A Semantic Analysis of *Collect, Gather, Put Together, Assemble, Group, and Amass*

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Abstract: The field of verb studies suffers from a shortage of research studies and this paper attempts to add some weight to these kinds of studies. Unfortunately, most dictionaries as well as ESL/EFL textbooks do not provide a clear picture of the semantic usage of words. This paper investigates the semantic level of the following verbs: *collect*, *gather*, *put together*, and *assemble*. While at first glance these words appear to have very similar meanings, and indeed can appear synonymous with one another, each encompasses a different gradient of meaning. The paper describes the semantic usage and different sense of connotation that belong to these words. Additionally, the aim of this paper would be to determine which of the aforementioned verbs American speakers often use in their casual speech as well as in other genres. The framework of the semantic description is laid through the comparison of the definitions of these words from several major dictionaries. Taking into consideration that this probably is not something one can definitely determine unless a large corpus of English is used, the framework of the semantic description is refined through the use of the online corpus collection: Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). Many samples of each word have been collected as well as the collocations and contexts wherein they are found.

Keywords: Semantic, Analysis, Corpus, COCA

1. Introduction

In any language, there are few true synonyms. Even if some words are synonymous, they may show differences in sentence usage. They share what is called the generic component, but a synonym might have additional positive or negative overtones. They might be formal or less formal and so on (Larsen, 1984). It seems that the lexical entries in conventional dictionaries are listed in some arbitrary way, although lexical senses, which have a common meaning, are introduced as the first sense. Conventional dictionaries adopt the practice of giving synonyms, without taking into consideration that these words are not somehow identical (David, 2009). These lexemes are amalgamated without drawing a sharp distinction among synonymous words. This is what makes us regard these senses as unsatisfactory analysis. If ESL/EFL learners are not able to differentiate among these words and are not aware of the appropriate context, this casts doubt on the usefulness of the dictionaries with respect of synonymy. As a matter of fact, synonymy constitutes a problem for ESL/EFL learners. To know the meaning of words, we need to contrast the words that have similar meanings with others.

Despite the long standing interest in lexical semantics, and the call for the need for looking at similarities and differences among lexical items, there are few studies conducted on synonyms. Ahren and Huang

(2002) looked at the synonymous words: *put* and *set*. To obtain data, they examined two million words in the British National Corpus. They found they are interchangeable in most contexts. However, *put* implies a location that is like a "contained space" (e.g., they put us back into the van). The other word *set* suggests the theme that something is placed alongside (not inside something). For example, "It was set in a trim garden".

In a similar vein and a more recent study, Shen (2010) examined a pair of the synonyms: *glad* and *happy*. She looked at two large corpora: Chinese Learner English Corpus and Freiburg-LOB Corpus of British English. She found that *glad* and *happy* are often used to express a positive emotional mood. The adjective *glad* is usually used with certain modifiers (e.g. always, quite, clearly, just) whereas *happy* is used with other modifiers (e.g. most, extremely, blissfully). Moreover, *happy* is used before a noun (e.g. happy family, happy endings, and happy marriage) while *glad* is not.

This paper examines the similarities and differences between six closely related lexical items (*collect, gather, assemble, put together, group and compile*) through the use of COCA (a corpus of over 400 million words), as well as the native speakers' intuition. Some of these words show up in different parts of speech, but the focus of this paper is on their verbal usages, as well as the kinds of subjects and objects that accompany them. The distribution and the frequency of these words are reviewed in different registers: spoken, fiction, magazine, newspaper, and academic.

2. Syntactic Properties

A brief description of the syntactic properties of these lexemes is helpful for understanding them, since most words exhibit a correlation between semantic and syntactic properties. But we cannot say that synonyms are syntactically equivalent. Some of them are transitive and some are intransitive.
Collect (VN), (V) (Oxford American Writer's Thesaurus; Marriam-webster dictionary)

This verb can be both transitive and intransitive.
He is collecting data for his project (transitive).
He collected over $2000 for the appeal (intransitive).
However, it is more common that collect appears in transitive construction. It is rare that collect is used intransitively.
Gather (VN), (V)
The children gathered around their father (intransitive)
He is gathering red flowers (transitive).
Assemble (VN), (V)
The students were asked to assemble in the lobby (intransitive).
This table is easy to assemble its parts (transitive).
Amass (VN)
He amassed a fortune from silver mining (transitive).
Put together (VN)
He was putting together a model (transitive)
Group (V) (VN)
The books were grouped by subject (intransitive).

