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# Semantic Ambiguity of High-Frequency Polysemous Verbs in Business English: A Corpus-Based Investigation

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## Abstract

In English for Specific Purposes, according to Mišević and Beko (2022), the interpretation of contractual language based on the capacity of readers to distinguish polysemous lexical items, and the fact that parties interpret a contract clause in different routes, has been included in theory as a structural source of contractual disputes (Grant, Kline, & Quiggin, 2014). Nevertheless, systematic corpus-based evidence on how high-frequency polysemous verbs distribute their senses across business and general registers, and on which collocational positions reliably signal sense selection, remains limited. Therefore, this research was designed to investigate four verbs, including “run,” “execute,” “bear,” and “discharge,” by analyzing 36,219 KWIC instances drawn from authentic Business and General English sub-corpora in COCA. After that, its concordance lines were extracted using AntConc with a collocational window from L3 to R3. Sense coding followed a positionally weighted rule-based procedure with cue inventories derived from the Oxford English Dictionary and the Cambridge Business English Dictionary. Pearson chi-square tests with Bonferroni correction yielded sixteen significant results ( $p < .001$ ), with Cramér’s V values ranging from .11 to .61. Effects at R1 were consistently larger than at L1, indicating that right-adjacent collocates carry stronger disambiguating information than left-adjacent collocates. Register narrowing accounts for the contractual senses of “bear,” “discharge,” and “execute,” while metonymic transfer predominates for “run.” Lastly, the study provides statistically grounded disambiguation rules with implications for ESP vocabulary instruction and the lexicographic treatment of polysemous verbs in Business English reference works.

**Keywords:** Business English; Collocational Analysis; Corpus Linguistics; ESP; Polysemy