

USING LANGUAGE CORPORA TO INFORM ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS OF THE PHRASE MAKE SENSE FOR CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Teduh Pitutur Wicak Ikhtiar

Universitas Bunda Mulia, Departemen Sosial dan Humaniora,
tikhtiar@bundamulia.ac.id

ABSTRACT

There has been a great deal of interest in language corpora in applied linguistics (Biber et al., 1998; McEnery & Hardie, 2012) and educational linguistics (O’Keeffe, McCarthy, & Carter, 2007; Reppen, 2010) in the past decades. Language corpora have been explored and examined to find out more about natural language use in authentic contexts (Sinclair, 1991; Biber et al., 1998) and enrich classroom resources (Gavioli & Aston, 2001). However, despite a great deal of publications, how language corpora are used in English language education in Indonesian context is still limited. To address the gap, this study aims to shed light on how Indonesian language teachers could benefit from using an English corpus for their teaching practice. Specifically, the study offers critical explorations and examinations of how English phrases are constructed in authentic language use and their structure and collocation variations. To do so, a corpus-based methodology was employed using the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), and the phrase make sense was chosen for analysis. The data collection involved corpora queries (i.e. searches for one-word insertions, two word insertions) and prepositional collocations. To analyse the data, concordance lines, collocational patterns, and frequency distributions were first observed. Then a specific examination looked upon how the meaning and its structural variations expand. The findings show that make sense can co-occur not only with degree-related words (e.g. makes no sense, makes perfect sense, makes more sense) but also with domain related words (e.g. makes financial sense, makes economic sense, makes business sense). Make sense could also be constructed in extended sequences (e.g. make the most sense, make absolutely no sense) and be followed by various prepositional phrases (e.g. make sense of, make sense to, make sense for, make sense in). The corpus evidence shows that make sense is a flexible phrase that allows speakers to express degrees of judgement as well as specify perspectives and conditions. These findings show how English language teachers can develop corpus-based teaching materials and use them with more natural and context-appropriate language use.

Keywords: *corpus linguistics, make sense, COCA, collocation, patterning*

INTRODUCTION

There has been a great deal of interest in language corpora in applied linguistics (Biber et al., 1998; McEnery & Hardie, 2012) and educational linguistics (O’Keeffe, McCarthy, & Carter, 2007; Reppen, 2010) over the past decades. Language corpora focus on the empirical analysis of occurring language in natural contexts and emerged as a response to traditional approaches to language description that relied on invented examples (Conrad, 2000; Curry & McEnery, 2025). Traditional approaches to language description have been criticised as they may not accurately represent patterns of language use in naturally occurring discourse (Biber et al., 1998; McCarthy, 2004). It is found that real actual language use is significantly different from that in textbook language descriptions (Sinclair, 1991; Biber et al., 1998). However, many ELT materials and language teachers tend to present the decontextualised language descriptions from textbooks that might not reflect authentic communication (Curry & Mark, 2024; Oktavianti et al., 2023). As a result, there is a huge disparity between language used in classrooms and the language used in real-world interactions.

The growing availability of electronic language databases has led language researchers to investigate authentic language use more systematically. Some studies have focused on the exploration of how words, phrases, and grammatical structures are used in a wide range of communicative contexts and the possibility of the use of corpus in language classrooms (Johns, 1991; Hunston, 2002; McEnery & Hardie, 2012). For example, Conrad (2000) shows how corpus based learning can provide more consistent descriptions of grammatical variation in English grammar and help teachers illuminate the complexities of English grammar. Farr and Leńko-Szymańska (2023) summarise and report current findings in corpus linguistics research: They show how language corpora can provide authentic language data for instruction and language analysis for enriching second language teaching. Specifically, Curry and McEnery’s (2025) empirical qualitative study illustrated how corpus-informed teacher education can improve teachers’ awareness of spoken English features. Through workshop-based interventions, teachers could improve authentic spoken language awareness, especially spoken grammar. Language corpora support teachers in designing more actual language use instructions (Braun, 2005; Lusta et al., 2023).

Furthermore, studies have shown that corpus-informed approaches can enhance learner engagement and language development (Boulton & Cobb, 2017; Oktavianti et al., 2023).