They grouped the books by subject (transitive).

All of these verbs are used in the past participle and past tense more than any other tense/aspect as COCA shows their distributions. For instance, collect appeared with the past tense and the past participle 13,144 times (out of 30,430), the simple present tense collect 9,338 times, and the simple present tense with the inflection –s 1,760 times.

3. Semantic Analysis

ESL/EFL learners often use closely related words inaccurately. They tend to use words interchangeably in some contexts (Spooner, 2007). Some of these contexts might be appropriate but others are inappropriate. It is presumed that the reason for making this kind of mistake is that all ESL dictionaries, as well as monolingual dictionaries, overlook such a set of words. Dictionaries provide similar meanings, making these words seem synonymous, which can lead to confusion on the part of learners. Although these dictionaries show different collocations and usages of closely related words, they are not helpful for sorting them out.

To begin research into the connotations of the six words, it was first necessary to look them up in dictionaries. The following table shows the meanings of the target words in three popular dictionaries: The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDCE), Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English (OALD), and Random House Dictionary (RHD). Here, the focus is on the verbs.

Table 1: Senses of the target verbs

LCDE	OALD	RHD
Collect "to get things of the same type from different places and bring them together"	Collect "To bring things together from different people or places; gather"	Collect " to gather together; assemble"
Gather "to come together and form a group, or to make people do this; to get things from different places and put them together in one place"	Gather " bring together; collect"	Gather "to bring together or assemble from various places, sources, or people; collect gradually"
Assemble " to assemble a large number of people or things"	Assemble " to come together as a group; to fit together all the separate parts of something"	Assemble "to bring together or gather into one place, company, body, or whole; to put together the parts of"
Put together " to join parts to each other; joins things together"	Put together "to make something by fitting or collecting parts together"	Put together " to create; construct"
Group "to come together and form a group; to divide people or things into groups"	Group " divide people or things into groups"	Group " to place or arrange in group"

Amass "collect money, knowledge, information gradually"	Amass " to collect something especially in large quantities"	Amass "To gather for oneself, as for one's pleasure or profit; To accumulate or assemble a large quantity of"

The senses (or words) contained in the table share the central meaning "to bring people or things together," but the definitions do not necessarily help learners develop an idea of how to use the words properly in the context of conversation. However, dictionaries still maintain the habit of using the words to define one another. As seen above, some words are used to define one another. To sort these senses, COCA will be exploited. The semantic analysis will also be refined through the native speakers' point of view.

All six words occur in all of the registers of the corpus that are examined as illustrated in Table 2 and Figure 1. The following table and chart display the number of occurrences of the target verbs in different genres. Both verbs *collect* (35%) and *group* (58%) seem to appear more in academic texts than other fields. A cursory examination of the contexts in which the verb *collect* appears gives the sense that most writers prefer to use this verb. Most of the sentences used are referring to collecting data, information, questionnaires, taxes, donations, signatures, samples, payment, money, coins, etc. This indicates that *collect* is more neutral than other verbs, especially with these collocates. However, it is used less often in other fields, and least often in the spoken register. The word *group* or *grouping* with the sense of "classification" is used frequently in political, economic, and educational texts. This verb accounts for an unusually high frequency of 58% of the running words in most genres, which is most likely attributed to the fact that it is commonly used in academic texts.

It is not surprising that *gather* occurs more often in fiction, as it has fictional elements: it is greatly used in direct speech. The tendency of the appearance of assemble in magazines might be attributed to the sense of this verb. Upon reviewing the context in which the verb is utilized, it can be determined that this verb tends to be used when referring to the act of piecing together many parts or pieces of something (i.e., equipment, cars, solar cells, tiny devices, etc). Magazines typically dedicate some sections to instruction on how to assemble objects, which justifies the high percentage of usage in this register, as compared to other registers. The verb *amass* has the most instances of magazine and newspaper usage. It is expected that data analysis of the verb in context would reveal the preference of this verb in these two registers. The register that comes next is academic, which was gain, not very surprising as the verb often has formal elements. The verb *put together* has the greatest presence in spoken followed by magazine and newspaper and the least presence in academic register.

