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**On Cognitive Synonymy: A Case Study
(Soft and Mild)**

Bachelor's Diploma Thesis

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2009

*I declare that I have worked on this thesis independently,
using only the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography.*

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Author's signature

Acknowledgement:

I would like to thank to my supervisor PhDr. Naděžda Kudrnáčová, CSc. for her
valuable advice and patience.

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Anotace

Tato práce si klade za cíl porovnat významy dvou adjektiv (*soft* a *mild*), která jsou ve slovnících běžně označovaná jako synonyma. Právě tento sémantický vztah synonymie je podroben důkladnější analýze jak v teoretickém úvodu, tak v praktické části. Zvláštní pozornost je vyhrazena tzv. kognitivní synonymii. Cílem praktické části je dokázat či vyvrátit, zda se výše zmíněná adjektiva vyskytují ve funkci kognitivních synonym. Teoretická část sleduje moderní jazykové teorie a v rámci nich definice jevů, se kterými pracuje následující praktická část. Jde zejména o vymezení pojmů synonymie a kolokace. Moderní jazykověda velmi obohatila poznatky o těchto dvou pojmech. Důvodem zvýšeného zájmu jazykovědců o tuto oblast je fakt, že důkladné vymezení těchto pojmů je zcela klíčové pro další bádání. Moderní jazykověda dnes již prakticky výlučně čerpá data z rozsáhlých databází psaných textů zvaných jazykové korpusy. V této práci se zmiňují dva: *British National Corpus* (BNC) a *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA). V praktické části práce se srovnávají data vygenerovaná právě z těchto databází. Pozornost je zaměřena na jmenné fráze s adjektivy *soft* a *mild* v atributivní pozici. Tato jazyková data jsou rozčleněna do jednotlivých sémantických skupin podle konkrétních významů, které je spojují. Tím je umožněn a do určité míry i zpřehledněn vzhled do kolokativních možností každého z adjektiv. Rozčlenění do sémantických tříd a data v nich vypsaná umožňují formulování konkrétních závěrů, do jaké míry jsou výše zmíněná adjektiva skutečně synonymní.

Klíčová slova: synonymie, kolokace, adjektivum, slovník, korpus

Annotation

The aim of this thesis is to compare the meanings of two adjectives (*soft* and *mild*) that are usually recognized as synonymous. This kind of information is provided by various dictionaries. The semantic relation of synonymy is essential for the whole thesis and it is, therefore, dealt on in both the theoretical and the practical part. Special attention is paid to the notion of 'cognitive synonymy'. In the practical part (i.e., the actual analysis), I analyze the corpora data with the intention to determine whether *soft* and *mild* function as cognitive synonyms in certain contexts. The theoretical part follows modern linguistic theories and concepts with a special emphasis put on two linguistic phenomena: the semantic relation of synonymy and collocations. The linguistic concepts of the 20th and the 21st centuries have accentuated the research in this field because the extensive knowledge of these phenomena helps the researchers to describe the mechanisms of language. The modern linguistics has been collecting data from large databases of written texts that are commonly known as the text corpora. In this thesis, I work with two of them: *British National Corpus* (BNC) and *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA). Special attention is paid to the noun phrases with *mild* and *soft* in the attributive position. The collected data are divided into various semantic groups according to the meanings they share. This enables a clear insight into the true and up-to-date collocative ranges of both the synonyms. The division into the semantic groups helped me to prove that *soft* and *mild* are really synonymous.

Keywords: synonymy, collocation, adjective, dictionary, corpus

Definitions of the Word Class of Adjectives

The aim of this thesis is to analyze the measure of synonymy between two adjectives *soft* and *mild*. Before I proceed to the actual analysis, which is based mainly on the corpora findings and dictionary entries, I am going to introduce the word class of adjectives. The definitions of adjectives vary from grammar to grammar. In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of the principal characteristics. I will focus on the features that can be of certain relevance for the analysis.

According to Huddleston (2002: 526), "adjectives may be defined as a syntactically distinct class of words whose most characteristic function is to modify nouns." Carl Bache's (1978: 14) functional definition of adjectives says that adjectives are "words or phrases which premodify the head of a nominal phrase and which may be preceded by a determiner."

Greenbaum refers to adjectives as to 'content words'. "Content words are said – together with nouns, main verbs, and adverbs – carry in the main the semantic content of the vocabulary. The linguistic term 'content word' correlates with another term 'open class'. Open classes readily open to new words." (Greenbaum 1996: 431) The reason is that adjectives have their own lexical meaning and thus belong rather to the lexicon than to the grammar.

"Adjectives are most frequent in written registers, especially academic prose, while adverbs are most frequent in conversation and fiction." (Biber 1999: 504)

Basic Characteristics of Adjectives

1. Semantics

"Semantically, adjectives "typically denote properties – most centrally in the domains of size, shape, colour, worth, and age". (Huddleston 2002: 527) The semantic criterion divides adjectives into two basic groups: central and peripheral ones (Quirk 1985: 403). Central adjectives "code inherent, concrete, relatively stable qualities of entities", on the other hand, peripheral ones "are less prototypical, and thus code more temporary, less concrete states." (Givón 1993: 62) They are typically non-gradable.

With respect to central and peripheral adjectives, grammarians also distinguish between descriptive and classifying adjectives. Describers "tell us something about a quality of the thing represented by the head noun or about the speaker or writer's attitude toward the thing" (Lock 1996: 48), whereas classifiers "identify a subclass which the thing either is or is not a member of." (Lock 1996: 50) (e.g., *soft drug* = classifier × *soft woman* = describer)

2. Morphology

Many adjectives do not have any distinctive form. "The same form of an adjective is used for singular and plural, for subject and object, and for male and female." (Sinclair 1992: 11)

3. Syntax

Adjectives can appear in two syntactic roles: attributive and predicative. Since I am going to analyze only the collocations in which *soft* and *mild* function attributively, I will comment only on the attributive usage. While attributive, adjectives "join nominal expressions, occurring as constituents of the noun phrase and typically preceding the

head noun." (Biber 1999: 505) Attributive adjectives are altogether more frequent than the predicative ones and they are also characteristic for the expository written registers.

To sum up the the basic features of adjectives, I will end up this introductory theoretical part with Quirk's (1985: 402-3) definition of adjectives. According to Quirk, there are four features typical of adjectives:

1. they can freely occur in attributive position
2. they can freely occur in predicative position
3. they can be premodified by the intensifier *very*
4. they can take comparative and superlative forms

	attributive p.	predicative p.	premodification by <i>very</i>	comparative and superlative forms
<i>soft</i>	+	+	+	+
<i>mild</i>	+	+	+	+

Quirk considers the ability of functioning both attributively and predicatively to be a central feature of adjectives. The adjectives that satisfy this criterion are called central adjectives. (Quirk 1985: 404)

The data from the chart manifest that both *soft* and *mild* fulfill Quirk's criterion on being adjectives and, moreover, they can be classified as the central ones.

Collocations

Bolinger defines three units of lexicon that can be considered as the prefabs of language – words, idioms, and collocations. (Bolinger 1981: 57) Kjellmer states that "mastery of not only free combinations of words but also of idioms and collocations is an essential part of linguistic equipment of the speaker or writer and enables him to move swiftly and with little effort through his exposition from one prefabricated structure to the next." (Kjellmer 1991: 125)

Manning defines collocation as "an expression consisting of two or more words that correspond to some conventional way of saying things." (Manning, pars. 1) Manning also states another definition which is operated by authors in computational literature. These authors define collocations as "sequences of two or more consecutive words that has characteristics of a syntactic and semantic unit." (Manning, pars. 83) Manning, however, adds that "in most linguistically oriented research, a phrase can be a collocation even if it is not consecutive (e.g., *knock...door*)." (Manning, pars. 84) Lyons states a more detailed definition when he defines collocations in terms of a special "relationship holding within bipartite syntagm composed (typically) of a noun and a verb or a noun and an adjective." (Lyons 1977: 261) Finally, Bolinger defines collocations as "looser groupings about which something can be said over and beyond what is apparent from looking at the individual parts. Knowing the parts, one can deduce the meaning." (Bolinger 1981: 54)

Kjellmer claims that "the decisive characteristic of collocations is the predictable nature of their constituents: the presence of one of them will predict the presence of the other(s). Predictability is not unconditional. It varies from being total or near-total." (Kjellmer 1991: 125) In case of collocationally restricted lexemes, Lyons

admits that it is almost "impossible to describe their meaning without taking into account the set of lexemes with which they are syntagmatically connected, whether explicitly in texts or implicitly in the language-system, by means of essential meaning." (e.g., relation between '*kick*' and '*foot*') (Lyons 1977: 262) Lyons refers to this "lexicalization of the syntagmatic component" as to the *encapsulation*. (e.g., the sense of '*with the foot*' is encapsulated in the sense of '*kick*') (Lyons 1977: 262)

It is the predictability of meaning that makes the difference between collocations and idioms. Together with words and collocations, idioms fill in the capacity of our mental lexicon. Idioms are defined as "groups of words with set meanings that cannot be calculated by adding up the separate meanings of the parts." (Bolinger 1981: 53) Thus, however extensive they may be, idioms are stored in our mental lexicon with one meaning only. While most of the idioms are unchangeable, others allow certain transformations (e.g., *worth while* and *it is worth your while to visit the kitchen*).

The meaning of both an idiom and a collocation is in a way specialized. Leech explains the collocative meaning as "what is communicated through association with words which tend to occur in the environment of another word." (Leech 1976: 26) The range of contexts in which the collocating words can co-occur is called the collocational range. (Lyons 2005: 62) Lyons also adds that synonyms do not necessarily have to share the same collocational range. He assumes that there are contexts in which one synonym cannot be substituted for another one without violating the collocational restrictions of one or the other. (Lyons 2005: 62) For example, we can have a *soft texture*, but not **a mild texture*. (BNC)

Bolinger states that "there is evidence that idioms and collocations, or the 'automatic speech', are processed in special ways by the brain (e.g., **to invent a novel*

but *to invent plots*)." (Bolinger 1981: 55) There is virtually no linguistic mechanism that could satisfactorily explain these specific word combinations.

Manning recognizes three basic properties of collocations (Manning, pars. 84)

1. Non-compositionality: "The meaning of a collocation is not a straightforward composition of the meanings of its parts. Either the meaning is completely different from the free combination or there is a connotation or added element of meaning that cannot be predicted from the parts (e.g., *white wine*, *white woman*)."
2. Non-substitutability: "We cannot substitute near-synonyms for the components of a collocation (e.g., **yellow wine*)."
3. Non-modifiability: "Many collocations cannot be freely modified with additional lexical material or through grammatical transformations."

Kjellmer divides collocations into three categories (Kjellmer 1991: 112-6):

1. Fossilized phrases: "One element of such a phrase will suggest the other(s) with great consistency (e.g., *Anno Domini*).\" The components within the fossilized phrases are virtually unchangeable (e.g., *Cocker Spaniel*).
2. Semi-fossilized phrases: "one word predicts a very limited number of words (e.g., *Achilles heel*)."
3. Variable phrases: "One of the words in such a sequence can be said to predict the other(s), as in the previous types, but prediction will have to be interpreted more loosely.\" Variable phrases are realized by two or more lexical words (e.g., *classical music*, *soft texture*, *mild weather*) or one lexical word and one or more function words (e.g., *a number of*).

Collocations are well-established phrases in natural languages. The intentional violation of the collocational range of a certain word often leads to a witty and comic effect. Such linguistic mechanisms are mostly used by the journalists (e.g., *run for your wife* instead of *run for your life*). (Kjellmer 1991: 123)

The notion of a collocation has been recently emphasized by the linguists involved in the text corpora research. John Sinclair (1991: 4) in *Corpus, Concordance, Collocation* states that "the ability to examine large text corpora in a systematic manner allows access to a quality of evidence that has not been available before... Especially in lexicography, there is a marked contrast between the data collected by computer and that collected by human readers." "Comparing the collocational behaviour of so-called synonyms in concordance data may supplement dictionary information and help learners decide in what circumstances substitution of one item for another is possible in text". (Partington 1998: 29) Consequently, the most recently published grammars and dictionaries draw conclusions rather from corpora data than from the evidence collected by individual linguists (*Collins Cobuild Dictionary*).

Synonymy

The notion of synonymy has been discussed in a large number of grammars and referential books. However, it still has not been worked out any satisfactory cohesive definition that would unify all the requirements stated by contemporary grammarians.

It seems that the biggest problem is this semantic relation itself. Radford (1999: 198) defines synonymy as "the sameness of meaning." However, this simplistic definition does not say much about the true nature of synonymy. Synonyms do not necessarily have to have the same meaning. The meanings of two or more synonyms may differ in certain aspects and to a certain extent. Thus, Lyons (2005: 60) proposes that "it makes identity, not merely similarity of meaning the criterion of synonymy." Greenbaum (1996: 420) specifies Radford's definition by saying that "synonyms are expressions that are identical or similar in meaning and that can be used interchangeably in at least one context."

This first linguistic schism as regards to the 'identity' and 'similarity' in synonymy leads the linguistic research to the typology of meaning. As Leech (1976: 10) points out, there are altogether seven types of meaning in natural languages: conceptual (denotative, cognitive), connotative, stylistic, affective, collocative, reflected and thematic meaning. Synonyms that refer to the same concept and do not differ in any other shade of meaning truly satisfy the criterion of the sameness of meaning. Such synonyms have the same denotation and are interchangeable in all contexts. Problems arise when synonyms express certain amount of differentiation. Such synonyms express similar, rather than identical meaning and may vary semantically (denotative meaning), emotively (affective meaning), stylistically (stylistic meaning) and also in their

collocational range (collocative meaning). Most semanticists (Lyons 2005: 61; DiMarco, pars. 1) recognize only two basic types of variation of meaning of synonymous words: denotation (denotative meaning) and connotation (all other shades of meaning). Thus, it is the denotation and connotation that make such a difference between 'identity' and 'similarity' in synonymy.

Similarly, Lyons (1992: 446) writes about a stricter and looser sense of synonymy. According to the stricter sense, "two items are synonymous if they have the same sense." The looser sense means that one word may have "an array of literally dozens of equivalents...expressing every possible shade of meaning."

Some orthodox theories talk of synonyms only in connection to words that "can replace each other in any given context without the slightest change either in cognitive or emotive import." (Lyons 1992: 447) Such synonyms are, however, very rare and some linguists highly doubt if they ever exist. Palmer (1981: 89) states that "it can be maintained that there are no real synonyms, that no two words have exactly the same meaning."

Finally, with respect to connotation and denotation, Cruse (1986: 267) defines synonyms as "lexical items whose senses are identical in respect of 'central' semantic traits, but differ, if at all, only in respect of what we may provisionally describe as 'minor' or 'peripheral' traits."

