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## A Corpus-Based Comparative Study of the Verbs *suggest*, *recommend* and *propose* in the Corpus of COCA

Raina Tabbasum 

Visiting Faculty, Abasyn University Islamabad Campus

rainagillani1@gmail.com

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### ABSTRACT

Synonym discrimination is one of the most challenging yet essential aspects of English language learning. Effective pedagogy enables learners to understand and appropriately use relevant synonym vocabulary. This study investigates the verbs of the English synonyms *suggest*, *recommend*, and *propose* through a corpus-based analysis of The Corpus of the Contemporary American English (COCA), analysed with AntConc version 3.2.4, a concordance software developed by Anthony (2014). It also explores their frequency of occurrence, distributions across registers, and common collocations of these verbs to highlight their semantic and pragmatic differences. The findings indicate that, across several registers, *suggest* is the most widely used verb, particularly in academic contexts. In contrast, "*Recommend*" occurs more commonly in evaluative and consultative discourse, especially in magazines and conversation. *Propose* is the most frequent in formal and scientific discourse, reflecting its role in presenting formal ideas or plans. The findings benefit students and teachers by clarifying subtle usage distinctions and supporting accurate synonym use in academic contexts. The analysis underscores the pedagogical value of corpus-based methods for exploring subtle distinctions in English vocabulary's subtle meanings and improving English language teaching.

## 1. Introduction

The English language is rich in synonyms- words that share similar meanings but differ in nuances, levels of formality, and contexts of use. Distinguishing these subtle differences is crucial for both the teacher and students. Their definition, meaning, and usage, particularly among synonyms, are significant for teachers and students. Common synonyms such as the verbs *suggest*, *recommend*, and *propose* occur frequently in spoken and written English. These verbs often confuse their overlapping meanings. Although these verbs convey the general sense of putting forward an idea, their specific uses depend on context, formality, and collocational behaviour.

This study analyses these verbs using data from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (Davies, 2009) through a corpus-based methodology to uncover patterns of authentic use. It examines the frequency per million words, distribution across COCA's registers (spoken, fiction, magazine, newspaper, academic) and typical collocation within  $\pm 4$ -word windows. This research intends to distinguish the use of *suggest*, *recommend*, and *propose* more clearly by examining their frequency, distribution across registers, collocations, and other metrics. Such an analysis offers empirical evidence to support synonym teaching through authentic language data rather than intuition or dictionary-based explanations.

## 1.1 Background of the Study

English has many words that mean almost the same thing. These are called synonyms. Some verbs like *suggest*, *recommend*, and *propose* all mean to give an idea or advice. However, it can be hard for learners to know when and how to use these words correctly because their meanings and uses differ slightly. Teachers and students usually use dictionaries to understand these words. However, dictionaries do not always explain the slight differences or how the words are used in real situations. Now, Thanks to extensive collections of real English texts known as corpora, we can explore how native speakers use words. Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) is a complete and current compilation that allows the researcher to explore how words such as *suggest*, *recommend*, and *propose* are used in day-to-day speech and writing.

Synonyms are crucial for the English language, but a bit tricky for students to master. Whilst dictionaries inevitably fall short when it comes to showing how words vary by context, corpus-based studies enable scholars to see real patterns of usage. With a corpus of more than a billion words phrased from five registers, COCA is a phenomenal resource for exploring how verbs such as *suggest*, *recommend*, and *propose* are actually employed in a variety of contexts.

Synonymy plays a central role in the transmission of subtle shifts in meaning and style (Mair, 2009). Traditionally, learners and educators have depended heavily on dictionary definitions as the primary means to distinguish between synonyms (Jackson, 2002). Nonetheless, this traditional method tends to be shallow, as it usually misses the subtle semantic and pragmatic differences that occur in specific settings (Atkins & Rundell, 2008). Thus, learners may struggle to comprehend the synonyms' communicative functions, which may impede their overall communicative competence. Vocabulary is said to be the most crucial aspect of learning the English language, as commented by David Wilkins (1972, p.111), "without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed." That means vocabulary is crucial for communication. Without it, one cannot communicate effectively. This suggests that more focused and contextualised teaching methods in synonym discrimination in language teaching tend to be more effective.

