

## **Semantics of Averil Coxhead's *Academic Word List*: What can the idea of collocation help to explain?**

Shiau-ying Hung

The Language Training & Testing Center (LTTC)

### **Abstract**

This paper reports part of a research project whose ultimate concern is the general semantic features of Averil Coxhead's Academic Word List (AWL), so far neglected by mainstream research into the word list. For the purpose of this study, the researcher adopted the collocation method developed by Stefanowitsch and Gries (2003), who coined the term *collocation* to denote a special type of collocation, namely, a collocation of clausal constructions and lexis. The whole idea of collocation comes from an observation that the co-occurrence of a certain clausal construction and a word can be predicted if their semantic properties are compatible. Following this rationale, it is hypothesized that the general semantic features of the AWL words could be derived, if they could be found to be systematically co-occurring with specific clausal constructions whose semantic characters have been recognized. As an initial attempt to test this hypothesis, the researcher examined the co-occurrence patterns of AWL words and the *that*-clause—frequently used by academic writers to introduce new propositions—in the Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays. The results did not support a definite association between the AWL words and *that*-clauses. Nevertheless, the results did indicate that the collocation of the two, whenever it occurs, is conditioned by the rhetorical situation which frames the present study, namely, academic discourse.