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Research Article

## A case study of delexical nouns in an EFL setting

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**Abstract:** This paper demonstrates the relevance of delexical nouns (*way, end, case* and *point*) based on corpus findings, course book analyses and classroom experiments. To this end, first, delexical noun functions and frequencies have been studied in-depth in two large English language corpora: Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and British National Corpus (BNC). Additionally, the study reviewed the compound nouns' dictionary meanings. Two coursebooks, namely *New English File* and *Face2Face*, have been investigated to determine if delexical nouns are addressed in English language coursebooks to provide ideas to guide the learners in the classroom. Finally, a data-driven learning (DDL) experiment was carried out to assess the participants' familiarity with the delexical nouns and their collocations. The results of the quantitative analysis from the study demonstrate that delexical nouns are introduced in the course books but are not explicitly explained. Consequently, there are no actual exercises to practise them. The classroom experiment findings reveal the participants' positive attitude towards how the four delexical nouns, *way, end, case* and *point*, were introduced and taught.

**Keywords:** delexical nouns, corpus linguistics, EFL teaching, EFL learning/acquisition, L2

### 1 Introduction

The study of delexical nouns is important in an L2 teaching/learning environment and language acquisition. This necessity arises not only because they are frequent in the English language but also because they are used in numerous idiomatic phrases which are equally common.

Since the creation of the Brown corpus in the 1960s and with the explosion of information technologies, there has been a considerable body of research carried out in the area of corpus linguistics (Sinclair, 1991; Biber et al., 1998; Hunston, 2002, 2022; McEnery & Hardie, 2011; McEnery, 2019; Stefanowitsch, 2020). That has helped advance our language knowledge by studying linguistic phenomena through corpora.

Results from corpus studies have been used in (and have contributed to) language teaching and learning. One may discover a variety of corpus-based dictionaries, grammatical reference books, and corpus-based activities that improve the learning environment and stimulate L2 acquisition (Aston, 1997; Tracy-Ventura & Paquot, 2020; Ma et al., 2021).

Since the 1990s, teaching about corpora, training learners to use corpus data and exploiting corpus resources for instruction needs “assists the teaching process” (Fligelstolle, 1993, p. 98). Furthermore, one can consider corpus evidence to be a language tendency indicator. Barlow (1996, p. 32) points out that “the results of a corpus-based investigation can serve as a firm basis for both linguistic description and input for language learning”.

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Corpus evidence supports vocabulary selection, grammar description and users' needs analysis through L2 acquisition studies, according to Conrad (2005). It also helps organise the syllabus and helps us decide what and how to teach because it "has been increasingly used in English language teaching and learning for the English language teaching process" (Cheng, 2010, p. 19).

Practitioners might explain some linguistic peculiarities through the application of grammatical rules. Still, other aspects of the English language can be more difficult to explain: phrasal verbs in English, which form lexical units and helpful to are not easily understood: why is it that particular verbs go with special adverbs and prepositions? Corpora can be showing the linguist the most frequent collocations of certain words. Additionally, all languages have many structural forms that can be learned if born or brought up in close contact with the language. As Ter-Minasova (2000, p. 634) states, "an attempt to generate interest and respect for other cultures, overcoming a sense of irritation from redundancy, failure or simply differences of other cultures is especially important now when the mixing of peoples, languages, cultures reached a record level." Besides, every foreign language lesson is a cultural crossroad because a foreign word reflects the culture and the world it belongs to.

This project aims to demonstrate the relevance of delexical nouns (*way, end, case and point*) based on corpus findings and apply the research results to our training courses. This research shows that these analyses of delexical nouns function as multiword units through collocation and colligation in corpora. Two coursebooks have also been reviewed to reveal if delexical nouns are taught in English language courses and to provide ideas for teaching delexical nouns in the classroom. Below we outline the way our project has developed in various stages:

**Table 1**

*Research outline*

<b>Stages</b>	<b>Description</b>
Step 1	Word list analysis: list of delexical nouns in BNC (top 1000 words) and their frequencies
Step 2	Dictionary definitions of the chosen delexical nouns
Step 3	Analysis of the chosen delexical nouns and their use in corpora: BNC and COCA
Step 4	Analysis of the chosen delexical nouns and their use in English language course books
Step 5	In an experiment in the classroom, data-driven learning (DDL) related to the training of the chosen delexical nouns use.

The present study on the most frequent delexical noun structures and their collocations is motivated by several factors:

1. Frequency: Delexical nouns are extremely common in the English language. They rank among the most frequently used English words, particularly when used as nouns. Furthermore, their relative frequency is even higher compared to other nouns alone and enter into multiple structures (Galstyan Sarsyan, 2013).
2. Fixed Multiword Units: Delexical nouns form fixed multiword units, and their literal translation is not possible. Their meaning is distributed throughout the entire linguistic pattern and is derived from the words they collocate with. This characteristic poses difficulties for L2 learners (Namvar et al., 2015).
3. Language Fluency: Delexicalised structures contribute to language fluency, as native speakers utilize them more frequently than non-native speakers (Altenberg & Granger, 2001).

4. Translation Challenges: Delexical nouns tend to be inaccurately translated into all languages (Vrbinc, 2004).

5. Limited Representation in Coursebooks: Modern English coursebooks do not fully address delexical nouns (Dellar & Walkley, 2004).

By investigating these aspects, the study aims to enhance our understanding of delexical noun structures and their collocations, providing valuable insights for language learners and educators.

The overall research aims to support three hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. Increased use of delexical nouns in the learning process enhances English language learning.