In Indonesian English language teaching context, Corpus-based approaches have gained limelight. Corpus is shown to enhance vocabulary learning and academic skills among university students (Safriyani, 2020), evaluate lexical input in Indonesian EFL textbooks (Wardani, 2020), and improve teachers' language proficiency and pedagogical competence (Lestariningsih et al., 2025). Hidayat et al. (2025) presented the introduction of corpus tools to Indonesian teachers for educational practices in Indonesian language classroom. They reported that the consistent integration of corpus linguistics into classroom practice remains uneven. Similarly, Hamamah's (2023) findings' share the same trend. Although corpus-related research has become popular, many teachers remain unfamiliar with corpus linguistics and lack the knowledge to implement language corpora in their classrooms. This imbalance highlights an important need to investigate how authentic corpus evidence can inform language teaching practices in Indonesian EFL contexts.

Although corpus-informed studies have influenced the classroom materials and curriculum design in language learning (Braun, 2005; Farr & Leńko-Szymańska, 2024; Curry & McEnery, 2025), the implementation in everyday teaching practices is considerably modest. In the Indonesian context, existing language corpora studies have investigated vocabulary learning, textbook evaluation, and teacher's education on the use of corpus (Safriyani, 2020; Wardani, 2020; Hamamah, 2023; Lestariningsih et al., 2025), yet investigations on its pedagogical application in English language classrooms are underexplored. The corpus-informed materials also remain underutilised (Oktavianti et al., 2023; Hamamah, 2023). More importantly, less attention has been paid to high-frequency formulaic expressions and their authentic phraseological behaviour. Consequently, there remains a need for studies that not only analyse authentic phraseological patterns but also demonstrate how corpus findings can be implemented to teaching practices. This study addresses this gap by investigating the phrase *make sense* through corpus linguistic methods and exploring how the resulting findings may inform English language teaching.

Make sense represents a particularly interesting and pedagogically relevant unit for corpus-based investigation. The expression occurs frequently across a wide range of communicative contexts such as everyday conversation, classroom interaction, academic communication, and professional discourse. The expression appears in multiple grammatical constructions: *It makes sense*, *That does not make sense*, *It makes sense to + verb*, and *make sense of + noun*. Furthermore, speakers use *make sense* to evaluate ideas, express agreement, provide explanations, justify decisions, and negotiate meaning during interaction. Such functional and structural variation illustrates the phraseological complexity of the expression and suggests that learners need more than a dictionary definition to use it appropriately. Building on this rationale, the present study aims to investigate the phrase *make sense* through corpus linguistic methods and explore how corpus findings can inform English language teaching. The study is guided by these following research questions: (1) What are the most frequent grammatical patterns associated with *make sense* in the corpus? (2) What collocations commonly occur with *make sense*? (3) What communicative functions does *make sense* perform in authentic discourse?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilised a corpus-based research design. The data were obtained from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). The corpus comprises more than one billion words of text compiled between 1990-2009 with 25 million words added annually (Davies, 2008-). The words are taken from eight different genres that include newspapers, TV and movies subtitles, spoken, fiction, popular magazines, academic texts, blogs, and other web pages. To identify grammatical patterns of the phrase, *make sense*, two list searches were employed using queries: *MAKE * sense* and *MAKE ** sense*. The queries retrieved instances where one or two words occurred between make and sense. Frequency information was used to identify which recurrent constructions and patterns need to be investigated (Biber et al., 1998). To examine the collocational behaviours, collocates function was utilised: *make sense* as the node and prepositions as the collocate category. The collocation analysis was important to investigate *make sense* phraseological behaviour of linguistic expressions (Sinclair, 1991).

The data analysis comprised three procedures. First, frequency analysis was used to identify which common grammatical constructions are common. Then, collocation analysis examined the lexical and prepositional items that frequently co-occurred with the expression. Third, concordance analysis was conducted to investigate how these patterns functioned in authentic contexts. Concordance lines were examined qualitatively to identify the communicative functions performed (Hunston, 2002). The

concordance analysis included evaluation, explanation, reasoning, interpretation, agreement, and the negotiation of meaning. The findings were analysed to explore their pedagogical implications for classroom use.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Learner dictionaries present *make sense* through a number of recurrent constructions. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary illustrates patterns such as *make sense*, *make sense to + verb*, *make much sense*, *make no sense*, *make perfect sense*, and *make sense of + noun* (Oxford University Press, n.d.). Similarly, the Cambridge Dictionary includes constructions such as *make sense*, *make any sense*, *make sense to + verb*, *make good sense*, and *make sense of something* (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). These examples suggest that dictionaries recognise some degree of grammatical variation through modification and complementation.