To distinguish between synonyms, it is necessary first to understand what a synonym is and how synonyms may differ. Among the countless words in sets of synonyms, three words—*recommend*, *suggest* and *propose* - appeal to our research interest. These words are listed in the most important 9000 words to learn and are in the top 3000 most frequent words (Pearson Dictionary, 2014). Moreover, from the researchers' English teaching experience, questions regarding distinguishing appropriate, proper, and suitable have often been raised during class. However, the answers given to students are based on intuition only; no concrete academic evidence is provided. For this reason, it would be worth studying these three synonyms systematically by using the dictionary and corpus data as major data sources.

In the last few decades, the teaching and study of language within its authentic context has profited from the innovative and powerful approach of corpus linguistics (Biber et al., 1998). Due to corpora—large and structured collections of authentic language data—language teachers and researchers have the unique advantage of analysing the lexicon, syntax, and even the semantics of different genres and registers (Hunston, 2022). Vocabulary learning, semantics, syntax, and even translation, as some of the subfields of linguistics, have successfully benefited from corpus-based studies. This has helped inform language teaching (McEnery & Hardie, 2012).

Previous corpus-based studies have analysed the collocational and semantic behaviours of English synonyms, revealing register- and context-dependent variations. However, few have directly compared *suggest*, *recommend*, and *propose* within COCA. The most current study uses COCA to analyse the synonyms *suggest*, *recommend*, and *propose*, building on the extensive research which COCA has enabled in the field. These three synonyms suggest the action of advising or putting forward ideas, but Szczepaniak and Adamska-Sałaciak (2010) state that Idioms which are semantically similar may still differ in pragmatic use, function, or register. Although these verbs occur frequently in spoken and written English, relatively few studies have examined them comparatively using large-scale authentic corpora. This study aims to provide an evidence-based explanation of the distinctions among *suggest*, *recommend*, and *propose*, offering pedagogical insights for corpus-informed teaching. The study is undertaken in the hope of fostering the integration of COCA and other corpora as pedagogical and didactic tools in their teaching and learning (Brezina, 2018).

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Synonyms are globally used, particularly for different purposes explicitly in academic and learning language in non-native countries. However, teachers and students use synonyms without fully understanding their actual meaning since not every synonym is appropriate in each context, as it varies from context to context. As a result, both groups may misuse them by substituting words without acknowledging the crucial difference in meaning and usage. Although many studies focus on English synonyms, there is minimal research that centres on dictionary definitions alongside real-word contexts within corpus databases like the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) to explore sets of synonyms such as appropriate, proper, and suitable.

Moreover, English language teaching, particularly in teaching a second language, continues to rely on outdated methods and

practices that do not allow students to grasp the nuanced differences among words that are often considered similar. Such discrepancies in learning and teaching procedures result in confusion and exploitation of synonyms in oral and written communication. While their students are commonly exposed to the verbs *suggest*, *recommend*, and *propose*, the students themselves commonly utilise the verbs interchangeably without sensing subtle variation in formality, collocation, and context. This incorrect usage indicates shortcomings in the conventional pedagogical methods that are dependent upon dictionary definitions and intuition, but not realistic data. Very few studies have examined the verbs systematically by way of large, tastefully balanced corpora like COCA, so that a question remains about their behaviour across registers.

This research adopts a corpus-based way of investigating how frequently these verbs are employed, where they are taken up, and how they are connected to each other. An integration of the insights of both corpus evidence and dictionaries is aimed at maximising the manner in which synonyms are delivered. Finally, this work elevates the teaching methods of instructional design that are inclined towards the instruction of synonyms so that the vocabulary accuracy of students improves along with their speaking proficiency and overall communication. Although a great number of studies have explored English synonyms, very few have employed large-scale language corpora to systematically explore the distinction between *suggest*, *recommend*, and *propose*. Most of the previous studies have chosen dictionary explanations and small corpora and have ignored relevant patterns, collocations, and differences across various contexts. This present work tries to bridge the gap by exploring synonyms using the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) so that evident, clear distinctions will be helpful for both students and teachers to understand the subtle meaning and usage of these words.

