Unveiling the Distinction of Near Synonymy: A Corpus-based Analysis on *Attempt*, *Endeavor*, *Strive*, and *Try*

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Abstract	Learners frequently encounter challenges in accurately utilizing near-synonyms in the English language. This investigation explored the similarities and differences among four near-synonymous verbs: *attempt*, *endeavor*, *strive*, and *try*. The analysis encompassed their prevalence across diverse genres, formality levels, collocational patterns, semantic preferences, semantic prosody, and colligations, utilizing linguistic data from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) for examination. Statistical measures, including frequency, MI scores, corpus-based judgment, and linguistic research tools like the UCREL Semantic Analysis System (USAS), were employed to scrutinize the similarities and variances. The findings have shown that although the four near-synonymous verbs share surface-level resemblances in meaning and certain characteristics, they also manifest distinct and unique features. In summary, *try* markedly differs from other near-synonyms in terms of genre distribution and degree of formality, while *strive* is distinguished by its unique colligational pattern. Among the six criteria used to differentiate the four near-synonyms, their semantic preferences exhibit the most significant differences. Although the four near-synonyms share some collocations and have others that are unique to each term, an analysis of semantic preferences has revealed the semantic distinctions

	preferred by each near-synonym. Consequently, these four target verbs are not interchangeable in particular contexts.
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1. Introduction

Vocabulary is considered a fundamental skill that plays a crucial role in learning and comprehension, as well as in the successful communication of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners (Laosrirattanachai & Ruangjaroon, 2021a; Nation, 2022; Schmitt, 2000; Wilkins, 1972). However, even if learners can master the meanings of words, this does not necessarily imply that they can use the vocabulary naturally in real communication. Several factors can enhance learners' ability to use language more naturally, including awareness of appropriate collocations for each word and understanding the similarities and differences among near-synonyms with closely related meanings (DiMarco, 1994; Flowerdew, 2022; O'Dell & McCarthy, 2008). Understanding lexical semantics, particularly the nuances among near-synonyms, is a crucial aspect of achieving language proficiency. However, this presents a considerable challenge for non-native English speakers (Jackson & Amvela, 2007; Phoocharoensil, 2021a; Yeh et al., 2007). Many EFL learners mistakenly assume that near-synonyms can be freely interchanged without altering meaning or structure. In reality, near-synonyms are not entirely identical in all aspects and often demonstrate subtle connotational and contextual variations in meaning (Liu, 2010). Consequently, the interchangeable use of near-synonyms is often considered impractical, and substituting them can lead to grammatical ambiguity or produce unnatural language in English (Cruse, 1986; Edmonds & Hirst, 2002; Szudarski, 2018; Thornbury, 2002).

Amidst a plethora of verbs, *try* is one of the primary terms that EFL learners encounter early in their learning journey. Subsequently, learners encounter other words with similar meanings, such as *attempt*, *strive*, and *endeavor*. Once EFL learners acquire this cluster of closely related vocabulary, confusion and misunderstandings may arise. Based on over ten years of experience teaching English, we have observed that L2 learners are often unaware of the distinctions between the four near-synonyms. Their vocabulary usage shows that they tend to use *attempt*, *endeavor*, *strive*, and *try* interchangeably. However, numerous scholars and research studies have indicated that absolute synonyms are rare and seldom encountered (Uba, 2015). This raises the question: Are these four words absolute or near-synonyms? If they are near-synonyms, what contexts or factors influence the choice among them? Initially, the researchers consulted the definitions of these four words in the Cambridge Dictionary and Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, which revealed the following meanings.

Table 1

Definitions of the Verbs Attempt, Endeavor, Strive, and Try from Two Online Dictionaries

Heading	Definition	
	Cambridge Dictionary	**Oxford Learners Dictionaries**
attempt	1) to **TRY** to do something, especially something difficult 2) to **TRY** to make or do something	to make an effort or **TRY** to do something, especially something difficult
endeavor	to **TRY** to do something	to **TRY** very hard to do something
strive	to **TRY** very hard to do something or to make something happen, especially for a long time or against difficulties	to **TRY** very hard to achieve something
try	1) to *ATTEMPT* to do something 2) to make an effort to do something	to make an *ATTEMPT* or effort to do or get something

Table 1 reveals that the distinctions between the meanings of the four verbs were not discernible in the two online dictionaries, as the near-synonym *try* remained included in the definitions for *attempt*, *endeavor*, and *strive*. The provided definitions clearly indicate that *attempt*, *endeavor*, *strive*, and *try* can be

considered near-synonyms due to their shared core meaning of "*to try to do something.*" The lexical descriptions provided by these online dictionaries rarely offer comprehensive or explicit details regarding the usage or contextual constraints of these synonyms and the extent of their interchangeability. In some instances, synonyms are used without thorough consideration of their usage nuances or contextual limitations, merely serving as descriptors for one another.

Upon examining these four near-synonyms, it is observed that only *try* and *attempt* appear in the General Service List (GSL), a compilation of basic vocabulary used in everyday life, comprising the first 2,000 most frequently encountered words (West, 1953). On the other hand, the remaining two terms, *endeavor* and *strive*, do not appear in the GSL. It can be assumed that these two words might be technical terms used more frequently in specialized contexts rather than in general everyday situations. Furthermore, when examining the four near-synonyms in the context of vocabulary levels using the VocabProfile program (Cobb, n.d.), it was found that *try* appears in base list 1, *attempt* in base list 2, *endeavor* in base list 4, and *strive* in base list 5. Each base list comprises 1,000 words arranged in order of frequency derived from English language corpora, including the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). There are a total of 25 base lists, ranging from base list 1, which includes words with the highest frequency, to base list 25. According to Schmit and Schmitt (2014), the most frequent 3,000 words (base lists 1-3) are labeled as high-frequency words, those appearing in the frequency range of 3,001 to 9,000 (base lists 4-9) are categorized as mid-frequency words, and words beyond the most frequent 9,000 words (base lists 10 and beyond) are considered low-frequency words. This leads to the conclusion that the four near-synonyms are classified into different frequency levels. Specifically, *try* and *attempt* are high-frequency words, while *endeavor* and *strive* fall into the mid-frequency category.

