Semantic Distinctions in Cognitive Verb-Preposition Combinations: A Corpus-Based Analysis of *Of* and *About*

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Abstract

The current paper explores the semantic distinctions of cognitive verbs followed by the prepositions *of* and *about* through corpus methods, framed within Construal theory, backgrounded in Cognitive Grammar (Langacker, 1986). Construal theory suggests that meaning is shaped by how speakers conceptualize the world around them. The study examines how these verb-preposition combinations reflect different conceptualizations, where verb+ *of* encodes a more limited partitive construal meaning, while verb+ *about* signals broader and more holistic construal meanings. The analysis demonstrates that *of* is used for selective and abstract meanings (recalling and imagining ideas), whereas *about* implies a closer and more concrete involvement in a given situation. Through using frequency, dispersion, distributional, and collocation measures, the findings demonstrate that *of* and *about* systematically alter verb semantics, confirming the construal framework. Differences in frequency of use appear clearly in COCA and BNC, which might be due to regional preferences. Dispersion analysis shows *think of/about* are more common in spoken English. *Know about* is more frequent than *know of*, especially in spoken discourse. Genre analysis reveals different usage patterns in fiction, TV, and blog genres, expressing imaginative situations, feelings, and ideas. The study underscores the interplay between prepositional semantics and usage in context, offering insights for lexicography and theoretical semantics of verb-preposition interaction.

Keywords: Semantics, Cognitive Verbs, Prepositions, Corpus, Construal Theory, Cognitive Grammar

1. Introduction

Language functions as both a reflection of cognitive processes and a medium of social role in communication. Within this framework, verb-preposition combinations offer a rich linguistic source that enables speakers and hearers to explore how meaning is conveyed through the syntactic structure. Cognitive verbs such as *think, know,* and *dream* show a semantic and contextual variability when paired with prepositions *of* and *about*, reflecting different ways of conceptualizing situations and events. It is claimed that *think of* suggests a passing idea, whereas *think about* suggests a deeper reflection (Yamazaki, 1994). The difference in the paired preposition suggests subtle cognitive changes in meaning (Broccias, 2021; Al-Khawaldeh et al., 2024). This distinction in meaning is important to language learners, educators, and lexicographers.

Since prepositions play a crucial role in language structure and use, they have been widely analyzed for their grammatical and lexical functions. Their significant role in conveying meaning across different contexts has been the focus of linguistic analysis. The use of propositions in different contexts could be confusing, emphasizing the importance of lexical definitions for accurate interpretation (Cungu & Toska, 2023). Due to the polysemous nature of many prepositions in English, they pose difficulties for language learners (Alqarni, 2025; Cardona, 2019; Dekeyser, 2011; Rao, 2018; Saravanan, 2015; Yaş, 2022; Zaabalawi, 2021). That applies to the meaning of the prepositions *of* and *about* with verbs, where *of* indicates a mental state or a result of an action, *about,* on the other hand, denotes feelings and attitudes according to The Preposition Project (TPP) (Litkowski & Hargraves, 2021).

To examine the underlying distinctions behind these combinations, this study is grounded in Cognitive Linguistics (CL) that emphasizes the role of cognition in shaping the structure and meaning (Evans and Tyler, 2005). A key model in CL is Cognitive Grammar (CG) that views lexical and grammatical expressions as a reflection of the way speakers conceptualize the world around them (Langacker, 1986).

Therefore, the current analysis examines the meaning of three cognitive verbs: *think, know,* and *dream,* followed by *of* and *about* in two native corpora, the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and the British National Corpus (BNC). This study aims to examine their behavior, analyzing their use and meanings in the spoken and written discourses and across genres, uncovering the

tendencies of use by American and British users to shed light over their contextual behaviors, uncovering the contextual meanings (partitive or holistic) of *think of/about, know of/about, and dream of/about* following Langacker's Construal theory within Cognitive Grammar. The analysis goes through several stages: First, the meaning of these verbs as provided by two learner dictionaries is presented, then the analysis explores their frequency, dispersion, and genre distribution among the spoken and written proportions of each corpus, as well as among different genres, through collocational analysis. Contextual analysis of their meanings is also conducted to explore the context of use of each combination across genres through concordance analysis.

2. Theoretical Framework

Cognitive Grammar (CG) (Langacker, 1986) provides a framework to understand the relationship between language and cognition, with a focus on the way language reflects conceptual structures in our minds. It is considered a usage-based and meaning-oriented model of language that emphasizes the inseparability of grammar and semantics. Thus, language is not just a set of arbitrary rules but is deeply related to human cognition or the way humans perceive and categorize their experiences. Furthermore, according to CG, grammar is a means of representing meaning, as it interacts with cognitive processes that enable us to categorize and perceive the world around us (Alyousef & Alyahya., 2018; Sobirova, 2023). CG is based on the idea that language is fundamentally symbolic; in other words, every linguistic expression comprises a phonological structure and a semantic structure that are both connected symbolically as illustrated in the figure below (Salih & Jawad, 2024).

