

On Speak to and Talk to: A Corpora-Based Analysis

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Abstract—The ultimate goal of this paper is to compare *speak to* with *talk to* in four corpora. In the Movie Corpus (Movie Corpus (MC). 20, January 2022. Online <https://english-corpora.org/movies/>), *talk to* was preferable to *speak to* in the films of six countries (America, the UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Ireland). It is worth mentioning that in the Movie Corpus (Movie Corpus (MC). 20, January 2022. Online <https://english-corpora.org/movies/>), *speak to* (2,620 tokens) and *talk to* (18,667 tokens) was the most preferred types in the 2010s. In the TV Corpus (TV Corpus (TVC). 20, January 2022. Online <https://english-corpora.org/tv/>), *talk to* is preferable to *speak to* in six countries' (America, the UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Ireland) TV programs. It is noteworthy that in the TV Corpus (TV Corpus (TVC). 20, January 2022. Online <https://english-corpora.org/tv/>), *speak to* (8,279 tokens) and *talk to* (59,703 tokens) reached a peak in the 2010s. In the BNC (British National Corpus (BNC). 20, January 2022. Online <https://corpus.byu.edu/bnc/>), the types *speak to* and *talk to* show the same pattern in three genres, whereas they show a different pattern in four genres. That is, *speak to* is 42.85% the same as *talk to* in their ranking. Finally, the COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). 20, January 2022. Online <https://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>) clearly shows that 42.85% of forty two nouns are the collocations of both *speak to* and *talk to*.

Index Terms—Movie Corpus, TV Corpus, BNC, COCA

I. INTRODUCTION

As Murphy (2016, 2019) points out, *speak to* and *talk to* are used interchangeably. The main goal of this paper is to compare *speak to* with *talk to* in the Movie Corpus (MC) (Movie Corpus (MC). 20, January 2022. Online <https://english-corpora.org/movies/>), the TV Corpus (TVC) (TV Corpus (TVC). 20, January 2022. Online <https://english-corpora.org/tv/>), the British National Corpus (BNC) (British National Corpus (BNC). 20, January 2022. Online <https://corpus.byu.edu/bnc/>), and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) (Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). 20, January 2022. Online <https://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>). As argued by Kang (2021), the COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English) and the BNC (British National Corpus) are major corpora that are used heavily in English learning. First, we provide a diachronic analysis of *speak to* and *talk to* in the Movie Corpus (MC) (Movie Corpus (MC). 20, January 2022. Online <https://english-corpora.org/movies/>) and the TV Corpus (TVC) (TV Corpus (TVC). 20, January 2022. Online <https://english-corpora.org/tv/>). Second, we compare *speak to* with *talk to* in the seven genres of the BNC (British National Corpus (BNC). 20, January 2022. Online <https://corpus.byu.edu/bnc/>). Third, we consider the similarity between *speak to* and *talk to* in terms of the Euclidean distance. Fourth, we examine the collocations of *speak to* and *talk to* in the COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). 20, January 2022. Online <https://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>). We compare the collocation of *speak to* with that of *talk to* in the COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). 20, January 2022. Online <https://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>). Fifth, we investigate the similarity between *speak to* and *talk to* in terms of the software NetMiner. The organization of this paper is as follows. In section 2, we show that *talk to* was preferable to *speak to* in the films of six countries. We further argue that *speak to* (2,620 tokens) and *talk to* (18,667 tokens) was the most preferred types in the 2010s. In section 3, we maintain that *talk to* is preferable to *speak to* in the TV programs of six countries. We also maintain that *speak to* (8,279 tokens) and *talk to* (59,703 tokens) reached a peak in the 2010s. In section 4, we contend that *speak to* and *talk to* show the same pattern in three genres, whereas they show a different pattern in four genres. That is, *speak to* is 42.85% the same as *talk to* in their ranking. In section 5, we show that *speak to people* (158 tokens) and *talk to people* (1,728 tokens) are the most preferable ones for Americans. We also show that 42.85% of forty two nouns are the collocations of both *speak to* and *talk to*.

