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## **Diplomová práce**

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**Adjectives of Positive Evaluation in Present-day Spoken British English**

Pozitivně hodnotící adjektiva v současné mluvené britské angličtině

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Velmi ráda bych tímto poděkovala doc. PhDr. Markétě Malé, Ph.D. za již několikaleté odborné vedení, cenné rady a čas, který mi věnovala.

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V Praze, dne .....

.....

Vladimíra Krajcsovicsová

## **Abstract**

The present MA thesis studies adjectives of positive evaluation in present-day spoken British English. Other means of expressing subjective stance (e.g. intensifiers) were repeatedly described as undergoing constant change. However, variation in evaluative adjectives has received little quantitative attention so far (perhaps with the exception of Tagliamonte & Pabst, 2020).

Our material consists of two corpora of informal spoken British English: Spoken BNC2014 and the spoken, demographically sampled section of the original BNC (1994). The starting point for the analysis is a frequency list of adjectives, from which we select adjectives with evaluative potential which differ significantly in frequency across the two corpora. Three adjectives: *amazing*, *awesome* and *cool*, are described in greater detail.

The use of evaluative adjectives is described from several perspectives. We focus on syntactic functions of the adjectives, their co-occurrence with intensifiers and their collocations. From a sociolinguistic point of view, we describe the use of the adjectives with respect to the age and gender of the speakers.

The analysis showed that adjectives of positive evaluation are an unstable category, and the change in adjectival use was reflected in its distribution. At the same time, we note changes in syntactic behaviour or semantic shifts.

**Key words:** positive evaluation, adjectives, informal spoken language, language change

## Abstrakt

Tato diplomová práce se zaměřuje na pozitivně evaluativní adjektiva v současné mluvené britské angličtině. Jiné prostředky vyjadřující subjektivní postoj mluvčího (např. intenzifikátory) byly několikrát předmětem studií, které je popsaly jako proměnlivé a nestabilní jazykové prvky. Nicméně variaci v užití evaluativních adjektiv nebyla zdaleka věnována taková pozornost (snad s výjimkou studie Tagliamonte & Pabst, 2020).

Materiál práce čerpá ze dvou korpusů neformální mluvené britské angličtiny, a sice z korpusu Spoken BNC2014 a z mluvené demografické složky původního BNC (1994). Jako výchozí bod pro analýzu slouží seznam frekventovaných adjektiv, ze kterých byla vybrána adjektiva s evaluativním potenciálem, jejichž frekvence se významně liší napříč korpusy. Práce detailně zkoumá tři adjektiva: *amazing*, *awesome* a *cool*.

Užití evaluativních adjektiv je popsáno z několika hledisek. Soustředíme se na syntaktické funkce adjektiv a na jejich kolokace. Z pohledu sociolingvistického je důraz kladen na gender a věk mluvčích, kteří tato adjektiva užívají.

Analýza ukázala, že pozitivně evaluativní adjektiva podléhají rychlé změně, a tato změna se odráží v jejich distribuci. Zároveň jsme u vybraných adjektiv zaznamenali syntaktické i sémantické změny.

**Klíčová slova:** pozitivní evaluace, adjektiva, neformální mluvený jazyk, jazyková změna

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## List of abbreviations

BNC1994 – British National Corpus, spoken, demographically sampled section

BNC2014 – British National Corpus 2014, spoken

# 1. Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to examine means of evaluation with respect to lexical variation and change during a short period of time. In order to do that, we will analyse the behaviour of frequent adjectives of express positive evaluation in contemporary spoken British English. We will work with the spoken section of the British National Corpus, more specifically with the new data from 2014, which will be compared to the older data from the 1994.

Our approach is going to combine the construct of ‘apparent’ and ‘real’ time. Apparent time examines the distribution of a linguistic variable across different age groups in one speech community. For us, it means that we are going to examine generational distribution of selected adjectives in BNC2014, in order to see whether there are some generational preferences which would detect some evidence of language change. The concept of real time, which compares language patterns at different time periods, will be taken into consideration as well, as we are going to compare the frequency and distribution of selected adjectives in BNC1994 and in BNC2014.

The main reason why we have decided to work with evaluative adjectives is the fact that they are capable of expressing highly subjective stance while denoting strong emotion. In this respect, they are very similar to intensifying adverbs which have proved to be an unstable category undergoing constant change. Based on the similarity of these two classes (subjectivity, emotionality, importance in social interaction), we hypothesize that evaluative adjectives will be equally prone to a rapid change. The assumption is that some evaluative adjectives will be used very frequently among a specific generation, but their popularity will decline in the course of time as they will be gradually replaced by newer means of evaluation whose frequency should in turn substantially increase. This implies that evaluative expressions participate in defining the linguistic habits of one generation in comparison to another one. Similar patterns were already thoroughly described in relation to intensifying adverbs, but the description of adjectives in this context is much less extensive.

The increase and decline in frequency can be visible from language data available in the corpus. Apart from frequency, we shall focus on the surroundings and behaviour of the adjectives. In particular, we are going to describe syntactic functions of these adjectives or their collocations (e.g. their co-occurrence with intensifiers). At the same time, we will work with sociolinguistic metadata which are available in the corpus, such as the age of the speaker and their gender.

## 2. Theoretical Background

### 2.1. General Characteristics of Adjectives

This chapter is going to provide a basic definition and classification of adjectives based on two main criteria: grammar and semantics. First of all, we are going to present criteria which are used to identify adjectives and to differentiate them from other parts of speech. Then we shall continue with morphosyntactic analysis of adjectives, discussing syntactic functions of adjectives and inflection. This will be followed by semantic analysis of adjectives, focusing not only on the meanings which adjectives denote, but also taking into consideration concepts such as dynamics, gradeability and inherence.

#### 2.1.1. Morphosyntactic Analysis of Adjectives

In order to define adjectives, Quirk et al. (1985) provide four basic criteria which can be used to identify adjectives: they can be intensified by the adverb *very*, they can take comparative and superlative degree (see 2.1.2.) and they can appear in attributive and predicative position (Quirk et al., 1985: 402-403)<sup>1</sup>. If the adjective stands in attributive position, it functions as a premodifier (e.g. *a nice girl*). Some adjectives can also appear in postposition, i.e. immediately after the modified noun or pronoun: *something useful* (ibid.: 418). If the adjective stands in predicative position, the adjective is either subject or object complement (e.g. *the girl is nice*). Sometimes however, the copula may be elided, which causes the adjective to be the only visible component of the predication (e.g. the exclamation *Nice!* with the underlying structure *It is nice.*).

However, not all adjectives satisfy all criteria: non-gradable adjectives do not take comparative and superlative degree and cannot be intensified by adverbs such as *very*. At the same time, there is a group of adjectives which occur only in attributive position or only in predicative position. As a result, we may differentiate between central and peripheral adjectives. Central adjectives are capable of appearing in both positions (attributive and predicative), whereas peripheral adjectives allow either the attributive or the predicative use only.

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<sup>1</sup> Adverbs, on the other hand, cannot be found in either of these positions and consequently cannot be classified as adjectives, even if they meet the other criteria, namely gradeability and intensifiability (ibid.: 404).

### 2.1.2. Semantic Classification of Adjectives

The central meaning expressed by adjectives is that of quality or characteristics. Of course, it is possible to further categorize adjectival meanings into various subclasses. Biber et al. (1999) draw a distinction between “descriptors” and “classifiers”.

Descriptors are usually gradable adjectives which characterize the referent of a nominal expression, denoting characteristics like colour (*black*), size/quantity/weight (*little, heavy*), time (*recent*), evaluation/emotion (*lovely*) and so on. Evaluative adjectives denote judgements, affect or emphasis. Classifiers, on the other hand, are predominantly non-gradable, and their primary function is to restrict a noun’s referent by placing it into a category. Classifiers can be grouped into subclasses such as relation (*hostile*), affiliation (*American*) or topic (*political*) (Biber et al., 1999: 509-10).

We can further differentiate adjectives based on their dynamicity. Quirk et al. (1985: 434) claim that “adjectives are characteristically stative”, although many adjectives which are susceptible to subjective measurement can be used dynamically (*ibid.*). For example, the adjective *careful* denotes a quality which the possessor is capable of controlling and this ‘agency’ is what allows dynamic interpretation. This is visible in constructions with the imperative mood (*Be careful!*) or progressive aspect (*He is being careful*). On the other hand, adjectives like *tall*, which denote a quality which the possessor cannot affect, can only be used statically (*ibid.*).

Another common feature of adjectives is gradeability. Adjectives may be inflected by suffixes *-er* and *-est* to indicate a degree of comparison or the degree may be marked by adverbs *more* and *most* (*ibid.*: 435). Biber et al. (1999) also note that in informal spoken language, we may encounter “doubly marked” adjectives – i.e. adjectives, whose degree is marked both inflectionally and periphrastically. Hence the expressions *more easier, more warmer* or *most cockiest*. Similarly, we may encounter double comparison with irregular comparative and superlative adjectives, resulting in words like *worser* or *bestest*, though these formations are of course widely unacceptable in standard English (Biber et al., 1999: 525). Apart from comparison, gradeability is also manifested through modification by emphatic (intensifying) adverbs (e.g. *very tall, extremely useful* etc.) (*ibid.*; Quirk et al., 1985: 435).

Although gradeability is a very common feature of adjectives, it does not apply to most classifiers (typically stative denominals: *cotton, atomic, medical, polar* etc.) (Quirk et al.,

1985: 432). At the same time, intensifying adjectives which already have superlative meaning – e.g. *perfect*, *unique*, or *absolute* – are considered to be non-gradable, as degree marking and additional intensification is redundant. However, actual usage, most notably spoken conversation, shows that these adjectives are often treated as gradable: e.g. *very unique*, *most perfect* (Biber et al., 1999: 526).

Finally, we can distinguish between inherent and non-inherent use of an adjective. Adjectives used inherently are those which directly characterize the referent of the modified noun (e.g. *heavy bag*), whereas non-inherent use of an adjective extends the basic sense of the noun (*heavy smoker*) (Quirk et al., 1985: 428). Non-inherent adjectives function only as modifiers, whereas inherent adjectives are not restricted to attributive position and may also function as predicates: cf. *the bag is heavy* as opposed to *\*the smoker is heavy*.

## 2.2. Language of Evaluation

Hunston and Thompson (2003) define evaluation<sup>2</sup> as a “term for the expression of the speaker’s or writer’s attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about.” (Hunston and Thompson, 2003: 5). Evaluation is related to the personal feelings and opinions of the speaker, concerning not only ‘goodness’ or ‘desirability’ (which we aim to study here), but also ‘likelihood’<sup>3</sup>. Evaluation may be described as comparative (it contrasts the object with the norm), subjective and value-laden (it ascribes value to the object) (ibid.: 13).

Apart from expressing one’s opinion, language of evaluation can also form and maintain relationships between speakers. The assumption of shared opinions, values and reactions often causes the listener to adopt the same attitude as the speaker and this manipulation is especially effective if the evaluation is subtle, often when the ‘given’ information is expressed evaluatively: “the reader is not positioned to make a decision whether or not to agree with these evaluations; instead, the reader’s acceptance of the evaluation is simply

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<sup>2</sup> Terms used by other authors include ‘stance’, ‘appraisal’, ‘sentiment’, ‘metadiscourse’, ‘attitudinal language’ or ‘affective language’ (Hunston, 2011: 10).

<sup>3</sup> The speaker’s opinion of likelihood or (un)certainly of an event is traditionally called ‘modality’ but it does share a common ground with ‘affective evaluation’ (as both express one’s opinion). According to Hunston and Thompson (2003), the relationship between the two types of opinion is not perceived unanimously: some authors see evaluation and modality as two separate categories (Halliday (1994)), while others combine modality and attitudinal meanings (Biber and Conrad (2003)), and also Hunston and Thompson (2003) who use the superordinate term ‘evaluation’, which includes the subclass of ‘modality’ (Hunston and Thompson, 2003: 5).

assumed” (ibid.: 8). Evaluation may be also used for ‘hedging’, which moderates and tones down one’s claims or functions as a means to express politeness (ibid.: 10).

Finally, evaluation may function as a discourse organizer. Evaluative expressions are often used for monitoring: phrases such as *that’s right* or *good* show that the listener is involved in the conversation and keeps track of it (ibid.: 11). Evaluation is equally important in narratives, where the speaker may want to express what is *interesting*, *funny* or *terrifying* in order to communicate the main point of the narration to the listener and so facilitate the reception of the text (ibid.: 13).

Subjective attitude may be expressed by a number of lexical items, but open word classes are most prone to indicate evaluation, in particular adjectives (*terrible*), adverbs (*unfortunately*), nouns (*success*) and verbs (*succeed*) (ibid.: 14).

### 2.2.1. Evaluative Adjectives

Adjectives are a word class “most associated with evaluation”, as evaluative meaning is typically articulated by using the so-called ‘intensive clauses’ where an attribute (most commonly a gradable adjective) is assigned to a carrier (Hunston, 2011: 129). In addition, Hunston and Sinclair (2003) note that evaluative adjectives often appear in specific patterns whose primary purpose is evaluation. This was discovered when they attempted to use the concept of local grammar to describe evaluation, using specific and transparent terminology with terms “evaluative category” and “thing evaluated”.

They identified several patterns whose main purpose is evaluation. Some of these patterns are productive, which means that they can make a non-evaluative adjective temporarily evaluative (ibid.: 100). This is visible for example in the pattern “*there* + link verb + *something* + adjective + *about* + noun”, as nationality adjectives occurring in this pattern are perceived as subjective, gradable and therefore evaluative (*there is something very American about the National Archives collection (...)*). Later they note that gradeability is a good indicator of evaluativeness, as adjectives with multiple meanings are likely to be evaluative only in the graded sense (cf. *original building* and *the most original film*) (ibid.: 92).

We can distinguish between three types of evaluative meanings. Firstly, there is ‘affect’ which is associated with one’s emotions (*I feel happy*). The second type is ‘judgement’ which typically evaluates an action (*It was kind of him to do that*). The third evaluative meaning is

‘appreciation’, which expresses how good or bad an entity is (*I consider it unimaginative*) (Hunston, 2011: 131).

Evaluators which express strong (in our case positive) emotions include adjectives such as *amazing, cool, lovely, exciting, beautiful* or *awesome*. These emotionally charged adjectives can be compared to intensifying adverbs. Intensifiers are defined as scaling devices which co-occur with gradable adjectives (Quirk et al., 1985: 445). We have already stated that evaluative adjectives are subjective, comparative and are used in social interactions to express one’s feelings while maintaining a relationship with the listener. Very similar characteristics can be observed with intensifying adverbs. Intensifiers play an important role in social interaction, being a “vehicle for impressing, praising, persuading, insulting, and generally influencing the listener’s reception of the message” (Partington, 1993:178). Intensifiers are further characterized by their “versatility and colour” and their “capacity for rapid change” (Ito and Tagliamonte, 2003:258). New intensifiers can be created at any time, their creation being a productive process (Partington, 1993: 179). Tagliamonte and Brooke (2014: 17) explain that “as one form loses its force (...) new one comes to take its place” (see also 2.5. for studies focusing on this subject). Since evaluative adjectives share some characteristics with intensifying adverbs, it could be assumed that this capacity for rapid change will be their feature as well, though this is something which shall be confirmed or disproved in the analysis in Chapter 4.

### **2.2.2. Investigating Evaluation by Corpus Linguistics Tools**

Corpus linguistics is a discipline which uses computers to “identify and analyse complex patterns of language use”, while working with “large and principled collection of natural texts”, i.e. a corpus (Biber et al., 1998: 4). This approach offers a number of advantages, mainly objective and empirical extraction of linguistic data from the corpus and ability to work quickly with texts which are too extensive for manual examination (Sinclair, 1991: 4). This will be useful especially when describing the phraseology of evaluative adjectives, as the user interface of many corpora allows us to extract clusters or collocates which could not be retrieved from the text using only intuitive introspection.

However, it can also be challenging to use corpus linguistics tools to detect and describe evaluation. This is mainly due to the fact that evaluation depends heavily on the context and therefore individual items may not be always reliably identified as evaluative or not (Hunston

and Thompson, 2011: 14). Sinclair (1991: 5) adds that “any instance of language depends on its surrounding context (...) and so no example is ever complete unless it is a whole text.” Surrounding words and phrases proved useful when distinguishing between meanings in polysemous words, as for instance ‘second, the numeral’ will have different collocates from ‘second, the unit of time’ (ibid.: 107). The same can be said about evaluation. If we consider the adjective *electric* in isolation, it is likely to be regarded as non-evaluative by most speakers (assuming neutral context, e.g. *electric storm*), though in some contexts, it may gain positive evaluative meaning (e.g. *the performance was electric*) (Hunston and Thompson, 2011: 14).

Another potential problem is that the speaker may not always intend to be genuine, as irony and insincerity are common communication tools (ibid.: 65). This problem may be prevented, however, if the researcher examines wider context and typical collocates, instead of focusing on individual words. Hunston and Thompson (2011: 15) add that “whether a word is, in a given instance, neutral, positive or negative can be ascertained by looking at a context no longer than a concordance line of something between 80 and 500 characters long.”