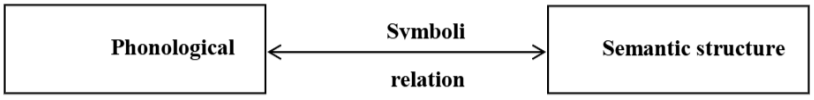

Figure 1. The three elements of a linguistic expression (Adopted from Salih & Jawad, 2024, p. 38)

A central concept in CG is Construal, which reflects how language is used to conceptualize the world and how the speaker perceives it (Bi ên, 2021). Arab (2016) defines construal as the "semantic features of an expression, which do not result from some objective affairs external to the speaker but rather come up from and characterize the relation between the speaker and those affairs" (p. 87). In other words, construal theory proposes that language encodes how humans present situations, rather than treating meaning as a fixed relation between linguistic forms and reality. Therefore, meaning is a cognitive act through which speakers can structure, organize, and frame aspects of a specific event or situation.

Construal involves several cognitive processes: specificity, scope, prominence, background, and perspective. Specificity can be defined as "the degree of precision and detail with which a situation is characterized" (Arab, 2016, p. 88). This dimension focuses on the level of detail a speaker chooses to include. Scope refers to the amount of the conceptual domain that a certain linguistic expression is used to express meaning. Whereas prominence indicates the level or degree to of an element stands out within a cognitive situation (things we can see or touch are more prominent than abstract ideas). Background deals with conceptualizing two different structures together in a way that one is over the other, where they are considered simultaneously but not evenly. Finally, perceptive involves point of view and spatial orientation, as describing directions, depending on the speaker's position (Arab, 2016).

In conclusion, construal offers a background to examine how *think of/ about, know of/ about,* and *dream of/ about* might vary in both grammatical structure and conceptual perspective. This framework provides an understanding of how prepositions engage with cognitive verbs to impact the meaning through delicate cognitive processes.

2.1 Research Questions

1. How do frequencies, dispersion, and cross-genres analyses of these combinations vary in the spoken and written discourses in COCA and BNC?
2. How do the meanings of these cognitive verb-proposition combinations vary across genres?
3. What are the meanings of *think of/ about, know of/ about,* and *dream of/ about* in American and British English, and how are the partitive and holistic construal distinctions reflected in each pair?

3. Literature Review

This section reviews previous studies related to the current analysis of cognitive verbs followed by prepositions, as well as the theoretical concept of construal within the larger framework of CL. Some studies have investigated the behavior of cognitive verbs when paired with prepositions.

Yamazaki (1994) provides one of the earliest qualitative analyses on the semantic distinctions between prepositions *of* and *about* with cognitive verbs, that certain verbs have different meanings when followed by *of* compared to when followed by *about*. He argues that *think of* denotes a temporary or spontaneous idea, whereas *think about* reflects deeper reflection. For instance, *dreaming of* relates to the type of dream a speaker experiences, whereas *dreaming about* involves the details of the dream. Numerous verbs like *feel, hear, know, learn, read, speed, talk, tell, think, and write* have this usage, indicating they require cognitive activities related to information or knowledge, with a focus on this usage concerning "information quality and quantity".

Yamazaki links this to the origins of the preposition *of* that expresses "partitive genitive" meaning, which refers to partial quantities, linked to verbs of drinking, eating, and sensing that involve uncountable material nouns (food and drinks). This function extended over time to cognitive verbs whose objects are uncountable too (knowledge and information). Thus, the meaning of this preposition emphasizes the structure of the information rather than the quantity. On the other hand, the preposition *about* implies a thorough examination of each part of the topic being discussed, taking a more holistic approach. That means, *about* suggests a deeper understanding and thorough knowledge of the topic. In addition, *of* indicates obtaining information indirectly, like through rumors, while *about* suggests a deeper comprehension. This indirectness shows the bias present in the partitive genitive construction, where the speaker might only possess restricted or minor details. Yamazaki points out that *of* is frequently used in negative statements to stress a small likelihood, whereas *about* can produce a "euphemistic tone" when paired with negative phrases. Such interpretation is important to understand how different prepositions contribute to conceptualizing metal activities.

Fine (2023), expanding on Giordani's conceptual frameworks, investigates how prepositions layer relations and functions to verbs, arguing that *of* and *about* offer meanings that extend beyond their syntactic roles. This approach expands on Yamazaki's distinction and informs the present analysis of contextual variation. In a more recent work by Cungu and Toska (2023), who investigate the semantic variation of the use of prepositions across contexts, highlighting how prepositions influence the meaning of verb phrases.

This is also highlighted by Alqarni (2025), who discusses the various cognitive levels of prepositional interpretation with cognitive verbs. Alqarni shows that prepositions demonstrate intricate, special, and metaphorical interpretations that extend beyond their grammatical role. Such analysis highlights the significance of a cognitive perspective to understand the prepositional meaning, which corresponds with the current analysis that examines how *of* and *about* carry subtle meanings when used with cognitive verbs, carrying different meanings and interpretations of the way the speaker conceptualizes reality.