Hypothesis 2. Corpus study analyses effectively investigate delexical noun usage and enable pedagogical implementation.

Hypothesis 3. Delexical nouns such as *way*, *end*, *case*, and *point* enhance practical L2 training when incorporated into modern English language course books.

The article is structured into the following five sections. Firstly, we discuss the significance of corpus analysis of delexical nouns for an innovative model of EFL training. Next, we situate our work within the context of relevant research in this field. We then outline the methodology and procedures employed in the corpus study and classroom experiment. Finally, we present a comprehensive overview of the study findings, enabling us to draw theoretical and practical conclusions from the research.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

Corpus Linguistics (CL) forms the basis of the theoretical framework of this research project. According to Hunston (2022, p. 1), it is “an approach to the study of language that involves collecting large quantities of naturally occurring language and using specialised software that manipulates that language to obtain information about frequencies, co-occurrences and meanings”.

However, it is far from clear that corpus linguistics needs or has its theoretical framework. Directly addressing the issue of whether corpus linguistics needs its theoretical framework, Malhberg (2006, p. 370) states, "there is still disagreement on whether corpus linguistics is mainly a methodology or needs its theoretical framework". Hunston & Thompson (2006, p. 8) state that "at its most basic corpus linguistics is a methodology that can be aligned to any theoretical approach to language."

Nevertheless, a major theory of language has come out of corpus linguistics, well-known as "an area which focuses upon a set of procedures, or methods, for studying the language" (McEnery & Hardie 2012, p. 3). CL is associated with "the outlook that the rules of language are usage-based" (Lindquist & Levin, 2018, p. 1). For most users, the emphasis is probably on methodology. Still, some discoveries have far-reaching consequences that may be used to lay the foundation for a new theory of language, as indicated by Stig Johansson (2011, p. 117). First, that meaning is not located in single words but in 'units of meaning' in Sinclair's terminology (Sinclair, 1996, p. 94).

Consequently, that communicative discourse unfolds mainly as a series of semi-fixed phrases. This analysis focuses explicitly on delexical nouns within the concept of semi-fixed phrases and the idiom principle of language. Additionally, Stefanowitsch (2020, p. 55) advocates for the idea of corpus linguistics being "the investigation of linguistic research questions based on the complete and systematic analysis of the distribution of linguistic

phenomena in a linguistic corpus". Most importantly, Chung (2011, p. 402) added that with a focus on defining the 'presupposed meanings', all corpus-based investigations must undoubtedly determine the variations and the size of the particular research corpus to guarantee the merit in the feedback information. Indeed, considering how some subcorpora and concordance lines can undesirably impact the outcomes, making it more important to explain the powerful and strong forms of words that are suitable and relevant for the investigation (Phoocharoensil, 2021). Furthermore, the definitions make it necessary to determine the nouns to omit in the study from the line employing a stronger sense of concordance.

Aroonmanakun (2015) observed that concentrating on the limited concordance lines is useful for thoroughly examining linguistic details. Previous studies by McEnery and Hardie (2012) and Sinclair (1991) highlight various corpus data mining approaches to ensure a balanced representation of the information. The lexicographical definitions emphasise the challenges around establishing the most appropriate words to use and selection based on the contextual boundaries. Additionally, studies by Wongkhan & Thienthong (2020) and Szudarski (2018) show that language learners may find it more challenging to distinguish or differentiate the word types that are more likely to be obtained, allowing the appreciation of the occurring lexical nuances. Thus, it is necessary to turn to the corpus study to clarify their relationship.

Petcharat & Phoocharoensil (2017, p. 12) stated that "corpus linguistics is a methodology through which a particular language is studied for its real usage." This framework undoubtedly has some relevance since language users can apply the meanings in different contexts more effectively. In addition, Jirananthipor (2018, p.1) added that "disparity in their occurrences in different registers was somewhat in line with findings of the verb collocates of the synonym pair." That means defining linguistic theories provides an understanding of the grammar systems and structures used for studying the development of various perspectives of meanings using different linguistic forms, including words, emphasis, and tones. Learning the most pervasive language takes diverse presuppositions and numerous views, focusing on words, phrases, and an inherent array of references to pull out its intended meanings. Leading researchers in corpus linguistics (e.g. Sinclair 1991; Stubbs 1996; Biber et al. 1998; Hunston 2002, 2022) view a corpus as a collection of authentic language, either written or spoken, which has been compiled for a particular purpose. Most commonly, these purposes are purely linguistic but can also be socio-pragmatic. Corpora are "social artefacts" (McCarthy, 2001, p.63), the investigation of which can uncover the socio-pragmatic behaviour of particular discourse communities. It is also generally agreed that nowadays when a reference is made to a corpus, the corpus data are machine-readable, which everyone can access electronically for analysis. To define a corpus, we present four essential (but not exclusive) criteria:

1. A corpus is designed for a specific purpose (this may be linguistic or applied linguistic, in the broadest sense, or socio-pragmatic);
2. A corpus consists of authentic, naturally occurring data;
3. A corpus is assembled according to explicit design criteria;
4. A corpus is representative of a particular language or genre.

Our definition for this research is: a corpus is a collection of naturally occurring language, which has been systematically planned and collected following principled external design criteria with an a priori purpose in mind, which, in turn, determines the design parameters.