The differences mentioned above provide fundamental information indicating that, although the four near-synonyms share similar meanings, they

have distinct usage principles. Consequently, these four near-synonyms appear in different vocabulary profiles and at various vocabulary levels. The rationale behind selecting the near synonyms *attempt*, *endeavor*, *strive*, and *try* stems from the fact that, since it is impossible to teach or learn every word in a language, certain words must be given priority. Similarly, English contains numerous sets of near-synonyms, and it is impractical to teach or learn them all. Therefore, prioritizing specific sets of near-synonyms is essential. The data mentioned above indicates that *attempt*, *endeavor*, *strive*, and *try* appear within the first five base lists and are classified as high- and mid-frequency words, which are considered essential for L2 learners of English to know and use appropriately (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2014). This particular set of near-synonyms is thus of significant interest and warrants further study and analysis for the benefit of L2 learners of English.

With these challenges in mind, this research employs a corpus-based analysis, considered an efficient method for seeking answers regarding the differences in the usage of these near-synonyms. The purpose of this research is to examine the distinctions between the verbs *attempt*, *endeavor*, *strive*, and *try* by analyzing their distribution across various genres and levels of formality. This study also seeks to explore the collocational patterns, semantic preferences, and prosodies associated with each verb to gain a better understanding of their nuances. Additionally, it investigates the syntactic environments, or colligations, in which these verbs commonly occur, thereby offering insights into their unique functional roles within the English language. In addition, previous research on near-synonyms has often relied on extensive datasets such as COCA and BNC as the basis for analysis. However, lacking research tools, many researchers have analyzed certain aspects manually, introducing significant obstacles and burdens on researchers and potentially leading to errors in research findings. Therefore, this study introduces the use of research tools for corpus linguistics analysis, coupled with COCA, to enhance the convenience and precision of near-synonym analysis.

2. Literature Review

Synonyms, as delineated in academic literature, are words or phrases that share similar or nearly identical meanings in a language (Cruse, 2010; Jackson & Amvela, 2007). The essence of synonyms entails a significant overlap in meaning, where the commonalities often outweigh the differences (Taylor, 2003). Instances of confusion or misapplication may arise when learners erroneously substitute synonyms in contexts where such replacements are lexically inappropriate (Laufer, 1990). The evolution of the English language, shaped by historical and cross-linguistic factors, has resulted in a diverse array of synonyms, where native and foreign-derived terms are frequently paired to convey comparable meanings (Cruse, 1986; Palmer, 1981). Scholars have classified synonyms into two primary categories: strict, perfect, or absolute synonyms, and loose or near-synonyms, each carrying nuanced implications (Edmonds & Hirst, 2002; Murphy, 2010).

Perfect synonyms, more formally recognized as absolute synonyms or strict synonyms (Thongpan, 2022), must embody nearly identical meanings and seamlessly interchange across all contexts without impacting meaning, context, style, or connotation (Cruse, 1986; Edmonds & Hirst, 2002; Jackson & Amvela, 2007; Lyons, 1995). This necessitates their interchangeable use without any discernible disparity in interpretation. It is noteworthy that terms designated as absolute synonyms are both infrequent and elusive in natural language usage. Due to their contextual limitations, they are seldom employed in language. The interchangeable deployment of such expressions may lead to redundancy or overly repetitive language, potentially hindering effective communication (Chung, 2011).

In contrast, loose or near-synonyms constitute a category of words sharing closely aligned meanings, though not precisely identical, and their interchangeability is not universally applicable (Liu, 2013). The absence of universal interchangeability arises from various factors nuanced by the distinctions in meaning or connotation inherent in these terms. Additionally, grammatical restrictions or variations in collocation contribute to their differentiation (DiMarco

et al., 1993; Inkpen & Hirst, 2006). In summary, near-synonyms are encountered more frequently than absolute synonyms. The improper use of near-synonymous terms within a given context can significantly impact the meaning, structure, perspective, and linguistic context of the text. Therefore, EFL learners should recognize the paramount importance of judiciously employing near-synonyms in diverse contexts.

The corpus-based approach, supported by various scholars, yields insights into the usage of near-synonyms in authentic linguistic contexts (Gu, 2017; Lindquist & Levin, 2018; Phoocharoensil, 2010). Data derived from corpora form the basis for distinguishing near-synonyms, involving an analysis of linguistic aspects such as genres, word frequency, collocation, colligation, formality, and semantic preference or prosody (Moon, 2010). Evaluating distribution across diverse genres aids in assessing the formality of near-synonymous words, facilitating effective differentiation (Szudarski, 2018). Corpus analysis focused on collocations provides insights into natural word combinations, especially beneficial for non-native English speakers. As suggested by Yoon (2008), the Keyword in Context (KWIC) function displays concordance lines, allowing examination of the lexical-syntactic structure. Each near-synonym exhibits distinct grammatical usage, aiding in highlighting nuanced distinctions. Recent corpus linguistics research indicates that such analysis significantly contributes to learners' comprehension of differences between near-synonyms (Phoocharoensil, 2020a; Phoocharoensil & Kanokpermpoon, 2021; Yang, 2016). Various criteria, including distribution across genres, degrees of formality, collocations, semantic preference, semantic prosody, and colligations, can be employed to differentiate near-synonyms. In the current study, the researchers analyzed distinctions among near-synonyms based on these criteria, offering valuable insights into nuanced distinctions in meaning and usage among these words.

