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**Intensifiers of adjectives in present-day spoken British English**

Intenzifikátory adjektív v súčasnej hovorenej britskej angličtine

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V úvode by som sa rada poďakovala vedúcej svojej bakalárskej práce doc. PhDr. Markéte Malej, Ph.D. za jej trpezlivosť, cenné rady, odborné konzultácie a podnetné pripomienky a komentáre.

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## **Abstrakt**

Cieľom tejto bakalárskej práce je vypracovať prehľad používania intenzifikátorov adjektív v súčasnej hovorenej britskej angličtine. Pre tento účel bol ako najvhodnejší študijný materiál zvolený jazykový korpus Spoken BNC 2014. V teoretickej časti práce sú zhrnuté dostupné informácie o intenzifikátoroch, ako z gramatik, tak aj z novších štúdií. Sú popísané rozdiely v používaní intenzifikátorov v závislosti na rôznych sociolingvistických aspektoch a nakoniec sú spomenuté detailnejšie charakteristiky v prípade niekoľkých konkrétnych intenzifikátorov.

Praktická časť práce má podobnú štruktúru ako teoretická. V prvom rade obsahuje zoznam 105 najčastejšie používaných intenzifikátorov adjektív v korpuse Spoken BNC 2014. Ďalej boli na bližšiu analýzu a porovnanie vybrané dva konkrétne intenzifikátory, a to *quite* a *pretty*. Skúmanými vlastnosťami sú ich syntaktické okolie, kolokácie a sociolingvistické charakteristiky hovorcov.

**klúčové slová:** intenzifikácia, intenzifikátory adjektív, hovorená britská angličtina, syntaktické okolie, sémantické preferencie, sociolingvistické charakteristiky

## **Abstract**

The objective of the present thesis is to provide an overview of the usage of adjectival intensifiers in present-day spoken British English. For this purpose the corpus Spoken BNC 2014 was selected as the most suitable studying material. In the theoretical part of the thesis the available information on intensifiers is summarised, both from grammar books and more recent studies. The variation in the usage of intensifiers with respect to different socio-linguistic variables is described and finally, some more detailed characteristics of a few specific intensifiers are mentioned.

The practical section of the thesis follows a similar structure to that of the theoretical part. It first includes a list of the 105 most frequently used intensifiers of adjectives in the Spoken BNC 2014. Furthermore, two specific intensifiers, namely *quite* and *pretty*, were selected for closer analysis and comparison. The analysed features of the intensifiers are their syntactic environment, collocational patterns and socio-linguistic characteristics of the speakers.

**key words:** intensification, intensifiers of adjectives, spoken British English, syntactic environment, semantic preferences, socio-linguistic characteristics

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## 1 Introduction

The aim of the present thesis is to examine the use of intensifiers of adjectives in present-day spoken British English. It consists of two main parts: the theoretical background and the analysis. First of all, the theoretical part provides basic definition of intensifiers, their division and more detailed information about their usage based on the grammar books *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (Quirk et al. 1985) and *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (Biber et al. 1999). The chapter furthermore summarizes more recent finds on intensifiers in spoken British English from different corpora. The sources for this part were studies by Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010: 252-287), Fuchs (2017: 345-374), Hessner and Gawlitzek (2017: 403-428), Ito and Tagliamonte (2003: 257-279), Martínez and Pertejo (2014: 210-237), Partington (1993: 177-192), and Stenström and Hasund (2002: 131-163).

In the practical part, firstly, a list of the most frequently used adjectival intensifiers is comprised based on the Spoken BNC 2014. This is followed by a thorough examination of two highly prominent downtoners, *quite* and *pretty*. Each intensifier is analysed with respect to its syntactic environment, semantic preferences and socio-linguistic characteristics of the speakers who use it. Finally, *quite* and *pretty* are compared and their usage by different speakers in the corpus is contrasted based on the previously mentioned criteria.



## 2 Theoretical background

### 2.1 Adverbial intensifiers of adjectives described in grammar books

Intensifiers are adverbs which modify other elements and function as a "scaling device" (Quirk et al. 1985: 445). They can modify elements of various word classes, namely adjectives, as in *a really clever boy*, other adverbs, as in *They are coming really soon*, verbs as in *They really love each other*, etc. The aim of this study is to analyse adverbial intensifiers of adjectives, hence, we will limit our focus to these. Such an adverb "[m]ost commonly...cooccurs with a gradable adjective" (ibid.). There are two types of intensifiers according to Quirk et al. (ibid.): "amplifiers" and "downtoners". Biber et al. (1999: 554-555) use a slightly different terminology for intensifying adverbs, calling them "degree adverbs". They refer to the first type as "amplifiers" or "intensifiers", and to the second one as "downtoners" or "diminishers". In this study, however, we will be using Quirk et al.'s terminology in order to avoid confusion.

Amplifiers intensify the adjective they modify in a positive way, i.e. they "scale upwards from an assumed norm" (Quirk et al. 1985: 445), e.g. the amplifier *very* increases the intensity of the adjective *pretty* in *a very pretty picture*, as compared to *a pretty picture*. Some other examples of amplifiers mentioned by Quirk et al. (ibid.) are shown in exx a-p below.

Amplifiers:

- |                                   |                                |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| a. <i>absurdly</i> fussy          | i. <i>amazingly</i> calm       |
| b. <i>awfully</i> sorry           | j. <i>deeply</i> concerned     |
| c. <i>downright</i> ridiculous    | k. <i>entirely</i> free        |
| d. <i>extremely</i> dangerous     | l. <i>highly</i> intelligent   |
| e. <i>irretrievably</i> dangerous | m. <i>perfectly</i> reasonable |
| f. <i>sharply</i> critical        | n. <i>strikingly</i> handsome  |
| g. <i>terribly</i> nervous        | o. <i>too</i> bright           |
| h. <i>totally</i> anonymous       | p. <i>unbelievably</i> smart   |

Biber et al. (1999: 554-555) distinguish further subtypes of amplifiers:

- Amplifiers modifying gradable adjectives and indicating degrees on a scale, such as *more*, *very*, *so*, *too*, and *extremely*, e.g.

- a. *Our dentist was very good.*
- b. *We both thought you were marvelous. And so kind to let us come to the party afterwards.*
- Amplifiers indicating an endpoint on a scale, such as *totally*, *absolutely* and *quite* (in the sense of ‘completely’), e.g.
  - a. *But snow and ice accumulate in a totally different way from sediment.*
  - b. *Completely cold and unemotional.*
- Manner adverbs used as amplifiers, e.g.
  - a. *New York’s an awfully safe place.*
  - b. *And Carl was perfectly awful.*
- *How* used as an amplifier, e.g.
  - a. *How cruel!*
  - b. *How ironic that Hays is launching one of the biggest non-privatisation share offers to the public at a time when the party is in trouble.*

*How* "typically introduces ironic comments in conversation" if used as an amplifier (Biber et al. 1999: 555), as can be seen in the example below:

A: *This guy came reeling down the hallway completely plastered, uh, and the manager told me, oh, don't worry about him. He lives here, but he's completely harmless, and he sits out front, on the grass, right in front of the door to my apartment and drinks.*

B: *How lovely.*

Some adjectives can lose their literal meaning and be used as amplifiers. These are, however, "restricted to a small set of lexical items" (Quirk et al. 1985: 447) (exx a-c below).

- a. *dead tired/drunk/serious*
- b. *fast asleep*
- c. *wide awake*

The choice of the amplifier is also dependent on register. Some amplifiers are typical of informal speech (exx a-e below). Biber et al. (1999:543) state, though, that "only AmE conversation uses *real* with a variety of adjectives."

- a. *real nice*
- b. *plain silly*
- c. *awful good*
- d. *mighty helpful*
- e. *That's sure kind of you.*

*Any* and *that* can also be used as amplifiers in informal speech, mostly in non-assertive contexts, e.g.

- a. *Is the team any different from last year?*
- b. *It's not that unusual for women nowadays to join the police force, is it?*

Downtoners, on the other hand, decrease the intensity of the modified adjective, which means that they "scale downwards from an assumed norm" (Quirk et al. 1985: 445), as in *I was almost late* compared with *I was late*. Other examples of downtoners listed by Quirk et al. (ibid.) are given in exx a-l below.

- a. *a bit dull*
- b. *almost impossible*
- c. *fairly small*
- d. *nearly dark*
- e. *quite normal*
- f. *relatively small*
- g. *a little extravagant*
- h. *barely intelligible*
- i. *hardly noticeable*
- j. *pretty rare*
- k. *rather late*
- l. *somewhat uneasy*

Biber et al. (1999: 555-556) further distinguish:

- Downtoners modifying gradable adjectives and indicating degrees on a scale, such as *less*, *slightly*, *somewhat*, *rather* and *quite* (in the sense ‘to some extent’):
  - a. *A slightly cold start gave way to wonderful contrasts of feeling.*
  - b. *Consequently, Marx often uses the term *Klass* in a somewhat cavalier fashion.*
  
- Other degree adverbs indicating a lesser degree in terms of falling short of the endpoint on a scale, such as *almost*, *nearly*, and *pretty*: *Mr Deane's glass is almost empty.*

As shown above, *quite* can have two different meanings, i.e. ‘absolutely, completely’, in which case it is an amplifier, or ‘fairly, rather’ as a downtoner (Quirk et al. 1985: 446). Biber et al. (1999: 556) note that the amplifier usually occurs with non-gradable adjectives, and the downtoner with gradable adjectives. However, there is a number of adjectives with which the pre-modifying *quite* can be understood in either way.

Although *fairly*, *pretty* and *rather* can all be used as downtoners, their uses differ. *Fairly* is typically restricted to modifying adjectives which denote "a desirable quality" (Quirk et al. 1985: 446). "*Pretty* is the most informal and strongest of the three" and *rather* is the only one that can intensify adjectives in comparative form and *too*-constructions (ibid.).

## 2.2 More recent studies on intensifiers

Intensifiers have been attributed a key role in communication (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003: 258), since they are "a vehicle of praising, persuading, insulting, and generally influencing the listener's reception of the message" (Partington 1993: 178). That is one of the reasons why they have been of interest to a large number of linguistic studies.

Another reason for this might be that "in theory [they] form an open set, in the sense that the creation of intensifiers is a creative process – new ones can be coined at any time" (Partington 1993: 179-180). Indeed, intensifiers are subject to quite a fast change and very interesting semantic developments (Ito and

Tagliamonte 2003: 257). Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010: 255-256) specify that there are two categories of intensifiers: "a well-established closed class, such as *very*, *much* and *well*, as well as an open word-class, such as *totally*, *absolutely* and *highly*". Apart from expanding the open class of adverbs, another source of innovation are different word classes, such as quantifiers (*all*) and adjectives (*pure*). Martínez and Pertejo (2014: 213) also stress that the "competitive and recycling nature of intensifiers is characteristic of spoken language".

Partington (1993: 188) also mentions an interesting point based on Bolinger's argument, namely that "any adverb, placed in a submodifying position, will be interpreted as having an intensifying function in addition to its descriptive meaning". This may be exemplified by unusual combinations of an adverb and an adjective, such as *horribly articulate* or *excruciatingly gaudy*. It is the unpredictability of the combination that makes the phrase more emphatic. Partington (1993: 188-189) argues that "the sheer novelty of the collocation is likely to make it more intensifying than a predictable one... The concept of literary cliché is bound up with predictability of collocation", which supports the claim about speakers innovating intensifiers in order to be original and thus, "[t]he system of English intensifiers is... a locus of abundant variation and change" (Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010: 255).

According to Stoffel (1901: 2; cited in Ito and Tagliamonte 2003: 258)<sup>1</sup> the meaning of certain adverbs is constantly becoming weaker and less emphatic and therefore new ones have to appear to substitute them. In other words, the reason for the appearance of new intensifiers is that the old ones no longer feel adequate.