Related to cognitive semantic analysis of prepositions, Evans and Tyler (2005) examine prepositions, highlighting their significance in spatial experiences from a cognitive linguistic point of view. They claim that their meaning comes from the image schemas related to experiences, and create semantic networks based on cognitive spatial relations, which emphasize the idea that they reflect different viewpoints of mental involvement.

Within the scope of construal theory, Divjak et al (2020) examine how changes in prepositions, voice, and dative forms influence visual perception and understanding of situations and events. Through utilizing the "Visual World Paradigm", the researchers find out that variation in construal affects the processing of the sequencing of specific elements. Significantly, the analysis indicates that changes in prepositions show a stronger impact on the visual perception. Such results are relevant to the current work as they highlight the impact of selecting prepositions with the same cognitive verbs on the mental representation of a situation or an experience.

Despite the insights drawn from these studies, there is still a research gap related to the analysis of cognitive verbs-preposition combinations from a construal perspective. This paper utilizes CG with emphasis on construal theory to analyze *think of/ about, know of/ about,* and *dream of/ about,* drawing on corpus data from two native corpora focusing on the cognitive interpretations of those combinations.

4. Methods

4.1 Corpus

Two native corpora are used to collect data: Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) is the largest, genre-balanced corpus of English, designed as a monitor corpus to study changes in English over time (1990-now). It is continually updated with 20 million words annually, totaling about one billion words and divided into eight genres: spoken, fiction, magazines, newspapers, academics, WEB, Blogs, and TV/Movies. The British National Corpus (BNC) contains approximately 100 million words, encompassing written and spoken texts. Created to represent various sections and genres of British English from the late 20th century, the BNC is predominantly written content, with 90% of the corpus comprising fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, academic texts, and other resources.

These include academic books, popular fiction, published letters, newspapers, specialist periodicals, school and university essays, among others, amounting to a total of 90 million words. The spoken proportion of the BNC is about 10 million words, comprising various demographics in unscripted recordings capturing diverse contexts from business meetings to radio shows (Al Ahmad, 2021).

4.2 Learners' Dictionaries

The rationale behind selecting think, know, and dream is that they are the top three cognitive verbs that occur with of and about in both the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and the British National Corpus (BNC). First, the meaning of these verbs is examined through two learners' dictionaries. Unlike traditional dictionaries, learner dictionaries straightforwardly provide meanings, away from complexities, making subtle differences accessible and explicitly explained through examples. This study consulted two learners' dictionaries available online: Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, specifically Oxford Advanced American Dictionary (OAAD) (https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/), and Cambridge Dictionary/learner-english (https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/learner-english/) (CD), representing both English varieties: American and British.

4.3 Procedures

Different measures have been followed to determine collocational patterns in general, where the two most recognizable approaches are the phraseological approach that concentrates on providing the semantic relationship between the two component words of a collocation

to show their non-compositional meaning. The second approach is the distributional or frequency method, which depends upon quantitative and statistical evidence of the co-occurrences of words in a given corpus. This study follows the latter approach that includes three sub-categories: the surface, textual, and syntactic levels of collocations. The surface co-occurrence investigates the simple coincidence of lexis (Ammari & Al Ahmad, 2023). On the other hand, the textual and syntactic types of co-occurrences depend on further information about the structure of utterances and sentences and the syntactic relation between the different components of the sentence in which the collocation occurs.

In the current paper, the researchers looked for different forms of the verbs (think, know, dream) followed by of and about, and calculated the sum of all forms (present, past, continuous). This process is called lemmatization (Al Ahmad & Hussein, 2020; Ammari & Hussein, 2019). In Corpus Linguistics (CL), researchers need to look at the distance between the component elements when searching for collocations. To do that, three methods are followed to examine the proximity of collocations: n-grams that cover clusters, lexical bundles, conc-grams, and p-frames. N-grams determine the adjacent sequences, as in "of the". Second, the collocation window method specifies the span of a collocation, for example, 3L-3R (i.e., searching for three words to the left of the node word and three words to the right). Using collocation windows helps find looser associations of the word of interest (node word). Third, collocation networks "combine multiple associations identified using the window approach to bring together interconnections between words that exist in language and discourse" (Gablasova et al.,2017, p. 158). This paper uses the surface-level collocations (including lemmatization of the different forms of each verb) and collocation window or discover if the examined collocations can be separated.

To provide accurate answers about the usage of these structures from corpora, researchers use statistical measures to test the collocability, namely, absolute or raw frequency, which depends on the counting of co-occurrences of word combinations. The second type of measures is the strength of association between the component elements of a collocation (Association Measures, AMs). Absolute frequency shows if a linguistic item (lexical or grammatical) is common or rare in a specific corpus or a sub-corpus (genre). For example, in BNC, the collocations "risk issues" and "moral issues" have somewhat similar raw frequencies: 54 and 51, respectively. On the other hand, genre analysis illustrated that all the 54 occurrences of "risk issues" appeared in one text type, whereas all occurrences of "moral issues" appeared in over 41 texts. Therefore, the probability of collocation occurrences is affected by the distributional patterns used by the speakers/writers, and this refers to genre variation. To study genre variation, **dispersion** is used to explore how a linguistic item occurs in different subsections of a certain corpus. COCA and BNC provide several sub-corpora representing **spoken** and **written** genres used by American and British speakers/writers. Therefore, dispersion is an important indicator that reflects how collocations are used in certain genres than others, which helps second language learners of English to learn the meaning, use, and context of collocations (Ammari & Al Ahmad, 2023).