Table 2: Registers

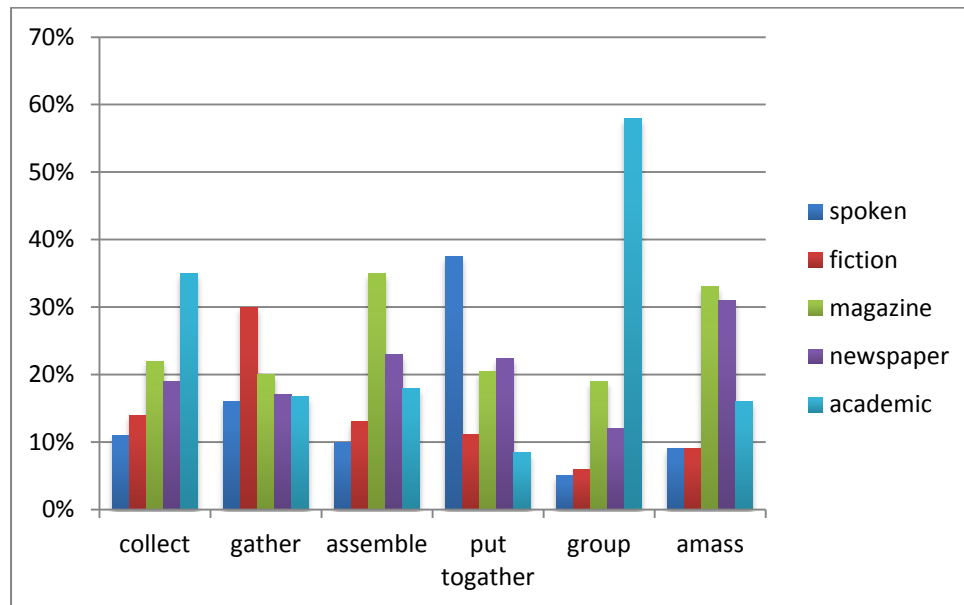|	Spoken	fiction	Magazine	Newspaper	Academic
Collect	11%	14%	22%	19%	35%
Gather	16%	30%	20%	17%	16.7%
Assemble	10%	13%	35%	23%	18%
Put together	38%	11.2	20.4	22.4	8.5
Group	5%	6%	19%	12%	58%
Amass	9%	9%	33%	31%	16%

Figure 1: Number of occurrences of the target verbs in different genres

Finally, there are some things of note in the number of usages of these words across time. The frequency of these verbs throughout the two decades (1990-2010) has not been greatly affected. There is a slight increase in usage of these verbs over the last ten years. For instance, from 1990 - 1994, *group* was used at a rate of 22% and from 2005 – 2010 at a rate of 27%.

4. Data Sample Examination
4.1 *collect*

The selection of the data sample was randomized. The rationale behind selecting the data randomly is to avoid researcher bias, and to allow for a clearer picture of the differences and similarities among the target verbs. The data sample shows that out of 7304 words, the verb *collect* collocates with data (13%), information (6%), money (3%), samples (2%), taxes (2%), evidence (1.4), payments (1%), signatures (1%) and garbage (1%) (See table 2). Since *collect* is used more in the past tense, it is typically used in conjunction with the prepositions "from" (19%) and "by" (14%). This explains the high frequency of occurrences of these prepositions.

Table 3: Collocations of the verb *collect*

Collocation	Number of occurrences
From	1361(19%)
By	1033 (14%)
Data	937 (13%)
Information	449 (6%)
Money	232 (3%)
Samples	146 (2%)
Taxes	141(2%)
Evidence	108 (1.4%)
Payments	26 (1%)
Signatures	58 (15%)
Garbage	24 (1%)
Other collocates	2789 (22.6 %)
Total number of collocates	7304

Along the following line, examples will be reviewed in more depth.

1. That examined in detail the failings of several major N.S.A. programs, costing billions of dollars, using computers to <u>collect</u> and sort electronic intelligence (News).