Figure 1. Grammatical patterns of *make sense* in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary

make sense

□  **A2** to have a meaning that you can easily understand

- *This sentence doesn't make sense.*

□  **B1** to be a sensible thing to do

- *It makes sense to buy the most up-to-date version.*
- *There are strict medicals for pilots, which makes good sense.*

+ Extra Examples

□  **B2** to be easy to understand or explain

- *John wasn't making much sense on the phone.*
- *Who would send me all these flowers? It makes no sense.*
- *It all made perfect sense to me.*

make sense of something

□ to understand something that is difficult or has no clear meaning

- *I can't make sense of that painting.*

Note. Screenshot from *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, n.d.).

FigureGrammatical patterns of *make sense* in the Cambridge Dictionary

make sense

idiom

Add to word list

to be clear and easy to understand:

- *This last paragraph doesn't make any sense.*

▶ makes sense

+ ≡

Someone who makes sense is reasonable or shows good judgment:

- *Everything he said made sense – I'd definitely vote for him.*
- *It makes sense to pay off your debts before you start trying to save money.*

(Definition of **make sense** from the [Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary](#) © Cambridge University Press)

Note. Screenshot from *Cambridge Dictionary* (Cambridge University Press, n.d.).

Nevertheless, the range of patterns presented by dictionaries is relatively limited to a small set of conventional examples. As in COCA, *make sense* occurs in a wider range of grammatical constructions and shows phraseological flexibility in authentic language use. Table 1 presents the grammatical patterns from the COCA query *MAKE * SENSE*. The corpus evidence illustrates that speakers modify the expression by including a wide range of lexical items between *make* and *sense*: degree markers (*any, much, some, perfect, complete*); comparative forms (*more, better, less, greater*); negative markers (*no, zero*); and domain-specific descriptors (*economic, financial, business, political, scientific, and legal*). The phrase *make sense* also occurs with superlative constructions such as *make most sense* and with less common patterns such as *make coherent sense* and *make intuitive sense*.

Table 3 Grammatical Patterns Associated with *make sense* in COCA (Davies, 2008–)

No	Pattern	Frequency	Pattern Type
1	make any sense	3,358	Degree
2	make more sense	784	Comparative
3	make no sense	667	Negation
4	make much sense	588	Degree
5	make some sense	312	Degree
6	make perfect sense	176	Degree
7	make economic sense	124	Domain
8	make little sense	75	Degree
9	make good sense	64	Degree
10	make financial sense	61	Domain
11	make better sense	33	Comparative
12	make logical sense	33	Domain
13	make complete sense	31	Degree

14	make business sense	24	Domain
15	make common sense	18	Degree
16	make less sense	17	Comparative
17	make total sense	16	Degree
18	make intuitive sense	11	Domain
19	make a sense	10	Other
20	make enough sense	10	Degree
21	make most sense	9	Superlative
22	make practical sense	9	Domain
23	make zero sense	8	Negation
24	make great sense	8	Degree
25	make musical sense	8	Domain
26	make the sense	7	Other
27	make greater sense	7	Comparative
28	make political sense	6	Domain
29	make fiscal sense	6	Domain
30	make biological sense	6	Domain
31	make strategic sense	6	Domain
32	make coherent sense	5	Domain
33	make real sense	5	Degree
34	make full sense	4	Degree
35	make military sense	4	Domain
36	make rational sense	4	Domain
37	make scientific sense	4	Domain
38	make legal sense	3	Domain
39	make geographic sense	3	Domain
40	make eminent sense	3	Degree
41	make equal sense	3	Comparative

Note. Data retrieved from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) using the query *MAKE ** SENSE* (Davies, 2008–).