Another impulse for speakers to create new intensifiers is described by Peters (1994: 271; cited in Ito and Tagliamonte 2003: 257), namely their "desire to be 'original', to demonstrate their verbal skills, and to capture the attention of their audience". In addition, intensifiers are often used as a symbol of in-group membership. However, the use of a certain intensifier may spread to other groups within the speech community, and consequently there has to appear a new intensifying item that will be truly typical of a specific group. As a result, intensifiers have a tendency to change at a rather rapid pace - "they are subject to fashion" (*ibid.*).

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<sup>1</sup> Stoffel, Cornelis (1901). *Intensives and down-toners*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter.

It has also been of great interest to find out where the change usually originates. Several authors have attributed the extensive use and innovation of intensifiers to women. Jespersen (1922: 250) wrote that "the fondness of women for hyperbole will very often lead the fashion with regard to adverbs of intensity, and these are very often used with disregard of their proper meaning", by which he means expressions like *awfully pretty* or *terribly nice*. On the other hand, Martínez and Pertejo (2014: 211) argue that "teenagers are great innovators in their use of language" and they have a "tendency to play with language and to be lexically creative". Among other things, they also mention "particular ways of intensifying language" as a part of the lexical innovations of teenagers.

### 2.2.1 Delexicalisation

Adverbial intensifiers are a good example of the result of delexicalisation, one of the processes of grammaticalisation in language. Delexicalisation is "the reduction of the independent lexical content of a word, or group of words, so that it comes to fulfill a particular function but has no meaning apart from this to contribute to the phrase in which it occurs" (Partington 1993: 183). In the case of intensifiers Partington (*ibid.*: 181) describes it more precisely as a "modal-to-intensifier shift". A number of lexical items which are today used merely as intensifiers used to have "some modal semantic content, through which speakers comment on their assessment of the truth of the matter under discussion or vouch for the sincerity of their words" (*ibid.*). However, their semantic content weakened over time, and they began to be used as expressions of emphasis, often in combination with attributive adjectives, and thus became adverbs. Moreover, they were further delexicalised to be used with predicative adjectives and developed into intensifiers, so that their original meaning was lost (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003: 261).

A typical example is one of the most frequent intensifiers nowadays, *very*. The original meaning of *very* was 'true' or 'real', however, after it underwent the sequence of changes previously described, it began to be used merely to intensify other items and the original semantic content of truth has disappeared (*ibid.*). It is important to note that some intensifiers can still function both ways. "Words like *really*, *truly*, and to some extent *certainly*, when used as sentence adverbs, maintain faith with their obvious modal origins" (Partington 1993: 182), which is shown in exx a-b below.

- a. *Really*, I could hear her thinking.
- b. *Truly*, the British race is the finest on earth, Haig thought ... (ibid.)

However, when these adverbs modify an adjective, they are usually perceived as intensifiers, as shown in exx c-e below.

- c. When the horsetail is *really* hot, wrap it up ...
- d. What a *truly* hateful man you are.
- e. Oh, by all means. How very kind, how *truly* thoughtful. (ibid.)

This proves that the modal-to-intensifier shift is not merely a diachronic, but also a synchronic phenomenon (ibid.).

Partington (1993: 183) also comments on the correlation between the degree of delexicalisation of an intensifier and its potential to collocate with different items. These two characteristics are closely linked, and it is apparent that "the more delexicalised an intensifier is, the more widely it collocates" (ibid.). The relationship can, however, also be perceived from the opposite point of view, namely that "once a submodifier begins to collocate more and more widely, it automatically loses the independent lexical content it once had". Partington therefore assumes that these two phenomena, degree of delexicalisation and width of collocation, are in fact one and the same (ibid.).

## **2.2.2 Socio-linguistic characteristics**

The objective of many studies has been the connection between the socio-linguistic characteristics of the speakers and their use of intensifiers. The variables studied include age, gender, social background, dialect, etc.

### **2.2.2.1 Age**

Age especially seems to be a very important distinguishing criterion with respect to intensifiers. As mentioned before, younger generations and teenagers have a tendency to create new intensifiers. The research of Martínez and Pertejo (2014: 230) showed that "English teenagers use strategies of their own to intensify

language, and that on many occasions these differ greatly from those typical of adults". Stenström, Andersen and Hasund (2002: 141) also state that "teenagers and adults do not use the same set of intensifiers; nor do they use the ones they have in common to the same extent".

Both of these studies show that adults in fact use intensifiers much more often than teenagers<sup>2</sup>, except for *really*, *so* and *well* (Martínez and Pertejo 2014: 218). There was a particularly striking difference in the case of *-ly* adverbs, such as *absolutely* or *extremely*, which is a result of two factors. Firstly, these adverbs are typical of formal language and therefore do not fit "the spontaneity of youth interactions". Secondly, teenagers tend to use taboo and swear words as a means of intensification much more often than adults; such intensifiers can sometimes function "as markers of in-group solidarity and identity, and possibly also as a sign of rebellion against the adult world and the establishment" (ibid.). The study of Xiao and Tao<sup>3</sup> on the *British National Corpus* (BNC) also confirms that teenagers have a smaller inventory of intensifiers and speakers with higher level of education use amplifiers more frequently (Martínez and Pertejo 2014: 214). On the other hand, unlike adults, teenagers have enriched their repertoire by using *right* and *well* as adjective intensifiers and some of them have a tendency to use *enough* in premodifying position, instead of as a postmodifying intensifier (Stenström, Andersen and Hasund 2002: 142).

The more recent study of Fuchs (2017), which compares the two versions of the spoken BNC from 1994 and 2014, also comments on the difference between age groups with respect to the frequency of using intensifiers, and it might contradict the aforementioned conclusions. Its results show that in 1994 younger speakers of both genders generally used intensifiers more than older ones, but in 2014 the trend changed with females. While younger male speakers still show a higher frequency in using intensifiers than older males, female speakers between the age of 30 and 60 display a drop in frequency of intensifiers compared to the other age groups (Fuchs 2017: 356-357). It is, however, difficult to claim with certainty that this study contradicts the older ones, since it puts speakers of the age

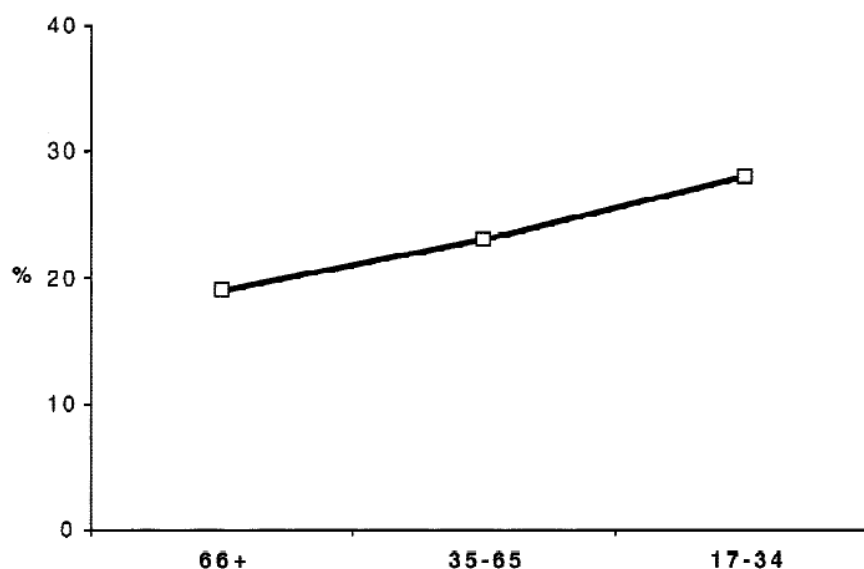
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<sup>2</sup> According to Stenström, Andersen and Hasund (2002: 141) adults use intensifiers twice as frequently as teenagers.

<sup>3</sup> Xiao, R. & H. Tao (2007) "A corpus-based sociolinguistic study of amplifiers in British English." *Sociolinguistic Studies* 1(2), 241–273.



up to 29 into one category and does not separate teenagers as an individual age group. The study of Ito and Tagliamonte (2003: 264) analysing the York English corpus also mentions that "the frequency of intensification is gradually increasing from the oldest to the youngest speakers", which is shown in Figure 1<sup>4</sup>.



*Figure 1: Overall distribution of intensification by age*  
(Ito and Tagliamonte 2003: 265)

#### 2.2.2.2 Gender

As was already mentioned, women have been extensively associated with the use of intensifiers for a long time. Not only have female speakers been suggested as the source of language change concerning intensifiers, but they are also often said to use intensifiers much more frequently than men. These expectations usually rely on traditional stereotypes and generalisations concerning gender, which characterise women as "indirect, conciliatory, facilitative, collaborative, person-oriented and affectively oriented", while men are believed to be "direct, aggressive, competitive, autonomous, task-oriented and referentially oriented" (Fuchs 2017: 347). However, these characteristics are no longer seen as precise or fitting in every situation and "it has become more acceptable for men to perform in social roles

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<sup>4</sup>Ito, R. and S. Tagliamonte (2003) "Well Weird, Right Dodgy, Very Strange, Really Cool: Layering and Recycling in English Intensifiers." *Language in Society* 32, 265.

traditionally associated with women and vice versa" (ibid.), which is probably one of the factors contributing to the reduction of differences between the language of men and women.

Nonetheless, gender is still studied as a crucial distinguishing linguistic variable, and the use of intensifiers is one of the frequently discussed topics associated with it. Several studies have tried to confirm or contradict the earlier assertion that women use intensifiers more than men. There is not a unanimous agreement on this topic and individual studies have ended up with different results, which is presumably due to differences in dialects and small amount of data available (Fuchs 2017: 350). The most extensive material was used by Xiao and Tao (2007). They studied the Spoken BNC1994 and came to the conclusion that female speakers generally use intensifiers more frequently than male speakers (Fuchs 2017: 350). They also paid closer attention to amplifiers and to how men and women differ in their use. The results show that men have a tendency to prefer maximisers while women use boosters more often (Martínez and Pertejo 2014: 214).

Fuchs (2017) took the study of Xiao and Tao (2007) as a basis for his article comparing the two versions of the Spoken BNC from 1994 and 2014. He analysed to what extent the use of intensifiers is dependent on gender combined with other variables, such as age, social class and dialect. The results show that "male speakers across all social classes and age groups and at both time points [used] fewer intensifiers than female speakers, though some of the differences are not statistically significant" (Fuchs 2017: 356). More specifically, in 1994 men used 80% of the number of intensifiers used by women. "By 2014, the gender difference has increased in the upper and working, but somewhat decreased in the middle class" to the extent of not being significant anymore (ibid.). Gender was also proved to have the most consistent effect on the way Britons use intensifiers in their private conversations. All in all, "male speakers are more likely than not to use fewer intensifiers than female speakers of the same age or social class" (Fuchs 2017: 361), a claim also supported by the study of Hessner and Gawlitzek (2017: 420). The study by Fuchs further shows that although these gender-based differences are significant in almost all age groups, they are "greatest for young speakers and tend to diminish as they get older" (Fuchs 2017: 356-362).

Hessner and Gawlitzek (2017: 416-7) also focused on the distinction between amplifiers and downtoners and examined whether men and women differ in the use of these two types of intensifiers. According to their results, in all age groups women generally use amplifiers more frequently than men and the men's usage of amplifiers decreases with age, except for the age group 19-29. However, the situation is quite different with downtoners. Apart from the oldest age group, men generally use downtoners more often than women of the same age. Though this is an interesting result, their study still supports the claim that overall female speakers use intensifiers more frequently than male speakers (ibid.: 420).

Stenström et al. (2002) address the language of teenagers in their study and also make some distinctions between male and female speakers of this age group. Their results also show that generally girls use intensifiers more than boys (ibid.: 143). Additionally, they differ in terms of which specific intensifiers they are more likely to use. Boys use the strongest ones, which is to say "either in the form of adverbs (*extremely angry, completely paralytic, absolutely stupid*) or taboo words (*bloody mean, fucking weird*)" (ibid.). The intensifier *totally* is an exception in being more frequently used by girls. Boys furthermore tend to use *right, well* and premodifying *enough* in the function of intensifiers more than girls. Finally, both girls and boys have a predilection to use *really* as an intensifier, but this applies especially to girls (ibid.: 139).