II. THE MOVIE CORPUS

In section 2, we consider the diachronic aspects of *speak to* and *talk to* in the Movie Corpus (Movie Corpus (MC). 20, January 2022. Online <https://english-corpora.org/movies/>). Table 1 shows the diachronic use of *speak to* and *talk to* in the Movie Corpus (Movie Corpus (MC). 20, January 2022. Online <https://english-corpora.org/movies/>):

TABLE 1
FREQUENCY OF SPEAK TO AND TALK TO IN THE MOVIE CORPUS

Type	Speak to	Talk to
1930s	634	1,665
1940s	847	2,676
1950s	828	3,092
1960s	667	2,291
1970s	639	3,032
1980s	757	4,903
1990s	1,273	8,145
2000s	2,325	15,388
2010s	2,620	18,667
All	10,590	59,859
US/CA	7,042	49,475
UK/IE	2,568	6,031
AU/NZ	197	851
Misc	783	3,502

It is significant to note that *talk to* was preferable to *speak to* in the films of six countries (America, the UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Ireland). The overall frequency of *speak to* is 10,590 tokens, whereas that of *talk to* is 59,859 tokens. The frequency of the type *talk to* is five times higher than that of the type *speak to*. From this, it is clear that *talk to* was preferable to *speak to* in six countries' films from the 1930s to the 2010s. Figure 1 shows the frequency of *speak to* and *talk to* from the 1930s to the 2010s:

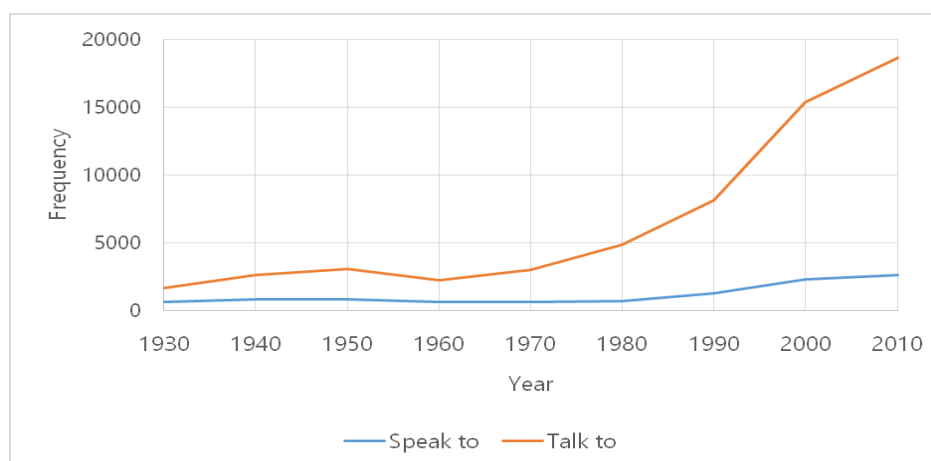


Figure 1 Frequency of Speak to and Talk to in the Movie Corpus

It is interesting to point out that there was a slight rise (213 tokens) in the figure of *speak to* from the 1930s to the 1940s. However, there was a sudden decrease (a decline of 19 tokens) in the figure of *speak to* in the 1950s. Interestingly, there was a gradual decline (a fall of 189 tokens) in the figure of *speak to* from the 1950s to the 1970s. More interestingly, there was a dramatic rise (a sharp increase of 1,863 tokens) in the figure of *speak to* from the 1980s to the 2010s. It is worth pointing out that *speak to* had the highest frequency (2,620 tokens) in the 2010s, whereas it had the lowest frequency (634 tokens) in the 1930s. This in turn implies that *speak to* was the most preferred one (2,620 tokens) in the 2010s, whereas it was the least preferred one (634 tokens) in the 1930s. Most importantly, *speak to* was the most preferred (7,042 tokens) by American and Canadian film writers, followed by British and Irish ones (2,568 tokens), and Australian and New Zealand ones (197 tokens), in that order.

