

# Using Corpora to Teach English Amplifiers in ESL/EFL Classrooms

Trung Ngoc Dao

Tuyen Quang High School for the Gifted and Talented

## Abstract

English amplifiers can be a challenge for ESL and EFL learners, especially when the amplifiers have near-synonymous meanings. This paper analyzes the grammatical and functional aspects of three amplifiers, *absolutely*, *completely*, and *totally*, by utilizing the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and various mini-corpora of everyday language. Based on the analysis, I created materials for five hours of teaching to help ESL/EFL learners acquire these amplifiers in spoken contexts.

## Introduction

Using a corpus along with textbooks and/or dictionaries in an ESL/EFL classroom can, by and large, help language learners understand and use the target language effectively. A corpus is “a principled collection of naturally occurring texts, written or spoken, stored electronically for analytical purposes of actual language uses in real-life contexts” (Reppen, 2010; O’Keeffe, McCarthy, & Carter, 2007). Because corpus analysis enables the understanding of how language is used authentically, I will use corpus tools to investigate and analyze the functions of three amplifiers, *absolutely*, *completely*, and *totally*, in the spoken register since they are typically seen as difficult for ESL/EFL learners in terms of their semantic affinity. Based on the analysis, I will suggest corpus-based materials for five hours of instruction to help ESL/EFL teachers and students make full use of online corpora as well as their own mini-corpora to understand the usage of these three amplifiers. This understanding will hopefully assist them in using English in context.

## What Are Amplifiers?

Amplifiers are a common type of adverb, which convey the degree or the exact value of the word(s) they are associated with. In an early study, Stoffel (1901) studied the so-called intensive adverbs such as *purely*, *fully*, or *very*, and explained that intensives are used to express “the notion of completeness” or “absolute qualities, which in their strictest sense do not admit of degree of comparison” (p. 1). Much later, Quick, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik (1985) concluded, “amplifiers scale upwards from an assumed norm” (p. 590). Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, and Finegan (1999) worked out important lexical and grammar features of amplifiers based on corpus findings, and also agreed that amplifiers are to indicate degrees, and some other amplifiers even indicate “an endpoint on the scale” (pp. 554-55).

According to Quirk et al (1985), amplifiers are divided into two subclasses, “maximizers” such as *completely*, and “boosters” such as *very much*. Common maximizers, such as *absolutely*, *completely*, *entirely*, *extremely*, *fully*, *perfectly*, *totally*, or *utterly*, are those that can “denote the upper extreme of the scale” (p. 590). Meanwhile, boosters, such as *badly*, *bitterly*, *deeply*, *much*, *severely*, or *strongly*, “denote a high degree, a high point on the scale” (pp. 590-91). Both subsets are described as amplifiers or, traditionally, adverbs of degree. For the specific purpose and scope of this study, I will only focus on the three maximizers, *absolutely*, *completely*, and *totally* and their collocations.<sup>1</sup>



## Amplifiers and their Collocations

A number of authors have written on amplifiers' functions and other linguistic features such as semantic meanings, syntactic structures, stylistic uses, or lexical patterns. Quirk et al. (1985) categorized, and more importantly, analyzed the levels of modification that accompany *absolutely*, *completely*, *totally*, and other common amplifiers. They pointed out that although these three amplifiers are generally regarded as synonymous to some extent, there still exist different semantic nuances. These authors stressed that each intensifier indicates “a point on abstractly received intensity scale; and the point indicated may be relatively low or relatively high” (p. 589). Furthermore, Quirk et al. (1985) discussed co-occurrence restrictions in which amplifiers tend to co-occur predominantly with certain verbs or a semantic class of verbs. For instance, *greatly* can co-occur with verbs that have a favorable implication, and *utterly* with those having an unfavorable implication (p. 593). Thus, it seems that although two amplifiers may mean roughly the same, they do not always co-occur with all the items in the same class.

Another important point that Quirk et al. (1985) made is that amplifiers can only co-occur with gradable verbs (verbs referring to actions that can happen more or less completely, such as *enjoy* and *agree*). That is to say, if one amplifier co-occurs with a non-gradable verb, it is not considered an amplifier. Instead, it functions as a quantifier, durative, or frequentative (pp. 594-95). Finally, Quirk et al. also presented an analysis of amplifier positions at all grammatical levels. The position of an amplifier may occur in the middle or end position in a sentence or clause, which will then influence the meaning of that sentence or clause. An amplifier in the middle position tends to express a scaling upwards, but it tends to “denote the absolute upper extreme of the scale” when it is in the end position (p. 595). For example, “he *completely* denied it” would be interpreted as he *strongly/really* denied it. Thus, *completely* functions more like a booster rather than a maximizer. However, “he denied it *completely*” would be understood as “he denied it *in every respect*,” and *completely* in this sense functions truly as a maximizer (pp. 595-6).

In addition to Quirk et al.'s (1985) description, Biber et al. (1999) investigated the modifying effects of amplifiers upon adjectives. The results of their analyses are based on data from the corpus of American and British spoken and written English. These authors asserted that amplifiers are used to increase the intensity of an adjective. Biber et al. pointed out which amplifiers can modify what type of adjectives. The gradable adjectives show that something can have different degrees (such as *cold*) while the non-gradable adjectives do not have different degrees (such as *married*). Along the same lines as Quirk et al. (1985), Biber et al. (1999) also noted that *absolutely*, *completely*, and *totally* are those that indicate an endpoint on a scale of intensity, and they can be used with some, but not all, gradables as well as with some non-gradables (pp. 554-55). However, they also agreed that there are cases when “there is little semantic difference between degree adverbs” (p. 564). In other words, the adverbs can probably be interchangeable without any or very little change in meaning, as in these two examples: “*That's completely different*” and “*It is totally different*” (p. 564).

Another study of amplifiers comes from Paradis (1997). Using the London-Lund Corpus of Spoken English (LLC), Paradis investigated semantic variables between adjectives and their degree modifiers. Paradis also shared a similar viewpoint with Biber et al. (1999) in the sense that there are sometimes constraints to combining a degree modifier with gradable adjectives (p. 41). That is, some gradable adjectives can only go with a specific group of modifiers, and some other non-gradables (such as *dead* or *excellent*) can only be associated with *absolutely* or *perfectly*. Additionally, Partington (2004) reviewed and pointed out differences in use between *absolutely*, *completely*, *totally*, and others. *Absolutely* is reported to display a distinct semantic preference in collocating with adjectives that have a strong or superlative sense,

such as *delighted*, *splendid*, *enchanting*, *preposterous*, *intolerable*, and *appalling*, whereas *completely* tends to co-occur with so-called ‘absence’ words, such as *devoid*, *disappeared*, *lost*, *empty*, *hopeless*, *vanished*, etc. Interestingly, Partington also agreed that *totally* has a great deal in common with *utterly*, *entirely*, and *completely*, that is, these amplifiers share a large number of collocates (cited in McEnery et al., 2006, pp. 149-51). Thus, it is possible that these four amplifiers could probably be interchangeable in some cases and to certain extent.

