Binomial Sequences, Informants' Judgments and Text Analysis

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Abstract

This large project explored frequency, English binomial fixedness and flexibility, and binomial sequences in text. A triangulation framework was used to investigate variations of word sequences across the British National Corpus, word order judgments by NNS and NS (N = 1400), and text analysis.

As is known, the binomial word order is reversible (e.g. black and blue vs. blue and black) or irreversible (e.g. *sooner or later* vs. **later or sooner*). Two tokens can be collocates as a result of free combination (e.g. *black and blue* and *blue and black* simply indicating colour), or can be fixed as a part of formulaic language (e.g. beaten *black and blue*, indicating 'being bruised'). However, it has been rarely discussed to what extent a binomial can be reversed, which may lead to various meanings and uses (Moon 1998; Wray 2002). Other issues have also been challenged. For instance, frequency of an individual word is commonly assumed the major factor deciding binomial sequences. But the matter of free variations may embarrass the frequency-first argument (Fenk-Oczlon, 1989, 2001). Indeed, frequency plays an important role in a binomial whose tokens should be considered all together (Sinclair 1991).

One of the findings using Kruscal Wallis Test is that the higher the frequency of fixed expressions, the more variations the NNS's judgments allow regarding the word order (p<.05). However, frequency is not always reliable because it is not the decisive factor to influence the NS's intuitive judgment. The statistical cross-tabulation indicates how the cline concept of fixity was applied to evaluate the fixedness and reversibility of word sequence judgment. Text analysis reinforced our findings about how the binomial word order and texts influence each other. It has also been observed that a regular example and its counterpart may co-exist in the same text.

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