2. Under a 1992 Supreme Court decision, only retailers with a nexus in a state can be compelled to <u>collect</u> sales tax from its residents (News).

3. Yes, taxes that the federal government would have to <u>collect</u> is $65 billion a year, it's just blue sky and mirrors (PBS_Newshour).

4. About 11.4 million out-of-work people now <u>collect</u> unemployment compensation, at a cost of $10 billion a month. Half of them have been receiving payments for more than six months, the usual insurance limit (Washpost).

5. But under multiple extensions enacted by the federal government in response to the downturn, workers can <u>collect</u> the payments for as long as 99 weeks in states with the highest unemployment rates (Washpost).

While *collect* is exploited in other usages, the above examples show the preference of using "money" with this verb (but not *gather or *assemble). In all the examples collect is used with dollars, sales taxes, unemployment compensation, and payments. Interestingly, the verb "get" can be a substituted for collect in examples 4 and 5, but it does not work as well for example 6:

6. So I take the money from Dr. Coolidge and he makes his measurements, but in case he <u>collects</u> the data that makes them stop, I would do Ulis for free (Richard Foss).

Another note about collect is that it expresses the idea of "purposefulness" as well as "habituality". When people collect coins, stamps, butterflies, etc, they have a purpose behind this accumulation. They practice their hobbies. For instance:

7. At first he <u>collected</u> <u>coins</u>, but later stamps, butterflies, moths, mineralogical specimens, fossils, and also photographs of rare diseases, especially those involving the skin; towards the end of his life he donated these to museums (Lancet).

Using *gather*, or *assemble* in this context would not give the more robust meaning as would using the word *collect*. The focus here is on the "hobby", not the gathering process. In the following example, *collect* is used rather than *gather* or *assemble* in reference to garbage.

8. Amir, aged 8, says his poor friends now <u>collect</u> <u>garbage</u> during school hours, and only the rich are able to learn in private schools (PBS_NewsHour).

In the latter example it is proper to use the verb *collect* because it is treated as a separate entity and can be dealt with at one time (Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture, 2005). The verb *collect* could have an animate subject (examples 6 and 9)

9. Bees *collect* pollen from the flowers and mix it with their nectar, transforming it into a nutrient -- dense, natural super food (a single granule of bee pollen contains 300,000 to 500,000 pollen grains) (Total Health).

The subjects above refer to a human being in example (8) and to insects (bees) in example (9).

Also, *collect* could have an inanimate subject (examples10 and 11):

10. That guitar has been sitting *collecting* dust for years now (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary).

11. Dirt had *collected* in the corners of the room (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary).

Substituting *collect* for gather in examples 10 and 11 is more appropriate because *collect* presupposes intention and purpose, which the subjects in these examples do not possess. Consider the following example. We see here that *gather* takes precedence over *collect:*

12. Thousands of machines are **gathering** dust in stockroom (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary).

13. A chill sets in. **<u>Clouds gather</u>** around the mountain, obscuring it from view (Bicycling).

There are however other implications that *collect* suggests. As *collect* implies a "purposeful accumulation," it also indicates "organization" and gives the sense of well- arranged sources of the gathered item, such as in example (9) (Bees **collect** pollen from the flowers and mix it with their nectar, transforming it into a nutrient -- dense, natural super food (a single granule of bee pollen contains 300,000 to 500,000 pollen grains) (Total Health). The bees *collect* pollen from specific flowers (a predictable place) and mix it with their nectar to produce a natural food. Thus, bees *collect* pollen for a particular purpose, that being food, and they do that in a well-organized way. Since bees' work is associated with organization, and the fact that the word *collect* implies this sense of meaning, this word is better suited to use with bees rather than words such as *gather* or *assemble*. Moreover, *collect* takes

different objects ranging from animate (butterflies, people: 14) to inanimate (toys: 15), to abstract nouns (information, thoughts: 16 and 17).

14. She has gone to **collect her son** from school (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary). (We might exclude this example because it is a British usage).