Apart from that, Cruse (1986: 265) states that there exists a scale of synonymy - "some synonyms are more synonymous than the others." With respect to this argument, three basic types of synonyms are defined:

1. **total synonymy (absolute synonymy)**

Two or more expressions are absolutely synonymous if they satisfy the following three criteria (Lyons 2005: 61):

- a) all their meanings are identical
- b) they are synonymous in all contexts
- c) they are semantically equivalent (their meaning or meanings are identical on all dimensions of meaning)

This kind of synonymy is, as Cruse (1986: 270) points out, extremely rare because "natural languages abhor absolute synonyms just as nature abhors a vacuum." According to Edmonds (Edmonds, pars. 11), absolute synonyms are mostly to be found in dialectical variation and technical terminology (e.g., *underwear*: AmE vs. *pants*: BrE). Some semanticists regard absolute synonymy as the only possible representation of this semantic relationship. (Lyons 1992: 447)

2. **cognitive synonymy (propositional synonymy)**

"If two lexical items are propositional synonyms, they can be substituted in any expression with truth-conditional properties without effect on those properties." In other words, "two sentences which differ only in that one has one member of a pair of propositional synonyms where the other has the other member of the pair are mutually entailing." (Cruse 2000: 158) (e.g., *I heard him tuning his violin*: *I heard him tuning his fiddle*.) Cruse (2000: 158) also adds that differences in the meanings of propositional synonyms involve one or more aspects of non-propositional meaning:

- a) differences in expressive meaning
- b) differences of stylistic level (on the colloquial – formal dimension)
- c) differences of presupposed field of discourse

For example, *fiddle* is a more colloquial expression for an 'outsider' to music, and perhaps also jocular compared with *violin*. However, if the speaker is a professional musician, *fiddle* is the neutral term, with no jocularity, and *violin* is used mainly to

outsiders. (Cruse 2000: 158) According to Cruse (1986: 271) the above mentioned expressions "differ in respect of semantic mode." Thus, for an 'outsider' to music, the meaning of *violin* is in prepositional mode, whereas the meaning of *fiddle* is in expressive mode. "The characteristics of propositional meaning depend partly on the propositional attitude expressed by the sentence in which it operates – on whether it is a statement, question, command, exclamation, etc." (Cruse 1986: 271)

3. near-synonymy (plesionymy)

Near-synonymy is probably the most varied kind of synonymy. There is no strict boundary between near-synonymy and non-synonymy. Near-synonyms yield, unlike propositional synonyms, sentences with different truth-conditions (e.g., *fog* vs *mist*; *stream* vs *brook*; *dive* vs *plunge*). (Cruse 1986: 285) Lyons (2005: 60) defines near-synonyms as "expressions that are more or less similar, but not identical in meaning." Edmonds (pars. 12) adds that "plesionyms are not fully interchangeable, but instead varying in their shades of denotation, connotation, implicature, emphasis, or register" (e.g., *fib* vs. *falsehood* vs. *untruth*).

As Lyons (1992: 447) points out, while defining stricter and looser sense of synonymy, "lexical items can be arranged on a scale of similarity and difference of sense, so that, for example, *a* and *b* might be shown identical in sense (strictly synonymous), *a* and *c* relatively similar in sense (loosely synonymous), *a* and *d* less similar in sense and so on." However, there is no reason to believe that *b* and *c* are themselves synonymous and related semantically in the same way. In this way, synonymy is closely related to another semantic relation of antonymy. As Cruse (2000: 159) points out, the difference between synonyms and antonyms is that in case of synonyms, "their common features are more salient than their differences." Thus, the

concept of difference is crucial for near-synonyms. Apart from that, near synonyms are closely connected to the semantic relation of hyponymy (*soft drug* – *mild drug*). Hyponymy is defined as an "asymmetric semantic implication that occurs where sense of one proposition, say Q1, semantically implies the sense of another, Q2, but the sense of Q2 does not imply that of Q1". (e.g., *soft drug* implies *mild drug* but *mild drug* does not imply *soft drug*) (Allan 1986: 179)

Synonymy is "more context-dependent than any other sense relation." (Lyons 1992: 452) For example, in case of two lexical items *to buy* and *to get*, the semantic relation of synonymy is possible only when *from the shop* is added. Here, we have to rely on the cultural presuppositions.

Sometimes, it happens that the distinction between two lexical items is contextually neutralized. (Lyons 1992: 452) For example, in *My ___ has just had puppies* it is possible to add both the marked term *bitch* and unmarked term *dog* and it will still be clear from the context whom we refer to.

It is sometimes stated that typical examples of total synonymy are to be found in bilingual dictionaries. Thus, for example the German word *der Hund* is considered to be totally synonymous with the English *dog*. However, Edmonds (pars. 27) argues that "the word in the target language that is closest to that in the source text might be a near-synonym rather than an exact synonym." (e.g., *der Wald* can be both *forest* and *wood* in English but neither of them can be considered to be a total synonym) Edmonds (pars. 28) refers to this particular type of synonymy as to the 'cross-linguistic near synonymy'.

Dictionary definitions of soft and mild

In the actual analysis, I will draw conclusions from the information selected from the dictionaries stated in this chapter and from the data taken from *British National Corpus* (BNC) and *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA).

Since I am going to compare the data from BNC and COCA, I have intentionally chosen the dictionaries of both British and American provenience. The seven dictionaries are:

Colins Cobuild English Dictionary (CCED 1995: 1050, 1585-7)

Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDCE 1995: 898, 1362-3)

Macmillan English Dictionary (MED 2007: 949, 1419-20)

The Oxford English Dictionary (OAD 1933: 434-5, 367-70)

The Random House Dictionary of the English Language (RHDEL 1987: 1219, 1813-4)

Webster's New World Dictionary (WNWD 1991: 860, 1274-5)

Webster's Third New International Dictionary (WTNID 1993: 1433, 2165-6)

Definitions of the adjective mild

CCED (1995: 1050)

1. *mild* is used to describe something such as a feeling, attitude, or illness that is not very strong or severe: *Teddy turned to Mona with a look of mild confusion. If you have only mild symptoms, try an over-the-counter treatment.*
2. a mild person is gentle and does not get angry easily: *He is a mild man, who is reasonable almost to the point of blandness.*
3. mild weather is pleasant because it is neither extremely hot nor extremely cold: *The area is famous for its very mild winter climate.*
4. You describe food as mild when it does not taste or smell strong, sharp, or bitter, especially when you like it because of this: *a mild curry powder*
5. Mild soap or washing-up liquid feels soft and pleasant on your skin and does not contain anything which might damage the things you want to wash: *Wash your face thoroughly with a mild soap and warm water.*

LDCE (1995: 898)

1. weather; not too cold or wet, and sometimes pleasantly warm: *We had an exceptionally mild winter last year.*

2. illness; a mild illness or health problem is not serious: *It's nothing – just a mild throat infection.*
3. food/taste; not very strong or hot-tasting: *a mild curry*
4. punishment/criticism; not severe or strict: *a mild rebuke*
5. small effect; not serious enough to cause much suffering: *a mild earthquake*
6. character/manner; having a gentle character and not easily getting angry: *Joe was a mild man who rarely raised his voice.*
7. soap etc; soft and gentle to your skin: *a mild washing-up liquids*

MED (2007: 949)

1. not strong/severe
 - a) a mild illness or injury is one that is not serious: *They were both suffering from a mild bout of flu.*
 - b) a mild feeling or expression is one that is not very strong or severe: *He eyed her with mild amusement. There was a note of mild alarm in her voice.*
 - c) a mild punishment or criticism is not very severe: *He received the mild sentence of a year's probation.*
2. about the weather; mild weather is warm and pleasant, especially warmer than usual for the time of year: *a mild winter*
3. about food; mild food does not have a strong taste: *Edam is a cheese that is mild and firm.*
4. about drugs/cosmetics; mild drugs, cosmetics etc are very gentle and not likely to have any bad effects: *a mild soap that's kind to your skin, I was given a mild sedative that help me sleep.*
5. not very large or extreme: *The joke caused mild amusement. The economy will slip into a mild recession.*
6. gentle
 - a) a mild person is gentle and does not often become angry: *Jerry gave the impression of being a rather mild man.*
 - b) used about someone's behaviour or way of speaking: *Nick spoke in a mild voice.*
7. mild-mannered: gentle and kind: *He was a small mild-mannered man with beautiful grey eyes.*

OED (1933: 434-5)

1. of persons, their disposition and behaviour
 - a) (chiefly of a superior) kind, considerate, gracious, merciful, indulgent; not harsh or severe
 - b) applied to God, Christ, and the Virgin Mary
 - c) gentle and conciliatory in disposition or behaviour; not easily provoked, and giving no offence to others; not rough or fierce in manners
 - e) of looks, language, etc.
 - f) of rule, punishment, treatment of persons, influence, and the like
 - g) in proverbial similes: *as mild as a dove*
2.
 - a) of an animal: Tame, gentle; not wild or fierce
 - b) of a plant: cultivated, not wild
3. of weather, etc.: Not rough or stormy, not sharp or severe; calm, fine, and moderately warm of climate: Temperate
4. of light, or a luminous body: Shining with tempered lustre, softly radiant
5. of a medicine: Operating gently; not violent or strong in its effects.
 - of food, tobacco, etc.: Soft to the palate, not rough or sharp or strong in taste or odour, not over-stimulating or over-feeding.
 - of pathological secretions: Not acid or irritating
 - of ale or beer: In early use app. Free from acidity, not sour or stale; now applied to those kinds that are not strongly flavoured with hops (opposed to bitter)
 - of a disease, or an attack of disease: Not severe or acute
6. of bodily exercise: Moderate, gentle, easy
 - of amusement or recreation: Not boisterous, not exuberant in enjoyment or mirth
7. of chemicals: Neutral
8.
 - a) of soil, wood: Soft, easy to work (*dial.*)
 - b) *mild steel*: steel containing only a small percentage of carbon, of great strength and toughness, but not readily tempered or hardened

9. peculiarly used by Byron. Of a slope: Gentle. Of a wood: Not thorny

RHDEL (1987: 1219)

1. amiably gentle or temperate in feeling or behavior towards others
2. characterized by or showing such gentleness, as manners or speech: *a mild voice*
3. not cold, severe, or extreme, as air or weather: *mild breezes*
4. not sharp, pungent, or strong: *a mild flavour*
5. not acute or serious, as disease: *a mild case of flu*
6. gentle or moderate in force or effect: *mild penalties*
7. soft; pleasant: *mild sunshine*
8. moderate in intensity, degree, or character: *mild regret*
9. Brit. Dial. comparatively soft and easily worked, as soil, wood, or stone
10. *mild steel*: low-carbon steel, containing no more than 0.25 percent carbon

WNWD (1991: 860)

1.
 - a) gentle or kind in disposition, action, or effect; not severe or harsh, bitter, etc.
 - b) not extreme in any way; moderate; temperate: *a mild winter*
2. having a soft, pleasant taste or flavour; not strong, sour, bitter, biting, or sharp; said of tobacco, cheese, etc.
3. designating steel that is tough but malleable and contains only a small percentage of carbon: *mild steel*

WTNID (1993: 1433)

1.
 - a) *archaic*: kind, gracious, considerate
 - b) gentle in nature or behaviour; not harsh or vehement; not giving offense: *mild disposition, mild manners*
2.
 - a) moderate in action or sensuous effect: *mild drug, mild cigar*; of moderate strength or intensity; not sharp or bitter: *mild oath, mild humus, mild slope, mild reproof*
 - b) of *ale* or *beer*: not strongly flavored with hops
 - c) of *disease*: not severe or dangerous: *a mild case of whooping cough*
3.
 - a) *archaic*: not wild: *wild beasts...at his sight grew mild*
 - b) of less than normal of expected vigor, boldness, or severity: *mild sarcasm, mild game of bridge, mild punishment, mild exercise*
 - c) characterized by absence of extremes in temperature: *mild climate*
 - d) not cold; pleasantly warm: *mild spring day, mild spell of February*

Dictionary entries of the adjective soft

CCED (1995: 1585-7)

1. something that is soft is pleasant to the touch, and not rough or hard: *When it's dry, brush the hair using a soft, nylon baby brush.*
2. something that is soft changes shape or bends easily when you press it: *Add milk to form a soft dough.*
3. something that has a soft appearance has smooth curves rather than sharp or distinct edges: *the soft curves of her body*
4. something that is soft is very gentle and has no force; a soft sound or voice is quiet and not harsh; soft light or colour is pleasant to look at because *it is not bright*: *soft music, soft Irish accent, a soft spring rain*

5. if you are soft on someone, you do not treat them as strictly or severely as you should do; used showing disapproval
6. if you say that someone has a soft heart, you mean that they are sensitive and sympathetic towards other people
7. you use soft to describe a way of life that is easy and involves very little work
8. soft drugs are drugs, such as marijuana, which are illegal but which many people do not consider to be strong, harmful, or addictive
9. a soft target is a place or person that can easily be attacked: *It sums these terrorists up when they go after such soft targets.*
10. soft water does not contain much calcium and so makes bubbles easily when you use soap to wash things
11. if you have a soft spot for someone or something, you feel a great deal of affection for them or like them a lot
12. softback is a book with a thin cardboard, paper, or plastic cover
13. softball is a game similar to baseball, but played with a larger, softer ball
14. soft-boiled
15. soft-core: soft-core pornography shows or mentions sexual acts or naked bodies, but not in a very explicit or violent way
16. soft drink is a cold, non-alcoholic drink such as lemonade or fruit juice
17. soft focus: if something in a photograph or film is in soft focus, it has been made to look slightly blurred to give it a more romantic effect
18. soft fruit (BrE): small fruits with soft skins
19. soft furnishings (BrE): cushions, curtains, lampshades, and furniture covers
20. soft-hearted: someone who is soft-hearted has a very sympathetic and kind nature
21. soft loan: a loan with a very low interest rate
22. soft-pedal (AmE): to reduce the amount of activity or pressure that you have been using to get something done
23. soft porn
24. soft sell: a method of selling or advertising that involves gentle persuasion rather than putting a lot of pressure on people
25. soft-soap: to flatter someone or to tell someone what you think they want to hear in order to try and persuade them to do something
26. soft-spoken: to have a quiet, gentle voice
27. soft toy: toys that look like animals; made of soft material and stuffed
28. software: computer programs
29. softwood: the wood from trees such as pines, that grow quickly and can be sawn easily

LDCE (1995: 1362-3)

1. not hard:
 - a) not hard or firm, but easy to press: *a soft pillow, soft ground*
 - b) less hard than average: *soft cheese, a soft lead pencil*
2. not rough; having a surface that is smooth and pleasant to touch: *the fur was soft to the touch*
3. not loud; a soft sound, voice, or music is quiet and pleasant to listen to: *a soft accent*
4. not bright (only before nouns); soft colours or lights are pleasant and relaxing because they are not too bright: *The room was a soft peach colour.*
5. violent; gentle and without much force: *a soft breeze*
6. *infml*, too easy; a soft job, life etc is too easy and does not involve much work or hard physical work
7. not strict; someone who is soft means weak because they are not strict enough with other people
8. water; not containing much lime so that it forms bubbles from soap easily
9. *infml*, physical condition; having a body that is not in a strong physical condition, because you do not do enough exercise
10. have a soft spot for: to be fond of someone even when they do not behave well
11. *infml*, a soft touch: someone from whom you can easily get money, because they are kind or easy to deceive: *The children regard their aunt as a bit of a soft touch.*
12. stupid (BrE); stupid or silly
13. *old-fashioned*, soft in the head: very stupid or crazy
14. *old-fashioned*, be soft on to be sexually attracted to someone