Although the study of gender as a factor influencing the usage of intensifiers has brought a number of interesting and important results, Fuchs (2017: 364) stresses that its importance should not be overstated. Contradicting the popular idea that "gender-based differences are greater than those relating to other variables", Fuchs claims that "differences based on social class and age were at least as great as those found for gender" (Fuchs 2017: 364).

### **2.2.3 Analysis of specific intensifiers**

Several studies have addressed the usage of specific intensifiers, including the most frequent ones, such as *very*, or newer intensifiers mostly used by teenagers, e.g. *enough* in premodifying position. They have studied the degree of delexicalisation of the intensifiers, their width of collocation, etc.

### 2.2.3.1 *Very and really*

*Very* has been proved to be the most popular intensifier in the English language (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003: 264-265). The reason for this is that it has undergone the process of delexicalisation, therefore it "combines very widely... and is also the intensifier with the least independent lexical content" (Partington 1993: 183). However, in recent years *very* has been competed by *really*, an intensifier typical for colloquial conversation in American English (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003: 265) and "the teenagers' favourite intensifier" (Stenström et al. 2002: 147). Although Ito and Tagliamonte (2003: 265) claim at the beginning of their study that "in British English, *really* has not received much attention", they also found out that it is the second most popular intensifier in York, especially among the younger speakers under the age of 35. Hessner and Gawlitzek (2017: 418) also confirm that in the Spoken BNC 2014 the usage of *really* generally decreases with increasing age.

Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010: 267) suggest that already in the 1990s "the younger speakers have started to lead a change away from *very* and towards *really*". The data from 2007/8 proves that *really* continues to increase in popularity, although it has not yet surpassed *very* (ibid.: 269-270). Stenström et al. (2002: 151) also found out that the variant *real* is on its way to become used in British English, at least among teenagers. It is interesting that Biber et al. (1999: 543) describe *real* as very common in American English conversation, but rare as a modifier of adjectives in British English. According to Stenström et al. (2002: 151) this variant is more popular among (upper) middle class teenagers, which implies that "(upper) middle-class girls and boys are more open to, or maybe more exposed to, American usage than lower-class boys and girls".

The study of Ito and Tagliamonte (2003: 273), however, proves that *very* still collocates more widely, because it is much further in the process of delexicalisation than *really*. Indeed, intensification is the main function of *very* in present-day English, while *really* still retains its original modal meaning 'truly'.

### 2.2.3.2 *Absolutely and totally*

Both the amplifiers *absolutely* and *totally* belong to the subtype of maximisers, which means that they "can denote the upper extreme of the scale" (Quirk et al. 1985: 590). They typically tend to collocate with adjectives that "do

not admit grading but contain a notion of extreme or absolute degree", such as *absolutely terrifying* (Martínez and Pertejo 2014: 223). *Absolutely* often occurs with adjectives that are "emotionally loaded", whether it is a positive or a negative emotion (ibid.). However, there is a tendency for it to collocate slightly more with negative adjectives, according to Martínez and Pertejo (ibid.: 231). An analysis of the Spoken BNC 2014 showed, nonetheless, that there is balance between positive and negative adjectives intensified by *absolutely* (Aijmer<sup>5</sup>).

The situation is similar with the intensifier *totally*. The adjectives it frequently collocates with often contain a negative prefix (e.g. *in-*, *un-*, *anti-*) or suffix (e.g. *-less*), as shown in exx. a-c below. In these cases the intensifier "strengthen[s] the negative meaning of the message conveyed" (Martínez and Pertejo 2014: 227). Moreover, teenagers often combine it with negative slang words, particularly the three past participles *fucked*, *pissed* and *tarted*, as found in COLT (*The Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language*) from 1993. *Totally* is undergoing the process of delexicalisation; apart from intensifier, it has also begun to fulfil other functions, such as 'hedge' or a 'response item' (ibid.: 215).

- a. totally *inadequate*
- b. totally *incomprehensible*
- c. totally *unreliable* (ibid.: 228)

### 2.2.3.3 *Highly, heavily and thoroughly*

The first two of these 'spatio-physical words', *highly* and *heavily*, used to describe actual physical height and heaviness. However, after the process of delexicalisation, they began to fulfil the function of intensifiers and their meaning is more or less the same: "a lot of or a large amount of" (Partington 1993: 184). While *highly* really did lose its original meaning and today is mostly found in fixed collocations, some of the adjectives combined with *heavily* show that it still retains some of its connection to weight. Its collocations include e.g. *heavily clad* or *heavily laden*. Thus, it is obvious that *heavily* "has moved less far along the road of delexicalisation" (ibid.: 185).

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<sup>5</sup> Aijmer, K. *Absolutely in colloquial English – variation and change* [lecture]. Prague: Charles University, 11 April 2018.

*Thoroughly*, similarly, used to carry the meaning of penetration. As an intensifier nowadays, it is mostly used in the sense of completely, as in *thoroughly inaccessible*. On the other hand, a lot of the adjectives it collocates with have to do with water and washing, e.g. *thoroughly wet*. Emotions are also frequently premodified by this intensifier, as in *thoroughly annoyed* or *thoroughly confused*. Both these groups of adjectives contain an echo of the older meaning of *thoroughly*, since both "penetrate 'through and through'" (Partington 1993: 185-186).

#### **2.2.3.4 Right, well and enough**

The study of Stenström et al. (2002: 144-153) discovered quite unusual usage of *right*, *well* and *enough* in premodifying position as intensifiers of adjectives, mostly among teenagers. However, it is sometimes difficult to determine what the intensifiers modify. They can be found before adjectives premodifying a noun, as in *Wendy said enough bad things* or *All my parents' mates have a right good laugh*. By merely reading the transcript, it is not possible to decide whether the modified item is the adjective (*enough bad, right good*) or the rest of the noun phrase (*enough bad things, right good laugh*). In order to determine this, it is necessary to listen to the sound track and find out which item is stressed.

All the instances of *enough* premodifying an adjective were found among the youngest teenagers from the studied corpus. The conversations where it occurred were also marked by other non-standard features, such as the missing auxiliary verb *do* in a question (*What schools she go to?*) or double negation (*Don't say nuffink to him though.*). In any case, this usage of *enough* was largely missing among adults in the BNC (Stenström et al. 2002: 144-147). *Right* as an intensifier could be another influence of American English, since OED (Oxford English Dictionary) presents this usage as "chiefly U.S." (1989: vol.XIII, 930; cited in Stenström et al. 2002: 152). On the other hand, according to *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (1984: 899; cited in Stenström et al. 2002: 153) it is either British English slang or old use meaning 'very'.

The intensifier *well* has been discovered to be mostly used by teenage male speakers (Stenström et al. 2002: 155-156). Teenagers are generally much more likely to use this intensifier with a full-status adjective than adults from the BNC, which "indicates that they are a step ahead of the adult speakers; the teenagers seem

to treat *well* as an equivalent of *very*" (ibid.: 158). Moreover, according to one of the conversations from the studied corpus, the teenage speakers "realize that their use of *well* is not accepted by the parent generation and probably not by society as large" (ibid.). The "'traditional and accepted' combinations" with *well* include *well able*, *well aware*, and *well worth/worthy* (ibid.).

### 3 Material and method

#### 3.1 Material

The source material selected for the present research was the Spoken British National Corpus 2014. The reason for this specific corpus being selected was its large size, coverage of present-day informal spoken British English and public access. The Spoken BNC 2014 contains “11.5 million words of transcribed content featuring 668 speakers”, recorded in the years 2012-2016 (Love et al. 2017: 319-20). The corpus is publicly accessible via Lancaster University’s *CQPweb* (<https://cqpweb.lancs.ac.uk/usr/index.php>). One of the main objectives of the authors of the corpus was to gather data exclusively from informal conversations after noticing that there was greater use as well as demand for this kind of material. Instead of distributing special recording equipment, the speakers were instructed to record their conversations using their own devices (smartphones), which required no previous training. By choosing this strategy, the authors believe they facilitated an opportunistic approach to data collection for the speakers (ibid.: 324-5).

Another important objective of the Spoken BNC 2014 was to create a balanced corpus with relatively similar number of speakers in each demographic category<sup>6</sup>. All the available data was accepted, but also monitored for imbalances. If there began to occur a lack of speakers in any of the demographic categories, the specific groups were targeted and encouraged to participate (ibid.:227).

All the speakers provided their own metadata: age, gender, accent/dialect, occupation, nationality, birthplace, current location, duration of stay there, mother tongue, most influential country on language, additional languages and education level (ibid.: 329-333).

#### 3.2 Methodology

For the purpose of identifying the most frequent intensifiers of adjectives, first, all the adjectives were filtered from the Spoken BNC 2014. They were sorted by 1 Left position. A frequency list of the part of speech tags occurring before the adjectives was compiled. This list was then checked manually in order to determine which parts of speech may contain intensifiers. In the present study we decided to focus solely on single-word intensifiers, therefore multiple-word intensifiers, such

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<sup>6</sup> The lack of such balance has been criticised in the case of the Spoken BNC 1994.



as *a bit*, *a little*, *kind of*, *sort of* etc., as shown in exx a-d below, were excluded from the list. On the other hand, *kinda*, the more colloquial version of the diminisher *kind of* was maintained, since it is a single-word intensifier, which is used fairly often according to the frequency list.

We also decided to exclude those intensifiers that are in the category of comparative degree adverbs or superlative degree adverbs, such as *less* and *most* in exx e-f below. Furthermore, *wh-* degree adverbs, such as *how* in ex g, were also excluded, as there is not much innovation expected in either of these categories. After considering all these restrictions, it was concluded that intensifiers of adjectives can be found under three different POS-tags, namely RR (general adverb), RG (degree adverb) and JJ (general adjective).

- a. it's not is it not th- it just is it is *a bit* weird ? (S23A, 533)
- b. ...and then you can get a block of iron which is *a little* shiny (S24D 339)
- c. ...you can't taste the kale and it's just *kind of* tangy from the kiwi (S23A 1022)
- d. ...he was a real meat fella you know *sort of* big (SZNG 853)
- e. it's *less* disturbing than the llamas in hats (SMGY 1224)
- f. right what would you say over the years was the *most* satisfying project you worked on? (SQ63 181)
- g. *how* funny oh that's good (STW7 417)

A new query “(\_RR|\_RG|\_JJ)”<sup>7</sup> searching for all the potential intensifiers was formulated. The concordances comprising the intensifiers were afterwards sorted on the 1 Right position and only the concordances where they were immediately followed by an adjective were chosen. This action, however, uses a lot of disk space, as the query returned more than 1,000,000 instances. Hence the results were thinned with random selection method from the original, 1,114,618 matches to 1,000,000 matches.

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<sup>7</sup> A query “(\_RR|\_RG|\_JJ) \_JJ\*” searching for all instances of potential intensifiers followed by an adjective did not prove applicable. The query returned matches containing an adjective phrase with a modifier, such as *slightly orange*, *really nice* or *pretty horrible*. Therefore, the frequency breakdown resulted in a frequency list of the whole adjective phrases. However, the aim was to obtain a frequency list of the modifiers only, hence a different query had to be used, “(\_RR|\_RG|\_JJ)”.

The next step was to perform a frequency breakdown on the Node position in order to obtain a list of all the potential intensifiers of adjectives sorted by frequency. Nonetheless, as shown in Table 1 below, not all these items can actually function as intensifiers of adjectives. The concordance of each modifier was therefore tested manually in order to select solely those which can perform the function of an intensifier of adjectives (in bold in Table 1 below) until a list comprising 105 items was compiled.<sup>8</sup>

The number of occurrences of the selected adverbs and adjectives (as illustrated by the initial 50 examples) does not indicate their use as intensifiers. There are cases when the potential intensifier occurs before an adjective but does not intensify it (e.g. the discourse marker use of *absolutely*: *yes absolutely* (S28F 1386)). As a result, in some instances the actual number of adverbs/adjectives with an intensifying function constitutes merely a fraction of what the frequency list states. The frequency list of pre-adjectival adverbs and adjectives may therefore serve merely as a starting point of more detailed examination of intensifiers.