15. But he also organizes children to **collect <u>toys</u>** for foster children and save coins for a playground-construction project in Tanzania (Christian Science Monitor)

16. Technology designed to make it easy for people in any part of the world to **<u>collect</u> <u>information</u>** about a crisis (Technology Review).

17. On the way, he **<u>collects</u> <u>his thoughts</u>** for what may be a difficult meeting (NBC- Dateline).

In example 17, collect could be replaced by gather. In order to gather thoughts, a person needs to bring his/her scattered thoughts together. Since gather "implies bringing widely scattered things or people to one place" (Oxford American Writer's Thesaurus, 2004, p.379), it could be used as a substitute for collect.

4.2 *gather*

It is shown that out of (8373) instances, *gather* accompanies the word *around* (18%), the word *at* (16%), the word *up* (13%), the word *information* (9%), the word *together* (6%), the word *data* (5%), the word *evidence* (2%), the word *dust* (2%), and the word *signatures* (1%) (See Table 3).

Table 4: Collocations of the verb gather

Collocation	Number of occurrences
Around	1494 (18%)
At	1327 (16%)
Up	1097 (13%)
Information	749 (9%)
Together	501(6%)
Data	364 (5%)
Evidence	176 (2%)
Dust	144 (2%)
Signature	35 (1%)
Other collocates	2486 (28%)
Total number of collocates	8373

The number of occurrences shows that the verb *gather* shares some collocates with the verb *collect.* Both words collocate with the nouns *information*, *data* and *signatures*; however, some of these collocates are preferably used with one but not the other. It is more appropriate to say, "collect data" rather than "gather data," or to say "gather information" rather than "collect information." This refers back to the senses of the nouns that accompany these verbs. For instance, the noun "information" suggests randomly distributed items (e.g., when you gather information, you gather it from various sources, while the noun

"data" indicates items that are organized (e.g., distributing a questionnaire, a survey). This could explain the high percentage of using the word "information" with *gather*, as compared to *collect.* The same can be said about the following examples:

18. Steffe and Ava **gather** wildflowers in the yard (Country Living).

19. My sister and I screamed from the camper window, as our parents scampered into oncoming traffic, **gathering up** our scattered belongings (USA Today).

In example (18), the two speakers "gather wildflowers" are irregularly distributed in a variety of places. Similarly, the two speakers in example (19) "gather their scattered belongings," which also indicates that the items are not in one place. Additionally, we usually say "*gather* laundry" but not "**collect* laundry" because laundry is regarded as an entity that cannot be dealt with at one time. Laundry involves randomly distributed items that could potentially not be located in a single place.

As for the collocate "signatures," it could be used interchangeably with *gather* and *collect,* since there is little difference in preference among them as the percentage shows in the aforementioned Tables (2 and 3). According to table (3), the preposition *up* collocates with *gather*, but not with the verbs **collect* up or **assemble up.* The verb *gather up*, as in example (19: My sister and I screamed from the camper window as our parents scampered into oncoming traffic, **gathering up** our scattered belongings (USA Today), has a stronger sense of the gathering process than the verb *collect*, which focuses more on accumulation. Moreover, the senses of *collect* and *assemble* do not entail graded completion as does *gather.* Another aspect of the word *gather* is that it involves the meaning of picking things up piece by piece. Thus, when we say *gather up*, it means the gathering is done completely or fully. Let us now consider other examples of *gather*:

The verb *gather* is more closely related to people as opposed to the word *collect*, especially as used in American English.

20. The first-year class gathers together outside, surrounding Cadel. Narr 3 (Jeff Ives).

21. When I noticed a crowd of people gathered around the television (NPR_FreshAir).

22. Photograph: Family and friends gather outside the main cabin for a game of horseshoes (Country Living)

Like the verb *collect*, the verb *gather* presupposes a definite purpose behind doing the action. Consider the following example:

23. We **gathered** the company's stock performance and annual profit or loss figures for 2008 and 2009 to compare to the CEOs pay gains or losses (AJC).

24. The nuns had **gathered** to pray over the newborn (Houston).

In example (23), they gathered the annual profit for a singular reason, which is to see their stock performance. In example (24), nuns gathered for ritual ceremony (i.e., praying over the newborn).