2.1 Distribution across Genres and Degree of Formality

To distinguish among near-synonyms in English, it is crucial to consider their formal or informal usage (Phoocharoensil, 2020b). While near-synonymous words may share similar meanings, their application can vary based on formality. Some terms are prevalent in formal settings, such as academic texts, while others are more commonly associated with informal situations, like spoken language (Imsa-ard & Phoocharoensil, 2022). To determine a word's typical formality, extensive corpora like COCA provide a reliable source. They also reveal the genres in which these words are commonly used. The COCA offers insights into word frequency across eight genres: spoken language, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, academic journals, blogs, web pages, and TV and movie subtitles (Davies, 2020). This information is crucial for examining the formality associated with near-synonymous words. By analyzing the distribution of these words across genres, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of their usage in both formal and informal contexts, contributing to a comprehensive study of their nuances and appropriateness in diverse language settings.

2.2 Collocation and Colligation

Collocation involves exploring associations between words (Stubbs, 1995; Webb & Nation, 2017). Palmer (1933) initially introduced this concept in English language teaching, which was later incorporated into theoretical linguistics by Firth (1957). Collocation denotes a recurring pattern where two or more items often appear in close proximity, though not necessarily in a fixed order (Lewis, 2000; Sinclair, 1999). Proximity in this context typically refers to a distance of approximately four words on both the right and left sides of the examined word, known as the "node" (Nesselhauf, 2005). Words within a set of synonyms may exhibit distinct collocational preferences, contributing to their differentiation. Certain synonyms are associated with specific collocates, defining their expected co-occurrence (Nesselhauf, 2005; Palmer, 1981). Collocation serves as a criterion for distinguishing nuances among near-synonyms.

On a broader scale than collocation, colligation directs attention to the structural patterns surrounding a specific word or phrase (Cheng, 2012). The concept is closely linked to collocation, which can be used to distinguish lexical interrelations from those associated with grammatical categories. A word's colligations outline its typical grammatical functions (Hoey, 2005). Thus, colligation aligns with collocation but emphasizes different aspects, including speech, tense, voice, or the specific position of a word in a sentence (Flowerdew, 2012). Beyond collocation, colligation represents another key focus in the study of synonymy (Ly & Jung, 2015; Tognini-Bonelli, 1993).

2.3 Semantic Preference and Semantic Prosody

Semantic preference pertains to the association between a lemma or word form and a group of words that share a similar meaning (Stubbs, 2001). Semantic preference and collocation are interconnected concepts. Collocation represents the relationship between a node and a single collocate, whereas semantic preference denotes a connection between a node and a group of collocates sharing a related meaning (Phoocharoensil, 2021b). When exploring semantic preference, lexical items can be categorized based on their similarity in meaning (McEnery & Hardie, 2012). For instance, words like *seen*, *visible*, and *perceived* fall within the same semantic preference category of VISIBILITY (Sinclair, 1999). Consequently, semantic preference is frequently examined alongside collocations to distinguish between near-synonyms (Szudarski, 2018).

Semantic prosody, recognized as a subset of semantic preference (Flowerdew, 2012), can assume a positive or negative orientation when words or phrases are used alongside others with positive or negative meanings (McEnery & Hardie, 2012). It involves the emotional or judgmental connotations arising from a word's occurrence within specific collocations (Phoocharoensil, 2020b; Szudarski, 2018). Semantic prosody serves as a means to convey the speaker's or writer's perspective while also reflecting the connotations of words within a particular context (Hunston, 2002).

2.4 Previous Studies

Based on our literature review of prior research, numerous studies on near-synonyms have explored verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs. Researchers in the past have utilized linguistic corpora such as COCA or BNC to examine the similarities and distinctions among near-synonyms (Lin & Chung, 2021; Song, 2021; Uba & Irudayasamy, 2023). For instance, specific studies have focused on near-synonymous verbs such as *affect* and *impact* (Alanazi, 2022); *assess*, *evaluate*, and *measure* (Sridhanyarat & Phoocharoensil, 2023); and *teach*, *educate*, and *instruct* (Kruawong & Phoocharoensil, 2022). Studies aiming to analyze near-synonymous nouns include *chance* and *opportunity* (Jarunwaraphan & Mallikamas, 2020), *people* and *persons* (Supanfai, 2022), and *primary*, *main*, and *major* (Phoocharoensil, 2022). Research on near-synonymous adjectives includes *appropriate*, *proper*, and *suitable* (Petcharat & Phoocharoensil, 2017); *high* and *tall* (Taylor, 2003); and *little* and *small* (Aroonmanakun & Aroonmanakun, 2023). For near-synonymous adverbs, a few studies cover *actually*, *genuinely*, *really*, and *truly* (Liu & Espino, 2012), and *surprisingly*, *astonishingly*, and *amazingly* (İŞLER, 2022).

According to a number of studies mentioned above, it can be observed that research in the field of near-synonym studies has garnered significant attention from scholars in the past decade. Upon reviewing the research findings, it is noted that the findings of previous studies consistently indicate that near-synonyms lack complete interchangeability. In our current investigation, we focused on a set of verbs—*attempt*, *endeavor*, *strive*, and *try*—which had not been previously explored in research. We analyzed six dimensions: distribution across genres, degrees of formality, collocations, semantic preference, semantic prosody, and colligations, utilizing the COCA as the primary data source through corpus research instruments. The COCA is widely acknowledged as one of the most extensive and frequently used collections of American English texts, comprising over one billion words from diverse genres, including newspapers, academic journals, spoken conversations, and more. Its robust search functionalities facilitate the identification of specific language patterns, making it an invaluable resource. The

widespread reliance on COCA by researchers, educators, and professionals in linguistics underscores its pivotal role as a reliable and indispensable asset in academic and linguistic circles.

