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### Modality and the V wh pattern

The advent of large computer-readable corpora has allowed researchers greater ease of access to language as it is used and has helped to highlight the close association between form and meaning pointed out by Sinclair (1991). Research into corpora has also provided evidence of the interdependence of paradigmatic and syntagmatic choices, which have traditionally been considered distinct (Hunston, 2003), thereby offering support to Sinclair's (1991; 2004) claim that the phrase is the 'essential building block of English' (Hunston, 2003: 58). An example of this interdependence is that the paradigmatic choice of *decide* rather than *decided* seems strongly related to the syntagmatic choice of a following *wh*-clause instead of a *that*-clause (Hunston, 2003). Moreover, the association between *decide* and the *wh*-clause can also be shown to be functionally motivated, in that, in most cases, the decision referred to has yet to be made, in contrast with *decided that*, where the decision has generally been made (ibid.).

The association between the base form *decide* and *wh*-clause coupled with the fact that the base form is also associated with modal or modal-like language led Hunston (2011) to hypothesise that modal-like language is attracted to the **V wh** pattern, that is, verbs that govern *wh*-clauses (Francis et al, 1996). However, it has yet to be demonstrated whether this observation about the lemma DECIDE reveals a systematic pattern applying to all verbs that frequently govern interrogative clauses.

This paper reports on a study that sets out to test Hunston's hypothesis by investigating verbs that frequently appear in the **V wh** pattern in the British National Corpus (BNC), using the CQP-edition of the online interface BNCweb (Hoffman & Evert, 2008). A quantitative approach is used to establish whether there is a significant attraction between *wh*-clauses and modal or modal-like language across verbs that govern the **V wh** pattern. This involves searching for instances of verbs complemented by *wh*-clauses and preceded either by a modal auxiliary or the infinitival operator *to*, a relatively simple task using the CQP-edition of BNCweb (Hoffman & Evert, 2008). A more qualitative methodology is used to identify the kinds of phraseologies that emerge from the data and to establish the extent to which queries based on the infinitival operator *to* followed by **V wh** can be said to result in hits containing 'modal-like expressions' (Hunston, 2011).

It is thought that this study will contribute to understanding of the relationship between paradigmatic and syntactic choice, as well as suggesting reasons why such a relationship might exist. There are also thought to be potential implications of this research in terms of producing more accurate and therefore helpful grammatical descriptions which can inform English language pedagogy.

### References

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