Therefore, for the current research, we would like to highlight the connection between a corpus study and delexical nouns: delexical nouns are semi-idiomatic expressions, meaning in the collocates of the word in question. With delexical nouns strongly dependent on their importance, we tend to analyse the complete collocate or expression extracted from a language

corpus with delexical nouns strongly reliant on their collocates for their meaning. Similar to verbal nouns, we consider delexical nouns:

- Nouns with little semantic content.
- Nouns that enter into collocational frameworks.
- Nouns that enter into collocational frameworks.
- Nouns that enter into semi-fixed idiomatic expressions.
- Nouns that enter into fixed idiomatic expressions.

Due to the limited extension of the present work, the researchers chose four highly frequent delexical nouns (*way*, *end*, *case* and *point*) for our detailed analysis and pedagogical experiment.

## 2.1 Importance of delexical structures

We now centre our attention on delexical structures and begin our understanding of delexical nouns in greater depth. Here are two examples of spoken discourse from the International Corpus of English (ICE) to get the kind of language we are dealing with.

Example 1:

I know, but if I send it to them now, it's going to look like we're only sending them because they sent us one.

Example 2:

A> Nothing stands out.

B> Yeah, I suppose.

A> is that because... You've got lots or...

B> Yeah, I guess. I can't say anything stands out.

It is quite challenging to understand these conversations out of context; they are heavily delexicalised and highly repetitive. Repetition is because speech is mainly used to establish and maintain human relationships. Generally, spoken English has a lower lexical density than written English. The lexis of conversation in English tends to feature simple Anglo-Saxon words like "go", "have", "put", and "do" rather than Latin origin words. Many of these words enter into verb phrases and are often the most common verbs in the language. They combine with nouns to make common phrases – 'have a look,' 'go for a walk,' 'do the washing up,' etc. These are delexical verbs, which are more common in informal conversation and spoken discourse.

Delexical verbs are used with nouns (have a shower, make a decision, take care, give a hand), which is the most common structure for these verbs. They indicate that somebody performs an action, where the main verb's meaning is delexicalised and is shifted to the co-occurring noun.

If we examine the structures that these verbs enter into, we find that their delexical structures can be divided into two main groups (see Sinclair 1990, p.148–149): delexical verbs are used intransitive constructions, and the design consists of a delexical verb followed by a noun group that forms a delexical structure. The simplified pattern of this structure is as follows:

Delexical verb + (Indefinite article, modifier) + noun, the delexical verb is followed by: a) A noun in the singular, which is the delexical verb's object, sometimes preceded by the indefinite article. 'Mr Clarke had given no satisfactory explanation.' These nouns acting as objects are commonly used as verbs in English. So, for example, give a call = to call, provide a

cry = to cry, give an explanation = to explain . b) A noun in the plural: His colleague, sitting on the far side of the room, taking written notes of the questions and answers, looked up. c) An uncountable noun: Liz is beginning to make outstanding progress. d) An adjective follows the delexical verb before the noun. We can add further details about the event using adjectives in front of the noun rather than adverbs. It is more common, for example, to say “John gave a quick furtive glance around the room” than to say “He glanced and furtively around the room”, which is felt to be rather clumsy and unnatural in English (Sinclair, 1990, p.148). 2. A delexical verb is a verb with a range, where the content represents most or all of the process's meaning; the most common delexical verbs that enter into this kind of structure are: give, have, make and take. Of these, “have” is the clearest example of this kind of structure: Have + a bath /a break/ a drink/ a holiday/ a look/ a rest/ a shave/ a shower/ a sleep/ a taste/ a walk/ a wash

At the stage of delexical teaching material development, it is interesting to note that delexical verb collections exist not only in English but also in Spanish (Spanish: "ofrecer – Hacer una oferta", English: "to offer – to make an offer"). There is a possible contrastive study to be carried out here.

Consequently, Sinclair (1991) emphasised that normally the delexical verb structures simplify the actions described, particularly when no proper adverb has been included to demonstrate the situational concrete attributes. Therefore, one main reason behind applying the delexical verbs following the modifications on the statement entails the appropriateness of noun modification that leads to more flexible and better verb modifications to convey the desired meanings. For example, a group of collocations with the verb "have" could be based on eating & drinking – having breakfast, tea, a drink, a snack, a sandwich, or sleeping – having a nap, asleep, a dream, or a nightmare. The important thing here is that we are dealing with semi-idiomatic expressions, meaning in the collections of the word in question. Some researchers raised awareness of this phenomenon within the EFL teaching community: delexical verb + noun collocations such as make a decision, give rise to and take care of in Swedish and Chinese learner English (Wang, 2016), delexical verb + noun structures for Korean learners (Choi, 2019) and a comparative study of delexical verbs in an EFL Learner Corpus in Korea too (Park, 2020), among others.

However, the specificity of delexical nominal structures needed to be analysed more. It depends on their collections for their purpose; specific training might be a plausible way of approaching this type of conversational structure.

Delexical nouns are highly frequent common nouns that may acquire different meanings depending on the context in which they are used and the words they collocate with (Galstyan Sargsyan, 2013). This study is an initial analysis of these delexical nouns. Its main goal is main goal is to show the multiple linguistic constructions they enter into from the corpus-based and didactic perspective.

### **3 Methods and procedures**

As outlined in the project objectives described in Part 1, this study aims to showcase the significance of delexical nouns by utilizing corpus findings and illustrating how they function as multiword units through phenomena like collocation and colligation.

To achieve this purpose, several steps were undertaken to analyze the functions and structures of delexical nouns in dictionaries and two extensive corpora:

1. Dictionaries: *The Oxford English Dictionary*, *Collins*, *Chambers*, and *Penguin* were consulted to examine the delexical nouns' definitions and meanings.