### **2.3. Phraseology**

Phraseology can be defined as “the tendency of words, and groups of words, to occur more frequently in some environments than in others” (Hunston, 2011: 5). In this thesis, we will work with Sinclair’s model of extended lexical units, which is summarized in Stubbs (2007). This model proposes that a lexical item consists of the core item and four types of phrasal constructions: collocation, colligation, semantic preference and semantic prosody.

Sinclair defines collocation as the co-occurrence of word forms, which is therefore directly observable in texts. Colligation, on the other hand, is defined as the relation between the node and grammatical categories (e.g. prepositions). Semantic preference is the relation between the node and semantically related words from the same lexical field. Finally, semantic prosody is the discourse function of the unit which describes the speaker’s evaluative attitude or communicative purpose (Stubbs, 2007: 4-5).

Semantic prosodies are often very subtle and are therefore detected mainly by corpus linguistics tools: “[semantic prosodies] are essentially a phenomenon that has been only revealed computationally, and whose extent and development can only be properly traced by computational methods” (Louw, 1993: 32). Louw (1993) exemplifies this when he studies

the adverb *utterly*, discovering its marked negative prosody, while Sinclair (1991: 112) notes similarly negative semantic prosodies with the verbs *set in* and *happen*.

Our overview of recurrent language patterns would not be complete without a quick mention of the so-called clusters or n-grams<sup>4</sup>. Hyland (2008: 5-6) defines clusters as “semantically transparent and formally regular” multiword units which consist of “words which follow each other more frequently than expected by chance”. The fact that clusters are identified on the basis of their frequency makes them quite relevant for corpus linguistics research, as they can be quickly detected using corpus linguistics tools. In addition, clusters typically differ across genres and they therefore help to shape textual meanings and characterize various registers (ibid.): for example, in spoken informal conversation, we are likely to detect clusters like *I don't know*, whereas in academic discourse, clusters such as *in this study* or *the result of* are much more probable (ibid.: 7).

Clusters also serve various discourse functions. Biber et al. (2004: 384) propose a taxonomy which describes three major types of functions served by clusters. Firstly, there are ‘stance expressions’, which include epistemic and attitudinal clusters (expressing desire, obligation, intention and ability). Stance expressions also cover evaluative clusters, e.g. ‘I think it was (ADJ)’ or ‘are more likely to’. The second class, ‘discourse organizers’, consists of topic introduction and elaboration. Finally, there are ‘referential expressions’ which refer to physical and abstract entities and to the text itself.

## **2.4. Language Variation and Change**

Historical linguistics makes it quite apparent that languages can undergo enormous changes in the course of time. However, since these changes are rather slow and gradual, they are not always easy to detect. They do become quite clear though if we focus on historical development of one language. If we compare, for example, the ‘Old English’ to the ‘Present-Day English’, the changes are so significant that the former is approached as a foreign language. The consequences of past changes are however very much present in the language of today. Labov (2010: 5) provides the example of often unpredictable spellings such as

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<sup>4</sup> Hyland (2008: 1) mentions other widely used terms for this concept: chunks, lexical bundles, extended collocations or chains.

“cough”, “through” and “enough” or homophones such as “whale” and “wail”, which are the result of sound changes taking place in past centuries.

Nevertheless, language change is an ongoing process which can be observed on much smaller scale (with correspondingly smaller changes). Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015: 6) assert that the “language we use in everyday living is remarkably varied” and that “people constantly exploit variation within the language they speak for a wide variety of purposes.” This variation can occur in social and regional groups but also within the speech of a single speaker (ibid.). In fact, older generations take notice of this widespread phenomenon, though they often dislike it and even tend to point out the illogical character of incoming forms (e.g. ‘*aren’t I*’ or ‘*like*’ used as a conjunction) (Labov, 2010: 4). Finally, Mesthrie et al. (2009: 110) confirm this stance, adding that prescriptivism holds that language changes are the result of “sloppiness, laziness and lack of attention to logic.”

Mesthrie et al. (ibid.) add that sociolinguists provide more scholarly understanding of linguistic change and its social context, explaining that there is more behind the process than mere laziness of the speakers. In addition, sociolinguistics explains why language change sometimes occurs in one speech community but not in another one and why social groups within one speech community may react differently to incoming changes. For these reasons, linguistic change is the concern of not only historical linguists, but of sociolinguists as well.

### **2.4.1. Types of Linguistic Change**

Labov (2010) suggests that it is important to distinguish between two basic types of linguistic change: change from below and change from above. Changes from above are changes made consciously by the speakers and they deal with the issues of prestige: “changes from above take place at a relatively high level of social consciousness, show a higher rate of occurrence in formal styles, are often subject to hypercorrection” (Labov, 2010: 274). Changes from below, on the other hand, are systematic changes which occur below the conscious awareness of the speaker (ibid.: 279).

Phonology is perhaps the most prominent aspect of linguistic change in terms of research: Labov (2010: 11-12) claims that the work of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century linguists makes it “abundantly clear that they saw sound change as the primary, most systematic and omnipresent mechanism of linguistic change” and that “sound change became almost by default synonymous with the notion of ‘linguistic change’”. Nonetheless, linguistic change

is not confined solely to phonological matters (Wardhaugh and Fuller, 2015: 150) and we can also observe semantic changes, as well as changes in lexis and grammar.

According to Tagliamonte and Brooke (2014: 13), lexical variation refers to the variation between synonymic expressions. They further note that lexis is changing constantly and so “lexical variation is perhaps the most common, most rapid, and most obvious type of linguistic change”. Speakers are often “highly conscious of lexical variants” and shifts between two synonymous expressions from the same semantic field are socially marked, as they relate to region (cf. BrE ‘*loo*’, AmE ‘*toilet*’, CanE ‘*washroom*’) (ibid.), ethnicity, degree of formality (‘*timorous*’-‘*afraid*’-‘*scared*’-‘*chicken*’) (Tagliamonte, 2016: 167) or age (e.g. one generation using consciously ‘*groovy*’ instead of ‘*good*’ or ‘*sick*’ instead of ‘*great*’) (ibid.: 3).

When the meaning of a word shifts, we speak of semantic change. The most commonly listed categories of semantic change include metonymic and metaphoric extensions, broadening and narrowing, along with amelioration and pejoration (i.e. subjective terms referring to the word’s becoming either more positive or more negative, respectively) (Fortson, 2003: 648-9).

‘Broadening’ occurs when “a word that originally denoted one member of a particular set of things comes to denote more or all the members of that set” (e.g. ‘dog’ referring to any member of the species *Canis familiaris*) (ibid.). ‘Bleaching’ is a similar process which occurs when “a word’s meaning becomes so vague that one is hard-pressed to ascribe any specific meaning to it anymore.” This can be observed with the word ‘thing’ which originally meant ‘assembly’ or ‘council’, but now it refers to ‘anything’. Tagliamonte (2016: 168) adds that adjectives and adverbs with strong positive and negative connotations may be easily bleached of their impact by overuse: “to say something is *interesting* may have once meant something highly positive but nowadays it is so overused that to call something *interesting* is almost damning”. She continues to claim that “this type of change necessitates the rise of a new word to carry the full impact of the intended meaning” (ibid.).

In addition, there are some independent linguistic processes which are involved in semantic change (Tagliamonte and Brooke, 2014: 10). They include ‘morphological clipping’ (fabulous → fab; legitimate → legit), analogical extension (lame (unoriginal) → lame food) and non-standard affixation (bad-ass, weak-ass) (ibid.).

### **2.4.2. Linguistic Variables**

In order to examine linguistic change, it is useful to work with the so-called ‘linguistic variable’. Linguistic variable is a “linguistic item which has identifiable variants, which are the different forms which can be used in an environment” (Wardhaugh and Fuller, 2015: 149). An example of a linguistic variable can be seen in words with post-vocalic (r) as in ‘farm’, offering two variants of pronunciation: with or without the [r] sound. On clausal level, variation is often observed at the beginning of relative clauses (e.g. ‘She is the girl who(m)/that/Ø I saw’) (ibid.: 150).

Tagliamonte and Brooke (2014) used adjectives as a linguistic variable. In order to determine whether choice of a specific adjective is indeed a linguistic variable, they worked only with synonyms from one semantic field (adjectives of ‘strangeness’ with synonyms like ‘weird’, ‘strange’ or ‘odd’). They note that “semantic fields, just like other systems of variation, evidence longitudinal layering” – the coexistence of new forms alongside functionally equivalent ones (ibid.: 11). Tagliamonte (2016: 168) adds that “variation among (partial) synonyms is much more socially stratified than might be expected and shifts across generations are evident.”

Linguistic variability is necessary for linguistic change, as “all change is preceded by variation” (Mesthrie et al., 2009: 110). Linguistic change occurs when one variant becomes generalized or extended to new lexical environments or to new social groups. The variant then continues to spread across the vocabulary system of the language and throughout the speech community, until it finally becomes part of its repertoire, making the process of linguistic change complete (110).

### **2.4.3. Social Variables**

Social variables consist of factors present in society which are “in some way quantifiable”, for example gender, age, social-class membership, ethnicity etc. (Wardhaugh and Fuller, 2015: 152). In order to establish social significance of a variable, we need to identify the relationship between linguistic (dependent) and social (independent) variables (ibid.: 161). In other words, we want to see if and how a linguistic variable changes after we manipulate a social variable (e.g. the age of the speaker). A linguistic variable which is socially significant requires correlation: “the dependent (linguistic) variable must change when some independent variable changes” (Chambers, 2003 cited in Wardhaugh and Fuller, 2015: 162).

We can use social variables not only to describe social distribution of a linguistic variable, but also to identify the social location of language innovators. According to Labov (2010: 279-284), women are the leaders of linguistic change: “women have been found to be in advance of men in most of the linguistic changes in progress studied by quantitative means in the several decades”. It is important to note though that most of the provided evidence comes from studies on phonological change and this female lead may not necessarily apply when dealing with different types of changes, e.g. those concerning lexis and semantics (Tagliamonte, 2016: 263).

Apart from gender, age can be a useful tool for identification of linguistic innovators as well. Tagliamonte (2016: 3) claims that adolescents are “the key individuals to look to when it comes to trying to find out what is changing in language and where language is headed.” Adolescents are most likely to employ incoming forms in effort to make language “more vivid and expressive” (ibid.: 2) and they tend to avoid neutral terms, replacing them with ‘trendier’ variants, partly in order to distance themselves from the older generation (ibid.). This includes slang expressions, which are often short-lived, as well as more lasting structural changes, for example the tendency towards ‘have’ instead of ‘have got’, which is becoming old fashioned. According to Tagliamonte (2016: 5), the grammar is set after adolescence and individuals are expected to keep the same patterns for the rest of their lives.

#### **2.4.4. Apparent Time and Real Time**

In order to examine linguistic change, we need to compare two states of the same language. There are two major time constructs which are commonly employed for this purpose: apparent time and real time (Labov, 1999: 43).

Apparent time is “the first and most straightforward” approach one can apply when studying linguistic change (ibid.: 45). Apparent time examines the distribution of linguistic variables across age groups in a speech community (Labov, 1999: 28). Bailey et al. (1992: 241) explain the relationship between age and distribution of linguistic features as follows: “unless there is evidence to the contrary, differences among generations of similar adults mirror actual diachronic developments in a language: the speech of each generation is assumed to reflect the language more or less as it existed at the time when that generation learned the language”. Labov (1999: 46) notes however that if we discover a significant correlation between age and

linguistic variable, we first need to assess whether we are dealing with linguistic change in progress or with the process of ‘age-grading’.

Age grading can be defined as a “regular change of linguistic behavior with age that repeats in each generation” (ibid.). It refers to the fact that language of one speaker is not stable during his or her lifetime. For example, younger speakers typically leave their linguistic habits as they get older and use the language which is more appropriate for their age group (Wardhaugh and Fuller, 2015: 203). Mesthrie et al. (2009: 117) mention slang as an instance of this process: “slang occurs in cycles generationally, with young people sweeping into it in adolescence and moving out of it as they grow older.” In this respect, real time studies are quite helpful. Labov (1999: 73) claims that “the obvious answer to the problems involved in the interpretation of apparent time would be to rely upon observations in real time, that is, to observe a speech community at two discrete points in time.”

Labov (ibid.) lists two basic approaches to real time studies. The first approach is to search for studies dealing with a given linguistic community and compare earlier and current findings. In the second approach, the researcher works with a linguistic community and after some time returns to repeat the study.

We can distinguish between two types of longitudinal studies: trend and panel studies (ibid.: 76). In a trend study, the researcher selects a representative sample and performs a study. After several years, he returns and selects another sample and repeats the procedure with different participants. In a panel study, the researcher works with the same speakers in different points in time, providing perhaps the most reliable data. A major drawback is typically present when dealing with this type of study: it is very time consuming and requires big amount of financial resources.

## **2.5. Recent Studies**

Utilization of corpus linguistics tools for the detection and description of language change in progress has recently been the subject of many studies. Language of evaluation proved to be an interesting basis for analysis, since this area of language has displayed the capacity for rapid change. This has been observed especially with intensifying adverbs, whose changing nature was described in a number of studies, some of which we shall quickly mention.

Macaulay (2006) investigates the language of Glasgow adolescents while focusing on the novel intensifier *pure* which appeared rather frequently in their speech (e.g. ‘this is *pure* embarrassing’) (Macaulay, 2006: 271). Macaulay suggests that the adverb undergoes the process of grammaticalization. Grammaticalization (or delexicalization) is seen as a process whereby a word is bleached of its original meaning and its function is then mainly pragmatic (ibid: 279). In fact, as *pure* got more popular over the period of seven years, it extended its use to different contexts. As a result, the adverb *pure*, which originally co-occurred predominantly with adjectives of negative evaluation, started to appear alongside adverbs, nouns and verbs with both positive and negative connotations (ibid.: 273), suggesting that the process of grammaticalization is indeed taking place.

Tagliamonte (2008) studies more common intensifiers, such as *really*, *so*, *very* or *pretty*, and observes that they are undergoing the processes of ‘renewal’ and ‘recycling’. Renewal, she explains, occurs when a new word enters the lexicon with the same effectiveness as the previous form (Tagliamonte, 2008: 362). This was observed with the adverb *really* which rises in popularity at the expense of *very*. Recycling, on the other hand, occurs when a form fluctuates in frequency and as a result, an older form may return to supremacy after some time. This was, in fact, the case of all the four intensifiers studied, since they were present in language for centuries but only at given time did they function as the supreme variant (ibid.: 389).

In 2014, Tagliamonte and Brooke applied the processes of renewal and recycling to the study of adjectives in the semantic field of ‘strangeness’ (*strange*, *weird*, *unusual*, *odd*, *bizarre*, *creepy*, *eerie* etc.) (Tagliamonte and Brooke, 2014). Using the corpus of spoken Canadian English, Toronto English Archive (TEA), they coded each adjective for syntactic function and the speaker’s gender, age, level of education and job type (the last two parameters were restricted to individuals over the age of 29). When looking at the co-occurrence of these adjectives with intensifiers, they again note the rapid rise of *really*, which is evolving in parallel with the rise of *weird*. Distributional analysis showed that *weird* is the most frequent adjective of strangeness (70% of all occurrences), followed by *strange* (14%). In addition, it was apparent that *weird* increases steadily across generations while *strange* is on the decline; suggesting that the process of renewal is active. However, Tagliamonte and Brooke did not find the syntactic function or sociolinguistic parameters to be significant factors in the recent change towards *weird*, concluding that we deal with lexical replacement, rather than grammatical development.

Finally, Tagliamonte and Pabst (2020) examine adjectives which are used to express highly positive evaluation (e.g. *great, cool, wonderful*) in Toronto, Canada and in York, England. They note some interesting regional differences in the distribution of these adjectives (e.g. the Toronto corpus is dominated by *cool*, though this adjective is very infrequent in York corpus, which is, in turn, dominated by *lovely*). The sociolinguistic analysis of the adjectives showed that there was little evidence to conclude that women are the leaders of linguistic change. They also uncovered that new incoming forms are “favoured in predicative position or as stand-alones”, hypothesizing that adjectives of highly positive evaluation rise as stand-alones or in predicative position, and are later expanded to other syntactic positions.

### 3. Material and Method

#### 3.1. Material

We worked with two editions of the British National Corpus (BNC): we used the Spoken BNC2014 (accessed through the [cqpweb](http://cqpweb.lancs.ac.uk/bnc2014spoken/)<sup>5</sup>) to uncover adjectives used frequently in present-day informal spoken conversation and we compared it with the data in the original BNC from 1994 (accessed through the [bncweb](http://bncweb.lancs.ac.uk/)<sup>6</sup>) (cf. Love et al. 2017). Since the original BNC consists of a great variety of spoken and written data, we needed to create a subcorpus of texts comparable to Spoken BNC2014, i.e. spoken, demographically-sampled texts. For our convenience, we labelled this subcorpus as ‘BNC1994’, while the Spoken BNC2014 is referred to as ‘BNC2014’. The sizes of both corpora are given in the table below.

Corpus	Number of texts	Size in words
BNC1994	153	4.233.962
BNC2014	1251	11.422.617

**Table 1:** Corpora used in the thesis

<sup>5</sup> <http://cqpweb.lancs.ac.uk/bnc2014spoken/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://bncweb.lancs.ac.uk/>

## 3.2. Method

### 3.2.1. Data Selection

The first step of the analysis was the extraction of adjectives of positive evaluation from BNC2014 and BNC1994. We began by generating a list of the most frequent general adjectives in both corpora<sup>7</sup>, regardless of their semantics. Then we examined the 150 most frequent general adjectives in both corpora and selected only those which expressed positive evaluation.