15. softball: a game similar to baseball but played on a smaller field with a slightly larger and softer ball
16. soft-boiled
17. soft copy (*technical*): information stored in computer's memory or shown on a screen
18. soft currency: money of a particular country that may fall in value and is difficult to exchange for the money of a country that is economically stronger
19. soft drink: a cold drink that does not contain alcohol
20. soft drug: an illegal drug such marijuana that is not considered to be harmful
21. soft focus: the arrangement of a photographic lens in a camera so that the edge of the object that is being photographed is not clear
22. soft fruit: small fruit that you can eat that has no hard skin
23. soft-hearted: easily affected by feelings of pity or sympathy for other people
24. soft furnishings (BrE): things such as curtains, chair covers etc that are made of cloth and are used in decorating a room
25. soft landing: a situation in which a space craft comes down onto the ground gently and without any damage
26. soft palate: the soft part of the back of the top of your mouth
27. *infml*, soft pedal: to make something seem less important or less urgent than it really is
28. soft porn
29. softsell: a way of advertising or selling things that involves gently persuading people to buy something in a friendly and indirect way
30. soft shoulder: ground at the edge of a road that is too soft to drive on
31. *infml*, soft-soap: to say nice things to someone in order to persuade them to do something
32. soft-spoken: having a pleasant gentle voice
33. soft toy (BrE): a toy for young children made of cloth and filled with soft material
34. software: the sets of programs that you put into a computer when you want it to do particular jobs
35. softwood: wood from trees such as pine and fir that is cheap and easy to cut, or a tree with this type of wood

MED (2007: 1419-20)

1. not stiff/firm/rough: a soft substance is easy to press or shape and is not hard or firm (*soft mud*); a soft material or surface is one that is pleasant to touch and not rough or stiff
2. (usually before noun) not harsh: a soft sound is quiet and pleasant to listen to (*a soft Neapolitan music*); a soft light or colour is pale, gentle and pleasant to look at (*soft shades of pink*)
3. soft wind, rain etc is not strong or unpleasant (*soft breeze, soft rain*)
4.
 - a) kind and sympathetic to other people
 - b) soft words, looks, or actions are gentle and not severe or angry (*Her soft words did not get a soft reply*)
 - c) not strict enough with other people and allowing them to do things that they should not do (*You are too soft*)
5. *infml*, not complicated, or not needing a lot of effort (*a couple of soft games*)
6. soft water
7. *phrase*, have a soft spot for somebody
8. softback
9. softball
10. soft-boiled
11. soft commodities: business things that are bought and sold that are not metals
12. soft copy: (computing) information that is stored in a computer and can be read on a screen, and is not printed on paper
13. soft-core:
14. soft drink
15. soft drug
16. soft error: a mistake caused by software that is very difficult to find because it only appears in particular situation
17. soft focus
18. soft fruit

19. soft furnishings
20. soft goods: clothes; software that you can buy and download from the Internet
21. soft-hearted: kind and generous towards other people
22. soft landing
23. soft loan
24. soft pedal
25. soft porn
26. soft sell
27. *infml*, soft-soap: to be nice to someone when you want them to do something for you
28. soft-spoken
29. soft target: someone or something that is very easy to attack or criticize
30. soft-top: a car that has a roof made of cloth that can be opened and folded back
31. soft toy: a toy, especially a toy animal, that is made of cloth with soft material inside for young children
32. software
33. softwood

OAD (1933: 367-71)

1. a) producing agreeable or pleasant sensations; characterized by ease and quiet enjoyment; of a calm and placid nature
 - b) pleasing in (of of) taste; free from acidity or sharpness. Also of odour: Not pungent, strong, or heavy.
 - c) pleasing to the eye; free from ruggedness or asperity. Also of colour, or with reference to this: Not crude or glaring; quiet, subdued.
2. a) causing or involving little or no discomfort, hardship, or suffering; easily endured or borne
 - b) involving little or no exertion or effort; free from toil or labour. Now chiefly colloq., easy, lazy, idle
3. a) of a sound, the voice, etc.: Low, quiet, subdued; not loud, harsh, or rough. Also, melodious, pleasing to the ear, sweet.
 - b) in Phonetics (opposed to HARD)
 - c) of musical instruments: Making or emitting a soft sound
4. a) of weather, seasons, etc.: Free from storms or rough winds; genial, mild, balmy
 - b) of the sun, rain, wind, etc.: Shining, falling, or blowing gently; not strong, violent, or boisterous
 - c) of the sea, streams, etc.: Free from rough waves or turbulence; smooth, calm, running calmly or gently
5. a) of place, progression, or movement: Leisurely, easy; slow; not hasty or hurried
 - b) having a smooth easy motion
6. of fire: Burning slowly or gently; moderate or gentle in heat or intensity; slow
7. of a slope, ascent, etc.: Gentle, gradual
8. a) of persons: Gentle or mild in nature or character; inclined to be merciful, lenient, or considerate in dealing with others; free from harshness, severity, or rigour; compassionate, kind, tender-hearted
 - b) of animals: Gentle, docile; lacking in spirit.
 - c) gentle in speech or looks
 - d) quiet; not making a noise
 - e) not rigid or severe; lax, yielding
9. a) of disposition, look, etc.: Gentle, mild; indicative of a mild or gentle character
 - b) of qualities, feelings, etc.: Characterized by gentleness or tenderness
10. of words, language, etc.
 - a) ingratiating, soothing, bland; tender, sentimental
 - b) free from roughness or harshness; tending to tone down or minimize something unpleasant
 - c) expressive of what is tender or peaceful
11. of actions, means, etc.
 - a) gentle or moderate in character; carried on, performed, etc., without harshness, severity, or violence
 - b) in comparative use: Less rigid or strict
12. of the hand, etc.: Touching lightly or gently
13. a) yielding readily to emotions of a tender nature; easily affected or moved in this way; impressionable
 - b) in figurative expressions
 - c) to be soft on
14. a) easily influenced or swayed; having little power or resistance to the influence of other persons or things; facile, compliant
 - b) weak, effeminate, unmanly

- c) refined, delicate
- 15. lax or slack in duty
- 16. of a weakly or delicate constitution; not strong or robust; incapable of much physical endurance or exertion
- 17. *the soft(er) sex*: the female sex
- 18. more or less foolish, silly, or simple; lacking ordinary intelligence or common-sense; easily imposed upon or deceived. Also *dial.* or *colloq.*, mentally deficient, half-witted
- 19. a) presenting a yielding surface to the touch; not offering absolute resistance to pressure
 - b) of the pulse
- 20. a) of cloth, hair, or similar substances: of a yielding texture, pleasant to the feel or touch; also, capable of being easily folded or put into a different form; flexible
 - b) *soft wares*, or *goods*, woolen or cotton fabrics, such as cretonne, chintz, lace, muslin, velvet, etc., or articles made of these
 - c) U.S. of paper money
- 21. of a bed, pillow, etc.: Readily yielding to the weight of the body; into or upon which one sinks or settles down comfortably
- 22. of ground
 - a) yielding agreeably to the feet
 - b) insufficiently hard; allowing a vehicle, person, etc., to sink in, esp. through excess of wet
 - c) of a fall: Made on a soft substance, or in such a way as to escape injury
- 23. a) of a yielding consistency; composed of, or forming, a substance which may easily be moulded or compressed without disintegration
 - b) in more or less specific uses
 - c) of a semi-fluid consistency
 - d) of oil
- 24. a) relatively inferior or deficient in hardness
 - b) in specific uses, as *soft bast, brass, burr, coal, iron, metal, paste, porcelain, steel, stuff*
- 25. a) applied to water, such as rain or river; water which is more or less free from calcium and magnesium salts
 - b) *dial.* and *U.S.* of beverages: non-alcoholic, non-spirituous
- 26. of the weather, a day, etc.: Rainy, wet
- 27. special collocations: *soft sugar*: moist sugar
 - b) in the names of plants or trees (*soft brome, grass, maple, rush*)
 - c) in the names of animals, esp. reptiles or fishes, as *soft-back, clam, crab, tortoise*

RHDL (1987: 1813-4)

1. yielding readily to touch or pressure; easily penetrated, divided, or changed in shape; not hard or stiff (*a soft pillow*)
2. relatively deficient in hardness, as metal or wood
3. smooth and agreeable to the touch; not rough or coarse (*a soft fabric, soft skin*)
4. producing agreeable sensations; pleasant and comfortable (*soft slumber*)
5. low or subdued in sound; gentle and melodious (*soft music, a soft voice*)
6. not harsh or unpleasant to the eye; not glaring (*soft light, a soft color*)
7. not hard or sharp (*soft outlines*)
8. gentle or mild (*soft breezes*)
9. genial or balmy, as climate or air
10. gentle, mild, warm-hearted, or compassionate (*a soft, grandmotherly woman*)
11. smooth, soothing, or ingratiating (*soft words*)
12. not harsh or severe, as a penalty or demand
13. responsive or sympathetic to the feelings, emotions, needs, etc., of others; tender-hearted
14. sentimental or flowery, as language (*soft, meaningless talk*)
15. not strong or robust; delicate; incapable of great endurance or exertion
16. *informal*, easy; involving little effort; not difficult, laborious, trying, or severe (*a soft job*)
17. *informal*, easily influenced or swayed
18. lenient, permissive, or conciliatory (*to be soft on Communism*)
19. (of water) relatively free from mineral salts that interfere with the action of soap
20. (of paper money or a monetary system) not supported by sufficient gold reserves or not easily convertible into a foreign currency

21. (of a market, market condition, or prices) declining in value, volume
22. (of money) plentiful or available at low interest rates or on easy terms
23. soft-core
24. *Metall.* (*soft steel*)
25. soft-focus
26. soft landing
27. *Physics:* having relatively low energy (*soft x-rays*)
28. foolish or stupid (*soft in the head*)
29. softback
30. softball
31. soft-boiled
32. soft copy
33. soft drink
34. soft drug
35. soft energy
36. soft goods
37. soft ground: an etching ground usually mixed with tallow
38. softkey: any key on a keyboard, as a function key, that can be programmed
39. soft line: a position or policy, as in politics, that is moderate and flexible
40. soft palate
41. soft paste: any of a variety of artificial porcelains, usually incorporating glass or glass ingredients
42. soft pedal
43. soft rock: a comparatively unaggressive, melodic style of rock-n-roll in which the arrangement and lyrics are emphasized more than the beat
44. soft rot: a disease of fruits and vegetables
45. soft science: any of the specialized fields or disciplines, as psychology, sociology, or political science
46. soft sculpture: sculpture principally in vinyl, canvas, or other flexible material
47. soft sell
48. soft soap
49. soft-spoken
50. soft steel
51. soft top
52. soft touch
53. software
54. soft wheat: a wheat characterized by soft, starchy kernels that yield a flour used in making pastry
55. softwood

WNWD (1991: 1274-5)

1. giving way easily under pressure, as a feather pillow or moist clay
2. easily cut, marked, shaped, or worn away, as pine wood or pure gold
3. not hard for its kind; not hard as is normal or desirable, etc: *soft butter*
4. smooth or fine to the touch; not rough, harsh, or coarse
5. a) bland; not acid, sour, or sharp
b) easy to digest because free from roughage (of a diet)
6. nonalcoholic: said of drinks
7. having in solution few or none of the mineral salts that interfere with the lathering and cleansing properties of soap: said of water
8. mild, gentle, or temperate, as a breeze, the weather, climate, etc.
9. a) weak or delicate; not strong or vigorous; esp., not able to endure hardship, as because of easy living
b) having flabby muscles
10. requiring little effort; not difficult; easy
11. a) kind or gentle, esp. to the point of weakness; not severe; lenient or compassionate
b) easily impressed, influenced, or imposed upon
12. not bright, intense, or glaring; subdued: said of color or light
13. showing little contrast or distinctness; not sharp in lines, tones, focus, etc., as a photograph
14. gentle; low; not loud or harsh: said of sound
15. *Finance* a) unstable and declining (said of a market, prices, etc.)
a) not readily excepted as a foreign exchange (said of currencies)

- b) having very favourable terms (said of loans)
- 16. above ground and vulnerable: said of targets or bases
- 17. *Radiology* of low penetrating power: said of X-rays
- 18. softball
- 19. soft-boiled
- 20. soft coal
- 21. soft-core: portraying sexual acts in a manner that is highly suggestive rather than explicit
- 22. softcover: designating any book bound in a flexible cover, as vinyl plastic or imitation leather
- 23. soft goods: goods that last a relatively short time, esp. textile products
- 24. soft-headed: stupid or foolish
- 25. soft-hearted: full of compassion or tenderness; not strict or severe, as in discipline or authority
- 26. soft landing: a landing of a spacecraft on a planet or moon without damage to the craft or its contents
- 27. soft palate
- 28. soft pedal: a pedal used to soften or dampen the tone of a musical instrument
- 29. soft-pedal: to soften or dampen the tone of a musical instrument; *Coll.*, to make less emphatic, less obtrusive, less conspicuous, etc.
- 30. soft rot: any of various plant diseases, characterized by watery decay of rhizomes, roots, fruits, etc. and caused by any of numerous fungi or bacteria
- 31. soft sculpture: sculpture, as of human or animal forms, made of fabric, stuffing, plastic, foam, etc.
- 32. soft sell: selling that relies on subtle suggestion rather than highpressure salesmanship
- 33. soft shoulder: soft ground along the edge of a highway
- 34. soft soap: soap in liquid or semifluid form; flattery or smooth talk
- 35. soft-spoken: speaking or spoken with a soft, low voice
- 36. soft touch
- 37. software
- 38. soft wheat: wheat with low protein content
- 39. softwood

WTNID (1993: 2165-6)

- 1.
 - a) pleasing or agreeable to the senses; bringing easy, comfort, or quiet (*the soft influences of home*)
 - b) having the restfulness of sleep
 - c) having a bland or mellow rather than a sharp or acid taste or flavour; containing no alcohol (of drinks)
 - d) having only moderate contrast between light and shadow or between colors or color shades, not bright or glaring
 - e) having or producing little contrast or a relatively short range of tones (*soft spring, soft paper, soft lighting*)
 - f) free from loudness, harshness, or stridency; quiet in pitch or volume; *archaic*: making a low and gentle rather than a loud or harsh sound (of musical instruments)
 - g) melodious, pleasing, sensuous (*her voice was soft and thrilling*)
 - h) (of eyes) having a liquid or gentle appearance
 - i) smooth or delicate in texture, grain, or fiber; not rough or irritating to the touch (a soft cashmere)
 - j) balmy, mild, or clement in weather or temperature; moving or falling with slight force or impact (*soft rain, soft breezes*)
- 2. (of river or sea) having a surface unbroken by heavy waves
- 3. a) readily endured or supported
demanding little work or effort
- 4. a) *archaic*: moving slowly and unhurriedly
b)(of fire) moderate in burning
- 5. rising gradually: ascending by moderate degrees (a soft slope)
- 6. having curved or rounded outline: blending easily into the general effect of view (*soft hills on the horizon*)
- 7. showing gentleness, kindness, or mercy; exhibiting sympathetic understanding
- 8. tender, sentimental (*a soft utterance of a loving heart*)
- 9. mild, lenient, or gentle in method or procedure (*hopes...died in the awful gap between tough talk and soft action*)

