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## TOWARDS DESCRIPTION OF CORE ENGLISH NOUNS: AN EFL LEARNER PERSPECTIVE

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### Abstract:

Vocabulary plays a significant role in the learning of English as a foreign language (EFL). According to Cameron (2001), it is often considered as a key indicator in foreign language curriculum and its deficiency impedes successful communication in the target language. Schmitt (2000: 55) asserts that “lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence and to the acquisition of a second language”. Nouns constitute a considerable bulk of English vocabulary. Rather they are the bones of the English language and are the main semantic carrier in spoken and written discourse. As nouns dominate the bulk of English lexicon, their role becomes all the more potential. The undertaken research is a systematic effort in this regard to work out a list of highly frequent list of English nouns for the EFL learners. The corpus used for the research is The English Web Corpus (enTenTen) that has been compiled by collecting text from the internet. Sketch Engine, a corpus tool, has been used to process corpus data and to retrieve word list of English frequent nouns. The retrieved list of core English nouns is supposed to be useful for English language teachers, learners, lexicographers, lexicologists and grammarians.

**Keywords:** EFL, vocabulary learning, nouns, corpus, frequency list.

### Introduction

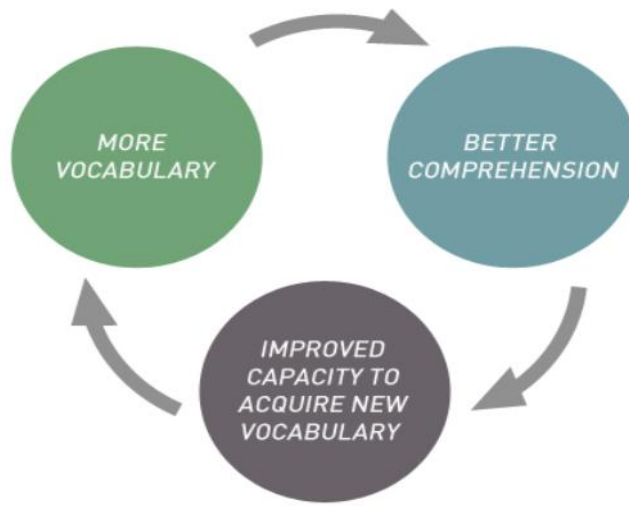
The vocabulary of English as a foreign language has long been one of the most difficult tasks (Thorburry, 2002). Recently, however, there has been a revival of the approach dealing with the issues of English as a foreign language, although much research has been done on learning English as a foreign language compared to teaching English as a foreign language. Teller (2008) states that the vocabulary of a foreign language is a way of learning a foreign language. Researchers such as Stuart (2008) and Schmitt (2000) have realized that vocabulary acquisition is essential for the successful use of the second language and plays an important role in the composition of spoken and written texts of English as a foreign language. Nation (2011) argues that acquiring enough vocabulary is necessary for successful use of the foreign language because without extensive vocabulary, the learners will be unable to use the structures and functions of language successfully.

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Stuart's (2011) idea of EFL vocabulary

Traditional strategies for dealing with vocabulary issues have not achieved the desired results. One of the flaws in the traditional methods of dealing with vocabulary is the teacher-centered approach and the passive role of the listeners in the vocabulary learning process.

There is also a notable theoretical change in the vocabulary approach in the context of English as a foreign language (Cameron, 2001). The concept of "word" has been replaced by "Lexical item" and there are many forms of lexical item from single word items to multi-word lexical items, also known as phraseology. The various forms of English vocabulary are: pen (single word lexical item), zebra crossing (compound), To make the day (idiomatic expression), bus stop (collocation), haste makes waste (maxims), See you (set phrases), etc. Dealing with all these different forms of English as a foreign language is a challenging task.

According to Read (2000), the list of foreign language vocabulary should cover all aspects of human life. His approach to EFL vocabulary is very potential, and has become possible with the availability of large multi-purpose corpora and tools. With the emergence of computers, new trends and strategies have also emerged in foreign language classroom. In addition, there is a need to provide learners of English as a foreign language with maximum autonomy in the learning process.