Thus, to fulfill the objectives of the study, data is obtained from COCA and BNC, searching both corpora to find out the absolute frequency of occurrences of *think of/ about, know of/ about, and dream of/ about*. All verbs were lemmatized to find the total frequency of use, after the norm frequency is calculated, so the result can be comparable. Then, each corpus is divided into spoken proportions to include: COCA includes TV/Movies and Spoken subsection to be about 256890399 million words, and the written proportion, including Blog, Web, Fiction, Magazine, Newspaper, and Academics to be about 746199355 million words. The spoken subsection of BNC is about 10 million words, whereas the written subsection is about 86.300.000 million words (including fiction, magazine, newspapers, academic, non-academic, and miscellaneous). Such division is used to compare the norm frequency of use by native users of the target grammatical structures, and to find out if there are significant differences between the two proportions. Moreover, the researchers also looked for the frequencies of use of these verbs in the eight subsections of both corpora to highlight the differences in use among different disciplines.

To study the contextual meaning of each pair (*think of/ about, know of/ about, dream of/ about*), concordance analysis is conducted to examine the subtle connotations of each verb with context across genres in both corpora, where 30 lines are collected from each genre from COCA with a total of 1440 concordance lines, and AntConc software is used to conduct in-depth analysis of concordances compiled.

5. Results and Analysis

5.1 Dictionaries' Analysis of think of/about, know of/ about, dream of/about

Dictionary analysis illustrated that the Oxford Advanced American Dictionary (OAAD) categorizes *think of/about* as phrasal verbs, providing six definitions: having an image or idea in one's mind, creating an idea, remembering something, imagining a situation, considering someone or something in planning, and considering doing something. The Cambridge Dictionary (CD), on the other hand, groups *think of/about* under the main verb *think* without a specific classification. It includes five definitions: forming an opinion, considering an idea or problem, considering doing something, using imagination to envision a situation, and using imagination or intelligence to produce an idea.

Related to *know of*, OAAD has restricted access to the definition of *this verb*, requiring a code to view. In contrast, CD classifies *know of* as a phrasal verb, meaning having heard of something or someone but knowing little about them, exemplified by the sentence "*Is there a good restaurant near the station that you know of?", while know about is not defined in* OAAD. In addition, CD includes *knowledge* under the main verb *know*, defining it as having information in one's mind or being familiar with and understanding a subject. OAAD does not define *dream of/about* too. According to CD, *dream of/about* are classified as phrasal verbs, meaning to think about something one desires deeply, as illustrated in "*dreaming of working for oneself one day*". This comparison highlights differences in the coverage and classification of these multi-word verb combinations between the two dictionaries. OAAD provides more definitions for *think*

of/about, but lacks accessible information for k*now of* and *dream of/about*. Conversely, CD provides classifications and definitions for all listed combinations, but with less details for *think of/about*. This discrepancy underscores the need for learners and educators to consult multiple resources for a comprehensive understanding of these verb combinations

5.2 Corpus Analysis of the use of think, know, dream, with of and about

To investigate the frequency and usage of cognitive verbs think, know, and dream with prepositions of and about in COCA and BNC, frequency analysis is conducted to determine the similarities and differences between the usage of each pair in general, then an examination of their usage in the spoken and written discourses is presented followed by analysis of utilization across genres.

5.2.1 Frequency Analysis of Usage of think, know, dream with of and about in COCA and BNC

Table 1. Frequencies of usage of cognitive verbs with of and about in COCA and BNC in General PM

Corpus	Think of	Think about	Know of	Know about	Dream of	Dream about
COCA	129.44	126.48	17.58	86.53	15.6	3.79
BNC	123.54	57.03	14.19	31.5	14.37	1.91

Table 1 illustrates that there is a slight difference in use between *think of* and *think about* (129.44 pm and 126.48 pm, respectively) in COCA. The verb combination *know about* recorded a higher frequency than *know of* (the former combination is used five times more than the latter, recording 86.53 PM and 17.58 PM, respectively). Further, *dream of* (15.6 PM) is used five times more than *dream about* (3.79 PM). Thus, *dream about* is the least used verb combination.

In BNC, *think o*f the highest frequency of use around 123.54 PM. A significant difference in use between *think of* and *think about* can be noticed (*think of* is about 123.54 PM and *think about* is about 57.03 PM). In other words, *think of* is used twice more than *think about*. In the case of COCA, *know about* is more commonly used than *know of* in BNC (31.5 PM and 14.19 PM, respectively). Impressively, the results showed that *dream of* (14.37 PM) is used 14 times more than *dream about* (1.91 PM).