It is worth noting that there was a steady increase (a rise of 1,427 tokens) in the figure of *talk to* from the 1930s to the 1950s. There was a sudden decrease (a decline of 801 tokens) in the figure of *talk to* in the 1960s. More importantly, there was a dramatic increase (a sharp rise of 16,376 tokens) in the figure of *talk to* from the 1960s to the 2010s. It is important to note that *talk to* reached a peak (the highest frequency: 18,667 tokens) in the 2010s, whereas it had the lowest frequency (1,665 tokens) in the 1930s. This in turn shows that *talk to* was the most preferred one (18,667 tokens) in the 2010s, whereas it was the least preferred one (1,665 tokens) in the 1930s. More interestingly, just as in the case of *speak to*, *talk to* was the most preferred by American and Canadian film writers, followed by British and Irish ones, and Australian and New Zealand ones, in descending order. Finally, it is significant to note that *talk to* was always preferable to *speak to* in six countries' films from the 1930s to the 2010s.

III. THE TV CORPUS

In the following, we consider the diachronic use of *speak to* and *talk to* in the TV Corpus (TV Corpus (TVC). 20, January 2022. Online <https://english-corpora.org/tv/>). Table 2 shows the frequency of *speak to* and *talk to* from the

1950s to the 2010s:

TABLE 2
FREQUENCY OF SPEAK TO AND TALK TO IN THE TV CORPUS

Type	Speak to	Talk to
1950s	154	613
1960s	599	2,277
1970s	564	2,789
1980s	757	4,960
1990s	1,634	10,753
2000s	4,199	35,182
2010s	8,279	59,703
All	16,186	116,277
US/CA	10,325	102,561
UK/IE	5,308	11,566
AU/NZ	415	1,572
Misc	138	578

It is significant to note that *talk to* is preferable to *speak to* in six countries' (America, the UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Ireland) TV programs. The frequency of *talk to* (116,277 tokens) is almost eleven times higher than that of *speak to* (16,186 tokens). This in turn shows that six countries' celebrities preferred using *talk to* rather than using *speak to* (1950s-2010s). Figure 2 shows the diachronic use of *speak to* and *talk to* in the TV Corpus (1950s-2010s) (TV Corpus (TVC). 20, January 2022. Online <https://english-corpora.org/tv/>):

