

A Corpus-Based Study of English Synonyms: Rich and Wealthy

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โดยใช้ภาษาศาสตร์คลังข้อมูล: Rich and Wealthy

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Abstract

This paper addressed the differences and similarities between two synonyms adjectives: rich and wealthy. Two learners' dictionaries and the British National Corpus (BNC) were used to investigate their noun collocates. The findings indicate that some nouns follow either rich or wealthy, while few nouns collocate with both adjectives, e. g., wealthy men, rich men, rich mixture, rich history but not a wealthy mixture, and wealthy history. Drawing on the corpus data, it is found that they differ in collocation, colligation, semantic preference, and semantic prosody. In terms of the degree of formality, they tend to occur in informal genres. Thus, English language teachers should incorporate multi-word units of these two words into multi-word unit pedagogy when teaching these synonymous words.

Keywords: Synonyms; Collocations; Corpus Linguistics

Introduction

Not only are the similarities and differences in meanings and usages of synonyms or near-synonyms problematic for L2 learners but they are also a tough stage to master the understanding and usage of words in an authentic way (Aroonmanakoon, 2015). Consulting dictionaries may be the first tool for getting explanations but they, indeed, do not provide everything. The words *get* and *acquire*, for instance, are difficult for learners to use. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English Online (2014) explains some senses of these two words, with the amount of overlapping and interchanging. *Get* can be coexisted with a job, an idea, a good qualification, or a degree but *acquire* cannot. *Knowledge*, *fluency* (in language), and *skill/habit* can collocate with *acquired* but cannot be used with *get*. However, both words can be followed by *reputation* (Punyarattabandhu, 2008). A synonym is one of

the most difficult areas for ELF learners learning vocabulary (Laufer, 1990) as some synonyms cannot be interchanged in every context (Palmer, 1997). Although some synonyms resemble in the meaning, they vary from each other in a linguistic perspective: i.e., semantic meaning, semantic preference, semantic prosody, collocation, colligation, and a degree of formality; resulting in difficulty in using English words. A study by Phoochareonsil (2011) reveals that Thai EFL students have collocation problems regardless of what L2 proficiency they possess. Both high- and low-proficiency groups tend to transfer their L1 collocation knowledge. Therefore, it is essential to equip L2 learners with knowledge on selecting an appropriate word to suit the context (Rozakis, 2011).

Focusing on two English synonyms, this study examined two synonym adjectives: *rich* and *wealthy*. The similarities and differences in terms of meaning, collocation, grammatical pattern or colligation, semantic preference, and semantic prosody, the degree of formality of words based on the distribution across different genres were investigated.

Research Questions

2.1 What are the similarities and differences between a pair of synonyms: *rich* and *wealthy* in terms of meaning, formalities, collocations, and grammatical pattern?

2.2 How are *rich* and *wealthy* distributed in various genres on the British National Corpus (BNC)?

Literature Review

Strict and Loose Synonym

A strict synonym refers to the words that can be used interchangeably in all contexts and the substitution must not result in a change of meaning, style, and connotation of the context” (Jackson & Amvela, 2000) but it appears rarely or may already be disappeared. In addition, strict synonyms are hardly found or are inexistent (McCarthy, O’Keeffe, & Walsh, 2010)

The definition of a loose synonym, by contrast, is where the identification does not only overlap significantly in meaning between two words but also in some contexts at least where they cannot substitute for each other (Jackson & Amvela, 2000). For example, the words: *neat* and *tidy*, are synonyms. Both means being neat or tidy and carefully arranged. They can be interchanged without any changes of meaning in such a context as "A salesperson should have a tidy or neat appearance". On the other hand, the word *neat* cannot replace *tidy* in this context, “He wears tidy clothes to school” (Punyaratabandhu, 2008).

Collocation

Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English Online or LDOCE (2015) indicates that collocation is the way some words or a particular combination of words is often used together. Collocational restrictions lead to differences in the meanings of synonyms (Palmer, 1997). For instance, both words *acquire* and *obtain* share a similar meaning; to receive something. Considering their noun collocates in terms of their semantic prosody or attitudinal meaning, *obtain*, however, cannot be used with a word, *infection* while *acquire* can, e.g., “female is more likely to acquire *infection* in the throat than her male sexual partner” (Sittironnarit et al, 2022).

Corpus linguistics about synonyms

The benefit of corpus linguistics sheds light on a methodology that a particular register is studied for its actual use (Lindquist, 2009) as well as enables an empirical language study contributing to insight apprehension of linguistic features: grammar and lexis and the development of relevant fields such as discourse analysis and language teaching (O’Keeffe, McCarthy, and Carter, 2007).