Finally, Kennedy (2003) thoroughly examined the functions and uses of the 24 most common amplifiers, including both maximizers and boosters, and their collocations in the British National Corpus (BNC). In his study, Kennedy analyzed in detail the frequencies and collocations of those selected amplifiers that are most used to modify adjectives in English. The results of this study show that *absolutely*, with a frequency of 58, tends to be associated with adjectives that are used hyperbolically, such as *fabulous*, *marvelous*, or *fantastic*, and with those that have both positive (*wonderful*) and negative (*disgusting*) semantic associations. By contrast, the amplifier *completely*, with a frequency of 86, tends to occur with the abolition of things, such as *eliminated* and *eradicated*. And the amplifier *totally* (58) tends to associate mainly with negative words, such as *unsuited*, *lacking*, or *insane* (pp. 474-75).

In summary, the above studies point out important linguistic features, functions and uses of amplifiers, and their collocations in the English language. It can be concluded that amplifiers or intensifying adverbs are mainly used to express semantic features of adjectives, verbs, or adverbs. As pointed out by Quirk et al. (1985), the function of the amplifiers *absolutely*, *completely*, *totally*, and others is to scale modified words upward in order to impress, persuade, and/or express strong beliefs about something stated. Similarly, through observations and empirical research, Stoffel (1901), Paradis (1997), Biber et al. (1999), Kennedy (2003), and Parrington (2004) have specified the overlapping as well as distinctive collocations, functions, by these amplifiers.

To extend these investigations about *absolutely*, *completely*, and *totally*, I use the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and a collection of mini-corpora to further understand these amplifiers' functions in context and to mine contemporary examples for language teaching materials.

## Research Questions

According to Biber, Conrad, and Reppen (1998), there are six major types of research questions to be addressed when investigating lexicographic issues. These are: 1) what meanings are associated with a particular word; 2) what the frequency of a word is relative to other related words; 3) what non-linguistic association patterns (e.g., *to registers*, *historical periods*, or *dialects*) a particular word has; 4) what words commonly co-occur with a particular word, and the distribution of these “collocational” sequences across registers; 5) how the senses and uses of a word are distributed; and 6) how seemingly synonymous words are used and distributed in different ways (pp. 23-4). I will address these questions by looking step-by-step into the frequencies, collocations, contexts of use, and speech acts of the three amplifiers.

## Method

### Corpora

The first corpus I used is the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). COCA is a free online corpus created by Mark Davies at Brigham Young University in Utah. The corpus is composed of more than 450 million words in 189,431 texts of which 20 million words have been collected each year beginning in 1990, and last updated in 2012. This corpus covers and is evenly divided into five different genres: spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, and academic journals. Each genre includes more than 90 million words from different text sources. For the spoken register, there are around 95 million words

collected and transcribed from more than 150 different TV and radio programs, such as: *All Things Considered* (NPR), *PBS NewsHour*, *Good Morning America* (ABC), *Today Show* (NBC), *60 Minutes* (CBS), *Hannity and Colmes* (Fox), and the syndicated *The Jerry Springer Show* (COCA, 2012).

In addition to COCA, I used several mini-corpora (MC). These mini corpora include authentic texts of letters of complaint, letters of application, chart descriptions, fairy tales, event announcements, bad news deliveries, and everyday conversations.<sup>2</sup> The size of these mini corpora is 677,930 words.

### Analytical Procedure

In order to analyze texts of these mini-corpora, I used AntConc concordancer, developed by Laurence Anthony (2011). The basic functions of AntConc are to generate key words in context concordance lines and concordance distribution plots. It is additionally used to analyze word clusters or lexical bundles, n-grams, collocates, word frequencies, and keywords.

### Findings

#### Frequencies of absolutely, completely, and totally in COCA

As shown in Figure 1, *absolutely* occurs most often in the spoken register with a frequency of about 304.5 words per million (WPM) whereas it is much less used in other registers, especially in the academic genre where the frequency is just around 18.5 WPM.

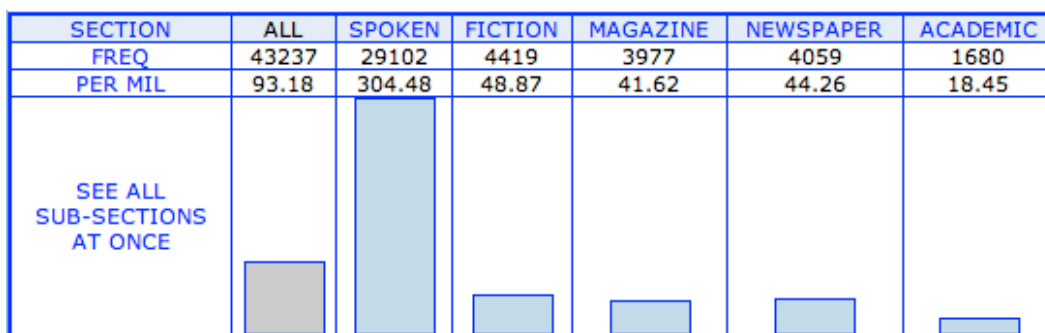


Figure 1. The frequency of *absolutely* in five different registers

In contrast, *completely* is frequently used across the spoken, fiction, and magazine genres. This amplifier also occurs more frequently in the academic genre (about 68 WPM) than *absolutely* (about 18.5 WPM) (Figure 2).

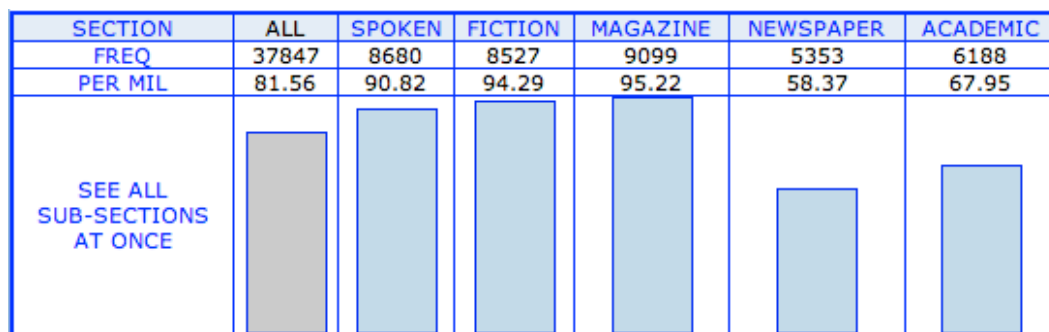


Figure 2. The frequency of *completely* in five different registers

Like *absolutely*, the amplifier *totally* has a higher frequency (about 81 WPM) in the spoken register than the other four genres, as seen in Figure 3. Unlike *absolutely*, however, it is also commonly used in the other registers of fiction (about 40 WPM), magazine (about 45 WPM), newspaper (about 37 WPM), and academic (about 26 WPM).

SECTION	ALL	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	ACADEMIC
FREQ	21381	7751	3645	4294	3354	2337
PER MIL	46.08	81.10	40.31	44.94	36.57	25.66

Figure 3. The frequency of *totally* in five different registers

Overall, the three amplifiers are most frequently used in the spoken register. This means that people prefer to use such amplifiers in various interactional situations. The amplifier *completely* is the only one among the three that is also used commonly in magazines and fiction. It is also used more commonly than the other two amplifiers in the academic register. It is important for learners of English to know how these amplifiers are actually used in different registers so that they can use the appropriate form in context.