2. Corpora: The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and the British National Corpus (BNC) were utilized to analyze the functions and collocational patterns of the delexical nouns.

In addition to a linguistic approach, this investigation also incorporates a pedagogical perspective. The delexical nouns *way*, *end*, *case*, and *point* were tracked in two modern English language course books, namely *Face2Face* and *New English File*. The objective was to assess whether these highly frequent nouns are appropriately introduced and taught at various proficiency levels within the English language curriculum. Furthermore, a data-driven learning (DDL) experiment was conducted to introduce the four delexical nouns to student participants through inductive and deductive exercises. This experiment aimed to gauge the students' overall awareness of these nouns and gather their opinions on the usage and methodology employed to teach them.

Moreover, apart from a strictly linguistic approach to analysing delexical nouns, we have also adopted a pedagogical approach to this investigation. We tracked the delexical nouns *way*, *end*, *case* and *point* in two modern English language course books (*Face2Face* and *New English File*) to determine whether these highly frequent nouns are correctly introduced and taught at different levels within the English language curriculum. Also, an experiment based on the data-driven learning (DDL) was carried out to introduce the four delexical nouns *way*, *end*, *case* and *point* to the student participants through inductive and deductive exercises. The researchers planned this experiment to check their general awareness of these nouns and find out their opinion about the way the nouns are used and the methodology used to teach them.

To summarise, so the reader can get a clearer idea of how to undertake this project, a list of all the steps taken is presented below (steps 1-3 are a purely linguistic analysis; steps 4-5 detailed analysis of course books and a simple pedagogical experiment).

### 3.1 Word list analysis

We conducted an in-depth study on four delexical nouns (*case*, *end*, *point*, *way*) extracted from the British National Corpus (BNC). Our investigation began by examining the most frequently used words in the BNC. To determine the frequency of delexical nouns in this corpus, we extracted all nouns from a general list of the top 1000 most frequent words. The quantitative analysis yielded several insightful findings. Firstly, among the list of the most frequent nouns (comprising 363 words with a cut-off placement score of 46-60), there were several nouns that could be potentially considered delexicalised. From this pool, we selected four delexical nouns for a more detailed analysis. The table below presents the list of these delexicalised nouns, extracted from the top 1000 words in the BNC. Moreover, we examined their relative frequencies compared to other commonly used nouns in the English language. It was found that they ranked as the third (*way*), sixteenth (*end*), seventeenth (*case*), and twenty-eighth (*point*) most frequent nouns in English.

**Table 2**

*Delexical nouns case, end, point, way*

<b>Word position in the BNC list of the most frequent nouns</b>	<b>Frequency, BNC (per 1000 words)</b>	<b>Frequency, BNC (per million words)</b>
98. way	94797	947.74
208. case	44616	446.16
209. end	47608	476.08
241. point	39053	390.53

### **3.2 Analysis of delexical nouns in dictionaries**

The four selected words were examined in multiple English dictionaries, including Collins, Chambers, and Penguin. In order to enhance the reliability of our corpus-based quantitative analysis, we utilized the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) to verify how the four delexical nouns (way, end, case, and point) are defined within this authoritative dictionary. Additionally, we analysed the usage of these words in Collins, Chambers, and Penguin dictionaries. However, due to its comprehensive nature and authoritative status, our primary focus was on the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), where we traced their meanings (refer to Table 3).



**Table 3**

*Delexical nouns' meanings. Source: Oxford English Dictionary*

Delexical nouns	OED meanings
Way, n.1	<p>l. Road, path * for passage of persons, animals, vehicles.</p> <p>1. a. gen. A track prepared or available for travelling along b. In figurative context, regarding a metaphorical walking or travelling. Parting of the ways. c. A main road connecting different parts of a country d. transf. In MILKY WAY n. and various synonyms e. A road considered with reference to its surface condition or difficulties or dangers of transit. f. A place of passage, e.g. an opening made through a crowd, a door or gate, etc. Also, way in, way out. Hence Way Out sign. Cf. ARCHWAY n., DOORWAY n., GATEWAY. g. Applied to a path in a block of wood or through the fields. See also greenway n. at GREEN. and n. 1 Special uses 4a since all the meanings are considered delexicalised. h. Fortification. A passage left between walls or buildings. covered (†covert) way (= French chemin couvert), a route running along the top of the counterscarp, protected from the enemy's fire by a parapet.) †way of the rounds</p>
End, n.1	<p>l. With reference to space</p> <p>1. a. The extremity or outermost part (in any direction) of a portion of space or anything extended in the area; utmost limit. Obs. in general s b. A limit of magnitude or multitude. c. A boundary. In pl. territorial boundaries [? after Latin fines]. d. the end. fig. and colloq</p>
Case, n.1	<p>1. a. A thing that occurs or happens to anyone; event, occurrence, hap, or chance b. A deed, a thing</p> <p>2. a. Chance, hazard, hap b. Chiefly on phrases: by case, of the case, on the case, upon the case.</p> <p>3. a. An instance or example of the occurrence or existence of a thing b. An infatuation; is a situation in which two people fall in love A separate or single item, article, or element in an extended whole (usually an abstract whole, as a course of action, a subject of thought, a treatise, a discourse, a set of ideas, etc.)</p>
The point, n.1	<p>1. a. an individual part, element, or matter; a detail, a particular; (sometimes) a piece of nature or character, a specific quality or respect; (formerly) † an instance of some quality, etc. b. With prefixed numeral forming an attributive phrase. ** A minute particle; is the smallest unit of measurement.</p> <p>2. A small part, division, or portion of a whole. a. A very small part of something; a jot, whit, or particle. Obs. no point: not a bit; not in the least. b. A small portion or division of time; a moment or instant. c. In the medieval reckoning: any of various divisions of an hour, esp. a quarter of an hour. d. A unit of shadow length, usually the twelfth part of a full shadow scale as commonly found on the back of an astrolabe or quadrant (being a measure of the tangent or cotangent of the solar altitude); (also) a twelfth part (occasionally a 24th part) of the solar or lunar diameter, by which the degree of obscuration in an eclipse was expressed.</p>