This second search highlights the grammatical flexibility of *make sense*. The corpus data show that speakers can combine multiple modifiers between make and sense, such as *make much more sense*, *make absolutely no sense*, *make good business sense*, and *make perfectly good sense*. The findings also show the occurrence of superlative constructions (*make the most sense*, *make the best sense*), intensified negative constructions (*make no fucking sense*, *make no damn sense*), and specialised domain-oriented constructions (*make good economic sense*, *make perfect business sense*, *make good financial sense*). The evidence from corpus suggest that *make sense* functions as a flexible phrase that allows speakers to express nuanced evaluations, comparisons, and domain-specific judgements. Make sense does not only operate as a fixed idiom, but also flexible grammatical resource.

No	Pattern	Frequency	Pattern Type
1	make the most sense	123	Superlative
2	make much more sense	41	Comparative
3	make as much sense	39	Comparative
4	make too much sense	36	Degree
5	make good business sense	35	Domain
6	make so much sense	31	Degree
7	make it make sense	24	Metalinguistic
8	make absolutely no sense	23	Negation
9	make any more sense	21	Comparative
10	make even more sense	19	Comparative
11	make that much sense	15	Degree
12	make good economic sense	14	Domain
13	make the best sense	12	Superlative
14	make any fucking sense	12	Emphatic Negation
15	make even less sense	11	Comparative
16	make very much sense	11	Degree
17	make any logical sense	11	Domain
18	make any real sense	9	Degree
19	make more economic sense	8	Comparative Domain
20	make no damn sense	8	Emphatic Negation
21	make no economic sense	8	Domain Negation
22	make no fucking sense	8	Emphatic Negation
23	make no more sense	8	Comparative Negation
24	make very little sense	8	Degree
25	make far more sense	7	Comparative
26	make any economic sense	6	Domain
27	make any damn sense	6	Emphatic Negation
28	make all the sense	5	Degree
29	make perfectly good sense	5	Degree
30	make this make sense	5	Metalinguistic
31	make a lot sense	4	Degree
32	make a little sense	4	Degree
33	make any goddamn sense	4	Emphatic Negation
34	make as little sense	4	Comparative
35	make good financial sense	4	Domain
36	make so little sense	4	Degree
37	make far better sense	3	Comparative
38	make a lotta sense	3	Informal Degree
39	make any rational sense	3	Domain
40	make any good sense	3	Degree
41	make good fiscal sense	3	Domain
42	make little economic sense	3	Domain
43	make much business sense	3	Domain
44	make much economic sense	3	Domain
45	make no goddamn sense	3	Emphatic Negation
46	make no logical sense	3	Domain Negation
47	make perfect business sense	3	Domain

48	make their own sense	3	Possessive
49	make very good sense	3	Degree
50	make a certain sense	2	Degree

Note. Data retrieved from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) using the query *MAKE ** SENSE* (Davies, 2008–).

Collocational Behaviour of *make sense*

To answer the second research question, *What collocations commonly occur with make sense?*, a collocation search was conducted in COCA. The node word was *make sense*, and the collocate category was prepositions (PREP). The search examined prepositions occurring immediately after the expression to identify recurrent prepositions of *make sense*. Figure 3 presents the search settings used in the corpus analysis.

Figure 3 COCA collocation search settings for *make sense*

The screenshot shows the COCA Collocates search interface. At the top, there are tabs: List, Chart, Word Browse, **Collocates**, Compare, and KWIC. Below the tabs, there is a search bar containing 'MAKE sense' and a dropdown menu for 'Word/phrase [POS] ?'. Below that, there is a dropdown menu for 'PREP' and a label 'Collocates [POS]'. A frequency distribution bar is shown with buttons for '+', '4', '3', '2', '1', '0', '0', '1', '2', '3', '4', and '+'. The '1' button is highlighted in green. Below the bar are buttons for 'Find collocates' and 'Reset'. At the bottom, there is a checkbox for 'Sections Texts/Virtual Sort/Limit Options' and a text box containing 'AI: search by concepts, translations, rephrasing'.

