impeccable with*” are commonly used.

When looking closely at each adjective from the concordance lines in COCA, grammatical pattern can be seen as follows:

Perfect

Linking verb + <i>perfect</i> +for	This is <i>perfect</i> for your request.
Make + <i>perfect</i> + Noun	It makes <i>perfect</i> sense.
Make + Noun + Determiner + <i>perfect</i> + Noun + for	Make it a <i>perfect</i> location for yourself.

“*Make perfect sense*” is seen quite often in the concordance lines. This suggests that it is common to use “*make perfect sense*” to indicate if something is reasonable.

Flawless

Make + Noun + <i>flawless</i>	make something <i>flawless</i>
Preposition + <i>flawless</i> + Noun	You speak in <i>flawless</i> English. You said in <i>flawless</i> English.

It is noteworthy that “*speak in flawless English*” and “*said in flawless English*” appear frequently in concordance lines which indicates that the word *flawless* can be used when explaining the fluency of language use. In such a context, the word *flawless* is seen to be used with the preposition *in* more often than other prepositions.

Impeccable

Make + Noun + <i>impeccable</i>	make someone <i>impeccable</i>
Preposition + <i>impeccable</i> + Noun	of <i>impeccable</i> appearance of <i>impeccable</i> quality of <i>impeccable</i> skill ...find somebody of <i>impeccable</i> integrity to do the job.
Verb + <i>impeccable</i> + Noun	have <i>impeccable</i> taste

The grammatical pattern of the word *impeccable* differs from the words *perfect* and *flawless* regarding pattern “Verb + *impeccable* + Noun” in “*have impeccable taste*”. When looking at the pattern

of “Preposition + Adjective + Noun”, the preposition *of* preceded the adjective *impeccable* more often than other prepositions. However, it should be noted that the choice of preposition preceding the adjective *impeccable* depends on the verb used in the sentence.

From the patterns above, it can be seen that the synonymous adjectives *perfect*, *flawless*, and *impeccable* have different grammatical patterns which indicate that they are near synonyms.

Conclusion and Implication

Conclusion

The adjectives *perfect*, *flawless*, and *impeccable* are near synonyms. They are not completely interchangeable. Though they may not be much different in terms of formality, there are some differences among them with regard to collocations and grammatical patterns. Therefore, these three adjectives can be used differently depending on the contexts and collocations. In hotel discourse, collocations of the adjective *impeccable* such as *impeccable taste*, *impeccable politeness*, and *impeccable manner* tend to be more suitable to the context. The adjective *perfect* is used in a variety of contexts such as *perfect time*, *perfect timing*, *perfect solution*, *perfect health*, *perfect food*, *perfect support*, and *perfect sense* while the adjective *flawless* is used more often when the topic is about appearance such as *flawless face*, *flawless skin*, and *flawless complexion*. So, when explaining about a person’s personality or appearance, the adjective *flawless* tends to be more suitable to the context.

Implications

In English for Hotel Business, teachers can create activities by asking students to generate a sentence or a paragraph relating to the conditions in a hotel or its atmosphere using the collocations provided in Table 4. Such activities can enhance students’ ability to use these three adjectives with their collocates appropriately. Moreover, activities based on grammatical patterns can be initiated. With regards to Table 5, asking students to form sentences with specified grammatical structures is another good class activity. For example, form a sentence by using “Verb + Object + *perfect*”, “Verb + Object + *flawless*”, or “Verb + Object + *impeccable*”. Besides that, *impeccable* is suggested to be used in English for Hotel Business since it appears most frequently with the collocates that are related to hotel context. The activities described above can surely enhance students’ ability to use the adjectives *perfect*, *flawless*, and *impeccable* perfectly, flawlessly, and impeccably.

Limitation and Further Suggestions

The three synonymous adjectives *perfect*, *flawless*, and *impeccable* were examined through three online dictionaries and COCA only. Other dictionaries and corpora such as British National

Corpus (BNC) are suggested to further scrutinize the synonymous adjectives to see the more similarities and differences.

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