### 3.3 Corpora analysis of delexical nouns

The functions and structures of the four delexical nouns selected were analysed in two large English language corpora: Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and British National Corpus (BNC). In the following section, we will provide a brief overview of the process we used to extract collocations from both corpora. It is noteworthy that these delexical

nouns commonly form collocations. Presented below are examples of these delexical nouns in conjunction with prepositions.

**Table 4**

*Preposition + the way (COCA, BNC)*

Collocation	Frequency	Relative Frequency	Collocation	Frequency	Relative Frequency
1. by the way	13635	136.35	1. in the way	2990	29.90
2. in the way	10467	104.67	2. on the way	2230	22.30
3. on the way	9694	96.94	3. of the way	1928	19.28
4. of the way	8475	84.75	4. by the way	1527	15.27
5. along the way	5185	51.85	5. about the way	562	5.62
6. about the way	1945	19.45	6. to the way	482	4.82
7. to the way	1650	16.50	7. with the way	415	4.15
8. with the way	1621	16.21	8. along the way	312	3.12

**Table 5**

*Preposition + the end (COCA, BNC)*

Collocation	Frequency	Relative Frequency	Collocation	Frequency	Relative Frequency
1. at the end	30400	304	1. at the end	10381	103.81
2. in the end	13219	132.19	2. by the end	3426	34.26
3. by the end	9473	94.73	3. in the end	3072	30.72
4. to the end	4121	41.21	4. to the end	1318	13.18
5. toward the end	2121	21.21	5. towards the end	1123	11.23
6. until the end	1555	15.55	6. until the end	735	7.35
7. near the end	1440	14.4	7. before the end	550	5.5
8. of the end	1359	13.59	8. on the end	490	4.9

**Table 6**

*Case + preposition (COCA, BNC)*

Collocation	Frequency	Relative Frequency	Collocation	Frequency	Relative Frequency
1. case of	20634	206.34	1. case of	7645	76.45
2. case in	5766	57.66	2. case for	1613	16.13
3. case for	4885	48.85	3. case in	1220	12.2
4. case with	2651	26.51	4. case with	577	5.77
5. case against	2271	22.71	5. case to	331	3.31
6. case to	1403	14.03	6. case against	291	2.91
7. case on	838	8.38	7. case on	195	1.95
8. case at	572	5.72	8. case by	146	1.46

**Table 7***Point + preposition (COCA, BNC)*

Collocation	Frequency	Relative Frequency	Collocation	Frequency	Relative Frequency
1. point of	23121	231.21	1. point of	6981	69.81
2. point in	10075	100.75	2. point in	2616	26.61
3. point to	6187	61.87	3. point to	1101	11.01
4. point for	3125	31.25	4. point for	756	7.56
5. point at	1581	15.81	5. point at	584	5.84
6. point on	1425	14.25	6. point on	454	4.54
7. point about	1111	11.11	7. point about	416	4.16
8. point with	642	6.42	8. point with	123	1.23

### 3.4 Analysis of delexical nouns in dictionaries

The analysis of these words in English language course books, namely *Face2Face* (a general English course with six levels published by Cambridge University Press) and *New English File* (a general English course with five levels published by Oxford University Press). While studies on teaching delexical verbs have been conducted (Lewis, 1993; Hill, 1999; Thornbury, 2002) our data analysis confirms that delexical nouns have not been thoroughly investigated or taught as a subject matter in these course books. Insufficient attention has been given to delexical nouns in English language teaching materials such as *Face2Face* and *New English File*.

Delexical nouns, similar to delexical verbs, contribute to the fluency improvement of non-native speakers. However, the term “delexical verbs” is used in *Collins Cobuild English Grammar* (Sinclair, 1990) to refer to “Verbs with little meaning: delexical verbs” while there are no dedicated sections related to delexical nouns. Students primarily focus on individual words at specific levels to enhance their vocabulary and tend to avoid using fixed unit structures or collocations. Nevertheless, Hill (2000, p.54) notes that native speakers are more fluent because: “they are calling on a vast repertoire of ready-made language in their mental lexicons”.

Bhuvanewar (2019) highlights that many course books place significant emphasis on grammar while neglecting vocabulary instruction. However, the adaptability and flexibility of frequent words, such as “way,” which form collocations or fixed lexical units, play a crucial role in teaching English vocabulary to L2 learners. Delexical nouns also serve as a bridge between grammar and vocabulary through structures like *the way of + ing*. For example, with the word *point*, constructions like *there is no point in + ing* or *is there any point in + ing* are common.

Our study reveals that the delexical nouns *way*, *end*, *case*, and *point* are introduced at different levels in course books. However, rather than being explicitly taught, they mostly appear in “Teacher’s language” or in reading exercises. In other words, they are not intentionally prepared but are so prevalent in the English language that they inevitably find their way into course books through reading exercises and teacher instructions for activities.