When comparing COCA and BNC, *think of* showed approximate frequencies of use in both corpora (129.44 PM in COCA and 123.54 PM in BNC). However, *think about* is used twice more in COCA than in BNC (126.48 PM and 57.03 PM respectively). Furthermore, the results showed somewhat similar frequencies of use of *know of* in both corpora (17.58 PM in COCA and 14.19 PM in BNC). On the other hand, *know about* is used almost three times more in COCA than in BNC (86.53 PM and 31.5 PM, respectively). Frequencies of use of *dream of* and *dream about* are close in both corpora (see table 1). Overall, these findings underscore the variability in the usage of these combinations across both corpora and highlight specific preferences and patterns in language use, providing valuable insights for understanding their use by native users in both varieties.

5.2.2 Distributional analysis of *think, know, dream* with *of* and *about* in the spoken and written proportions of COCA and BNC

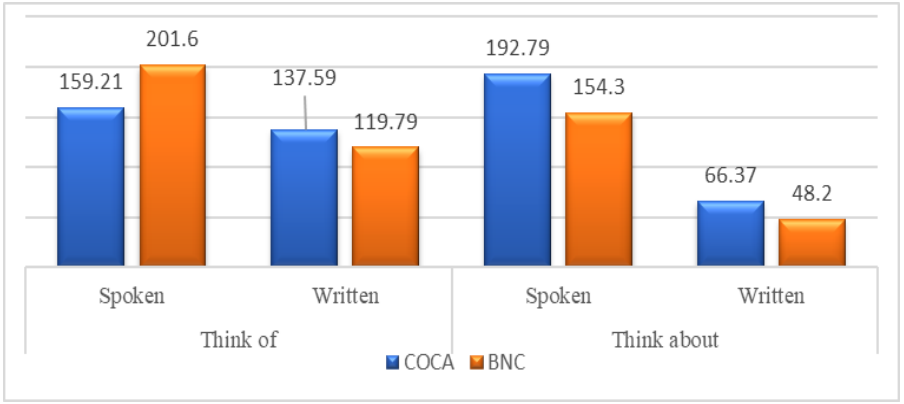

Figure 2. Frequency of Use of *Think of* / *About* in the Spoken and Written Subsections of COCA and BNC (PM)

Figure 2 displays the frequencies of use of *think of* and *think about* in the spoken and written sub-sections of COCA and BNC per million. It shows that *think of* and *think about* are more frequent in the spoken subcorpora of COCA (*think of*:159.21 PM, *think about*: 192.79 PM) and BNC (*think of*: 201.6 PM, *think about*: 154.3 PM). Another indication is that *think about* is more used in COCA than *think of*. On the other hand, *think of* (201.6 PM) recorded a higher frequency in BNC than *think about* (154.3 PM). In addition, the frequencies of use of *think of* in the spoken and written sub-sections of COCA are somewhat close (159.21 PM and 137.59 PM, respectively). In contrast, a substantial difference in the use of *think about* in the spoken and written sub-sections of COCA and BNC. It is used almost three times more in the spoken sub-sections of both corpora. Therefore, we can assume that these two verb-preposition combinations are features of spoken American and British English rather than written discourse.

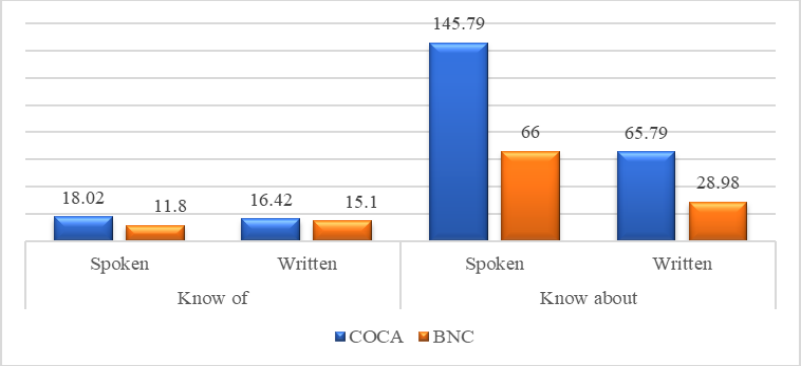

Figure 3. Frequency of Use of *Know of* /*about* in the Spoken and Written Subsections of COCA and BNC(PM)

Figure 3 illustrates the frequencies of use of *know of* and *know about* in the spoken and written sub-sections of COCA and BNC. The findings show great differences in the use of *know of* and *know about* in both sub-sections in both corpora. *Know of* recorded low frequencies in both corpora. There is a substantial difference in the use of *know about* between the spoken and written sub-sections of COCA recording (145.79 PM) and (65.79 PM), respectively. The same case with results in BNC, *know about* is used three times more in the spoken sub-section than in the written sub-section (66 PM and 28.98 PM, respectively). Therefore, it might be assumed that *know about* covers more meanings than *know of* in both corpora.