We should mention that the term ‘evaluation’ is quite broad, as one can evaluate not only whether something is good or bad (e.g. *awesome*), but also one’s feelings (e.g. *happy*), whether a situation is likely or unlikely to occur (e.g. *certain*) etc. (Cf. Chapter 2.2.). In this thesis, we limit ourselves to the judgement of good or bad, and since we focus on positive evaluation, we are interested only in adjectives which evaluate a thing or a situation as being ‘good’.

When identifying evaluative adjectives, we relied on several sources. We began with the model of semantic classification of adjectives provided by Biber et al. (1999) (discussed in Chapter 2.1.2.). Evaluative adjectives are typically gradable and they have descriptive meaning. These adjectives typically denote judgement, affect or emphasis. If an adjective meets this requirement, it most likely has an evaluative potential. Biber et. al. (1999) list several adjectives as being evaluative: *good, great, fine, lovely, beautiful, nice, right*. If these adjectives appeared among our data, we included them into our analysis and looked for adjectives with the same or similar meaning.

Those adjectives were then tested for their evaluative potential, which was done by exploring their textual context and presence in lexico-grammatical patterns which are associated with evaluative adjectives. This was done mainly to avoid intuitive selection of adjectives. Hunston and Sinclair (2003) identified patterns which are associated with evaluation (Table 2, also briefly mentioned in Chapter 2.2.1.). This is especially useful for some adjectives which are evaluative only in one of their senses (e.g. *cool*). Finally, evaluative adjectives are typically graded and frequently intensified by degree adverbs, which also helped us to decide if the adjective had an evaluative potential.

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<sup>7</sup> BNC2014 (cqpweb) simple query: \_JJ, frequency breakdown  
BNC1994 (bncweb) simple query: \_AJ0, frequency breakdown

Pattern	Example
<i>It</i> + link V + adj. group + clause	<i>It was <b>wonderful</b> talking to you the other day.</i>
<i>There</i> + link V + <i>something/nothing/anything</i> + adj. group + <i>about/in</i> + N/ <i>-ing</i> clause	<i>There's something <b>rather appealing</b> about being able to spend the evening in a town.</i>
Link V + adj. group + <i>that/to</i> -infinitive clause	<i>This book is <b>interesting</b> to read.</i>
Pseudo-clefts	<i>What's <b>very good</b> about this play is that it broadens people's view.</i>
Patterns with general nouns	<i>The <b>surprising</b> thing about chess is that computers play it so well.</i>

**Table 2:** Lexico-grammatical patterns associated with evaluative adjectives

It should be stressed that an adjective needed to be clear and consistent in expressing positive evaluation and/or in entering the patterns listed above, since some of these patterns are productive and may force otherwise non-evaluative adjective to behave temporarily as an evaluative one. An example of an adjective which meets these criteria and could therefore be included into the analysis is *fun*. The adjective expresses positive subjective judgement, is often intensified by degree adverbs and enters frequently some patterns typical of evaluative adjectives (e.g. *It's just **so fun** to read*).

Once we have determined which adjectives (out of the 150 most frequent ones in both corpora) often have evaluative potential, we noted their raw and relative frequency (instances per million). The data are presented in Table 3. We then compared the frequencies of the adjectives<sup>8</sup> to see if the adjective appeared significantly more frequently in a given corpus. The statistical value used is log-likelihood and the difference is statistically significant on the 0.05 level of significance (27 adjectives of 30, i.e. 90 %). Out of these adjectives, we singled out a group whose relative frequency in one corpus was at least twice as high as in the other one (13 adjectives of 30, i.e. approximately 43.3 %). We refer to this difference as 'highly significant'. It is this group that we focused on in the analysis. In the analysis, we are going

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.korpus.cz/calc/> (2 words in 2 corpora) was used for frequency comparison between adjectives found in BNC2014 and BNC1994.

to provide a general overview of these adjectives and then we will select three adjectives (*amazing, awesome, cool*) which we will describe in detail.

BNC2014	Hits	ipm	BNC1994	Hits	Ipm
good	26113	2286.1	good	7886	1862.6
nice	13803	1208.4	nice	4636	1095.0
right	8110	710.0	right	4387	1036.2
fine	5556	486.4	fine	731	172.7
okay	4887	427.8	okay	472	111.5
funny	4075	356.7	funny	1350	318.9
alright	4056	355.1	alright	2997	707.9
lovely	3964	347.0	lovely	1842	435.1
great	3716	325.3	great	1043	246.3
cool	2874	251.6	cool	86	20.3
interesting	2688	235.3	interesting	330	77.9
amazing	2093	183.2	amazing	173	40.9
brilliant	1521	133.2	brilliant	476	112.4
proper	1191	104.3	proper	266	62.8
fun	1119	98.0	fun	64	15.1
beautiful	1114	97.5	beautiful	443	104.6
sweet	996	87.2	sweet	198	46.8
cute	763	66.8	cute	50	11.8
pretty	699	61.2	pretty	263	62.1
perfect	686	60.1	perfect	111	26.2
fantastic	662	58.0	fantastic	74	17.5
clever	608	53.2	clever	271	64.0
exciting	542	47.5	exciting	86	20.3
wonderful	517	45.3	wonderful	276	65.2
excellent	487	42.6	excellent	133	31.4
awesome	482	42.2	awesome	0	0
gorgeous	231	20.2	gorgeous	164	38.7
super	423	37.0	super	156	36.8
marvellous	72	6.3	marvellous	155	36.6
wicked	75	6.6	wicked	151	35.7

significant difference  
 highly significant difference  
 the difference is not significant

**Table 3:** Evaluative adjectives in BNC2014 and BNC1994

### 3.2.2. The descriptive parameters used

A thorough analysis of selected adjectives focused on three areas: syntactic functions of the adjective, its phraseology (collocations) and sociolinguistic distribution.

### 3.2.2.1. Syntactic features of adjectives

As a first step, we generated 50 random concordance lines with the particular adjective, and determined its syntactic function. Sometimes it was impossible to identify the syntactic function due to speech related fluency phenomena (mainly fragmentary or unfinished utterances), e.g. in *got an awesome to for you to watch* – the presence of the indefinite article suggests that the adjective maybe functions as a modifier, but since there is no noun to confirm that, this example was discarded. The deleted examples were not further dealt with, and were replaced by subsequent examples, until a set of 50 syntactically analysable concordance lines was extracted. In other cases, we cannot identify the syntactic function due to grammatical ambiguity. Such examples were retained, and labelled as ‘equivocal’ in the analysis, e.g. *find someone else that’s awesome*, depending on the syntactic function of *that*.

Basic syntactic functions, with subtypes, were distinguished:

- a) The ‘attributive’ function, which includes instances where the adjective is a premodifier (*nice house*) or a postmodifier (*something nice*).
- b) Two subtypes of the predicative function were distinguished:
  - the ‘predicative with a definite noun phrase in the subject position’, e.g. *the house is lovely*; *he is brilliant*. This also includes clauses where the subject is realized by anaphoric *it*, since *it* refers to a noun phrase which can be identified in the preceding text, e.g. *My friend’s just been to Burma and it looks amazing*.
  - the ‘predicative with cataphoric reference’, e.g. *it’s amazing how kind and helpful people can be*. The subordinate clause functions as a notional subject in extraposition and the function of *it* is anticipatory. The extraposed subject may also be realized by a nominal expression or non-finite clause. We also include other structures with cataphoric reference, e.g. those where the subject complement is realized by a nominal content exclamative clause (*that’s how awesome Jack Bauer is*) or instances where the adjective is followed by a noun which it evaluates (*amazing the photograph*).
- c) The ‘extended reference’ means that the subject *it* (or other pronouns) does not refer to a specific noun or nominal expression (and hence to a particular person or object), but to a “whole process or complex phenomenon” (Halliday and Hassan: 1976), e.g. A: *it’s been quite a long holiday already there’s another week* B: *it’s great isn’t it?* We cannot identify a specific noun phrase which is being evaluated, rather we understand that the speaker B evaluates an entire situation as being great.

- d) We employ the term ‘stand-alone position’ (Tagliamonte and Pabst, 2020) to refer to utterances where the adjective does not modify any noun, nor is it preceded by a verb. However, it may be (and often is) accompanied by adverbs, interjections, particles etc., e.g. A: *I spoke to him yesterday actually* B: *oh cool*. The main function of an adjective used in stand-alone position is to express a reaction to the preceding utterance or to serve as a monitoring device.
- e) Marginally, adjectives are used to make ‘metalinguistic’ comments, e.g. *I say awesome all the time and I have to stop myself from saying it*. This syntactic function will be called ‘metalinguistic’.

### **3.2.2.2. Collocations**

We have used the ‘collocation’ tool in the BNC1994 and BNC2014 to explore collocates of selected adjectives. This gave us a more general grasp of the data, and helped us identify textual functions or semantic preferences of the adjectives.

The collocation span varied, as we wanted to focus both on immediate and more distant collocates. The statistical value used was the dice coefficient. The Dice collocation measure favours “collocates which occur exclusively in each other’s company but do not have to be rare” (Březina, 2018: 70). In this analysis, exclusivity is more important than frequency, which is the reason why the dice coefficient was used.

### **3.2.2.3. Sociolinguistic variables**

The final step was to explore the distribution of the adjective, focusing on sociolinguistic data: age and gender of the speaker. The aim was to see which speakers, based on their gender and age, tend to adopt these innovative adjectives. By comparing the demographic data in the two corpora, we were able to examine whether speakers usually retain these expressions, or whether they stopped using them after some time.

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1. General Overview

We are going to begin the analysis by providing a general sociolinguistic overview of adjectives of positive evaluation, focusing on those whose difference in frequency among BNC1994 and BNC2014 was statistically ‘highly significant’ (see Table 3). Most of these adjectives were more frequent in BNC2014, with the exception of *marvellous* and *wicked*, which were more common in BNC1994.

Table 4 and Table 5 give the information on age distribution in BNC1994 and BNC2014. The total relative frequency of the adjective then serves as a norm: it is the frequency which is generally expected. Speakers from different age groups may overuse the adjective (they use it more frequently than would be expected based on the overall frequency of the adjective in the corpus), or they underuse it. We highlight all age groups which overuse an adjective with a light blue colour. The highest relative frequency is always printed in bold and highlighted with dark blue colour, so that we can see which age group uses the adjective most frequently.

	Age (years of age)						total
	0-14	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-59	60+	
<b>BNC1994</b>							
<b>fine</b>	140.6	147.8	<b>209.9</b>	158.7	201.9	134.1	172.7
<b>okay</b>	<b>151.8</b>	121.9	131.8	120.4	75.0	40.2	111.5
<b>cool</b>	<b>67.5</b>	42.0	5.8	4.3	5.5	13.4	20.3
<b>interesting</b>	53.4	95.9	62.3	52.4	<b>106.4</b>	84.9	77.9
<b>amazing</b>	25.3	38.0	<b>63.7</b>	31.2	36.8	53.6	40.9
<b>fun</b>	25.3	28.0	<b>31.9</b>	7.1	5.5	4.5	15.1
<b>cute</b>	<b>42.2</b>	26.0	11.6	7.1	0.0	4.5	11.8
<b>perfect</b>	28.1	<b>32.0</b>	20.3	15.6	28.6	31.3	26.2
<b>fantastic</b>	8.4	18.0	20.3	18.4	15.0	<b>22.3</b>	17.5
<b>exciting</b>	8.4	<b>36.0</b>	27.5	17.0	25.9	4.5	20.3
<b>awesome</b>	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>marvellous</b>	0.0	10.0	26.1	21.3	49.1	<b>93.8</b>	36.6
<b>wicked</b>	<b>177.1</b>	38.0	14.5	15.6	6.8	10.4	35.7

**Table 4:** Age distribution of adjectives of positive evaluation in BNC1994 (frequency per million words)

	Age (years of age)						total
	0-14	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-59	60+	
<b>BNC2014</b>	<b>0-14</b>	<b>15-24</b>	<b>25-34</b>	<b>35-44</b>	<b>45-59</b>	<b>60+</b>	<b>total</b>
<b>fine</b>	433.4	<b>627.8</b>	506.1	360.2	439.7	288.2	486.4
<b>okay</b>	549.9	<b>562.7</b>	445.7	487.0	364.1	222.2	427.8
<b>cool</b>	<b>633.9</b>	435.2	505.5	197.1	59.2	32.0	251.6
<b>interesting</b>	106.7	244.4	233.0	<b>328.3</b>	200.1	229.7	235.3
<b>amazing</b>	187.6	187.2	<b>287.9</b>	192.8	126.7	138.2	183.2
<b>fun</b>	<b>161.7</b>	160.9	123.9	81.9	44.2	39.0	98.0
<b>cute</b>	93.8	<b>146.9</b>	52.4	46.4	26.0	7.6	66.8
<b>perfect</b>	77.6	67.9	<b>77.7</b>	66.7	41.5	32.0	60.1
<b>fantastic</b>	3.2	28.4	25.9	72.5	77.0	<b>100.2</b>	58.0
<b>exciting</b>	22.6	53.3	46.2	<b>63.1</b>	32.8	25.5	47.5
<b>awesome</b>	51.8	47.9	<b>108.5</b>	26.8	4.1	8.1	42.2
<b>marvellous</b>	0.0	5.0	0.0	5.1	6.8	<b>17.3</b>	6.3
<b>wicked</b>	0.0	8.3	<b>11.1</b>	8.7	2.3	7.0	6.6

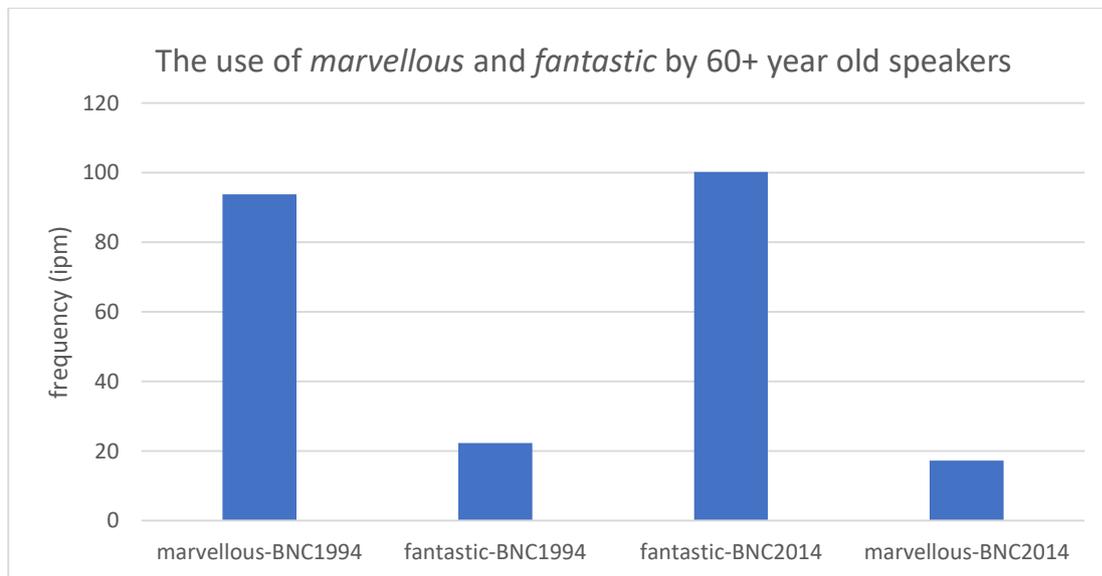
**Table 5:** Age distribution of adjectives of positive evaluation in BNC2014 (frequency per million words)

We can see that some adjectives are very strongly associated with a specific age group: e.g. *wicked* in BNC1994 was used almost exclusively by the age group 0-14 years (177.1 ipm) (note that the use of the second most represented age group, 15-24 years, was only 38.0 ipm). Similar preference for a specific age group can be observed with *marvellous* in BNC1994 (common among speakers who are 60 years or older). However, sometimes it is impossible to determine only one age group which frequently uses the adjective, as some adjectives are frequent between older and younger people at the same time (e.g. *amazing* in BNC1994, which was relatively frequent among the group 25-34 as well as 60+, or *perfect* in BNC2014, which is common among speakers from 0 to 44 years).

We observe that the speakers from the age group 15-24 years overuse almost all evaluative adjectives in question (in BNC2014, they overuse all adjectives with the exception of *fantastic* and *marvellous*, which are, however, associated with older speakers). In addition, we may note a steep decline in frequency after around the age of 35 (e.g. *cool*, *fun* or *awesome* in BNC2014), or sooner (*cute* in BNC2014, where the frequency declines after the age of 24).

The data show that some adjectives are used by the same age group both in BNC1994 as well as in BNC2014. In both corpora, *cool* is preferred by children and teenagers (0-14 years old) and *fantastic* and *marvellous* by speakers who are 60 years or older. Some adjectives were used by younger speakers in BNC1994 and by older in BNC2014, suggesting that the generation may have retained the adjective, e.g. *wicked* (0-14 in BNC1994 and 25-34 in BNC2014) or *exciting* (15-24 in BNC1994, 35-44 in BNC2014).