To study synonyms, users can differentiate the dissimilarity and similarity by examining the linguistic features of synonyms such as genres, word frequency, phrases, and collocation (Moon, 2010). For example, Aroonmanakul (2015) found that although *fast* and *quick* share a close similar meaning, the findings in BNC revealed that the quality or property of an action is used with *the word quick* while the sense of manner of action comes after *fast*.

Concerning collocations and their use across different disciplines, another interesting study worth noticing was conducted by Jarunwaraphan, and Mallikamas (2020) on the differences and similarities of a pair of synonymous nouns: *chance* and *opportunity*. The Corpus of Contemporary American English and online dictionaries were used. Despite their similar meanings, the two synonyms are not interchangeably replaced in every context.

Concerning grammatical patterns or colligation, Phoocharoensil (2010) revealed that despite the same main meaning, each word of a pair of synonyms does not have the same grammatical pattern. To point out a clearer explanation, it was shown that the grammatical patterns of these synonymous words *ask*, and *request* are different. The same patterns they share are ask/request+ sb+ to+ Verb.inf and ask/request + that + S+Verb inf. However, there are still differences: ask + sb + if/ whether, ask + to -V.inf, ask + sb + for + something while request + sth and request sth + from + sb. The words, *request* and *ask*, share the same meaning but cannot be interchanged in

the same pattern as in *I would like to ask to join the party* while the word *request* cannot replace *ask* in this sentence, *I would like to request to join the party*.

A corpus can reveal semantic preference and semantic prosody which a dictionary tends to rarely provide (Phoochareonsil, 2021). “Semantic preferences’ are multiword units that involve lexical patterning that demonstrates the tendencies of words to form a chunk with one another and “become extended units of meaning” (Szudarski, 2018, p. 85). Flowerdew (2012) termed a different name as a semantic association in which a word tends to have a close association with a specific collocation. For example, the verb *cause* tends to co-occur with a disease such as *cancer, heart, disease*. To classify semantic preference, McEnery and Hardie (2012) suggest to group words by considering lexical elements. Phoochareonsil (2021)’s study points out that the semantic preferences of the word *foresee* are classified into 4 main themes, i.e. result, possibility, something adverse or unpleasant, and something positive while its synonymous word *predict* contains five different semantic preferences i.e. possibility, measurable output, weather, something adverse or unpleasant and something positive, meaning that these two words share some semantic preference i.e. possibility, something adverse or unpleasant and something positive. In contrast, each word contains its semantic preference such as weather with *predict* and result with *foresee*.

While semantic preference deals with the set of words with a similar meaning, semantic prosody is about an attitudinal or behavioral pattern of each word coined as “a consistent aura of meaning with which a form is imbued by its collocates” as mentioned earlier measured by its language tones, i.e., positive, negative, or neutral (Louw, 1993). For example., *cause* “is heavily used in contexts where cause and effect are unpleasant,” i.e., trouble and damage, death, pain, and disease” (Stubbs, p. 26).

Previous studies

Apart from only focusing on corpora, the dictionaries are used along with the corpus (corpora) for investigating the synonyms. Thamratana (2013) examined five synonyms: *reduce, decrease, diminish, dwindle, and decline*, focusing on their meanings, grammatical patterns, and formality degree by using the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (2010), Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2015), and the British National Corpus (BNC). The findings reveal that these five synonyms have the same core meaning but vary in terms of grammatical patterns and collocates. *Decrease* and *decline* are more formal words, while *decrease* occurs more often in academic contexts than *reduce, decline, diminish, and dwindle*.

More recently, Phoochareonsil and Kanokpermpoon (2021) investigated the differences between the words *increase* and *rise* using COCA focusing on their use in

different genres, semantic prosody, semantic preference, collocation, and colligation. They found that *increase* and *rise* are similar in their adverb collocates. Interestingly, while the adverb collocates of *rise* include the notion of direction, the meaning of direction is included in the adverb collocates of *rise*.

Research methodology and Data Analysis

The corpus-based comparative study of the near-synonym words: *wealthy* and *rich*, was conducted for they shared a similar sense of meaning in some contexts. The selected dictionaries were Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, (OALD, 2010) and Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE, 2014), used to provide more information about the similarity and differences as well as to analyze the collocations and grammatical patterns or colligation, semantic preference, and semantic prosody.

For the corpus data, these two words were searched on BNC to find their noun collocates with MI score >3 to find their distribution across different disciplines for RQ2. For RQ1, only the top 30 collocates of *rich* and *wealthy* with MI scores of at least 3 were drawn out to report their noun collocates, and then the researcher manually grouped their semantic preference. In addition, the top 100 noun collocates were extracted to find the shared noun collocates. Finally, the sample concordance lines were used to determine semantic prosody. However, as a limit of this current study, it should be noted that there might be nouns in the second or the third group which can be used with the near-synonym adjectives or vice versa, but they are not considered important.