### Collocations of *absolutely*, *completely*, and *totally*

For this analysis, I will look closely at adjectives and verbs, which have been studied by the researchers mentioned above. In addition, I will further investigate adverb collocates that are considered as frequent patterns to co-occur with the three adverbs of degree, or amplifiers, using Key Word in Context (KWIC) concordances in COCA, which is used to find and record every occurrence of a particular word or phrase.

The KWIC concordances and my mini-corpus revealed that *absolutely* has different collocates that go either before or after its node. Among those collocates, *absolutely* most frequently occurs with adjectives, verbs, and adverbs in addition to some other syntactic elements. First, data from the concordance lines show that adjectives are most commonly found to occur immediately to the right of this node. Specifically, there are two groups of adjectives that tend to occur with *absolutely*. They are 1) non-gradable adjectives such as *right*, *true*, *correct*, *wrong*, *essential*, *convinced*, *certain*, *impossible*, etc., and 2) adjectives that express a notion of extreme or the so-called absolute degree, such as *wonderful*, *gorgeous*, *ridiculous*, *outrageous*, *perfect*, *spectacular*, *marvelous*, *terrific*, *horrible*, etc. Here are some examples:

- 1) Getting Inkatha to participate in these elections was absolutely crucial for the future. (COCA)
- 2) But they will have an easier time, I believe, if they are absolutely honest about what it is that they are trying to accomplish and how long it will take. (COCA)
- 3) I think Kathleen is absolutely gorgeous and beautiful ... (COCA)
- 4) I think you -- you did an absolutely fantastic job. (COCA)
- 5) When I help homeless, doing it without a costume is absolutely wonderful but other people never seem to notice that anymore. (COCA)

- 6) However, it became absolutely necessary that he should pay his respects. (MC)
- 7) LETTERMAN: It was stored in the residue of the nicotine and other chemicals in your brain receptors? (MC)
- 8) ANDERSON: I think that's absolutely right. (MC)

In addition to adjectives, verbs are words that are also frequently found to stand right after this node. As seen from concordance lines, *absolutely* in these cases functions as an adverbial subjunct to amplify a predicate or part of a predicate. Specifically, verbs showing feelings or emotions (*love, hate, enjoy, adore, admire, fascinated, etc.*), agreements or disagreements (*agree, disagree, refuse, deserve, confirm, accept, etc.*), reactions (*refused, shocked, reject, deny, satisfy, resent, oppose, etc.*), or beliefs (*believe, support, convinced, determined, committed, etc.*) are among the collocates that are most used with *absolutely*. What is more important is that such types of verbs show levels of gradability as Quirk et al. (1985) pointed out in their description. Following are some examples:

- 9) Yeah. In fact, there's one that I absolutely wanted to buy... (COCA)
- 10) My grandchildren absolutely love bag bundle. (COCA)
- 11) I would say I absolutely believe in the notion of tax reform. (COCA)
- 12) I just want to say that I absolutely agree with your guest's last comments ... (COCA)
- 13) We are all absolutely shocked that there could be any connection with parts of West Yorkshire. (COCA)
- 14) When they saw this 10 foot long, four foot wide barnacle encrusted animal come to the surface, they were absolutely shocked. (COCA)
- 15) It seemed to me that her loveliness, which fairly dazzled me at first, had absolutely deprived her of the use of any of her other gifts or graces. (MC)

Also *absolutely* can also modify a number of adverbs that express absolute or extreme degrees or certain words that demand a level of gradability. Obviously, those adverbs are often found to occur after the node.

- 16) This came out absolutely perfectly. (COCA)
- 17) We absolutely totally believe that it's wrong. (COCA)
- 18) New Jersey Governor Chris Christie has absolutely unequivocally ruled out running for president this year. (COCA)
- 19) That is absolutely exactly what governors are trying to escape, the checks. (COCA)
- 20) I was -- I was struck by how absolutely wonderfully confident he looked. (COCA)
- 21) And I wanted to say absolutely clearly it needed to be changed. (COCA)

The KWIC results show that *completely* is associated mostly with words that have negative meanings. Specifically, this node collocates especially frequently with the three adjectives *different* (758), *wrong* (80), *new* (62), and many other adjectives that have negative affixes. For instance, many adjectives are preceded by a negative prefix (*unacceptable, untrue, unrelated, unaware, unexpected, inappropriate, irrelevant, ineffective, etc.*), or they are succeeded by a negative suffix such as (*clueless, helpless, meaningless, useless, etc.*).

- 22) There's a lot of affection there, but they're two completely different people. (COCA)

- 23) I knew that everything that was happening to us was completely wrong at a very, very young age. (COCA)
- 24) By the time the brigade got there, we were handling this completely new mission that had been assigned ... (COCA)
- 25) To me, laying off people in this economy is just completely unacceptable. (COCA)
- 26) And we were completely shocked that the word Auschwitz was completely meaningless to these people. (COCA)
- 27) Hong Kong and Mainland China, showed completely different trends. (MC)
- 28) This would imply that having a table for scholarships is completely unnecessary. (MC)

In addition, *completely* often occurs with gradable adjectives (*crazy, safe, dry, dependent, comfortable, confident, healthy, etc.*) as well as non-gradables (*dead, false, normal, honest, separate, opposite, sure, convinced, etc.*).

- 29) I mean the press has been going completely crazy for two months. (COCA)
- 30) I feel completely comfortable walking in there now every day. (COCA)
- 31) I think it's absolutely vital and wonderful, you know. (COCA)
- 32) His campaign was considered to be completely dead, and then he vaulted to New Hampshire, ... (COCA)
- 33) I think a criminal case has to be based on a completely false statement. (COCA)
- 34) Here the conversation seems to wander randomly to something completely unrelated. (MC)
- 35) FAWCETT: So if you lean up against it, you know, and then there's this and then there's this.  
LETTERMAN: And you're completely nude when you do this. (MC)

Regarding verb collocates, *completely* is especially associated with words showing abolition or those “denoting a failure to attain a desirable goal or state” (Greenbaum, 1970, p.76). Among the top 25 most frequent verbs—except for the collocate “*agree*,” which is considered more positive in meaning (130 tokens)—almost all of the others tend to occur with ideas of abolition or express negative meaning to a large extent. Those verbs include: *agree, change, destroy, gone, lost, disagree, covered, understand, ignored, eliminate, overwhelmed, shut, abandoned, made, blown, collapsed, eliminated, isolated, separate, devastated, cut, forgotten, and shocked*.

- 36) When Sandy finally went home early the next morning, she found it completely destroyed. (COCA)
- 37) It's a large concrete building, and the roof of the building had completely gone to the ground level. (COCA)
- 38) He just was completely and still is completely lost without her. (COCA)
- 39) But I'm still not so sure I completely understand why things are the way they are in Iraq. (COCA)
- 40) He acknowledged that insurgent violence will not be completely eliminated, and he declined to... (COCA)
- 41) Some of the people that know her now say, you know, they're completely shocked.
- 42) My childhood was completely taken away from me. (COCA)
- 43) He gave him such a tremendous thwack with his staff that the pony completely lost his temper and bolted. (MC)
- 44) “Come and help us,” said their king to Jesper, “or we shall be completely defeated.” (MC)

Unlike *absolutely*, which mostly occurs with multi-syllable adverbs, *completely* tends to go with particles that function as an adverb in almost all conversations. Such particles imply: 1) places, positions, directions (*out, over, down, around, through, straight, around, underwater, upside, upfront, across, aside, forward*); 2) time (*just, yet, still, then, ever, overnight, today*); and 3) non-gradable adverbs (*independently, continuously, synthetically, holistically, inaccurately, unreasonably*).

