Collocation, Semantic Prosody and Near Synonymy: Verbs of "Help" and "Aid" in Mandarin Chinese

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Abstract:
   This paper invesitgates the collocational behavior, semantic prosody, and morphological combinations of the two near synonymous verbs in Mandarin Chinese, i.e., 幫忙 *bāngmáng* "help" and 幫助 *bāngzhù* "aid". We analyzed the two words via using Chinese Word Sketch and found that the semantic prosody is an important index to distinguish between 幫忙 and 幫助. This study has pratical implication for language learners in understanding the subtle differences in the usages between 幫忙 and 幫助.

Keywords: Near synonym, Chinese Word Sketch, Corpus study, Collocation, Semantic Prosody, Mandarin Chinese

1.   Introduction

   This paper explores the collocational behavior, semantic prosody, and morphological combinations of the two near synonymous verbs in Mandarin Chinese, 幫忙 and 幫助. In this paper, near synonymy is identified as lexical pairs that have very similar denotational meanings, but which may differ in collocational or prosodic behavior (Partington 1998:77; Xiao and Mcenery 2006). Dictionaries provide very similar meanings, "to help or to aid", to define "幫忙" and "幫助". Indeed, the two synonymous verbs in Mandarin Chinese have similar collocations. For example, we can say "大家應該互相幫忙" or "大家應該互相幫助". However, they have subtle difference in usages. For instance, we can say "全家 幫忙 洗米", but we cannot say "*全家 幫助 洗米" in daily language. Furthermore, the two near synonymys also differ in semantic prosodies (Tognini-Bonelli 2001:18-24), such as "幫忙家事" and "幫助貧童". "家事" contains a neutral meaning whereas "貧童" is a negative meaning. Finally, the near synonyms are very different at the morphological level (Greenbaum 1974; Xiao and Mcenery 2006).

   Therefore, this paper investigates collocation, semantic prosody, and morphological combinations in 幫忙 and 幫助 in Mandarin Chinese. The goal of this paper is to examine similarities and distinctions between these two synonymous words through the corpus-based approach. In addition, in the conclusion of this paper, we will also consider the implications of this contrastive analysis for second language learning. Before proceeding to undertake the contrastive analysis for the two synonyms, we will first review previous research on near-synonyms, collocation, and semantic prosody.

2.   Background

   Corpus data can reveal important but opaque information of a pair of near synonyms that is not readily apparent based on native speaker intuition (Chief et al., 2000). As a result, a corpus approach is indispensable for studying near-synonyms. In past years, many researchers and linguists have devoted to studying near-synonyms through the corpus approach. Liu (2002) presents different classes of verbs in Mandarin Chinese with Module-Attribute Representation of Verbal Semantics

(MARVS). In addition, Huang and Hong (2005) analyze near synonyms in verbs of senses in Mandarin Chinese and distinguish their lexical concepts, collocations, and core senses. Furthermore, Tsai (2010) examines syntactic functions, occurrence frequency, and collocational relationship of 相同、一樣 and 同樣 and compare their referential properties.

"Collocation" is an important component for studying lexical and morophological structures of words. According to Firth (1968:181) 'collocations of a given word are statements of the habitual or customary place of that word'. This concept is accepted by many corpus linguistics, including Halliday (1966), Greenbaum (1974), Sinclair (1991), Hoey (1991), Stubbs (1995), Partington (1998), McEnery and Wilson (2001), and Hunston (2002) etc. All of these linguists follow Firth's proposal in that they argue that collocation refers to the characteristic co-occurrence of patterns of words.

From the semantic perspective, Stubbs (2002) considers that 'there are always semantic relations between node and collocates, and among the collocates themselves'. The collocational meaning arising from the interaction between a given node and its typical collocates might be referred to as semantic prosody (Xiao and Mcenery 2006). Louw (2000) defines semantic prosody as 'a form of meaning which is established through the proximity of a consistent series of collocates'. The primary function of semantic prosody is to express speaker or writer's attitude or evaluation (Louw 2000). Lots of linguistics consider that semantic prosodies are typically negative, with rare of them bearing positive meaning (Sinclair 1991; Louw 1993, 2000; Stubbs 1995, 1996, 2001a, 2001b; Partington 1998; Hunston 2002; Schmitt and Carter 2004; Xiao and Mcenery 2006).

