

# *A Corpus-based Analysis of Collocational Patterns: Taking Want [NP V-ing] for Example*

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**Abstract:** Based on idiomatic principle put forward by Sinclair, this study adopts a corpus-driven approach to analyze and explore the collocational pattern *want [NP V-ing]* from the phraseological level. Results suggest that *want [NP V-ing]*, which has received relatively little attention, is becoming increasingly important in spoken English. It tends to collocate with negatives such as “not” and colligates with modal auxiliaries, having a negative semantic prosody since it always has words like “bad idea, difficult, freak, revenge” around which can give pragmatic function of warning and request at the same time.

## 1. Introduction

Over the last twenty years, the significance of collocations and extended units of meaning has been widely recognised, as corpus linguistics research has validated the necessity of considering word co-occurrence patterns in linguistic analysis<sup>[1][2][3]</sup>. The goal for a linguistic approach, which integrates syntax and semantics in the description of language, has been reached. For the consideration of corpus linguistics, the studies of collocations, colligations and collocational patterning have always been concerning issues under investigation<sup>[1][4]</sup>. Inspired by works above, this paper intends to explore the collocational pattern of the lexical items “want [NP V-ing]”, and its semantic preference, semantic prosodies, as well as phraseological features.

This study is corpus-driven since the concordances in the corpus are carefully observed and conclusions are obtained from observations. The main source of data as regards this pattern is from The Corpus Of American Soap Opera of COCA. Findings of this study can be very useful information in English teaching and learning, which will not be found in dictionaries only concerned with semantic meanings.

## 2. Working Definition of Collocational Pattern

Both Sinclair<sup>[1][2]</sup> and Halliday<sup>[5]</sup> refer “Collocational Patterning” or “Collocational Patterns” to co-occurrence of node words with colligation, collocates and their semantic features. Therefore, “Collocational Patterning” or “Collocational Patterns” means more than colligation and Hunston & Francis believe it includes all the lexical items and grammatical structures co-occurred with node words. They define it in Pattern Grammar as following:

*The patterns of a word can be defined as all the words and structures which are regularly*

associated with the word and which contribute to its meaning.<sup>[6]</sup>

This study adopts Hunston & Francis' definition of collocational patterns since they are quite in accordance with Sinclair and Halliday<sup>[7]</sup>.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Corpus to Be Used

The following study is based on the analysis of all the occurrences of *want* [NP V-ing] in The Corpus Of American Soap Opera from COCA. The first reason to choose The Corpus Of American Soap Opera of COCA among various native speaker corpora available is that it is the newest native speaker spoken corpus dated from year 2001 to year 2012, containing 100 million words. The second reason is that the author believes spoken English is more of significance to investigate since previous studies only concern with written English.

#### 3.2 Patterns to Be Investigated

The central issue of this study is the collocational pattern *want* [NP V-ing], in which *want* only presented in verb form with noun or pronoun following it, and then by a verb ending in -ing.

#### 3.3 Data Collection

Since the corpus in this study is tagged for part of speech (i.e., POS-tagged), it was possible to use search strings that would retrieve all the concordances containing the collocational pattern *want* [NP V-ing] from *The Corpus Of American Soap Opera*. The first main search strings was "[want]. [v\*] [p\*][v?g\*]" (where *v\** stands for only verb form and *p\** stands for all pronouns and *v?g\** stands for all verbs ending in -ing). The second search string was "[want]. [v\*] [nn\*] [v?g\*]" (where *v\** stands for only verb form and *nn\** stands for all pronouns and *v?g\** stands for all verbs ending in -ing). After searching, 2739 lines of concordances were got (2587 of [want]. [v\*] [p\*] [v?g\*] and 152 of [want]. [v\*] [nn\*] [v?g\*]), as following examples show:

- a) *I just don't want us getting all caught up in this drama between the girls.* (2002)
- b) *I don't want people talking about my mother that way.* (2005)

Even these straightforward searches yielded several false hits, such as instances when the term "noun" was not a noun, but rather a misunderstanding caused by the absence of a comma. (*when you show what you got then you get what you want stop being a good girl.*) or where the noun was a post-modifier of the object (*they want classic tailoring.*).

After necessary elimination of errors, all together 2731 lines of concordance can be allowed to compute, therefore, random sampling will be necessary as the result exceeds the limit. Also because of the limitation of user status, *The Corpus Of American Soap Opera* provided only 54 hits of the KWIC list for each search string, in the discussion part.

### 4. Research Findings and Analysis

In the analysis, I will begin by looking at a profile of illustrative examples of collocational pattern *want* [NP V-ing] of different search strings in the Corpus of American Soap Opera.