The tables below present the results of the quantitative analysis conducted on *New English File*, shedding some light on the current pedagogical approach towards how delexical nouns are treated due to their high frequency. For instance, in the first two tables from *New English File*, we observe that at the elementary and pre-intermediate levels, these four words appear only 10 and 5 times, respectively. When they do appear, they are typically part of the language used for instruction or incidentally occur within listening, reading, or speaking exercises. They are never explicitly taught in the textbooks.

**Table 8***New English File textbooks' analysis*

<b>Word</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Type of exercise</b>
New English File (Elementary):		
Way	2	Teacher's language Reading
End	8	Reading, teacher's language, listening and speaking.
Case	0	
Point	0	
New English File (Pre-Intermediate):		
Way	3	Speaking, reading, teacher's language
End	1	Speaking
Case	0	
Point	1	Reading and vocabulary (teacher's language)
New English File (Intermediate):		
Way	11	Teacher's language, reading, speaking, grammar, vocabulary Reading and grammar
End	5	Writing, listening and speaking grammar reading
Case	2	Speaking, reading
Point	1	Vocabulary
New English File (Upper-Intermediate):		
Way	38	Teacher's language, reading, speaking, grammar, reading and grammar, reading and vocabulary
End	9	Reading, vocabulary
Case	14	Reading, vocabulary, grammar
Point	6	Vocabulary
New English File (Advanced):		
Way	59	Teacher's language reading, listening, grammar, vocabulary.
End	24	Reading, vocabulary, teacher's language, grammar
Case	11	Reading, vocabulary, grammar, speaking, listening
Point	15	Vocabulary, teacher's language, grammar, reading, writing, teacher's language

### 3.5 Classroom experiment

In May 2019, a classroom experiment was conducted using the data-driven learning (DDL) method. The purpose of this research was to compare and analyze data collected from two groups of English language students. Specifically, students from the Faculty of Business Administration and Management at *Universitat Politècnica de València* (UPV), were invited to participate in the classroom experiment. These students were enrolled in an upper-intermediate (B2) level course focused on business English, aiming to enhance their spoken and written professional language skills.

One notable advantage of our experiment is the diverse composition of the participant group, consisting of students from different countries such as the Czech Republic, France, and Spain. This diversity contributes to the richness of our research, as the participants bring varied educational backgrounds and experiences to the table. Their diverse perspectives enable them to provide more objective statements and insights. While the students are enrolled in a B2-level course, it is important to note that they are not expected to possess extensive knowledge about delexical nouns or the associated issues. An initial placement test indicated that the average English language proficiency level of the students was B1/B1+.

By involving participants from diverse backgrounds with limited familiarity regarding delexical nouns, our experiment aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and learning outcomes associated with these linguistic elements. This approach

allows us to gather valuable data and draw meaningful conclusions regarding the effectiveness of incorporating delexical nouns into language learning curricula.

The two groups involved in the classroom experiment had different numbers of participants. Group 1 consisted of 20 participants, while Group 2 had 10 participants. The respondents' ages ranged from 21 to 23, and they represented various countries. However, to ensure fairness and avoid biases, the participants' identities were not included in the questionnaire forms. Since the research focuses on linguistic and teaching data, a survey was designed to cover both aspects. During the introductory session, the students were informed about the objectives of the questionnaire and data-driven learning (DDL). The participation of UPV students in the experiment was voluntary, and at the conclusion of the investigation, the undergraduate students were provided with the survey results and future training guidelines.

The experiment included two types of learner-centered exercises: inductive and deductive. These exercises were created using sentences extracted from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), ensuring that only authentic language examples were used. The selection of collocates for the exercises was based on their frequency in COCA, enabling students to immerse themselves in a natural English language environment.

In Group 1, a comprehensive explanation was presented using PowerPoint slides, showcasing the collocates associated with the delexical nouns *way*, *end*, *case*, and *point*. On the other hand, Group 2 analyzed contextual examples where delexical nouns were used, aiming to identify their specific meanings and verify them with the guidance of the lecturer. Appendix 1 provides additional information and examples that were presented to the participants for conducting the exercises (See Appendix 1 for examples).

## 4 Results

Little research has been carried out on delexical nouns corpus study and their application to EFL or L2 training. In line with these two ideas, at this moment, we describe the findings in two parts: corpus study and classroom use of delexical nouns.

### 4.1 Corpus study

The following overview summarizes the first three research steps, focusing on the results of the corpus study. Analysis of the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) revealed that the delexical nouns *way*, *end*, *case* and *point* are highly frequent as individual word units. Unlike delexical verbs, which are predominantly used in informal language (Lock, 2005) and have a colloquial tone, these delexical nouns can be found in both written and spoken genres. They form common lexical units (collocations) in everyday spoken language, as well as in fiction, magazines, newspapers, and academic genres. The specific arrangement of these nouns depends on the structures they are used in. Corpus analysis (COCA) provides evidence of this distribution. For instance, when examining the use of "point," we observe an even distribution across spoken/written and informal/formal genres. However, "by the way" is more commonly used in spoken discourse.

The data obtained from the British National Corpus (BNC) and its connection to the corpus study on delexical nouns reveal that these nouns are semi-idiomatic expressions, where their meaning is derived from their collocates. The delexical nouns *way*, *end*, *case* and *point* exhibit multiple meanings, and it is significant to note that they are not only presented as single-word

units but also as components of compounds and in association with specific collocations. Examining the number of senses, compounds, and collocates of these words in the Oxford English Dictionary, in conjunction with the COCA results we have presented, further emphasizes the importance of investigating the use of these delexical nouns.