Given the significance of studying the differences among these four near-synonyms, and drawing on insights from the relevant literature review, this study aimed to address the following research questions:

1. How do *attempt*, *endeavor*, *strive*, and *try* differ in their distribution across various genres and levels of formality?

2. In what ways do the words *attempt*, *endeavor*, *strive*, and *try* vary in their verb collocations, semantic preferences, and prosodic associations?

3. What is the distinction between *attempt*, *endeavor*, *strive*, and *try* in terms of colligations?

3. Methodology

In the current research, data from the COCA served as the primary analytical foundation. The COCA is widely recognized as a large, contemporary corpus that encompasses a diverse range of genres. The corpus contains a total of 1,002,888,754 words derived from 458,179 texts (Davies, 2020). It comprises eight genres: blogs, web pages, TV and movie subtitles, spoken transcripts, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, and academic journals. COCA, with its extensive and varied data, proves to be a valuable resource for researchers, educators, and learners, highly esteemed for its reliability as a source of authentic English language data (Friginal, 2018). Subsequently, the data was analyzed following the ensuing steps.

3.1 Genre Distribution

The COCA search was executed by selecting all four verbs to examine the frequency and distribution of these verbs across different genres. The assessment of distribution considered the occurrence of all four verbs in each of the eight genres in the COCA, offering insights into potential variations and preferences for

each genre. Analyzing verbs based solely on frequency may introduce bias, given the tendency for larger datasets to exhibit higher frequencies (Coxhead, 2000; Thorndike, 1921). Therefore, the analysis did not rely on raw frequency values but considered per million values as the primary metric.

3.2 Degree of Formality

Formal genre comprises academic articles, while informal genres consist of TV and movie subtitles and spoken transcripts (Davies, 2020). The remaining genres exhibit a blend of formal and informal characteristics, making it challenging to employ them as a clear framework for analyzing the degree of formality. Consequently, this research only analyzed genres where the degree of formality could be clearly identified and employed per million values for evaluation, similar to the genre distribution analysis.

3.3 Collocation

In research on near-synonymous verbs, one common aspect that researchers often explore is collocation. Previous research has frequently chosen to examine noun collocates. However, the near-synonymous verbs *attempt*, *endeavor*, *strive*, and *try* stand out because they are verbs with a distinctive meaning related to putting effort into doing something, and consequently, they are often followed by a second verb. Therefore, in this research, the decision was made to investigate verb collocates instead. In this investigation, the COLLOCATE function was employed to identify verbs that frequently co-occur with the four near-synonymous verbs. In terms of usage for analysis, a crucial condition when entering commands was to specify the criteria for selecting data, focusing exclusively on cases where all four near-synonyms functioned solely as verbs. This specificity was necessary because word types such as *attempt*, *endeavor*, and *try* can serve as both nouns and verbs. Therefore, to obtain results specific to verbs, the search command 'VERB' must be chosen, ensuring that the Parts of Speech (POS) designation precisely categorized the data as authentic verb instances. The method involved examining two key factors—MI scores and frequency (Schmitt,

2010). The MI score identifies the strength of the relationship between two words when they appear together, considering their co-occurrence frequency with all other words in the corpus (Hunston, 2002). However, relying solely on MI values may not provide a comprehensive understanding of word associations, as a word might have a high MI value but infrequently appear in the corpus (Cheng, 2012; Szudarski, 2018). Unusual or infrequent associations often involve less common words not encountered in everyday language (Baker, 2006). Regarding the frequency of these associations, different experts propose varying thresholds to determine significant word collocations. Scholars have suggested cut-off points, such as 3-5 times (Evert, 2007), 5 times (Nesselhauf, 2005), and 6 times (Chaengchenkit, 2023) across the corpus. In the current study, the researchers aimed for thoroughness by considering both the frequency of word co-occurrence and the MI values. Specifically, the selected verb collocates were the top 30 of a frequency list with an MI score of at least 3, appearing at least 5 times in the corpus.

3.4 Semantic Preference and Semantic Prosody

Following the identification of 30 verb collocates for each key term, a systematic categorization was undertaken based on their habitual co-occurrence, particularly when conveying akin meanings. This categorization adhered to the principle of semantic preference, signifying the propensity of certain words to associate with others and impart a specific evaluative connotation (Hunston, 2002). The detected collocations further elucidated the semantic prosody of the four near-synonyms, encompassing the emotional or evaluative nuances arising from the combination of these words with specific collocates (Phoocharoensil, 2021b; Szudarski, 2018). Such nuances may convey either positive or negative connotations. However, the analysis of semantic preference and semantic prosody in previous research employed a manual approach, where the researchers relied on their own intuition to evaluate the data. This method has drawbacks, including time-consuming analysis, a lack of precision, and the potential influence of external factors on the results. To address these aforementioned issues, the

researchers proposed a two-step analysis approach. Initially, the analysis began with a corpus-based approach using a computer program, followed by a judgment-based approach utilizing the researchers' intuition and knowledge. Therefore, this study suggested utilizing the UCREL Semantic Analysis System (USAS) (Piao et al., 2015), which serves as a valuable tool for annotating the semantics of English. The USAS functions as an annotation system, organizing words based on their meanings in 21 major semantic fields, further subdivided in certain cases (see https://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/usas/). These fields encompass synonyms, antonyms, hypernyms, and hyponyms. In addition to annotating semantic fields, the USAS can indicate positive or negative meanings using the +/- symbols. The use of the USAS program facilitates a rapid and reliable analysis of a large dataset, ensuring consistency in the analysis. Nevertheless, following the analysis with the USAS program, the researchers conducted a secondary examination to ensure the appropriateness, accuracy, and precision of the results.

