Chapter 3 – Looking for Lexis

3.1 As mentioned in section 3.4, the word regime is associated with a certain “semantic prosody” or evaluative colouring, so that it often does not just mean ‘method or system of government’, but rather ‘disagreeable method or system of government’. Take a look at some of examples of this word in the Time Corpus.

(i) Go to http://corpus.byu.edu/time/. NB: during the session you may be asked to register as a user. Do this – it is free of charge. Choose the same password as you chose for BYU-BNC and COCA.

(ii) In the search panel, click the “Chart” button and type in the search word regime. Then click “Search”.

(iii) The results will be displayed in a bar chart showing the frequency distribution per decade. Click in the bar for the 1920s to see the concordance lines. Study the first twenty lines carefully and decide for each instance of regime whether it has negative or positive evaluation or seems to be neutral. If you need to see more context, click on the date to the left of the concordance line. To get back to the concordance from the expanded concordance line, click twice on the return arrow in your web browser. Write down your results.

(iv) Repeat the procedure for the 2000s.

Did you find any semantic prosody/evaluative colouring in these forty concordance lines? Is there any indication of change from the 1920s to 2000s? (To investigate such a change in meaning properly you would have to study many more examples, but this small sample could give a hint.)

3.2 Section 3.5 describes how words can change in frequency over time, and Figure 3.6 in the book illustrates this with the examples greenhouse effect and global warming in the Time Corpus. Now try similar investigations with some other words.

(i) Log in to the Time Corpus. In the search panel, click the “Chart” button. Then type in the search words motor car. The frequency distribution per decade will be given in a bar chart. You can copy and paste the whole chart into a word processing document, or else write down the frequencies per million words. Then repeat the procedure for the following words, one at a time: car, automobile, auto. Report on your findings by making a diagram like Figure 3.6 in the book, or by showing the four bar charts.
(ii) Investigate at least one other set of words with similar meaning from a field that interests you, for instance sports, politics, fashion or arts, or study at least four single words.