Results

Table 1 Meanings of Rich and Wealthy on OALD and LDOCE

	OALD	LDOCE
rich	Having a lot of money or property p. 1315	Someone rich has a lot of money and available possession p.1565
wealthy	Having a lot of money, possession p.1745	Having a lot of money, possession, etc. P.2063

Table 2 Example Sentences of Rich on OALD

with a lot of money	Ex: Nobody gets rich from writing nowadays.
full of variety	Ex: She leads a rich and varied life.
containing or providing something	Ex: The area is rich in wildlife.
food	Ex: This is a rich chocolate cake.
soil	Ex: Rich soil makes your plants grow well.
colors/sounds	Ex: A rich sound is low and pleasant: the rich tone of Cello.
expensive	Ex: The room was decorated with rich fabric.
criticism	Ex: Me? Lazy? That's rich coming from you.
cloth	Ex: she stroked the rich velvet of the dress enviously.

Table 3 Example Sentences of Rich on LDOCE

wealthy	Ex: She found herself a rich husband.
large amount	Ex: Pregnant women should eat protein-rich foods.
full of interest	Ex: the rich literary tradition of England
food	Ex: The sauce was very rich.
smell/flavour	Ex: the rich scent of the pine trees
colors/	Ex: a rich dark brown colour
sound	Ex: He laughed with a rich, throaty chuckle.
Soil	Ex: Vegetables grow well in the rich, black soil.
cloth	Ex: She stroked the rich velvet of the dress enviously.

As shown in Table 1 - 3, both synonyms reveal a close meaning: having a lot of money or possessions. In addition, OALD shows how *rich* is used: 1) with a lot of money, 2) full of variety, 3) containing or providing something, 4) food, 5) soil, 6) color/sounds, 7) expensive, 8) criticism. LDOCE also indicates the use of *rich* as 1) wealthy, 2) large amount, 3) full of interests, 4) food, 5) smell/flavors 6) color, 7) sound, 8) soil, and 9) cloth. In LDOCE, *wealthy* is used especially when have been rich for a long time. The only thing to differentiate this pair is that the word *wealthy* can be used when the people have been rich for a long time. One distinction is that *wealthy* cannot be replaced in a fixed phrase: It is a favorite resort for a rich and famous while “*She stroked the rich velvet of the dress*” *enviously* cannot be found. Moreover, for grammatical patterns, the word *rich* has one fixed pattern while *wealthy* cannot replace, i.e.,

Table 4 Frequency of *rich* and *wealthy* in the BNC (per million)

	Rich	Wealthy
Total	6613	1309
Per Million	68.69	13.59

Based on Table 4, *rich* is used more than the word *wealthy*; this means that the word *rich* is more often found than *wealthy*.

Table 5 Top-30 Collocates

Wealthy	Rich
man, people, families, individuals, merchants, businessmen, landowners, widow, woman, farmer, nations, parents, country, benefactor, patrons, citizens, clients, friends, industrialist, households, investors, lady, areas, aristocrats, suburb, peasants, classes, lord, lifestyle, traders	man, countries, peasant, people, variety, source, world, pickings, colour, vein, mixture, picture, diversity, soil, heritage, seam, nations, food, harvest, rewards, chocolate, kids, red, history, merchant, ones, girl, flavour, fruit, diet

As seen in Table 5, noun collocates of *wealthy* are mostly about people such as man, people, and job noun such as farmer, businessman while the word *rich* collocates with common nouns meaning people such as man, people, and abstract nouns such as harvest, heritage, diversity and some specific noun such as soil meaning the rich one as well as nouns relating to food such as chocolate flavour, fruit.

Shared Collocates of Rich and Wealthy

1. man 2. people 3. merchant 4. landowner 5. widow 6. farmer 7. nation 8. country 9. client 10. farmer 11. lady 12. American 13. peasant 14. farming

As listed above, the researcher extracted the top-100 noun collocates of both words to find the shared ones. It can be addressed that the shared collocates are common nouns, especially relating to people. This means, that for these nouns both words can be interchangeably used without any significant changes in some nouns involving people or countries and some nouns.

Table 6 Degree of Formality of Wealthy and Rich

Genre	Wealthy			Rich		
	Frequency	Size (M)	Per M.	Frequency	Size (M)	Per M.
Spoken	61	10.0	6.12	468	10.0	46.97
Fiction	213	15.9	13.39	1,301	15.9	81.78
Magazine	70	7.3	9.64	892	7.9	122.83
Newspaper	160	10.5	15.29	533	10.5	50.92
Non-Academic	295	16.5	17.88	1,113	16.5	67.47
Academic	195	15.3	12.72	793	15.3	51.72
Miscellaneous	315	20.8	15.12	1,509	20.8	72.43
Total	1,309			6,609		

According to Table 6, *rich* is found in BNC 6,609 times. It is mostly used in magazines 122.83 times per million while it occurs in fiction, non-academic, and miscellaneous at 81.78, 72.43, and 67.42 per million. It occurs in academics,

newspapers, and spoken at 51.72, 50.92, and 46.97, respectively. This can be summed up that this word majorly exists in the non-academic genre. It can be implied that British native speakers mostly use this word in the informal genres.