Note. Screenshot of the collocates search interface in the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), showing *make sense* as the node word and *PREP* as the collocate category (Davies, 2008–). The search produced a range of recurrent prepositional collocations. The frequency results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 *Prepositional Collocations Associated with make sense in COCA* (Davies, 2008–)

Preposition	Frequency
of	4,752
to	2,838
for	1,883
in	762
out	270
from	163
as	142
on	131
at	121
with	90
within	42
considering	31
without	29

about	25
after	19
because	19
under	11
by	8
like	7
except	7
up	6
against	6
between	5
before	5
until	5
since	4
over	4
outside	4
re	4
during	4

Note. Data retrieved from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) using the collocates function with *make sense* as the node word and *PREP* as the collocate category (Davies, 2008–).

The findings show that *make sense* occurs with a wide range of prepositions: *make sense of*, *make sense to*, *make sense for*, *make sense in*, and *etc.* This indicates that the expression is not a fixed expression and used as part of larger phraseological units. As shown in Table 3, *make sense of* was the most common pattern among the identified collocations. Using this construction, speakers try to understand, interpret, or explain information that is unclear or complex. Additionally, the pattern *make sense to* is used to introduce a particular person or group and indicates that an idea, explanation, or decision is understandable from their perspective. While *make sense for* expresses the speakers' evaluation whether an action, choice, or decision is appropriate in a specific situation, while *make sense in* places evaluations within a particular context.

The corpus also revealed a range of less common collocations: *make sense from*; *make sense with*, *make sense within*; and *make sense considering*. The constructions demonstrate the flexibility of the expression and show how speakers adapt it to express viewpoint, context, comparison, and conditional reasoning. Overall, the meaning of *make sense* is closely connected to the words that follow it as well as allowing speakers to express understanding, evaluation, and reasoning in different communicative contexts.

Communicative Functions of *make sense*

To answer the third research question, representative concordance lines obtained from the grammatical pattern and collocation analyses were examined qualitatively. The analysis focused on how speakers employ *make sense* in authentic communicative contexts and what communicative purposes the expression serves. Examples from the corpus are presented throughout the section to illustrate the functions identified.

Examples 1–15 present representative concordance lines illustrating domain-related constructions of *make sense* (Davies, 2008–).

1. Buybacks will come because they make economic sense for certain companies.
2. The idea might suddenly make economic sense for us. I do believe our economy is headed in that direction.
3. Commercial growers will buy when the prices make economic sense and use their economies of scale to make the land profitable.

4. While the cost of mining the moon may not currently make financial sense, that doesn't mean it won't always in the future.
5. Would such a bounty program make financial sense for the government? You bet!
6. I believe it won't make financial sense for someone to own a vehicle in major cities by 2025.
7. There is other research that does not make logical sense to me so I discard it.
8. That doesn't even make logical sense. Are you seriously saying that no one should be allowed to shape policy.
9. In fact, comic books and superheroes baffle me. They don't make logical sense. You wouldn't get powers from a radioactive spider bite.
10. Make your environmental viewpoint make business sense, and you will have these old codgers on canoe trips by next spring.
11. Does it make business sense? The poorest of the poor spend 4134669 a year on kerosene alone.
12. It better make business sense, or we won't invest in it, " he says.
13. Is anything I do necessary? It all makes common sense.
14. He believed that he would be killed. Now, whether that makes common sense or not is not really relevant.
15. The idea is to deconstruct the central beast to give us something that makes common sense. Decentralize, localize. Secession, as Paul has said.

The concordance lines suggest that *make sense* is used as an evaluative resource and domain-related. Speakers often employ *make economic sense*, *make financial sense*, *make business sense*, and *make logical sense* to assess the appropriateness, practicality, or plausibility of an action or idea. For example, one concordance line shows "Buybacks will come because they make economic sense for certain companies", while other concordance highlights whether a policy would "*make financial sense for the government*". Similarly, constructions such as "That doesn't even make logical sense" and "It all makes common sense" are used to evaluate the rationality of arguments and explanations.

Examples 16–30 present representative concordance lines illustrating degree-based expansions of *make sense* (Davies, 2008–).