Stubbs (2002) contends that the meaning arising from the common semantic features of the collocates of a given node word can be referred to semantic preference, which is defined 'by a lexical set of frequently occurring collocates [sharing] some semantic feature'. Partington (2004) notes that semantic preference relates the node item to another item from a particular semantic set whereas semantic prosody can affect wider stretches of text. Semantic preference can be viewed as a feature of the collocates while semantic prosody is a feature of the node word (Xiao and Mcenery 2006).

3.   Method
3.1 Data collocation
In this study, data collected from Chinese Word Sketch (http://wordsketch.ling.sinica.edu.tw/cws/), which is a corpus incorporating collocational behavior, and grammatical relations. The corpus contains Chinese Giga Word Corpus and Academia Sinica Balanced Corpus. The former includes one billion words from newspapers of Taiwan and Beijing. The latter involves five million words from newspapers, fictions, and academic articles in Taiwan.

From the corpus, we first modulate the minimum frequency of collocates as 1 and observe the collocations of each verb to see how these grammatical distributions to our analysis. In the corpus, the number of data of "幫忙" is 9635, while "幫助" has 124147 data.

3.2 Data analysis
For the syntactic categories, we focus on the collocational position of subject, object, modifier, and verb. The token frequency of subject of "幫忙" is 2067, while that of "幫助" is 14090. For the data of object, "幫忙" has 1853 while "幫助" has

72723 data. In the modifier position, "幫忙" has 1306 modifiers while "幫助" has 11461 tokens. Finally, for the verbs that can precede "幫忙" or "幫助", "幫忙" has 1025 while "幫助" has 5496 data. Table 1 shows the exact tokens and proportions. Note that the proportion of "幫忙" in its object is far lower than that of "幫助", which indicates the major distinction between this pair of near synonyms. Details of similarities and differences in every part between "幫忙" and "幫助" will be discussed in following sections.

Table 1. Token Frequency and Proportions of the "幫忙" and "幫助"

	幫忙 (9635)		幫助 (124147)	
	Tokens	Proportion	Tokens	Proportion
Subject	2067	21.45%	14090	11.35%
Object	1853	19.23%	72723	58.58%
Modifier	1306	13.55%	11461	9.23%
Verb	1025	10.64%	5496	4.43%

4. Collocation Results

4.1 The Similarities of "幫忙" and "幫助"

In this section, some common subjects, objects, modifiers, and serial verb pairs of "幫忙" and "幫助" will be examined in order. First, among data of Chinese Word Sketch, "幫忙" and "幫助" can take some common subjects, which seem to have the semantic feature [+animate]. The followings are some sample sentences, in which the subjects are also italicized and underlined.

(1) a. *大家* 互相 **幫忙**
  b. 請 *大家* **幫助** 我們
(2) a. *我* 一定 會 **幫忙**
  b. *我* 會 盡力 **幫助** 你
(3) a. 有些 *人* 表示 無法 **幫忙**
  b. 沒有 *人* 能夠 **幫助** 他

As the above sentences (1), (2), and (3) showed, "大家", "我" and "人" all have the semantic feature [+animate].

After examining the common subjects, now we turn to look at some common objects of "幫忙" and "幫助". The followings are some sample sentences showing the common objects, which are italicized and underlined, of this pair of near-synonyms.