First, each of the adverbs and adjectives was again entered into a query followed by an adjective (e.g. “really \_JJ\*”), and the number of its intensifying uses was counted manually. In the case of the adverbs/adjectives whose frequency in pre-adjectival position exceeded 50, the number was estimated on the basis of a random sample of 50 instances, as shown in Table 2 below. In the case of the adverbs/adjectives with a frequency in pre-adjectival position of 50 and below the actual number of intensifiers is stated. The relative frequency per 1,000,000 words was subsequently counted for each adverb/adjective and the list of the 105 most frequent intensifiers was compiled (see Table 3 in Section 4.1).

In the following chapter, examples from the Spoken BNC 2014 are often used to illustrate the described phenomena. All such examples are numbered and marked by their filename from the corpus.

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<sup>8</sup> 666 pre-adjectival adverbs and adjectives from the original frequency list were needed to compile the list.

No.	Search result	No. of occurrences
<b>1</b>	<b>really</b>	<b>15502</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>very</b>	<b>11412</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>so</b>	<b>9599</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>quite</b>	<b>7794</b>
5	like	4534
6	too	3460
7	just	2601
<b>8</b>	<b>pretty</b>	<b>2487</b>
9	as	1962
<b>10</b>	<b>that</b>	<b>1244</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>absolutely</b>	<b>850</b>
12	okay	718
13	good	696
<b>14</b>	<b>well</b>	<b>679</b>
15	big	649
16	nice	648
<b>17</b>	<b>fucking</b>	<b>645</b>
<b>18</b>	<b>completely</b>	<b>643</b>
19	still	567
<b>20</b>	<b>right</b>	<b>550</b>
21	little	486
22	always	410
23	only	389
24	actually	359
<b>25</b>	<b>fairly</b>	<b>354</b>
26	great	321
<b>27</b>	<b>slightly</b>	<b>311</b>
28	probably	293
<b>29</b>	<b>totally</b>	<b>276</b>
30	other	236
<b>31</b>	<b>particularly</b>	<b>232</b>
32	lovely	230
<b>33</b>	<b>real</b>	<b>226</b>
<b>34</b>	<b>rather</b>	<b>223</b>
35	even	213
36	tiny	186
37	long	184
<b>38</b>	<b>whole</b>	<b>181</b>
<b>39</b>	<b>proper</b>	<b>180</b>
<b>40</b>	<b>super</b>	<b>177</b>

<b>41</b>	<b>bloody</b>	<b>174</b>
42	old	170
43	fine	166
44	sorry	156
<b>45</b>	<b>dead</b>	<b>154</b>
46	alright	150
<b>47</b>	<b>perfectly</b>	<b>148</b>
48	also	141
<b>49</b>	<b>extremely</b>	<b>138</b>
50	new	136

*Table 1: The first 50 pre-adjectival adverbs and adjectives ranked by frequency (potential intensifiers are highlighted in bold)*

	No. of adv/adj in pre-adjectival position	No. of intensifiers within the first 50 instances (random order)	Expected <sup>9</sup> /actual no. of intensifiers in the corpus	No. of intensifiers per 1,000,000 words <sup>10</sup>
	p	n	$e = (n \times p) : 50$	$f = (e \times 1\,000\,000) : 11\,422\,617$
really	15 502	45	13 952	1 221.4
highly	48	-	46	4.1

*Table 2: The estimated frequency of intensifiers per 1,000,000 words*

<sup>9</sup> In the case of adverbs/adjectives whose frequency in pre-adjectival position exceeded 50.

<sup>10</sup> The size of the corpus used is 11,422,617 tokens.

## 4 Analysis

### 4.1 The most frequent intensifiers of adjectives in the Spoken BNC 2014

One of the aims of the present study was to create a list of the most popular adjectival intensifiers in spoken British English based on the material from the Spoken BNC 2014. Table 3 shows a list of the 105 most frequently used intensifiers resulting from the aforementioned method of analysis. The table also includes the frequency per million words for each of the intensifiers and an example of its use in a sentence from the corpus.

*Really*, which was claimed by Ito and Tagliamonte (2003: 265) not to have received much attention in British English, currently seems to be the most popular intensifier. With its frequency of usage it has even surpassed the second most popular intensifier *very*. This might be due to the fact that *really* as an intensifier generally has a more colloquial status, therefore its high occurrence in informal spoken communication is natural. The variant *real*, which according to Biber et al. (1999: 543) is rare as a modifier of adjectives in British English, can also be found among the most frequently occurring intensifiers in the list.

Furthermore, it is interesting that there are multiple examples of a simple adjectival variant functioning as an intensifier alongside the corresponding adverb (with the adverbial suffix), such as *pure* alongside *purely*, *terrible* and *terribly*, *particular* and *particularly*, etc. As mentioned before, it has become quite common to use the adjectival variant *real* instead of the adverb *really* as an intensifier. When adjectives such as *terrible* occur before another adjective, it is much more likely a mere coordination of the two. However, a close analysis of the examples proved that these adjectives clearly have an intensifying function at least in a few cases, therefore they must be included in the list.

Some of the less frequent intensifiers (marked by asterisk (\*)) have a very limited range of adjectival collocates, mostly reduced to a single adjective. These cases include: *deadly serious*, *whacking great*, *stunningly pretty/beautiful*, *smoking hot* and *burning hot*.

No.	Intensifier	Frequency per 1,000,000 words	Example
1.	really	1221.4	there's a burglar in taking a <i>really</i> long bath
2.	very	999	that man looks <i>very</i> scared
3.	so	773.1	I could be <i>so</i> mean in that situation...
4.	quite	682.3	now in Brighton it was <i>quite</i> easy to come by...
5.	pretty	217.7	either way it'd be <i>pretty</i> hilarious if the police arrived...
6.	absolutely	74.4	just happened to taste <i>absolutely</i> awful
7.	completely	55.2	that's a <i>completely</i> different language like
8.	fucking	47.4	it's <i>fucking</i> expensive in there
9.	fairly	31	but the chances are <i>fairly</i> low
10.	that	30.5	...but it's just like it's not <i>that</i> appealing
11.	slightly	26.6	I was <i>slightly</i> concerned for a second...
12.	totally	24.2	well I suppose if I'm <i>totally</i> honest...
13.	rather	18.7	the nether is a <i>rather</i> hellish place...
14.	particularly	17.9	he doesn't seem to buy them anything <i>particularly</i> special
15.	super	15	he was <i>super</i> excited
16.	real	14.6	including like the boxes of wine which are <i>real</i> cheap
17.	perfectly	13	yeah that's <i>perfectly</i> fine thank you
18.	bloody	12.8	...he's <i>bloody</i> useless
19.	extremely	12.1	when really she's <i>extremely</i> intelligent
20.	incredibly	11.6	and I I I erm I found it <i>incredibly</i> sad
21.	dead	10.8	...cos she always buys me <i>dead</i> nice things
22.	terribly	10.1	they are <i>terribly</i> suspicious
23.	kinda	9.7	snazzy means <i>kinda</i> fashionable
24.	almost	8.8	...I'm <i>almost</i> certain he's gonna propose to me...
25.	entirely	8.8	I'm not <i>entirely</i> sure how it goes...
26.	whole	7.3	it's ex- exactly that's a <i>whole</i> different thing
27.	proper	6.9	like one of the check men got <i>proper</i> grumpy...
28.	relatively	6.6	oh okay so it's <i>relatively</i> new
29.	massively	4.6	it was just <i>massively</i> distressing
30.	highly	4.1	Cos they're <i>highly</i> addictive though...
31.	reasonably	4.1	yeah I think that's been <i>reasonably</i> popular
32.	extra	3.9	it's like an <i>extra</i> special sauce
33.	nearly	3.5	are you <i>nearly</i> ready...
34.	jolly	3.1	...but it was <i>jolly</i> hard on the back
35.	fully	3.1	I am stupid like I know I'm <i>fully</i> aware...
36.	hugely	2.6	the last two summers have been <i>hugely</i> disappointing haven't they?
37.	overly	2.5	men don't get <i>overly</i> emotional

38.	well	2.4	I'm <i>well</i> aware of this
39.	amazingly	2.4	...but he was like an <i>amazingly</i> bad baseball player...
40.	seriously	2.3	his grandfather's <i>seriously</i> ill with cancer
41.	utterly	2.3	I mean I can't bear it myself I find it <i>utterly</i> irritating
42.	properly	2.2	do you think Darth Vader's <i>properly</i> evil though isn't he?
43.	mega	2.2	we're not <i>mega</i> rich by all means you know
44.	damn	2.2	why are llamas so <i>damn</i> cute?
45.	right	1.9	yeah he'll be <i>right</i> pleased he will won't he?
46.	genuinely	1.6	...I was <i>genuinely</i> desperate for shoes...
47.	horribly	1.6	this looks <i>horribly</i> complicated
48.	truly	1.4	they're not gonna be <i>truly</i> popular
49.	unbelievably	1.3	the pay is <i>unbelievably</i> low
50.	absolute	1.2	cos it's <i>absolute</i> horrible...
51.	much	1.1	I don't think that was <i>much</i> different to any other monarchy of that time
52.	any	1.1	like the first one on are they <i>any</i> good?
53.	blooming	1.1	...and you get a lot of sunshine but it's <i>blooming</i> cold...
54.	equally	1.1	I think it was Randolph Sutton who was <i>equally</i> famous...
55.	partly	1.1	because it's <i>partly</i> true
56.	awfully	1.1	...so I was thinking that's an <i>awfully</i> long time ...
57.	heavily	1.1	my sister laid on it when she was <i>heavily</i> pregnant obviously
58.	horrendously	1.1	it was <i>horrendously</i> funny
59.	crazy	0.9	...she wouldn't know how <i>crazy</i> inappropriate that w- is...
60.	deeply	0.9	mm they were <i>deeply</i> embarrassed because
61.	frigging	0.9	why does their pancake look <i>frigging</i> awesome?
62.	purely	0.9	is it <i>purely</i> financial then?
63.	virtually	0.9	...who's got really fair eyebrows that are <i>virtually</i> invisible anyway...
64.	awful	0.8	...it was an <i>awful</i> long time ago
65.	stupidly	0.8	yeah they are <i>stupidly</i> accurate these raids
66.	far	0.7	...you can't go <i>far</i> wrong with that for me
67.	especially	0.7	I think that's <i>especially</i> hot cayenne pepper...
68.	deadly*	0.7	it's the way they said it like <i>deadly</i> serious...
69.	exceptionally	0.7	I should be <i>exceptionally</i> happy
70.	insanely	0.7	I mean she looks <i>insanely</i> skinny
71.	whacking*	0.7	and er she'll always give them a <i>whacking</i> great tip as well
72.	extraordinarily	0.6	...you would've thought she was <i>extraordinarily</i> posh
73.	flipping	0.5	I mean you were <i>flipping</i> lucky...