16. This is this advice that makes the most sense to me, I guess.
17. Choose the kind of service that makes the most sense in your case.
18. It makes absolutely no sense, and it's ridiculous to leave it up to states.
19. Your analogy makes absolutely no sense whatsoever.
20. Which makes so much sense, now that I think about it.
21. This article makes so much sense to me.
22. Nah. I make the most sense alone. Your father did too, to be honest.
23. I think it would make the most sense to tax things that cause medical problems.
24. A centennial park makes much more sense and would be thousands of dollars cheaper.
25. Yes, that makes much more sense, Jenson. And you, Andy? What do you think of the theory?
26. Saving me \$20 an hour in the process? It makes good business sense, right? Well, because I don't have an extra \$10 a week.
27. We've always felt that it makes good business sense to keep customers happy.
28. That makes even less sense than what you just said. This line is for emergencies only, okay?
29. And it makes even less sense when we have online working and people able to telecommute.
30. Anyway, the plot this time around probably makes even less sense than all the previous plots combined.

The concordance lines drawn from degree-based expansions reveal another communicative function. Expressions: *make the most sense*: *make much more sense*: *make so much sense*: *make absolutely no sense*: and *make even less sense* allow speakers to strengthen, weaken, compare, or reject evaluations. For instance, one speaker described a particular option as the one that "makes the most sense", whereas another argued that a proposal "makes much more sense" than an alternative. In contrast, examples such as "It makes absolutely no sense" and "That makes even less sense than what you just said" demonstrate how speakers use the expression to challenge or dismiss ideas. The corpus, therefore, shows that

grammatical expansions add important nuances of intensity that helps speakers express various degrees of agreement, preference, certainty, and disagreement.

Examples 31–50 present representative concordance lines illustrating prepositional collocations of *make sense* (Davies, 2008–).

31. I am an English opera singer trying occasionally to make sense of my life in Germany.
32. I squinted at the clock and tried to make sense of what was going on.
33. It does not make sense to film too much in the winter where there is a lot of snow.
34. It didn't make sense to me to spend 100–200 dollars on a finishing nail gun.
35. I know it doesn't make sense for them to buy magazine ads.
36. It makes sense for schools to have skin in the game.
37. The Settlement Agreement made sense in 1995 because all the cleanup milestones were still in the future.
38. Private property titles may make sense in one setting, and may not work at all in another.
39. My time here is about me trying to make sense out of my future, not yours.
40. Your goal is to underline enough to help you make sense out of the material at a later date.
41. I just don't think they make sense from a statistical point of view, any more than it would make sense.
42. It makes sense from a tribal resource perspective. Men can have countless children in their lifetime.
43. It seemed to make sense at the time. Less sense now.
44. Captain Stacy found out it was him but it made sense at the end for me.
45. And I think it makes sense on some level.
46. The modernization of Duncan's work makes sense on a commercial level.
47. Now things make sense with some interactions or a depression episode when she was feeling down.
48. That makes sense with the anger. Where is the love and tolerant from you?
49. It didn't make sense within the context. Who was to say that wasn't what was happening.
50. We have posted them where it makes sense within our Web suite.

The concordance lines of prepositional collocations demonstrate additional communicative functions. *Make sense* can be used to express how speakers interpret experiences, events, or information, as in “*trying to make sense of my life in Germany*” and “*trying to make sense of what was going on*”. Meanwhile, *make sense to* and *make sense for* frequently occur in contexts where speakers justify actions or decisions: “*It doesn't make sense for them to buy magazine ads*” and “*It makes sense for schools to have skin in the game*”. Other collocations: *make sense from*, *make sense in*, and *make sense within* introduce specific viewpoints or contexts. These suggest that prepositional collocations help speakers specify who is making the judgement, what is being interpreted, and the context in which an evaluation is considered reasonable. The concordance analysis also demonstrates indicate that much of the communicative meaning associated with *make sense* emerges from the grammatical and phraseological patterns in which it occurs.

Language corpora extend the meaning and the constructions of the phrase *make sense*. The corpus evidence highlights more flexible grammatical variations and nuances: degree-related, domain-related, and extended constructions than what dictionaries typically present. Various patterns of *make sense* show that speakers regularly modify the expression to express different degrees of evaluation. Speakers systematically exploit the phrase to negotiate judgements about logic and acceptability in various contexts. The expression, therefore, functions as evaluative meanings rather than carrying static meaning. The corpus evidence demonstrates that speakers frequently adapt the phrase to fulfil communicative purposes that extend beyond the core meanings of “understandable” or “reasonable”. In this respect, language is characterised by recurring phraseological patterns rather than isolated lexical items (Sinclair’s, 1991). Hunston (2002) argues that corpus evidence often reveals systematic patterning that is not immediately visible through traditional descriptions of vocabulary. The findings, thus, suggest that the meaning of *make sense* depends not only on the expression itself but also on the linguistic environments in which it occurs, with different constructions enabling speakers to express varying levels of certainty, plausibility, and reasonableness.