### 1.3 Research Objectives

1. To analyse the differences in frequency, context, and collocations of the verbs *propose*, *recommend*, and *suggest* using the COCA corpus.
2. To enhance teachers' and students' understanding of how corpus tools can support accurate use of English synonyms.

### 1.4 Research Questions

1. How do the verbs *Propose*, *Recommend*, and *Suggest* differ in frequency and context of use in COCA?
2. What are the typical collocations of each verb, and how do these collocations clarify their semantics and pragmatic distinctions?

### 1.5 Significance of the study

This research also benefits English pedagogy by separating the differences between *suggest*, *recommend*, and *propose* using corpus evidence. By emphasising real patterns of use, it aids students in using the verbs accurately and provides practitioners with usable wisdom for data-driven vocabulary teaching. The study focuses exclusively on the verbs *suggest*, *recommend*, and *propose* in American English, as represented in COCA. It analyses frequencies, contexts, and collocations across five registers. The research is limited to COCA's data and does not include other corpora or learner-based experiments.

## 2. Literature Review

First, it is important to understand the general topic of synonyms and their subtle differences. Many words seem similar but have slight differences in meaning and use. Corpus linguistics, which studies real language data, helps explore this. This chapter will start with general ideas about synonyms and corpus linguistics, then focus on the verbs *suggest*, *recommend*, and *propose*. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 9th edition (2015, p. 1589) defines a synonym as "a word or expression that has the same or nearly the same meaning as another in the same language." With this definition, it can be stated that words can be considered synonyms if they have similar meanings. Palmer (1981) suggested that the English language has many synonyms because its words are borrowed from many other languages. So a pair of native and foreign words denote the same things (p. 58). Synonymy refers to the relationship between words with similar but not identical meanings (Cruse, 1986, p. 101). Because complete synonymy is rare, learners must understand subtle semantic and pragmatic distinctions. Corpus linguistics provides a robust empirical approach to examining these distinctions through authentic usage patterns (McEnery & Hardie, 2012).

### 2.1 Corpus Linguistics as a Method

Corpus linguistics studies large collections of real texts. It helps researchers see how often words are used, which words

appear together, and how they are used in context (McEnery & Hardie, 2012). Concordance analysis, a method in corpus linguistics, shows real examples of language use that cannot be guessed by intuition alone (Hunston, 2022). Using corpora like the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) or the British National Corpus (BNC) helps find patterns of word use and differences between similar words (Stubbs, 2001).

## 2.2 Corpus Studies on Synonyms

While these studies successfully demonstrate the potential of corpus methods in distinguishing near-synonyms, most focus narrowly on one or two words or lack discussion of pragmatic and pedagogical implications. Few examine, *suggest*, *recommend*, and *propose* together across multiple registers. Biber et al. (1998) emphasized that frequency and collocation strength (measured by MI values) reveal meaningful distinctions between near synonyms. Statistical methods in corpus studies help find strong collocations that distinguish synonyms (Brezina, 2018).

According to Hunston (2022), point out, the use of frequency alone is not a sufficient reason for synonym choice; their collocations and the context in which they occur are equally important. Yet, research specifically examining the words *suggest*, *recommend*, and *propose* is scarce. Many researchers have studied how to tell synonyms apart by using data from large collections of real language called corpora, such as the Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus (LOB), Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), and British National Corpus (BNC). They usually focus on meanings, word combinations (collocations), grammar, and formality.

According to Taylor (2002), they studied high and tall using the LOB corpus. He found that high is nearly ten times more common than tall and is often used non-physically, like high number or high temperature. In contrast, tall is mainly used for physical height and rarely in metaphorical senses. Also, high can describe how tall something is and where it is placed vertically (e.g., high building and high ceiling), but tall only refers to height. Then, Bergdahl (2009) looked beautiful, handsome, and good-looking using five dictionaries and COCA. Although all mean “pleasing to look at,” beautiful is more often used for women, handsome for men, and good-looking is neutral but appears with men more often in real use. Interestingly, handsome can sometimes describe women with masculine traits.

Similarly, Phoocharoensil (2010) studied ask, beg, plead, request, and appeal using learner dictionaries and corpus data. Even though these words share a core meaning, they differ in tone, style, dialect, grammar, and collocations. Importantly, this study showed that corpora give more detailed and useful information than dictionaries. According to Chung (2011), the creation and production were compared using the Brown and Frown corpora. Both verbs mostly appear as base forms or past participles and share meanings like “to bring into existence” and “to make something.” However, creation often comes before abstract and fewer objects with creative ideas, while production usually pairs with large quantities of physical products.