10. based on negotiation and conciliation rather than on a show of power or on threats (*had switched to a soft line and the situation worsened*)
11. emotionally susceptible or responsive: readily affected by sentiment
12. readily imposed on
13. lacking firmness or strength of character
14. weak or delicate in health or constitution; weak and deficient mentally
15. yielding or giving way to physical pressure: having a surface that does not firmly resist the touch; permitting to sink in (of wet ground)
16. easily magnetized or demagnetized (*magnetically soft alloys are used for motors*)
17. lacking relatively or comparatively in hardness (*soft steel*)
18. (of water) characterized by the practical absence of substances that prevent formation of lather with soap
19. maturing as a ceramic glaze or object at a relatively low temperature
20. having relatively low penetrating power (*soft X rays*)
21. not durable
22. tending to decline in price under the influence of selling
23. (of money) paper as distinct from metallic
24. (of currency) not convertible into gold nor heavily backed by gold reserve and typically unstable
25. (of brick) underburned because of its position in the kiln
26. (of paper) being opaque and not brittle or crisp and having under the microscope a slightly fuzzy texture
27. (of news) unimportant in its economic, political, or larger social bearing
28. containing some of the solids of raw cane sugar that are removed in refining white sugar and being usually brown and somewhat moist
29. softball
30. soft-boiled
31. soft corn: an Indian corn
32. soft-cover: paperback
33. soft-cure: to cure (tobacco) slowly with limited heat
34. soft dough: the early part of the dough stage of a cereal grain
35. soft fiber
36. soft flame: a thin shell of flame surrounding a core of unburned gas that is produced by using a small amount of primary air in the mixture and is used as a free flame
37. soft focus
38. soft fruit
39. soft goods
40. softhead: a silly or feeble-minded person
41. soft lead
42. soft palate
43. soft pedal
44. soft pork: pork made oily and flabby by feeding hogs on oily feeds
45. soft rot
46. soft-shell: having a soft shell
47. soft-shoe: of or relating to tap dancing done in soft-soled shoes without metal taps
48. soft snap: a post, job, or course of study demanding little time or effort
49. soft soap
50. soft-spoken
51. soft spot: sentimental weakness
52. soft toe: a shoe having a soft toe
53. soft touch: someone who can be easily talked into giving help
54. soft wheat
55. softwood

The Analysis of Dictionary Definitions

The dictionary definitions of both *soft* and *mild* reveal which semantic traits the adjectives have in common as well as the traits that are typical of them individually. Firstly, I will sum up the shared characteristics.

Considering the data extracted from the dictionaries, it can be concluded that both *soft* and *mild* share the meaning of "being gentle; kind". In this respect, they collocate with nouns that refer to humans or animals. Except for that, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* and *The Oxford English Dictionary* state that *mild* can have one additional meaning of "being not wild" when it collocates with nouns that refer to animals. Finally, *mild* can also be a plant. In this respect, the meaning is "cultivated; not wild". (OED 1933: 434) In comparison to the adjective *mild*, *soft* has a more extended meaning. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, the collocation *soft man* has – apart from the more general one - the meaning of "being too kind; not strict enough" or the meaning of being "weak, effeminate, unmanly". Together with *Webster's New World Dictionary*, *The Oxford English Dictionary* states another possible meaning of "being easily impressed, imposed upon". (OED 1933: 368; WNWD 1991: 1274)

Both *soft* and *mild* share the meaning of "being gentle; temperate" when they collocate with the expressions like *climate* or *weather*. Whilst all the dictionaries mentioned above characterize *soft weather* as only "gentle and temperate", *mild weather* is "warm and pleasant, esp. warmer than usual for the time of the year". (MED 2007: 1419) Similar situation is with the collocations like *soft wind* and *mild wind*. They both share the meaning of "being gentle; pleasant", while *soft wind* has also the meaning "with little force". (LDCE 1995: 1362)

The meaning of "being gentle" is shared by the two adjectives when they collocate with nouns referring to sound. The collocations modified by *soft* have a more extended meaning of "being quiet; not loud" or "gentle and melodious". In this respect, it can be concluded that the collocation *soft voice* is the hyperonym for *mild voice* because the semantic range of the phrase *mild voice* is included within that of *soft voice*. (Saeed 2003: 68) Consequently, in the dichotomy *soft voice* – *mild voice*, it is obvious that *mild voice* is always *soft voice* but *soft voice* does not have to be necessarily *mild voice*.

Interesting is the relationship between the collocations *mild drug* and *soft drug*. Both the collocations share the meaning of "being gentle and not likely to have any bad effects", but the collocation with *soft* as the modifier is somehow special. Firstly, it is implemented into the dictionary as the part of the definition of the adjective *soft*. Consequently, *soft drug* has to be a more fixed collocation than *mild drug* with a modified meaning. The collocation *soft drug* is a label for the whole category of drugs that are gentle and not likely to harm anyone. In fact, *soft drug* is a term that can be freely operated with in the language of science, whereas *mild drug* is vague. In other words, *mild drug* is a *soft drug*, whereas *soft drug* does not necessarily have to be *mild drug*. The same relationship is between the collocations *mild drink* and *soft drink*. The collocation *soft drink* forms a part of the definition of the adjective *soft* in most of the dictionaries. *Soft drink* is a label for the whole category of drinks that are purely "non-alcoholic", whereas *mild drink* is principally "not strong". Unlike *soft drink*, *mild drink* may contain alcohol.

Another meaning shared by *soft* and *mild* is "not sharp or bitter" The head of the noun phrase is a noun referring to food or flavour. While the meaning of the collocations with *mild* as the modifier is described as "not very strong, sharp, or bitter,

esp. when you like it because of this" (CCED 1995: 1050), the collocations with *soft* have the dictionary definitions as follows: "bland; not acid, sour, or sharp". (WNWD 1991: 1274) Thus, it can be concluded that the collocation *mild flavour* – apart from "being not sharp or bitter" - is not strong as to the intensity, whereas *soft flavour* may be strong but it is also bland. Except for that, the collocations with *mild* may sometimes appear in the meaning of "not hot-tasting". (LDCE 1995: 898)

Soft and *mild* share the meaning of "being not harsh, severe, or strong". In case of *mild*, *Random House Dictionary of the English Language* states an example *mild penalty* the meaning of which is described as "gentle and moderate in force or effect". In case of *soft*, the same dictionary provides the meaning of "being not harsh or severe". Nevertheless, the collocability of nouns with *soft* and *mild* with these meanings proves to be more prevalent in the environment of the modifier *mild*. All the dictionaries stated above count on the explanation of this meaning for *mild*, but it is only *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language* that provides this piece of information for *soft* as well. The collocative units that appear in the environment of *mild* refer to feelings, expressions and attitudes (*mild alarm in her voice, mild amusement*). (MED 2007: 949)

Another meaning the two adjectives share is "being gentle" when they collocate with nouns like language, talk, word, etc. *Mild word* is "gentle", whereas *soft word* is usually "gentle", as well as "smooth; soothing, or ingratiating" (RHDEL 1987: 1813), "tender, sentimental", or "based on negotiation and conciliation rather than on a show of power or on threats". (WTNID 1993: 2165) *Soft language* is "sentimental or flowery". (RHDEL 1987: 1813)

Finally, *soft* and *mild* may appear in the same meaning of "shining with tempered lustre" when they refer to light. However, it is only *The Oxford English*

Dictionary (1933: 434) that states this particular meaning for *mild* as well. Otherwise, all dictionaries provide this meaning for *soft* (*soft color*).

These were the common traits that both the adjectives share. I will now pay attention to the semantic traits that *soft* and *mild* vary in.

Mild is used when the meaning of "being not serious" is implied. In this respect, *mild* appears in the environment of nouns that refer to a disease or an injury. Neither of the dictionaries states the same meaning for *soft* as well.

Mild appears in the meaning of "being moderate, gentle, easy" when it refers to bodily exercise.

Soft is used when the speaker refers to the texture of physical objects. In this respect, *soft* may express the meaning of "giving way easily under pressure", "easily cut, marked, shaped, or worn away", "not hard for its kind", or "smooth and fine to the touch". (WNWD 1991: 1274) These meanings belong almost invariably to the collocational range of *soft*. However, there is an exception to this rule. *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (1987: 1219) provides the information that in British dialects, *mild* may appear in the meaning of "being comparatively soft and easily worked, as soil, wood, or stone".

Apart from that, *soft* can appear in these meanings: "being easy, not difficult" (*soft job, soft journey*), "not sharp or clear; not distinct" (*soft outlines*), "producing agreeable sensations; pleasing and comfortable" (*soft slumber*) and "smooth, calm, running calmly and gently" (*soft waves*).

I will now sum up the findings in this chapter with the help of *The Merriam-Webster Pocket Dictionary of Synonyms*. (1972: 367) This publication states that both *soft* and *mild* share the meaning of "being devoid of harshness, roughness, or intensity". *Soft* "implies a subduing of all vivid, intense, or forceful until it is agreeably soothing"

(*as soft as air, soft answer*), whereas *mild* and *gentle* "stress moderation or restraint of force or intensity" (*mild weather*).

MILD: The Analysis of the Data Taken from British National Corpus and Corpus of Contemporary American English

The following charts show the data I have taken from two large databases of written texts: *British National Corpus* (BNC) and *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA). The actual analysis is based on the data taken from BNC. The findings from this database are contrasted with the results in COCA. With the help of the dictionary definitions, I have divided the lexical material into several semantic categories according to what meaning they referred to. The same was done with the results for *soft* in the next chapter.

The material in the charts is lined up alphabetically. The most numerous examples are highlighted. The singular and plural forms of individual words are counted together, but only on condition that they do not differ semantically. The findings for *mild* are sorted in the left column with the information about the particular results for BNC and COCA, the same is done for *soft* in the right column.

The findings will be accompanied by model sentences from the text databases. The sentences taken from BNC will be cited with the help of a special code that appears for every generated result. The sentences from COCA will be cited by the numbers of particular contexts that are generated for the particular entries.

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
1. Not strong or bitter; not hot-tasting (of flavour) (+n. flavour, taste)				
ale	4	0	0	0
beer	2	1	0	0
brew	1	1	0	0
cheese	3	15	47	41
curry	8	9	0	0
flavour	6	45	1	2
garlic	1	9	0	2

malt	1	0	0	0
mustard	4	0	0	1
spice	1	1	0	0
taste	2	11	0	0

The nouns in the first chart share the meaning of "being not sharp or bitter; not hot-tasting", when modified by *mild*. Some of them may be modified by *soft* as well. However, in this case, the meaning does not stay the same. In case of *cheese*, all the results with the modifier *soft* refer rather to the texture than to the flavour. The meaning is "not hard".

1. *Low fat hard and **soft cheeses** account for 8 per cent of sales.* (BNC: A1S)

2. *If you like a **mild cheese**, buy pasteurised Stilton, but for the true flavour of the cheese, do look out for the unpasteurised cheeses.* (BNC: ABB)

The second noun that can collocate with both the adjectives is *flavour*. *Mild flavour* is "not strong, esp. when you like it because of this" (CCED 1995: 1050), whereas *soft flavour* is rather "bland". Whether these two can be interchangeable in some contexts, is not to be analyzed here because neither BNC nor COCA provides enough material for comparison.

3. *Dutch Edam is well known and much loved in Britain for its **mild flavour** and appeal on the cheeseboard.* (BNC: ED4)

4. *Nicolo gulped his **soft flavor** swiftly, for his disappointment had turned the **soft flavor** to a bitter drink indeed.* (COCA: 1)

The last noun that can appear in the collocational range of *soft* is *mustard*. (COCA) In this case, the reference is not made to the flavour, but to light.

5. *In a **soft mustard** shade, these walls complement adjacent rooms.* (COCA: 1)

Mild ale and *mild beer* are included into the dictionaries and form a part of the definition of *mild*. The meaning is "not strongly flavoured with hops". (OED 1933: 434)

Summary: All the nouns within the first semantic group refer to food. When modified by *mild*, their meaning is "not sharp; not hot-tasting". The modification by *soft* brings about a change of meaning ("not hard"; "bright"). There are no cognitive synonyms here.

2a. not serious (of illness or health problem)	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
anaemia	3	15	0	0
angina	2	0	0	0
asthma	3	15	0	0
blasphemy	1	0	0	0
concussion	2	31	0	0
colic	1	0	0	0
cough	1	5	0	3
delirium	4	0	0	0
dementia	2	9	0	0
diabetes	1	1	0	0
diarrhoea	3	0	0	0
disease	15	15	0	0
dyslexia	1	2	0	0
dysplasia	4	2	0	0
dyspnoea	1	0	0	0
epilepsy	2	1	0	0
fever	1	20	0	0
flu	2	7	0	0
headache	4	14	0	0
heart attack	7	58	0	0
handicap	1	7	0	0
hypertension	1	7	0	0
hysteria	4	4	0	0
illness	4	14	0	0
incontinence	1	2	0	0
infection	5	15	0	0
intoxication	1	1	0	0
migraine	1	7	0	0
nausea	1	2	0	0
pain	4	14	0	1
paranoia	1	4	0	0
poisoning	1	1	0	0

proteinuria	2	0	0	0
prurience	1	0	0	0
purge	1	0	0	0
rash	1	8	0	0
sciatica	1	0	0	0
snoring	1	2	0	5
sore throat	2	3	0	0
stupor	1	1	0	0
swelling	5	16	0	0

The nouns in the chart 2a are closely connected to any forms of diseases or health problems. Their meaning is "not strong; not serious", or in certain cases, "moderate as to the degree of intensity". Considering the figures above, it is obvious that the units within this semantic category belong rather to the collocational range of *mild* than *soft*. Whereas *British National Corpus* allows no collocations with *soft*, *Corpus of Contemporary American English* states three nouns that can appear in the environment of this adjective.

Firstly, it is *mild cough* vs. *soft cough*. The collocation *mild cough* means "not serious", whereas *soft cough* has another meaning of "being not loud".

6. *When a child has a **mild cough** (only a few coughs per hour) and has chest congestion with mucous that is difficult to cough up, the mucous may be causing the cough.* (COCA: 1)

7. *He gets a bar into it -- and there's a polite, **soft cough**.* (COCA: 1)

Secondly, it is *mild snoring* vs. *soft snoring*. The meaning of *mild snoring* is "moderate as to the degree of intensity". This collocation functions as a real diagnose in the medical terminology. *Soft snoring* implies the meaning of "being not loud".

Finally, COCA states that it is possible to distinguish between *mild pain* and *soft pain*. *Mild pain* is "not strong". The collocation *soft pain* is used only once and in an artistic way with the meaning "not strong; melancholy; not actually painful in the same way mild pain is".

8. A *soft pain* twined through him. "Yes." "You have to find the hole inside you before you'll find the one in the ice." (COCA: 1)

Summary: The data in the second chart revealed that nouns with a direct reference to any health problems or diseases belong almost invariably to the collocational range of *mild*. Their meaning is "not serious; moderate in intensity". The three collocations with the modifier *soft* appear in different meanings: "not loud; not strong; melancholy".