- 45) It's Khrushchev banging on the table with a shoe. It's completely out there. (COCA)
- 46) Where's the time when you just get off line and go completely down to another concourse and take another carrier? (COCA)
- 47) But, even now, as the boat is almost completely underwater, people are still huddled on its bow. (COCA)
- 48) The right forearm was broken completely across at several points, ... (COCA)
- 49) Managed care has turned the system's incentives completely upside down. (COCA)
- 50) I don't think it's even quite hit me completely yet. (COCA)
- 51) It was sort of one of those moments that stops you completely still. (COCA)
- 52) Nobody has even asked about it. I found it well after the trial completely independently. (COCA)
- 53) As he spoke he lifted his large wings and spread them completely over his head. (MC)

By looking at collocations of *totally* with respect to adjectives, verbs, and adverbs, it is clearly shown that this amplifier shares a lot of collocates in common compared with those of *completely*. Specifically, *totally* tends to associate with adjectives that imply negative meanings. Those adjectives are *wrong, false, unacceptable, unaware, unrelated, unexpected, unnecessary, irrelevant, unknown, impossible, or unrealistic*, etc. Obviously, those adjectives are formed by negative affixes. Furthermore, this amplifier often co-occurs with gradables (*new, free, safe, clear, or healthy*) and some other non-gradables showing extreme, absolute, or classifying meaning (*different, true, normal, empty, sure, etc.*).

- 54) So whatever else you heard, that was totally wrong. (COCA)
- 55) But my choice of words was totally unacceptable and insensitive, and I apologize for that. (COCA)
- 56) We will need to do something totally new with Haiti at the national level (COCA)
- 57) This is totally false, and he is lying. He was not kidnapped. (COCA)
- 58) Oh, my God, she says a number of times, totally different from the way that Sergio talks to the police. (COCA)
- 59) Here are things that, I think, in a liberal world, that sound totally normal, and outside of that world, I don't know that he appreciates how it sounds. (COCA)
- 60) Because their experience would be totally different. (MC)
- 61) You set up an on-line registration facility, but I found the facility totally unworkable. (MC)

Similarly, although there are certain verbs (*agree, understand, believe*) that collocate positively with *totally* in meaning, there are still more verbs with negative meaning to go after this node. They include: *disagree, destroy, changed, lost, committed, shocked, ignored, devastated, oppose, isolate, exonerated, confuse, reject*, and many others.



- 62) And I'm not making excuses, I totally disagree with it (COCA)
- 63) The truth is, the reason it's a year later, is that they totally lost control of the message (COCA)
- 64) Yes. I knew that he would be totally devastated that I could go behind his back to someone else. (COCA)
- 65) He put out a budget that totally ignored this issue. (COCA)
- 66) Yes, and I totally reject that analysis. (COCA)
- 67) I believe that Hillary Clinton was totally exonerated on Whitewater, Bill, and you know that. (COCA)
- 68) Yeah, I could totally do that. (MC)
- 69) She totally screwed up the show that they're working on now. (MC)

Finally, *totally* co-occurs with a number of adverbs, although there are many cases that have only one token used in that context. Accordingly, *totally* is most collocated with *out*, *just*, *up*, and *differently*, which have more than ten tokens each in this corpus.

- 70) And, obviously, Adam is obviously totally out there. (COCA)
- 71) If you'll read the UN resolutions, you'll see that he should be totally out, totally out of Kuwait, by January 15th. (COCA)
- 72) I wanted her to just totally just commit her heart to the Lord. (COCA)
- 73) I think in terms of a choice to replace him, that situation is totally up in the air (COCA)
- 74) I had heard one biologist describe it totally differently (COCA)
- 75) Is he? Totally out of the insurance business? (MC)

However, the amplifier *totally* can also be associated with two or more syllable adjectives ending in *-ly*, and expressing negative meaning.

- 76) We found a pin that you're supposed to insert was totally improperly put in so that it actually was a hazard. (COCA)
- 77) In the Ruby Ridge situation, no question, the FBI acted totally improperly. (COCA)
- 78) But, Joe, one thing, your remark - and I know that you didn't intend it totally seriously (COCA)
- 79) You keep continuing to argue totally incorrectly without any empirical foundation whatsoever that capital gains cuts are only for the rich. (COCA)
- 80) It has pissed off a large part of the world, if you want me to talk bluntly, and totally unnecessarily so. (COCA)
- 81) He could have taken a million dollars with him totally illegally. (COCA)

For such features, it is clear that there are cases where these amplifiers overlap with each other, especially between *completely* and *totally*. However, a collocate comparison between these amplifiers reveals that there are collocates that can only occur either with *absolutely*, *completely*, or *totally*, but they cannot go with the other two, and vice versa. Tables 1-3 display the collocates of adjectives, verbs, and adverbs that are solely associated with each of these three amplifiers in the top 50 most frequent word list in COCA.

Table 1

*Adjectives Collocating with absolutely, completely, and totally*

Amplifier	Adjectives
<i>Absolutely</i>	<i>essential, critical, wonderful, gorgeous, stunning, perfect, crucial, extraordinary, great, vital, terrific, terrible, unbelievable, spectacular, key, marvelous, delighted, lovely, important, magnificent, imperative, superb, appalling, awful, phenomenal, huge, outstanding, astonishing, disgraceful, enormous</i>
<i>Completely</i>	<i>separate*, unrelated*, dry, dark, phony, disappeared, naked*</i>
<i>Totally</i>	<i>separate*, unrelated*, supportive, naked*, cool, excited, inadequate</i>

Note. Words marked \* can be interchangeable between *completely* and *totally*, but not *absolutely*

Table 2

*Verbs Collocating with absolutely, completely, and totally*

Amplifier	Verbs
<i>Absolutely</i>	<i>loved, need, adored, adore, correct, say, require</i>
<i>Completely</i>	<i>Ignored*, isolated*, confused*, exonerated*, wiped*, protected*, eliminate*</i>
<i>Totally</i>	<i>Ignored*, isolated*, confused*, exonerated*, wiped*, protected*, eliminate*</i>

Note. Words marked \* can be interchangeable between *completely* and *totally*, but not *absolutely*

Table 3

*Adverbs Collocating with absolutely, completely, and totally*

Amplifier	Adverbs
<i>Absolutely</i>	<i>nowhere, totally, perfectly, never</i>
<i>Completely</i>	<i>differently*</i>
<i>Totally</i>	<i>differently*</i>

Note. Words marked \* can be interchangeable between *completely* and *totally*, but not *absolutely*

Through this investigation of collocations of *absolutely*, *completely*, and *totally*, it can probably be concluded that these amplifiers, though similar in meaning in some ways, are not always used interchangeably in all respects, especially with *absolutely* versus both *completely* and *totally*. For a better understanding between these three amplifiers, it is necessary to further analyze their contexts of use to see when and how these words are actually used in specific interactional situations.