Additionally, the word *gather* focuses on the gathering process, such as in the following examples. In these examples, there is little emphasis on the accumulation, per se.

25. Next, students develop a search plan that identifies how they will **gather** information: by reading books, magazines, newspapers, reference materials; by watching videos; by interviewing people or conducting surveys; or by carrying out experiments (Teacher Librarian).

26. In 2007, the number of leases issued to oil companies there jumped by about 25 percent, and the average bid price for a single tract has soared this year by 50 percent to nearly $6 million, according to GOM Explorer, which **gathers** data on the Gulf's oil and gas industry. This is partly a matter of timing (U.S. News & World Report).

When *gather* is used with the collocate "around" it indicates that the subject is within the surrounding area, such as example (21): (when I noticed a crowd of people **gathered** **around** the television) (NPR_FreshAir). Here, the subject (i.e., a crowd of people) is within the surrounding area (television). Other examples include (a group of tourists gathered around a statute; gather around us; gather around a fire; gather around a tree), the verb (*gather around*) in these examples gives the sense that the subjects are in circular location. On the other hand, the landmarks in the following examples (27 and 28) are seen as a point rather than as an encircling location.

27. Fifty years ago today, several hundred students, civil rights activists, **gathered at** Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina

28. The dozen men and women **gathered at** the long table in the Washington conference room gave worried nods (H G Stratmann).

A final note on *gather* is that it takes human and non-human subjects. In the following example, *gather* appears with a human subject (18.Steffe and Ava **gather** wildflowers in the yard (Country Living). In example 13, the word *gather* has a non-human subject (13. A chill sets in. **Clouds gather** around the mountain, obscuring it from view (Bicycling). Similarly, *gather* takes animate objects (e.g., I **gathered** 15 of my friends) and inanimate objects (23. We **gathered** the company's stock performance).

4.3 *assemble*

Assemble is used more often in the passive construction than in the active one. The phrase "*assembled by*" occurred 296 times in the corpus which consists of 776 examples. For example,

29. Elsewhere on campus, solar lanterns - another aspect of solar energy - are being **assembled by** Tilonia women from components brought from the city of Jaipur (Ms.).

In a formal context, *assemble* tends to be more frequently used, especially with people as well as with inanimate (e.g. cars, engines, etc) as the following examples show. *Assemble* has a strong association with machinery, nearly 40% of the uses have a collocation with cars/engines which suggests its technical usage.

30. A special task force of federal and state labor officials **assembles at** dawn, led by Victoria Bradshaw, California's labor commissioner (CBS_Sixty).

31. This year's panelists, with more than 190 years of fishing expertise among them, **assembled in** the Mississippi Delta in September to put the newest equipment through its paces (Outdoor Life).

32. The car will be **assembled by** contract auto builder Valmet Automotive in Finland (USA).

33. Stamp the metal, etch the integrated circuits, **assemble** the components, package the computer, and ship the box to the store (Mechanical Engineering).

34. After lunch, he **assembles** the changing table, while Lise moves in and out of the baby's room (Good Housekeeping).

35. The $7 billion Taiwanese computer and electronics maker brings components in from around the world and **assembles** them at factories in Taiwan (Fortune).

If we compare *assemble* with *collect*, *gather* or *put together*, the verb *assemble* does not usually appear with abstract nouns. Accompanied with the word "evidence," it appears in 12 examples. If we compare this low percentage of occurrence with *collect* (108) and *gather* (176), we will notice that is rarely used with abstractness. To use another comparison, we usually say "put together the puzzle" rather than "*assemble the puzzle". Thus we could say that assemble is more appropriate with concrete materials (e.g., joining parts, assemble the engine).

Similar to the other verbs examined in this paper, *assemble* is used with the implication of intention and having a purpose behind the action (i.e., look at example 31: This year's panelists, with more than 190 years of fishing expertise among them, assembled in the Mississippi Delta in September to put the newest equipment through its paces) (Outdoor Life). In this example, people gathered in Mississippi for a particular purpose.

There are, however, some new meanings of *assemble* that might help to distinguish this verb among others. The verb *assemble* has the connotation of precision and accuracy. Example 36 gives a sense that Murrow worked hard to assemble a news team, who later became famous people.