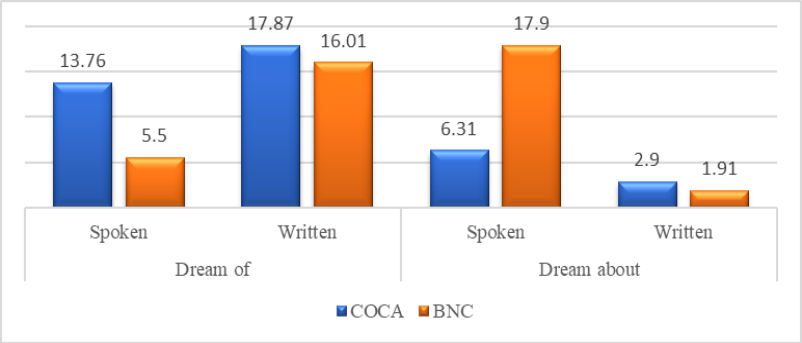

Figure 4. Frequency of Use of *Dream of*/ *About* in the Spoken and Written Subsections of COCA and BNC (PM)

Even though the frequencies of using *dream of* are very low, significant differences are noticed in the spoken and written sub-sections of COCA and BNC. It is more frequently used in the written sub-sections of COCA and BNC (17.87 PM and 16.01 PM, respectively). In contrast, *dream about* is more commonly used in the spoken sub-sections of COCA and BNC (17.9 PM and 6.31 PM, respectively). *Dream about* recorded very low frequencies of use in the written subsections of both corpora (see figure 4). Therefore, these patterns reflect how these combinations are used differently across spoken and written contexts and in various forms of English, highlighting the influence of context, regional preferences, and functional differences in language use.

5.2.3 Distributional Analysis of *think, know, dream* with *of* and *about* in across-genres in COCA and BNC

Cross-genre analysis attempts to highlight the use of each combination in different sections of each corpus, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of their usage by native users.

Table 2. Distributional Analysis of the V-Prep. combinations in COCA and BNC (PM)

Verb-preposition combination	**Mostly used in**		**Least used in**	
	COCA	**BNC**	**COCA**	**BNC**
Think of	Fiction 280.22	Fiction 326.41	Academics 60.96	Newspaper 56.1
Think about	TV/Movies 210.13	Fiction 131.95	Academics 39.14	Academics 17.78
Know of	Blog 20.73	Fiction 19.62	Academics 8.16	Newspaper 8.95
Know about	TV/Movies 174.47	Fiction 67.92	Academics 40.19	Newspapers 15.43
Dream of	Fiction 22.64	Fiction 30.94	Academics 9.66	Academics 4.84
Dream about	TV/Movies 9.6	Fiction 5.97	Academics 0.8	Academics 0.19

Table 2 elucidates the findings related to the cross-subject of the verbs in COCA and BNC according to their frequencies per million. It is obvious from the table that the ACADEMIC section scored the lowest for all combinations in COCA. The tabulated data show that *think of* recorded (60.96 PM), which is used more often than *think about* (39.14 PM) in ACADEMIC. Moreover, *know about* (40.19 PM) has a higher frequency than *know of* (8.16 PM). Hence, *dream of* and *dream about* scored the lowest, (9.66 PM) and (0.8 PM), respectively, in COCA.

A positive correlation is found between the three *verb+ of* in two genres, namely, FICTION and BLOG. This indicates that these cognitive verbs are mainly used to express feelings and thoughts as well as imaginative settings due to the variety in meaning in British English. On the other hand, *think about, know about*, and *dream about* have recorded the highest frequencies (210.13 PM), (174.47 PM), and (9.6 PM), respectively, in the TV/Movies section. Movies are fictional TV works that are usually unrealistic. People can express their feelings and clarify how they make decisions in daily situations.

5.3 Contextual Analysis

This section highlights the contextual meanings of these combinations across genres in COCA to examine the partitive and holistic construal meanings of cognitive verbs followed by of and about.

Table 3. Genre-specific contextual meaning of think, know, dream, with of & about