**Contexts of use for absolutely, completely, and totally**

In analyzing the contexts of use of these three amplifiers, it is necessary to look into the different linguistic aspects in which *absolutely*, *completely*, and *totally* are used. In addition to the word collocations, it is also

concerned with 1) syntactic restrictions, and 2) semantic restrictions/prosody in which words tend to occur in particular environments (O’Keeffe et al., 2007, p. 14).

### Syntactic Restrictions

As can be seen from spoken data in KWIC displays, *absolutely*, *completely*, and *totally* occur mostly in the present, past, or future simple, and sometimes with present perfect tense. It is also noted that *absolutely*, *completely*, and *totally* are most used in affirmative sentences. They are sometimes associated with negative utterances but rarely with interrogative structures.

- 82) If this is about Barack Obama, they lose. They absolutely know they lose. (COCA)
- 83) No, I absolutely did not expect something like that. (COCA)
- 84) Three people are missing on that and they got completely snubbed by the entire thing. (COCA)
- 85) So, I think both campaigns will be completely well-financed (COCA)
- 86) My hands are totally doing the wrong thing, so it’s a learning experience. (COCA)
- 87) David puts his hand across his knee close to Farrah and it totally spaces her out. (MC)
- 88) “I absolutely trust you,” cried the King, “and I will do whatever you tell me.” (MC)

Another observation is that although these three amplifiers occur both in active and passive voices, it seems that people prefer to use the active voice in spoken language, and thus *absolutely*, *completely*, as well as *totally* are used more frequently in spoken English.

- 89) As we heard, he totally trashed the Arab League in his speech. (COCA)
- 90) He is totally committed to the cause. (COCA)
- 91) Well, this does drive people completely nuts. (COCA)
- 92) They can do it like that and they absolutely can ... (COCA)
- 93) I was just absolutely soaked. (MC)

Interestingly, *absolutely*, *completely*, or *totally* can each stand alone, by itself, to function as a response token within a conversation.

- 94) PETER-1ACTOR2: Thank you for standing up for us. We really appreciate that.
- 95) EDITH-1PATRON2: Absolutely. (COCA)
- 96) COOPER: ...you said, Why not give them a record contract.
- 97) Mr. COWELL: Completely. And we sold a million ... (COCA)
- 98) LUCY-BUFFETT: I’m better than hanging in.
- 99) HARRY-SMITH: Yeah?
- 100) LUCY-BUFFETT: Yeah, I am.
- 101) HARRY-SMITH: Optimistic?
- 102) LUCY-BUFFETT: Totally. Totally. (COCA)
- 103) LETTERMAN: Now, when you hear people talk about what might go wrong, they can paint a very dire picture.
- 104) ANDERSON: Oh, absolutely. (MC)
- 105) LETTERMAN: You mean the troubled loner chat room on the Internet?
- 106) GATES: Absolutely. (MC)

However, *absolutely* can also co-occur frequently in many cases with *yes*, as in (*Yes, absolutely.*); *yeah* (*Yeah, absolutely!*); *oh* (*Oh, absolutely!*); *not* (*Absolutely not.*); or *no* (*Absolutely no!*) as chunks functioning as response tokens. Meanwhile, *completely* or *totally*, though still in very few cases, cannot function in the same way.

Similarly, *absolutely* can be a pre-modifier of a pronoun or modifier, whereas *completely* or *totally* cannot function as such.

- 107) Actually, John, we know absolutely nothing because the family has asked for privacy and the U.S. ... (COCA)
- 108) It made absolutely no sense, and I truly thought this was just a horrible misunderstanding. (COCA)
- 109) I have absolutely no interest and no reason for doing anything other than just dismissing these stories and moving on. (COCA)
- 110) When there was absolutely nothing left at the bottom of the bag, the stranger proposed that they should have just one more game. (MC)
- 111) I know absolutely nothing about baseball. (MC)

#### Semantic Prosody

Again, as was investigated above, while *absolutely* can probably co-occur more with positive adjectives, verbs, and adverbs, the amplifiers *completely* and *totally* tend to modify items that have a negative meaning. Another important finding is that these three amplifiers are mostly applied to human reactions or behaviors to express extreme/absolute agreements or disagreements.

- 112) CHRIS: Other facilitators have made accusations like that?
- 113) DEBORAH-GORDON: Absolutely. (COCA)
- 114) CHRIS: At the time, Ravi was unaware that Tyler knew all about the webcam spying.
- 115) DHARUN: Yeah, he seemed completely normal to me. (COCA)
- 116) JAY-SCHADLER: He himself got addicted.
- 117) CHRISTINE-PELISEK: Oh, he was totally addicted. (COCA)

Overall, this corpus-based study of amplifiers in use has addressed the issues of how and when *absolutely*, *completely*, and *totally* are actually used to modify an adjective, verb, or adverb in English. More importantly, it lists and categorizes words, types of words, or semantic classes of words that tend to collocate most frequently with the three amplifiers. Based on this investigation, I would like to put the findings into practice by designing materials for five hours of teaching for a language class in an EFL setting.

### Teaching Amplifiers with Corpus Data

#### Teaching Approach

As was contended by O’Keeffe et al. (2007), data-driven learning (DDL) is considered an autonomous, more commutative, and inductive method (p. 24). Through DDL, learners can explore materials to examine meanings as well as functions and uses of words in their authentic contexts. Different from traditional learning, which depends much on the teacher presenting a language pattern, DDL offers the

learners opportunities to observe, infer, and hypothesize a phenomenon of the target language. By applying DDL into language teaching, the learners will experiment and achieve an awareness of the typical combinations in which word(s), or type(s) of word(s) are used. But most importantly, the learners are able to expose themselves to authentic texts that they are likely to come across as users of the target language. Influenced by DDL, the materials below aim to help EFL students acquire the target amplifiers so that they can become aware of their actual usage.

The materials will use data from COCA and the analysis above to help the students learn how to investigate and analyze a language phenomenon. In addition, I will introduce AntConc and data from the mini-corpora so that students can learn the target language by creating and using specialized mini-corpora.

### ***Target Teaching Context***

#### *Description of the English Program*

The materials created in this paper are for the students who are studying in a Gifted and Talented High School in Vietnam, where English is taught as a foreign language. The program is designed to develop students' English language skills of listening, speaking, writing, reading, and other linguistic aspects.

#### *Description of the students*

The students are between 17 and 18 years old. There are about 20 students in a class. The students' level of English varies between high intermediate and low advanced. Although the students have been learning English for 7 years, they still have certain limitations on using the target language, especially with speaking skills as well as vocabulary use.

### ***Teaching Materials***

The materials below are created to improve students' skills in using amplifying adverbs in spoken language. Particularly, the teaching materials focus on functions of *absolutely*, *completely*, and *totally* in spoken English. Each topic in this set of materials can be taught in about one class hour, although teachers may vary the time allocated depending on the needs of their students.