3.5 Colligation

The grammatical structures of the near-synonymous verbs were examined using the Key Word in Context (KWIC) tool. This involved selecting the first 400 concordance lines for each near-synonym from COCA. Color-coded KWIC displays were employed, assigning specific colors to different parts of speech; for instance, pink for verbs, blue for nouns, green for adjectives, and orange for adverbs. Analyzing the frequency of grammatical structure patterns related to each near-synonymous verb contributed to clarifying both commonalities and distinctions in the usage of each near-synonym.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 The Distinction between *Attempt*, *Endeavor*, S*trive*, and *Try* in Terms of Distribution across Genres and Degrees of Formality

To address RQ 1, the raw frequency (Freq.) and the number of occurrences of each near-synonym per million words (PM.) were investigated (see Table 2).

Table 2

Raw Frequency and Number of Occurrences of each Near-synonym per Million Words across Eight Genres

Degree	Genre	Size (Mil)	attempt		endeavor		strive		try	
			Freq.	PM.	Freq.	PM.	Freq.	PM.	Freq.	PM.
Formal	Academic	119.8	13,249	110.60	1,601	13.37	1,363	11.38	10,015	83.60
	Total	**119.8**	**13,249**	**110.60**	**1,601**	**13.37**	**1,363**	**11.38**	**10,015**	**83.60**
Informal	TV/Movies	128.1	2,627	20.51	212	1.66	244	1.91	56,981	128.1
	Spoken	126.1	5,166	40.96	314	2.49	232	1.84	48,529	126.1
	Total	**254.2**	**7,793**	**30.66**	**526**	**2.07**	**476**	**1.87**	**105,510**	**415.07**
Mixed	BLOG	128.6	10,356	80.52	962	7.48	1,358	10.56	44,705	347.59
	Web	124.3	10,823	87.10	977	7.86	1,298	10.45	38,798	312.25
	Fiction	118.3	4,715	39.85	411	3.47	170	1.44	27,042	228.55
	Magazine	126.1	7,441	59.01	866	6.87	711	5.64	34,981	277.43
	Newspaper	121.7	8,074	66.32	637	5.23	942	7.74	25,359	208.30
	Total	**619**	**41,409**	**66.90**	**3,853**	**6.22**	**4,479**	**7.24**	**170,885**	**276.07**
	Total	**993**	**62,451**	**62.89**	**5,980**	**6.02**	**6,318**	**6.36**	**286,410**	**288.42**

According to Table 2, it was evident that *try* had the highest Per Million (PM) value (288.42) among the four near-synonymous verbs across all genres in COCA, while *endeavor* had the lowest PM value (6.02). This suggested that *try* was commonly used in various English language contexts, and vice versa for *endeavor* when compared to the other near-synonyms. Examining each near-synonym based on the PM value, it was revealed that *attempt* and *endeavor* were most frequently used in the academic genre. *Strive* was commonly employed in academic, blog, and web genres, while *try* was predominantly utilized in blog genres. However, from the viewpoint of each genre, it was observed that in an academic context, language users tended to prefer the word *attempt*, while in other contexts, users favored the word *try*.

Considering the degree of formality, the results in Table 2 indicated that *attempt*, *endeavor*, and *strive* were frequently used in formal contexts due to their higher PM values in the formal genre (Academic) compared to the informal genre (TV/Movies combined with Spoken), namely 110.60:30.66, 13.37:2.07, and 11.38:1.87, respectively. In contrast, *try* was commonly employed in informal

contexts, as its PM value in the formal genre was lower than in the informal genre, namely 83.60:415.07.

The results in this section reflected language users' choices when encountered with situations involving word choice in the form of near-synonyms, highlighting that different near-synonyms served different contexts.

4.2 The Distinction between *Attempt*, *Endeavor*, *Strive*, and *Try* in Terms of Collocations with Verbs, Semantic Preference, and Semantic Prosody

To address RQ 2, the COLLOCATE function was employed to identify verbs that frequently co-occurred with the four near-synonymous verbs (see Table 3).

Table 3

Verb Collocates of Attempt, Endeavor, Strive, and Try

Rank	attempt			endeavor			strive			try		
	V. Col.	Freq.	MI	V. Col.	Freq.	MI	V. Col.	Freq.	MI	V. Col.	Freq.	MI
1	address	338	3.02	shall	59	5.28	achieve	208	4.77	figure	11,368	3.99
2	influence	231	3.52	establish	19	3.61	improve[E]	167	4.12	convince[F]	4,311	3.97
3	escape[D]	212	3.49	improve[E]	14	3.12	maintain	137	3.90	escape[D]	2,273	3.06
4	solve	188	3.07	demonstrate	11	3.35	ensure	60	3.35	persuade[A]	1,446	3.71
5	justify	159	3.57	promote	10	3.08	attain	52	5.73	reassure	434	3.07
6	resolve[B]	157	3.49	convince[F]	10	3.77	preserve[E]	50	3.96	trick	415	3.03
7	impose	132	3.26	preserve[E]	8	3.89	overcome[E]	30	3.70	re-create	360	3.09
8	persuade[A]	127	4.06	capture	7	3.01	emulate[G]	25	5.94	emulate[G]	354	3.79
9	flee	119	3.55	foster[E]	7	5.08	educate	22	3.14	discredit[D]	350	3.51
10	negotiate	110	3.26	obstruct	7	6.89	correct[C]	22	3.20	intimidate	349	3.04
11	correct[C]	109	3.38	eliminate	6	3.06	please	21	3.57	seduce	334	3.55
12	murder	102	3.15	accomplish	6	3.38	motivate	20	3.32	salvage	293	3.62
13	assassinate	95	5.66	resolve[B]	6	3.49	fulfill[E]	17	4.10	coax	291	3.77
14	balance	93	3.12	accommodate	6	4.64	uphold	15	3.81	pry	288	3.39
15	portray	88	3.38	conceal	6	5.22	regain	14	3.71	decipher	245	3.64
16	manipulate	85	3.63	assist	5	3.15	imitate	14	4.44	sabotage	240	3.51
17	replicate	83	4.47	communicate	5	3.24	foster[E]	13	3.39	bribe	225	3.51
18	enforce	80	3.21	advance	5	3.39	maximize	13	3.69	downplay	210	3.33
19	convey	80	3.48	free	5	3.46	excel	13	4.09	instill[G]	197	3.84
20	reconcile[C]	79	4.67	overcome[E]	5	3.48	conquer	10	3.59	rationalize	186	3.43
21	rape	78	3.30	persuade[A]	5	4.09	embody	9	3.16	outdo[G]	183	4.03
22	minimize[B]	78	3.58	minimize[B]	5	4.32	exert	9	3.65	dissuade	177	3.99
23	rescue	77	3.22	grasp	5	4.45	instill[G]	9	5.36	recapture	173	3.50
24	clarify	75	3.64	fulfill[E]	5	4.91	adhere	8	3.40	appease	161	3.33
25	undermine	74	3.28	ascertain	5	6.32	perfect	8	3.70	outrun	158	3.99