(4) a. 政府 會 全力 **幫忙** *他們* 渡過 難關 。
  b. 我們 應該 多 為 民眾 服務 、**幫助** *他們* 。
(5) a. **幫忙** *別人* 就是 **幫忙** 自己
  b. 他 一直 在 **幫助** *別人*
(6) a. 他 承諾 未來 一定 會 **幫忙** *災民* 解決 問題 。
  b. 政府 沒有 足夠 的 財力 **幫助** 這些 *災民*。
(7) 路人 不 得 不 **幫忙** *推車*
(8) 他 願意 **幫忙** *站台*

In the above sentences (4), (5), and (6), "他們", "別人", and "災民" all refer to human beings. As sentences (7) and (8) show, neither "推車" nor "站台" act as a real beneficiary in respect of thematic role. In addition, based on the corpus data, the objects "他們" and "農民" have much higher proportion in collocation with "幫助" than with "幫忙", which indicates that "幫助" has much inclination to take an direct object.

At this point, we turn to examine some modifiers which can collocate with "幫忙" and "幫助". In normal sentences, the two verbs can be modified by some adverbs. The followings are some sample sentences showing the common modifiers.

(9) a. 大家 應該 *互相* **幫忙**
　　b. 大家 可以 *互相* **幫助**
(10) a. 他們 一定 會 *全力* **幫忙** 。
　　 b. 中央 一定 會 *全力* **幫助** 金門 進行 重建 工作 。

Sentences (9) and (10) show that "幫忙" and "幫助" can be modified by extent adverbs "互相" and "全力".

Finally, "幫忙" and "幫助" can be preceded by another verb, composing a serial verb sentence, which contains two or more verb phrases or clauses juxtaposed without any marker indicating what the relationship is between them (Li and Thompson, 1999). Most of these verbs express the meaning of "to be willing", "to hope", or "to ask for help". Some sample sentences are listed below.

(11) a. 美國 *願意* **幫忙**
　　 b. 我們 *願意* **幫助** 別人
(12) a. 他 很 *樂意* **幫忙**
　　 b. 我 非常 *樂意* **幫助** 別人
(13) a. 她 很 *希望* 政府 能 **幫忙** 解決 困難
　　 b. 她 *希望* 社會 能 盡快 **幫助** 他們

As sentences (11), (12), and (13) show, "願意", "樂意", and "希望", which express "to be willing" and "to hope", can be juxtaposed with both "幫忙" and "幫助". In addition, we observe that the verbs "希望" and "請求" collocate with "幫忙" more frequently than with "幫助". However, the verb "繼續" occurs more often with "幫助". Next part we will discuss the different collocation in semantic, and morphological perspectives.

4.2 The Differences between "幫忙" and "幫助"
4.2.1 Semantic Perspective: Semantic Prosody

Among data of Chinese Word Sketch, "幫忙" and "幫助" can take some different subjects. Most subjects of "幫忙" refer to human beings, such as "好友", "左鄰右舍", etc. except "老天爺". However, those subjects of "幫助" refer to countries (e.g., "納米比亞"), organizations (e.g., "難民署"), or institutions (e.g., "世界銀行"). This result seems to be consistent with what has been mentioned in the section of common subjects of "幫忙" and "幫助". The followings are some sample sentences.

(14) 她 聘 有 鐘點 *女傭* **幫忙** 做家務

(15) 幾 位 *好友* **幫忙** 湊齊 不足 款項

(16) *難民署* 將 盡力 **幫助** 非洲 國家 的 難民

(17) *部隊* **幫助** 我們 修 公路

As sentences (14) to (17) show, God "女傭" and a person "好友" are subjects of "幫忙" . On the other hand, the subjects of "幫助" refer to the organizations "難民署" and "部隊". "幫忙" and "幫助" typically do not express a negative meaning. The semantic prosody of "幫忙" and "幫助" is dependent on its collocates. Take subject position for example, when "幫忙" collocates with "女傭", it indicates an unfavorable result; conversely, when it collocates with 好朋友, the result is evaluated favorably. This phenomenon is the same as in "幫助", when "幫助" collocate with "難民署", it relates to unfavorable result; otherwise, when it collocates with "部隊", it indicates neutral. However, the overall situation in the corpus, it shows that collocates in subject position of "幫助" are more negative than "幫忙". The result is as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of 幫忙 and 幫助 across meaning categories in subject position