**absolutely**  
**completely**  
**totally**

Prepared by  
Trung Ngoc Dao

*using*  
The Corpus of Contemporary American English and Mini-Corpora

2014

## I. Frequency, Genre, Register, and Examples

1. Form groups of three.
2. Carry out searches with *absolutely*, *completely*, and *totally* with respect to their frequency, genre, register, and examples from KWICs. Follow these steps:
  - a. Search for frequency of the target word  
Log into COCA; search for *absolutely/completely/totally*  
DISPLAY: select CHART  
SEARCH STRING: at WORD(S) enter *absolutely/completely/totally*. One at a time  
SEARCH STRING: click SEARCH  
  
To see *absolutely/completely/totally* in context, click on the bar in the chart. The information on the right side of the main window will change to a table of KWICs with the target word from the register you selected.
  - b. Extract examples from KWICs  
Take out at least 5 different examples for the target word regarding its position (initial, middle, end), types of sentences (affirmative/negative/interrogative), collocates (words such as adjective/verb/adverb/noun/pronoun, etc., mostly occurring with the searched word), tenses (present/past/future), voice (active/passive), or modals, etc.
3. Language observations:
  - a. What is the entire frequency of the searched word in this corpus?
  - b. Which register has the highest use of *absolutely*, *completely*, or *totally*?
  - c. What can you conclude about these words from their frequency?
4. Make a comparison between *absolutely*, *completely*, and *totally* in spoken register. Follow the following steps:  
DISPLAY: select COMPARE  
SEARCH STRING: at WORD(S): enter *absolutely vs. completely, absolutely vs. totally, and completely vs. totally*  
COLLOCATES: select 1-1  
SECTIONS:  
    at 1 select SPOKEN  
    at 2 select SPOKEN  
SORTING AND LIMITS:  
    SORTING BY: select RELEVANCE  
SEARCH STRING: click SEARCH
5. Language observations:
  - a. What are the top 15 words that mostly occur with each of the compared words?
  - b. What collocate(s)/word(s) is/are not shared with between the two compared words?
6. Compare your language observations (parts 3 and 5 above) with the other groups.

## II. Investigation of Collocations with Adjectives

1. Form groups of three.
2. Study examples extracted from COCA in spoken register. Then, answer the questions.

### Examples extracted from COCA

#### **Absolutely**

- (1) Getting Inkatha to participate in these elections was absolutely crucial for the future.
- (2) But they will have an easier time, I believe, if they are absolutely honest about what it is that they are trying to accomplish and how long it will take.
- (3) I think Kathleen is absolutely gorgeous and beautiful...
- (4) I think you did an absolutely fantastic job.
- (5) When I help homeless, doing it without a costume is absolutely wonderful but other people never seem to notice that anymore.

#### **Completely**

- (1) There's a lot of affection there, but they're two completely different people.
- (2) I knew that everything that was happening to us was completely wrong at a very, very young age.
- (3) By the time the brigade got there, we were handling this completely new mission that had been assigned...
- (4) And to me, laying off people in this economy is just completely unacceptable.
- (5) And we were completely shocked that the word Auschwitz was completely meaningless to these people.

#### **Totally**

- (1) So whatever else you heard, that was totally wrong.
- (2) But my choice of words was totally unacceptable and insensitive, and I apologize for that.
- (3) Probably, we need to do something totally new with Haiti at the national level
- (4) This is totally false, and he is lying. He was not kidnapped.
- (5) It's a totally false idea because Islam never says you should kill people for your idea.

### Questions for discussion

- (1) What are positions of these three words (*absolutely, completely, totally*) in a sentence?
- (2) What are the most frequent words that tend to occur to the left of your searched word? List them out.
- (3) What are the most frequent words that tend to occur to the right of your searched word? List them out.
- (4) Give some possible explanations about those words that collocate/occur with the searched word. (*Positive/negative meaning, gradable/non-gradable, affixes, etc.*)
- (5) Do the word(s) modified by these amplifiers function as attributive or predicate? Give specific examples.
- (6) What tenses can probably be used in association with these words?
- (7) What voice is used in those situations? Is it active or passive?
- (8) Are there any more findings you could point out? What are they?



3. Do further investigation in COCA when necessary. Follow these steps below:
  - DISPLAY: select LIST
  - SEARCH STRING:
    - at WORD(S): enter *absolutely/ completely/ totally*. One word at a time
    - at POS LIST: choose adj.ALL
  - SECTIONS: at 1, select SPOKEN
  - at 2, select SPOKEN
  - SEARCH STRING: click SEARCH
4. Compare your results with the other groups.
5. Now, present your group's results on the board.

### III. Practice

Choose *absolutely*, *completely*, or *totally* to fill in the blanks. Some of the blanks may have more than one option.

1. Ms. BORBA: The proper punishment is taking away the cellphone.  
MORALES: But even more powerful than punishment, our expert tells us, is setting a good example.  
Ms. BORBA: Modeling is \_\_\_\_\_ critical.
2. CAVUTO: It's a whole separate issue. But, nonetheless, that could land him in the clink, and all of these other guys could get off scot-free.  
MITCHELL: Well, that's a matter that is of course \_\_\_\_\_ unrelated to our investigation.
3. MARK: Well, hello.  
CONAN: Hi, Mark.  
MARK: Great show, as always.  
CONAN: Thank you.  
MARK: I just want to make a comment. I don't believe that it's \_\_\_\_\_ dead.
4. MITCHELL: "\_\_\_\_\_", you like that word, don't you?  
Ms. SNOW: I keep saying that, yeah.  
MITCHELL: We'll be back. Stay with us. \_\_\_\_\_ cool.
5. MARK: Brian's childhood friend, Danielle, remembers the moment she heard.  
DETOMASO: I just went \_\_\_\_\_ blank. It was just so shocking.
6. Mr. GREGORY: And it is another case where the debate on the campaign trail may be \_\_\_\_\_ distinct from what the next president has to deal with in terms of a huge foreign policy crisis..  
Ms. BURNETT: Mm-hmm.
7. Mr. HOOKS: Let me speak directly to that. I went to the Army in World War II ...  
Mr. WILLIAMS: No, you're not speaking directly to that.  
Mr. HOOKS: ... and served in a \_\_\_\_\_ segregated army.
8. Mr. LEHRER: Now ... where did it all come from?  
Mr. AIKMAN: Primarily from his personal experience. I don't agree entirely with Steve Cohen's description of him as a \_\_\_\_\_ typical apparatchik.
9. Ms. Hunter: Is it inconceivable that the United States and the allied forces could lose?  
McBroom: To me, it is \_\_\_\_\_ inconceivable. I can't even begin to get that in my mind.
10. KING: Would you like to be if it's your client?  
MCDANIEL: Yes, I think you like to be \_\_\_\_\_ involved with them because they need to
11. BRADLEY: Every single one?  
Mr. RIEGLE: Every single one is a false alarm. Now that's \_\_\_\_\_ unbelievable. Our chemical detectors are set to go off at the slightest provocation.
12. CHRISTIANE: What did you think; she was the devil with horns?  
REPRESENTATIVE: Well, you know, no, but, I mean, you see a \_\_\_\_\_ different person, kind of like when we see you on TV.
13. COOPER: Now he said the document basically told people well, you know, if the low fat one doesn't work for you, go back to the other one  
TRAGER: Sure