While the corpus evidence highlights the existence of compound words and nouns in broader structures, the dictionaries fail to fully describe some words, including certain compound nouns that commonly occur with determiners and various modifiers such as adjectives, nominal phrases, and verbal prepositional phrases. According to Mahlberg (2006), single words in frequency lists give information about a text's content; nevertheless, their position in the list does not tell us much about meaning. As Stubbs (1996) suggests, computer-generated findings such as frequencies, comparisons, or graphs present formal features of the text rather than the interpretation of its meaning. These formal features need to be linked with contextual features to uncover the meaning of the examined words. Furthermore, some of the analyzed lexical units fall into the category of compound nouns. Scholars do not consider the unit of meaning as arbitrary for fixed expressions (Halliday et al., 2004). Additionally, it is important to note that the selection of nouns for this study was limited to a manageable amount of information to be presented within this paper. The aim was to construct a comprehensive understanding of the semantic behavior of names of nervous system diseases.

After examining word frequency lists, corpus data, and dictionaries, a selected set of the most relevant collocations associated with the delexical nouns *way*, *end*, *case* and *point* was chosen for further study. The subsequent sections provide details on the analysis of course books and the classroom experiment (see Appendix 1).

## 4.2 Educational implications

The following overview of research steps four and five focuses on the educational outcomes and implications of the current study.

The analysis of the *New English File* course books has prompted us to address and answer the following questions:

a) At which levels are the delexical nouns *way*, *end*, *case* and *point* introduced in course books? We found that there are limited indirect references to these delexical nouns at the elementary and intermediate levels, with a noticeable increase in their coverage for upper-intermediate and advanced learners.

b) How are these delexical nouns presented? Are they presented as single-word units or in collocations? In all cases, the delexical nouns were only presented in collocations, with no focus on their standalone usage.

c) How are the delexical nouns *way*, *end*, *case*, and *point* practised or taught? Generally, these delexical nouns were neither explicitly explained nor taught at any level in the *New English File* course books. Consequently, there are no dedicated exercises to practise these nouns. This finding can be attributed to the predominant grammatical approach in L2 teaching, which often overlooks the linguistic aspects of the language.

In addition to the course book analysis, classroom experiments were conducted with two groups using inductive and deductive tasks. To gather students' opinions on the teaching of these words, a brief questionnaire was designed. The results of the questionnaire are presented below:

**Table 9**

*Classroom questionnaire*

<b>*Group 1 (20 participants), inductive type of training</b>	<b>Group 2 (10 participants), deductive kind of training</b>
A. Have you been explicitly taught the words (case, end, point, way)? Yes: 20% No: 77,5%	A. Have you been explicitly taught the words (case, end, point, way)? Yes: 30% No: 70%
B. Did you like how I presented these words and their structures? strongly agree: 28,5% agree: 60% undecided: 11,5%	B. Did you like how I presented these words and their structures? strongly agree: 40% agree: 60% undecided: 10%
C. I like to work out grammatical rules strongly agree: 15% agree: 61% indifferent: 15%	C. I like to work out grammatical rules strongly agree: 30% agree: 60% indifferent: 10%

In essence, the implementation of the short questionnaire embraced the principles of data-driven learning (DDL), where students actively engaged as participants and researchers, exploring and understanding the structures and rules of the language. In our experiment, participants were encouraged to identify patterns without prior knowledge of their meanings and the collocations associated with the delexical nouns *way*, *end*, *case* and *point*.

Overall, the results of the classroom experiment revealed the following key findings:

- The participants displayed a positive attitude towards the introduction and teaching of the four delexical nouns: *way*, *end*, *case* and *point*.
- The significance of striking a balance between lexical and grammatical approaches in L2 teaching was highlighted, with data-driven learning (DDL) emerging as a valuable approach that considers the practical requirements of students.

## 5 Conclusions

This research aims to explore the challenges and opportunities associated with the use of delexical nouns in the English language within the education community. By adopting a comprehensive and meticulous approach to studying delexical nouns, we can recognize their significance based on the following aspects:

- Delexical nouns exhibit high frequency in the English language, with *way* ranking as the third most common noun. The four delexical nouns analyzed in this study all fall within the top 250 most frequent words, collectively representing over 50% of the language found in any English language corpus.
- Delexical nouns, namely *way*, *end*, *case* and *point*, are versatile in their usage, appearing in various constructions, including lexical, grammatical, semi-fixed idioms, and fixed idioms.
- Delexical nouns find application in both spoken (e.g., "in any case," "no way") and written (e.g., "it is the case that") genres, encompassing both formal and informal contexts.
- Delexical nouns hold relevance in second language acquisition due to their frequency and the multitude of structures in which they are employed. Currently, they are not explicitly taught, making their study all the more significant.

- By examining these four instances of delexical nouns (*way*, *end*, *case* and *point*) this study establishes a foundation for investigating numerous other potential candidates (e.g., "part," "side," "problem," "question," "thing") that warrant further examination.

By shedding light on these aspects, this research contributes to our understanding of delexical nouns and their implications in language learning and teaching.

Furthermore, the implementation of corpus studies for educational purposes requires meticulous effort, and in this article, we have not taken any shortcuts. We have presented the outcomes of our research into delexical nouns, which were derived from various sources, including dictionaries, corpora, course books, and classroom experiments. These findings strengthen our belief in the pedagogical potential of these nouns in the acquisition of English as a Second Language.