Cai (2012) conducted a comprehensive study on the adjective great and its six synonyms: awesome, excellent, fabulous, fantastic, terrific, and wonderful. The data was retrieved from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). The findings reveal that great is more frequently used than the other synonyms. It has a more general and weaker meaning than the rest. Fabulous, fantastic, great, terrific, and wonderful appear in the spoken genre, whereas excellent are not strange to magazines. These synonyms differ in the number of adverb collocates and also partially share some noun collocates.

Later, Thamratana (2013) analysed reduce, decrease, diminish, dwindle, and decline using data from dictionaries and COCA. The results showed that while these verbs share a core meaning, they differ in grammar and collocations. Notably, according to Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (2015) and Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2014), decrease and decline are more formal and occur more frequently in academic texts than the others, 8th ed.. In addition, Petcharat et al. (2017) compared different, diverse, and various using the Oxford Dictionary (2015) and the British National Corpus (BNC). This study agreed that corpora provide more helpful details about synonyms than dictionaries do. Aroonmanakun (2015) studied quick and fast based on Longman Dictionary and COCA, again confirming that corpus data offers richer information about word usage than dictionary definitions alone. Finally, Petcharat et al. (2017) focused on appropriate, proper, and suitable, combining data from three dictionaries — Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2014), Longman Advanced American Dictionary (2013), Macmillan Collocations Dictionary (2010) — and COCA.

Although most corpus-based studies on synonym discrimination were conducted before 2017, recent research continues to demonstrate the value of corpus approaches. For example, the near synonym persists and persevere were studied in the COCA and found to have differences in collocational patterns and prosody semantics (Phoocharoensil, 2021). Again, Liu (2023) studied corpora to favour synonym instruction and pragmatic description. These recent studies further confirm that corpus linguistics offers an accurate evidence-based understanding of lexical variation, which warrants the retention of the use of the COCA in investigating near-synonymous verbs like *suggest*, *recommend*, and *propose*.

The above studies confirm the need for corpus data but often focus on adjectives or learner corpora rather than verbs with overlapping meanings in COCA. They found that although these three words share a basic meaning, they differ in detailed

meanings, formality, collocations, and grammar. Therefore, they cannot always replace one another. Moreover, the corpus revealed information not available in the dictionaries. Collectively, prior corpus-based studies have shown that synonym discrimination benefits from quantitative and collocational analysis. However, few studies have examined the triad *suggest*, *recommend*, and *propose* in a single, large-scale corpus such as COCA. Moreover, existing research seldom integrates frequency, register distribution, and collocational analysis to draw pedagogical implications. The present study addresses these gaps by conducting a comparative corpus-based investigation of these verbs to clarify their semantic and pragmatic distinctions.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study employed the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), a balanced corpus of approximately one billion words drawn from five registers: spoken, fiction, magazine, newspapers, and academic writing. COCA provides tools for retrieving word frequencies, collocations and concordance lines, making it well-suited for empirical analysis of lexical usage. A corpus-driven approach was used to analyse the verbs *suggest*, *recommend*, and *propose* as the main focus. These verbs were chosen because they share similar semantics domains (offering ideas or advice) yet differ in pragmatic collocational usage, which frequently confuses English learners.

There are two main motivations for analysing these precise verbs. First, all three words function as verbs and have a near-analogous meaning of offering ideas or advice; thus, they illustrate well a specific area of language where verb classification is particularly challenging for learners of English. Second, because the English language is rich and abundant with synonyms, more often than not, English learners encounter challenges in differentiating the subtle nuances of meaning and usage. For efficient and effective communication, mastery of the language, especially regarding synonyms, requires grasping in-depth the differences of the terms and their contextual usage.