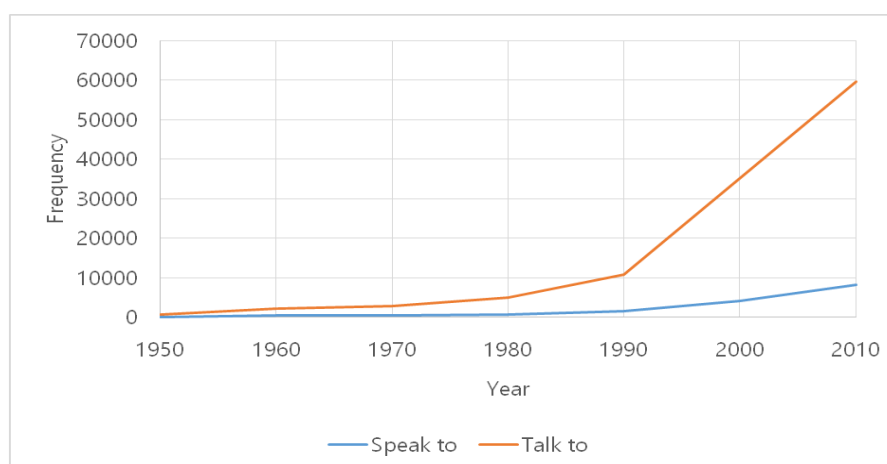


Figure 2 Frequency of Speak to and Talk to in the TV Corpus

It is worth noting that there was a slight increase (a rise of 445 tokens) in the figure of *speak to* from the 1950s to the 1960s. However, there was a sudden fall (a slight decline of 35 tokens) in the figure of *speak to* in the 1970s. More importantly, there was a dramatic increase (a sharp rise of 7,715 tokens) in the figure of *speak to* from the 1970s to the 2010s. It is important to note that *speak to* reached a peak (the highest frequency: 8,279 tokens) in the 2010s, whereas it had the lowest frequency (154 tokens) in the 1950s. From this, it can be inferred that *speak to* was the most preferable type (8,279 tokens) for six countries' celebrities in the 2010s, whereas it was the least preferred one (154 tokens) in the 1950s. Additionally, it should be pointed out that *speak to* was the most preferred (10,325 tokens) by American and Canadian celebrities, followed by British and Irish ones (5,308 tokens), and Australian and New Zealand ones (415 tokens).

It is worthwhile noting that there was a sharp increase (a rise of 2,176 tokens) in the figure of *talk to* from the 1950s to the 1970s. More importantly, there was a dramatic increase (a rise of 54,743 tokens) in the figure of *talk to* from the 1980s to the 2010s. It is worthwhile mentioning that *talk to* reached a peak (the highest frequency: 59,703 tokens) in the 2010s, whereas it had the lowest frequency (613 tokens) in the 1950s. Just as in the case of *speak to*, *talk to* was the most preferred (102,561 tokens) by American and Canadian celebrities, followed by British and Irish ones (11,566 tokens), and Australian and New Zealand ones (1,572 tokens), in descending order. Finally, it is important to note that *talk to* was always preferable to *speak to* in six countries' TV programs (1950s-2010s).

IV. SPEAK TO AND TALK TO IN THE BRITISH NATIONAL CORPUS

In the following, we aim to consider the frequency of *speak to* and *talk to* in the BNC (British National Corpus (BNC). 20, January 2022. Online <https://corpus.byu.edu/bnc>). Also, we examine the similarity between *speak to* and *talk to* in seven genres. Table 3 shows the frequency of *speak to* and *talk to* in the BNC (British National Corpus (BNC). 20, January 2022. Online <https://corpus.byu.edu/bnc>):

TABLE 3
FREQUENCY OF SPEAK TO AND TALK TO IN THE BNC

Type	ALL	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	NON-ACAD	ACADEMIC	MISC
Speak to	2,001	468	877	47	165	116	64	264
Talk to	4,074	928	1,613	180	340	360	145	508

It would be worth mentioning that *talk to* is the preferable one (4,074 tokens) for the British. The overall frequency of *speak to* is 2,001 tokens, whereas that of *talk to* is 4,074 tokens. This in turn implies that the British prefer using *talk to* to using *speak to*.

It is worthwhile noting that *speak to* (877 tokens) and *talk to* (1,613 tokens) rank first in the fiction genre. Interestingly, *speak to* and *talk to* show the same pattern (rank-one) in the fiction genre, thus showing a high degree of similarity. It should be noted, however, that *talk to* (1,613 tokens) is preferred over *speak to* (877 tokens) by British writers. This can be derived from the fact that the frequency of *talk to* (1,613 tokens) is much higher than that of *speak to* (877 tokens) in the fiction genre.

It is interesting to point out that *speak to* (468 tokens) and *talk to* (928 tokens) rank second in the spoken genre. Simply put, *speak to* and *talk to* show the same property (rank-two) in the spoken genre, thus showing a high degree of similarity with respect to their ranking. It must be noted, however, that *talk to* (928 tokens) is almost two times higher than that of *speak to* (468 tokens). Thus, we take this as indicating that the British prefer using *talk to* rather than using *speak to* in daily conversation.

It is worth mentioning that *speak to* (264 tokens) and *talk to* (508 tokens) rank third in the misc genre. This indicates that they show the same pattern (rank-three) in the misc genre, hence a high degree of similarity in the misc genre. It should be pointed out, however, that the frequency of *talk to* (508 tokens) is almost two times higher than that of *speak to* (264 tokens) in the misc genre. Thus, it amounts saying that *talk to* is preferable to *speak to* in the misc genre.

