COMMON INTENSIFIERS AND EVALUATION PHRASES IN SPOKEN ENGLISH

In order to find out more about common intensifiers and evaluation phrases used in current spoken English, let’s check the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). To conduct the analysis, follow the steps below:

1. Go to Google and search for COCA Corpus
2. Once you are at COCA front page, click ENTER
3. Register by creating your own account: type in your user name and password

Once you are registered, you can begin to search the corpus.

Let’s find out which adjectives go with the following intensifiers in evaluation phrases we use in spoken English. Work with a partner.

1. TOTALLY
2. ABSOLUTELY
3. SO

Task 1: “Totally” Search
1. First, type IT [one space] ‘S TOTALLY in the box next to WORD (S)
2. Under DISPLAY click on LIST
3. Click on POS and choose ADJ.ALL
4. In the box next to WORD (S) you will see IT [one space] ‘S TOTALLY [j*]
5. Leave one space after [j*] and put a period at the end of the phrase. It will look like this: IT [one space] ‘S TOTALLY [j*] [one space].
6. In Section 1, choose SPOKEN
7. Then, click on SEARCH
8. On the right, you will see many examples of IT’S TOTALLY + ADJ listed from highest to lowest in frequency of usage.

What do you notice? What kinds of adjectives follow TOTALLY? List the top 15 adjectives that follow “IT’S TOTALLY” in the table below. Include the number of their occurrences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IT’S TOTALLY -------------</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>THAT’S TOTALLY -------------</th>
<th>#</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DIFFERENT</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>WRONG</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNTRUE</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>UNTRUE</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATURAL</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>TRUE</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRONG</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>UNDERSTANDABLE</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAFE</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>INACCURATE</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRAZY</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>INCORRECT</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COOL</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>FALSE</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INAPPROPRIATE</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>INAPPROPRIATE</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INACCURATE</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>RIDICULOUS</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAIR</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>UNACCEPTABLE</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRRESPONSIBLE</td>
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<td>UNREALISTIC</td>
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<td>UNFAIR</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>WEIRD</td>
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<td>UNWEARABLE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNFAIR</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>UNWARRANTED</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Task 2: “Absolutely” Search
Repeat the same search for “IT’S ABSOLUTELY + ADJ” and “THAT’S ABSOLUTELY + ADJ.” What do you notice? What kinds of adjectives follow ABSOLUTELY? List the top 15 adjectives that follow “IT’S/THAT’S ABSOLUTELY” in the table below. Include the number of their occurrences.

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IT’S ABSOLUTELY ---------. # THAT’S ABSOLUTELY ---------. #
TRUE 22  RIGHT 101
WONDERFUL 10 TRUE 50
AMAZING 8 CORRECT 10
RIDICULOUS 8 FALSE 10
RIGHT 7 WRONG 10
UNTRUE 6 RIDICULOUS 8
BIZARRE 6 UNTRUE 8
DELICIOUS 5 INCORRECT 5
FALSE 5 FINE 4
OUTRAGEOUS 5 CLEAR 3
STUPID 4 ABSURD 2
NECESSARY 4 CONSISTENT 2
GREAT 4 CRITICAL 2
WRONG 3 FALLACIOUS 2
GORGEOUS 3 IMPORTANT 2

Task 3: “So” Search
Repeat the same search for “IT’S SO + ADJ” and “THAT’S SO + ADJ.” What do you notice? What kinds of adjectives follow SO? List the top 15 adjectives that follow “IT/THAT’S SO” in the table below. Include the number of their occurrences.

IT’S SO ---------. # THAT’S SO ---------. #
GOOD 32  CUTE 24
BEAUTIFUL 30 NICE 24
IMPORTANT 29 SWEET 20
EASY 23 TRUE 12
BAD 21 GREAT 8
FUNNY 19 IMPORTANT 7
GREAT 19 INTERESTING 6
INTERESTING 19 GOOD 6
SIMPLE 17 FUNNY 6
CUTE 14 COOL 5
HARD 14 BEAUTIFUL 5
BAD 13 FANTASTIC 4
TRUE 11 UNFAIR 4
CONFUSING 10 WONDERFUL 3
COOL 10 SIMPLE 3

Task 4: Discussion
Now look at the search results and answer the following questions. Discuss your findings in class.

1. The corpus results can help you see tendencies in language usage. What kind of adjective (positive, negative, or neutral in meaning) is “TOTALLY” mostly used with? Give an example.
2. What kind of adjective (positive, negative, or neutral in meaning) is “ABSOLUTELY” mostly used with? Give an example.
3. What kind of adjective (positive, negative, or neutral in meaning) is “SO” mostly used with? Give an example.
4. Look at the top 5 adjectives across all tables above. Which adjectives seem to have the highest frequency in these COCA corpus data?

Task 5: Exploring Students’ Talk
Now it’s your turn to explore how students on campus use intensifiers and descriptive adjectives to express an evaluation. Answer the following questions with the help of your Conversation Partner:

1. What other informal intensifiers do students use? Give an example.
2. You hear the evaluative phrases “IT’S/THAT’S SWEET/SICK/INSANE/RIDICULOUS” very frequently on campus. Explain and illustrate the meaning of each phrase.

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