#### 3.2 Data Sources

The primary data source is the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), which encompasses over 600 million words from different registers such as spoken language, fiction, magazines, newspapers, and academic texts (COCA; Davies, 2009). COCA is selected because of its balanced, up-to-date, and large-scale nature, which is useful in studying the frequency and contextual usage of synonyms across different registers. These dictionaries were used to complement corpus results by providing standardised lexical definitions and degrees of formality: the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2014), the Longman Advanced American Dictionary (2013), and the Macmillan Collocations Dictionary for Learners of English (2010). These dictionaries complement corpus data by providing standard lexical descriptions.

#### 3.2 Data Collection Procedures

Word frequencies of each target verb were downloaded using the word frequency utility of COCA. Results were normalised by the million words to facilitate comparison across registers. Comparison between the frequencies of the five COCA registers (spoken, fiction, magazine, news, academic) helped identify distribution patterns. Collocations were taken by a  $\pm 4$ -word span from each verb, and Mutual Information (MI) values were utilised to compute collocational strength. Collocates that included  $MI > 3$  were regarded significantly significant.

### 4. Data Analysis

#### 4.1 Data Sources

The quantitative data (frequency and register distribution) were studied descriptively with the help of tables of frequency-per-million and comparison of percentages. Collocations and concordance lines were studied qualitatively for the interpretation of semantic and pragmatic differences between the verbs. Dictionary information serves the corroborate insights into meaning and formality. This research design combines the quantitative data of frequency and the qualitative collocational analysis for a detailed foundation for the differentiation between near-synonyms in natural English uses.

#### 4.2 Word Frequency

Utilising the COCA corpus, the cumulative frequencies of the three target synonyms *suggest*, *recommend*, and *propose* were

obtained. The data is summarised in Table 1 below:

**Table 1**  
*Word and Frequency*

Word	Total Frequency
<i>Suggest</i>	68,806
<i>Recommend</i>	24,827
<i>Propose</i>	10,707

All three verbs convey the overall meaning of advancing ideas or advice, but the frequency evidence demonstrates obvious dissimilarities in their utilisation. Such dissimilarity in frequencies translates the dissimilarities in the conditions and levels of solemnities where a verb is likely to occur into initial lights regarding their varied pragmatic and semantic contributions. More analysis on the utilisation patterns and collocations will further illuminate such differences. The usage frequency of *recommend* and *propose* appears starkly different from *suggest*. These words suggest three different behaviours and serve different purposes in different contexts. In favour, it is used more often in daily conversation, so between *recommend* and *propose*, *recommend* is used slightly more because of its suggestive connotations; however, *propose* does have its place in formal conversation.

The differences in how often one uses *suggest*, *recommend* and *propose* reveal how contexts and levels of formality shape the varying frequency of each verb. However, further in-depth analysis of usage patterns is necessary to tell a more complete story. The verb usage data for *suggest*, *recommend*, and *propose* were taken from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). A summary of the total occurrences of each verb is presented in Table 1. COCA outputs were included in the appendix for the full corpus interface; thus, for the reader's convenience, the full search results are presented in Appendix A, Figures 1 to 3. This inclusion maintains the integrity of the data collection process and enables the audience to cross-check the corpus results.

### 4.3 Register

The data for this study were taken from COCA. The occurrence of the verbs: *propose*, *recommend*, and *suggest* across different registers, spoken language, novels, magazines, newspapers, and academic articles, is shown in frequency and percentage in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
*Distribution Of Propose, Recommend and Suggest in Different Registers*

Node word	Spoken	Novel	Magazine	Newspaper	Academic articles
<i>Propose</i>	1,066 / 9.96%	648 / 6.05%	954 / 8.90%	988 / 9.22%	2,530 / 23.63%
<i>recommend</i>	1,911 / 7.70%	748 / 3.01%	3,790 / 15.26%	1,947 / 7.84%	2,425 / 9.77%
<i>Suggest</i>	5,720 / 9.10%	2,678 / 4.26%	8,759 / 13.94%	5,352 / 8.51%	21,064 / 33.54%

As demonstrated in Table 2, *suggest* is the most frequently occurring verb in all registers, occurring most in academic articles (33.54%), followed by magazines (13.94%) and newspapers (8.51%). The high occurrence in academic writing indicates *suggest* is the verb of choice in offering ideas or hypotheses in formal contexts. *Propose* shows a high concentration in academic articles too, constituting 23.63% of its total usage. This means *propose* is naturally found in the formal or scientific conversation, often to advance a theory, a solution, or a proposed course of action.