74.	thoroughly	0.5	well it was <i>thoroughly</i> interesting
75.	moderately	0.5	er no no we've got some <i>moderately</i> decent stuff
76.	somewhat	0.5	I think their life was <i>somewhat</i> hectic...
77.	ultra	0.5	cos you can get these u- <i>ultra</i> slim hard drives
78.	mad	0.4	they're <i>mad</i> keen on it
79.	all	0.4	you are <i>all</i> mad
80.	pure	0.4	... but it'd be <i>pure</i> hot
81.	badly	0.4	....she's quite <i>badly</i> ill actually
82.	somehow	0.4	so it looks <i>somehow</i> similar to tadpoles
83.	doubly	0.4	it must've been <i>doubly</i> difficult for them
84.	fantastically	0.4	...the English language is a <i>fantastically</i> rich language...
85.	remarkably	0.4	and he was <i>remarkably</i> cheerful...
86.	roughly	0.4	... and it's <i>roughly</i> equitable size as well...
87.	distinctly	0.4	does it have a <i>distinctly</i> different sound to man folk
88.	exceedingly	0.4	er find you email <i>exceedingly</i> offensive...
89.	frantically	0.4	oh you will be leaving <i>frantically</i> early
90.	ludicrously	0.4	when I say young I mean <i>ludicrously</i> young
91.	majorly	0.4	it wasn't anything <i>majorly</i> interesting
92.	stunningly*	0.4	they were all really skinny very athletic not <i>stunningly</i> pretty but...
93.	tremendously	0.4	but she is <i>tremendously</i> energetic
94.	wildly	0.4	the goals that they set themselves are so <i>wildly</i> unrealistic
95.	bleeding	0.3	level of conversation stating the <i>bleeding</i> obvious...
96.	total	0.3	<i>total</i> weird film
97.	increasingly	0.3	...as people get <i>increasingly</i> desperate for money...
98.	mighty	0.3	like all like <i>mighty</i> sensible about the situation
99.	terrible	0.2	but Tes- Tesco's <i>terrible</i> shocking
100.	smoking*	0.2	and Monica Baccarin was just <i>smoking</i> hot
101.	strongly	0.2	just how <i>strongly</i> negative they are about...
102.	burning*	0.2	you picked up a <i>burning</i> hot...
103.	this	0.1	bet your folders aren't <i>this</i> neat
104.	particular	0.1	not that we'd be <i>particular</i> interested
105.	wicked	0.1	cos his <i>wicked</i> smart

Table 3: The most frequent intensifiers of adjectives in the Spoken BNC 2014



## 4.2 *Quite*

*Quite* is the fourth most frequently used intensifier in the Spoken BNC 2014. Its popularity is probably enhanced by the fact that it can function either as an amplifier or as a downtoner, as mentioned in section 2.1. Although it would be interesting and more precise for the purposes of the study, it is nearly impossible to distinguish these two meanings as two separate intensifiers. The high number of occurrences (over 8,000), which would have to be analysed manually, is the first reason. Moreover, in the vast majority of cases it is difficult to determine which meaning of *quite* the speaker had in mind, since it can be understood both ways and both meanings make sense. Therefore in the present study both possible meanings of *quite* were treated as one intensifier.

The following subsections will explore the usage of *quite* by the speakers in the corpus. The syntactic environment as well as the semantic preferences of the intensifier will be described, and based on these its degree of delexicalisation will be determined.

### 4.2.1 *Quite* – syntactic environment

The first aspect of the syntactic environment of an intensifier is whether it mostly collocates with adjectives in the predicative (ex. 1) or attributive function (ex. 2). The total number of hits where *quite* occurs before an adjective in the corpus is 8,706. The next step is to determine the number of cases where *quite* intensifies an adjective with the predicative function. Such adjective phrases must be preceded by a copular verb. A query was entered in the corpus looking for all the adjectives intensified by *quite* which are preceded by a copular verb: “({be}|{seem}|{become}|{look}|{get}|{feel}) quite \_JJ\*”<sup>11</sup>. This query returned 6,248 matches, which leads to the conclusion that *quite* pre-modifies predicative adjectives much more frequently than those with attributive function.

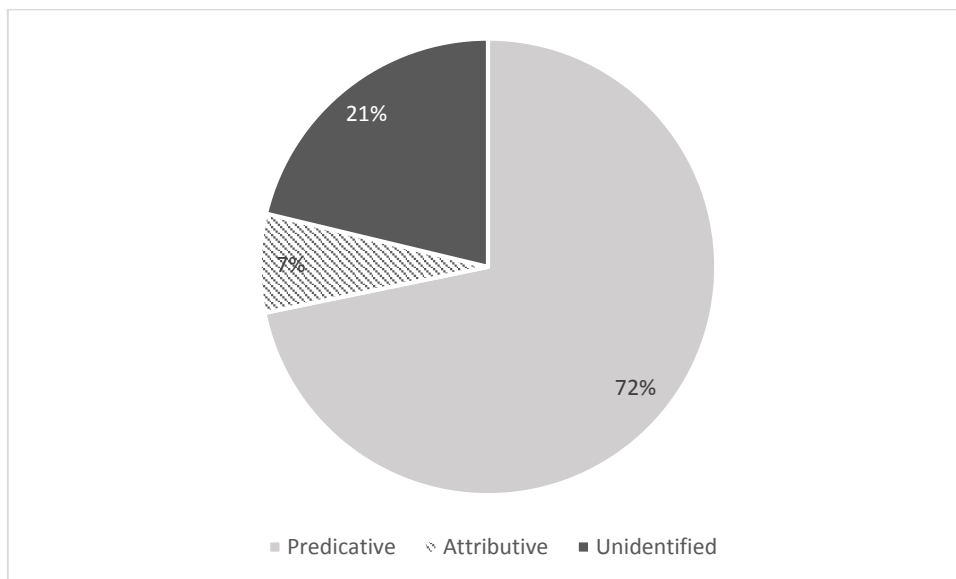
This was verified by searching for all the cases where *quite* pre-modifies an adjective with attributive function, which means that it has to be followed by a noun.

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<sup>11</sup> We realise that adjectives with attributive function can follow a copular verb as well, such as in *They were quite nice people*. A search for such cases was made entering the query “({be}|{seem}|{become}|{look}|{get}|{feel}) quite \_JJ\* \_N+”. The number of results, however, was so small (290) that we decided not to include it in the calculation.

The query “quite \_JJ\* \_N+” did indeed return merely 608 matches, which, however, leaves us with almost 2,000 uncategorised instances from the total of 8,706 hits. This is probably due to other tokens occurring in the sentences (underlined in the exemplified) which hindered their inclusion in the results (ex.3). The adjective phrase on its own may also constitute a sentence, such as in ex. 7. These instances represent predicative function of the adjective as well, despite there being no copular verb formally. Nevertheless, since the large number of these instances renders manual analysis quite impossible, and due to the fact that they represent only a fragment (21%) of the total number of the intensifying uses of *quite*, all these were categorised as *Unidentified*. Figure 2 represents the distribution.

- (1) It seemed quite popular (S355 1422)
- (2) ...they've got some quite interesting pictures of the area...(S33B 438)
- (3) See they are actually like quite comfortable if you put them on...(S23A 1804)



*Figure 2: Distribution of the intensifier quite pre-modifying predicative and attributive adjectives*

The conclusion nevertheless remained that *quite* most frequently intensifies adjectives with predicative function. This proves that the process of delexicalisation has gone very far in the case of *quite*, since it can freely occur with predicative

adjectives, which according to Ito and Tagliamonte (2003:261) is the final stage of the delexicalisation process.

To verify the above overall results, a detailed analysis of the syntactic functions of the adjective phrases containing the intensifier *quite* was performed on the basis of the first 100 concordances from the corpus displayed in random order. By manually checking all the examples it was concluded that adjective phrases with *quite* as an intensifier only fulfill two different syntactic functions in the sample. The first and clearly prevailing one is the complement of the subject after a copular verb (exx 4 and 5). There are instances where such an adjective phrase occurs on its own as a verbless adjectival sentence (ex. 7). The adjective phrase with the intensifier, nevertheless, still has the function of a subject complement in these sentences, despite there being no overt subject or copular verb<sup>12</sup>.

The second type of syntactic function the adjective phrase with the intensifier can fulfill is a modifier of noun (ex. 6). Though this function is quite typical of adjective phrases, in this particular research there were only two instances out of the total 100 where an adjective phrase with intensifying *quite* modified a noun. Figure 3 represents the distribution.

(4) It is *quite* Christmassy (SLNB 889)

(5) Cos she looked *quite* different (S2EF 754)

(6) I think they get *quite* good benefits from being with us (S2B5 342)

(7) *Quite* right (SKDX 1601)

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<sup>12</sup> The full sentence in ex. 6 would probably be *That is quite right*.

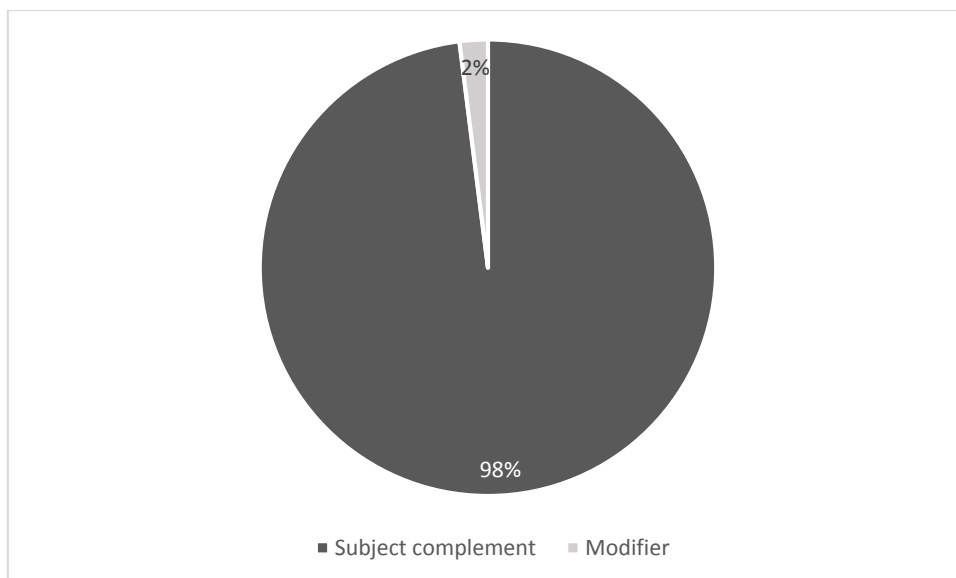


Figure 3: Distribution of syntactic functions fulfilled by adjective phrases with the intensifier *quite*

It is not uncommon to combine intensifiers into sequences in spoken communication. An adjective can be modified by multiple intensifiers, such as in ex. 8. Although they can combine relatively freely, there are certainly some preferences and each intensifier collocates with some much more frequently than others. This study will also examine this particular aspect of the syntactic environment of each intensifier in question. As it was previously concluded, intensifiers occurred under three different POS-tags in the studied corpus: RG, RR and JJ. A query was entered in the corpus searching for the intensifier *quite* preceded by one of these items: “(\_RR|\_RG|\_JJ) *quite*”. The results were subsequently sorted by the tokens on the position immediately following *quite* and the results were restricted to adjectives (JJ), so that only the instances where *quite* modifies an adjective were sorted. The last step was a frequency breakdown on the Node position creating a list of the most frequent adverbs and adjectives occurring before *quite*. Not all these, however, have the capability to function as an intensifier. The results were therefore checked manually in order to isolate those instances where it is clear that two intensifiers are combined.

The same method was then repeated only exchanging the order of *quite* and the other intensifier in the original query (“*quite* (\_RR|\_RG|\_JJ)”) in order to also retrieve the combinations where *quite* is the first intensifier of the two. Figure 4

represents the results.<sup>13</sup> There are relatively few types of combinations of *quite* with other intensifiers used by the speakers in the corpus, *really* being by far the most frequent one (ex.9). It is also interesting to note that *very* seems to be the only intensifier which may quite freely either precede or follow *quite* (exx 10 and 11)<sup>14</sup>.