### **Statement of the Purpose**

Owing to its geo-economical and geo-political position, English has assumed the role of lingua franca. As a result, the need to learn English as a foreign language has also increased many times. Folse (2004) asserts that potential of vocabulary in learning English as a foreign language is an established phenomenon. Vocabulary list of any language is mostly shaded by content words and especially by nouns. The undertaken study focuses to work out a list of frequent EFL nouns for non-native learners with maximum possible autonomy in the learning process.

### **Studies on EFL Vocabulary**

Pinter (2006) classifies memory and cognitive strategies in handling vocabulary of English language. He states that verbal, written repetition, taking notes, using word lists, flash cards, vocabulary sections in a text book, audio visual aids, placing vocabulary on physical objects and keeping vocabulary notebooks can be very useful in the comprehension of English as a foreign language. He also stresses on cognitive strategies to be the crucial factor in learning EFL vocabulary.

Read (2000) makes a distinction between those who structure their own learning of EFL vocabulary and those who do not make any serious self-efforts apart from the classroom instruction and do not go through self-practice. The unstructured EFL learners only depend on classroom instructions and make no independent efforts. While structured learners make their own learning, by creating innovations in learning strategies, record and review new vocabulary items consistently and even use that new EFL vocabulary outside the classroom.

Gu (2003) approaches the vocabulary issue for the EFL learners on the ground that knowing a word means to know its meaning and use. He states nine dimensions of EFL vocabulary. At the first level, he explains the word form, meaning, and use of the vocabulary items. He further sub-divides these three aspects in further three domains each. He explains word form in relation with spoken, written and word parts while he distinguishes word meaning in terms of concepts, referents and associations. Finally, he discusses word use in relation with grammatical functions, collocations, and constraints on use.

Kumaravadivelu, (2003) states that key word method to learn EFL vocabulary is very potential to face the challenges of foreign language vocabulary. However, the results of his study were not motivating since a post test, arranged only a week after, indicated that EFL learners forgot the meanings and use of the new words up to 52 percent who were instructed only with the help of key words method while the EFL learners lost up to 76 percent who were instructed with combine context condition method. However, the comparative impact of word list method led to further experiments in EFL learning strategies. He also believes that L2 vocabulary depth is also a key indicator in this regard.

### **Research Methodology**

With the dawn of 21<sup>st</sup> century, there has emerged a considerable shift in the theory and practice of foreign language learning, especially, computer based large corpora and tools have revolutionized the art and craft of EFL vocabulary learning. Corpus is a large electronically stored text that may be in written or spoken form. Corpus may be compiled from special to general according to the needs of the users. Corpus data is collected from real life situation to make the corpus more potential and productive (Macaro, 2001). There are many tools to work with the corpus that perform various functions for example n-grams, word sketch, word list, key words, concordance, etc. EnTenTen corpus of English has been used for the undertaken study. The data of the corpus has been collected from the web of English. EnTenTen belongs to TenTen corpus family that is a corpus with more than ten billion words and has been tagged by Tree Tagger using Penn Tree Bank Tagset. Sketch engine has been used with a little modification to work with enTenTen corpus of English web. List of frequent English nouns have been retrieved from enTenTen corpus for the non-native learners of the English language.

### **Corpus and Foreign Language Teaching**

With the advent of computers, there have occurred significant changes in all the domains of foreign language teaching, especially in applied linguistics, computer has brought about very potential changes. Corpora, a large electronically stored text, have been compiled across the

languages for non-native learners. They have absolutely improved the traditional orthodox mode of foreign language learning with maximum autonomy to the learners.

Sinclair (1991) states that corpus and the tools have established their position in handling the challenges of the foreign language vocabulary, especially the idea of wordlist has proved very successful for foreign learners of a language. Apart from that the theory and practice of lexicography has also been influenced with the help of corpora and tools. Finally, the teacher centered approach in foreign language learning has been replaced by student centered approach that was not possible up to recent times.