Patterns	Negative	Neutral	Positive
幫忙	6	536	14
幫助	35	1326	0

Table 2 shows the distrubution of 幫忙 and 幫助 across meaning catrgories in the Chines Word Sketch. The significant collocates of 幫忙 is neutral (e.g. 大家、裁判、鄰居), then positive (e.g. 好朋友、老公、徒弟), and then negative (e.g. 女傭). As with neutral (e.g. 我們、社會、部隊) use of 幫助 occurs most frequently in the corpus, and negative (e.g. 難民署、納米比亞) is more than positive.

After examining the different subjects of "幫忙" and "幫助", now we turn to look at their objects. Almost all objects of "幫忙" are verb phrases (e.g., "宣傳宣傳"), while objects of "幫助" are noun phrases, including people (e.g., "群眾"), countries (e.g., "阿富汗") and so on. The followings are some sample sentences.

(18) 請 記者 **幫忙** *宣傳宣傳*

(19) 國防部 已經 答應 派員 **幫忙** *剷雪*

(20) 全家 **幫忙** *洗米*

(21) 各 級幹部 全力 **幫助** *群眾* 抗旱 救災

(22) 全 社會 都 應 **幫助** *殘疾人*

(23) 有錢人 必須 **幫助** *窮人*

In the above 6 sentences, "幫忙" takes verb phrases as its objects, such as "宣傳宣傳" in (18), "剷雪" in (19), and "洗米" in (20). On the other hand, "幫助" takes noun phrases as its objects, such as "群眾" in (21), "殘疾人" in (22), and "窮人" in (23). As mention before, "幫忙" and "幫助" can be good or bad, according to its conexts. Table 3 shows the distribution of the two near synonyms across meaning categories.

In Table 3, note that the significant collocates of "幫忙" and "幫助" is neutral. However, "幫助" is very frequently used with a negative semantic prosody than 幫忙. The essentially negative semantic prosody of "幫助" observed in Chinese Word Sketch is, for example, "貧童", "窮人", "貧困戶", "殘疾人", "患者", "病人", "災區", and "災民" etc. According to the result, we observe that most of the collocates of "幫忙" and "幫助" in the corpus contain nutral meanings. This is not consistent with the previous study that most linguistics consider that semantic prosodies are typically negative (Sinclair 1991; Louw 1993, 2000; Stubbs 1995, 1996, 2001a, 2001b; Partington 1998; Hunston 2002; Schmitt and Carter 2004; Xiao and Mcenery 2006). However, the analytic result shows that no matter in subject or object position, negative semantic prosody of "幫助" is much more frequently than "幫忙".

Table 3. Distribution of 幫忙 and 幫助 across meaning categories in object position

Patterns	Negative	Neutral	Positive
幫忙	0	127	0
幫助	2193	16784	0

4.2.2 Morphological Perspective

In the previous sections, semantic and syntactic similarities and distinctions of "幫忙" and "幫助" were discussed, and many sample sentences in Chinese Word Sketch were also given. Now we should turn to examine a difference of "幫忙" and "幫助" -- morphological combination. In Chinese, "幫忙" is a verb-object compound, which means it consists of two constituents having the syntactic relation of a verb and direct object (Li and Thompson, 1999). In the case of "幫忙", it is composed of a verb "幫" and a direct object "忙". Besides, like majority of verb-object compounds, "幫忙" can allow its constituents to be separated, such as "幫個忙". Moreover, according to Li and Thompson (1999), vast majority of verb-object compounds do not take a direct object. In the case of "幫忙", it allows a possessive phrase to precede its object constituent "忙" to express what might be taken to be the direct object of "幫忙" itself. This seems to support the fact that the proportion of the object of "幫忙" (19.23%)is far lower than that of "幫助"(58.58%), which is shown by the data in Chinese Word Sketch. The following is a sample sentence:

(24) 我 幫 他的 忙

However, "幫忙" sometimes can take a verb phrase or a clause to be its direct object, as the sample sentences have shown in (10) and (11), which are listed below.