A second important finding concerns the predominance of evaluative meanings in authentic language use. Meanings are not merely expressed to indicate understanding but also to position speakers' competing viewpoints and alternative interpretations (Biber et al., 1998; McEnery & Hardie, 2012). From this perspective, *make sense* does not only represent one's understanding, but also functions as speakers' evaluations toward something discussed. The collocation analysis illustrates how phraseological environments of *make sense* affect its communicative functions of *make sense*. In particular, prepositional constructions such as *make sense of*, *make sense to*, *make sense for*, and *make sense in* were found to perform distinct communicative functions. The pattern *make sense of* was strongly associated with interpretation and meaning-making, while *make sense to* frequently introduced personal perspectives or judgements. Similarly, *make sense for* commonly expressed appropriateness or usefulness, whereas *make sense in* typically situated evaluations within particular contexts or conditions. These findings support Sinclair's (1991) view that collocational behaviour contributes significantly to meaning construction. The results also demonstrate that learners cannot fully understand the expression by studying the base form alone because much of its communicative meaning emerges through recurrent collocational patterns. Thus, it is important for language teachers to examine authentic language use at the phraseological level rather than focusing solely on isolated words or phrases.

The findings carry important implications for English language teaching. Traditional teaching materials frequently present words or phrases in isolated and limited examples such as dictionary-style explanations. This approach may provide learners with a partial understanding of the actual usage. A rich network of grammatical patterns, collocations, and communicative functions are rarely represented in classroom materials. Conrad (2000) argues that corpus evidence can help teachers identify which language items deserve instructional attention. The present findings suggest that instruction should move beyond teaching *make sense* as a single expression and instead introduce learners to common constructions such as *make no sense*, *make perfect sense*, *make the most sense*, and *make sense of*. Introducing most common constructions would encourage phraseological awareness and provide learners with a more authentic understanding of how the expression functions in real communication. Within the context of English language teaching in Indonesia, there is a need for the integration of authentic language evidence into English language teaching as Indonesian learners might not have enough English language exposure outside the classroom (Oktavianti et al., 2023; Hamamah, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the phrase *make sense* guided by corpus linguistics and how corpus findings can inform English language teaching. An investigation from corpus linguistics shows that *make sense* is a flexible phraseological construction. The expression is not limited on degree-related modifiers such as *any*, *no*, and *perfect*, but also cover domain-related modifiers such as *economic*, *financial*, and *business*. In addition, extended constructions such as *make the most sense* and *make absolutely no sense* showed that people use *make sense* to compare alternatives and strengthen evaluations. The collocation analysis and the concordance analysis demonstrated that *make sense* performs multiple discourse functions: evaluation, reasoning, explanation, interpretation, and the negotiation of meaning. These findings highlight how authentic language patterns that may not be apparent in traditional language descriptions.

The study demonstrates the pedagogical potential of corpus-informed approaches to language teaching. Teachers can draw on corpus evidence to introduce learners to its recurrent grammatical patterns, collocations, and communicative functions. Guided by language corpora, language teachers may help learners develop phraseological awareness and a more authentic understanding of how English is used in real communicative contexts. The study focused on a single expression and utilised one corpus, thus future research could extend this approach to other high-frequency formulaic expressions, compare usage across different varieties of English, or investigate how corpus-informed materials influence learner understanding and language production.

