

A CORPUS ANALYSIS OF PREPOSITIONAL COLLIGATIONS IN NIGERIAN LEGAL DISCOURSE

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ABSTRACT

English is recognised as a national lingua franca of Nigeria. It is adopted as a medium of instruction at almost all levels of the Nigerian educational system, in bureaucracy, the main mass media, national politics, science and technology, corporal companies, two legislative chambers, and the judiciary. The empirical studies using corpus approaches had shown that prepositions are essential linguistic features of legal phraseology. That area was under explored in the Nigerian context. As Nigeria is using English in legal affairs, the present study purports to investigate the representativeness and essentiality of prepositional colligations in Nigerian legal texts. Using a corpus methodology, a new corpus was compiled namely Nigerian Law Corpus (NLC) which contained 546313 word-tokens. The list of prepositional colligations generated from NLC were compared with two reference corpora - British National Corpus of Law (BNCL – 2.2 million word-tokens), and British National Corpus of General Written English (BNCW - 1 million word-tokens) explored using Lextutor (v.8.3). The analysis was aided with the AntConc (v.3.5.7), Lextutor (v.8.3), and Rayson's Log-likelihood Calculator. This paper reports the quantitative parts of a large study. The findings revealed that prepositional colligations were prevalent linguistic features in Nigerian legal discourse. The findings showed that prepositional colligations were under-represented in the NLC compared with BNCL (NLC observed frequency = 3619, relative frequency = 0.66, BNC observed frequency = 17923, relative frequency = 0.81, Over-/under-representation (-), Log likelihood = 134.82). On the other hand, prepositional colligations were over-represented in NLC compared with BNCW (NLC observed frequency = 3619, relative frequency = 0.66, BNCW = 3939, relative frequency = 0.39, Over-/under-representation (+), Log likelihood = 500.43). The study concludes that prepositional colligations were important linguistic elements that formed the phraseological profiles of Nigerian legal discourse due to their prevalent distributions and multifarious semantic and pragmatic functions.

Keywords: British National Corpus (BNC), corpus linguistics, colligation, prepositional colligations, legal phraseology, Nigerian law corpus (NLC)