In addition, *wealthy* occurs in BNC 1,309 times. It is mostly used in non-academic at 17.87 times per million while it is found in newspapers, miscellaneous and fiction, at 15.29, 15.12, and 13.39 per million. It also occurs in academic, magazine, and spoken genres at 12.72, 9.64, and 6.12 times per million. This can be implied that this word majorly appears in the non-academic genre. Or in other words, British native speakers tend to use *wealthy* in informal communication.

Grammatical Patterns or Colligations

1. Rich/wealthy + Noun
2. The rich/wealthy
3. Linking verb or be + Rich + in + something
4. Make somebody + rich
5. Linking verb or be + rich/wealthy
6. as + rich/wealthy

No.1 - 6 grammatical patterns show that these synonyms share only four grammatical structures. The findings also show that these synonyms cannot be used interchangeably in all grammatical contexts because they do not share all the same grammatical structures. However, the information is from dictionaries and a small corpus; thus, it may not be all potential patterns involving these two synonyms.

Table 7 Semantic Preferences of *Wealthy* and *Rich*

Semantic preference	Wealthy	Rich
People	man, people, individuals, family, widow, benefactor, citizens, clients, friends, households, lady, classes, lord	man people, kids, ones, girl
Job Occupation	merchants, widow, traders landowners, farmer, peasants industrialist, investors, aristocrats,	peasant, merchant
Nation	Nation, Country	Countries, nations, world
Location	areas, suburb	
Food		food chocolate, flavour, fruit, diet
Colour	colours, red	
A great deal of collections		variety source, mixture diversity
MISC	lifestyle	Pickings, harvest picture, heritage, seam, rewards history, soil

After manually categorizing the top-30 noun collocates of both words, it was found that both words share some semantic preferences which are nouns meaning people e.g., man and woman, job or occupation e.g., merchants and peasant and but they differ in some noun collocates. On the other hand, while *wealthy* has semantic preferences in some specific types such as location, *rich* does not; it tends to collocate with a great deal of collection e.g., *diversity* or *source* or *variety*, noun relating to food, and its specific collocates in the miscellaneous group.

Semantic prosody

To analyze semantic prosody which is classified into three main additional tones (positive, negative, or neutral) (Louw, 1993), the researcher manually considered both words' top-100 concordance lines on BNC. It can be noted that both words are likely to reveal positive and neutral semantic prosodies. However, *rich* signifies a negative connotation in example 1 and irony in example 2.

1. Ex.1 ...over there and I'm working my finger to the bone. Tara. The **rich** get richer, and the poor become poorer.
2. Ex2. ...we don't need to do anything. ' This made Roger angry. **Rich** families usually behave worse than less important families....

Moreover, there is a clear excerpt from BNC revealing the different use of *rich* and *wealthy* in example 3. *Rich* precedes *woman* to indicate the status of people as a rich woman while *wealthy* collates with the word *landowners*, meaning the job or occupation that indicating of being wealthy.

3. Ex.3 ...practicing as a solicitor in Ipswich, took care of himself by marrying a **rich** woman. The Berelands were **wealthy** landowners. If a son or daughter married and

Conclusions and discussion

The main objective of this study is to examine the similarities and differences of the close synonyms, *rich* and *wealthy*, and their distribution across different disciplines. Drawing upon dictionaries and corpus data, although these two synonyms share a close meaning, they cannot be used interchangeably. They share a few common colligations, noun collocates, and semantic preferences. For example, *rich* can occur in this sentence, 'this is a rich flavor' but 'this is a wealthy flavor' cannot

be found. Corpus data reveals that they differ in terms of collocation alongside semantic preference and semantic prosody. A set of semantic preferences shed light on how to use these two words naturally. In terms of formality, both words lie in all genres with the highest numbers for non-academic (wealthy) and magazine (rich). Both words have some occurrences in academic genres, meaning that they can be used informally and formally. Concerning their colligations, both words differ in some patterns e.g., *rich in* but not *wealthy in*. The semantic prosody of both words is likely to be neutral and positive with some irony and negative uses of *rich*.

To sum up, *rich* and *wealthy* are loose synonyms. They cannot be interchangeably replaced due to their different semantic preference and colligation as well as semantic prosody. Only information from dictionaries may not cover all details of how each word is used. To prepare vocabulary instructional material, ESL/EFL teachers should encourage students to understand the differences and similarities of synonyms to boost their awareness of loose synonyms in English through concordance lines on corpora along with dictionaries.

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