Chelsea: No , you ca n't . I don't	want Hope knowing	about anything that happened tonight . --
So what ? Who is ? I want tonight . I	want people whispering	about me for all the right reasons . I want
, but I assume that is exactly what you don't	want people thinking	about you -- that you are off or not on
now , let me deal with Brad . I don't	want things falling	apart again . # J.T.: Yeah , for your sake
get anything until we know for sure . # Iris: You	want kid going	around in dishtowels , your party . # Gwen: I
. You realize that , right ? Taylor: I don't	want people staring	at me like I 'm some sort of freak .
, in the sky . Dinah: No . I don't	want people squinting	at you while you 're saying your speech . Come
have any embarrassing situations . I mean , we wouldn't	want Nana disappearing	between courses -- Rafe: If you come
now . Like Luis and Sheridan . I just don't	want Theres hurting	for the rest of her life just like her brother
your involvement ? Of course not . But she doesn't	want Hope being	hassled . Bill: Hope needs to be tested , Ramona
station that we 're dating . I said I didn't	want people thinking	I got the job because you 're a cop !
. Eve: Well , I do , and I don't	want outsiders interfering	in our family . It causes problems .
going to happen . I mean , he doesn't even	want Granddad doing	it . James: But he is doing it . Lizzie:
did n't want to tell you . Reva: I don't	want people protecting	me from these things . Shayne: And I do n't
taken care of , okay ? # Lorenzo: I don't	want people seeing	me like this . Skye: It 's all right .
protecting me from these things . Shayne: And I don't	want people protecting	me , either . Ditto . Reva: Are there going
Dillon: You think the Newmans are	want people following	Nicholas in Buenos Aires and surveillance on
scamming us ? Heather: I	want people knowing	our business . Belle: Oh , no . I do
being so difficult ? Shawn-D. Because . I don't	want people freaking	out until we have all the information , till we
do n't want anybody to know , because I don't	want word getting	out . Katherine is already concerned about
no . That 's a bad idea . I don't	want people tripping	over Tracy 's underwear . Alice: Oh , I can
We 're having guests after the memorial . We don't	want people thinking	that I 'm unreliable . I want to keep this
going to get a regular paycheck . Abby: I don't	want people thinking	that you 're playing favorites . # Kevin: Even
. # Jana: No , thank you . I don't	want people pointing	their finger at you , saying that you had a
little boy . What 's the matter ? You don't	want Charity coming	to her full powers , but playing such mean tricks
. Timmy: Timmy 's not sure . He definitely doesn't	want Babe doing	to you what she tried to pull with me .
to miss you so much . # J.R.: I don't		

Figure 1: Some Illustrative examples of [want]. [v\*] [p\*] [v?g\*] in the Corpus of American Soap Opera.

According to Fig.1, some of the most frequent in the corpus are *want you going*, *want you getting*, *want you putting* in the middle column. Interestingly, one thing should be noticed that only 29 of the thirty concordances have negative words in front the collocational pattern discussed, so it is most possible the pattern can be in the form:

#### 4.1 x Modal Aux Neg want y Ving

Variable x is always a person related to the speaker of the conversation usually first person pronoun “I” while y is always a pronoun, mostly second person “YOU”. The whole unit is a conventional and intensive way of requesting or asking for someone out of one’s own desire. If you say that I didn’t want you going after him after I’d already slapped the hell out., you mean “I strongly oppose to the idea of going after him”. Therefore, from this, the collocational pattern has a typical form, with minor variants and a clear pragmatic force.

For the collocates may be adjacent or not to this pattern, some words of the same semantic preference (e.g. bad idea, screw up, jealous) do occur in the left side and words like revenge, guilty, divorce, damn thing in the right side. As is shown clearly, this form [want]. [v\*] [p\*] [v?g\*] has a strong negative semantic prosody which will be further explained in the next part of the article. However, semantic prosody is present, or tangible, in different concentrations depending on how severe the need is for word meaning to be augmented by pragmatic meaning in language-based communication. The concordances that were provided above may have been a little bit of an exaggeration of the point, but it is still present.