Rank	attempt			endeavor			strive			try		
	V. Col.	Freq.	MI	V. Col.	Freq.	MI	V. Col.	Freq.	MI	V. Col.	Freq.	MI
26	discredit[D]	74	5.12	prolong	5	6.42	better	8	4.40	blackmail	157	3.45
27	rob	72	3.49				impart	7	4.36	extort	145	4.37
28	integrate	71	3.04				reconcile[C]	6	3.07	rein	143	3.02
29	quantify	71	5.01				err	6	4.40	drum (up)	142	3.15
30	suppress	69	3.79				outdo[G]	5	4.82	defuse	134	3.53

Remarks: The verb collocates that the near-synonyms shared are as follows: A = attempt, endeavor, and try (1); B = attempt and endeavor (2); C = 'attempt' and 'strive' (2); D = 'attempt' and 'try' (2); E = 'endeavor' and 'strive' (5); F = 'endeavor' and 'try' (1); and G = 'strive' and 'try' (3).

Table 3 shows the top 30 verb collocates commonly associated with all four near-synonyms. However, based on the specified criteria, requiring a minimum co-occurrence of five times and an MI score of at least 3, it was observed that *attempt*, *strive*, and *try* had 30 or more verb collocates that met the conditions, with the exception of *endeavor*, which satisfied the conditions with only 26 verb collocates. When considering the overall picture, out of the total 116 verb collocates, only 16 verb collocates appeared with more than one synonym. Notably, the verb *persuade* stood alone as a collocate shared among *attempt*, *endeavor*, and *try*, while the remaining 15 collocates appeared with two near-synonyms, such as *resolve* with both *attempt* and *endeavor*, and *outdo* with both *strive* and *try*. Of particular interest was the near-synonym pair *endeavor* and *strive*, which shared five collocates. When examining the proportion of *strive* collocates among *endeavor*, it became evident that nearly 20% of *endeavor* collocates were shared with *strive*. This suggested that the four verbs lacked a strong degree of near-synonym, except for *endeavor* and *strive*, which exhibited a relatively stronger degree of near-synonymy compared to the verb collocates shared among other groups. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that there may be additional verb collocates commonly shared among the four near-synonymous verbs, but they are not included in Table 3 due to their MI scores being lower than 3 or their ranks exceeding 30.

In the subsequent phase, an examination of the semantic preference for the specified near-synonyms was carried out to classify the verb collocates based on

their shared meanings. The USAS program was employed to annotate the semantic aspects of English (see Table 4).

Table 4

Semantic Preference and Semantic Prosody of Verb Collocates of Attempt, Endeavor, Strive, and Try

	Semantic field	Near-synonym			
		Attempt (30)	**Endeavor (26)**	**Strive (30)**	**Try (30)**
1	CAUSE/CHANGE	(|) influence, impose, portray, manipulate, enforce	(+) improve, advance	(+) improve, motivate (|) embody, exert	(|) convince
2	CERTAINTY		(+) ascertain	(+) ensure	(+) reassure
3	CHEAT/THREAT				(-) trick, seduce, bribe, downplay, blackmail, extort
4	COMMUNICATION	(+) clarify (|) address, convey	(|) communicate	(|) impart	(|) decipher
5	CONQUEST		(+) overcome (-) eliminate	(+) overcome, conquer, outdo	(+) outdo, outrun
6	CRIME/LAW	(+) justify, reconcile (-) murder, rape, assassinate, rob		(+) reconcile	
7	DAMAGING/DESTROYING	(-) undermine, discredit, suppress			(-) discredit, intimidate, sabotage
8	EVALUATION			(+) excel, perfect, better (-) err	
9	FREEDOM	(-) escape, flee	(+) free		(-) escape, dissuade, rein
10	HELP/HINDRANCE	(+) rescue	(+) promote, foster, assist (-) obstruct	(+) educate, uphold, foster	(+) salvage, defuse,
11	IMITATION	(|) replicate		(|) emulate, imitate	(|) emulate