- (8) Oh my god that's *so fucking cute* (S2W4 88)
- (9) The BBC ones are *really quite easy* to receive... (S2AX 41)
- (10) It's a brilliant film. It's *very quite sad* (SRFV 489)
- (11) It's *quite very funny*... (S8PW 676)

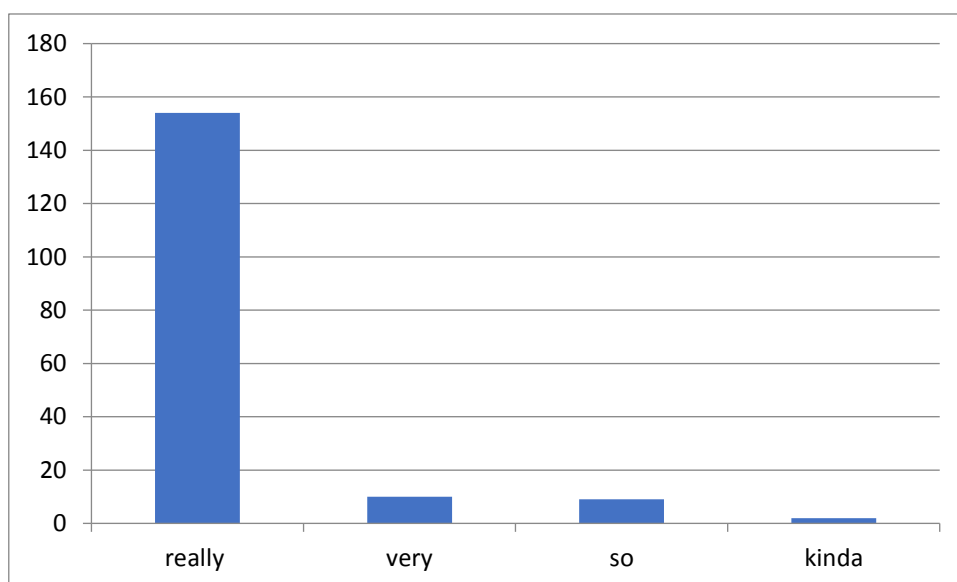


Figure 4: Distribution of intensifiers combining with *quite*

#### 4.2.2 *Quite* – semantic preferences

The following subsection will focus on the adjectives the intensifier *quite* collocates with in order to describe its semantic preferences. *Quite* pre-modifies 1,233 different types of adjectives in the corpus. *Table 4* shows an example of the 20 most frequent ones. Because of the large number of results overall a statistic was made based on the 50 most frequent adjectives whose number of occurrences is

<sup>13</sup> Only the combinations with number of occurrences higher than 1 were considered relevant.

<sup>14</sup> There are also instances in the corpus where *quite* is repeated twice by the speaker before an adjective. These, however, seem rather like hesitation or a break for the speaker to think further about what he/she is going to say, therefore the instances are not included in the results.

higher than 1. The adjectives were subsequently categorised as having a rather positive, negative or neutral connotation.

In the case of *quite*, most adjectives were categorised as neutral. The reason for this was either their not belonging to either of the categories (*different*, *common*), or quite the opposite, their capability of denoting both positive and neutral meaning depending on the context, such as *big*, *far* and *old* (exx. 12-17). Nevertheless, the majority of the remaining collocations are rather positive. As shown in Figure 5, 31% of the analysed adjectives clearly have a positive connotation, such as *nice*, *happy* or *clever* (exx. 18-20). Negative adjectives constitute merely 14% of the analysed sample (exx. 21 and 22).

No.	Adjective	Percent
1	good	9.6
2	nice	7.51
3	funny	3.69
4	interesting	2.71
5	happy	2.47
6	hard	2.3
7	big	1.9
8	sure	1.73
9	difficult	1.64
10	cool	1.63
11	fun	1.39
12	expensive	1.17
13	small	1.2
14	young	0.99
15	bad	0.93
16	easy	0.93
17	far	0.79
18	late	0.76
19	old	0.76
20	high	0.74

Table 4: The 20 most frequent adjectives pre-modified by *quite*

(12) ...there's like a VIP area over there which is *quite big* as well... - pos. (S5SJ 346)

- (13) ... she doesn't live the healthiest lifestyle she's *quite big*...-neg. (S5XD 223)
- (14) ...there's a girl in [X Factor] at the moment I think she she got *quite far* in the first one...-pos. (SVFH 1089)
- (15) ... it didn't quite work because it's *quite far* from the motorway...-neg. (SMEB 499)
- (16) ... cos we bought they're *quite old* and they're like made from proper wood and everything... pos. (SAVW 1104)
- (17) But she's aged badly so she looked *quite old*... neg. (SP7F 152)

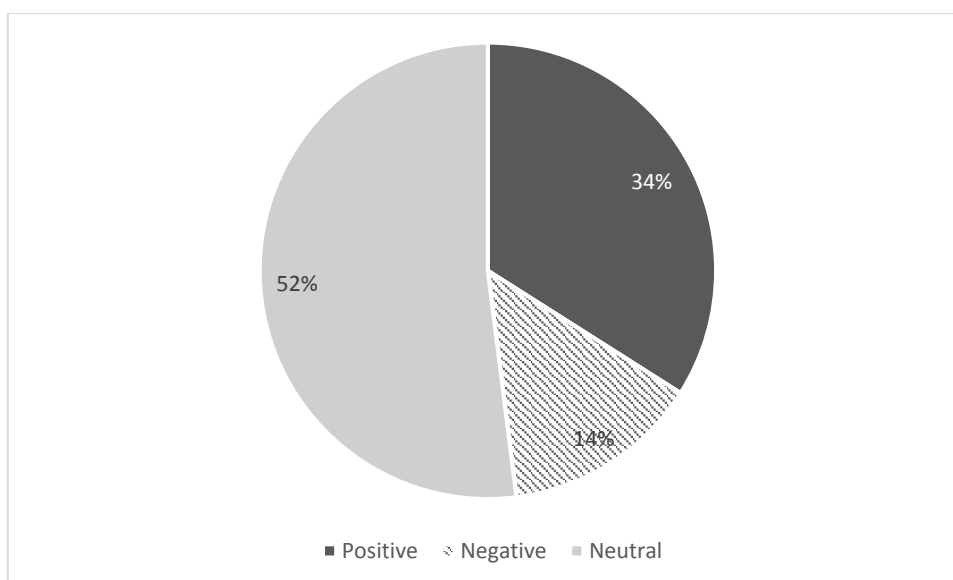


Figure 5: Distribution of adjectives with positive, negative and neutral connotation intensified by *quite*

- (18) I mean it is *quite nice* that one it's the right colour anyway for us (S2QU 662)
- (19) I think she's *quite happy* as she is actually (S4QF 1442)
- (20) ... she was obviously *quite clever* cos she was doing er chemistry and biology...(SAF8 138)
- (21) It's *quite annoying* getting interrupted every two minutes by a bloody machine (SKJ3 72)
- (22) ... now I just smoke every time I get drunk which is *quite bad* (S43M 1050)

When it comes to the more specific semantic content of the analysed adjectives, there are those denoting qualities of both people and inanimate things, such as *nice, interesting, cute*. Some of them furthermore express emotions (*excited, scared, surprised*) or dimensions and distance (*long, big, far*). This wide range of collocation of *quite*, together with its ability to intensify predicative adjectives and its overall high occurrence in the corpus, shows that *quite* has indeed undergone the final stages in the process of delexicalisation. Consequently, its high degree of delexicalisation allows it to freely intensify all different kinds of adjectives, and therefore explains its popularity among speakers.

#### **4.2.3 *Quite* – socio-linguistic characteristics of the speakers**

The final feature of the intensifier to be dealt with is the socio-linguistic characteristics of the speakers who use the specific intensifier. This subchapter will explore the distribution of usage of the intensifier between different age groups in the corpus as well as the distribution between genders. The highest degree of education of the individual groups will also be taken into account. Finally, the distribution based on social grade will be included.

Since *quite* is one of the most popular intensifiers in the corpus and, as mentioned before, also very versatile, it is not particularly unexpected that speakers of all age groups use it rather frequently. Nonetheless, it still seems to be much more prominent among speakers of two groups: 25-34 and 35-44. There is quite a big leap in the frequency of usage between these two groups and the third most frequent one, the speakers of the age 15-24 (see Table 5). Teenagers, however, have been proven to generally use intensifiers less frequently than adults (see section 2.2.2.1). Apart from that none of the groups shows particularly strong preference for the intensifier *quite*, nor the opposite.

Previous studies on intensifiers also connect the frequency of their usage with the degree of education of the speaker. According to Martínez and Pertejo (2014: 214), speakers with higher level of education use amplifiers more frequently. The data from the Spoken BNC 2014 confirm this result in the case of *quite*. The speaker group with postgraduate level of education achieved is the one to use the intensifier most frequently (see Table 6). Based on the order of the groups it furthermore seems like the lower the degree of qualification, the less frequent the



usage of the intensifier, with the exception of the group with primary education, which is on the third place in the list.

The intensifier seems to be vividly more popular among female speakers from the corpus (see Table 7), who, however, generally tend to use intensifiers more frequently than male speakers, as was proven in previous research (see section 2.2.2.2). Finally, with respect to the differentiation of speakers based on their social grade, *quite* is most popular among the C2 group, i.e. skilled manual workers (Love et al. 2017: 332), as shown in Table 8. The frequency of usage is nevertheless relatively high in all the groups with no significantly great differences. This supports the position of *quite* as not only a very popular, but also versatile and generally used intensifier.

Category	Frequency per 1,000,000 words in category
25-34	913.51
Unknown	898.32
35-44	874.05
15-24	717.48
45-59	703.13
60plus	618.24
0-14	578.96
Total:	762.17

Table 5: Distribution across age groups using the intensifier *quite*

Category	Frequency per 1,000,000 words in category
5_postgrad	889.75
4_graduate	797.24
9_unknown	750.39
1_primary	678.72
3_sixthform	613.95
2_secondary	571.89
Total:	762.17

Table 6: Distribution across speaker groups using the intensifier *quite* based on highest qualification

Category	Frequency per 1,000,000 word in category
F	833.96
M	645.67
Total:	762.17

Table 7: Distribution across gender groups using the intensifier *quite*

Category <sup>15</sup>	Frequency per 1,000,000 words in category
C2	967.82
B	928.00
C1	857.41
A	764.59
D	718.61
E	620.70
unknown	514.35
Total:	762.17

Table 8: Distribution across social grade groups using the intensifier *quite*

### 4.3 *Pretty*

Although *pretty* is one of the most frequently used intensifiers, it received almost no attention in the major studies on adjectival intensifiers in British English that were the sources for the theoretical part of the present study. In the Spoken BNC 2014, however, it is the fifth most popular intensifier and the second most frequent downtoner after *quite*. Therefore it was considered interesting for further analysis of its syntactic environment and semantic preferences described in the following subchapters. Its usage will furthermore be contrasted with that of *quite* as two widely used dntoners.

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<sup>15</sup> A – Higher managerial, administrative and professional, B – Intermediate managerial, administrative and professional, C1 – Supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative and professional, C2 – Skilled manual workers, D – Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers, E – State pensioners, casual and lowest grade workers, unemployed with state benefits only (Love et al. 2017: 332)

### 4.3.1 *Pretty* – syntactic environment

In the Spoken BNC 2014 there are 2,781 instances of *pretty* intensifying an adjective. In order to determine whether it more frequently intensifies predicative (ex.23) or attributive (ex. 24) adjectives, the same method was used as with *quite*. The search for adjective phrases modified by *pretty* and preceded by a copular verb returned 1,956 matches. This is clearly a majority, however, another search was made for the instances of *pretty* intensifying attributive adjectives, as before. This search resulted in 366 matches, leaving out 456 unidentified instances from the total number. Figure 6 represents the distribution. The speakers from the corpus clearly have a tendency to use *pretty* as an intensifier of predicative adjectives very frequently.