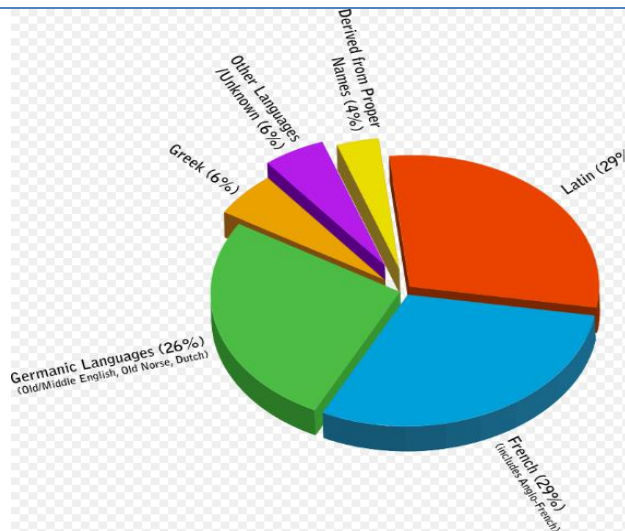
Cameron (2001) argues that corpus and tools have proved a useful strategy for foreign language teachers and learners. He suggests that EFL teachers and learners should develop their own corpora of various registers for facing the foreign vocabulary issues. He recommends that reference corpora have been very potential in foreign language learning.

Kumaravadivelu (2003) identifies that concordance can be very useful in the art of lexicography that was previously very old fashioned and based on mere translations. The potential meanings of the lexical items can be verified from large corpus data in a few times. Moreover, concordance can be useful for EFL learners in terms of pragmatic meanings as the node is presented with the context.

Pinter (2006) asserts that Corpus and tools have also contributed in retrieving core lists of foreign languages that were not possible until the recent past and the EFL learners had to cram long list of foreign vocabulary items. Now a day, the word lists of foreign languages are more focused and precise with a lot of information. Moreover, the depth and size of wordlists can be determined according to the level and needs of the non-native learners.

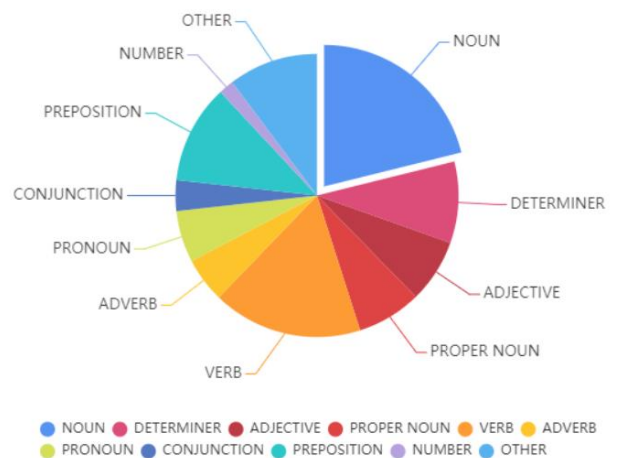
### **Core vocabulary List of the English Nouns**

English is the Western Germanic language that emerged from the Anglo-Friesian dialects. These dialects were introduced by the Anglo-Saxon invaders in the mid-fifth to seventh centuries. English has been formed through many regional languages such as French, Romanian, German, etc. It contains very rich vocabulary, having the influence of many other neighboring languages. As a result, dealing with English vocabulary is a serious problem for learners in English as a foreign language.



Foreign influence on English Vocabulary (Encarta Encyclopedia of English)

Nouns, almost in all languages of the world constitute the main bulk of the vocabulary. They are one of the content words and carry most of the information of the utterance. Commonly, every foreign language vocabulary program is started by the description of noun. enTenTen, the English corpus of the web that has been used for the undertaken research also highlights the significant position of English nouns.