V+ Prep. **Genre**	***Think of***	***Think about***	***Know of***	***Know about***	***Dream of***	***Dream about***
News	Evaluative consideration of something/someone	Analytical evaluation of something, shift of opinion of someone/something	Express general knowledge, stating something with uncertain or limited details	Broader understanding of something or a situation	Aspirational narratives of accomplishing goals	Expresses hopes and aspirations
Fiction	Recalling a past event or experiment, visualizing a situation, or something	Speculating a situation or a decision, introspection of a character, and careful decision making	Expressing awareness, vagueness, and limited knowledge	In-depth knowledge or understanding of something/someone	Expresses idealized goals might be achieved or not	Expresses a character's inner emotions and longing tone, visualizing and imaging certain situations
Spoken	Shift in perception, suggesting something	Considering something with some depth or carefully	Expresses a lack of details, general knowledge	Suggests incomplete knowledge, uncertainty	Expresses desires and hopes that might be achieved or not	Describing fantasies and desires expresses spiritual dreams related to personal and religious beliefs
Magazine	Evaluation of a situation/something	In-depth consideration of something with a focus on self-improvement	Broader or general knowledge	Reflection on a general understanding of something/someone	Expresses aspiration of achieving something	Expresses visualizing a situation, whether it is in the future or the past
Academic	Reflecting critical thinking, showing theoretical sense, and conceptualizing abstract ideas	Critically or analytically considering ideas, concepts, or theories, in-depth consideration of something	General awareness and familiarity with something with a degree of uncertainty	Specialized or technical knowledge that requires expertise	Expresses societal changes or personal transformation	Expresses unpleasant thoughts
WEB	Evaluation of experiences or opinions in a rhetorical way	Reflecting on personal opinions toward something/someone	Expresses common knowledge with a lack of details	Expresses in-depth knowledge and awareness	Expresses imaginative situations or contexts, expresses idealized desires	Expresses aspirational and hopeful ideas
Blog	Evaluation of experiences or opinions in a rhetorical way	Reflecting emotionally on personal experience	Expresses general awareness, lack of specific details	Expresses broader collective awareness about something/ someone	Expresses imaginative situations or contexts	Expresses aspiration of achieving goals that are possible
TV	Mental association or suggestion in a conversational tone	Considering the consequences of something	Expresses general familiarity with something	Suggests informal knowledge with a degree of uncertainty	Expresses personal desires and hopes	Expresses dreams and hopes that are achievable

Table 3 shows the genre-specific contextual meaning of *think of, think about, know of, know about, dream of*, and *dream about*, demonstrating how their meanings vary across contexts. *Verbs+ of* are used to express evaluation and judgement, as in *think of* for making judgement, whereas *verbs + about* are utilized to express analytical evaluation and imagining future situations, as in *dream about*, which

is used for aspirations. In fiction, *think of* expresses recalling past events and visualization, whereas *dream about* is used to demonstrate emotional depth or longing. *Think about* and *know about* reflect a deeper understanding of a character. In the spoken genre, *think of* shows as a shift in perception, whereas *dream about* is utilized to express fantasies, and *know of* and *know about* shows uncertainty or limited information about something/someone.

In the magazine genre, *think of* and *think about* express evaluations and reflecting on personal growth, whereas *dream of* and *dream about* show aspirations and visualizing future goals. In academic contexts, *think of* and *think about* express critical thinking and deep consideration, where *dream of* represents a sort of societal changes and *dream about* expresses a societal critique. In the Web genre, *think of* and *think about* express rhetorical evaluations, whereas *dream of* and *dream about* demonstrate idealized and imaginative aspirations. Blog genre mirrors the web genre with the meanings of *dream of* and *dream about*, which often reflect futuristic goals and imagining scenarios. In the TV genre, *think of* is used to express casual suggestions, where *dream about* expresses achievable desires and dreams.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This analysis aims to highlight the use and meanings of *think of, think about, know of, know about, dream of,* and *dream about* in American and British English, revealing significant insights into the construal meaning, especially through the cognitive distinctions between partitive and holistic construals. The findings align with Yamazaki's (1994) claim that verbs followed by *of* convey partitive meanings, focusing on a limited aspect of the experience, whereas verbs followed by *about* are associated with holistic construals.

6.1 Corpus Analysis: Frequency, Dispersion, and Genre Analyses

The frequency and distribution analyses show patterns that reveal significant insights into the usage of those combinations across different corpora. Firstly, *think of* and *think about* demonstrating high frequencies of use in both COCA and BNC. However, *think of* appears to be utilized more frequently than *think about* across both corpora. However, if they donate the same meaning following the consulted dictionaries, such frequencies might imply no significant differences. Additionally, there is a noticeable difference in the usage of *think about* between the spoken and written sections, indicating its prevalence in spoken discourse. Further, *know about* exhibits a significantly higher frequency of use compared to *know of* in both COCA and BNC, suggesting its common usage to indicate a comprehensive understanding. In contrast, *dream of* is employed more frequently than *dream about*, with *dream about* being the least utilized combination. Additionally, *know about* exhibits important differences in usage between spoken and written sections, while *dream of* and *dream about* show contrasting patterns in their usage across spoken and written contexts. Thus, the findings reflect usage variations between American and British English.

Distribution analysis highlights that *think of* and *think about* are prominent in spoken contexts, especially in the BNC, assuming that they are features of spoken American and British English. It is also assumed that *know about* covers a large range of meaning due to the great difference in frequency of utilization with know of in the spoken and written proportions of COCA and BNC. In addition, the findings showed tendencies toward using dream of more in the written proportions of both corpora, whereas dream about is more used in the spoken discourse in both corpora.

For cross-genre distribution analysis, the results showed that all combinations are least used in academic contexts in COCA, reflecting that American scholars and writers don't prefer to use these cognitive-verb combinations in academic writing. In BNC, British users also showed less preference to use them in academic and journalistic contexts. In contrast with that, American users prefer to use them in fictional, conversational, and blog contexts. However, all combinations are dominantly used by British users in fictional discourse.