(23) I'm *pretty suspicious* of smoothies (S23A 1027)

(24) ... well I generally I've got a *pretty good* idea but they have to get the numbers to justify the courses... (S2XV 222)

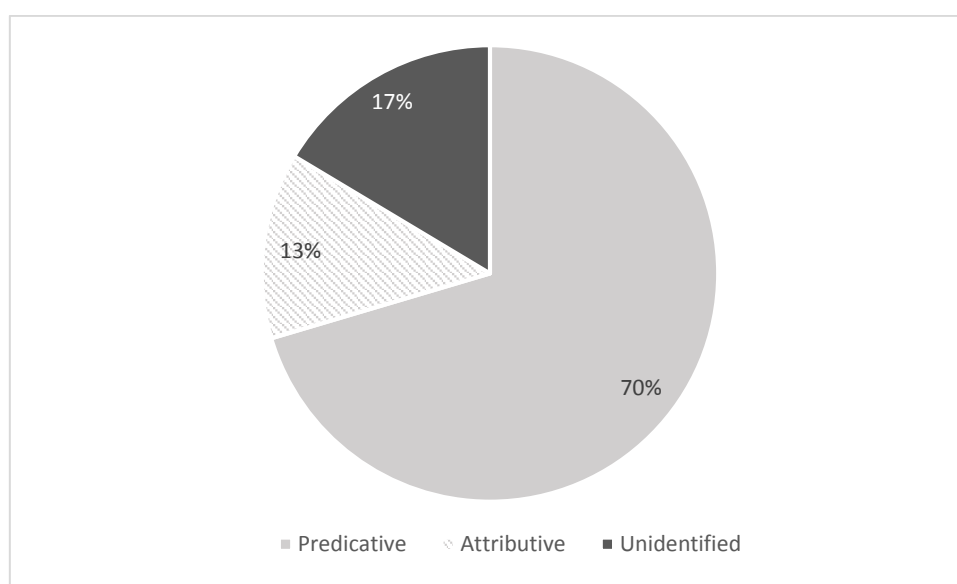


Figure 6: Distribution of the intensifier *pretty* pre-modifying predicative and attributive adjectives

Similarly to the situation of *quite*, adjective phrases with *pretty* as pre-modifier function mostly as subject complements (ex. 25) in a random sample of 100 instances of adjective phrases comprising the intensifier *pretty*. There were also 9 instances of *pretty* occurring in an adjective phrase with the function of a modifier

(ex.26), but the subject complement function clearly prevails (91%). Figure 7 shows the distribution.

(25) I reckon I'll have to be *pretty sharp* on the tickets in the morning (S376 645)

(26) I've had some *pretty amazing* experiences... (S5XD 1075)

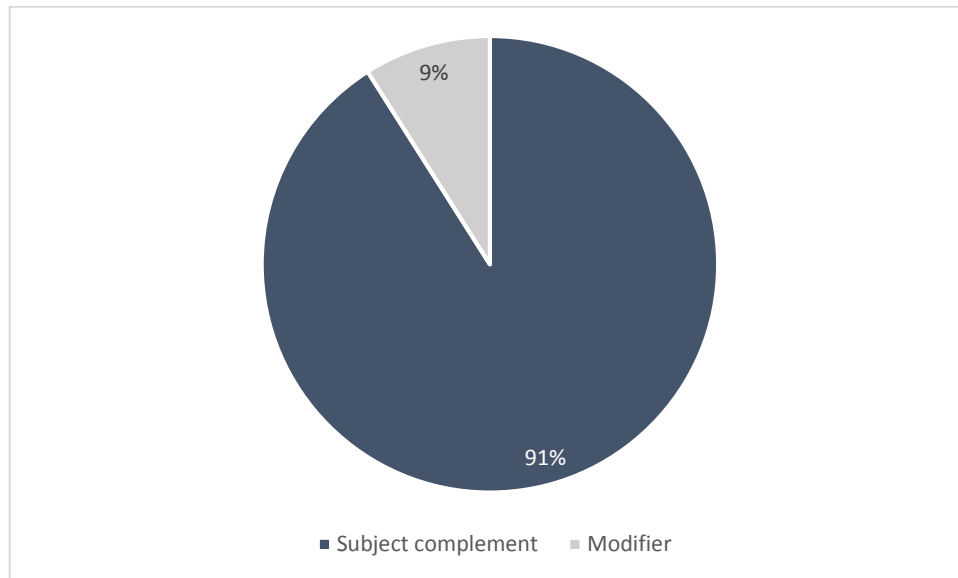


Figure 7: Distribution of syntactic functions fulfilled by adjective phrases with the intensifier *pretty*

Combinations of *pretty* with other intensifiers seem to be rather limited. It is quite common to use it multiple times in a row, such as in ex. 27. Moreover, *pretty* seems to have a preference to collocate with pejorative intensifiers, most frequently *damn* (ex. 28). Apart from that there were no relevant instances found of other intensifiers combining with *pretty*, neither in the preceding or the following position. Figure 8 represents the results.

(27) Oh er these things are *pretty pretty* high at the moment (SRFV 134)

(28) ...all the other seasons have been *pretty damn* funny (SB9K 1676)

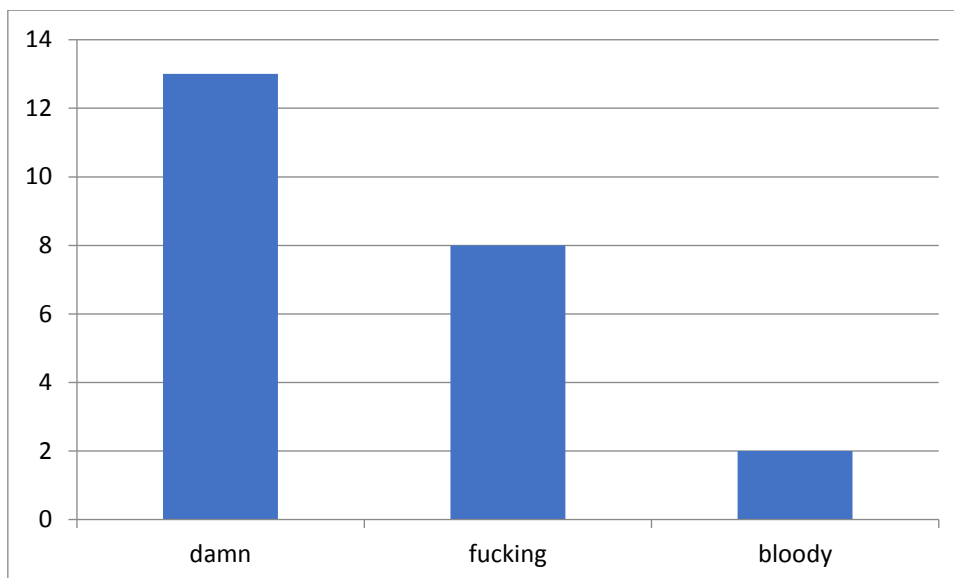


Figure 8: Distribution of intensifiers combining with *pretty*

#### 4.3.2 *Pretty* – semantic preferences

The tendency of *pretty* to collocate with positive, negative or neutral adjectives was calculated by the same method as that used with *quite*. *Pretty* pre-modifies 468 different adjectival heads in the Spoken BNC 2014. Table 5 shows the 20 most frequent ones as an example. Despite positive adjectives slightly prevailing (14 instances) in collocations with *pretty*, they are almost balanced by the negative ones.

No.	Adjective	Percent
1	good	20.86
2	sure	11.97
3	cool	4.93
4	bad	4.28
5	nice	2.19
6	big	2.12
7	funny	1.22
8	quick	1.8
9	high	0.93
10	amazing	0.9
11	cheap	0.9
12	old	0.86
13	close	0.83
14	hard	0.83

15	intense	0.79
16	easy	0.68
17	impressive	0.68
18	exciting	0.61
19	serious	0.61
20	young	0.61

Table 9: The 20 most frequent adjectives pre-modified by pretty

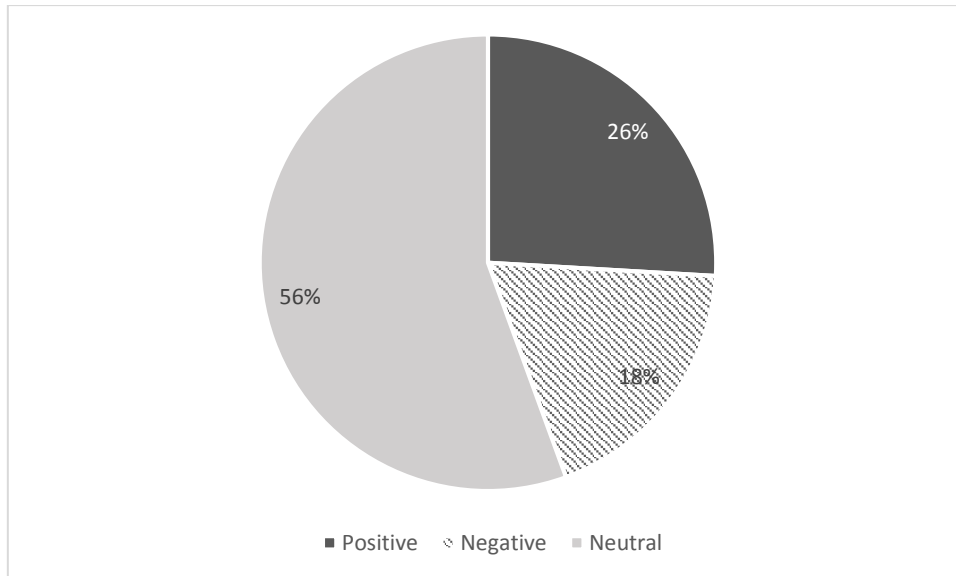


Figure 9: Distribution of adjectives with positive, negative and neutral connotation intensified by pretty

#### 4.3.3 *Pretty* – socio-linguistic characteristics of the speakers

The first speaker variable to be examined is age. The frequency of usage of the intensifier *pretty* roughly splits the speakers into two big groups: speakers under the age of 45, who use it markedly more often, and the speakers over 45, among whom the intensifier is not as popular (see Table 10). Having said that, there is also a strikingly big leap in frequency inside the younger group between the 25-34 and the 15-24 categories. *Pretty* appears in the speech of the 25-34 group more than twice as frequently as in that of their younger counterparts.

The highest frequency of usage of the intensifier can be found among the speakers with postgraduate education (see Table 11). Based on the order it might be concluded that the lower the highest degree of qualification, the less often is *pretty* used. The individual groups, however, do not differ from one another in their

frequencies to any great extent, which suggests that the usage of *pretty* is quite evenly spread among the speaker groups based on highest qualification.

As can be observed in Table 12, male speakers actually surpass female speakers in the frequency of usage of *pretty* by a strikingly large difference. *Pretty* being a typical downtoner, however, this find is in accord with the study of Hessner and Gawlitzek (2017: 416), who report that “the male speakers [in the Spoken BNC 2014] use dntoners more frequently than female speakers in most age groups”. The frequency list based on social grade furthermore shows that the intensifier is most popular among the C1 and C2 groups (supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative and professional and skilled manual workers).

Category	Frequency per 1,000,000 words in category
25_34	504.22
Unknown	385.77
15_24	244.80
0_14	216.70
35_44	199.31
60plus	119.75
45_59	100.71
Total:	243.46

Table 10: Distribution across age groups using the intensifier *pretty* sorted by frequency

Category	Frequency per 1,000,000 words in category
9_unknown	275,25
5_postgrad	271,17
4_graduate	269,91
3_sixthform	195,85
2_secondary	161,72
1_primary	147,19
Total:	243,46

Table 11: Distribution across speaker groups using the intensifier *pretty* based on highest qualification

Category	Frequency per 1,000,000 words in category
M	324.44
F	193.43
Total:	243.46

*Table 12: Distribution across gender groups using the intensifier pretty*

Category	Frequency per 1,000,000 words in category
C1	369.45
C2	356.56
B	282.27
D	215.90
A	215.51
E	189.09
unknown	134.40
Total:	243.46

*Table 13: Distribution across social grade groups using the intensifier pretty*



## 5 Conclusion

The first part of the analysis of the present study provides overview of the most frequently used adjectival intensifiers in present day spoken British English based on the material from the Spoken BNC 2014. Table 3 (see Section 4.1) shows the results, namely the 105 most popular intensifiers in the corpus. The list includes both amplifiers and downtoners. The majority of the intensifiers are adverbs, however, there are instances where the intensifier is homonymous with an adjective (*real*, *absolute*), a pronoun (*this*) or a non-finite verb form ending with -ing (*fucking*, *whacking*). The word *ultra* can either stand on its own as an adjective or function as a prefix, nevertheless, speakers also use it as an intensifier.