The overall objective of our research was to demonstrate: (1) the everyday usage of delexical nouns; (2) the applicability of corpus study in analyzing and implementing delexical nouns in pedagogy; and (3) the practicality of using delexical nouns such as *way*, *end*, *case* and *point* in L2 training. The following evaluation aims to clarify these points and presents a step-by-step overview of our research:

Step 1: Analysis of delexical nouns and word list analysis in the BNC: Frequency analysis highlighted the crucial importance of studying delexical nouns due to their frequent use in everyday English interactions. We selected four delexical nouns (*way*, *end*, *case* and *point*) as a case study to demonstrate their relevance.

Step 2: Dictionary definitions of the selected delexical nouns: We consulted four dictionaries to examine how these words were defined in reference sources. The definitions provided by the Oxford English Dictionary influenced the explanations offered during the classroom experiments.

Step 3: Analysis of the selected delexical nouns and their usage in English language course books: We discovered that these nouns had relatively low frequency in course books and were typically incorporated into the language of instruction or appeared incidentally in listening, reading, and speaking exercises. None of the course books in the New English File series explicitly taught these words. These findings informed the principles and types of activities we designed for the classroom experiment.

Step 4: Analysis of the selected delexical nouns and their usage in corpora (BNC and COCA): We examined lexical and grammatical patterns of the four words in the corpora and identified four basic structures: a) collocational frameworks (e.g., case study, case history, case record); b) colligational frameworks (e.g., way of thinking, way of saying, way of knowing); c) semi-fixed idioms (e.g., come to the point, get the point); d) fixed idioms (e.g., a sticky end, when it comes to the point).

Step 5: Classroom experiments based on data-driven learning (DDL) for teaching delexical nouns: We conducted experiments with two groups of students, employing both inductive and deductive training methods to showcase the potential of delexical nouns in ESL classes.

Through this sequence of research stages, we obtained relevant results: (1) frequency lists confirmed that delexical nouns are among the most frequently used words in English; (2) the BNC and COCA corpora provided high-quality data for research and educational purposes related to the analyzed delexical nouns; (3) classroom experiments involving DDL assisted in methodological development and the educational application of the data obtained.

Although our research introduced an innovative empirical approach, it does face certain limitations. The nomenclature for delexical nouns is not yet established in the literature. However, given the existence of terms like "delexical structure" and "delexical verb," it is



logical to assume the existence of delexical nouns within delexicalized discourse. Additionally, the corpora studied were vast, and further detailed and exhaustive research would reveal additional ways these words are used and the structures they enter into.

Given our conviction in the validity of the nomenclature for delexical nouns, the logical next step is to compile a comprehensive list of these words and conduct a thorough study of their structures and uses. The procedures and methods employed in this study can be adopted by textbook authors, lecturers, teachers, and course designers to establish a stronger connection between published materials and the authentic use of delexical nouns in real-life contexts. This would enhance the effectiveness of language learning and teaching practices.

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## Appendix 1.

### Delexical nouns, classroom experiment

Group 1 (20 participants), inductive type of training	Group 2 (10 participants), deductive kind of training
<p>Example: 1) Introductory information WAY way of thinking (1214), in no way (1431), to have it both ways (411), either way (2932), way of living (252), in any way (4611), in the way (10473), in a way (14136), no way (149470), by the way (13647), on the way (9721).</p> <p>During the inductive training, the participants were introduced to the principal words for collocations. During the search, the most frequent delexical unit where the compound noun occurs was no way. The noun is preceded by in a way, by the way, in the way, on the way, either way, in any way, in no way, and finally, way of thinking. The order of emergence of the compound noun makes the adjectives identify with their predictable features. In this example, the BNC website specifies the meanings of the <i>way</i> based on its spread across various English language registers and the formal expressive categorisation means of determining the most applicable delexical units as illustrated by the research material.</p>	<p>Example: Deductive exercise: WAY Living in Suck Creek, I don't know how she could hold to that way of thinking. But she was strong on religion. Lots of folks are strong. Thankfulness, in part. After all, at least they had a gut way of living to return to. Uneasiness too. She'd prayed for Levi to the idea of being whole, of loving oneself. And I think there is no way to reach your fullest potential if you don't really find the love of yourself is quiet. Some days the cabin feels dark and small, there's no way to stay warm outside for longer than an hour, and I wish for a head because I never got to know her. So, I wrote to her in a way that interested me and worked with this other character. "# Suzy is responsible.</p>
<p>Example: 2) Inductive exercise: Complete the following sentences with a suitable phrase from the list below: WAY How's he doing,..... ? Richie Maggio beamed. Good, very good. Enjoying himself. She winks..... that only a Latina can wink.</p>	

<p>.....back at the airport, I felt let down, irritated, and melancholy. Americans who believe that government gets ..... more often than it helps should be as limited and small as ... You have my word of honour, Harry, that I am ..... connected with Dr. Grimshaw at the moment, she said.</p>	
<p>Way of thinking, in no way, to have it both ways, either way, way of living, in any way, in the way, in a way, no way, by the way, and on the way.</p>	
<p>As for such nouns that become known based on the compound noun, the words indicate some semantic ally relationship to the terms within the same syntactical position as hyponyms. Mahlberg (2006, p. 162) stated that this example below represents part of a longer stretch of texts that we are usually analysed in terms of patterns as indicated in the corpus; linguistic conclusions presuppose that meaning is observable through designs (Mahlberg, 2005, p. 162). All compound nouns usually have significant collocations as observable in <i>the way</i> the words become a modifying phrase to another noun while studying the lexical units' first lemma towards the right. Wongkhan &amp; Thienthong (2020) stated that the collocations of the texts are in concord with other established dictionaries' notions and may depict a combination of the original words.</p>	