

Univerzita Karlova  
Pedagogická fakulta  
Katedra anglického jazyka a literatury

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

Intensification of adjectives in present-day spoken British English

Intenzifikace adjektiv v současné mluvené britské angličtině

Eliška Chvátlová

Vedoucí práce: doc. PhDr. Markéta Malá, Ph.D.

Studijní program: Specializace v pedagogice (B7507)

Studijní obor: B AJ-NJ (7507R036, 7507R041)

2021

Odevzdáním této bakalářské práce na téma *Intensification of adjectives in present-day spoken British English* potvrzuji, že jsem ji vypracovala pod vedením vedoucího práce samostatně za použití v práci uvedených pramenů a literatury. Dále potvrzuji, že tato práce nebyla využita k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

V Praze dne 19. 4. 2021

Tímto bych ráda poděkovala paní doc. PhDr. Markétě Malé, Ph.D. za její čas, trpělivost a odbornou pomoc, kterou mi poskytovala při zpracovávání této bakalářské práce.

## **ABSTRAKT**

Tato práce se zabývá intenzifikátory adjektiv, které se používají v současné mluvené britské angličtině. Jejím cílem je poskytnout přehled nejčastěji užívaných intenzifikátorů v současném anglickém jazyce a na příkladu dvou z nich ukázat, jak se intenzifikátory užívají. Materiál zvolený pro účely této analýzy byl čerpán z korpusu Spoken BNC 2014. Teoretická část podává přehled dostupných informací o intenzifikátorech vycházející z gramatik a studií týkajících se intenzifikátorů. Na tomto teoretickém základu je založena následující praktická část. Ta se skládá z kvantitativní části, která uvádí nejčastější intenzifikátory, a kvalitativní analýzy zaměřující se na dva vybrané intenzifikátory, konkrétně *super* a *totally*. Analyzované intenzifikátory jsou charakterizované ze tří hledisek. Nejprve jsou zohledněny sociolingvistické charakteristiky uživatelů konkrétního intenzifikátoru, dále je zkoumáno syntaktické chování intenzifikátoru, na které navazují jeho sémantické preference.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

intenzifikátory, adjektiva, hovorový mluvený jazyk, britská angličtina

## **ABSTRACT**

The thesis explores intensifiers of adjectives used in present-day spoken British English. Its aim is to provide an overview of the most frequently used intensifiers in contemporary English, and exemplify their use by a detailed analysis of two intensifiers. The material selected for the purposes of the analysis was drawn from the Spoken BNC 2014 corpus. The theoretical part gives an overview of the available information on intensifiers based on grammar books and intensifier-related studies. The subsequent practical part is based on this theoretical background. It comprises a quantitative part, which lists the most frequent intensifiers, and a qualitative analysis focusing on two selected intensifiers, namely *super* and *totally*. The analysed intensifiers are characterized from three points of view. Firstly, the socio-linguistic characteristics of the users of a specific intensifier are taken into account, then its syntactic behaviour is explored, which is followed by its semantic preferences.

## **KEYWORDS**

intensifiers, adjectives, informal spoken language, British English

## Table of contents

1	Introduction .....	8
2	Theoretical background.....	10
2.1	Intensification .....	10
2.2	Syntactic and semantic characteristics of intensifiers .....	10
2.3	Division of intensifiers .....	11
2.3.1	Amplifiers.....	11
2.3.1.1	Restrictions on the use of amplifiers.....	12
2.3.2	Downtoners .....	14
2.3.2.1	Restrictions on the use of downtoners .....	14
2.4	Socio-demographic characteristics of intensifiers .....	15
2.4.1	Gender .....	16
2.4.1.1	Gender differences within social classes .....	16
2.4.1.2	Gender differences within age groups .....	17
2.4.2	Dialect .....	18
3	Material and method.....	19
3.1	Material.....	19
3.2	Method.....	19
4	Analysis.....	22
4.1	Quantitative analysis of intensifiers .....	22
4.2	Qualitative analysis of selected intensifiers.....	27
4.2.1	The intensifier <i>super</i> .....	27
4.2.1.1	Socio-linguistic characteristics .....	28
4.2.1.2	Syntactic behaviour.....	31
4.2.1.3	Semantic collocation analysis .....	33
4.2.2	The intensifier <i>totally</i> .....	37
4.2.2.1	Socio-linguistic characteristics .....	37
4.2.2.2	Syntactic behaviour.....	40
4.2.2.3	Semantic collocation analysis .....	42
5	Conclusions .....	45