	MILD		SOFT	
2b. vocabulary connected to diseases, treatment				
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
anaesthetic	1	0	0	0
antiseptic	5	0	0	0
carcinogen	1	1	0	0
chemotherapy	1	2	0	0
cure	1	0	0	0
indisposition	1	0	0	0
laxative	2	2	0	0
medication	1	0	0	0
painkiller	3	0	0	0
pathogen	1	0	0	0
recovery	2	5	0	0
sedative	5	21	0	0
symptom	7	26	0	0
tranquilliser	3	0	0	0
case	8	93	4	6
form	25	66	1	9

This subcategory counts mostly on the collocations with *mild* as the modifier. The nouns sorted here share the meaning of "being not strong", "moderate in degree or intensity", or "not severe". Interesting are the nouns *case* and *form*. They often collocate with *mild* to refer to a disease or an injury that is "not serious". These two nouns can be modified by *soft*.

Mild case refers to a disease or a health problem that is "not serious", whereas *soft case* is only "a bag made of soft material" in both the text databases.

9. *It features a 2.2" screen with built in aerial, weighs as little as 8oz and comes complete with a protective **soft case** and batteries.* (BNC: A0V)

Mild form refers to a disease or a health problem as well, but it can also modify nouns like movement and doctrine that are "not extreme; not extremist". On the other hand, *soft form* is "yielding easily to pressure" when it refers to physical objects, or "not extremist; comparatively unaggressive" when it refers to movements or politics. These two nouns modified by *soft* can be found only in COCA.

10. *One was the detestation by the liberally oriented of religious paternalism, a **mild form** of anti-clericalism.* (BNC: A07)

11. *I call that a **soft form** of fascism, something that is very dangerous.* (COCA: 2)

Summary: The nouns in the chart 2b belong almost without any exception to the collocational range of *mild*. The meaning of these collocations is "not strong; not severe". The modification by *soft* is possible only in two contexts and it brings about a change in meaning: "yielding easily to pressure" and "comparatively unaggressive".

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
3a. Not cold or wet (of weather)				
afternoon	1	5	1	0
area	2	9	6	3
autumn	5	6	0	3
climate	18	90	0	0
day	7	23	9	7
evening	2	8	4	14
morning	2	1	1	14
night	12	6	4	10
spring	3	10	5	20

south	1	1	1	2
weather	20	55	0	1
winter	38	135	1	5
3b. Not cold or wet				
air	2	7	2	17
breeze	2	10	12	65
shower	1	2	0	0
wind	1	6	8	30
3c. Not cold or wet; moderate as to the degree of intensity				
heat	1	8	1	0
sunshine	4	2	1	1
temperature	2	15	0	0

The third semantic category is quite interesting because most of the words that are listed here belong to the collocational range of both *soft* and *mild*.

The first noun that comes into consideration is area. *Mild area* is usually "not cold or wet; characterized by no extremes in temperatures". However, the text databases reveal that the phrase *soft area* appears in three different meanings, but the one typical for *mild area*: "easy to press or shape", "rising gradually" and "easy; not difficult".

12. *Stomach/Belly: Sensitive soft areas, so no risk of hurting yourself when you hit them.* (BNC: CDT)

Climate collocates only with *mild*. The meaning stays the same: "temperate; characterized by no extremes in temperatures". It is interesting that there are no collocations with *soft*. The same situation is with *weather*. The only context for *soft weather* (COCA) refers to the weather that is "rainy, cold, cloudy".

13. *Who knows what the words mean, but they clog the room like soft weather and even the cobbler picks up on the melancholy.* (COCA: 1)

The same meaning of *soft* appears for the collocations with *day*. *Soft day* can be either "pleasant; not cold or wet", or "rainy, cold, cloudy, drizzly but still bright".

(COCA) This second meaning is particularly interesting because none of the dictionaries stated in the previous chapter mention it.

14. A **soft day**, the Irish call it. A fucking downpour is what it's turned into. (COCA. 4)

On the other hand, *mild day* is "not cold or wet; characterized by no extremes in temperatures". The basic difference between *soft day* and *mild day* is that *mild day* is more neutral, whereas *soft day* stresses that it is also pleasant.

Other nouns in the chart that can be both *soft* and *mild* are *morning*, *afternoon*, *evening* and *night*. When modified by *mild*, their meaning is "not cold or wet". When modified by *soft*, they are either "not cold or wet; pleasant", or they refer to other nouns within complex noun phrases: *soft morning light*, *soft evening breeze*. These 'target nouns' belong to the collocational range of *mild* and *soft* as well and will be dealt on later in this chapter. The same distinction between the modification by either *soft* or *mild* is valid for *spring*, *autumn* and *winter*.

The next subcategory of nouns that allow the modification by both the adjectives stores these words: *air*, *breeze* and *wind*. When collocating with *mild*, their meaning is "gentle, pleasant". However, when they appear in the lexical environment of *soft*, their meaning is not only "gentle, pleasant", but also "blowing gently; not strong". Thus, in this case, the collocation *soft wind* can be marked as the hypernym for *mild wind*.

15. The mayten trees swayed as a **soft wind** blew. (COCA: 4)

Finally, *soft* and *mild* can be *heat* and *sunshine*. The collocations with *mild* share the meaning of "being gentle; moderate as to the degree of intensity". *Mild sunshine* refers to light and *mild light* is described by *The Oxford English Dictionary*

(1933: 434) as "shining with tempered lustre, softly radiant". Similar definition is provided for *soft light*: "having only moderate contrast between light and shadow or between colors or color shades, not bright or glaring". (WTNID 1993: 2165) However, the data in both the text databases proved that *mild sunshine* is the only collocation with *mild* that refers to light. On the other hand, the nouns within the collocational range of *soft* that refer to light are relatively numerous and will be dealt on in the next chapter.

Summary: The nouns within the third semantic category refer to weather or weather conditions. Most of them can be modified by both the adjectives. The collocations with *mild* share the meaning of "being not cold or wet; gentle", whereas the collocations with *soft* can be - apart from the more general meaning - "not strong; rainy, drizzly; pleasant".

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
4a. Gentle and kind; not violent (of people)				
anarchist	1	0	0	0
bride	1	0	0	0
chap	1	0	0	0
man	3	6	0	9
people	1	2	0	4
person	1	2	1	0
prankster	1	0	0	0
reformer	1	0	0	0
4b. Gentle and kind; not violent (of behaviour)				
manner	5	16	1	3
nature	1	4	0	3
temperament	1	2	0	0

The chart No. 4 provides information about nouns that refer to humans. The phrases with the modifier *mild* share the meaning of "being gentle and kind; not violent", whereas the collocations with *soft* can have other additional meanings of "not

strict enough", or "weak, unmanly". The corpora data reveal (COCA) that the phrases with *soft* tend to occur in contexts where the writer uses them intentionally for an artistic play with language.

16. *He was a hard man with a **soft man's** face.* (COCA: 1)

The nouns *reformer*, *prankster* and *anarchist* share the meaning of "being not violent". Interesting is the noun *bride*. The only context for *mild bride* (BNC) appears in the meaning of "being effeminate, unmanly", which is usually the meaning of the collocation with *soft*. However, since there is no other lexical material for comparison, I cannot draw any conclusions from that.

17. *She'd agree to marry him as part of a partnership -- not as some sort of meek, **mild bride** agreeing to graciously give her hand.* (BNC: CBF)

Mild and *soft* can be *manner* and *nature*. When collocating with this noun, both *soft* and *mild* share the meaning of "being gentle, kind". The collocations with the modifier *soft* has - apart from the more general meaning stated for *mild* - the meaning of "being compassionate".

18. *Natural affection" animated both, he argued, and "operating on us in a **soft manner**," such affection could kindle "desires of love and tenderness."* (COCA: 1)

19. *The papers also told about my crying, my **soft nature**, how I sold Girl Scout cookies in a bar in Houston.* (COCA: 1)

Summary: The nouns within the fourth semantic category refer to humans. The nouns modified by *mild* share the meaning of "being gentle; not violent", whereas the collocations with *soft* can be – apart from the general meaning stated for *mild* - "weak, unmanly; not strict enough".

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
5. Gentle, containing gentle and harmless substances				
acid	11	16	11	0
alkali	2	0	0	0
detergent	3	16	1	0
exfoliator	1	0	0	0
herbicide	1	0	0	0
irritant	2	3	0	0
material	1	0	18	46
product	1	2	0	1
shampoo	5	4	0	0
soap	2	39	13	10
steel	26	12	0	5
sunscreen	1	0	0	0

The next semantic category deals with nouns that share the meaning of being "gentle; containing gentle and harmless substances; having a slight effect". Several from them can appear in the environment of both *soft* and *mild*.

The first one is *mild acid* and *soft acid*. Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica Online) defines *soft acid* as a chemical liquid that "reacts with soft bases". *Mild acid* has the meaning of "being gentle; having a slight effect". The collocation with *mild* does not function as the real term.

20. *He states that it is not necessary to use vinegar or mild acetic acid to neutralise the reaction, as it is a waste of time to apply a mild acid on top of a stronger acid.* (BNC: A0X)

The second subcategory is *mild material* vs. *soft material*. In both BNC and COCA, *soft material* refers only to the texture of physical objects with the meaning "not hard; yielding easily to pressure", whereas *mild materials* are "gentle; having a slight effect".

21. *Alkalis commonly used range from **mild materials** such as sodium carbonate (washing soda or soda ash) to sodium metasilicate.* (BNC: APV)

The text databases distinguish between *mild products* and *soft products*. *Mild products* share the meaning of "having a slight effect", whereas *soft products* refer rather to the texture.

Other nouns in the chart that can be both *soft* and *mild* are soap and steel. *Mild soap* has the meaning of "being gentle to the skin and "containing nothing which might damage the things you want to wash" (CCED 1995: 1275), whereas *soft soap* is either idiomatical with the meaning of "to flatter someone or to tell someone what you think they want to hear in order to try and persuade them to do something" (CCED 1995: 1587), or it has the meaning of "being gentle; of liquid or semifluid form" (WTNID 1993: 2166) The first meaning is implemented into the dictionaries as a part of the definition of the adjective *soft*.

22. *When the rods (stems) were first taken down they were scraped and painted with sulphur mixed with paraffin and **soft soap**.* (BNC: A0G)

23. *There has been a great deal of **soft soap** talked about God for the last hundred years.* (BNC: A7C)

Both *mild steel* and *soft steel* refer to the same thing. *Mild steel* is characterized as "low-carbon steel, containing no more than 0.25 percent carbon". (RHDL 1987: 1219) *Soft steel* has the meaning of "lacking relatively or comparatively in hardness". (WTNID 1993: 2165) Apart from that, *Webster's Online Dictionary* (Websters-online-dictionary.org) states that it is "plain carbon steel containing about 0.10 - 0.20% of carbon". In this respect, both *soft* and *mild* refer to the same thing without any fundamental change of meaning. The collocation *soft steel* appears only in

COCA. Interesting is that *mild steel* is to be found in the dictionaries of both the British and American provenience, whereas *soft steel* is stated only by RHD and WTNID.

Summary: The fifth semantic category deals with nouns that refer to materials which are "gentle; containing gentle and harmless substances; having a slight effect", when modified by *mild*. Several from them can be modified by *soft*. In this case, the meaning does not stay the same: "not hard" (*soft products*), *idiom*. "to flatter someone" (*soft soap*). The dictionaries revealed that the collocations *soft steel* and *mild steel* refer to the same thing without any fundamental change of meaning.

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
6. Slight, not strong (of feelings, sensations)				
affection	2	0	0	1
amazement	1	1	0	0
amusement	10	13	0	2
anger	1	0	0	1
apprehension	1	2	0	0
astonishment	2	5	0	0
chagrin	1	0	0	0
concern	3	8	0	1
confusion	4	4	0	0
contempt	2	5	0	0
curiosity	7	19	0	0
disapproval	5	5	0	0
discomfort	3	14	0	0
dislike	1	0	0	0
disquiet	1	0	0	0
elation	2	1	0	0
hope	1	0	0	0
indifference	1	0	0	0
interest	8	35	0	0
irritation	9	14	0	0
panic	4	8	0	3
pleasure	2	3	0	1
relief	1	1	0	0
resentment	1	0	0	0
satisfaction	1	4	2	0
sensation	5	2	1	0

shock	11	20	0	2
shocks	0	2	0	5
surprise	19	42	0	1
suspiciousness	1	0	0	0
tension	1	12	0	0

The sixth category deals with nouns that refer to feelings or sensations. Whether modified by *soft* or *mild*, they still share the meaning of "being not strong or severe; slight". The figures in the chart reveal that most of the nouns belong only to the collocational range of *mild*. However, the modification by *soft* is also possible in certain contexts.

The nouns *affection*, *amusement*, *surprise* and *satisfaction* can be modified by *soft*. The collocations with *soft* may appear in contexts where their meaning is – apart from the more general one stated for *mild* - "not loud".

24. *I imagine others around her beginning, with **soft affection** in their voices, to bless the mother of Jesus....* (COCA: 1)

This semantic extension is not valid for all the collocations with *soft* as the modifier. Some of them are just "not strong or severe; slight", but since there is only very limited material for comparison, I cannot draw any conclusions on whether *soft* and *mild* are fully interchangeable in these contexts.

25. *His face lost the **soft amusement** as he studied Sara.* (COCA: 1)

Interesting is the distinction between *soft pleasure* and *mild pleasure*. Whereas *mild pleasure* is "not strong; moderate as to the degree of intensity", *soft pleasure* can fully derive benefit from the meaning of *soft* as of "being pleasant". Thus, it can be concluded that the collocation *mild pleasure* stresses moderation, whereas *soft pleasure* may be moderate but principally, it is "pleasant".

Finally, it is necessary to distinguish between *soft shock* and *soft shocks*. *Soft shock* is "a feeling of surprise and disbelief when something very unexpected happens" (Ldoceonline) and this feeling is "not strong". The plural form *soft shocks* refers to an entirely different linguistic reality. In this respect, *shock* is "a piece of equipment connected to each wheel of a vehicle to make traveling on uneven ground more comfortable". (Ldoceonline.com) Here, the meaning is "easy to press, bend or shape".

26. *Most trucks come from the factory with **soft shocks**,*" Dwyer said. (COCA: 2)

Summary: The nouns within the sixth category refer to feelings and sensations that are "not strong or severe; slight". The figures in the chart show that most of the nouns collocate only with *mild*. The collocations with the modifier *soft* can have these meanings: "pleasant; not loud".

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
7. Moderate in intensity, degree or character (of verbal and non-verbal reactions + n. voice)				
comment	1	2	0	0
complaint	3	3	0	1
controversy	2	4	0	0
criticism	3	6	0	0
hint	1	0	1	0
libel	1	0	0	0
objection	1	3	0	0
proposal	1	1	0	0
protest	2	11	1	0
pun	1	0	0	0
question	1	1	2	7
reaction	8	13	0	0
rebuke	4	7	0	0
reproach	1	0	0	1
reproof	5	7	0	0

speech	1	3	1	3
squeak	1	0	0	0
statement	3	3	0	1
swear	1	0	0	0
swearing	1	0	0	1
tone	7	4	8	34
voice	4	11	48	366

The seventh category deals with nouns that collocate with both *soft* and *mild* and the meaning of the collocations is "gentle, not severe or angry". Apart from the general meaning, the collocations with *soft* are usually also either "smooth, soothing, ingratiating", "sentimental or flowery", or "not loud". There is no context for any of the nouns modified by either *soft* or *mild* to be fully interchangeable in.