We can also observe an interesting variation between *marvellous* and *fantastic*. Both adjectives are preferred by speakers from the age group 60+. However, in BNC1994, the favoured adjective would be *marvellous* (93.8 ipm) and *fantastic* was more peripheral (22.3 ipm). This changes in BNC2014. The popularity of *marvellous* rapidly declines (17.3 ipm) and is replaced by *fantastic*, where we can see an increase in frequency (100.2) (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** The use of *marvellous* and *fantastic* by 60+ year old speakers

As a next step, we explore gender variation. If women are the leaders of linguistic change (Labov 2010, also see Chapter 2.4.3.), we would expect that they would use a novel expression (in this case an adjective) significantly more frequently than men. We therefore focus only on those adjectives which were significantly more frequent in BNC2014 (i.e. ‘novel’ adjectives, leaving aside *marvellous* and *wicked*). For each adjective we note the relative frequency (ipm) of men’s and women’s usage and compare them. If the difference in frequency is not significant, we use yellow colour to label the data. If the difference is statistically significant<sup>9</sup>, we print the higher frequency in bold and use blue colour to indicate that men use the adjective more frequently, or orange colour if women do. The gender distribution is provided in the table below.

<b>BNC1994</b>	<b>male</b>	<b>female</b>	<b>BNC2014</b>	<b>male</b>	<b>female</b>
<i>fine</i>	169.2	170.5	<i>fine</i>	364.0	<b>561.6</b>
<i>okay</i>	<b>129.3</b>	87.0	<i>okay</i>	350.2	<b>475.7</b>
<i>cool</i>	<b>25.4</b>	13.3	<i>cool</i>	<b>268.8</b>	240.9
<i>interesting</i>	89.4	74.6	<i>interesting</i>	234.3	236.0
<i>amazing</i>	<b>61.2</b>	30.5	<i>amazing</i>	146.7	<b>205.7</b>
<i>fun</i>	15.8	15.0	<i>fun</i>	82.1	<b>107.8</b>
<i>cute</i>	7.6	14.6	<i>cute</i>	33.8	<b>87.1</b>
<i>perfect</i>	<b>36.4</b>	19.4	<i>perfect</i>	58.4	61.1
<i>fantastic</i>	18.6	17.7	<i>fantastic</i>	62.3	55.3
<i>exciting</i>	12.4	<b>25.6</b>	<i>exciting</i>	21.6	<b>63.4</b>
<i>awesome</i>	0.0	0.0	<i>awesome</i>	37.5	45.1

**Table 6:** Gender distribution of adjectives of positive evaluation

In BNC1994, the only adjective which is significantly more frequent among women is *exciting*, in other cases it is men who use evaluative adjectives more frequently (*okay*, *cool*, *amazing*, *perfect*), or there is no significant difference among genders (*fine*, *interesting*, *fun*, *cute*, *fantastic*). However, in BNC2014, the adjectives are relatively less frequent in comparison to BNC1994. We can see that as the adjectives are generally more popular, women use them more frequently. As a result, some adjectives are no longer gender-neutral in BNC2014 (*fine*, *fun*, *cute*) and we even see women taking the lead from men (*okay*,

<sup>9</sup> The difference is significant at 0.05, see Chapter 3.2.1.

*amazing*). At the same time, there are adjectives (*interesting, fantastic, awesome*) which are much more popular in BNC2014, yet they are used more or less equally by men and women alike. The only adjective which is used significantly more frequently by men in BNC1994 as well as in BNC2014 is *cool*.

It is difficult to say whether women are responsible for the linguistic change. When an adjective becomes popular, women do usually use it more frequently than men (e.g. *amazing*). However, the data from BNC1994 show that when the adjective is less popular, there tends to be no gender distinction or even a male lead.

## 4.2. *Amazing*

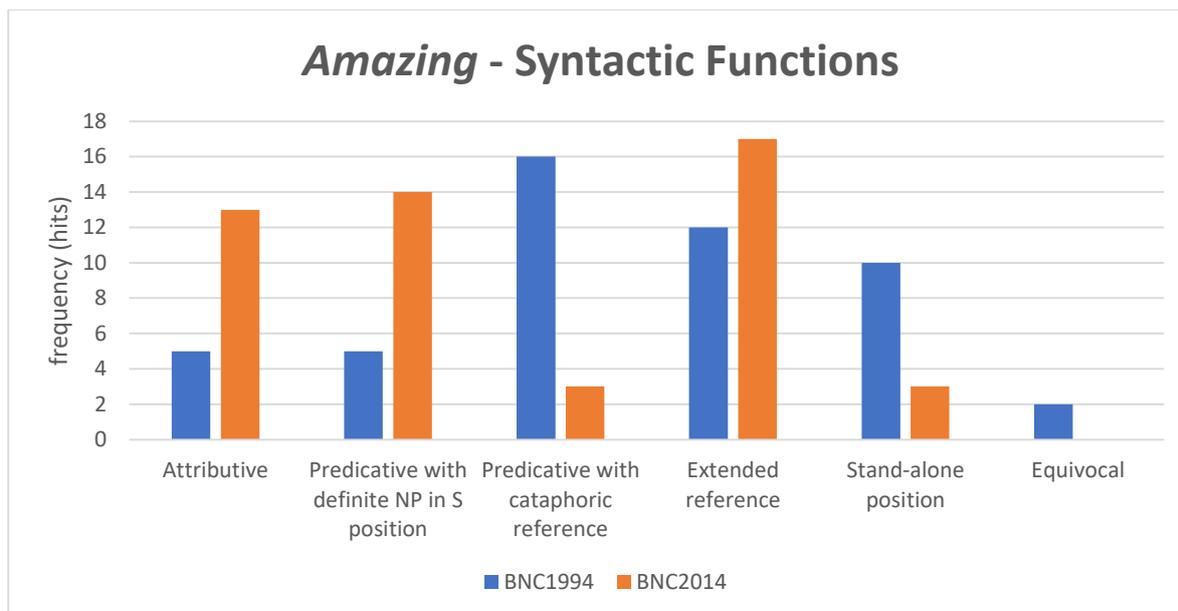
The adjective *amazing* seems to be a good starting point for our analysis. It is one of the most prominent evaluators in BNC2014 (183.2 ipm), though it is not infrequent in BNC1994 either (40.9 ipm). The major growth in frequency shows that the adjective is gaining in popularity. The following analysis aims to uncover the changes that the adjective has undergone over the period of twenty years, focusing on its syntactic functions and prosody, as well as on sociolinguistic categories, in particular gender and age of the speaker.

### 4.2.1. Syntactic Analysis

Firstly, let us examine the various syntactic functions of the adjective. In the table below, we provide an overview of the syntactic functions of 50 random instances of the adjective *amazing* from both corpora.

Syntactic function	BNC1994	BNC2014
Attributive	5	13
Predicative with definite NP in S position	5	14
Predicative with cataphoric reference	16	3
Extended reference	12	17
Stand-alone position	10	3
Equivocal	2	0
Total	50	50

**Table 7:** Syntactic functions of *amazing*



**Figure 2:** Syntactic functions of *amazing*

Firstly, it should be noted that our data suggest that the adjective *amazing* is increasingly being used as a modifier: in BNC1994, *amazing* was only occasionally attested in the attributive position (e.g. *amazing picture*), while in BNC2014 this function has considerably risen. The structure with a definite noun phrase in the subject position, where *amazing* functions as the subject complement (e.g. *the music is amazing*) underwent a similar development over time.

There are several instances where the subject is realized by *it*, *this*, or *that*, with the adjective referring to an entire event mentioned previously in the text (grammatically, to a preceding clause (or clauses), not just to a single nominal) – these are the cases of the so-called extended reference. This construction occurs in both corpora, though it is slightly more frequent in the 2014 corpus. By contrast, the stand-alone position was not very frequent in contemporary speech, especially when compared to BNC1994.

The most striking difference, as far as syntax is concerned, is present in cases where the adjective *amazing* has cataphoric reference – it evaluates some event which is specified later on in the text. While this function of the adjective is by far the most frequent one in BNC1994, it is barely present in BNC2014, which again implies that the rise in popularity is accompanied by changes in usage.

In the following part, we shall work with our corpora in their entirety, instead of examining individual concordance lines, as was done thus far. Collocational analysis will be used to

explore in detail the tendencies for preferred syntactic structures which were outlined above, as well as to identify semantic preference or semantic prosody associated with the adjective.

#### 4.2.1.1. Predicative position and stand-alone position

If we search for immediate right collocates of the node *amazing* in BNC1994, we can see that the adjective is most frequently followed by grammatical words, such as *how*, *what*, *that*, *where* and *when*, which introduce a subordinate nominal clause. The adjective evaluates the event described in the subordinate clause, therefore these are the cases when *amazing* has cataphoric reference. The syntactic function of the clause is that of a notional subject in extraposition; the sentence-initial subject position is occupied by anticipatory *it* (ex. 1, 3), or it is left empty (ex. 2). The dependent clause is often exclamative<sup>10</sup>, where *how* has an intensifying function: the intensified quality may be implied (ex. 2, equivalent to *amazing how much people's attitude change*), or overt (ex. 1; other adverbs which co-occur with *how* include *fast*, *quickly* or *often*). Interestingly, it is very common that the sentence is followed by a question tag which is used to maintain the attention of the listener. As a result, we can see a pattern '(it's) amazing + how (that/what/where/when) clause + (question tag)' (ex. 1, 3).

(1) *It's amazing how much you forget isn't it this* (1994)

(2) *Amazing how people's attitude change towards it when they learn you got <unclear>* (1994)

(3) *It's amazing how the worst weather we've had recently has been on Saturdays and Sundays isn't it?* (1994)

Constructions such as these do appear in BNC2014 as well (ex. 4), though they are not as prominent (immediate right collocates are much more diverse, including personal pronouns, nouns or interjections). It should also be noted that if the adjective is used in this pattern, the meaning of the adjective is 'surprising', rather than 'very good' and the speaker's stance is often negatively evaluative. This is clear in examples (1) and (3) – *forgetting* and *the worst weather* are not to be desired; example (2) allows both positive and negative reading, depending on the context. In fact, this holds true for both corpora – in example (4), which is taken from BNC2014, we may observe another instance of negative evaluation. This suggests

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<sup>10</sup> Also described in Dušková a kol., *Elektronická mluvnice současné angličtiny*, <http://emsa.ff.cuni.cz/12.14>.

that it is the construction which sometimes causes the otherwise positive adjective to have negative semantic prosody, rather than saying that the adjective meaning changed in and of itself over time. However, one of the reasons why the ‘very good’ meaning prevails in today’s language (as we shall see further on) is most likely the fact that this pattern, while extremely frequent in the BNC1994, substantially decreased in BNC2014 (see Table 4).

(4) *it's it's very entertaining (.) I thought it was a very good film (.) ah (.) amazing how many bad films are made isn't it* (2014)

Still, to say that this pattern always triggers negative connotations in the adjective would be inaccurate – in both corpora, there are instances where the adjective clearly has positive semantic prosody (cf. ex. 5). However, it seems that the construction is quite prone to attract negative evaluation (e.g. as opposed to the cases when the adjective is in a stand-alone position).

(5) *it's amazing how many people had actually wished me happy birthday messages* (2014)

In this following section, we will be focusing on the left collocates of the node *amazing* (5L-1L), in order to identify the subject of the sentence. In BNC1994, the subject is typically realized by *it*, *this* or *that*, which confirms our observations from examples (1-3) – the pronoun anticipates the clausal subject in extraposition. These pronouns may of course also have anaphoric reference, referring to a preceding nominal expression (exx 6-7).

(6) *you wouldn't believe the computer Nasha's got, it's absolutely amazing.* (1994)

(7) *oh my friend's just been to Burma and it looks amazing.* (2014)

If the pronoun refers to an entire process or event mentioned previously in the text, we speak of the so-called extended reference. This occurs in both corpora, but closer analysis of the concordance lines shows that in BNC1994, the speakers tend to describe as *amazing* something which they themselves have mentioned. This is visible both in sentences with anticipatory *it* (exx 1-3) and with anaphoric *it* (exx 8-9). Of course, the adjective may also be used more interactively (ex. 10), but *amazing* is more likely to evaluate the content of the speaker’s own utterance in BNC1994.

(8) *I could watch telly and actually hear what Jim was saying in Neighbours. It was amazing!* (1994)

(9) *And then he thought, this is queer so he picked the bonnet <pause> took the bonnet up like that <pause> and all the bloody front of the car had come loose <pause> and all all <-|-> the welding <-|-> had co--come loose! Bloody amazing it was! (1994)*

(10) A: *That's marvellous that, isn't <-|-> it yes?* B: *It's amazing!* (1994)

In BNC2014, the adjective *amazing* is much more interactive (exx 11-12). This is confirmed by its co-occurrence with interjections, such as *wow* (which itself expresses positive evaluation), *oh*, *ah*, or *yeah*, which appear both on the left and on the right from the node *amazing*.

(11) A: *yeah that's Slovenia that's from er when we were still at university* B: *that's amazing* (.) *that's amazing gosh you look young there* (2014)

(12) A: *we've got some kind of connection you know* B: *oh that's amazing* A: *oh it is totally* (...) (2014)

It should be noted that this construction is very similar to the stand-alone position of the adjective, especially when it functions as a reaction to the utterance of the previous speaker. *Amazing* standing on its own alternates with *it's/that's amazing*, as it has the same meaning and effect (exx 13-14).

(13) *so she actually does get in there with the dogs and and swims with the dogs sort of thing* B: *oh wow* (.) *oh my god* (.) *oh wow amazing* (1994)

(14) A: *apparently it's haunted* B: *amazing* (2014)

This stand-alone position of the adjective occurs in both corpora, however, it is rather infrequent in BNC2014 (see Table 4). A possible explanation for that may be the fact that the adjective is relatively more frequent in different contexts, e.g. when modifying nouns.

Apart from the above-mentioned pronouns (i.e. *it*, *this* and *that*), the subject of the copular predication with *amazing* in BNC2014 is realized by various means, namely by personal pronouns (mostly *he*, *she* and *you*), proper nouns referring to people, places or companies (e.g. *Spain*, *Venice*, *William and Kate*, *Facebook*); people can be also referred to by common nouns (e.g. *people*, *students*). In addition, *amazing* seems to be used for evaluation based on sensory perception (cf. subject realized by nouns which evoke sensory perception, e.g. *cakes*, *food*, *cream*, *gravy*, *juice*, *herbs*, *pizza* imply taste, smell and even sight; *photos* imply sight

as well, *music* implies hearing, and so on). Nouns with general meaning can form the subject (*stuff, life*), as well as other miscellaneous nouns (*books, roads, room* etc.).

This list (which is by no means exhaustive) should illustrate the fact that there is a great variability in what noun phrases can function as the subject. Overall however, there seems to be a strong preference for personal subjects and subjects implying sensory perceptions, with especially noticeable semantic preference for words referring to food and drinks. The copular verb is typically *be* (ex. 16), but ‘sensory’ copular verbs are also very frequent (*look, sound, smell, taste, feel*) (exx 15-17)<sup>11</sup>.

(15) A: *I would like lots and lots of different flavoured marshmallows erm raspberry ones and lavender ones and rose ones and violet ones they 'd be very nice* B: *mm lavender tastes amazing* (2014)

(16) *ah my mum my mum gets it gets it without the mayo that's so boring the mayo's amazing oh you don't like mayonnaise? what?* (2014)

(17) A: *The food sounded amazing*, B: *It did sound nice* (2014)

If we try to identify the nouns which stand in the subject position in BNC1994, the situation is quite different. Firstly, there are not many of them: partly due to the fact that the adjective itself is much less frequent in the corpus, partly due to the common use of anticipatory *it* followed by a subordinate clause (exx 1-3). The only nouns which appeared in the subject position were *cassette player, Tony, Fred, countries, colour combination, contracts* and *nan* (ex. 18). We can see that there are not enough instances to attempt a semantic classification of these nouns. The same can be said about the copular predicator, which is realized only by *be*.

(18) *I was chatting to his nan, his nan's amazing you know, she's a right traveller.* (1994)

#### 4.2.1.2. Attributive position

The attributive function of the adjective is more frequent in BNC2014 than in BNC1994 (see Table 7). In order to identify the nouns which are being modified, we need to look for structures consisting of the adjective *amazing* followed by a noun, with the possibility of

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<sup>11</sup> The verb *sound* in (17) ascribes the quality to what the speaker heard, rather than to the subject (*the food*).

another modifier between them<sup>12</sup>. In BNC2014, nouns with general meaning are the most frequent ones. They typically refer to people (e.g. *person*) or they denote other general entities (e.g. *thing, experience*). This noun phrase often functions as the subject complement, which gives rise to a copular predication (qualification by non-genuine classification). The structure is semantically very similar to the cases when the adjective itself has predicative function (qualifying predication), as can be seen in examples (19-20).

(19) you're an amazing person I think you are (cf. you're amazing) (2014)

(20) it was a pretty pretty amazing experience (cf. it was pretty amazing) (2014)

*Amazing* also tends to co-occur with nouns which describe some temporal dimension, e.g. *afternoon*, or location (e.g. *beach*). Nouns which relate to leisure activities are also modified by the adjective (e.g. *book*), as are, again, many nouns depicting foods (e.g. *chicken sandwich*) We can also find various nouns from different semantic categories which are modified by *amazing* (e.g. *friendship*). All of these nouns are similar in that they all relate to the everyday life of the speaker and they usually have positive connotations – the adjective is synonymous with *very good* (ex. 21).