## List of tables

Table 1: The most frequently used intensifiers of adjectives according to the Spoken BNC 2014 .....	27
Table 2: The list of the first 35 adjectives (ranked by frequency) premodified by the intensifier super in the corpus.....	35
Table 3: The list of the first 37 adjectives (ranked by frequency) premodified by the intensifier totally in the corpus .....	43

## List of figures

Figure 1: Distribution of the intensifier super across age groups .....	28
Figure 2: Distribution of the intensifier super across genders .....	29
Figure 3: Distribution of the intensifier super based on dialect .....	30
Figure 4: Distribution of the intensifier super based on social grade.....	31
Figure 5: Distribution of the intensifier totally across age groups .....	38
Figure 6: Distribution of the intensifier totally across genders .....	39
Figure 7: Distribution of the intensifier totally based on dialect.....	39
Figure 8: Distribution of the intensifier totally based on social grade .....	40
Figure 9: Age distribution of the intensifiers super and totally.....	46
Figure 10: Gender distribution of the intensifiers super and totally .....	46

# 1 Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to examine adjectival intensifiers used in contemporary spoken British English and to provide an overview of the intensifiers which are utilized most frequently. Intensifiers are, indeed, an intriguing subject for research as they are under constant development and change with each and every new generation. And it is in informal spoken language that the changes brought by the incoming generations will manifest themselves first. The corpus Spoken BNC 2014 was found to be a suitable material for the purposes of the present analysis because it provides us with a more accurate picture of how people actually interact with each other and what present-day spoken English really looks like. With its help, we can, therefore, explore the way intensifiers are used in the present-day spoken British English.

The bachelor thesis is organised as follows. It comprises two major parts; the theoretical part, which summarizes the relevant content relating to the subject of intensifiers obtained from grammar books and which interprets the findings of recent studies on intensifiers. To begin with, basic information on intensification including the definition of intensifiers is provided. Then the description of the syntactic and semantic features of intensifiers is given, followed by the division of intensifiers into categories and subcategories. Furthermore, there are the characteristics of socio-demographic variables influencing the use of intensifiers, which is supplemented by a view on the development of the usage of intensifiers over time. In the next section, the material used and the method applied in the present study is described. The second major part, namely the practical component of the thesis, follows. It contains two subsections, the first one, the quantitative part, identifies and lists the intensifiers most frequently used by speakers of British English. The second subsection is a qualitative part, whose aim is to perform a closer analysis of the two selected intensifiers *super* and *totally*. These are characterized from three different perspectives. First of all, the socio-linguistic profile (i.e. age, gender, social grade, dialect) of the speakers who make use of a specific intensifier is constructed. Secondly, syntactic characteristics (i.e. the co-occurrence of a particular intensifier with adjectives used attributively and predicatively, and with other modifiers) are explored. Finally, the attention is focused on semantic preference (i.e. a tendency of an intensifier to collocate with certain adjectives) and related semantic prosody (i.e. a preference of an intensifier for either positive or negative adjectives).

The main research question is, which intensifiers are used in present-day informal spoken British English. We assume that, in addition to the standard frequent intensifiers such as *really*

or *very*, there will emerge new intensifiers, which can be expected to be used more frequently by younger generations of speakers.