Semantic field		Near-synonym			
		Attempt (30)	Endeavor (26)	Strive (30)	Try (30)
12	MAINTENANCE		(+) preserve	(+) maintain, preserve	
13	MEASUREMENT	(|) quantify (-) minimize	(+) prolong (-) minimize	(+) maximize	
14	OPENING/HIDING		(+) demonstrate (-) conceal		(+) pry
15	PERSUASION	(+) persuade, negotiate	(+) convince, persuade		(+) persuade, coax, drum
16	POSSESSION		(|) capture, grasp	(|) regain	(|) recapture
17	SATISFACTION			(+) please, instill	(+) re-create, instill, appease
18	SUCCESS/FAILURE	(+) correct, solve, resolve	(+) establish, fulfill, accomplish, resolve	(+) attain, correct, fulfill, achieve	
19	THOUGHT, BELIEF			(+) adhere	(+) rationalize (|) figure
20	MISCELLANEOUS	(|) balance, integrate	(|) accommodate, shall		
	Total semantic fields	12	12	13	14
	Positive	9 (30.00%)	17 (65.38%)	23 (76.67%)	13 (43.33%)
	Neutral	11 (36.67%)	5 (19.23%)	6 (20.00%)	5 (16.67%)
	Negative	10 (33.33%)	4 (15.38%)	1 (3.33%)	12 (40.00%)

Table 4 shows that the four near-synonymous verbs shared both common and distinct characteristics. In examining the coverage of semantic fields by verb collocates, it became evident that *attempt*, *endeavor*, *strive*, and *try* covered 12, 12, 13, and 14 semantic fields, respectively. When exploring the distinctive aspects of semantic preference among the near-synonymous verbs, it was found that *try* differed from the other near-synonymous verbs as the only term with semantic preference in the CHEAT/THREAT domain, illustrated by examples such as "She put an ill wish under my bed and then **tried to seduce** my husband." Similarly, *strive* stood out because it was the only term with semantic preference in the evaluation domain, as seen in phrases like "Good man! You must always **strive to better** yourself." Additionally, the term *attempt* was noteworthy, as it frequently

collocated with verb collocates in the semantic field of CRIME/LAW, and did so more often than other near-synonyms, as clearly seen in examples such as "He **attempted to assassinate** his political enemy." Furthermore, when considering semantic preference in conjunction with collocation, an interesting observation emerged. Despite near-synonyms having shared semantic preferences, the verb collocates that appeared distinctly highlighted that each near-synonym had its own set of verb collocates. For example, in the semantic preference related to CERTAINTY, *endeavor* was commonly collocated with *ascertain*, *strive* often occurred with *ensure*, and *try* was usually used with *reassure*.

Subsequently, when the aspect of semantic prosody was considered, it was observed that *endeavor* and *strive* displayed a positive shading, as evidenced by the proportion of verb collocates with positive meanings, accounting for 17 words (65.38%) and 23 words (76.67%), respectively. Regarding the term *attempt*, it demonstrated diverse usage, with the proportion of verb collocates being jointly distributed across positive, neutral, and negative aspects in a closely aligned manner. On the other hand, the term *try* tended to emphasize usage with verb collocates indicating either positive or negative aspects more than its usage in a neutral context.

4.3 The Distinction between *Attempt*, *Endeavor*, *Strive*, and *Try* in Terms of Colligations

To address RQ 3, 400 concordance lines for each near-synonym from COCA, totally 1,600 lines, were investigated. Table 5 presents the grammatical patterns found in each near-synonym.

Table 5

Colligational Patterns of Attempt, Endeavor, Strive, and Try

Pattern	Example	Freq. (%)
Attempt		
1. *attempt* + **to** + infinitive	two armed men wearing ski masks attempted to rob him	323 (80.75)

Pattern	Example	Freq. (%)
2. *attempt* + **n.**	the soon-to-be-stricken countries attempted a fixed-rate policy	70 (17.5)
3. *attempt* + **in**	may be the most important mission ever attempted in this war	4 (1.00)
4. *attempt* + **for**	Bangladesh and Myanmar attempted for a second time to begin repatriating	3 (0.75)
Endeavor		
1. *endeavor* + **to** + **infinitive**	we should endeavor to rescue it .	390 (97.5)
2. *endeavor* + **n.**	Zay had endeavored a tone of cheerfulness	3 (0.75)
3. *endeavor* + **in**	they endeavor in opposition to the books to live more purely	3 (0.75)
4. *endeavor* + **for**	We will continue to endeavor for a further progress	2 (0.50)
5. *endeavor* + **gerund**	If you are going to endeavor ridiculing the ignorant misconceptions	1 (0.25)
¥ 6. *endeavor* + **with**	the girls endeavor with a selflessness that is surpassed only by	1 (0.25)
Strive		
1. *strive* + **to** + **infinitive**	The COGNET educational model strives to overcome the problems	265 (66.25)
2. *strive* + **for**	we must all strive for a better future for our country	123(30.75)
3. *strive* + **toward**	it is imperative that their leaders continue to strive toward this goal	6 (1.50)
4. *strive* + **against**	the representatives of one part will be continually striving against those of the other	3 (0.75)
5. *strive* + **with**	who strived with all the means available to " conquer their land .	3 (0.75)
Try		
1. *try* + **to** + **infinitive**	China will try to salvage its international economic relations	356 (89.00)
2. *try* + **n.**	If he could n't find the right words , he 'd try a different way	35 (8.75)
3. *try* + **gerund**	You could also try changing the admin password	9 (2.25)

Table 5 illustrates the colligational patterns of all four near-synonymous verbs. It was evident that all four verbs shared a distinct and prevalent pattern, namely "*node* + to + infinitive." Remarkably, *endeavor* exhibited a more varied range of patterns compared to other verbs, although this diversity was observed with very low frequency. The verb *strive* presented interesting patterns as well. Upon closer examination, it was the only verb with patterns that were commonly used, consisting of two frequently occurring patterns: "*strive* + to + infinitive" and "*strive* + for." Nevertheless, it is imperative to recognize that there might exist additional colligational patterns beyond those discernible in the arbitrary sampling of 400 concordance lines for each near-synonym employed in this scrutiny.

