

# A Corpus-based Comparative Study of “get-passive” Semantic Prosody

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**Abstract:** Research on semantic prosody education is playing a vital role in the process of learning English. This research is based on the LOB corpus (Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen corpus) and the IWriteBaby corpus, the core library of the IWrite Chinese English Learner Corpus. Using AntConc 3.5.7, to compare the semantic preference of the collocation words of get in the two corpora that meet the get-passive structure. Aiming to compare the semantic prosody differences between Chinese English learners and native speakers when they use the structure “get-passive”. It mainly focuses on the analysis of neutral collocation terms that have a higher frequency of co-occurrence with get and a mutual information value (I value) which is greater than or equal to 3. The research results show that Chinese English learners tend to have neutral semantic prosody when using this structure, while native speakers tend to prefer negative semantic prosody. With the combination of semantic prosody and corpus method should be attached importance to improve the level of English education.

**Keywords:** Semantic prosody; Lexical collocation; Lexical frequency; IWriteBaby corpus; LOB corpus

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## 1 Background

Grammarians utilize the corpus that can provide the characteristics of actual language examples to extensively study grammatical frequencies and patterns, and research in detail the differences in grammar usage in different types of languages. We

also use the basic method of corpus, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to compare the differences between Chinese English learners and native speakers. And we will discover the characteristics of structure usage and its differences with native speakers, the characteristics of semantic prosody and explore the reasons for these differences. Get is a high-frequency verb, through searching and observing the spoken language corpus, researchers found that 90% of the usage of get-passive is used to talk about “unpleasant” things (Carter & McCarthy, 1999; Collins, 1996). Although the Get-passive structure has the characteristics of negative semantic prosody, its negative semantic prosody is relative to the context and the speaker (Anne O’Keeffe & Michael McCarthy & Ronald Carter, 2007).

Stubbs (1996) divides semantic prosody into positive semantic prosody, negative semantic prosody and neutral semantic prosody. It is of great significance for improving the level of English teaching and cultivating students’ ability to observe and evaluate language by our research on the use of specifically semantic inclined structures for Chinese English learners.

## 2 Literature review

Semantic prosody refers to the presence of both semantic and prosodic relationships between node words and their collocation terms (Wang Haihua & Wang Tongshun, 2004). “Semantics is determined by meaning, and prosody is because it is not only related to one word, but involves the combination of several words” (Sinclair, 2003: 117). Semantic prosody is one of the most valuable research results of corpus linguistics. In recent years, the research

on semantic prosody phenomenon using corpus is in full swing. There are not only the research review of semantic prosody, but also the semantic prosody research on translation teaching, literary appreciation, lexicography, vocabulary learning, etc., which fully shows that semantic prosody is important to language learning and teaching. Dai Jianchun (2018) used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to review and analyze the journals and dissertation databases on semantic prosody on CNKI from 2000 to 2016, presenting research trends, problems and suggestions for semantic prosody. Gao Ge and Wei Naixing (2019) explored the role and change characteristics of semantic prosody in the translation process by studying similarities and differences about hear of between the English version of and the original version of "A Dream of Red Mansions". Based on data and data-driven research methods, Wu Xiaofei (2019) conducted research and analysis on the word "ghost" in Caston Leroux's "The Phantom of the Opera" to help readers better understand literary works. Ji Yuhua and Wu Jianping (2000) introduced the important role of semantic prosody research from the perspective of dictionary compilation. Cai Chen (2016) explored the stylistic knowledge of English semantic prosody by Chinese learners through comparative interlanguage analysis, and found that the semantic prosody type of the "GET+adj" structure in English academic stylistics is mostly negative. Through the summary of the above research, it is found that get-passive, as a structure frequently used by Chinese English learners, has little research on it. Hatcher (1949) found through the study of the get-passive semantic prosody structure that there is no obvious agent in this structure, and the usage is either pleasant or unpleasant, but then the scholar Carter & McCarthy (1999) refuted his view and believed that it should be consider the actual context and the position of the speaker. Therefore, the study will be based on the LOB corpus and IWriteBaby Chinese English learner corpus, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, to study the semantic prosody differences between Chinese English learners and native speakers and the reasons for the differences when using the get-passive structure.

### 3 Research design and research methods

#### 3.1 Research questions

The research focuses on solving the following problems: What are the lexical collocation and semantic prosody of get-passive structure? What are the differences between Chinese English learners and native speakers in the lexical collocation and semantic prosody when using this structure? What are the reasons for these differences?