(21) I th-there's an amazing chocolate bar like the most amazing chocolate bar I've ever had  
*Echos they're called* (2014)

Sometimes, the adjective can mean *big* or *enormous* and it modifies nouns depicting quantity: *number, amount* (ex. 22).

(22) the thing is his studio apparently is about ten acres he has er all this amazing amount of space and erm I mean it is big beyond the whole thing is big beyond belief (2014)

However, the dominant meaning of the adjective in BNC2014 is the one with positive evaluation. The nouns which are frequently modified by *amazing* are summarized in the table below.

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<sup>12</sup> Query BNC2014: [word="amazing"][pos="JJ.\*"]{0,1}[pos="N.\*"] within u

Semantic category	Example
People	<i>person, people, guy, woman, girl, babies</i>
Food and drinks	<i>apple, brownie(s), cake(s), cheeses, chicken sandwich, meatballs, coffee</i>
Nouns with general meaning	<i>stuff, thing(s), place(s), experience, time</i>
Temporal nouns	<i>day, life, time(s), afternoon, weekend</i>
Locative nouns	<i>place, beach, house, hotel</i>
Entertainment	<i>book, film, ballet, music, holiday</i>
Other nouns with positive connotations	<i>friendship, gift, creativity</i>
Nouns depicting quantity	<i>number, amount</i>

**Table 8:** Nouns modified by *amazing* in BNC2014

If we try to identify which nouns are being modified by the adjective in BNC1994, we can see several differences. Firstly, there are not many of them – partly due to the fact that the adjective itself is less frequent in this corpus, partly due to its occurrence in different constructions, namely in those with anticipatory *it* with clausal subject in extraposition. Secondly, the adjective *amazing* meaning *enormous* is much more noticeable in BNC1994 – e.g. *amazing amount, difference, sensation or pain*.

#### 4.2.1.3. Collocational analysis

Finally, we are going to examine various left and right collocates of the node *amazing* in BNC2014, which can provide some additional information on the behaviour of the adjective and, at the same time, we may explore different mechanisms of positive evaluation in general.

Collocates on parts of speech tags reveal that *amazing* co-occurs with intensifiers, often on both sides. *Most*, which typically functions as a superlative marker, further illustrates the tendency of *amazing* to function as a premodifier (*the most amazing N*).

The noun is then often further postmodified (e.g. by subordinate clause (ex. 23; also see ex. 21) or prepositional phrase (ex. 24)); it should be mentioned that in these cases, the postmodifier cannot occur without the premodifier.

(23) *it's like absolutely positively the most amazing thing I have ever seen in my li-entire life like yeah* (2014)

(24) *it's like the most amazing house in the world* (2014)

*How* is another adverb with intensifying function which frequently precedes *amazing* – mostly independently (ex. 25), or in exclamatory clauses (ex. 26). These clauses are inherently emotionally charged and therefore further contribute to and emphasize the overall positive evaluation of the utterance. They are used to refer to an entire situation and are employed in similar contexts as stand-alone *amazing*, but the difference is that the exclamatory clause is capable of adding extra emphasis on the utterance, while the adjective in a stand-alone position is used more as a monitoring tool (cf. ex. 25, where *amazing* has a similar function as *yeah*, and ex. 26).

(25) *A: I saw this advert for the BBC to work as a production assistant in Bristol to work on natural history programmes (.) and I thought well I know much more about this than I do about the B: how amazing A: the London thing B: yeah* (2014)

(26) *A: my great great grandfather I say saw William Wordsworth B: oh wow C: that's amazing A: how how amazing is that* (2014)

Other intensifying adverbs which contribute to positive discourse prosody are for example *absolutely*, *quite*, *fucking*, *pretty* or *really*. The accumulation of positive meaning is also indicated by adjectives of positive evaluation which co-occur with *amazing*, namely *amazing* itself, *fantastic*, *cool*, *incredible*, *good*, *brilliant*, *beautiful*, *awesome* or *best*.

(27) *A: I thought that was excellent but this one just eclipsed it by a mile I thought it was a fantastic production B: yeah absolutely amazing I could 've gone back and watched it again* (2014)

(28) *but she were fucking amazing literally the best psychic ever* (2014)

#### 4.2.1.4. General tendencies summarized

Overall, we can observe that the adjective *amazing* in contemporary usage often collocates with nouns, in which case *amazing* functions either as the subject complement ('definite NP + copula + *amazing*') or as a premodifier ('*amazing* + N'). The adjective tends to express a strong emotion, which is confirmed by its co-occurrence with other means of evaluation (interjections, exclamatory clauses, intensifying adverbs and other evaluative adjectives).

Apart from evaluating people and objects, the adjective can also refer to an entire situation – typically in structures introduced by *it* or *that* (‘extended reference’); however, these pronouns may be omitted and the adjective is then used independently. The stand-alone position of the adjective is not particularly frequent in BNC2014 – probably due to the fact that the adjective prefers to combine with nouns. At the same time, it could perhaps be argued that *amazing* is too emotionally charged for it to be used as a stand-alone – adjectives which tend to stand on their own (e.g. *good*) are sometimes used as a monitoring device, or as a means of expressing consent, and in these contexts, the evaluative meaning of the adjective is set aside and the adjective starts to function more as a discourse particle – but this does not seem to occur too often with *amazing*.

In BNC1994, the adjective *amazing* appears predominantly in constructions with anticipatory *it*, followed by a subordinate clause. Interestingly, other aspects of meaning (apart from positive evaluation) have been detected, notably disbelief (often unpleasant) (*it's amazing what people will buy*) or a great degree (*amazing pain*). *Amazing* in BNC2014, on the other hand, much more consistently expressed positive evaluation and it tended to be used more interactively.

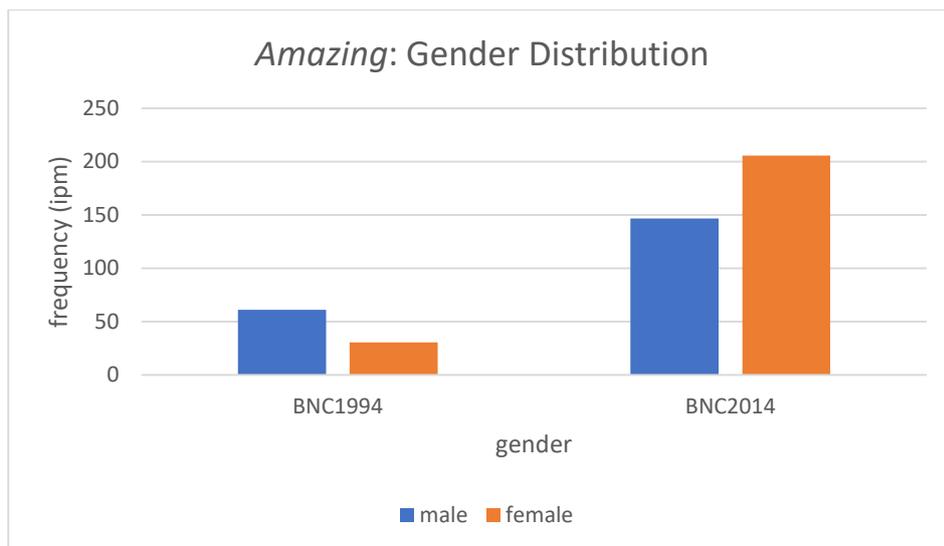
#### 4.2.2. Sociolinguistic Analysis

Finally, a sociolinguistic analysis should uncover other tendencies of the adjective which have not been discussed so far. Firstly, we shall look at the distribution based on the gender of the speakers from both corpora. These data are presented in the table and figure below.

<b>Gender</b>	<b>BNC1994 (hits)</b>	<b>BNC1994 (ipm)</b>	<b>BNC2014 (hits)</b>	<b>BNC2014 (ipm)</b>
Male	89	61.2	638	146.7
Female	69	30.5	1455	205.7
<b>Total<sup>13</sup></b>	<b>158</b>	<b>42.5</b>	<b>2093</b>	<b>183.2</b>

**Table 9:** Gender distribution of *amazing*

<sup>13</sup> The row ‘total’ sums up only the instances where the gender of the speaker was listed in the corpus metadata (i.e. only 158 instances out of 173 in BNC1994; BNC2014 gives this information for all 2093 instances).



**Figure 3:** Gender distribution of *amazing*

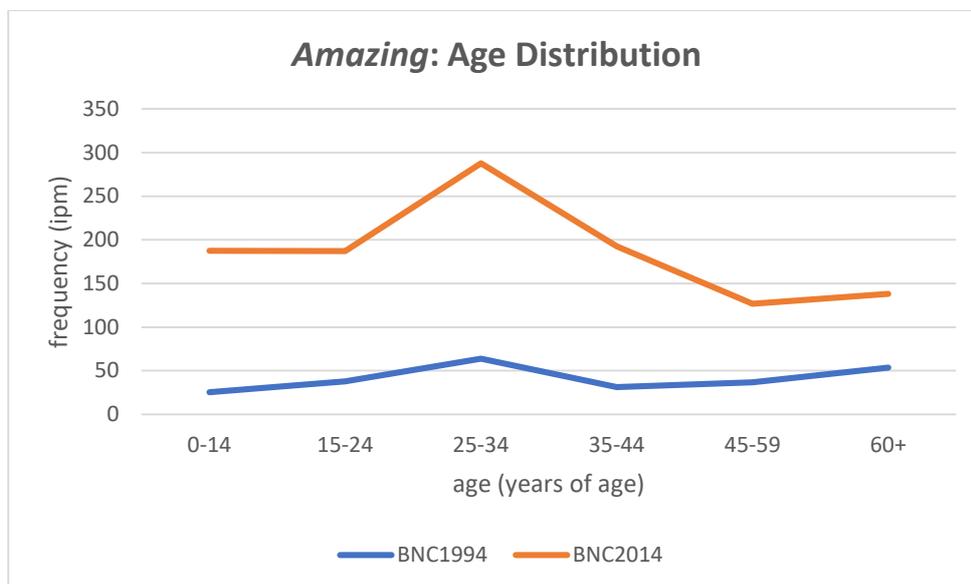
The data indicate that in BNC1994, men would use the adjective *amazing* twice as often as women (with relative frequency 61.2 ipm for men and only 30.5 ipm for women). Interestingly, the situation changed quite noticeably: women started to employ the adjective so frequently that they surpassed them: by 2014, women use the adjective significantly more frequently (0.05 level of significance, log-likelihood) than men (with relative frequency 205.7 ipm for women and only 146,7 ipm for men). This could imply that women are responsible for the increased popularity of the adjective and that they are the leaders of linguistic change.

The next point of interest is the age of the speakers, which is again presented in the table and figure below.

Age	BNC1994 (hits)	BNC1994 (ipm)	BNC2014 (hits)	BNC2014 (ipm)
0-14	9	25.3	58	187.6
15-24	19	38	520	187.2
25-34	44	63.7	467	287.9
35-44	22	31.2	266	192.8
45-59	27	36.8	278	126.7
60+	36	53.6	255	138.2
<b>Total<sup>14</sup></b>	<b>157</b>	<b>42.9</b>	<b>1844</b>	<b>182.1</b>

<sup>14</sup> The row ‘total’ sums up only the instances where the age of the speaker was listed in the corpus metadata (i.e. only 157 instances out of 173 in BNC1994 and 1844 out of 2093 in BNC2014).

**Table 10:** Age distribution of *amazing*



**Figure 4:** Age distribution of *amazing*

If we look at the figure, we can see that the use of the adjective reaches its peak with the age group 25-34 years in both corpora. Interestingly though, if we examine the data for BNC1994, we may notice that the group which is also very likely to employ the adjective are speakers older than 60. The possible explanation is that in BNC1994, the adjective was used by all age groups, including older people – as shown in the figure, the line is relatively steady, especially when compared to the curve for BNC2014, where there are very noticeable high (25-34) and low (45-59) points. BNC1994 does not have such distinct generational preferences: the 60+ age group is almost as likely to use the adjective as younger (25-34) people. It seems that the adjective started to be preferred by specific generations only after it became more popular over the years.

The generational preferences are very clear in BNC2014, as the adjective is clearly popular among young adults (25-34), who will probably use different means of evaluation as they get older. This may be confirmed by the fact that in BNC2014, the age group 45-59, which would correspond to 25-34 in BNC1994, uses the adjective the least. However, if these speakers (i.e. 25-34, BNC1994) continued to use the adjective over the years, it would be much more popular among the group 45-49 in BNC2014, which is not the case.

### 4.3. *Awesome*

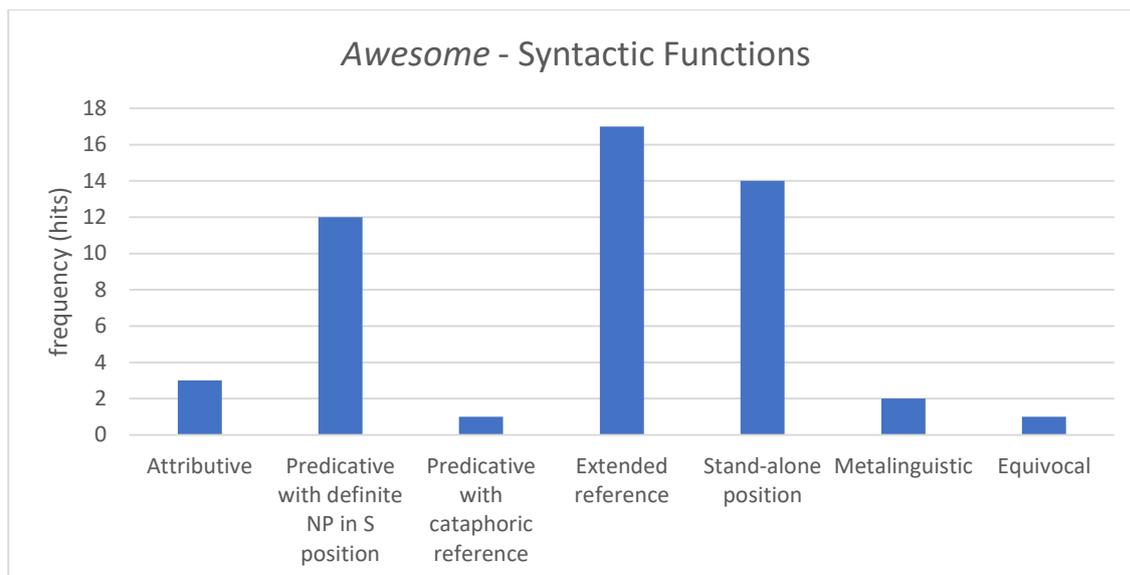
While there are 482 instances (42.2 ipm) of the adjective *awesome* in BNC2014, there are no occurrences of it in the spoken demographically sampled section of the BNC1994. *Awesome* is the only adjective of positive evaluation which appeared frequently in one corpus while not being attested at all in the other. This increase in frequency points to the adjective's novelty and popularity, but since it did not appear in the BNC1994, we cannot examine the use of the adjective over time. However, we are still going to describe the use of the adjective, its syntactic functions, collocations and sociolinguistic distribution in BNC2014.

#### 4.3.1. Syntactic Analysis

The overview of syntactic functions of 50 random instances of the adjective *awesome* from both corpora is given in the table and figure below.

Syntactic function	BNC2014
Attributive	3
Predicative with definite NP in S position	12
Predicative with cataphoric reference	1
Extended reference	17
Stand-alone position	14
Metalinguistic	2
Equivocal	1
Total	50

**Table 11:** Syntactic functions of *awesome*



**Figure 5:** Syntactic functions of *awesome*

The adjective appears predominantly in the extended reference (*That's awesome*) or in stand-alone position (*Awesome*). Both of these structures typically refer to wider context, rather than to one specific nominal expression. *Awesome* also appears in the predicative position with a definite noun phrase in the subject position (*Jessica Lange was awesome*).

Interestingly, the adjective rarely functions as a modifier (cf. *amazing*, where the attributive position increased in frequency over time). There was only one instance (out of 50 random examples) where the reference was cataphoric. Finally, the adjective was used to make metalinguistic comments (see 4.3.1.4.).

#### 4.3.1.1. Extended reference and stand-alone position

The adjective *awesome* appeared frequently as a part of the extended reference. The function of this structure is to evaluate an entire situation. We can also note the accumulation of positive expressions (ex. 29).

(29) A: *it's great you don't hear a wink out of the kids* B: *well that's good* A: *it's awesome* (2014)

If the adjective appears in a stand-alone context (ex. 30), the function of the adjective is often similar to that of extended reference.

(30) A: *oh how much was that? oh it's our pouch* B: *yeah of course* A: *oh fuck yeah awesome* (2014)

Sometimes the meaning of the adjective is weakened and the evaluation of a situation is not its primary function. Instead, the adjective functions as a monitoring device which is used to express engagement and interest in the conversation (ex. 31). The adjective can also express agreement (ex. 32), and it then behaves more as a discourse particle. This seems to be the case only when the adjective is in a stand-alone context.