- COOPER: I had read a different one. Am I \_\_\_\_\_ wrong here?  
TRAGER: No, no, I agree with you 100 percent.
14. KOTB: We did have a lot of fun on that ship.  
GIFFORD: All right, all right. Anyway, thanks to Royal Caribbean. They were \_\_\_\_\_ wonderful to us.
15. Ms. CORA: Well, you want to make sure when you're looking at figs that they're not too firm and they're not too mushy.  
RODRIGUEZ: ok.  
Ms. CORA: So they're ripe, you can tell these are \_\_\_\_\_ perfect.  
RODRIGUEZ: ok.
16. KOTB: I liked when Kevin Costner said God's probably wondering how he created something so perfect.  
GIFFORD: So...  
KOTB: Yeah, I thought that was beautiful.  
GIFFORD: It was \_\_\_\_\_ great.
17. PALCA: ... okay. Go ahead.  
Dr. MILLER: I think Martin makes an \_\_\_\_\_ terrific point. I mean, the first book that I wrote is called "Finding Darwin's God," ...
18. THOMAS: The other part is the press created a phony story last week about what Bush knew and when he knew it.  
KURTZ Phony? \_\_\_\_\_ phony?  
THOMAS: Ninety percent phony story.
19. KING: Reverend Graham, would you comment on the killing of that doctor in Massachusetts, who had conducted abortions?  
REVEREND-BILLY-GRA: I think it was \_\_\_\_\_ terrible and hideous,
20. HOWARD: I didn't know who Steve Beard was. The unusual thing in this case is that he told dispatch that his guts were hanging out.  
VAN-SANT: It was close to 3:00 in the morning when Deputy Alan Howard arrived on the scene. The Beard estate was \_\_\_\_\_ dark.

## IV. Investigation of Collocations with Verbs

1. Form groups of three.
2. Study the following steps to search with AntConc.

### Search for frequency

- Run AntConc program (do on Mac)
- Upload data into AntConc. (Mini-corpora will be provided)  
File/ Open File(s)/ Users/ folder contained files/ command + shift to choose files. Files will be seen on “Corpus Files” column on the left.
- When the files are already uploaded,
- Click **Word List** on the menu bar
- Hit **Start** to see the entire word list of the corpus.
- Type the target word in the box to see its frequency  , then hit **Start**

### Search for collocates

- Select **Collocates** on the menu bar
- At the bottom, choose number of word(s) to the left/right
- Then, type the target word in  , and hit **Start** .  
The result will be displayed.
- Click on the target word to see how the word is used in the concordance lines.  
Examples look like this:

The screenshot shows the AntConc 3.2.4m (Macintosh OS X) 2011 interface. The 'Collocates' tab is active, displaying search results for the word 'service'. The search term is 'service', and the concordance hits are 54. The search window size is set to 50. The concordance lines show the word 'service' in various contexts, such as 'having with the [name of product or service performed] that I [bought, leased, ...]', 'I am dissatisfied with your [service or product] because [describe p...]', and 'I expected a much higher level of service from your company, and I am qui...'. The interface also shows a list of corpus files on the left and a menu bar at the top.

- Save the result: File/ Save output to text file/ rename the file/ and hit 'save'.
3. Import text data into AntConc.
  4. Investigate verb collocations of *absolutely*, *completely*, and *totally* and answer the questions:
    - a. What is the total number of word tokens in this mini-corpus?
    - b. What is the frequency of *absolutely*?
    - c. What is the frequency of *completely*?
    - d. What is the frequency of *totally*?
    - e. How many concordance hits of each of the target words are in this corpus?
    - f. *Focus on verb collocations*; what are verbs that most collocate with these three target words? List them out.
    - g. What type(s) of verbs (*transitive/intransitive; positive/negative; gradable/non-gradable*) are they?
    - h. What type of sentences (*affirmative/negative/interrogative*) are these amplifiers used in? Give examples.
    - i. What tenses do these words most occur with? Give examples.
    - j. What voice (active/passive) is more frequent in association with these words? Give examples.
    - k. What are your other findings from this investigation? Give examples if any.
  5. Present the group's results to the class.

## V. Practice

Choose *absolutely*, *completely*, or *totally* to fill in the blanks. Some of the blanks may have more than one option

1. AQUILLA: He always put her first in his life.  
BILL: He truly, \_\_\_\_\_ loved her to death.
2. KURIANSKY: I would agree with you as a psychologist that these kids \_\_\_\_\_ need some psychological help  
MITCHELL: All right. Let me ask you about Debbie Rowe, another gem.
3. Mr. WILL: I think it defends the right to life.
4. Mr. BRINKLEY: Of course, after the convention, it's \_\_\_\_\_ ignored anyway.
5. Ms-COLLINS: The general public \_\_\_\_\_ confused me with the character I played in "Dynasty", the Alexis character.
6. HOCKENBERRY: Who like to do it in elevators?
7. CHARLES: Christine, you're shaking your head.
8. BRENNAN: Right. Well, again, it -- it's just not true. I mean, and I love college football, I \_\_\_\_\_ adore it.
9. Mr. RAYMOND: Those two approaches, more than anything else, will greatly reduce the potential for picking someone out because of their race.
10. AKERS: But Kelly says he can't \_\_\_\_\_ guarantee it won't happen again.
11. Dr. RYCHIK: It's a little odd that the leakage \_\_\_\_\_ disappeared, and I can't explain it.
12. PHILLIPS: But Alex's family feels no need to look for explanations.
13. Dr. GAILIUNAS: Everything was just \_\_\_\_\_ thrown in every direction in the house.
14. MORIARTY: And her films?
15. Dr. GAILIUNAS: A lot of her films were ruined.
16. Ms. RANCIC:... she's not going to show up in Halle Berry's dress.
17. VIEIRA: Right.
18. Mr. RUBENSTEIN: And I \_\_\_\_\_ agree.
19. MR. GREGORY: You didn't even flinch. You just \_\_\_\_\_ think that they should be the New Jersey Giants.
20. GOV-CHRISTIE: Of course they are.

## Summary and Conclusion

This paper takes a corpus-based approach to language analysis and language teaching. First, I showed how teacher can carry out their own corpus analysis by presenting my analysis of three amplifiers, *absolutely*, *completely*, and *totally* in the spoken register. I described the frequencies, collocations, contexts of use, and functions of these amplifiers in typical situations. The results of this research analysis show that although there are certain similarities in use between these amplifiers, it is not possible for them to be interchangeable in all respects. Based on the findings, I then designed teaching materials that employ actual data in the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and the corpus tool Antconc to analyze mini-corpora in order for language students to successfully practice and apply these amplifiers in spoken English. In conclusion, I believe that teaching English by using corpora in the classrooms would be of great benefit for both teachers and learners. Corpora and corpus tools are particularly useful to teachers and students in EFL contexts, as they enable observations and practice with actual language in use.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Collocation is “the co-occurrence of two single words” (Partington, 1998, p. 16) and often signals a semantic association between words in their environment.