#### 3.2 Corpus and research instruments

In this study, IWriteBaby, the core library of the IWrite Chinese English learner corpus with a library capacity of 8 million words (the corpus consists of three parts: school exams, off-class writing, and class testing), and LOB corpus with a library capacity of 1 million words (Lancaster -Oslo/Bergen corpus) are research instruments. The IWrite Chinese English Learner Corpus is the largest English learner corpus that has been published in Chinese. It has a wide range of sources and diverse topics. The LOB corpus with all written language was jointly completed by Lancaster University in the United Kingdom, Oslo University in Norway and Bergen University. The analysis instrument is AntConc 3.5.7.

#### 3.3 Research process

Using the analysis instrument AntConc to retrieve the "get-passive" structure., and when the number of co-occurrences is more than 5 (including 5), the span is set to extract within the range of 5 words on the left and right of the node word, we extract the collocation words of get in the "get-passive" structure. Furthermore, the mutual information value is used to measure the collocation power between the collocation words and the node word (get). On this basis, we conduct a comparative analysis of the collocation words in the observation corpus (IWriteBaby) and the reference corpus (LOB) from the perspective of semantic connotation.

By analyzing the lexical collocation of the "get-passive" structure in IWriteBaby and LOB, we will get the semantic prosody characteristics and differences of "get-passive" between IWriteBaby and LOB, and conduct a comparative analysis about the differences between the two corpora.

## 4 Data analysis

### 4.1 The overall characteristics of collocation words of get in the get-passive structure

According to the above research process, there are 18,695 index lines of get in the IWriteBaby corpus. In order to facilitate research, 1000 index lines are randomly selected from the three parts of school exams, off-class writing and class testing. Finally, the collocation words of get are used to analyze the get-passive structure have a total of 41 words. There

are 5 lexical words for collocation words which conform to its structure and have the I value that is greater than or equal to 3. And get has a total of 738 index lines in the LOB corpus, all of them are used to analyze the structure, on account of the small data volume. Ultimately, 9 collocation words that are used to analyze the structure, in which have a total of 4 lexical words that meet the requirements and have the I value that is greater than or equal to 3. Table 1 accurately shows the percentage of various connotative words in collocation words.

**Table 1.** Percentage of various connotative words in collocation words

Corpus	Positive	Negative	Neutral
IWriterBaby	0%	7.4%	92.6%
LOB	0%	23.3%	77.7%

It can be seen from Table 1 that when Chinese English learners use the structure of get-passive, the collocations of get are mainly terms with neutral meaning, accounting for 92.6%. Native speakers mainly use terms that are also neutral meaning, accounting for 77.7%. This is also slightly different from the findings of researchers (Carter & McCarthy, 1999; Collins, 1996): 90% of the usage of get-passive is used to talk about “unpleasant” things.

### 4.2 Comparison of high-frequency collocation words

In order to compare the collocation words of the two corpora, we list the terms whose frequency is higher and the I value is greater than or equal to 3. According to Table 2, in the IWriterBaby corpus, the terms

that conform to the get-passive structure and have strong collocation strength are annoyed and fired. The collocation words that meet the requirements in the LOB corpus are fed, bored and dragged. According to the dictionary definition, annoyed and bored are words with obvious negative semantic prosody tendency, while fired, fed and dragged have no obvious semantic tendency and are neutral words. So, is there any difference between Chinese English learners and native speakers when they use get in the get-passive structure to match neutral meaning words? What kind of semantic tendencies will appear in the context? We will separately study the collocation of get and these three neutral words.

**Table 2.** Collocation words with I value  $\geq 3$  in IWriterBaby and LOB

IWriterBa-by	Frequen-cy	I value	LOB	Frequen-cy	I value
fired	4	3.17	bored	2	3.22
annoyed	1	3.17	fed	1	3.44
			drag-ged	1	4.03

### 4.3 The collocation of get and neutral words in the get-passive structure

#### 4.3.1 The collocation of get and fired in the get-passive structure

Using AntConc3.5.7 to retrieve the IWriteBaby corpus, we retrieved a total of 4 about get and fired collocations from the corpus. Here are the 4 retrieval lines: there are several reasons why people get fired from their 432 PT004893

their 432 PT0004893 many peolpe often get fired from jobs.

that those people who get 433 PT0004893 get fired from jobs.

rest from the book. Why people get fired from their jobs why people

After reading the context carefully, we found that these four collocation terms all show positive semantic prosody and come from the same composition topic. Examples of contexts are as follows when get and fired co-occur:

(1) There are several reasons why people get fired from their 432 PT004893.