Percentage of English parts of speech in enTenTen corpus of English web,



# noun

(5,008,828 items | 5,513,180,848 total frequency)

Lemma	Frequency	Per Million	Lemma	Frequency	Per Million	Lemma	Frequency	Per Million	Lemma	Frequency	Per Million
1 year	31,649,549	2,015	51 woman	7,738,997	493	101 form	5,455,873	347	151 s	4,496,092	286
2 time	26,584,395	1,693	52 datum	7,683,086	489	102 industry	5,454,023	347	152 council	4,487,136	286
3 people	22,438,703	1,429	53 water	7,678,049	489	103 class	5,446,899	347	153 region	4,465,212	284
4 day	17,547,740	1,117	54 book	7,465,804	475	104 end	5,426,872	346	154 county	4,444,637	283
5 student	16,973,297	1,081	55 technology	7,397,592	471	105 model	5,383,982	343	155 skill	4,435,465	282
6 school	15,880,752	1,011	56 use	7,353,884	468	106 president	5,381,492	343	156 medium	4,424,496	282
7 service	15,771,895	1,004	57 man	7,287,607	464	107 action	5,377,592	342	157 fact	4,407,821	281
8 community	15,164,544	966	58 center	7,260,174	462	108 history	5,361,000	341	158 room	4,394,260	280
9 way	15,063,717	959	59 management	7,196,783	458	109 science	5,333,782	340	159 leader	4,351,112	277
10 system	14,966,248	953	60 problem	7,118,378	453	110 director	5,315,477	338	160 war	4,335,718	276
11 information	14,922,178	950	61 month	7,016,946	447	111 i	5,315,329	338	161 effort	4,326,015	275
12 world	14,871,139	947	62 law	6,958,097	443	112 meeting	5,303,818	338	162 teacher	4,301,339	274
13 work	14,789,457	942	63 policy	6,952,528	443	113 user	5,302,300	338	163 united	4,284,436	273
14 project	14,546,322	926	64 game	6,946,870	442	114 idea	5,245,721	334	164 committee	4,270,668	272
15 program	14,334,549	913	65 opportunity	6,914,110	440	115 music	5,221,719	333	165 court	4,265,828	272
16 life	13,678,046	871	66 art	6,900,182	439	116 lot	5,201,313	331	166 image	4,261,720	271
17 state	13,645,308	869	67 activity	6,844,673	436	117 board	5,197,028	331	167 performance	4,250,883	271
18 child	13,420,273	855	68 result	6,823,258	434	118 church	5,190,908	331	168 effect	4,213,408	268
19 group	13,342,528	850	69 site	6,702,973	427	119 conference	5,162,714	329	169 u.s.	4,210,996	268
20 member	12,553,148	799	70 right	6,680,286	425	120 hour	5,130,173	327	170 view	4,198,064	267
21 research	12,408,937	790	71 today	6,674,924	425	121 practice	5,118,541	326	171 film	4,197,066	267
22 university	12,182,622	776	72 power	6,630,521	422	122 word	5,054,004	322	172 international	4,183,503	266
23 part	12,113,661	771	73 food	6,577,198	419	123 role	5,044,785	321	173 side	4,145,739	264
24 area	12,023,657	766	74 point	6,561,180	418	124 building	5,037,765	321	174 tool	4,114,159	262
25 development	11,898,101	758	75 report	6,461,794	411	125 quality	5,037,012	321	175 language	4,113,416	262
26 family	10,985,673	700	76 energy	6,393,481	407	126 society	5,018,224	320	176 patient	4,102,826	261
27 country	10,808,554	688	77 page	6,341,858	404	127 other	4,959,841	316	177 street	4,093,791	261
28 business	10,643,434	678	78 product	6,270,903	399	128 party	4,935,823	314	178 video	4,081,870	260
29 city	10,528,982	670	79 order	6,258,495	399	129 space	4,854,891	309	179 land	4,049,142	258
30 health	10,445,321	665	80 house	6,242,751	398	130 value	4,803,512	306	180 age	4,039,608	257
31 company	10,365,952	660	81 question	6,201,495	395	131 website	4,786,656	305	181 solution	4,034,623	257
32 government	9,782,517	623	82 market	6,154,563	392	132 cost	4,766,891	304	182 method	4,023,256	256
33 event	9,712,415	618	83 office	6,051,510	385	133 term	4,760,914	303	183 option	3,983,399	254
34 number	9,457,213	602	84 application	6,001,200	382	134 security	4,760,122	303	184 night	3,959,673	252
35 home	9,456,905	602	85 training	5,994,278	382	135 staff	4,741,785	302	185 association	3,929,578	250
36 place	9,260,520	590	86 need	5,965,171	380	136 control	4,724,921	301	186 knowledge	3,915,243	249
37 team	9,205,404	586	87 god	5,957,780	379	137 news	4,716,786	300	187 money	3,907,543	249
38 new	8,929,178	569	88 organization	5,944,589	379	138 friend	4,706,594	300	188 position	3,856,123	246
39 education	8,861,345	564	89 example	5,908,121	376	139 line	4,662,715	297	189 public	3,855,561	246
40 issue	8,605,771	548	90 care	5,871,328	374	140 source	4,660,742	297	190 analysis	3,848,425	245
41 thing	8,510,369	542	91 plan	5,825,532	371	141 interest	4,655,385	296	191 list	3,838,740	244
42 week	8,260,113	526	92 resource	5,777,785	368	142 environment	4,634,021	295	192 parent	3,829,317	244
43 experience	8,176,794	521	93 department	5,771,173	367	143 type	4,630,357	295	193 foundation	3,824,635	244
44 support	8,103,929	516	94 design	5,685,173	362	144 access	4,626,313	295	194 south	3,815,672	243
45 case	8,065,681	514	95 job	5,658,732	360	145 body	4,607,307	293	195 impact	3,808,259	243
46 process	8,041,483	512	96 network	5,615,851	358	146 material	4,601,072	293	196 challenge	3,807,795	242
47 study	8,027,829	511	97 national	5,597,404	356	147 something	4,567,036	291	197 story	3,804,987	242
48 change	7,910,704	504	98 name	5,557,513	354	148 person	4,544,896	289	198 rate	3,793,354	242
49 level	7,907,362	504	99 field	5,550,867	353	149 hand	4,514,051	287	199 condition	3,789,266	241
50 course	7,839,059	499	100 college	5,501,428	350	150 article	4,502,654	287	200 paper	3,788,113	241