36. After World War II, Murrow becomes vice president and director of public affairs at CBS. He assembles a news team. Most of them go on to become some of the most famous people in broadcasting journalism (NPR_FreshAir).

Additionally, *assemble* has the sense of building and combining parts. It is more involved with a very systematic process, which requires combining things step by step.

Let us look at example 37:

37. After lunch, he assembles the changing table, while Lise moves in and out of the baby's room (Good Housekeeping).

To *assemble* the table, a person needs first to bring all the materials and then look at the instructions on how to install the table, following the instructions step by step. There are other usages that are intriguing and rather amusing as well. The verb *assemble* does not take animals and non-animate subjects. It only allows a human subject. The reason for this, as mentioned before, is that assembling requires a more systematic process and following steps, which animals lack the ability to do (see example 37).

4.4 *put together*

The particle "together" is treated as a collocate of "put" in COCA. The two verbs *put together* and *gather together* are not specific to people nor things. They occur both with animate and inanimate subjects and objects. Consider the following examples:

38. We put together a great team of people (NPR_Science).

39. They have gathered together all over the country (Fox_Beck).

40. He's more discriminating in how he builds his tower than he is in the females he mates with……….This tower, three feet tall, consists of about 500 sticks, all put together by this one male Bower bird (60 Minutes 7:00 PM EST CBS).

41. At one time Earth's continents had all gathered together, just as in the examples above (though it also had the Moon) (Analog Science Fiction & Fact).

42. Sidebar Older chicks gather together to stay warm while their parents find food (National Geographic).

In examples 38 and 39, the words (*put together* and *gather together*) appear with human subjects. Conversely, in examples 40, 41, 42, the words show up with non-human subjects. It is notable from these examples that *gather together* can be substituted for *put together*, without suffering any loss of meaning or connotation. There is, however, a slight difference between these two verbs. The verb *gather* focuses on the action of "collecting" whereas *put together* focuses more on the "result" although an action is involved. *Gather* sounds like collecting items from different places possibly in various directions. By examining the corpus data, there appeared to be some interesting patterns. *Put together*, in its verbal sense, is used as an indication of forming a group (example 38). Similarly, gather together shares the same connotation (example 43). Thus, it can be said that *put together* and *gather together* tend to imply the "whole unit" of the individual items, as compared to *collect* and *gather*, which focus on the individual items coming together to form a whole unit.

43. We gathered together a group of teen-agers and we gave some of them a lecture about gun safety (ABC_GMA).

Also, put together can be linked with the meaning of organizing (example 44)

44. There was a lot of chaos around the putting together of this trip (NBC_Dateline).

In addition to being used with concrete materials (example 45), *put together* compared with *assemble* tends to be more common with abstractness (examples 46 and 47).

45. His family was poor: he lived in a home his father <u>put</u> <u>together</u> out of two oilfield shotgun houses (Smithsonian).

46. I think of the process as <u>putting</u> <u>together</u> a puzzle, " Colella explains (American Artist).

47. Well, I think, for the very first time, the federal government is - has <u>put</u> <u>together</u> a comprehensive plan (CNN_NewsSat).

4.5 *group*

In its verbal form, group has the least number of instances when compared with the other target verbs. However, a very quick examination showed that the sense of group is somehow different from the other lexical words. It lacks the sense of joining and building in most of the examples investigated in the present data. With group, there appears a sense of classification and categorization as the following examples show (The oxford American dictionary of current English, 2006)

48. They have <u>grouped</u> themselves by ethnicity or by the nature of their complaints and will be permitted to demand symbolic damages (New York Times).

49. We <u>group</u> these suggestions according to the roles of leadership and advocacy, work with families, the referral process, and professional development (Professional School Counseling).

50. Services, <u>grouped</u> by type, are administered by the people whose names and addresses appear below (PSA Journal).

51. and three boys were <u>grouped</u> in the " no sport " category (Journal of Sport Behavior).

As examples (48- 51) display, the sense that we can infer from these examples is classification as well as categorization. In example 50, services were classified by type and in example 51, the boys were categorized into different groups, and three boys were placed in the category "no sport". There is, however, another shade of meaning that has been mentioned before in the other lexical items. Group has the sense of "a single unit" or forming one group (example 52).