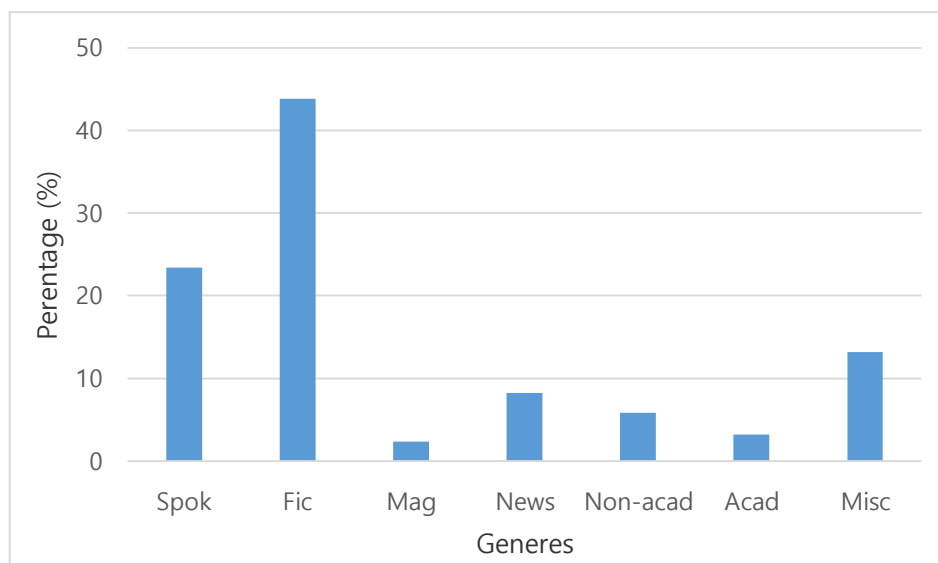
It is interesting to note that *speak to* ranks fourth (165 tokens) in the newspaper genre, whereas *talk to* ranks fourth (360 tokens) in the non-academic genre. Interestingly, *speak to* and *talk to* show a different property with respect to rank-four, thus showing a low degree of similarity. It is important to note that *talk to* is preferable to *speak to* in the newspaper genre and the non-academic genre. The frequency of *speak to* in the newspaper genre is 165 tokens, whereas that of *talk to* is 340 tokens. On the other hand, the frequency of *speak to* in the non-academic genre is 116 tokens, whereas that of *talk to* is 360 tokens. From all of this, it is clear that *talk to* is preferable to *speak to* in two genres.

It is worthwhile noting that *speak to* ranks fifth (116 tokens) in the non-academic genre, whereas *talk to* ranks fifth (340 tokens) in the newspaper genre. This indicates that *speak to* (116 tokens) and *talk to* (340 tokens) show a different pattern in rank-five, thus revealing a low degree of similarity in two genres.