## 2 Theoretical background

### 2.1 Intensification

Intensification is a linguistic device used to “strengthen the speakers’ position as well as their attitude towards what they are saying” (Pertejo and Martínez 2014: 212). It can be achieved by various means, however, the most frequently mentioned in this context is intensification using intensifiers (Ibid.), i.e. adverbs that perform the function of a modifier of adjectives and adverbs, or sometimes other word classes as well. The bachelor thesis will focus on adverbs functioning as intensifiers that are integrated into the adjective phrase. We can come across various designations of such adverbs. In Quirk et al.’s terminology, the modifying adverb is called an intensifier. On the other hand, Biber et al. (1999: 554) employ another term for such adverbs, namely degree adverbs.

Apart from intensifiers, which will be dealt with in detail below, modifiers of adjectives include also other semantic types of adverbs. Emphasizers, unlike intensifiers, modify nongradable adjectives, e.g. *That’s **just** impossible*. They “add to the force (as distinct from the degree) of the adjective” (Quirk et al. 1985: 447). The modifiers of adjectives can also convey the meanings of manner or means, e.g. *an **easily** debatable proposition*, typical of adjuncts (Ibid.: 448). Premodifying adverbs may also specify the point of view, e.g. ***politically** expedient* (Ibid.).

### 2.2 Syntactic and semantic characteristics of intensifiers

An intensifier functions as a scaling device, and co-occurs with a gradable adjective (Quirk et al. 1985: 445). From a syntactic point of view, the adjective phrase contains, besides the adjective as the head of the phrase, also modifiers. It is common for an adverb to stand before the adjective that it modifies as in ex. (1) (Biber et al. 1999: 538), however, we can come across postmodification as well, as shown in ex. (2) (Biber et al. 1999: 545).

(1) *I am **almost** positive she borrowed that off Barbie!*

(2) *Down came the dry flakes, fat **enough** and heavy **enough** to crash like nickels on stone.*

The same adverbs that function as modifiers can also function as adverbials, which means that they behave in a sentence as separate constituents (Biber et al. 1999: 538). For instance, the adverb *strangely* in ex. (3) (Ibid.) is a modifier, whereas the same adverb in ex. (4) (Ibid.) functions as an adverbial, a disjunct.

(3) *To put on a grey shirt once more was **strangely** pleasing.*

(4) ***Strangely**, it is in this area that the greatest fears concerning CAD exist.*

Biber et al. (1999: 545) note that in some cases there can arise difficulty distinguishing between the adverb functioning as a modifier and as an adverbial, as the adverb can be separated from the adjective. In ex. (5) (Ibid.), the adverb has the function of the adverbial.

(5) *Several preparations are available **commercially**.*

Since intensifiers are concerned with the semantic category of degree, Quirk et al. (1985: 589) suggest that we can visualize an intensity scale and imagine an intensifier as a point on that scale which may be relatively high in the case of amplifiers, or relatively low in the case of downtoners. Biber et al. (1999: 554) relate intensification to “the extent to which a characteristic holds” and stress that the extent is either greater or less than some standard.

Accordingly, there are two major groups of intensifiers to be distinguished according to Quirk et al. (1985: 445), namely amplifiers and downtoners. Biber et al.’s terminology differs from that of Quirk et al.’s in that that Biber et al. (1999: 554-555) refer to those intensifiers that increase intensity as amplifiers or intensifiers and those which scale down the effect of the adjective are called diminishers or downtoners.

## 2.3 Division of intensifiers

### 2.3.1 Amplifiers

Amplifiers “scale upwards from an assumed norm”, for instance, ***sharply** critical, **terribly** nervous, **amazingly** calm, **highly** intelligent, **entirely** free, **strikingly** handsome* (Quirk et al. 1985: 445).

Quirk et al. (1985: 590-591) distinguish two subtypes of amplifiers: maximizers, which represent “the upper extreme of the scale”, e.g. *absolutely, completely, entirely, extremely, fully, perfectly, quite, thoroughly, totally, utterly*, and boosters denoting “a high point on the scale”, e.g. *badly, bitterly, deeply, enormously, highly, intensely, much, severely, strongly, terribly*.