REFERENCES

- Biber, D., Conrad, S., & Reppen, R. (1998). *Corpus linguistics: Investigating language structure and use*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511804489>
- Boulton, A., & Cobb, T. (2017). Corpus use in language learning: A meta-analysis. *Language Learning*, 67(2), 348–393. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12224>
- Braun, S. (2005). From pedagogically relevant corpora to authentic language learning contents. *ReCALL*, 17(1), 47–64. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344005000510>

- Cambridge University Press. (n.d.). *Make sense*. In *Cambridge Dictionary*. Retrieved May 1, 2026, from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/make-sense>
- Conrad, S. (2000). Will corpus linguistics revolutionize grammar teaching in the 21st century? *TESOL Quarterly*, 34(3), 548–560. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3587743>
- Curry, N., & Mark, G. (2024). Using corpus linguistics in materials development and teacher education. *Second Language Teacher Education*, 2(2), 187–208. <https://doi.org/10.1558/slte.2572>
- Curry, N., & McEnery, T. (2025). Corpus linguistics for language teaching and learning: A research agenda. *Language Teaching*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444824000430>
- Davies, M. (2008–). *The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA): 1+ billion words, 1990–2019*. <https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/>
- Farr, F., & Leńko-Szymańska, A. (2024). Corpora in English language teacher education: Research, integration, and resources. *TESOL Quarterly*, 58(3), 1181–1192. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.3281>
- Gavioli, L. (2001). Enriching reality: Language corpora in language pedagogy. *ELT Journal*, 55(3), 238–246. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/55.3.238>
- Hamamah. (2023). *To data driven research and beyond: An overview of corpus linguistics research in Indonesia*. In *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Language, Literature, Education, and Culture (ICOLLEC 2022)* (pp. 67–79). EAI. <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.11-11-2022.2329401>
- Hidayat, R., Burhanuddin, B., Mahyuni, M., Hidayati, N., Hidayatullah, M. S., & Kusmiyati, K. (2025). Pengenalan linguistik korpus untuk pembelajaran dan penelitian bagi guru Bahasa Indonesia SMA se-Lombok Barat. *Jurnal Darmabakti Diksani*, 5(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.29303/darmadiksani.v5i1.6645>
- Hunston, S. (2002). *Corpora in applied linguistics*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139524773>
- Johns, T. F. (1991). Should you be persuaded: Two examples of data-driven learning materials. *English Language Research Journal*, 4, 1–16.
- Lestariningsih, F. E., Subekti, A. S., & Kurniawati, L. A. (2025). Integrating corpus linguistics to enhance English language proficiency among elementary school teachers. *JOLLT Journal of Languages and Language Teaching*, 13(3), 1578–1587. <https://doi.org/10.33394/jollt.v13i3.14843>
- Lusta, A., Demirel, Ö., & Mohammadzadeh, B. (2023). Language corpus and data-driven learning (DDL) in language classrooms: A systematic review. *Heliyon*, 9(12), Article e22731. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e22731>
- McCarthy, M. (2004). *Touchstone: From corpus to course book*. Cambridge University Press.
- McEnery, T., & Hardie, A. (2012). *Corpus linguistics: Method, theory and practice*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511981395>
- O'Keeffe, A., McCarthy, M., & Carter, R. (2007). *From corpus to classroom: Language use and language teaching*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511497650>
- Oktavianti, I. N., Eriani, E., Rolyana, I., & Prayogi, I. (2023). Investigating the use of corpus-informed grammar materials in Indonesian EFL classrooms. *Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, 7(2), 417–438. <https://doi.org/10.21093/ijeltal.v7i2.1415>
- Oxford University Press. (n.d.). *Make sense*. In *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. Retrieved May 1, 2026, from <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/make-sense?q=make+sense>
- Reppen, R. (2010). *Using corpora in the ESL/EFL classroom*. Cambridge University Press.
- Safriyani, R. (2020). Corpus-based research in vocabulary learning. *NOBEL: Journal of Literature and Language Teaching*, 11(2), 203–216. <https://doi.org/10.15642/NOBEL.2020.11.2.203-216>
- Sinclair, J. (Ed.). (1991). *Corpus, concordance, collocation*. Oxford University Press.
- Wardani, E. C. (2020). A corpus-based exploration of Indonesian EFL textbooks: Cultural and collocational input. *Seminar Nasional Ilmu Pendidikan dan Multi Disiplin*, 3(1), 71–76. <https://prosiding.esaunggul.ac.id/index.php/snip/article/view/13>

CURRICULUM VITAE

Complete Name : Teduh Pitutur Wicak Ikhtiar
 Institution : Universitas Bunda Mulia
 Education : S2 Language Education
 Research Interests : Critical approach to language education, descriptive grammar