Recommendations vary slightly, having a high prevalence in magazines (15.26%) and a fairly even spread between spoken language (7.70%), newspapers (7.84%), and research articles (9.77%). This suggests that recommendations are frequently utilised in advisory or assessment situations like opinion pieces, reviews, or oral speech. On the whole, the corpora show evident semantic and functional preference for the three verbs: *suggest* and *propose* are overwhelming in academic writing, whereas *recommend* prevails in the magazine and spoken corpora.

A summary of the total occurrences of each verb register is presented in Table 2. COCA outputs were included in the appendix for the full corpus interface; thus, for the reader's convenience, the full search results are presented in Appendix B, Figure 6. This inclusion maintains the integrity of the data collection process and enables the audience to cross-check the corpus results. The following tables list the noun, adjective, and adverb collocations, respectively.

**Table 3***Noun Collocations with MI > 3; from left to right: propose, recommend, suggest*

Words	Freq	MI	Words	Freq	MI	Words	Freq	MI
Amendment	638	5.23	Policy	177	3.78	Change	550	4.12
Legislation	466	4.95	Action	156	4.32	Idea	544	3.85
Hypothesis	222	4.82	measures	90	3.52	Approach	304	3.70
Budget	498	3.90	program	91	3.45	Method	262	3.69
Framework	212	4.38	Reform	97	3.15	Alternative	252	4.20

From Table 3, it is evident that *propose* often collocates with nouns related to formal initiatives or plans, such as amendment, legislation, and budget. *Recommend* is closely associated with policy-related nouns like policy, action, and measures, while *suggest* frequently collocates with more abstract or conceptual nouns such as change, idea, and approach.

**Table 4***Adjective Collocations with MI > 3; from left to right: propose, recommend, suggest*

Words	Freq	MI	Words	Freq	MI	Words	Freq	MI
Alternative	223	4.38	Effective	68	3.75	Plausible	14	3.28
Draconian	14	4.69	Strong	54	3.51	Tentative	9	3.30
Sweeping	51	4.16	Comprehensive	40	3.63	Novel	44	3.26
Radical	92	3.36	Specific	32	3.42	Broad	139	4.17
Constitutional	97	3.19	Strategic	27	3.14	Conceptual	43	3.71

Adjectives collocated with *propose* tend to emphasise the scope or impact of the proposal, such as alternative, draconian, and radical. For *recommendations*, adjectives focus on qualities like effective, strong, and comprehensive. Meanwhile, adjectives linked to *suggest* often highlight possibility or vagueness, including plausible, tentative, and novel.

**Table 5***Adverbial Collocations with MI > 3; from left to right: propose, recommend, suggest*

Words	Freq	MI	Words	Freq	MI	Words	Freq	MI
Formally	154	4.15	Strongly	178	5.10	Clearly	296	5.72
Tentatively	69	3.83	Highly	155	4.60	Broadly	139	6.30
Officially	122	4.06	Firmly	102	4.50	Widely	84	3.58
Boldly	48	3.67	clearly	238	5.30	Tentatively	43	4.39
Explicitly	90	3.99	particularly	71	4.21	indirectly	58	4.12

For adverbs, *suggest* is often a function of adverbs that advance formal or tentative presentation, like formally, tentatively, and officially. *Recommendations* are often strengthened by adverbs that convey certainty and strength, like strongly, highly, and firmly. *Suggest* is often a target for adverbs that convey clarity or generality, like clearly, broadly, and widely. The collocational patterns for *propose*, *recommend*, and *suggest* are the result of their semantic and pragmatic variations. *Propose* is frequently associated with formal or official situations and characterised by earmarks of cautious or assertive modifiers. *Recommend* features, strong and effective suggestions, frequently employed in policy or action situations. *Suggest* has a greater variety of tentative or more conceptual senses, often connected to abstract concepts or loose generalisations.