When considering all the aspects that could be used to demonstrate the differences among near-synonyms in the current study, it was found that there

were both similarities and differences. This served to emphasize and confirm the characteristics of near-synonymy of all four verbs. Despite the commonality in grammatical structures among these near-synonymous verbs, they imparted discrete meanings in diverse contexts.

5. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

In alignment with the six aspects used to analyze distinctions among the four near-synonymous verbs, the findings can be summarized using semantic features in the following five aspects:

Table 6

Semantic Features of Attempt, Endeavor, Strive, and Try

	attempt	endeavor	strive	try
Genre distribution	[+ACADEMIC]	[+ACADEMIC]	[+ACADEMIC] [+BLOG] [+WEB]	[+BLOG] [+WEB]
Degree of formality	[+FORMAL]	[+FORMAL]	[+FORMAL]	[-FORMAL]
Semantic preference	[+CRIME/LAW] [+CAUSE/CHANGE]	[+HELP/HINDRANCE]	[+EVALUATION]	[+CHEAT/ THREAT]
Semantic prosody	[+POSITIVE]	[+POSITIVE]	[+POSITIVE]	[+POSITIVE]
Colligation	[+TO INFINITIVE]	[+TO INFINITIVE]	[+TO INFINITIVE] [+FOR]	[+TO INFINITIVE]

Table 6 clearly illustrates that each near-synonymous verb possessed distinctive characteristics. The findings in the previous section indicated that, although the four near-synonymous verbs shared some traits, they also exhibited differing and unique features. This confirmed that the four verbs are not absolute synonyms but rather have near-synonymous properties, applicable only in specific contexts. Nevertheless, semantic features in the collocation aspect are not presented in Table 6 due to the abundance and diversity of the data, posing a challenge in selecting prominent features for inclusion as one of the semantic

features. These research findings are highly beneficial in helping L2 English users select appropriate and natural usage of these near-synonyms. For example, in an informal context, such as a conversation with close friends, the speaker might consider using the term *try*. In contrast, in a formal context where a positive tone is often required, the speaker might opt for *strive*, which is more suitable for the situation. Additionally, learners can benefit from COCA by utilizing Data-Driven Learning (DDL) methods (Laosrirattanachai & Ruangjaroon, 2021b). Through DDL, learners can observe the contexts in which the four near-synonyms appear using concordance lines and independently draw conclusions about their appropriate usage (Laosrirattanachai & Laosrirattanachai, 2021). In the field of vocabulary and near-synonym studies, there are still numerous near-synonyms that warrant further investigations and analyses. Such research will enhance the ability of proficient L2 English users to use the language more fluently, naturally, and in a native-like manner, ultimately promoting more effective communication.

For pedagogical purposes, teaching can be approached in two ways depending on the learning objectives. The first approach, suitable for teaching objectives that emphasize understanding the differences and the ability to use all four near-synonymous verbs in communication, allows instructors to design lessons emphasizing learners' comprehension. For instance, conducting a class where learners engage in bottom-up learning enables them to develop observational and analytical skills to discern the characteristics of the four near-synonymous verbs themselves. They utilize the COCA as a vital tool to aid learning under the guidance of the instructor. Once learners can observe, analyze, memorize, and understand, the instructor can then summarize and introduce additional necessary points. Alternatively, instructors may adopt a top-down learning approach, providing information about the differences among the four near-synonymous verbs and then encouraging learners to investigate using COCA. This helps learners better understand actual data and fosters confidence in linguistically proven information, providing clearer evidence than inference alone. For the second approach, it is suitable for teaching in the context of English for

Specific Purposes. According to Nation (2016), vocabulary teaching should not employ the lexical set approach because it may require learners to consume considerable effort and time in learning words of high-, mid-, and low-frequency simultaneously. Normally, low-frequency vocabulary consists of words that are not crucial or should be given the least priority. Therefore, understanding the differences among the four near-synonymous verbs allows instructors to selectively choose words that are appropriate for the context and objectives of a specific course. This enables instructors to teach only the near-synonymous verbs that are relevant to the course, thus saving time and resources.

In terms of diverse learner groups, the application of the findings from the current study to pedagogical implications for learners at different levels, including beginner, intermediate, and advanced L2 learners, can be utilized in various ways, as illustrated in the following examples. For beginner L2 learners, teaching should focus on the most frequently used term, *try*, given its versatility and prominence in informal contexts such as spoken language and blogs. Practical examples like "*try to solve the problem*" can help them grasp its everyday use. For intermediate learners, emphasis can shift towards the contextual usage of *attempt* and *endeavor*, particularly in mixed and formal contexts like academic writing or discussions. Activities can involve creating sentences using these words in more formal or goal-oriented scenarios, such as "*attempt to address the issue*" or "*endeavor to promote understanding*." Advanced learners can explore detailed distinctions, examining less common terms like "strive" and the specific collocations and semantic preferences associated with each word. For instance, they could analyze phrases like "*strive to achieve success*" and contrast them with collocations of *try*. Discussions about semantic prosody, such as the negative connotation in "*attempted to rob*," can deepen their awareness of subtleties in tone and intent.

6. Limitations and Future Research

It is crucial to acknowledge specific limitations within this study. Firstly, the data concerning the target verbs were sourced from COCA, primarily representing American English. Consequently, future investigations may consider exploring English variations beyond American English (Hunston, 2002), such as British English from BNC. Secondly, this study confined the consideration of verb collocates to those within the top 30 frequency lists. Expanding the scope to include additional verb collocates beyond these lists could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the collocational patterns associated with the examined near-synonyms (Phoocharoensil, 2020b).

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