27. *The boys whispered to each other, **soft speech** a charm against dropping it.* (COCA: 1)

28. *He didn't even notice his assistant who touched him lightly and asked a **soft question** as the D.A. took his seat beside her.* (COCA: 2)

Interesting is the distinction between *soft voice*, *mild voice* and *soft tone* and *mild tone*. *Mild voice* is "gentle; not severe or angry", whereas *soft voice* is always either "not loud", or "smooth, soothing, ingratiating".

30. *He bent to hear what she was saying, because she had a rather **soft voice**.* (BNC: G1L)

The distinction between *soft tone* and *mild tone* is based on the same principle as *soft voice* and *mild voice*.

31. *Despite his **soft tone** his words held a chip of flint, and Merrill found herself able to move away and rearrange the folds of her neckline with miraculously steady fingers.* (BNC: HA7)

Summary: The seventh semantic category deals with nouns that refer to various verbal and non-verbal reactions. The shared meaning is "gentle, not severe or angry". The collocations with *soft* are usually "smooth, soothing, ingratiating", "sentimental or flowery", or "not loud".

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
8. Moderate in intensity, degree or character (the way of presentation of ideas)				
criticism	3	6	0	0
humour	1	2	0	1
gesture	1	1	0	1
hurrah	1	0	0	0
joke	0	2	0	0
metaphor	1	1	0	0
sarcasm	2	4	1	0
satire	1	1	0	0

The nouns listed in the next category share the meaning of "being not severe, strong; moderate in intensity, degree or character". However, when modified by *soft*, they may also have the meaning of "not unpleasant", or at least "not very offensive".

32. *He expressed this calmly, sympathetically, with **soft humor** and hard evidence from archaeology and anthropology, and without promoting some alternative brand of faith to fill the void.* (COCA: 1)

The distinction between *soft sarcasm* and *mild sarcasm* is that *mild sarcasm* is "moderate in intensity", while *soft sarcasm* is moderate in intensity as well but usually, it is also "not very offensive".

33. *Well, go on," she prompted with **soft sarcasm** when he remained silent.* (BNC: H9V)

Summary: The nouns within the eighth semantic category belong almost invariably to the collocational range of *mild*. The shared meanings of the collocations with both *soft* and *mild* are "not severe, strong; moderate in intensity, degree or character". Apart from that, the collocations with *soft* can have these meanings: "not unpleasant", "not very offensive".

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
9. Gentle (of parts of body)				
face	1	8	6	26
head	1	3	3	5
skin	1	5	22	93

The nouns in the ninth category refer to the parts of body. It is interesting that these nouns belong rather to the collocational range of *soft* than *mild*. The meaning of the collocations with *soft* is "pleasant to the touch and not rough or stiff". The collocation *soft head* can be used idiomatically with the meaning of "being silly". (WNWD)

34. *If it had not been for the pain of stones, metal, pressed into **soft skin**.* (BNC: FPH)

35. *Her full, **soft face** was powdered white, her only other makeup a bloom of sticky scarlet on her lips, and although her clothes were unexceptional, she wore them with authority.* (COCA: 12)

The collocations with *mild* refer to a different noun within a complex noun phrase. The meaning is "slight; not serious" (*mild skin irritation, mild head injury*). In case of *mild face*, the meaning is "gentle".

Summary: The ninth semantic category deals with nouns that refer to parts of body. When modified by *soft*, the collocations share the meaning of "being pleasant to the

touch and not rough or stiff". When modified by *mild*, their meaning is "slight; not serious", or "gentle".

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
10. Moderate in intensity, degree (of sound)				
noise	2	0	3	16
dissonance	3	0	0	0
throbbing	1	0	1	1
uproar	2	1	0	0

The nouns in the next category refer to sound and some of them can be modified by both *soft* and *mild* as well.

Mild noise and *mild throbbing* share the meaning of "being moderate in intensity".

36. Fortunately, "Charlie" is a ***mild noise***, like a small aeroplane, not the sound of a jet at close range. (BNC: C9R)

The collocations with *soft* refer directly to "loudness".

37. Rose's hands fluttered slightly, so that the papers made a ***soft noise***, like birds passing overhead. (COCA: 3)

Summary: The nouns in the tenth category refer to sound. The collocations with *mild* share the meaning of "being moderate in intensity", whereas the collocations with *soft* are "not loud".

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
11. Slight, with small effect (of activities, actions)				
activity	2	2	0	1
adventure	3	1	0	8
affair	2	1	0	0

attempt	1	1	0	0
change	1	13	0	3
distraction	1	4	0	0
disturbance	1	5	0	0
end	3	2	4	1
exploitation	1	0	0	0
explosion	1	0	2	8
exaggeration	2	1	0	0
flirtation	4	3	0	0
incident	1	0	0	0
insult	1	2	0	0
modification	1	0	0	0
remonstration	1	0	0	0
rule	1	1	0	0
stimulation	1	0	0	0
stirring	1	2	1	0
support	4	1	0	9
tease	1	0	0	0
wobbling	1	2	0	0
worsening	1	0	0	0

The next semantic category deals with nouns with a direct reference to any kind of activities or actions. The figures in the chart show that these nouns belong rather to the collocational range of *mild* than *soft*. When modified by *mild*, their meaning is either "slight; not strong", or "with small effect".

38. *She had enjoyed the camaraderie of colleagues, and the **mild flirtation** which often underlay it.* (BNC: C8D)

The modification by *soft* brings about a change in meaning. In case of *soft explosion*, the reference is made to the "loudness".

39. *The sea was a **soft explosion** in the dark.* (BNC: FP7)

Soft activity refers to the idiomatical collocation *soft currency* which will be dealt on later in the next chapter. *Soft end* is "easy", "easy to press or shape".

40. *Shake this charming, beautifully crafted rattle for a gentle tinkling noise, or let your baby indulge by gnawing on one of the **soft ends**.* (COCA: 1)

Soft support is "not strong or harsh".

41. *There's just as much a chance that Giuliani reviews the **soft support** he got from D'Amato and Pataki and realizes that he's more of an executive than he is a legislator and that he would drop out.* (COCA: 7)

Summary: The nouns within the eleventh semantic category refer to any kind of activities and actions. When modified by *mild*, the collocations share the meaning of "being slight; not strong", "with small effect". When modified by *soft*, their meanings are more varied: "easy to press or shape", "not strong or harsh", or "not loud".

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
12. Slight, not severe or harsh (of the results of actions)				
breakdown	1	0	0	0
contortion	1	0	0	0
damage	1	0	0	0
decline	1	4	0	0
deficiency	4	2	0	0
defect	1	0	0	0
dictatorship	1	0	0	2
disarray	1	1	0	0
discomfort	3	14	0	0
downturn	2	3	0	0
effect	1	3	2	6
increase	1	2	0	0
leftism	1	0	0	0
problem	1	12	0	0
recession	6	2	0	0
reform	1	4	0	0
setback	1	3	0	0
stimul	1	0	0	0
upturn	1	0	0	0

The next semantic category deals with nouns that refer to the results of actions. Almost all the nouns listed here belong only to the collocational range of *mild*. The shared meaning is "slight; not strong". Two exceptions are *soft effect* and *soft dictatorship*.

The difference between *mild dictatorship* and *soft dictatorship* is that *soft dictatorship* is "not severe or harsh", but it is still a dictatorship. On the other hand, when modified by *mild*, it has the meaning of "being moderate as to the intensity". Thus, it is a political doctrine that has only to a certain degree the features of a dictatorship.

Soft effect may refer either to the colour with the meaning of "being bright", or it is "easy".

42. *Shown on lids: L'Oreal Soft Effects Eyecolour in Dawn.* (COCA: 1)

Summary: The nouns in the next category refer to various results of actions. The shared meaning is "slight; not strong". When modified by *soft*, the collocations have the meaning of "being bright", "easy", or "moderate in intensity".

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
13. Slight (of characteristics)				
dullness	1	0	0	0
intemperance	1	0	0	0
obscenity	1	1	0	0
reactivity	1	0	0	0
snootiness	1	1	0	0

Finally, the last semantic category lists nouns that collocate only with the adjective *mild*. The meaning is "slight; not strong".

43. *As Christmas and birthdays brought more Gortex, my confidence grew and developed into **mild snootiness** about people who didn't wear the right things on the hill. (BNC: AS3)*

SOFT: The Analysis of the Data Taken from British National Corpus and Corpus of Contemporary American English

The analysis of the corpora data that reflect the collocations with *soft* is based on the same principle as the analysis of the collocations with *mild*. The nouns that belong to the collocational range of *soft* are divided into semantic categories according to what meanings they refer to. The charts follow the same logical rules as the ones in the previous chapter. Special attention is now paid to the right column with the heading SOFT.

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
1a. Giving way easily under pressure				
bottom	0	0	2	18
centre	0	0	11	1
clay	0	0	8	23
cushion	0	0	1	21
dust	0	1	1	5
earth	0	0	19	59
filling	0	0	3	2
ground	0	3	44	44
heel	0	0	1	1
mud	0	0	15	38
padding	0	0	2	6
part	0	4	24	42
pillow	0	0	3	21
sand	0	0	21	54
sediment	0	0	4	6
shingle	0	0	1	1
soil	0	0	7	31
solder	0	0	7	1
sponge	0	0	3	3
stone	0	0	3	14
substrate	0	0	1	2
sugar	0	0	3	0
surface	0	1	16	37
verge	0	0	1	0
wall	0	0	2	12

The first semantic category is divided into 8 subcategories (a – h). All the nouns listed here refer to the texture of physical objects when they collocate with *soft*. This reference is associated to 8 possible meanings. The individual charts illustrate which nouns refer to which meanings.

The lexical material in the first chart (1a) belongs almost invariably to the collocational range of *soft*. When modified by this adjective, the collocations share the meaning of "giving way easily under pressure". Several nouns can collocate with *mild* as well. These examples are provided only by COCA.

The collocations with *mild* are: *mild dust*, *mild ground*, *mild part* and *mild surface*. All of them, however, refer to a different linguistic reality. *Mild dust* refers to a cloud that is "gentle; not large", *mild ground* refers to flavour (*mild ground red chili or chili powder*), *mild part* refers to an area that is characterized by no extremes in temperatures and finally, *mild surface* refers to a leakage that is not "large, extreme".

44. *As the pioneer settlements spread west and northwest like mushrooms, and the population of the Middle West and Great Lakes areas became denser, these **mild surface** leakages of salt became inadequate to meet the demand and attempts were made to increase it by boring deep wells into the lower strata. (COCA: 1)*

Summary: The nouns in the chart 1a refer to the texture of physical objects. The vast majority of them belong only to the collocational range of *soft*. The meaning of these collocations is "giving way easily under pressure". The corpora data revealed that in case of the collocations with the modifier *mild*, the reference is made to different nouns within complex noun phrases.

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
1b. Easily cut, marked, shaped, or worn away				
bark	0	0	1	2
branch	0	0	1	2
buffer	0	0	3	2
bumper	0	0	1	1
buskin	0	0	2	0
cedar	0	0	1	0
construction	0	0	1	4
contact lense	0	0	4	10
coral	0	0	18	31
core	0	0	4	27
fern	0	0	1	0
fold	0	0	13	25
foliage	0	0	1	2
fungus	0	0	1	0
holdall	0	0	2	0
kite	0	0	2	0
layer	0	0	1	12
lawn	0	0	1	3
leave	0	1	4	11
lining	0	0	2	8
load	0	0	1	0
nylon	0	0	1	2
pencil	0	0	9	6
petal	0	0	3	4
plastic	0	0	11	74
powder	0	0	1	9
pumice	0	0	1	0
pump	0	0	1	0
rail	0	0	1	0
rubber	0	0	10	23
shale	0	0	2	3
shell	0	0	3	48
sod	0	0	2	0
solid	0	0	1	6
specimen	0	0	1	0
spile	0	0	2	0
stem	0	0	1	1
vegetation	0	0	1	1
washer	0	0	1	1
weed	0	0	1	0
cover	0	0	9	19
good	0	0	1	0
roof	0	0	1	0

soap	2	39	13	10
top	0	0	12	30
wood	0	0	9	49

The second chart illustrates which nouns refer to the texture of physical objects with the meaning of "being easily cut, marked, shaped, or worn away". The figures above show quite clearly that the nouns within this category belong almost exceptionally to the collocational range of *soft*. The only finding on the collocation with the modifier *mild* does not refer to the texture because it refers to the flavour. The meaning is "not having a strong taste".

45. *Grow perennial kinds for flavorful bulbs and deliciously **mild** leaves.*
(COCA: 1)

The distinction between *mild soap* and *soft soap* has already been discussed in the previous chapter.

The nouns *cover*, *good*, *roof*, *soap*, *top* and *wood* are all included into the dictionaries as part of the definition of the adjective *soft*. Even though they refer to the same general meaning as the other words in this chart, their individual meanings are somehow specialized. I will not rewrite the particular definitions from the dictionaries because there is no lexical material with *mild* for comparison. The nouns that are implemented into the dictionaries and form a part of the definition of *soft* will be put separately at the back of every chart.

Summary: The nouns in the chart 1b share the meaning of "being easily cut, marked, shaped, or worn away" when they collocate with *soft*. The text corpora do not provide any collocations with the modifier *mild*.

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
1c. Not hard for its kind				
bag	0	0	1	5
box	0	0	5	2
burden	0	1	1	0
chalk	0	0	4	3
fibre	0	0	2	0
magnet	0	0	1	0
rucksack	0	0	2	0
sail	0	0	1	0
stool	0	0	5	4
string	0	0	4	0
wax	0	0	4	12
wire	0	0	3	2
furnishing	0	0	42	1
toy	0	0	26	19

The next category lists nouns the meaning of which is "not hard; not hard for its kind". Almost all of them belong only to the collocational range of *soft*. The one collocation that was found in COCA with *mild* as the modifier is *mild burden*. In this case, *mild burden* does not refer to any physical object because it refers to a feeling the meaning of which is "slight; not severe".

46. *The scores on the CRA indicated that, as an aggregate, the participants were feeling mild burden or strain in their role. (COCA: 1)*

Summary: The nouns in the chart 1c refer to the texture of physical objects. The meaning of the collocations with the modifier *soft* is "not hard; not hard for its kind". The text corpora generated only one collocation with the modifier *mild*. The meaning is "slight; not severe".

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
1d. Smooth or fine to the touch; not rough, harsh, or coarse				
blanket	0	0	2	21
boot	0	0	5	25
bob	0	1	1	0
bristle	0	0	4	15
broom	0	0	2	2
brush	0	0	11	43
carpet	0	0	9	16
coat	0	1	2	11
collar	0	0	6	5
duster	0	0	3	0
duvet	0	0	1	1
eiderdown	0	0	1	0
flake	0	0	1	3
fringe	0	0	2	0
fur	0	0	7	32
fuzz	0	0	2	3
hat	0	0	6	4
jeans	0	0	1	2
leather	0	0	40	97
moss	0	0	3	10
muzzle	0	0	1	2
pad	0	0	4	17
paw	0	0	1	7
peat	0	0	1	3
pelmet	0	0	1	0
pleat	0	0	3	2
roller	0	0	1	0
rug	0	0	4	9
shirt	0	0	2	4
sleeve	0	0	1	1
slipper	0	0	1	2
stubble	0	0	1	0
tail	0	0	1	3
tissue	0	0	48	838
towel	0	0	6	12
tunic	0	0	1	1
turf	0	1	5	5
upholstery	0	0	2	2
veil	0	0	1	2
wear	0	0	1	0
grass	0	0	10	38
shoe	0	0	17	28

The chart 1d stores nouns that share the meaning of "being smooth or fine to the touch; not rough, harsh, or coarse", when they are modified by *soft*. COCA provides three contexts in which the modification by *mild* is possible.