(25) 路人 不 得 不 幫忙 *推車*
(26) 他 願意 幫忙 *站台*

In this type of sentences, the verb phrase or clause does not act as a real beneficiary in respect of thematic role; instead, function of the verb phrase or clause is to supply more information about content of "忙". Take sentence (26) for example. The verb phrase "站台" does not act as a real beneficiary in respect of thematic role; instead, it supplies clear information about content of "忙", that is, what the subject

"他" would be willing to help with.

On the other hand, both "幫" and "助" are transitive verbs, meaning "to help others" or "to offer an aid". Therefore, "幫助" is a parallel verb compound, which means it is composed of two verbs that are synonymous or signal the same type of predicative notions (Li and Thompson, 1999). Besides, the parallel verb compound itself shares the semantic and syntactic properties of its constituents. Take the following two sentences as an example.

(27) 我們 應該 想 辦法 **幫** 他
(28) **助** 人 為 快樂 之本

In (27), "他" is the direct object of "幫", and in (28) "人" is the direct object of "助". Note that both "幫" and "助" are transitive verbs. As a result, "幫助" is a transitive verb in Chinese. And this can explain why "幫助" often takes a direct object in normal sentences.

In sum, "幫忙" is a verb-object compound, while "幫助" is a parallel verb compound. Owing to their different morphological combinations, "幫忙" would not be followed by an object, while "幫助" often would.

5.   Conclusion and Future Research

In this paper, we discussed the similarities between "幫忙" and "幫助" through analyzing their subjects, objects, modifiers, and serial verb pairs. In the subject position, both "幫忙" and "幫助" can take a subject who has the semantic feature [+animate]. In the object position, owing to the different morphological combinations, the frequency of "幫忙" that takes a direct object is less than "幫助" that takes a direct object. In the modifier position, most of the adverbs can equally collocate with "幫忙" and "幫助" in proportion. Finally, both "幫忙" and "幫助" can occur with verbs expressing "to be willing"(e.g., "願意"), or "to hope"(e.g., "希望").

In the differences between "幫忙" and "幫助, the discussion of the two words in semantic prosody suggests that the two near synonyms are normally not collocationally interchangeable, and that the main collocates of 幫忙 and 幫助 carry neutral meanings both in subject and object positions. However, 幫助 takes much more negative collocates as compared to 幫忙. On the other hand, because of the different morphological combinations, "幫忙" and "幫助" have distinctive syntactic patterns. "幫忙" can be a verb-object compound, so it can allow its constituents to be separated or a possessive phrase to precede its object constituent "忙"(e.g., "幫個**忙**" or "幫他的**忙**"). In addition, "幫忙" does not often take a direct object. On the other hand, "幫助" is a parallel verb compound, so it often takes a noun phrase as its direct object (e.g., "**幫助**窮人").

To conclude, from the definitions of dictionaries, "幫忙" and "幫助" have very similar meanings. However, the two near-synonyms behave differently in syntactic and morphological aspects via analyzing the corpus data. Furthermore, their distinctive morphological combinations also predict their different syntactic representations. The results of this corpus-based approach study have implications for Chinese learners having better understanding of "幫忙" and "幫助" on syntactic and semantic behaviors and morphological structures.

Even though the corpus-based approach used in this study can show the

collocational differences between "幫忙" and "幫助" from the lexical aspect, our results can not explain why "幫助" could substitute for "幫忙" in some sentences (e.g., (4a) "政府會盡力**幫忙**他們渡過難關"), and why "幫忙" could not replace "幫助" (e.g., (10)"中央一定會全力**幫助**金門進行重建工作"). We need to further analyze the complements following the two verbs and find out the different semantic and grammatical constraints of complements between "幫忙" and "幫助". It is hoped that our study has practical implications for teachers and learners of Chinese as a Second Language having better understanding in instructing and using "help" and "aid" in Mandarin Chinese.

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