(31) A: *it's not where I live but that's fine (.) it's because every time I fill something in I give a different address (.) cos my mum and dad both declare that I 'm an occasional guest* B: *yep* A: *so no one pays for council tax* B: *awesome* A: *turns out enrolling on the electoral r-roll um l- means gives you better credit rating (.) cos they can find you* B: *yes* (2014)

(32) A: *yeah we can have --UNCLEARWORD* B: *ah* A: *okay* B: *awesome* (2014)

#### 4.3.1.2. Predicative position with a definite NP in the subject position

Based on our preliminary analysis of syntactic functions (Table 11), we can see that the adjective *awesome* tends to stand in the predicative position where the subject is realized by a definite noun phrase.

If we focus on left collocates of the node *awesome*, we can see that the adjective is frequently associated with people, as the subject of the copular predication is usually realized by a personal pronoun (*he, she, I*) or a personal name (exx 33-34). The evaluative meaning is strengthened by the presence of other positively evaluative expressions (e.g. *good, love, awesomeness*) and intensifiers (*ridiculously, really*).

(33) A: *Milton Jones is good* B: *oh he's awesome* A: *I love Milton Jones* (2014)

(34) A: *because I've not seen that yet (.) and it's apparently ridiculously awesome with Jack Bauer cos he's ridiculously awesome* (2014) B: *oh A: Jack Bauer is really awesome (.) just carry on (.) the whole Jack Bauer awesomeness (.)* (2014)

Other nouns which stand in the subject position relate to various everyday topics (e.g. *weather, celebration, makeup, pancake* etc.).

### 4.3.1.3. Attributive position

Table 11 indicates that the attributive use of the adjective is not very common. This is, in fact, apparent if we focus on right collocates of the node *awesome*, as they do not return any nominal expressions which would frequently follow the adjective. If we search specifically for a structure where the adjective likely has attributive function (*'awesome + (adjective) + noun'*)<sup>15</sup>, we can see which nouns tend to be modified by the adjective. These nouns typically refer to people or everyday objects and activities. Nouns modified by *awesome* are therefore semantically similar to those which usually appear in the subject position if the adjective has a predicative function, as described in the previous section.

Semantic category	Example
People	<i>people, couple, guesser, kids, hero, chef, singer, swimmer</i>
Food	<i>cake, sauce, chocolate brownies</i>
Entertainment	<i>birthday party, holiday, film, video</i>
Nouns with general meaning	<i>stuff, thing</i>
Temporal nouns	<i>day, time</i>
Locative nouns	<i>beaches, place, pub</i>
Other	<i>idea, job, experience, name...</i>

**Table 12:** Nouns modified by *awesome*

It is apparent that in BNC2014, the adjective has the meaning of ‘notably good or impressive’. However, the original meaning of the adjective is ‘arousing or inspiring awe; that fills someone with reverential fear, wonder, or respect’<sup>16</sup>. These nouns clearly suggest that the meaning with positive connotations is the one which is active in BNC2014.

Since there are no data available for *awesome* in the spoken, demographically sampled section of the BNC1994, we cannot determine whether the meaning has shifted over time. However, if we look at the data in the entire original BNC (i.e. spoken and written component combined), we note that in that corpus, the meaning of the adjective is ‘inspiring awe’. If we search for a structure, where *awesome* likely functions as a premodifier<sup>17</sup>, we can see that nouns which are modified by *awesome* include: *power, sight, task, reputation, silence, beast, challenge, chasm, responsibility, burden*; nouns which would refer to trivial things or events were virtually absent. If we use the ‘collocates’ function, we can even see that the first five

<sup>15</sup> Query BNC2014: [word="awesome"][pos="JJ.\*"]{0,1}[pos="N.\*"] within u

<sup>16</sup> The *OED* online, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/13934>.

<sup>17</sup> Query BNC1994: [word="awesome"][pos="AJ.\*"]{0,1}[pos="N.\*"] within u

nouns listed here are also identified as prominent collocates of the adjective in the original BNC, yet this combination of the noun and adjective does not appear in the BNC2014. However, it is unclear whether this difference in meaning and connotations is caused by historical change, or whether it is due to us comparing various registers.

#### 4.3.1.4. Metalinguistic function

Finally, we have encountered several instances where speakers would make comments about the adjective and its use. This gives us an idea on how the speakers perceive the adjective and its sudden rise in popularity.

Example (35) illustrates the fact that *awesome* is associated mostly with American English. The speaker describes other evaluative adjectives apart from *awesome* (e.g. *sweet*) and how frequent they are in American English and suggests that they may have entered into British English through American TV shows. At the same time, the other speaker is aware of the popularity of the adjective, even noting that they themselves use it maybe too often and try to limit its usage. They also add that they say *awesome* for approximately seven years.

(35) A: *my um you know my boss is going to New York? (...) she got an e-mail from her new team (.) um just some general bollocks (.) work bollocks (...) Don't really wanna go into cos it's boring but but they were using like er sweet and awesome (.) we've got like this awesome contact and we 've got like um this really good deal with these subscription for photos (.) and then she just put sweet at the end (.) it's so funny (.) so she's gonna become she'll come back and talking like a real New Yorker*

B: *yeah (.) I don't know where I 've got that from you know (.) I say awesome all the time and I have to stop myself from saying it*

A: *awesome*

B: *but I don't know when the frig I picked it up (.) but I've said it for about seven years*

A: *well I wonder if it's just just culture (.) you know like we'll watch TV like American TV shows and Austral- Australian like awesome and sweet they say a lot in New Zealand (.) everything 's sweet (2014)*

The speakers in the example (36) similarly note the popularity of the adjective, discuss its origin, and one speaker again suggests a possible influence from America. The example (37) shows that yet another speaker uses the adjective so frequently that it is noticeable for his surroundings.

(36) A: *and now it's awesome awesome awesome* B: *as if you're in America* A: *yeah I actually thought awesome was quite English* (2014)

(37) A: *he's being he's being fined a pound every time he says awesome* B: *no I'm not (.) haven't got that much money* (2014)

#### 4.3.1.5. Collocational analysis

The collocational analysis showed that our observations about the behaviour of the adjective were correct. The lack of left nominal collocates proves that the attributive position of the adjective is rather marginal. On the other hand, the copular verb *sound* is a frequent collocate, as is the pronoun *that*. This illustrates that the extended reference is indeed very common (ex. 38).

(38) A: *walk through the tunnel (.) and you can see all the stuff* B: *oh (.) that sounds awesome (.) I wanna do that* (2014)

Another frequent collocate is *thank*, which expresses gratitude. *Awesome* is then typically in a stand-alone position (or in extended reference). This illustrates that *awesome* is sometimes used to express and maintain a positive interpersonal relationship, which was discussed briefly in relation with the monitoring function of *awesome* in stand-alone position. In examples (39-40) we can see that the adjective *awesome* (along with *fine* and *great*) is used to express gratitude, rather than to give opinion about a situation (as seen e.g. in ex. 38).

(39) A: *yes just tap water?* B: *yeah* C: *yeah that's fine thank you* B: *awesome thank you*

(40) *great great awesome well thank you for your help because I'm clueless about those sort of things I always do Paypal*

Finally, intensifying adverbs (*totally, fucking, pretty, absolutely*) and other positively evaluative adjectives (*awesome, cool, brilliant, great, good*) collocate frequently with *awesome*, which enhances the positive meaning of the adjective. This shows that the meaning 'inspiring awe' is not active in the corpus.

(41) A: *I thought that might be any good?* B: *yeah that's perfectly fine thank you (.) that's brilliant (.) awesome it's what just was required*

#### 4.3.1.6. General tendencies summarized

We have shown that *awesome* tends to be used in the extended reference or as a stand-alone adjective. If the adjective appears in a stand-alone context, it either has the same function as the extended reference (i.e. to evaluate a situation), or it is used to develop and maintain positive relationship between speakers. In that case, *awesome* functions as a monitoring device or as an expression of gratitude (*thank* is a frequent collocate) or agreement.

The predicative position of the adjective is also frequent. The subject is realized by a noun phrase which refers to people or various everyday topics. The attributive position, on the other hand, was shown to be rather marginal when compared to the other syntactic functions of the adjective.

The fact that the *awesome* is a new addition to the language is apparent both from its absence in BNC1994 and from several metalinguistic comments made by the speakers in BNC2014. These comments indicate that the adjective is considered to be novel, overused by some speakers (*I have to stop myself from saying it*) and perceived as coming from American English.

#### 4.3.2. Sociolinguistic analysis

We are going to begin the sociolinguistic analysis by focusing on the gender of the speakers who use *awesome*. The data are presented in Table 13.

Gender	BNC2014 (hits)	BNC2014 (ipm)
Male	163	37.5
Female	319	45.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>482</b>	<b>42.2</b>

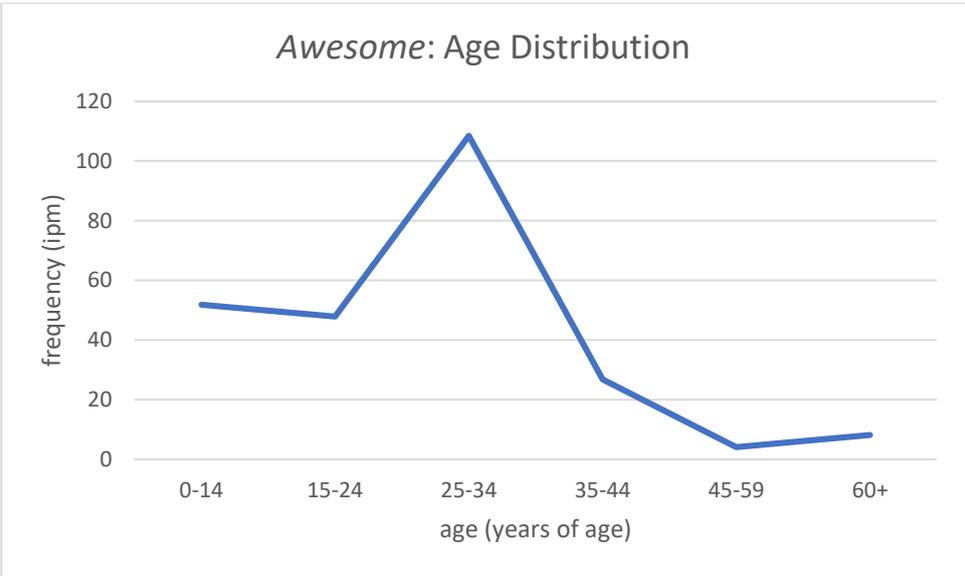
**Table 13:** Gender distribution of *awesome*

We can see that women use the adjective slightly more frequently, however, the difference was shown not to be statistically significant. Since there are no data available for the occurrence of *awesome* in BNC1994, we cannot determine whether the adjective was adopted by both genders simultaneously. We can only see that in contemporary spoken informal conversation, there is no significant difference between how men and women use the adjective.

Finally, we are going to focus on how the adjective is used by different generations. The data are presented in Table 14 and Figure 6.

Age	BNC2014 (hits)	BNC2014 (ipm)
0-14	16	51.8
15-24	133	47.9
25-34	176	108.5
35-44	37	26.8
45-59	9	4.1
60+	15	8.1
<b>Total<sup>18</sup></b>	<b>386</b>	<b>38.1</b>

**Table 14:** Age distribution of *awesome*



**Figure 6:** Age distribution of *awesome*

The data suggest that *awesome* is most popular among young people. The adjective is by far the most popular among the age group 25-34 years (108.5 ipm). Children and young teenagers (0-14 years), as well as older teens and young adults (15-24 years) use the adjective quite often as well (51.8 ipm and 47.9 ipm, respectively), though it is not nearly as common as was with the group 25-34. The frequency of the adjective decreases rapidly with age. The speakers who are 35-44 are much less likely to say *awesome* (26.8 ipm) and it appears only

<sup>18</sup> The row ‘total’ sums up only the instances where the age of the speaker was listed in the corpus metadata (i.e. only 386 out of 482 in BNC2014).

occasionally in the speech of speakers who are 45-59 years old (4.1 ipm) or over 60 (8.1 ipm). We can therefore see clear generational preferences, as there are extremely high (25-34) and low points (45-59 and 60+).

#### 4.4. *Cool*

The final adjective which we are going to describe is *cool*, as once again, we observe a major growth in frequency over time (20.3 ipm in BNC1994 and 251.6 ipm in BNC2014). We should mention that the adjective is also used to refer to objects of low temperature, rather than to express positive evaluation.

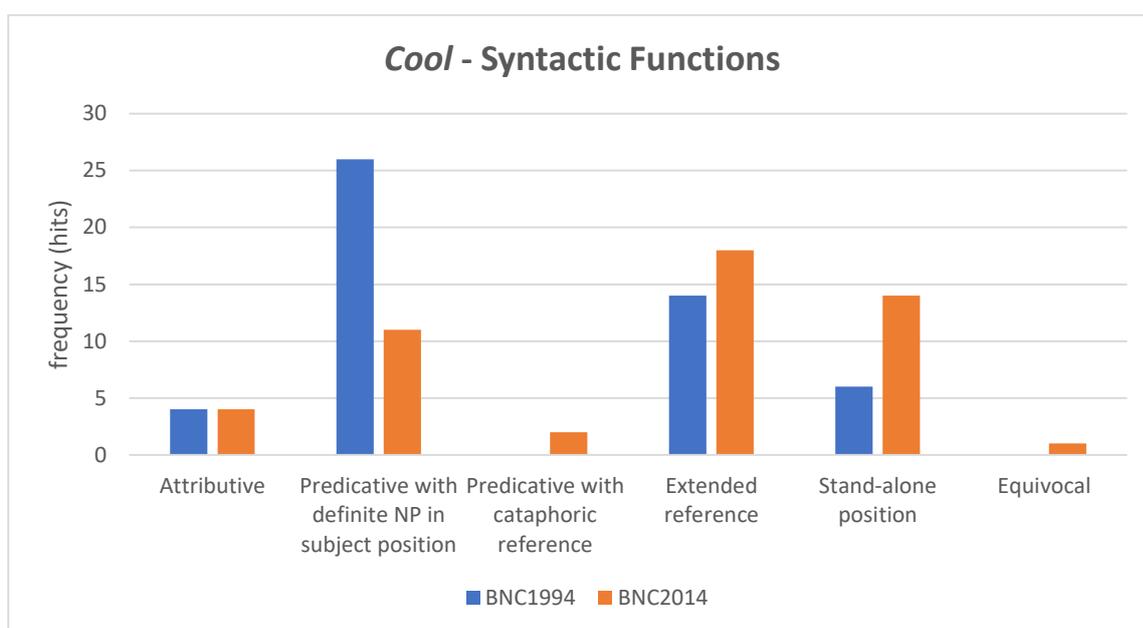
##### 4.4.1. Syntactic analysis

Before we were able to gather 50 analysable examples with the required adjectival meaning, we needed to remove 18 examples from the analysis in BNC1994, as the adjective referred to a cold temperature (e.g. *a cool breeze*). In contrast, there was no instance in the top 50 random examples of the adjective in BNC2014, where *cool* would mean *cold*. This implies that in BNC1994, the positively evaluative meaning of the adjective was not yet as widespread as it was in BNC2014.

The syntactic functions of *cool* (with positively evaluative meaning) are provided in Table 15 and Figure 7.

Syntactic function	BNC1994	BNC2014
Attributive	4	4
Predicative with definite NP in subject position	26	11
Predicative with cataphoric reference	0	2
Extended reference	14	18
Stand-alone position	6	14
Equivocal	0	1
Total	50	50

**Table 15:** Syntactic functions of *cool*



**Figure 7:** Syntactic functions of *cool*

We can see that the most prominent syntactic function of the adjective in BNC1994 is predicative with a definite noun phrase in the subject position (e.g. *He thinks he's really cool*). This is followed by the extended reference (*That's cool*). The stand-alone position of the adjective (*Cool*) and the attributive function (*a cool guy*) are less common.

If we look at the data in BNC2014, we see that the predicative function with a definite noun phrase in the subject position declined, but the stand-alone position, as well as extended reference increased. Interestingly, the attributive function is rather peripheral in both corpora. There are also two instances of the predicative function with cataphoric reference. In that case, the subject complement is realized by a nominal content exclamative clause (*look at how cool the fifty is*).

#### 4.4.1.1. Predicative function with a definite NP in the subject position

The most common syntactic function in BNC1994 is a predicative function where the subject is realized by a definite noun phrase. This changes in BNC2014, as this function becomes less frequent.

In BNC1994, the subject is typically a personal pronoun (*I, he, she*) (ex. 42), or a noun which typically refers to a person (ex. 43), though not necessarily (ex. 44). The positive meaning of the adjective is emphasized by intensifiers (*really*) and other words with positive meaning (*like, love, wicked*)<sup>19</sup>.

(42) *I like Lucy actually she's really cool-- cool she is.* (1994)

(43) *My mum is cool, I love my mum.* (1994)

(44) A: *I wish I'd keep the walkman that would be so wicked.* B: *Yeah I'd love to keep walkman.* A: *I think walkman's cool.* (1994)

In BNC2014, the situation is quite similar, as the subject is realized by personal pronouns (*I, he, she, you*), personal names (*Hank, Oscar Wilde*) or other nouns referring to people (*dad, grandma, friends*) or animals (*dolphins, ducks, horses, ladybirds*)<sup>20</sup>. We can again note the presence of other expressions which intensify the positive effect of the adjective (*as fuck, so, coolest*).