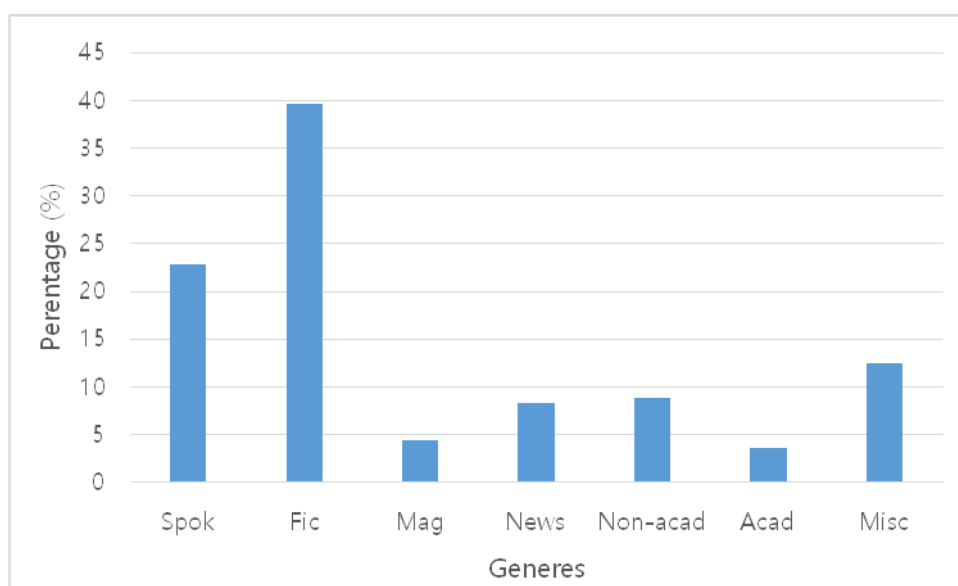
It is probably worth mentioning that *speak to* ranks sixth (64 tokens) in the academic genre, whereas *talk to* ranks sixth (180 tokens) in the magazine genre. Again, *speak to* and *talk to* show a different property in rank-six, hence a low degree of similarity in two genres. It should be pointed out, however, that the frequency of *talk to* (180 tokens) is two times higher than that of *speak to* (64 tokens) in the academic genre. This in turn indicates that *talk to* is favored over *speak to* in the academic genre. On the other hand, the frequency of *talk to* (180 tokens) is three times higher than that of *speak to* (47 tokens) in the magazine genre. This in turn implies that *talk to* is favored over *speak to* in British magazines.

Finally, it is noteworthy that *speak to* ranks seventh (47 tokens) in the magazine genre, whereas *talk to* ranks seventh (145 tokens) in the academic genre. Again, *speak to* and *talk to* reveal a different pattern in rank-seven, thus showing a low degree of similarity in two genres. To sum up, *speak to* and *talk to* show the same pattern in the spoken and misc genres and the fiction genre, whereas they show a different pattern in the magazine and newspaper genres and the academic and non-academic genres. This in turn suggests that *speak to* is 42.85% the same as *talk to* in their ranking. From this, it is clear that *speak to* and *talk to* are used interchangeably, but they show a low degree of similarity.

Figure 3 and Figure 4 show the use of *speak to* and *talk to* in seven genres:

Figure 3 Use of *Speak to* in the Seven Genres of the BNC

Most interestingly, the fiction genre is the most influenced by *speak to*, followed by the spoken genre, the misc genre, the newspaper genre, the non-academic genre, the academic genre, and the magazine genre, in that order.

Figure 4 Use of *Talk to* in the Seven Genres of the BNC

As illustrated in Figure 4, the fiction genre is the most influenced by *talk to*, followed by the spoken genre, the misc genre, the non-academic genre, the newspaper genre, the magazine genre, and the academic genre, in descending order.

Now let us turn our attention to the Euclidean distance. Here it provides the similarity between *speak to* and *talk to* in seven genres. We adopt the following definition about the Euclidean distance:

(1) The Euclidean distance:

$$d(p, q) = \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n (p_i - q_i)^2}$$

Table 4 provides the Euclidean distance between *speak to* and *talk to* in seven genres:

TABLE 4
EUCLIDEAN DISTANCE BETWEEN SPEAK TO AND TALK TO IN SEVEN GENRES

Genre	Spok	Fic	Mag	News	Non-acad	Acad	Misc
Percentage of speak to	23.38	43.82	2.34	8.24	5.79	3.19	13.19
Percentage of talk to	22.77	39.59	4.41	8.34	8.83	3.55	12.46
Euclidean distance	0.61	4.23	2.07	0.1	3.04	0.36	0.73

As indicated in Table 4, *speak to* is the furthest from *talk to* in the fiction genre. On the other hand, *speak to* is the nearest to *talk to* in the newspaper genre. More specifically, the Euclidean distance in the newspaper genre is 0.1, which is the lowest. This in turn implies that *speak to* and *talk to* show deep similarities in the newspaper genre. Interestingly, the Euclidean distance in the non-academic genre is 3.04, which is the second highest. This in turn suggests that *speak to* and *talk to* show a low degree of similarity in the non-academic genre. Finally, the Euclidean distance in the academic genre is 0.36, which is the second lowest. This in turn indicates that *speak to* and *talk to* show a high degree of similarity in the academic genre. We thus conclude that *speak to* is the nearest to *talk to* in the newspaper genre.