**noun** (5,008,828 items | 5,513,180,848 total frequency)

Lemma	Frequency	Per Million	Lemma	Frequency	Per Million	Lemma	Frequency	Per Million	Lemma	Frequency	Per Million
201 series	3,778,694	241	251 york	3,282,915	209	301 everyone	2,944,579	188	351 officer	2,670,578	170
202 approach	3,769,782	240	252 web	3,279,165	209	302 player	2,941,635	187	352 difference	2,669,913	170
203 decision	3,767,076	240	253 september	3,264,557	208	303 contract	2,941,584	187	353 initiative	2,662,793	170
204 goal	3,746,201	239	254 cell	3,263,322	208	304 india	2,941,357	187	354 phone	2,634,179	168
205 road	3,745,062	238	255 test	3,262,263	208	305 eye	2,940,623	187	355 climate	2,633,970	168
206 force	3,727,152	237	256 car	3,258,202	207	306 light	2,939,283	187	356 economy	2,632,513	168
207 price	3,705,964	236	257 detail	3,245,359	207	307 safety	2,932,739	187	357 bit	2,625,884	167
208 section	3,683,673	235	258 november	3,241,864	206	308 manager	2,924,441	186	358 function	2,612,966	166
209 culture	3,659,344	233	259 district	3,226,859	205	309 degree	2,918,216	186	359 december	2,602,605	166
210 park	3,653,824	233	260 sector	3,226,761	205	310 movement	2,912,434	185	360 de	2,600,282	166
211 may	3,651,587	233	261 communication	3,220,741	205	311 structure	2,911,037	185	361 call	2,597,163	165
212 strategy	3,633,085	231	262 states	3,217,986	205	312 content	2,900,549	185	362 oil	2,594,229	165
213 agency	3,617,849	230	263 session	3,211,501	205	313 date	2,900,152	185	363 american	2,592,722	165
214 air	3,603,483	229	264 partner	3,211,425	204	314 girl	2,890,676	184	364 everything	2,589,213	165
215 file	3,595,919	229	265 institute	3,208,453	204	315 minute	2,889,415	184	365 volunteer	2,580,160	164
216 risk	3,595,871	229	266 version	3,201,131	204	316 artist	2,880,587	183	366 figure	2,575,922	164
217 range	3,578,855	228	267 north	3,189,357	203	317 career	2,864,550	182	367 note	2,574,199	164
218 head	3,557,012	227	268 heart	3,173,691	202	318 uk	2,863,436	182	368 minister	2,573,883	164
219 software	3,545,115	226	269 link	3,167,809	202	319 success	2,841,318	181	369 search	2,568,022	164
220 review	3,539,267	225	270 c	3,165,094	202	320 percent	2,838,831	181	370 river	2,553,958	163
221 production	3,531,879	225	271 record	3,163,788	201	321 season	2,828,932	180	371 author	2,550,445	162
222 customer	3,531,587	225	272 unit	3,138,850	200	322 mission	2,823,810	180	372 table	2,542,656	162
223 future	3,522,065	224	273 m	3,131,251	199	323 photo	2,818,323	179	373 leadership	2,539,662	162
224 john	3,519,704	224	274 population	3,130,315	199	324 bill	2,817,461	179	374 professor	2,529,505	161