(45) A: *my dad is cool as fuck* B: *yeah* A: *like so cool (...)* yeah *my dad is the coolest guy I know easily*

In addition, there is a phrase in BNC2014, which consists of 'personal pronoun + *to be* + *cool* + *with* something', and is typically used to ask someone for their permission (ex. 46) or to indicate that the speaker agrees (or does not object) (ex. 47). A similar function of *cool* is illustrated in example (48), where the speaker indicates that they are content with the current situation.

(46) A: *if you're cool with that* B: *yeah yeah of course* (2014)

(47) A: *I'll take this seat if that's alright* B: *I'm quite cool with the bench* (2014)

(48) A: *sorry do you wanna like put a film on or something?* B: *no no I'm cool I'm cool chilling here to be honest* (2014)

The subject can also be realized by nouns and pronouns with general meaning (*everything, stuff*) (ex. 49). In this case, the adjective describes an entire situation, which is usually done by the extended reference (cf. *that's cool*).

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<sup>19</sup> Partington (2017) labels the consistent and coherent use of evaluation in a text as 'evaluative harmony'.

<sup>20</sup> These plural nouns have a generic reference, but they are included in the analysis as they are contextually-bound (they were all mentioned previously in the conversation).

(49) everything is cool when you're part of a team (2014)

Other nouns which stand in the subject position are locative (*place, China, Florence*), or they relate to other miscellaneous activities or objects (*teaching, film, game, ukulele* etc.)

#### 4.4.1.2. Extended reference

The adjective in the extended reference is often used for highly positive evaluation of a situation, which is emphasized by intensifying adverbs (*pretty, so*). This function is quite common in both corpora (exx 50-51).

(50) *So he's Gemini and Taurus. That's pretty cool actually.* (1994)

(51) A: *so basically William Matthews is on stage and he starts erm Deep Cries Out Reggae (...) and then he just turns it into the actual normal version* B: *that is so cool* A: *it's pretty cool yeah you gotta hear it* (2014)

However, sometimes the meaning of the adjective can be weakened so that it is similar to expressions like *okay* or *alright* (also cf. exx 46-48 when in predicative position). In that case, the adjective is not used to express highly positive evaluation, but rather to indicate that a situation is acceptable (ex. 52). *Cool* is also used when talking about relationships, where *cool* indicates that there are no negative feelings between the people involved (ex. 53). Interestingly, this kind of usage was not found in BNC1994, as the adjective in extended reference was used only to evaluate a situation as being good.

(52) A: *got some weights about sixty kilos that should do* B: *yeah this is cool* (2014)

(53) A: *I wasn't being rude I promise* B: *no no (.) that's alright (.) it's cool* (2014)

#### 4.4.1.3. Stand-alone position

The adjective behaves similarly to the extended reference when it is in a stand-alone position. Both in BNC1994 and in BNC2014, we observe that the adjective is used for positive evaluation (exx 54-55).

(54) A: *What do the gas tanks do?* B: *They pump air in so when you fire it it goes a lot faster. It goes really really fast. Really cool.* (1994)

(55) A: (...) *it of meet it's kind of a bit of a networking thing so talk to other businessmen and* (.) *listen to people that talk on stage which is quite cool isn't it?* B: really cool yeah (2014)

However, in BNC2014, the adjective has several functions. Apart from expressing positive evaluation, *cool* is used as a discourse particle which organizes the text, expresses agreement or it functions as a monitoring device, which is used by the speaker to indicate that they are paying attention to the conversation (exx 56-57). In these cases, *cool* is often preceded by words such as *okay*, *right*, or *alright*.

(56) A: *oh no cos you needed a lot of the grated cheese yeah exactly* (.) okay alright *so shall I light the fire?* B: okay cool (2014)

(57) A: *there was a health and well-being fair over that weekend* B: oh right A: *and they had like free taster sessions of --UNCLEARWORD* and B: oh right cool A: *reflexology and that and I thought I could go for the day* B: yeah (2014)

This function is very common in BNC2014 – if the adjective appears in a stand-alone position, it is most likely used to express agreement or engagement in the conversation, rather than positive evaluation. On the other hand, in BNC1994, the stand-alone position of the adjective is infrequent and if it does appear, it is used to evaluate a situation.

#### 4.4.1.4. Attributive position

The preliminary analysis of syntactic functions of *cool* (Table 12) indicates that the adjective does not appear frequently in the attributive position either in BNC1994, or in BNC2014. In order to see which nouns are typically preceded by the adjective, we search for a structure where *cool* is likely to function as a modifier: '*cool* + (adjective) + noun'<sup>21</sup>.

In BNC1994, there are not many cases of *cool* functioning as a modifier. However, we can still see some tendencies, as nouns modified by *cool* mostly refer to people (*dude*, *girl*, *guy*) (ex. 58), or to entertainment (*movie*, *film*). There are also some nouns where it is clear that the meaning of *cool* means *cold*, e.g. *counter*, *air*, *breeze*, *cloudy summer*, which illustrates that the meaning of *cool* with positively evaluative meaning is not as frequent as it is in BNC2014.

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<sup>21</sup> Query BNC2014: [word="cool"][pos="JJ.\*"]{0,1}[pos="N.\*"] within u  
Query BNC1994 [word="cool"][pos="AJ.\*"]{0,1}[pos="N.\*"] within u

(58) *Cool, yeah, er I'm a cool dude* (1994)

In BNC2014, we see that the adjective modifies nouns with general meaning (*thing(s), stuff*). *Thing* is often followed by a *to*-infinitive (ex. 59).

(59) *certainly a cool thing to think about isn't it?* (2014)

The adjective is also frequently followed by nouns which refer to people (*kids, people, guy*), however, we need to distinguish between occurrences where the noun is modified by *cool* (ex. 60) and where it is not (typically nouns in vocative, e.g. *that's cool man*).

(60) *I sat with the cool kids who smoked but I didn't smoke because I was too hard core not to smoke* (2014)

Another noun frequently modified by *cool* is *story*, often as a part of the phrase *cool story bro*, which is used to indicate that the listener in fact is not very interested in what the other person says (ex. 61, 62).

(61) A: *cool story bro* B: *fine I won't tell any more* (2014)

(62) A: *I haven't played Pokémon in ages* B: *that's a cool story bro* (2014)

Other nouns which are modified by *cool* in BNC2014 are summarized in the table below. Some nouns were not included in the table, as they combine with the adjective when it means 'cold' – e.g. *drink, temperature*.

Semantic category	Example
People	<i>kids, people, person, guy, dude, dad, teachers</i>
Nouns related to human qualities or appearance	<i>t-shirts, hat, clothes, shoes, hair; personality, accent</i>
Nouns with general meaning	<i>stuff, thing(s), life, place, concept, experience</i>
Entertainment	<i>song, game, film, movies, dance, video, website</i>
Animals	<i>cat</i>
Locative nouns	<i>place, spot, house, bar, city</i>
Other	<i>job, bike, car,...</i>

**Table 16:** Nouns modified by *cool* in BNC2014

#### 4.4.1.5. Collocational analysis

Finally, we are going to focus on right and left collocates of the node *cool*, which may help us uncover some additional information about the behaviour of the adjective.

In BNC1994, left collocates (3L-1L) include personal pronouns (*I, he*) and intensifying adverbs: *really, so, well* (ex. 63). Right collocates (1R-5R) did not uncover any additional information about the adjective, as the collocates consisted mostly of punctuation.

(63) *Well I'm such a well cool girl.* (1994)

If we focus on adverbial collocates in BNC2014 (3L-1L, collocates based on part-of-speech tag), we can see that *cool* frequently co-occurs with intensifiers; both with amplifiers (*well, really, very, well, pretty, super, fucking*), as well as with downtoners (*quite, kinda*). In fact, the intensifier *well* is quite common in BNC2014 (ex. 64), though we have not seen *well* being used with other adjectives (*amazing* or *awesome*).

(64) *your grandma's well cool* (2014)

The fact that *cool* co-occurs both with amplifiers and downtoners shows that the adjective has a wide scope of meaning, as it can be used to express strong emotions (ex. 65) as well as emotions which are less intense (ex. 66). In this way, *cool* differs from adjectives like *amazing* or *awesome*, as those are typically only amplified, but it also differs from more neutral adjectives like *okay*, which are downplayed even more visibly (e.g. *just/reasonably/fairly/only/relatively okay*).

(65) *no man she's Claudia Roden though she's so fucking cool she can do whatever she wants* (2014)

(66) A: *that's a good one that it's er it's illegal not to vote I think that's* B: *oh yeah that's kinda cool* (2014)

We may also note the presence of other evaluative expressions. On the one hand, we find expressions with highly positive meaning (*awesome, brilliant, amazing; wow, love*) and more neutral expressions (*okay, alright, right, fine*) on the other. If *cool* co-occurs with other positively evaluative expressions, *cool* functions as an evaluator as well. However, when it co-occurs with expressions like *okay* or *fine*, *cool* functions more like a particle and is used to agree with a proposition, or as a monitoring device (as was already discussed, see exx 56-57).

Another frequent collocater is *like*, which is used as a quotative. This again illustrates the tendency of the adjective to appear in a stand-alone position, where it functions as a particle (ex. 67).

(67) *she was like (...) I 'm going to focus on me I 'm going to focus on the kids I'm gonna be a better mother I 'm going to be this this this and I was like cool alright* (2014)

#### 4.4.1.6. General tendencies summarized

Overall, we can see that in some respects, *cool* behaves similarly as other adjectives of positive evaluation (e.g. it co-occurs with intensifiers and with other positively evaluative expressions). In both corpora, *cool* is often used to describe people or situations as being good. In BNC1994, the adjective is most likely to be used in the predicative position, whereas in BNC2014 it is the stand-alone position and extended reference which is more likely to occur. Interestingly, the modifying function of the adjective is not very common in either corpus.

The analysis showed that the adjective *cool* has undergone several changes. In BNC1994, the adjective is used primarily to express positive evaluation. While this function is frequent in BNC2014 as well, we can identify more functions which the adjective has in present-day spoken English. When the adjective is in a stand-alone position (or, less frequently, in the extended reference), *cool* is used to ask for or grant a permission, or it functions as a monitoring device. Similarly, the adjective may be used to evaluate a situation as being acceptable (but not necessarily very good).

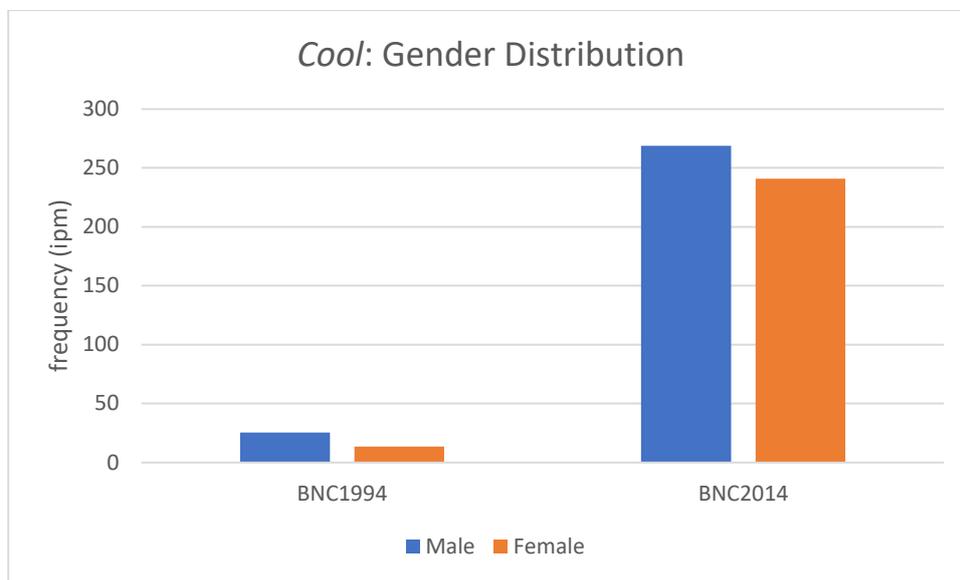
The fact that the adjective co-occurs with amplifiers (*super*) and downtoners (*kinda*), and highly positive (*awesome*) as well as more neutral expressions (*okay*), shows us that the adjective is capable of describing a wider range of situations. In addition, *cool* is used to describe human relationships (e.g. *we're cool* meaning 'there are no negative feelings between us'), or it enters collocational structures such as '*to be cool with something*' or '*cool story bro*'. Compared to that, the use of the adjective is quite limited in BNC1994.

#### 4.4.2. Sociolinguistic analysis

The table and figure below illustrate the use of *cool* across genders in BNC1994 and BNC2014.

Gender	BNC1994 (hits)	BNC1994 (ipm)	BNC2014 (hits)	BNC2014 (ipm)
Male	37	25.4	1169	268.8
Female	30	13.3	1704	240.9
<b>Total<sup>22</sup></b>	<b>67</b>	<b>18.0</b>	<b>2873</b>	<b>251.5</b>

**Table 17:** Gender distribution of *cool*



**Figure 8:** Gender distribution of *cool*

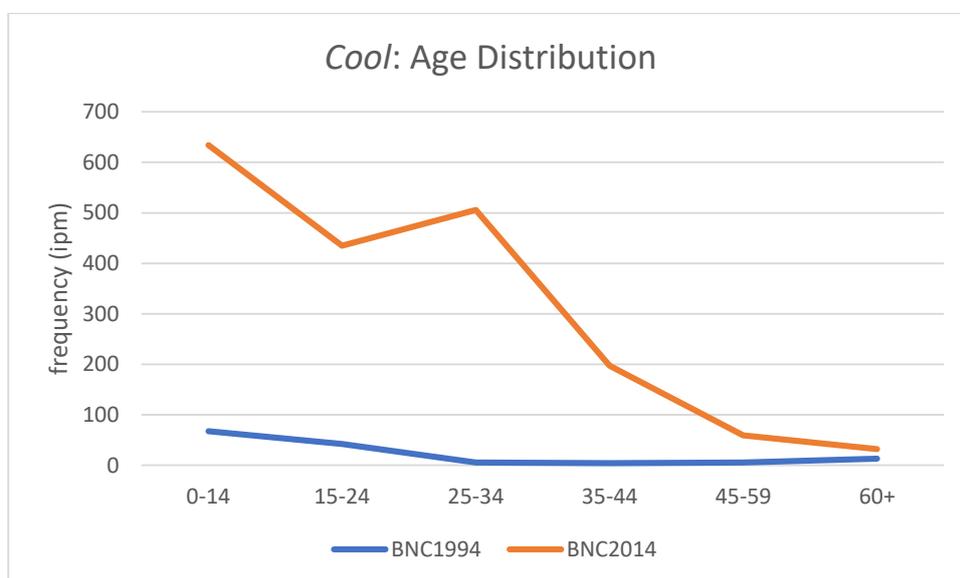
We can see that in both corpora, men are those who use the adjective more frequently (the difference is significant at 0.05). *Cool* is the only adjective from our data (see Table 6), where the adjective slightly more closely associated with men, than with women.

Finally, we are going to focus on distribution across the age groups in BNC1994 and BNC2014.

<sup>22</sup> The row 'total' sums up only the instances where the gender of the speaker was listed in the corpus metadata (i.e. only 67 instances out of 86 in BNC1994, and 2873 out of 2874 instances in BNC2014).

Age	BNC1994 (hits)	BNC1994 (ipm)	BNC2014 (hits)	BNC2014 (ipm)
0-14	24	67,5	196	633,9
15-24	21	42,0	1209	435,2
25-34	4	5,8	820	505,5
35-44	3	4,3	272	197,1
45-59	4	5,5	130	59,2
60+	9	13,4	59	32
<b>Total<sup>23</sup></b>	<b>65</b>	<b>17,8</b>	<b>2686</b>	<b>265.2</b>

**Table 18:** Age distribution of *cool*



**Figure 9:** Age distribution of *cool*

We can see that the adjective is most associated with young people (0-14 years), which holds true in both corpora. The popularity of the adjective declines quickly with age (visible especially in BNC2014: people who are up to 34 years old use the adjective very frequently, but it is quite unusual among people who are older than that.)

We can also see that if the adjective is used by older people, it usually does not function as an evaluator, as the second meaning ('cold') is expressed. In BNC1994, the age groups 0-14

<sup>23</sup> The row 'total' sums up only the instances where the age of the speaker was listed in the corpus metadata (i.e. only 65 instances out of 86 in BNC1994, and 2686 out of 2874 in BNC2014).

and 15-24 clearly use predominantly the evaluative sense (43 out of 45 instances of *cool* were positively evaluative), whereas if we look at the age group 60+ years of age, all instances of the adjective mean 'cold'. A similar tendency is visible in BNC2014, which can be illustrated, for example, by the comment made by a speaker who is over 60 years old in example (68).

(68) A: *I find that eh sometimes it's a little bit easier a little bit difficult to pick up what the youngsters are saying because they have a slightly different lingo (...) for instance if they say something 's cool I expect it to be a bit cold (.) But in fact that's not what they mean (2014)*

## 5. Conclusions

The main purpose of this research was to describe variation in the use of positively evaluative adjectives in spoken British English, and to examine how the use of these adjectives changed over a short period of time.