The verb usage data for *suggest*, *recommend*, and *propose* were taken from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). A summary of the total occurrences of each verb collocation is presented in Tables 3, 4 and 5. COCA outputs were included in the appendix for the full corpus interface; thus, for the reader's convenience, the full search results are presented in Appendix C, Figures 7 to 9. This inclusion maintains the integrity of the data collection process and enables the audience to cross-check the corpus results

#### 4.4 Discussion

Synonyms are an important part of English because they help us express small differences in meaning and style. In English, differences in meaning and style are best articulated with synonyms, and so they are an important part of the language. The present study compared the verbs *suggest*, *recommend*, and *propose* in COCA to identify their distributional and collocational

characteristics. Quantitative analysis confirmed that *suggest* is the most frequent and widely distributed verb, occurring across all registers but especially in academic and spoken discourse. This supports previous corpus findings that *suggest* it functions as a versatile reporting or hedging verb in research and conversation. *Recommend* appears predominantly in advisory and evaluative contexts such as magazines and spoken language, where interpersonal stance and persuasion are central. It collocates (policy, measures, strongly), emphasising authority and guidance.

If we encounter the term *propose*, it truly comes into its own in formal writing and official texts. You'll frequently see it accompanied by institutional nouns such as "amendment" and "legislation" and by tentative modifiers such as "formally" and "tentatively." This identifies its presence in formal propositions or theoretical writing. These variations indicate that the selection of synonyms isn't merely a question of their senses; it's also a question of context and purpose. For students, understanding these contextual subtleties may help avoid pitfalls—such as the use of *propose* where the context is informal advice or the use of *recommend* where the context is stern theory writing. For teachers, the evidence indicates that the employment of corpus evidence will enrich dictionary lexicons by revealing genuine patterns of real-world usage.

Finally, these results underscore that the corpus analysis of language may reveal subtle semantic and pragmatic details that individual reference sources may overlook. Incorporating these observations into the teaching of vocabulary will be able to help students develop greater accuracy and sensitivity to context awareness of the language.

## 5. Conclusion

Finally, *suggest*, *recommend*, and *propose* are synonyms that intersect meaning but vary in accordance with register, frequency and context. The verb *recommend*, the verb *suggest*, and the verb *propose* vary in accordance with register, frequency and context. Their variations are manifested in the collocations and the levels of formality that they convey. Corpus-oriented methodology employed here gives a transparent view of the variation, rather than a dictionary-oriented description indicates truly occurring patterns of Usage across a variety of registers. Based on the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) data, the research discovered that *suggest* is the most commonly occurring and most diffusely distributed verb, especially in academic writing, in which it serves the purpose of a versatile reporting or a hedging device. *Recommend* is most dominant in spoken and magazine writing, characteristically rendering the meaning of advice or evaluation, while *propose* is most dominant in academic and formal styles and connected to theoretical or proffered propositions.

Collocational analysis supported these patterns: co-occur with formal nouns and hedging adverbs (formally, tentatively), *recommend* with policy-associated nouns and strong adverbs (strongly, highly), and *suggest* with abstract nouns and downward hedging markers (idea, change, broadly). They highlight that the selection of synonyms depends not just on meaning but also on register, collocation, and pragmatic function. The findings point to the pedagogical potential of the corpus-based approach to vocabulary teaching. Access to real corpus data allows students to identify subtle meaning, register, and formulary differences and so raise their level of communicative competence. Teaching materials can incorporate corpus activities to show true patterns of use, and course planners can prepare course modules that focus on synonym differentiation by collocation exercises.

The corpus gives a lot of real examples that help learning. Because of this, both teachers and students should use corpora more and try new ways of learning instead of old methods.

- Synonyms may seem similar but have important differences in meaning and use.
- Using large collections of real texts (corpora) helps us understand these differences better than dictionaries alone.
- *Suggest* is the most common and is used widely, especially in academic writing.
- *Propose* is mostly used in formal or academic writing.
- Recommendations are used more in magazines and spoken English, often for advice.

### 5.1 Recommendations

Students are advised to frequently access corpus sources for viewing real instances of synonymy. Teachers are invited to incorporate corpus-inflected exercises in the classroom for greater sensitivity to context-sensitive words. Researchers can further generalise their future work to further sets of synonyms or learner corpora for exploring non-native pronunciation and intra-linguistic influence. Overall, the research highlights that Corpus-based analysis is a very effective pedagogic resource for facilitating correct and contextually sensitive choice of words.

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