Firstly, it is the collocation *mild coat*. In this case, the reference is made to politics. The meaning is "not extreme; not extremist".

47. *Gingrich is the rare conservative whose life has been wholly devoted to politics, but then in his college days he was at least a **mild Coat** and Tie Radical.* (COCA: 1)

Secondly, it is *mild turf*. In this case, the reference is made to another noun within a complex noun phrase (*mild turf war*). The meaning is "not strong; severe".

Finally, it is *mild bob*. Whereas *soft bob* refers to hair that is "pleasant to the touch", *mild Bob* refers to a person who is "gentle and kind".

Summary: The nouns in the chart 1d belong almost invariably to the collocational range of *soft*. The meaning of these collocative units is "smooth or fine to the touch; not rough, harsh, or coarse" The few contexts for the collocations with the modifier *mild* are generated only by COCA. Their meanings are "not strong; severe" and "gentle and kind".

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
1e. Smooth or fine to the touch (of materials, fabric)				
canvas	0	0	1	3
cloth	0	0	18	56
cotton	0	0	13	43
fabric	0	0	10	39
flannel	0	0	1	3
patch	0	0	4	17
serge	0	0	1	0
silk	0	0	8	13
texture	0	0	11	31
yarn	0	0	1	1
wool	0	0	9	17

The nouns in the fifth category are all either materials or fabrics that share the meaning of "being smooth or fine to the touch". There is no context for any collocation with *mild* as the modifier.

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
1f. Not hard; comfortable				
bed	0	0	15	68
chair	0	0	4	42
seat	0	0	1	15
headgear	0	0	1	0

All the nouns within this chart share the meaning of "being not hard; comfortable". Also within this semantic group, there are no nouns that collocate with *mild*.

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
1g. Not hard; containing soft, gentle substances				
alloy	0	0	1	0
aluminium	0	0	1	0
cement	0	0	1	0
coal	0	0	2	15
detergent	3	16	1	0
metal	0	1	12	19
substance	0	0	1	1
tar	0	0	1	3
drink	0	2	184	1108
steel	26	12	0	5
sugar	0	0	3	0
water	0	4	81	12

The next category deals with nouns that belong rather to the collocational range of *soft* than *mild*. However, there are certain cases in which the modification by

mild is possible as well. The meaning is "not hard; gentle; reacting with soft bases", when modified by *soft* and "gentle; gentle to the skin", when modified by *mild*.

48. *The only maintenance required is an occasional wipe over with a **mild detergent**.* (BNC: ECJ)

Mild metal appears only once in COCA and it is probably a mistake in graphics. (= mental)

49. *Of these 47, 20 respondents used it to measure physical fitness, 46 respondents used it to measure motor skills, 47 respondents used it to evaluate students with **mild metal** retardation.* (COCA: 1)

In case of *mild water*, the reference is not made to water but to a real head of the complex noun phrase (*mild water damage, mild water shortage*). *Soft water* is a collocation with the meaning of "having in solution few or none of the mineral salts that interfere with the lathering and cleansing properties of soap". (WNWD 1991: 1274)

The distinction between *mild steel* and *soft steel* has already been discussed in the previous chapter. Interesting is the distinction between *mild drink* and *soft drink*. *Soft drink* is purely "non-alcoholic", whereas *mild drink* is just "not strong". Unlike *soft drink*, *mild drink* may contain alcohol.

Summary: The nouns within this semantic category collocate with both *soft* and *mild*. The collocations with the modifier *soft* share the meaning of "being gentle; not hard; reacting with soft bases". On the other hand, the collocations with *mild* are "gentle; gentle to the skin". Interesting is the distinction between *soft drink* and *mild drink*.

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
1h. Pleasant to the touch; not harsh, rough; giving way easily under pressure (of parts of body)				
arm	0	0	1	8
bags	0	0	1	2
belly	0	1	3	24
body	1	1	15	42
bone	0	0	2	7
breast	0	0	7	18
cartilage	0	0	1	1
cheek	0	0	7	28
ear	1	2	2	7
face	1	8	6	26
finger	0	0	3	14
flesh	0	2	17	69
fold	0	0	13	25
gum	0	0	1	0
hand	0	0	13	88
knee	0	0	2	2
lip	0	0	13	31
mouth	0	0	7	23
neck	0	1	2	2
organ	0	0	4	13
palm	0	0	5	10
shoulder	0	0	3	21
tongue	0	0	2	6
underbelly	0	0	8	46
eye	1	10	5	40

The seventh subcategory headed with the number 1 lists nouns that refer to the parts of body. When modified by *soft*, their meaning is either "pleasant to the touch; not harsh, rough", or "giving way easily under pressure".

Mild body and *mild face* have already been dealt on in the previous chapter. In case of *mild belly*, *mild ear* and *mild neck*, the reference is not made to these nouns but to the heads of the complex noun phrases (*mild belly pain*, *mild ear infection*, *mild neck pain*). Here, the meaning is "slight; not serious". *Mild flesh* refers to the flavour. The meaning is "not sharp".

50. *Shimmering orange matchsticks speckled with coal-black sesame seeds are luminous beside pearly fish, and their flavors make a sweet and nutty contrast to mild flesh.* (COCA: 1)

Finally, the difference is made between *mild eye* and *soft eye*. *Mild eye* is "gentle", *soft eye* is characterized as "having gentle or liquid appearance". (WTNID 1993: 2165)

Summary: The nouns in the chart 1h refer to the parts of body. When modified by *soft*, their meaning is either "pleasant to the touch; not harsh, rough", or "giving way easily under pressure". The collocations with the modifier *mild* refer to the flavour ("not sharp").

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
1i. easily cut, marked, shaped; not hard for its kind (of food + n. flavour, diet)				
bap	0	0	1	0
bread	0	0	2	16
butter	0	0	2	20
carrot	0	0	1	0
cheese	3	15	47	41
corn	0	0	1	7
cream	0	2	5	6
dough	0	0	6	70
fruit	0	1	25	18
flour	0	0	1	7
food	0	1	2	33
icing	0	0	2	2
margarine	0	0	5	9
mushroom	0	0	1	0
pastry	0	0	1	2
plum	0	0	1	2
roll	0	0	2	16
toffee	0	0	2	0
tomato	0	2	2	5
corn	0	0	1	7
diet	0	0	1	3

flavour	6	45	1	2
wheat	0	0	2	11

The last category of nouns that refer to the texture of physical objects deals with nouns with a direct reference to food. When modified by *soft*, the nouns share the meaning of "being easily cut, marked, shaped; not hard for its kind", however, when modified by *mild*, their meaning is "not strong or sharp". The reference is made to the flavour.

51. *You can have it Veracruzana (mild tomato sauce) or mojo de ajo (garlic sauce).* (COCA: 2)

52. *On a cloth before him was a mound of soft tomatoes, and another of spoiling melons.* (COCA: 2)

The difference between *mild cheese* and *soft cheese* has already been dealt on in the previous chapter as well as the difference between the usage of the collocation *soft flavour* and *mild flavour*.

Summary: The nouns within the last semantic category headed with the number 1 refer to food. When modified by *soft*, the collocations share the meaning of "being easily cut, marked, shaped; not hard for its kind". When modified by *mild*, their meaning is "not strong or sharp".

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
2. (of characteristics, manner)				
beauty	0	1	2	1
femaleness	0	0	1	0
innocence	0	0	2	0
manner	5	16	1	3
nature	0	1	2	1
obscurity	0	0	1	0
persuasiveness	0	0	1	0
ripeness	0	0	1	0

vulnerability	0	0	2	2
whiteness	0	0	1	2
spot	0	0	59	310

The nouns in the second category refer to certain characteristics. The distinction between *soft/mild manner* and *soft/mild nature* is to be found in the previous chapter. Apart from that, COCA states one context for *mild beauty*. *Mild beauty* has the meaning of "being gentle, moderate", whereas *soft* in the collocation *soft beauty* does not refer directly to the head of the noun phrase because it refers to the actual reality that is characterized as "being beautiful".

53. *The **soft beauty** of their symmetrical curves, and the sinuous outlines, accentuated as they were at morning and evening by the glancing rays of the sun, provided an artistry one could not readily forget.* (COCA: 2)

In this context, *soft* refers to the curves that are modified by *soft* to imply that they are not "sharp".

54. *When he slowly drew her to him she made no attempt to struggle, held by the **soft beauty** of that one word and the warm security of his hands at her waist.* (COCA: 1)

The adjective *soft* refers to the noun *word* with the meaning of "being not loud; moderate in intensity".

55. *We have used the majesty of the lion as a symbol of royalty, the wide-eyed stare of owls for wisdom, the **mild beauty** of the dove for the spirit of God.* (COCA: 1)

The noun phrase *soft spot* functions idiomatically. *Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms* (1998: 362) defines its meaning as "to feel a lot of affection for someone or something, often without knowing why".

Summary: The nouns in the second category refer to various characteristics. The shared meaning is "gentle". The vast majority of nouns belong only to the collocational range of *soft*.

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
3a. Warm; gentle; pleasant (of weather)				
air	2	7	2	17
evening	2	8	4	14
day	7	23	9	7
heat	1	8	1	0
morning	2	1	1	14
spring	3	10	5	20
sunset	0	0	1	1
vacuum	0	0	1	1
warmth	0	2	8	14

All the nouns in the third category that collocate with both *soft* and *mild* have already been analyzed in the previous chapter. Therefore, I will not repeat the same information and just sum up the basic findings. The collocations with the modifier *soft* share the meaning of "being warm; gentle; pleasant". Apart from that, BNC provides one context for the meaning of "being rainy; drizzly" (*soft day*). On the other hand, all the collocations with *mild* share the meaning of being "warm; gentle; moderate in intensity".

The collocation *soft vacuum* refers to the sound. The meaning is "a space that enables the spreading of a soft sound".

56. *I suspect this (those silly "positive" electrons again) is about as accurate as Aspen's often repeated claims that a **soft vacuum** creates a soft sound and a hard vacuum creates a hard sound.* (BNC: C9H)

Summary: The nouns in the chart 3a refer to weather. Most of them collocate with both the adjectives. The collocations with *mild* share the meaning of "not cold or wet; sometimes pleasantly warm". The collocations with *soft* stress pleasantness.

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
3b. gentle; pleasant; not strong				
breeze	2	10	12	65
cloud	0	0	1	5
dew	0	0	1	2
drizzle	0	0	1	4
rain	0	1	6	42
haze	0	0	2	6
snow	0	0	8	88
thunder	0	0	1	2
wave	0	3	6	16
wind	1	6	8	30

The collocability of most of the nouns in the chart 3b have already been discussed in the previous chapter. To sum up the findings, the collocations with *soft* share the meaning of "being gentle; pleasant; not strong", whereas the collocations with *mild* are just "gentle". It can be concluded that the nouns modified by *mild* stand in the semantic relation of hyponymy to the same nouns modified by *soft*.

COCA provides two contexts for the collocations with *mild*. Firstly, it is the collocation *mild rain*. The meaning of this phrase is "gentle".

57. *So that you are made fertile, God has let his **mild rain** flow out of the highest clouds, his flesh, which never bore sin.* (COCA: 1)

Secondly, it is *mild wave*. The meaning is either "gentle" or "not strong". On the other hand, *soft wave* can be also – except for the general meaning stated above - "pleasant to the touch" when it refers to hair.

58. *But other economists fear that even a **mild wave** of unanticipated price increases could swamp a U.S. economy burdened with debt and weak job growth.* (COCA: 1) (= gentle)

59. *When the occasional **mild wave** formed it was edged with something phosphorescent, some tiny water bugs or microbes that scattered and disappeared with the impact of the wave's landing.* (COCA: 2) (= not strong)

Summary: The nouns listed in the chart 3b can be modified by both *soft* and *mild*. The meaning of the collocations with the modifier *soft* is "gentle; pleasant; not strong", whereas the meaning of the collocations with *mild* is just "gentle".

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
4a. kind; compassionate (of people)				
commission	0	0	5	0
cop	0	0	1	1
figure	0	0	1	5
kid	0	0	2	7
lad	0	0	3	0
person	1	2	1	0
rocker	0	0	1	1
teacher	0	0	2	0
woman	0	0	2	6
world	0	0	1	4
4b. not wild (of animals)				
animal	0	0	3	5
cat	0	0	1	1
cow	1	2	1	7
dog	0	1	1	1
dove	0	0	1	0

The next semantic category deals with nouns that refer to humans or animals. The basic distinction between the collocations with *soft* and *mild* has already been written about. I will now sum up the conclusions from the previous chapter. The collocations with *mild* share the meaning of "being gentle and kind; not violent", whereas the nouns modified by *soft* are either "not strict enough", or "weak, unmanly".

60. *He sang of big men made small by love, prison cells and cattle towns, soft women and hard liquor.* (BNC: AJN)

The collocations with the modifier *mild* that refer to animals share the meaning of "being not wild". The phrases modified by *soft* that refer to animals share the meaning of "being gentle, docile; lacking in spirit".

61. *Dusk comes, an early moon pops up over the swaying trees, the barge slips around on its tether like a **mild dog** happy to be tied, and I help myself to some noodles and milk.* (COCA: 1)

The corpora data revealed that collocations with *soft* can appear in the meanings of "being pleasant to the touch" and "not hard".

62. *Pressing himself into the shadows, he watched her hug the **soft animal** to her breast and take a few steps back.* (COCA: 1)

Summary: The nouns in the fourth category refer to humans and animals. When modified by *mild*, the collocations share the meaning of "being gentle and kind; not violent". When modified by *soft*, their meaning is "not strict enough", or "weak, unmanly".

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
5a. not bright, intense, or glaring; subdued (of light)				
filter	0	0	1	0
flame	0	0	1	2
glow	0	1	12	66
halo	0	0	1	3
illumination	0	0	1	6
image	0	0	1	8
lamp	0	0	3	2
light	0	4	57	165
line	0	0	7	14
penumbra	0	0	1	0
radius	0	0	1	0
shade	0	0	8	28
shadow	1	0	2	19
sheen	0	0	2	17
sunlight	0	2	1	5

x-ray	0	0	8	13
focus	0	0	10	39
5b. not bright, intense, or glaring; subdued (of colour)				
blue	2	10	21	95
brown	1	3	32	115
colour	0	0	9	50
green	0	25	24	107
mauve	0	0	1	1
pastel	0	0	19	107
peach	0	0	8	11
pink	0	1	20	84
red	0	11	5	38
rose	0	0	3	5
velvet	0	0	2	10

The nouns in the category 5a refer to light. Most of them belong only to the collocational range of *soft*. When modified by *soft*, their meaning is "not bright, intense, or glaring; subdued". The collocations with *mild* share the meaning of "not strong; moderate in intensity".