Firstly, by comparing the relative frequencies of adjectives of positive evaluation in two corpora of spoken British English, BNC1994 and BNC2014, we were able to show that adjectives of positive evaluation are an unstable category which is undergoing changes in frequency and in distribution. We have identified several novel additions to the set of positively evaluative adjectives (e.g. *amazing*, *cool*, *awesome*, *fun*, *cute*), and also some adjectives which are falling out of favour (e.g. *gorgeous*, *marvellous*, *wicked*).

We carried out a sociolinguistic analysis which uncovered that adjectives of positive evaluation tend to be overused by younger speakers, usually by teenagers (0-14 years) and young adults (15-24 years). On the other hand, the adjectives *fantastic* and *marvellous* were associated with older speakers (60 years and older). Some adjectives (e.g. *cool*) were used frequently by the same age group in both corpora, which suggests that we deal with age-graded variation (speakers change their linguistic habits during their lifetime). Other adjectives (e.g. *exciting*) seem to be retained by the speakers, as we observe some generational changes across the two corpora.

The analysis of gender distribution uncovered that women often use these adjectives more frequently than men in BNC2014 – that is, when the adjective is already popular. In BNC1994, when the adjective is not yet very frequent, there is often no gender distinction, or a male lead.

Three novel adjectives of positive evaluation were selected for further analysis: *amazing*, *awesome* and *cool*. A detailed analysis of syntactic functions of these adjectives uncovered that the syntactic behaviour of these adjectives changed rapidly over time.

In BNC1994, *amazing* frequently entered constructions with anticipatory *it*, followed by a subordinate clause (predicative function with cataphoric reference). The relative representation of this syntactic function of *amazing* was observed to decrease in BNC2014. Collocational analysis showed that apart from positive evaluation (*his nan's amazing you know*), *amazing* was used in BNC1994 to express a high degree (*amazing amount*), and sometimes it co-occurred with negatively evaluative items, suggesting the speaker's negative stance (*It's amazing how the worst weather we've had recently has been on Saturdays and*

*Sundays*). In BNC2014, *amazing* was much more consistent in expressing positive evaluation, as demonstrated by its co-occurrence with other evaluative expressions or intensifiers. The attributive position of the adjective increased visibly, as did the predicative function with a definite noun phrase in the subject position. The stand-alone position was rather infrequent and if the adjective was used as a stand-alone, its function was evaluation, rather than discourse organization (cf. *cool*).

*Awesome* is the newest addition to the set of evaluative adjectives, as it did not appear at all in BNC1994. The adjective was typically used to describe situations, as it often appeared in the extended reference or stand-alone position. When in a stand-alone position, the adjective functioned both as evaluator and as discourse organizer (e.g. as a monitoring device).

In BNC1994, *cool* was most frequent in the predicative function with a definite noun phrase in the subject position, while in BNC2014, the extended reference and stand-alone position were the most common syntactic functions. In addition, we may note several semantic changes which the adjective has undergone. In BNC1994, *cool* is used predominantly to express highly positive evaluation. However, in BNC2014, we see that the degree of evaluation lowered and the impact of the adjective may have been bleached by overuse. Analysis of concordance and collocations uncovered that *cool* is frequently used as a discourse particle, and as such, it expresses numerous functions (e.g. monitoring, asking for or giving consent). The adjective is also used to express that a situation is merely acceptable, and it collocates with neutral expressions (*okay*) and with downtoners (*kinda*). However, in some contexts, the adjective is still capable of expressing a high degree of positive evaluation and as a result, we see that the use of the adjective is quite versatile.

Overall, we may observe that all the adjectives share some common features. All three adjectives frequently co-occurred with intensifying adverbs and with other evaluative expressions which emphasize the impact of the adjective. From a sociolinguistic point of view, we can see that these novel adjectives were used mostly by young speakers. However, we cannot make any generalizations as far as gender is concerned (in BNC2014, *amazing* is preferred by women, *cool* by men and there was no difference in gender distribution for *awesome*).

We can also see that the syntactic development differs for each adjective. For example, as *amazing* became more popular, the attributive position started to be employed noticeably

more frequently. However, there was no such development with *awesome* or *cool*, where the attributive position was marginal.

In addition, the semantics of these adjectives changed over time, though once again, we note different tendencies. *Amazing* in BNC1994 had positive, as well as negative connotations, though in BNC2014, we encounter primarily positive connotations. On the other hand, *cool* in BNC1994 was used to express highly positive evaluation, but in BNC2014, the evaluative impact of the adjective was lowered in some contexts, and the adjective often functioned as a discourse particle, rather than an evaluator. However, an analysis of other adjectives of positive evaluation could hopefully uncover some general tendencies.

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## 7. Resumé

Diplomová práce si klade za cíl identifikovat a popsat populární pozitivně evaluativní adjektiva v současné mluvené britské angličtině a prozkoumat, jak se užití evaluativních adjektiv mění na krátké časové škále.

První část práce podává teoretický úvod, který začíná obecným popisem adjektiv. Quirk et al. (1985) předkládají přehled vlastností, které mohou odlišit adjektiva od jiných slovních druhů: adjektiva mohou být intenzifikována pomocí *very*, mohou být stupňována a mohou se vyskytovat v atributivní a predikativní pozici. Ze sémantického hlediska je možné adjektiva dělit na tzv. ‚classifiers‘ a ‚descriptors‘ (Biber et al., 1999; srov. adjektiva relační proti adjektivům kvalitativním a hodnotícím, Dušková a kol. 2009: kapitola 6.5), přičemž ‚classifiers‘ jsou většinou nestupňovatelná adjektiva, která zařazují substantivum do nějaké kategorie (např. *American*) a ‚descriptors‘ jsou typicky stupňovatelná adjektiva, která popisují vlastnosti substantiva jako je např. barva, rozměr, množství nebo evaluace (*lovely*). Evaluace vyjadřuje subjektivní postoj mluvčího a slovní druh, který je nejvíce spjatý s evaluací, jsou právě adjektiva (Hunston, 2011: 129). Hunston (2011) rozlišuje několik druhů evaluativního významu, která adjektiva mohou vyjádřit: ‚affect‘, který popisuje emoce, ‚judgement‘, který hodnotí aktivitu a nakonec ‚appreciation‘, který popisuje, zda je daná entita dobrá či špatná.

Využití metod korpusové lingvistiky pro analýzu evaluace má řadu výhod. Jedná se o přístup, který umožňuje extrakci jazykových dat z korpusu, díky čemuž je možné empiricky zkoumat texty, které jsou příliš rozsáhlé pro manuální analýzu. Tato vlastnost je zvlášť užitečná při popisu frazeologie evaluativních adjektiv, vzhledem k tomu, že uživatelské rozhraní zvládne vygenerovat kolokace daného adjektiva, a odhalit tak jazykové vzorce, které by pouhé intuitivní zkoumání nemuselo zaznamenat. Na druhou stranu je třeba pamatovat na to, že evaluace je silně kontextově vázaná (např. nějaká slova mohou být evaluativní pouze v jistém kontextu), a proto je důležité věnovat pozornost okolnímu textu. Nicméně, obvykle stačí prozkoumat okolních 80 až 500 znaků, aby bylo možné určit, zda je slovo v daném případě evaluativní, či nikoliv (Hunston and Thompson 2011).

Abychom mohli studovat jazykovou změnu, museli jsme nejdříve určit, s jakou lingvistickou proměnnou budeme pracovat. Variace v jazyce se dotýká různých rovin systému, od fonologie až po rovinu textovou, nicméně tato práce se zaměřuje na variaci v lexiku. Jako

ilustraci lexikální variace můžeme zmínit studii Tagliamonte a Brooke (2014), které zkoumaly variaci v užívání adjektiv ze sémantického pole ‚zvláštnosti‘ (*strange, weird, peculiar, odd* atd.) a ukázaly mimo jiné to, že variace mezi (částečnými) synonymy je rozvrstvená společensky a je možné pozorovat generační rozdíly v užití pozorovaných variant. Věk, spolu s dalšími parametry, jako například gender, vzdělání, či společenská třída, nazýváme společenskou proměnnou. Další relevantní studie, které zkoumají jazykové změny evaluativních výrazů na krátké časové škále zahrnují např. Tagliamonte & Pabst (2020), Tagliamonte (2008) and Macaulay (2006).

V této práci kombinujeme dva konstrukty, které sledují jazykovou změnu (Labov 1999). Konstrukt ‚apparent time‘ zkoumá distribuci lingvistických proměnných napříč věkovými skupinami a předpokládá, že generační rozdíly reflektují diachronní vývoj jazyka. Nicméně je důležité zmínit, že jazyk mluvčích se často během jejich života mění. Toto je způsobené mj. tím, že některé výrazy (např. slangové) jsou spjaty s určitou generací a s přibývajícím věkem mluvčí přestávají tyto výrazy používat. Tento proces označujeme ‚age grading‘. V tomto ohledu jsou velmi přínosné studie, které mohou využít i konstrukt tzv. ‚real time‘, který zkoumá jazyk v několika časových obdobích.

Jako materiál pro práci slouží dva korpusy neformální mluvené britské angličtiny, a sice korpus Spoken BNC2014 (BNC2014) a mluvená demografická složka původního BNC (BNC1994). Výchozím bodem pro analýzu je seznam 150 nejfrekventovanějších adjektiv z obou korpusů, ze kterých vybíráme adjektiva, která mají evaluativní potenciál (např. na základě lexiko-gramatických vzorců). Relativní frekvence vybraných adjektiv jsme následně porovnali, abychom viděli, zda se vyskytují signifikantně častěji v jednom z korpusů.

Adjektiva, kde je rozdíl v relativní frekvenci mezi korpusy vyšší než dvojnásobný jsou podrobena sociolingvistické analýze (věk, gender) a tři vybraná adjektiva (*amazing, awesome, cool*) jsou zkoumána podrobněji. Tato adjektiva jsou analyzována nejen z hlediska sociolingvistického, ale i z hlediska syntaktického: u 50 náhodných konkordančních řádků určíme syntaktickou funkci adjektiva. Rozlišujeme několik syntaktických funkcí: atributivní pozice (*a cool dude*), predikativní funkce s určitou nominální frází v podmětové pozici (*the music is amazing*), predikativní funkce s kataforickou referencí (*it's amazing how quickly you forget*), samostatné užití (*awesome*) a anaforické užití s rozšířeným antecedentem (tzv. ‚extended reference‘ (*That's awesome*)).

Analytická část práce je uvedena obecným přehledem evaluativních adjektiv, která se vyskytovala v jednom z korpusů alespoň dvakrát tak často, jako v korpusu druhém. Většina adjektiv byla častější v BNC2014, s výjimkou *marvellous* a *wicked*, které byly typické pro BNC1994. Distribuční analýza věkových kategorií odhalila, že pozitivně evaluativní adjektiva většinou nadužívají mladí mluvčí, a to převážně z věkové skupiny 15-34 a 25 až 34 let. Od 35 let často pozorujeme prudký pokles ve frekvenci evaluativních adjektiv. Kromě toho jsme identifikovali dvě adjektiva, která preferují mluvčí starší 60 let: *fantastic* a *marvellous*.

Distribuční analýza genderu se zaměřuje pouze na adjektiva, která jsou častější v BNC2014. Analýza ukazuje, že v době, kdy adjektivum ještě není příliš rozšířené (tj. v BNC1994), nebývá signifikantní rozdíl mezi tím, jak často dané adjektivum užívají muži a ženy (6 z 11 případů), případně pozorujeme častější užití u mužů (4 z 11 případů); pouze jedno adjektivum (*exciting*) používají častěji ženy. Nicméně, zdá se, že když je adjektivum již populární (BNC2014), tak jsou to ženy, které adjektivum spíše použijí (6 z 11 případů), u 5 adjektiv není rozdíl mezi užíváním genderových skupin signifikantní, a pouze jediné adjektivum (*cool*) je preferováno muži i v BNC2014.

*Amazing* je první adjektivum, které je podrobena detailní analýze. Adjektivum bylo vybráno z toho důvodu, že se jedná o jedno z nejčastějších evaluativních adjektiv v BNC2014 (183,2 ipm), které ale není neobvyklé ani v BNC1994 (40,9 ipm). Prudký nárůst frekvence ukazuje, že adjektivum během let získalo na popularitě, a proto nás zajímá, zda je tento nárůst doprovázen i změnami v syntaktickém chování adjektiva, případně zda rozpoznáme nějaké sémantické změny.

Analýza syntaktických funkcí ukázala, že v BNC1994 se *amazing* často objevuje v konstrukci s anticipačním *it*, po kterém následuje sponové sloveso, *amazing* a vedlejší věta (např. *It's amazing how he changed*). Tato konstrukce se vyskytuje výrazně méně v BNC2014. Na druhé straně v BNC2014 pozorujeme velký nárůst atributivní pozice a predikativní funkce s určitou nominální frází v podmětové pozici – adjektivum tedy funguje buď jako modifikátor nebo jako jmenná část přísudku. Zároveň je adjektivum často používáno k hodnocení celé situace (*That's amazing*). Samostatné užití je v BNC2014 poměrně neobvyklé a pokud adjektivum stojí samostatně, tak většinou plní svoji primární funkci, a sice kladně hodnotí situaci (*oh wow* (.) *oh my god* (.) *oh wow amazing*).

Kolokační analýza odhalila, že *amazing* má v BNC1994 kromě pozitivní evaluace i jiné aspekty významu, např. označuje údiv (*It's amazing how much you forget*) nebo velké množství (*amazing amount, amazing pain*). *Amazing* v BNC2014 funguje primárně jako prostředek pro pozitivní evaluaci - často se vyskytuje s jinými pozitivně evaluativními adjektivy, s intenzifikátory či citoslovci a modifikuje substantiva s obecným kategoriálním významem, nebo substantiva s pozitivními konotacemi.

*Awesome* je jediné pozitivně evaluativní adjektivum, které je frekventované v BNC2014 (42,2 ipm) a zároveň se vůbec nevyskytuje v mluvené sekci BNC1994. Z tohoto důvodu není možné porovnat syntaktické funkce napříč korpusy a analýza se proto soustředí jen na data u BNC2014.

*Awesome* se nejčastěji vyskytuje jako součást ‚extended reference‘ a samostatně. Pokud je adjektivum použito samostatně, má buď funkci evaluativní, případně funguje jako prostředek pro monitorování konverzace. V tomto případě je evaluativní význam oslaben a adjektivum funguje spíše jako diskurzni částice. Atributivní pozice adjektiva není příliš obvyklá – kromě předběžné analýzy padesáti konkordančních řádků je to zřejmé i na základě absence pravých nominálních kolokátů. Pokud cíleně hledáme struktury, kde *awesome* pravděpodobně funguje jako premodifikátor (tj. ‚*awesome*‘ + (adjektivum) + substantivum), lze pozorovat, že *awesome* typicky modifikuje substantiva, která odkazují na osoby, jídlo a pití, zábavu, místa apod., jedná se tedy o substantiva, která popisují každodenní život. Slovní kombinace, které byly časté v celém korpusu BNC1994 (tj. i v psané složce), jako např. *awesome power/silence/task/reputation*, se v mluveném BNC2014 vůbec nevyskytovaly, bohužel nelze říci, zda tento rozdíl ve významu adjektiva odráží jazykovou změnu, anebo zda je způsobený tím, že porovnáváme různé registry.

Dále jsme narazili na několik případů, kdy *awesome* bylo použito v rámci metajazykového komentáře. Obecně lze říci, že mluvčí považují *awesome* za nový prostředek evaluace, který se užívá nápadně často a pravděpodobně pochází z americké angličtiny.

*Cool* je poslední populární pozitivně evaluativní adjektivum, které zkoumáme. V BNC1994 má *cool* nejčastěji predikativní funkci, zatímco v BNC2014 je nejčastější ‚extended reference‘ a samostatné užití. Atributivní pozice je v obou korpusech poměrně neobvyklá, nevidíme tedy podobný vývoj jako u *amazing*, kdy se časem atributivní pozice zřetelně rozšířila.

Můžeme pozorovat, že v BNC2014 *cool* často vyjadřuje kromě pozitivní evaluace i jiné textové funkce. Pokud *cool* stojí samostatně nebo je součástí ‚extended reference‘, typicky funguje jako prostředek, kterým mluvčí dává souhlas (*okay cool*), případně slouží jako monitorovací prostředek. Zároveň je potřeba zmínit, že *cool* v BNC2014 může být silně emočně nabitě (*she's so fucking cool*), ale stejně tak může i značit pouhou přijatelnost. Toto je zřejmé např. z fráze *to be cool (with something/doing something)*, ale i z kolokátů jako např. *okay, fine, quite, kinda*. *Cool* je tak možné využívat v různých kontextech a k vyjádření různých stupňů evaluace. Je možné, že význam adjektiva byl oslaben přílišným užíváním: v BNC1994 je *cool* obvykle velmi silně emočně nabitě a používá se primárně pro evaluaci (a ne např. pro dávání souhlasu).

Analýza dále ukázala, že evaluativní adjektiva sdílejí několik společných vlastností. Všechna pozorovaná adjektiva se často vyskytovala spolu s intenzifikačními adverbii, s jinými evaluativními adjektivy a dalšími citově zabarvenými prostředky, jako jsou např. citoslovce. Zároveň jsme pozorovali, že se časem měnily nejen syntaktické funkce evaluativních adjektiv, ale i jejich sémantika.