V. THE COLLOCATIONS OF SPEAK TO AND TALK TO IN THE CORPUS OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN ENGLISH

In what follows, we examine the collocations of *speak to* and *talk to* in the COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). 20, January 2022. Online <https://corpus.byu.edu/coca>). Table 5 shows the collocation of *speak to* in the top 30:

TABLE 5
COLLOCATION OF SPEAK TO IN THE COCA

Number	Speak to	Frequency
1	speak to people	158
2	speak to Mr	77
3	speak to reporters	66
4	speak to students	35
5	speak to women	25
6	speak to children	22
7	speak to groups	22
8	speak to Dr	21
9	speak to president	20
10	speak to captain	16
11	speak to me	16
12	speak to congress	15
13	speak to Miss	15
14	speak to kids	14
15	speak to journalists	13
16	speak to members	13
17	speak to Mrs	13
18	speak to voters	13
19	speak to detective	12
20	speak to investigators	12
21	speak to men	12
22	speak to police	12
23	speak to strangers	11
24	speak to issues	10
25	speak to adults	9
26	speak to friends	9
27	speak to mom	9
28	speak to parents	9
29	speak to sergeant	8
30	speak to supporters	8

It is significant to note that *speak to people* is the most frequently used one (158 tokens) in America. This in turn suggests that *speak to people* is the most preferable one (158 tokens) for Americans. As alluded to in Table 5, *speak to people* is the most preferred (158 tokens) by Americans, followed by *speak to Mr* (77 tokens), *speak to reporters* (66 tokens), *speak to students* (35 tokens), *speak to women* (25 tokens), *speak to children* (22 tokens), *speak to groups* (22 tokens), *speak to Dr* (21 tokens), and *speak to president* (20 tokens), in that order. It is interesting to point out that *speak to me* ranks tenth (16 tokens) in the COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). 20, January 2022. Online <https://corpus.byu.edu/coca>). It is also interesting to note that *speak to voters* ranks fifteenth (13 tokens) in the COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). 20, January 2022. Online <https://corpus.byu.edu/coca>). We thus conclude that *speak to people* is the most widely used one (158 tokens) in America.

Now attention is paid to the collocation of *talk to* in the top 30:

TABLE 6
COLLOCATION OF TALK TO IN THE COCA

Number	Talk to	Frequency
1	talk to people	1,728
2	talk to strangers	246
3	talk to Mr	174
4	talk to me	142
5	talk to reporters	142
6	talk to women	137
7	talk to girls	132
8	talk to kids	119
9	talk to mom	107
10	talk to Dr	92
11	talk to friends	89
12	talk to us	80
13	talk to dad	78
14	talk to students	74
15	talk to police	65
16	talk to children	52
17	talk to folks	51
18	talk to voters	48
19	talk to senator	47
20	talk to animals	46
21	talk to parents	46
22	talk to president	46
23	talk to daddy	44
24	talk to Mrs	44
25	talk to members	40
26	talk to customers	39
27	talk to republicans	37
28	talk to men	34
29	talk to doctors	31
30	talk to patients	27