63. *He was older, but still beautiful. I had never before seen such a **soft light** in those once proud eyes, or felt such a friendly touch of her once cold hand.* (BNC: FPU)

64. *I have chosen species that need **mild light** and little precipitation.* (COCA: 2)

The condition on when to use which of the modifiers is based contextually.

The category 5b lists nouns that refer to colours with the same meanings for both *soft* and *mild* as in 5a. The corpora data reveal that none of the collocations with *mild* refers to colour in a way the collocations with *soft* do. Instead, they refer to flavour with the meaning of "being not sharp, strong" (*mild blue cheese, mild red chili, mild green olives*), eyes with the meaning "of gentle appearance" (*mild brown eyes*) and to the sky with the meaning of "being gentle" (*mild pink summer sky*).

Summary: The nouns in the fifth chart refer to light. Most of them belong only to the collocational range of *soft*. When modified by *soft*, the collocations share the meaning of "not bright, intense, or glaring; subdued". When modified by *mild*, their meaning is "not strong; moderate in intensity". The text corpora provide no context for *soft* and *mild* to be fully interchangeable in.

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
6a. gentle; not loud (of sound)				
accent	0	0	1	6
bass	0	0	1	0
breath	1	0	1	10
burr	0	0	1	2
buzz	0	2	1	4
chuckle	0	1	4	21
clack	0	0	1	0
clatter	1	1	1	5
cooing	0	0	2	5
cry	0	0	1	20
curse	0	1	2	4
drawl	0	1	5	6
drop	0	1	1	2
echo	0	1	2	4
gargle	0	0	1	0
giggle	0	2	1	6
growl	0	0	4	6
grunt	0	0	2	12
hissing	0	0	3	10
hum	0	0	4	17
knock	0	0	2	29
lapping	0	0	2	0
laugh	0	0	13	28
laughter	0	0	4	15
moan	0	0	3	30
moaning	0	0	2	6
music	0	0	14	74
murmur	0	1	12	25
mutter	0	0	1	0
name	0	0	1	3
peal	0	0	1	0
pitch	0	0	1	1
plop	0	0	1	6

purr	0	0	2	3
quack	0	0	1	0
refrain	0	0	1	1
reverberation	0	0	1	0
roaring	0	0	1	0
rumble	0	2	1	5
rustle	0	0	4	9
sigh	0	0	10	16
sound	0	1	22	89
splash	0	0	2	3
suck	0	0	2	0
swish	0	0	1	3
thud	0	0	4	35
ticking	0	0	2	0
tickle	0	0	1	2
tongue	0	0	2	6
tread	0	0	1	5
voice	4	11	48	366
whine	0	0	1	3
whistle	0	0	1	15
word	0	11	15	49

The basic difference between the collocations with *mild/soft* that refer to sound has already been discussed in the previous chapter. One meaning that is shared by all the collocations is "being gentle; moderate". Moreover, the collocations with *soft* refer either to the loudness or they can be "soothing, ingratiating". The figures in the chart demonstrate that the nouns within this semantic category belong rather to the collocational range of *soft* than *mild*. The reason on when to use which of the adjectives depends on the context and on the intentions of the writer or the speaker.

65. *She segues from purr to **mild giggle**, as if charmed by Garner's lack of charm.* (COCA: 1)

66. *On the phone she sounds lighthearted and personable, injecting a **soft giggle** or a throaty, deliberate laugh into almost every response.* (COCA: 4)

Summary: The nouns in the chart 6a refer to sound. When modified by *soft*, the collocations share the meaning of being "not loud" or "soothing, ingratiating". When modified by *mild*, their meaning is "being gentle; moderate".

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
6b. Gentle, also not loud (of manners of speech)				
acknowledgement	0	0	1	0
answer	0	0	2	8
call	0	0	2	9
constraint	0	0	1	1
demand	0	0	1	5
exclamation	0	0	1	3
expression	0	100	1	3
hint	1	0	1	0
impeachment	0	0	1	0
menace	0	0	4	0
message	0	0	1	1
petition	0	0	1	0
prayer	0	0	2	4
promise	0	0	1	1
protest	2	11	1	0
query	0	0	1	1
reply	0	0	1	1
sawdering	0	0	1	0
sentence	2	3	1	0
speech	1	3	1	3
talk	0	0	3	3
thinking	0	0	1	3
thought	0	0	1	1
utterance	0	0	1	2
malice	0	0	2	0
sarcasm	2	4	1	0

The chart 6b provides information about nouns that refer to the manners of speech. Most of them belong only to the collocational range of *soft* even though these phrases are altogether not very numerous. The meaning of the collocations modified by *mild* is "gentle; moderate", whereas the collocations with *soft* can be also "not loud",

"soothing, ingratiating", or "sentimental; flowery". This last meaning of *soft* is extremely rare. I have not found any context for it in both BNC and COCA.

Apart from that, the collocation *mild sentence* has the meaning of "being not severe; harsh" when it refers to a form of a punishment.

67. Under the legislation of the Gaviria administration, heads of organized crime, if they confessed and behaved well, could receive a **mild sentence**. (COCA: 2)

Summary: The nouns in the chart 6b refer to the manners of speech. When modified by *soft*, the collocations share the meaning of "not loud", "soothing, ingratiating", or "sentimental; flowery". When modified by *mild*, their meaning is "gentle; moderate".

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
7. (of physical activity)				
caress	0	0	1	10
cutting	0	0	6	1
dint	0	0	1	0
fall	0	2	3	6
flurry	0	0	1	0
gliding	0	0	1	0
handshake	0	0	1	2
hug	0	0	1	0
kiss	0	0	7	34
massage	0	0	1	1
rush	0	0	2	9
scratching	0	0	1	9
scuttle	0	0	1	0
shaking	0	0	1	1
stirring	1	2	1	0

The nouns in the seventh semantic category refer to physical activities. Most of them belong only to the collocational range of *soft*. The meaning of the collocations is "not strong or harsh". The phrases modified by *mild* are "moderate in intensity". There are altogether two contexts for the modification by *mild*.

Mild fall is not only an activity that is "not strong; moderate in intensity", it is also a time in year that is "characterized by no extremes in temperatures".

68. *The contractor was fortunate that Minnesota was experiencing its second **mild fall** in a row, a weather bonanza that would allow for successful completion well before winter's first snow.* (COCA: 6)

69. *Because it's been a **mild fall** and today was relatively warm, Cliff Reed and his team saw a record number of species by day's end, including several that are unusual for this time of year.* (COCA: 5)

Secondly, it is *mild stirring*. The meaning of this noun phrase is "not strong; moderate", whereas *soft stirring* is "not loud".

70. *Sunk in biology, she thought, listening for creaks or moans above the ceiling, listening to the **soft stirring** in her belly, licking her fingers.* (BNC: FET)

Summary: The nouns in this category refer to physical activities. When modified by *mild*, the collocations share the meaning of "moderate in intensity". When modified by *soft*, their meaning is "not strong or harsh".

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
8. Gentle; rising gradually				
area	2	9	6	4
bank	0	1	2	6
beach	0	0	1	2
cliff	0	0	4	1
coastline	0	0	1	0
desert	0	0	2	2
seabed	0	0	1	0
south	1	1	1	2
valley	0	0	1	2
curve	0	0	7	26
edge	0	0	5	63

The nouns in the next semantic category refer to areas that are "gentle; rising gradually; ascending by moderate degrees", or that are "having curved or rounded outline". (WTNID) Apart from that, the corpora data revealed that there are also other meanings: "not hard" (*soft cliff*) and "not strong" (*soft south wind*). These were the principal meanings for the noun phrases modified by *soft*. The collocations with *mild* share neither of the meanings stated for *soft*.

Mild area and *mild south* are "characterized by no extremes in temperatures".

Interesting is the collocation *mild bank*. It appears only once in COCA and the meaning is "with a small effect".

71. *A few haphazardly placed transitions, one block ramp in the center and a few **mild banks** that wouldn't amuse a 3-year-old on a Big Wheel.* (COCA: 1)

Summary: The nouns in the eighth category refer to areas and places that are "gentle; rising gradually; ascending by moderate degrees", or that are "having curved or rounded outline". The modification by *mild* is extremely rare and it is often associated to a different meaning: "characterized by no extremes in temperatures", "with a small effect".

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
9. not hard; yielding easily to pressure (of health problems)				
cellulite	0	0	1	0
chancre	0	0	1	1
depression	9	53	1	1
lump	0	0	1	2
rheumatism	0	0	1	0
sore	2	3	3	0

This semantic category has been largely discussed in the chapter on *mild*. Generally speaking, the nouns that refer to certain health problems and diseases are

usually modified by *mild* to imply that they are "not serious". The modification by *soft* is also possible but the meaning does not stay the same. All the nouns in the chart, except for rheumatism, share the meaning of "being not hard; yielding easily to pressure", when modified by *soft*. *Soft depression* is not "a particular state of mind". In this case, it is "a part of a surface that is lower than the other parts". (Ldoceonline)

72. *Injections of collagen, the protein in connective tissue, can build up soft depressions in skin caused by acne, age, injury, or disease.* (BNC: B74)

Soft rheumatism is used only in one context that refers to poetry.

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
10. Gentle (of non-verbal reaction)				
look	0	2	1	22
smile	0	4	4	35
view	0	0	1	1

The nouns listed in the category No. 10 refer to non-verbal reactions. Two of them can be modified by both *soft* and *mild*.

The basic distinction between *soft smile* and *mild smile* is that *mild smile* is just "gentle", whereas *soft smile* can be also "not loud".

Mild look is "gentle; moderate in intensity" and *soft look* is "gentle", as well as "pleasing".

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
11a. not severe or strong (of feelings, sensations)				
annoyance	0	13	1	0
endearment	0	0	1	0

satisfaction	1	4	2	0
sensation	5	2	1	0
sympathy	0	0	2	0

The nouns in the next semantic category refer to feelings or sensations with the meaning of "being not severe or strong". The collocations with *mild* imply the moderation in intensity.

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
11b. not severe or strong (of abstracts)				
abstraction	0	0	1	0
approach	0	1	5	11
contrast	0	1	1	4
growth	0	1	2	3
rise	0	1	3	1
urgency	0	0	1	1

The nouns in the chart 11b refer to abstracts that also share the meaning of "being not severe or strong". The collocations with *mild* stress moderation.

73. *The various attempts made by stylisticians to draw on narratology may be classified into three types: (1) the "mild" approach; (2) the "radical" approach; and (3) the "parallel" approach. (COCA: 1)*

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
12. words hard to classify into one semantic category				
aspect	0	0	2	2
case	8	93	4	6
condition	5	15	2	4
effect	1	4	2	6
form	25	66	1	9
side	1	14	11	52
state	4	6	1	5

The semantic category No. 12 provides information about nouns that can have lots of meanings according to what linguistic reality they refer to. The difference between *mild/soft case*, *mild/soft form* and *mild/soft effect* has already been discussed in the previous chapter. Therefore, I will now pay attention to the remaining nouns in the chart.

According to the data in BNC and COCA, the collocation *soft condition* can refer to the texture of physical objects with the meaning of "being not hard", to a regime that is "not severe", or to weather that is "warm and pleasant". On the other hand, *mild condition* refers to temperatures that are "moderate", or a disease that is "not serious".

Mild side refers either to flavour that is "not sharp or strong", or to side effects that are "not strong". *Soft side* refers to physical objects that are "not hard" or to people who are "kind and sympathetic".

Finally, *soft state* refers to a state whose political leaders are "kind; too kind" as well as to physical objects that are "not hard". On the other hand, *mild state* refers to a disease that is "not serious" (*mild state of shock*).

Summary: This semantic category deals with nouns that are hard to classify into one semantic category because they can refer to a large number of things.

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
13.easy; without problems				
fusion	0	0	1	0
goal	0	0	7	4
handle	0	0	2	0
journey	0	0	1	0
return	0	0	4	1
landing	0	0	19	162
life	0	0	3	11
sell	0	0	9	25

target	0	0	15	77
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The nouns within this particular semantic category belong to the collocational range of *soft* only. The meaning is "easy; without problems".

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
14. Fixed collocations (of money)				
budget	0	1	2	3
credit	0	0	4	1
cost	0	0	2	7
currency	0	0	2	5
loan	0	0	31	15
market	0	1	5	24
money	0	0	5	681
price	0	0	2	3

The nouns that refer to money collocate only with *soft*. Two exceptions from this rule (*mild budget* and *mild market*) refer to different linguistic realities: *mild budget deficit* and *mild market reaction*. The meaning is "not strong".

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
15. comparatively unaggressive, moderate (of music genres, sport, politics)				
band	0	0	1	1
football	0	0	1	1
law	0	0	1	9
left	0	1	13	3
logic	0	0	3	0
membership	0	0	1	0
movement	0	1	2	4
pop	0	0	1	10
porn	0	0	25	18

primitivism	0	0	1	0
propaganda	0	0	1	0
right	0	0	1	13
rock	0	0	10	46
style	0	0	2	7

The semantic category No. 15 deals with nouns the meaning of which is "comparatively unaggressive, moderate", when they are modified by *soft*. The modification with *mild* is also possible but it brings about a change of meaning.

Mild left refers to a dysfunction that is "not severe" and *mild movement* refers to exercise that is "moderate, not extreme".

	MILD		SOFT	
	BNC	COCA	BNC	COCA
16. technical terms				
byte	0	0	6	0
click	0	0	4	20
copy	0	0	3	7
hyphen	0	0	5	0
system	0	0	25	0
technology	0	0	1	5
ware	0	0	2	4

All the nouns listed into this category are fixed phrases implemented into all the dictionaries stated in one of the previous chapters. The modification by *mild* is not possible.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to analyze the dictionary definitions of two adjectives (*soft* and *mild*) and to compare them with the data from two large databases of written texts (*British National Corpus* and *Corpus of Contemporary American English*). The purpose was to examine the measure of synonymy between the nouns modified by both *soft* and *mild*.

Firstly, I analyzed the dictionary definitions. Secondly, I collected all the lexical material that referred to *soft* and *mild* in both BNC and COCA and divided it into semantic categories. The semantic categories provided frames for nouns with the same meanings. Following the succession of the individual charts, I compared the collocations with the modifiers *soft* and *mild* and examined to what degree they are actually synonymous.

The conclusions are as follows: Neither BNC nor COCA generated any contexts for absolute synonyms. The situation is similar for cognitive synonyms. The only exceptions may be the collocations *soft steel* and *mild steel*. Both the phrases refer to the same thing without any fundamental change of meaning. The analysis proved that *soft* and *mild* are near-synonyms.

The analysis confirmed that there are two semantic relationships that hold between the adjectives *soft* and *mild*. Firstly, it is synonymy. Secondly, it is the semantic relation of hyponymy (*soft drink – mild drink, soft drug – mild drug*)

The comparison of findings from both BNC and COCA revealed that the collocational ranges of *soft* and *mild* in either British or American English do not differ much. The reason why many of the collocations are far more numerous in COCA than in BNC is due to the fact that COCA is four times bigger.

The data in the analysis did not prove whether *soft* and *mild* can be used interchangeably in British dialects (*soft wood* – *mild wood*) with the meaning of "lacking comparatively in hardness, as wood, or soil".

Finally, the data in the charts showed that *mild* collocates mostly with abstracts (*weather, climate, amazement*), whereas *soft* collocates with both abstracts and concretes (*evening, day* vs. *coat, flesh*).

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