52. I don't think you can <u>group</u> the Republicans, you know as one monolithic block (ABC_ThisWeek).

The phrase *Put together* or *gather together* can be substituted here for group, only when the intended meaning implies "a single unit". However, replacing the other lexical items, as mentioned before, for examples (48-51) would deform the meaning of all these examples, since group implies classification. Another form in which *group* can be substituted with the target verbs (such as assemble and gather) is when it has the connotation "getting things together," as in example 53.

53. Mothers pushed baby carriages, lovers strolled hand in hand, senior <u>citizens</u> grouped on benches, and young girls who bared their limbs in summer dresses that left little to the imagination were trailed by boys in long baggy shorts. Summer was here (Carter, Mary).

A final note about group is that it tends to take place among a group of people (example 54) and things (example 55).

54. French intellectuals group all English-speaking people under the dismissive term Anglo-Saxons, a nomenclatural (The Antioch Review).

55. Commonly used phrases and words are grouped into relevant travel categories to make it easier for you to find the right expression at the push of a button (Motor Boating).

4.6 *amass*

Simply looking at the collocations of this verb across the data yields some interesting patterns. *Amass* has a strong association with wealth, fortunes, and millions of dollars. Out of 813 examples, *amass* appeared with wealth (8%), fortune (7%), evidence (4%), large (3.4%), fortunes (3.3%), huge (3%), great (3%), collection (3%), personal (2.4%), information (2%), power (2%) and data (1.2%).

Amass is rather formal (Caxton English Thesaurus, 1999), which is the reason for the low occurrence of such a verb in spoken and fiction genres (i.e., it accounted for 9% in both spoken and fiction genres). As seen from the COCA result of the top collocates found within two words to the right, *amass* is almost always used in reference to money (example 56), things (example 57), and power (example 58).

56. "It takes time to amass wealth." (Cosmopolitan).

57. A millionaire who amasses a fine collection of art and then gives it to a public institution is combining conspicuous consumption with civic generosity (Public Interest).

58. Once in office, Hoyer used his personal and political skills to quickly amass power (Washington Monthly).

Amass also is distinct from the other mentioned verbs because it implies gradual gathering and is more likely linked with a very large amount (Abate, 2006). As in example 53, the writer advises readers to budget their income, and by doing that over time, they could *amass* wealth. It is typical that *amass* gives the sense that something is collected for oneself. If we look at the collocation "personal," it implies that it is more related to a personal interest "amass a personal wealth" (example 59).

59. Unfortunately, charisma is value-neutral. Lenin, Hitler, Mao, Jim Jones, David Koresh, Shoko Asahara, and a host of lesser villains, including some notorious evangelists, have been charismatic figures who used their influence and power to amass personal wealth, exploit…(Christianity Today).

A final intriguing note about *amass* is that it does take a non-human subject.

In a very few cases, *gather* or *assemble* could be replaced by *amass* (when it is intransitive) such as the in following example (57):

60. A large crowd amassed for the parade (Random House Webster's College Dictionary)

5. Conclusion

The target lexical items *gather*, *collect*, *assemble*, *amass*, and *put together* can be used interchangeably in some contexts. However, they cannot be substituted in others. *Gather* implies bringing irregularly/widely dispersed things or people to one place with no implication of arrangement. *Collect*, on the other hand, suggests organization. *Gather* and *collect* focus on the individual items/people joining them together as a whole. *Put together* tends to imply the assembly of whole things/people. *Assemble* is more linked with technical usage (machinery). *Amass* suggests a gradual gathering over time. *Group* mostly has the sense of classification and categorization. Stylistically, the verbs *gather* and *collect* can occur in formal and informal contexts. *Put together* is considered to be less formal. *Assemble* is more formal. *Group* and *amass* are not commonly used as compared with the other target lexical items, and they mostly appear in formal contexts. Non-native speakers need to be aware of the differences between synonymous items, if there are any. Misunderstanding of the syntactic and semantic differences leads ESL/EFL learners to commit mistakes. Teachers and textbooks need to place an emphasis on this kind of issue by providing the semantic and syntactic differences among lexical items.

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