6.2 Dictionary meaning vs. Corpus Meaning

The contextual meanings of the verbs think of, think about, know of, know about, dream of, and dream about in the genre-specific analysis largely align with the definitions provided by the Oxford Advanced American Dictionary (OAAD) and the Cambridge Dictionary (CD), though some discrepancies exist in the coverage of these combinations. For think of and think about, both dictionaries recognize their phrasal verb status, with OAAD providing six definitions, including imagining a situation, considering something, and forming an idea, which align with their usage in various genres such as News (evaluating or considering something) and Magazine (reflecting critically). The genre-specific analysis, such as in Fiction (visualizing a situation) and Blog (reflecting on personal experiences), reflects similar meanings, focusing on thinking deeply or imagining scenarios.

Related to *know of* and *know about*, the dictionaries provide clearer distinctions. CD defines *know of* as having heard of something or someone but knowing little about them, a meaning that aligns with its genre-specific use in Spoken, expressing general awareness with uncertainty, and News indicating limited knowledge. In contrast, *know about* in the dictionaries suggests deeper understanding or familiarity, which corresponds to its usage in genres like Academic as specialized knowledge, and Magazine reflecting on broader knowledge. While OAAD restricts access to the definition of *know of*, CD's classification aligns more consistently with the genre-specific meanings in terms of awareness and familiarity.

For *dream of* and *dream about*, CD classifies both as phrasal verbs, relating to deep desires or aspirations, as seen in the genre analysis where *dream of* reflects aspirations and idealized goals, such as in Fiction referring to idealized goals and News expressing hopes of achievement. Moreover, the meanings of *dream of* in Fiction show idealized goals, but *dream about* show emotional longing. The genre-specific use of *dream about* in Blog (aspirations of achieving personal goals) and **TV** (desires and fantasies) similarly aligns with CD's definition of thinking about one's desires. The OAAD, however, does not define *dream of/about*, creating a coverage gap compared

to CD. These results are compatible with Fine's (2023) proposal that the prepositions add another layer of meaning to the verb based on genre-specific conceptualization. Even though the dictionary analysis shows alignment with corpus interpretations of these combinations, in-depth cross-genre meanings should be highlighted too. In addition, the ambiguity arising from attaching prepositions to cognitive verbs, such as 'think of' and 'think about', further highlights the need for contextual analysis to avoid misinterpretation (Almahameed, 2020), which shows the significance of such analysis.

6.3 Construal Analysis: Partitive vs. Holistic

The findings of concordance analysis show how the prepositions of and about shape the interpretations and meanings of cognitive verbs, aligning with construal theory. The findings demonstrate that *of* tends to indicate a partitive construal meaning, focusing on a specific aspect of a situation, event, or experience, while about indicates a holistic construal meaning that views the situation as a whole. Moreover, the concordance examination reinforces Yamazaki's argument that the preposition of indicates abstract or idealized thoughts and concepts, whereas about implies more concrete situations, experiences, or desires. Therefore, these combinations are not semantically static but also shaped by the cognitive processes and contextual factors, dynamically presenting certain conceptualizations of reality. Furthermore, the findings of concordance lines of think of and think about add insights to the construal cognition. Thinking often involves visualizing, recalling, and imagining, suggesting a selective and selective construal. In contrast, think about implies a broader thought or consideration, comprising a more detailed or holistic point of view. Thus, the preposition about broadens the conceptualization of a situation or an experience.

6.4 Implications and Future Research

Such examination of the impact of the context on the delivered meaning of each verb combination encourages educators to incorporate genre-based methods into the language teaching of multi-word verbs. Learners, on the other hand, can draw on the differences and subtle meanings and uses of such verbs based on the genre used to enhance their understanding. Dictionaries and lexicographers can also benefit from such findings to provide more examples and comprehensive definitions that align with corpus data. It is recommended to conduct further research on the syntactic behavior of such verbs and how polarity affects their meanings using corpus data. In addition, it is recommended to conduct an in-depth analysis of these verbs in each genre to examine their usage for ESP contexts that might enhance textbooks and syllabus design. Moreover, it is recommended to conduct a comparative analysis of the representation of verb-prepositions in traditional and learner dictionaries to detect similarities and differences between both types.

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Authors' contributions

1.Wajed Al Ahmad**:** Contributed to conceptualizing the study, designing the methodology, and supervising the research process. Drafted the initial manuscript and coordinated revisions based on feedback from co-authors. Ensured the final submission adhered to ethical and academic standards, including proper referencing and authorship representation.

2. Raeda Ammari**:** Managed data collection, including corpus compilation and preprocessing. Performed data analysis using tools like AntConc and contributed to interpreting the findings.

3. Ahmad Tawalbeh**:** Developed the theoretical framework for the study. Provided critical insights to align the study within the broader research context.

4. Murad Al Kayed**:** Provided technical assistance with software and tools used for data analysis. Developed visual representations (e.g., graphs, tables) to support data interpretation in the manuscript.

5. Majd AbuShunnar: Developed the theoretical framework for the study. Reviewed and refined the manuscript for coherence, accuracy, and alignment with journal guidelines.

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