Abstract

Sense relations, traditionally regarded as primarily paradigmatic, have been shown to carry syntagmatic implications. The present thesis explores intrasentential synonym co-occurrence in order to identify characteristic patterns of such co-occurrence and to explain it with reference to the functions it performs in discourse. The theoretical part provides an overview of both general treatments of synonymy and the studies that deal with co-occurring synonyms. The analysis itself is based on two hundred and thirty sentences retrieved from the British national corpus that contain pairs of co-occurring adjectival synonyms such as confident-sure, faithful-loyal or brave-courageous.

The findings suggest that adjectival synonyms co-occurring in the same sentence are typically coordinated (60% of analysed sentences) in order to signal semantic inclusiveness (e.g. a covetous and grasping man). Minor patterns of synonym co-occurrence, which accounted for 2% of the analysed sentences, include the scalar pattern (e.g. smooth, nearly urbane) and the negated pattern (e.g. cruel, not savage). The remaining sentences featured synonyms which did not form distinct patterns and were, accordingly, classified as instances of variation as their co-occurrence is likely to have been influenced by a desire to avoid repeating the same word. The results of the analysis show that co-occurring synonyms do recur in syntagmatic patterns, but these are far less varied and robust than the patterns displayed by co-occurring antonyms.