It is important to note that *talk to people* is the most commonly used one (1,728 tokens) in America. This in turn implies that *talk to people* is the most preferable one (1,728 tokens) among Americans. As illustrated in Table 6, *talk to people* is the most preferred (1,728 tokens) by Americans, followed by *talk to strangers* (246 tokens), *talk to Mr* (174 tokens), *talk to me* ((142 tokens) *talk to reporters* (142 tokens)), *talk to women* (137 tokens), *talk to girls* (132 tokens), and *talk to kids* (119 tokens), in descending order. More interestingly, *talk to people* (1,728 tokens) and *speak to people* rank first in the COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). 20, January 2022. Online <https://corpus.byu.edu/coca>). On the other hand, *talk to strangers* ranks second (246 tokens) in the COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). 20, January 2022. Online <https://corpus.byu.edu/coca>), whereas *speak to strangers* ranks twenty third (11 tokens). It is worthwhile noting that the everyday expression *talk to me* ranks fourth (142 tokens) in the COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). 20, January 2022. Online <https://corpus.byu.edu/coca>), whereas *speak to me* ranks tenth (16 tokens). Finally, *talk to president* ranks twentieth (20 tokens) in the COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). 20, January 2022. Online <https://corpus.byu.edu/coca>), whereas *speak to president* ranks ninth (20 tokens). We thus conclude that *talk to people* is the most preferable one (1,728 tokens) for Americans.

Now let us turn our attention to the visualization of the collocations of *speak to* and *talk to*:

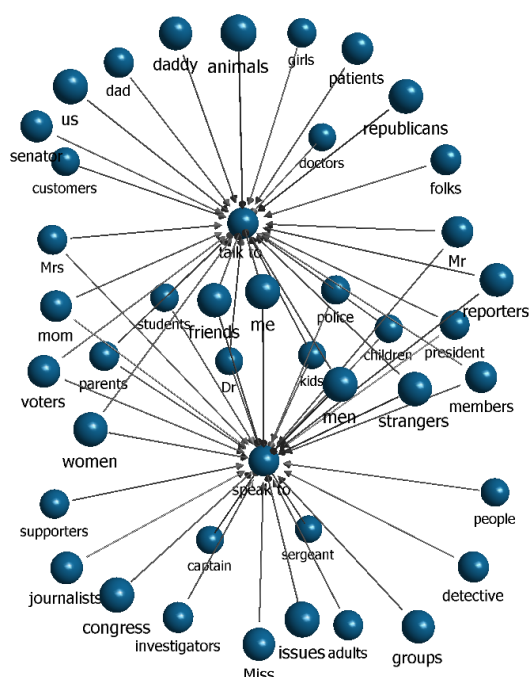


Figure 5 Visualization of the Collocations of Speak to and Talk to in the COCA

As exemplified in Figure 5, twelve nouns are linked to *speak to*, whereas twelve nouns are linked to *talk to*. More interestingly, eighteen nouns are linked to both *speak to* and *talk to*, which indicates that they are the collocations of both *speak to* and *talk to*. The expressions linked to both *speak to* and *talk to* are *people*, *strangers*, *Mr*, *me*, *reporters*, *women*, *kids*, *mom*, *Dr*, *friends*, *students*, *police*, *children*, *voters*, *parents*, *president*, *Mrs*, and *members*. Most importantly, 42.85% of forty two nouns are the collocations of both *speak to* and *talk to*. From all of this, it is evident that *speak to* and *talk to* are used interchangeably, but they show a low degree of similarity.

VI. CONCLUSION

To sum up, we have compared *speak to* with *talk to* in four corpora. In section 2, we have argued that *talk to* was preferable to *speak to* in the films of six countries (America, the UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Ireland). We have further argued that the types *speak to* (2,620 tokens) and *talk to* (18,667 tokens) was the most preferred ones in the 2010s. In section 3, we have maintained that *talk to* is preferable to *speak to* in six countries' (America, the UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Ireland) TV programs. We have also maintained that *speak to* (8,279 tokens) and *talk to* (59,703 tokens) reached a peak in the 2010s. In section 4, we have contended that *speak to* and *talk to* show the same pattern in three genres, whereas they show a different pattern in four genres. That is to say, *speak to* is 42.85% the same as *talk to* in their ranking. In section 5, we have argued that *speak to people* (158 tokens) and *talk to people* (1,728 tokens) are the most preferable ones for Americans. We have also shown that 42.85% of forty two nouns are the collocations of both *speak to* and *talk to*. From all of this, it is clear that *speak to* and *talk to* are used interchangeably, but they show a low degree of similarity.

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