225 reason	3,488,408	222	275 kind	3,127,398	199	325 client	2,816,951	179	375 requirement	2,527,571	161
226 library	3,476,534	221	276 location	3,112,245	198	326 matter	2,810,413	179	376 china	2,527,118	161
227 property	3,471,191	221	277 america	3,108,259	198	327 ability	2,810,011	179	377 trade	2,522,958	161
228 fund	3,466,671	221	278 operation	3,100,104	197	328 authority	2,809,966	179	378 august	2,519,708	160
229 post	3,463,822	221	279 plant	3,096,277	197	329 nature	2,805,758	179	379 commission	2,515,675	160
230 relationship	3,436,525	219	280 collection	3,088,884	197	330 europe	2,801,343	178	380 mind	2,509,236	160
231 treatment	3,428,232	218	281 programme	3,080,025	196	331 campaign	2,795,304	178	381 stage	2,507,875	160
232 centre	3,415,968	218	282 police	3,071,653	196	332 disease	2,791,934	178	382 item	2,504,146	159
233 march	3,372,902	215	283 club	3,057,116	195	333 hospital	2,770,834	176	383 january	2,502,164	159
234 act	3,370,868	215	284 facility	3,056,419	195	334 institution	2,764,677	176	384 century	2,487,652	158
235 device	3,368,137	214	285 standard	3,052,408	194	335 purpose	2,754,653	175	385 text	2,485,009	158
236 growth	3,365,158	214	286 youth	3,045,611	194	336 general	2,745,911	175	386 size	2,477,287	158
237 individual	3,361,345	214	287 code	3,020,793	192	337 rule	2,745,282	175	387 tax	2,473,334	157
238 step	3,360,524	214	288 april	3,019,552	192	338 internet	2,734,793	174	388 comment	2,470,435	157
239 period	3,350,735	213	289 a	3,012,652	192	339 investment	2,724,744	174	389 picture	2,460,156	157
240 october	3,343,290	213	290 july	2,981,449	190	340 situation	2,719,865	173	390 mother	2,455,526	156
241 june	3,340,677	213	291 workshop	2,980,291	190	341 thank	2,718,640	173	391 choice	2,451,906	156
242 benefit	3,322,739	212	292 death	2,977,128	190	342 participant	2,715,993	173	392 set	2,448,368	156
243 show	3,321,272	211	293 discussion	2,976,265	190	343 nation	2,714,512	173	393 download	2,443,665	156
244 us	3,320,452	211	294 love	2,974,357	189	344 amount	2,707,514	172	394 construction	2,440,297	155
245 bank	3,308,475	211	295 feature	2,962,490	189	345 employee	2,707,489	172	395 fire	2,431,735	155
246 award	3,295,785	210	296 town	2,960,831	189	346 west	2,706,622	172	396 tree	2,423,233	154
247 computer	3,290,810	210	297 worker	2,959,468	188	347 document	2,702,940	172	397 ground	2,411,361	154
248 dr.	3,290,378	210	298 union	2,958,821	188	348 email	2,688,520	171	398 engineering	2,404,644	153
249 addition	3,289,389	209	299 summer	2,949,757	188	349 account	2,678,851	171	399 topic	2,400,370	153
250 response	3,283,682	209	300 sale	2,946,421	188	350 message	2,676,574	170	400 kid	2,388,183	152