<sup>2</sup> I thank the following graduate students at Hawaii Pacific University (2013) for providing these mini-corpora: Linh Tran, Nga Loc, Phuong Tran, Thao Tran (Helen), Linh (Lindey) Huynh, Nguyet Dinh, Aya Terawa, Sean Sakata, Guri Sagvolden Lubomira Kanderova, Hanne Hakonsen, Janette Catahan, Kimberly Coleman, Linda Karlsson, and Cirenwangdui.

## References

- Anthony, L. (2011). AntCont (version 3.2.4m) [software]. Retrieved from [http://www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/antconc\\_index.html](http://www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/antconc_index.html)
- Biber, D., Conrad, S., & Reppen, R. (1998). *Corpus linguistics: Investigating language structure and use*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Biber, D., Johansson, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S., & Finegan, E. (1999). *Longman grammar of spoken and written English*. London, UK: Longman Group Limited.
- Davis, M. (2012). *Corpus of contemporary American English*. Retrieved April 10, 2013 from <http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>
- Greenbaum, S. (1970). *Verb-intensifier collocations in English: An experimental approach*. Janua Linguarum, Series Minor 86. The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton.
- Kennedy, G. (2003). Amplifier collocations in the British National Corpus: Implications for English language teaching. *TESOL Quarterly* 37(3): 467-487.
- O’Keeffe, A., McCarthy, M., & Carter, R. (2007). *From corpus to classroom: Language use and language learning*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Paradis, C. (1997). *Degree modifiers of adjectives in spoken British English*. Lund, Sweden: Lund University Press.
- Partington, A. (1998). *Patterns and meanings: Using corpora for English language research and teaching*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Partington, A. (2004). “Utterly content in each other’s company: Semantic prosody and semantic preference’. In *Corpus-based language studies: An advanced resource book*, pp. 148-152. New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Quirk, R., Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. (1985). *A comprehensive grammar of the English language*. London, UK: Longman Group Limited.
- Reppen, R., (2010). *Using corpora in the language classroom*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Stoffel, C. (1901). *Intensives and down-toners: A study in English adverbs*. Heidelberg, Germany: Carl Winter’s Universitätsbuchhandlung.

## Appendix: Answer keys

### I.

#### 1. Frequencies of absolutely, completely, or totally in different registers (sample)

SECTION FREQ	ALL	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWS- PAPER	ACADEMIC
<b>Absolutely</b>	43237	29102	4419	3977	4059	1680
<b>Completely</b>	37847	8527	8680	9099	5353	6188
<b>Totally</b>	21381	7751	3645	4294	3354	2337

#### 2. Examples from KWICs

1. I think Kathleen is absolutely gorgeous and beautiful... (COCA)
2. I think you -- you did an absolutely fantastic job. (COCA)
3. He acknowledged that insurgent violence will not be completely eliminated, and he declined to... (COCA)
4. My childhood was completely taken away from me. (COCA)
5. He is totally committed to the cause. (COCA)
6. Well, this does drive people completely nuts. (COCA)
7. They can do it like that and they absolutely can (COCA)
8. So whatever else you heard, that was totally wrong. (COCA)
9. This came out absolutely perfectly. (COCA)
10. We absolutely totally believe that it's wrong. (COCA)

#### 3. Comparison between searched words in spoken register

- What are top 15 words that mostly occur with each of the compared words?
- What collocate(s)/word(s) are not shared with between the two compared words?

Amplifier	Top 15 most frequent collocates
<b>Absolutely</b>	<i>Nothing, no, essential, critical, wonderful, gorgeous, none, necessary, beautiful, stunning, perfect, love, right, and crucial</i>
<b>Completely</b>	<i>Different, ignored, eliminate, unrelated, collapsed, shut, separate, eliminated, isolated, over, covered, forgotten, almost, and change</i>
<b>Totally</b>	<i>Different, unrelated, ignored, separate, isolated, unexpected, exonerated, supportive, cool, naked, confused, excited, eliminate, inadequate, and wiped</i>



**II.**

- 1) What are positions of these three words (*absolutely, completely, totally*) in a sentence?  
 As a modifier, these words mostly occur in the middle and end positions.
- 2) What are the most frequent word(s)/type(s) of words tend to occur to the left of your searched word? List them out.  
 Words such as Be-verb (is, are, was), indefinite articles (*a, an*), demonstrative adjective (*this, that*), pronoun (*something*), or adverb (*just*)
- 3) What are the most frequent word(s)/type(s) of words tend to occur to the right of your searched word? List them out.  
 Adjectives (*crucial, honest, gorgeous, fantastic, different, wrong, new, unacceptable, meaningless, false, etc.*)
- 4) Give explanations about the words that collocate with the searched words. (*Positive/negative meaning, gradable/non-gradable, affixes, etc.*)
  - Explain conceptions of gradable and non-gradable adjectives, and give some examples to students so that they are able to identify and categorize the adjectives they found.
  - Based on collocates, it can be explained that *absolutely* tends to occur with:
    - Adjectives which have a positive meaning (such as *wonderful, gorgeous, ridiculous, outrageous ...*). However, it can still occur with certain negative adjectives like (*terrible, wrong, false*)
    - Adjectives expressing absolute or extreme meaning (*perfect, spectacular*), and those that are considered as non-gradables (*marvelous, or terrific*).
  - By contrast, *completely* and *totally* are interchangeable in many cases. However, there are still differences between these words.
    - *Completely* tends to occur with adjectives that are formed by negative affixes (such as *unacceptable, untrue, unexpected, meaningless, useless...*). It can also occur with certain gradable (*different, safe...*) and non-gradable adjectives (*dead, false...*).
    - *Totally* occurs with negative adjectives.
- 5) Do the word(s) modified by these amplifiers function as attributive or predicate? Give specific examples?  
 All these amplifiers can modify word(s) which function as attributive or predicate in a sentence (explain attributive and predicate if necessary). Show examples.
- 6) What tenses can probably be used in association with these words?  
*Absolutely, completely, and totally* occur mostly in present tense, past simple, future simple, and sometimes with present perfect tense. Show examples.
- 7) What voice is used in those situations? Is it active or passive?  
*Absolutely, completely, and totally* can be used in both active and passive voice. Show examples.

**III.**

1. absolutely	2. completely	3. completely	4. totally	5. completely
6. completely	7. completely	8. completely/ absolutely	9. completely	10. totally/ absolutely

11. totally/ absolutely	12. totally/ completely	13. absolutely/ totally/completely	14. absolutely	15. absolutely
16. absolutely	17. absolutely	18. completely	19. absolutely	20. completely

**IV.**

Students show their findings in the class.

**V.**

- |                                    |                         |                        |                        |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. absolutely                      | 2. absolutely           | 3. totally/ completely | 4. totally/ completely |
| 5. absolutely                      | 6. absolutely           | 7. completely          | 8. completely          |
| 9. totally/ completely/ absolutely | 10. totally/ absolutely |                        |                        |

---

Trung Ngoc Dao (MA TESOL, Hawaii Pacific University) is an English teacher at Tuyen Quang High School for the Gifted and Talented, Tuyen Quang City, Vietnam. His research interests include methodologies, computer-assisted language learning, and corpus linguistics.

Email: [trungdao.hpu.edu@gmail.com](mailto:trungdao.hpu.edu@gmail.com)