The next part of the analysis focuses on two selected intensifiers from the list, *quite* and *pretty*. Both are highly prominent intensifiers with a high frequency of usage in spoken British English. Not only are they the two most popular downtoners in the Spoken BNC 2014, but their meaning as intensifiers is also synonymous. OED defines *quite* as “to a certain or significant extent or degree; moderately, somewhat, rather”<sup>16</sup> and *pretty* as “to a considerable extent; fairly, moderately; rather, quite”<sup>17</sup>. Nonetheless, there is a presupposition that they are not absolute synonyms. These two downtoners certainly differ in terms of their usage, syntactic and semantic preferences and collocations. Therefore it is desirable to compare them with respect to all the previously described aspects of their usage and thus complete the analysis of their usage by British English speakers.

Firstly, the syntactic environment of *quite* and *pretty* will be contrasted. Both intensifiers seem to behave relatively similarly with respect to collocating predicative and attributive adjectives. There is a clearly prevailing tendency to pre-modify adjectives with predicative function (see Figures 2 and 6); both downtoners most frequently modify adjective phrases functioning as a subject complement, although *pretty* showed a slightly higher preference to occur in modifying adjective phrases than *quite* (see Figures 2 and 7). Moreover, it seems that speakers do not tend to combine *pretty* in sequences with other intensifiers as much as *quite*. *Quite* is frequently preceded or followed by other amplifiers, including the most popular ones (*really*, *very* and *so*). *Pretty*, on the other hand, displays a strong tendency to collocate with pejorative intensifiers and there are no instances of it in combination

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/156796?rskey=ei6PKn&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid> III.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/151025?rskey=OvQY53&result=3&isAdvanced=false#eid> I.a.

with one of the prominent amplifiers (see Figures 3 and 8). Both downtoners are also often doubled before an adjective, as shown in exx. 29 and 30.

(29) I'm becoming *quite quite* keen on the broccolis now (S3YZ 942)

(30) It was a *pretty pretty* amazing experience (S72E 1448)

The next focus of the analysis will be the semantic preferences and collocational patterns of *quite* and *pretty*. When looking at the 20 most frequent adjectives intensified by the two (Tables 4 and 9) it can be concluded that their collocational patterns are quite similar. More precisely, 12 adjectives can be found in both lists and the most frequent one is moreover identical, namely *good*. The order of the remaining common adjectives naturally differs, for example, the adjectives *sure* and *cool* seem to collocate much more with *pretty* than with *quite*. In fact, *pretty* displays a strong preference for specifically these two adjectives, which reach a relatively high frequency of occurrence with the intensifier (*good* – 20,86%, *sure* – 11,97%) compared to the remaining adjectives (all below 5%). In the case of *quite* no such great differences can be found and the frequency of the collocating adjectives decreases gradually. Apart from that, both lists include a variety of frequent adjectives that can denote both positive and negative emotions, age, distance and dimensions, as well as other properties. This variety of collocations suggests a high degree of delexicalisation for both the intensifiers. The connotation of the adjectives is most frequently neutral (see Figures 5 and 9). *Quite* furthermore tends to intensify negative adjectives slightly less often than *pretty*.

The first variable from the socio-linguistic characteristics of the speakers to be examined is age. The usage of both intensifiers is spread over all the age groups, in other words, there seems to be no age group that would pronouncedly avoid using either of the intensifiers. In case of *quite*, however, the frequencies are generally much higher and the differences between the individual groups less significant (see Table 5). *Pretty*, on the other hand, seems to be clearly less popular among older speakers (see Table 10). The group 25-34 is the one to use both intensifiers most frequently, which in case of *quite* confirms the assumption that adults generally use intensifiers much more often than teenagers. Table 10, nonetheless, shows that in the frequency of using the intensifier *pretty*, the 25-34 age-group is immediately followed by the 15-24 and 0-14 groups. To sum up, *pretty* seems to be preferred

over *quite* by teenage and younger speakers, which suggests its status to be slightly more colloquial.

The frequency list based on the users' highest qualification is relatively similar for both the intensifiers. The speaker group that uses *quite* and *pretty* most frequently is the one with finished postgraduate education. Otherwise, with the degree of qualification decreasing, also the frequency of usage of the intensifiers drops, with an interesting exception in the case of *quite*, where the speakers with merely primary education finished display a relatively high frequency of using it and are the third most prominent group in the frequency list. With respect to gender as the distinguishing factor we can observe a great difference in usage. While *quite* is more popular among female speakers, who are also claimed to use intensifiers more frequently in general, male speakers apparently lean towards *pretty* more often. The distribution of usage across social grade groups, on the other hand, is very similar for the two intensifiers. While *pretty* is most frequently used by the C1 and C2 groups, *quite* also seems to be popular among the Intermediate managerial, administrative and professional group. *Pretty* is furthermore surprisingly infrequent in the speech of the higher managerial group. Both intensifiers are least frequently used by the E group.

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## 7 Resumé

Cieľom bakalárskej práce je preskúmať a popísať používanie intenzifikátorov adjektív v súčasnej hovorenej britskej angličtine. Ako študijný materiál k tomu poslúžila najnovšia verzia Britského národného korpusu pre hovorený jazyk, Spoken BNC 2014.

Teoretická časť práce obsahuje definíciu intenzifikátorov a ich rozdelenie podľa gramatík *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (Quirk a kol. 1985) a *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (Biber a kol. 1999) (viz. kapitola 2.1). Podľa nich intenzifikátory modifikujú iné prvky, predovšetkým adjektíva, na ktoré sa táto práca zameriava, a tento prvok umiestňujú na škále (Quirk a kol. 1985: 445). Podľa toho, či význam modifikovaného adjektíva zosilňujú alebo zoslabujú sa intenzifikátory delia na "amplifiers" a "downtoners".

V ďalšej kapitole teoretickej časti sú zhrnuté poznatky o intenzifikátoroch z novších štúdií založených na rôznych jazykových korpusoch (viz. kapitola 2.2). Použité sú štúdie od autorov Barnfield a Buchstaller (2010: 252-287), Fuchs (2017: 345-374), Hessner a Gawlitzek (2017: 403-428), Ito and Tagliamonte (2003: 257-279), Martínez a Pertejo (2014: 210-237), Partington (1993: 177-192), a Stenström a Hasund (2002: 131-163). Títo autori prisudzujú intenzifikátorom kľúčovú rolu v ústnej komunikácii. Ďalej je ich popularita v akademickom výskume vysvetlená tým, že podliehajú relatívne rýchlej jazykovej zmene a teoreticky tvoria otvorenú skupinu, takže je priestor pre vznik nových intenzifikátorov, čo sa aj často deje, predovšetkým medzi teenagermi.

Intenzifikátory sú taktiež dobrým príkladom výsledkov procesu delexikalizácie, kedy sa lexikálny význam slova zredukuje a začne plniť určitú gramatickú funkciu (viz. kapitola 2.2.1). V prípade intenzifikátorov existuje korelácia medzi stupňom ich delexikalizácie a ich schopnosťou modifikovať rôzne adjektíva, t.j. čím viac je intenzifikátor delexikalizovaný, tým voľnejšie dokáže modifikovať adjektíva.

V teoretickej časti sa ďalej popisuje spojenie medzi používaním intenzifikátorov a rôznymi sociolingvistickým charakteristikami hovorcov, napr. vek, pohlavie, stupeň vzdelania atď. (viz. kapitola 2.2.2). Väčšina štúdií poukazuje na to, že dospelí hovorcovia používajú intenzifikátory častejšie než teenageri, čo môže mať súvislosť so vzdelaním. Teenageri však na druhú stranu omnoho častejšie využívajú pejoratívne intenzifikátory. Pri skúmaní rozdielov v tomto aspekte

jazyka medzi mužmi a ženami je obvyklý záver, že intenzifikátory sú signifikantne populárnejšie u žien. Odchýlku objavili v Spoken BNC 2014 Hessner a Gawlitzek (2017), ktoré tvrdia, že v prípade *downtoners* je táto tendencia opačná a muži ich využívajú častejšie než ženy rovnakého veku.

Citované štúdie sa tiež často zameriavajú na konkrétne intenzifikátory a skúmajú rôzne aspekty ich výskytu (viz. kapitola 2.2.3). Ako prvé sú v teoretickej časti spomínané poznatky o zrejme najpopulárnejších intenzifikátoroch v anglickom jazyku, *very* a *really*. *Very* je vďaka svojmu vysokému stupňu delexikalizácie často využívaný intenzifikátor, keďže sa môže viazať so širokým spektrom adjektív. Konkurenciu má však v posledných rokoch v *really*, ku ktorému stále viac a viac inklinujú predovšetkým mladší hovorcovia. Ďalej sú zhrnuté bližšie špecifiká používania intenzifikátorov ako *absolutely* a *totally*, *highly*, *heavily* a *thoroughly* a popísané sú aj relatívne zriedkavé intenzifikátory *right*, *well* a *enough*, ktoré boli objavené v korpuse londýnskych teenagerov.

Nasledujúca časť práce popisuje materiál použitý na analýzu v praktickej časti (viz. kapitola 3). Analýza sa opiera o korpus Spoken BNC 2014, ktorý obsahuje 11,5 milióna slov a je voľne dostupný na webe Lancaster University. V metodologickej časti práce je popísaný postup, ktorým bol vytvorený zoznam najčastejšie používaných intenzifikátorov v danom korpuse. Kapitola zahŕňa podrobný popis zadávania dotazov do korpusu, ako aj prekážky problémy, ktoré museli byť vyriešené. Nakoniec uvádza spôsob počítania frekvencie intenzifikátoru na milión slov, aby mohli byť podľa tejto frekvencie zoradené do tabuľky od najčastejšie používaných po tie najmenej.

Praktická časť v prvom rade uvádza výsledný zoznam najpoužívanejších intenzifikátorov v Spoken BNC 2014 a ďalej sa zameriava na bližšiu analýzu dvoch vybraných intenzifikátorov, *quite* a *pretty* (viz. kapitola 4). Oba sú významovo *downtoners* a navyše je ich význam synonymický, čo poskytuje zaujímavý priestor pre porovnanie. Najprv je u každého intenzifikátoru zvlášť popísané jeho syntaktické prostredie, sémantické preferencie a sociolingvistické charakteristiky hovorcov. Napriek tomu, že sú oba tieto intenzifikátory na vysokých priečkach v zozname, frekvencia na 1000000 slov v prípade *quite* je stále omnoho vyššia než u *pretty*. Obidva však preukazujú vysoký stupeň delexikalizácie, čo sa prejavuje na ich tendencii modifikovať predovšetkým adjektíva s predikatívnou funkciou. *Quite*

v tomto prípade mierne prevyšuje *pretty*, a taktiež sa vyznačuje voľnejšou kombinovateľnosťou s inými intenzifikátormi.

V sémantických preferenciách sa tieto intenzifikátory od seba veľmi nelíšia, aj keď *pretty* preukazuje o niečo väčšiu tendenciu modifikovať adjektíva s negatívnou konotáciou. Je taktiež populárnejší u mladších hovorcov v porovnaní s *quite*, u ktorého sa rôzne vekové skupiny výrazne nelíšia vo frekvencii užívania. Oba intenzifikátory sú najpopulárnejšie u skupiny ľudí s ukončeným druhým stupňom vysokoškolského vzdelania. Pomerne veľký rozdiel sa vyskytol pri porovnaní užívania *quite* a *pretty* medzi mužmi a ženami. Kým *quite* podľa predpokladu omnoho častejšie používajú ženy, *pretty* je až prekvapivo obľúbené u mužov s vysokým rozdielom vo frekvencii. Porovnanie skupín s rôznou sociálnou úrovňou v tomto prípade neprinieslo markantné rozdiely.