thought Ethan knew me . # J.R.: Look I don't	want you worrying	about Ethan giving me Chandler Enterprises . ...
deal out of it . Starr: Yes . I didn't	want you going	after him after I 'd already slapped the hell out...
a past mistake . You're the one that didn't	want me bringing	Alistair into town in the first place . John: Let...
What is it ? # Nick: I know you didn't	want me pulling	any strings to push this divorce forward because of
There 's something I want to say . I don't	want you doing	anything . Do n't try and get revenge because of...
It works for me , which is why I don't	want you poking	around in my head , inventing things to analyze to
. Rafe , Brady , Dad ... even Nicole doesn't	want him hanging	around ! Sami: Well , no one should be hanging...
# Kevin: Lovely ? What are you -- I don't	want you printing	articles about my son . You understand me ? #
, can't let you travel . He 's gonna	want you popping	babies from day one . Look at your mother .
Just a little day-brightener for us old-timers . I don't	want you getting	guilty around christine , okay ? Paul: I wo n't...
Nick . Nick: Sharon , look -- Sharon: I don't	want you living	here anymore . It 's too hard for me .
Now , if that's the case , I do not	want her staying	home alone . What about Caroline ? Does n't she...
want to screw this up , okay ? I don't	want them walking	in here and telling us , no baby for you...
a look . Meg: Okay . Paul , I do n't	want you coming	in . Paul: She 's my daughter , too .
in there and get the place cleaned up ? Don't	want him burning	it down . Kid: Who are you ? Damon: Janitor...
Ugh . Scott: Jeez . What ? Luke: I don't	want you bringing	Laura daisies , or any other damn thing . #
time to get our families together , because I don't	want you feeling	like you 're having this baby on your own ...
, Lucy . Lucy: I mean it ! I don't	want you fighting	my battles for me . I do n't want you...
like you so much . You know , I didn't	want you thinking	of me as a hooker . You know , I...
I 'm thinking as your jealous boyfriend . I don't	want anybody hitting	on you , not ever , not even online .
. J.T.: No , colleen , wait . I don't	want you sneaking	out , or you 're gon na get in more...
do it . Jack: Thank you . But I don't	want you going	overboard and rearranging your life . This living
said what she said . And I know she wouldn't	want you getting	so upset . Neil: She did what she thought was
Your fugitive brother -- I do n't really you think you	want me discussing	that in front of someone . Claudia: How do I
do n't have to explain . Nick: I just don't	want you getting	the wrong idea . Sharon # : Meaning the jury
find out . Jack: Well , I-I thought Billy didn't	want you covering	this story . Phyllis: No , I 'm not gon
really ? Jill: Really . Olivia: Drucilla , I do not	want you talking	to brad ! Dru: You know , I do n't
a lot of pain over the years . I don't	want you adding	to it . James: I 'm not trying to cause

Figure 2: Some Illustrative examples of [want]. [v\*] [nn\*] [v?g\*] in the Corpus of American Soap Opera.

According to Fig.2, the three-word string is not so abstract, and some of the frequent occurrences are *want people thinking*, *want people going*, *want people knowing*. It looks like the exactly same thing happened when the search string [want]. [v\*] [nn\*] [v?g\*] has been taken into consideration because it most often is used negatively. 26 of the thirty lines have negative words in front of the search string. The form could be:

#### 4.2 x Modal Aux Neg want z Ving

Here for concordance 2, variable x is still a pronoun and mostly first person pronoun while z represents a noun, mostly "PEOPLE" or someone's names. The entire unit serves as a concentrated method of soliciting or cautioning others. For instance, if you express that we wish to prevent anyone from stumbling, you are cautioning someone to "Be cautious!" Consequently, this collocational pattern possesses a canonical structure, accompanied by slight variations and a clear pragmatic impact.

Collocates may be contiguous or not; certain words with similar semantic preferences, such as "bad idea," "difficult," and "embarrassing," appear on the left side. It is important to note that the majority of the lines on the left are interrogative sentences that query the appropriateness of the activity. On the right side, terms such as difficulties, freak, and unreliable are present. It is recognized that in concordance 2, there are not as many bad words as in concordance 1, but the tone

of speech is stronger due to the use of interrogative sentences. Still, it is clearly that [want]. [v\*] [nn\*] [v?g\*] has a strong negative semantic prosody.

## 5. Conclusions and Implications

Based on a corpus-driven approach, this study briefly reexamined the collocational pattern want [NP V-ing], which has been missed for attention in the past. A closer look at two concordances above reveals the flexibility and unexpectedness of this pattern as well as its potential to change. The result agrees with previous research done by Solveign & Wherrity (2008, 2013) and the only difference is that they used a written corpus. It not just shows us the pragmatic function of combination of a string of lexical items, more importantly, it proves that language in fact is semi-fixed or fixed based on idiomatic principle put forward by Sinclair. The evidence in the concordances tends to demonstrate that the collocational pattern want [NP V-ing] is a semi-fixed phraseological construction or multiword units. Language production is in sequences rather than arbitrary selections of vocabulary.

The syntactic pattern and semantic meanings are intertwined with each other as in the examples in the concordance 1 and 2, the pattern want [NP V-ing] and modal auxiliaries and negative semantic meaning are mutually indicated, which means co-selection of lexical items. Besides co-selection of words and grammar, there is also co-selection of words and words (e.g. collocating with difficult, bad idea and freak). Moreover, forms of co-selection regarding to this pattern want [NP V-ing] are able to display certain pragmatic functions as Solveign & Wherrity stated before [8]. In line with the idea of idiomatic principle, want [NP V-ing] is “a prestructured or semi structured phrase that constitute single choice, even though they appear to be analyzable into segments”, but which often available to native language user. The formulaic nature in oral communication is that speakers tend to express meaning with the choice of patterns instead of choosing word by word according to grammatical restrictions.

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