## Discussion

A close analysis of the word lists shows the wide range of the English noun vocabulary. The retrieved list of English nouns covers many domains from academic to social. As English language belongs to dominantly Western countries, there are many words in the list that highlight the Western culture of the list. For example, words like, purely belongs to English culture that will help the English learners to understand the delicacies of culture of the English language for successful communication.

Political aspect has shaped into an important part of human life. The list of frequent English nouns also covers the political scenario of the English culture. Words like etc., reflect that learners will have a chance to be exposed with the political vocabulary as well that will help them in successful communication in English language.

Economical aspect is another important dimension of human life. There are many nouns in the retrieved word list that are related with the professional aspect of English culture. Nouns like etc. belong the economic life of English culture. By focusing these nouns, learners of the English language will be familiar with the economical aspect of English language and will be prepared for purposeful communication in this domain too.

There are many nouns in the list that are related with the social life of English language. The importance of these nouns becomes all the more crucial as the real test of a foreign language is in the social interactions. By comprehending these nouns, EFL learners will be in a better position to handle this test of society-based real life communications.

Descriptive studies have great potential in figuring out the complex situation when an EFL learner continuously makes generalizations between his mother tongue and the target language.

Realistically, this convergence between the mother and the target language is not an ideal solution because words have different meanings when used in various contexts (Folse, 2004). Conversely, these strategies of convergence by the EFL learners may lead towards unsuccessful results. The above list of EFL nouns is likely to have potential results as the corpus data has been collected from various domains of English culture.

By comprehending the frequent nouns of the English language, the overall proficiency of the target language may be improved. Wordlists like these should be a part of EFL curriculum. Non-native learners of the English language must have maximum exposure with the frequent and focused data. Such wordlists are also very helpful in EFL genre writing and will guide to professional style.

## Concluding Remarks

Structurally, English is a complex language. The reason behind the fact is that English has been under the impact of many languages of the region. Consequently, learning English as a foreign language is a challenging task (Annisa, 2013). Core vocabulary, retrieved through corpus data, can be used to face the challenges of English as a foreign language. The use of corpus and tools in English as a foreign language are comparatively a new phenomenon but they have strong potential to motivate foreign learners of English language. The retrieved English list of frequent nouns can be reshaped according to the needs and levels of the learners. It will counter the





traditional laborious wordlists of English language that are not actively used in the real written and spoken discourse. The large number of English files refers to the bulk of the corpus, resulting in a focused and core vocabulary. The core list of English nouns may also be useful for English lexicographers, lexicologists, grammarians, in translations for foreign learners with lexical sensitivity, etc.

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