(2) Why people get fired from their 432

PT0004893 many people often get fired from jobs.

(3) One of the reasons is that those people who get fired from jobs.

(4) We can get rest from the book. Why people get fired from their jobs.

Through the above example sentences (1)-(4), we can see that the relevant content of the article is to discuss the reasons why people are unemployed. They have a positive semantic prosody, because these reasons are very vital to them.

### 4.3.2 The collocation of get, fed and dragged in the get-passive structure

By searching the LOB corpus, we get two index lines: get away while you can, before you get dragged in any deeper. For

get a job in London, modelling. I get fed up with ordinary clothes,

We found that these two collocation terms both show negative semantic prosody after reading the

context carefully. Examples of the context are as follows when get and fed and dragged co-occur:

(1) Take the children and get away while you can, before you get dragged in any deeper.

(2) I shall get a job in London, modelling. I get fed up with ordinary clothes,

The results of the two corpora show that get and neutral terms fired, fed and dragged present different semantic prosody. When Chinese English learners use this structure paired with neutral terms, accounting for 9.6% positive semantic prosody, which significantly reduces the use of neutral semantic prosody. This is one of the reasons why Chinese English learners cannot express their meaning accurately. However, when native speakers use the get-passive structure, they use negative semantic prosody in most cases, accounting for 55%, and there is no positive semantic prosody. As shown in Table 3:

Table 3. New percentage of various connotative words in collocation words

	消极	中性	积极
IWriteBaby	7.4%	83%	9.6%
LOB	55%	46%	0%

## 5 Results

The results of the comparative study show that the lexical collocations of the get-passive structure in the IWriteBaby corpus are very different from those in the LOB corpus, which exhibit that Chinese English learners have not mastered the precise collocation method when learning this structure. At the same time, the semantic prosody of this structure in the two corpora is also very different. The semantic prosody in IWriteBaby is mostly neutral semantic prosody, while in LOB is mostly negative semantic prosody. This is also not in line with the findings of the researchers: 90% of the usage of get-passive is used to talk about “unpleasant” things (Carter & McCarthy, 1999; Collins, 1996). The main reasons for differences are: Firstly, the data of the off-class writing in the IWriteBaby corpus is affected by the same composition topic, and the collocation terms of get in the get-passive structure will also be restricted. From the perspective of vocabulary knowledge, students have mastered the spelling, grammar and meaning of the structure, but have not fully grasped the knowledge of collocation. This is consistent with

the findings of scholars Bahns and Eldaw (1993) and Schmitt (1998, 2000) that learners’ mastery of collocation knowledge lags behind other aspects of knowledge. Second, it is affected by the negative transfer of Chinese. Get is explained in the Oxford dictionary as “receive, obtain, be in, suffer, reach, etc.”, while Chinese English learners do not grasp the negative semantic meaning of “suffer, be in”, leading to Chinese English learners only understand that get has a positive and neutral semantic prosody. Therefore, due to the influence and limitation of Chinese, Chinese English learners and native English speakers have deviated in terms of cognition of get-passive semantic prosody, resulting in conflicts in semantic prosody. Third, we cannot simply mark the semantic prosody of a structure as positive or negative. Particularly, the author’s position and context also determine the semantic prosody of a word or a structure. This is the demonstration of the probabilistic grammar relative to the deterministic grammar. (Anne O’Keeffe & Michael McCarthy & Ronald Carter, 2007).

## 6 Conclusion

Studies show that in the corpus of native English speakers, when get and lexical words co-occur in the get-passive structure, they present a negative semantic prosody tendency and positive semantic prosody fail to appear. As Chinese English learners use this structure, there are clear differences from native speakers. Therefore, in foreign language teaching, English teachers should comprehensively guide students to master the meaning of vocabulary, not just confined to its basic meaning, and teaching materials should pay more attention to students' autonomous learning. Teachers should encourage students to use English-English dictionaries to learn and master vocabulary. At the same time, lexicographers should also consider how to properly compile probabilistic grammar into the dictionary so that students can understand and learn well. This research is only a preliminary research and has certain limitations. Although the observation corpus has the same capacity as the reference corpus, the data obtained cannot fully explain our research because the observation corpus IWriteBaby is affected by its components. It's very significant to further explore the semantic prosody differences between Chinese English learners and native speakers when using get-passive structures.

### Conflict of interest

All of authors don't report conflicts of interest

### Author Profile

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