Biber et al. (1999: 554-555) mention the existence of the subgroups of amplifiers, too.

Amplifiers that “modify gradable adjectives and indicate degrees on a scale” include *more, very, so, too*, and *extremely*, as in ex. (6) (Ibid.: 554).

(6) *Our dentist was **very** good.*

The amplifiers *totally*, *absolutely*, and *quite* (meaning ‘completely’) “indicate an endpoint on a scale”, as shown in ex. (7), and can be used with gradable as well as non-gradable adjectives (Ibid.: 555).

(7) *But snow and ice accumulate in a **totally** different way from sediment.*

The adverb *how* can be used as an amplifier in exclamative clauses, such as in ex. (8) (Ibid.).

(8) ***How** lovely!*

Sometimes, when adverbs that can be used as manner adverbials lose their literal meaning, they can be used as amplifiers, as in ex. (9) (Ibid.).

(9) *And Carl was **perfectly** awful.*

### 2.3.1.1 Restrictions on the use of amplifiers

There are some semantic restrictions on the use of amplifiers. Amplifiers are available for adjectives referring to a quality that can be indicated on a scale (Quirk et al. 1985: 469-470). Thus, the adjective *original* in ex. (10) (Ibid.: 470) cannot be intensified unless it is used to refer to the quality of the work, meaning ‘of a new type’, which is the case of ex. (11) (Ibid.).

(10) *the original manuscript*

(11) *a **more** original book*

Particular amplifiers tend to co-occur with certain semantic classes of adjectives,<sup>1</sup> even though there are some exceptions. Although the amplifier *utterly*, for instance, has a tendency to co-occur with adjectives with negative meaning, which express ‘absence of quality’ (e.g. *utterly useless*) or a ‘change of state’ (e.g. *utterly different*), phrases with adjectives having positive meaning can occur (e.g. *utterly reliable*) (Quirk et al. 1985: 470; Partington 2004: 147).

Other restrictions are those concerning gradation of adjectives and its modification. As for adjectives in the absolute degree, they can be premodified by amplifiers *quite*, *so* or *very*, as can be seen in ex. (12) (Quirk et al. 1985: 472).

(12) *The job was **very** easy/difficult.*

---

<sup>1</sup> This tendency can be described as ‘semantic preference’, i.e. a tendency of a lemma or a word-form to co-occur with “a class of words which share some semantic feature” (Stubbs, M. 2001. *Words and Phrases*. Oxford: Blackwell: 88; cited in Partington 2004: 145).

Amplifiers, such as *much* or *very much*, premodify comparative adjectives regardless of whether the comparatives are inflected (ex. 13) or periphrastic (ex. 14) (Ibid.).

(13) *The job was (very) much easier than I thought.*

(14) *The job was (very) much more difficult than I thought.*

It is possible to premodify the nonperiphrastic superlative by the amplifier *very* (ex. 15). In such a case, “a determiner is obligatory” (Quirk et al. 1985: 474).

(15) *She put on her very best dress.*

On the other hand, the intensification by means of the amplifier *very* is not possible with the periphrastic superlative. Instead, other expressions such as *of all* in ex. (16) are used (Ibid.).

(16) *the most successful candidate of all*

The restriction of amplifiers to certain lexical items applies to adjectives used as premodifiers, as shown in ex. (17), and to some premodifying nouns (ex. 18) (Quirk et al. 1985: 447).

(17) *dead tired, fast asleep, wide awake*

(18) *stone cold, brand new*

Restrictions apply to the repetition of amplifiers as well, which is possible only if the repeated items either come first (ex. 19) or follow *so* (ex. 20). Moreover, the type of coordination is invariably asyndetic, i.e. without a comma (Quirk et al. 1985: 473).

(19) *much much ... more careful*

(20) *so very very ... much better*

As shown by Jindrová (2017: 33-34), in sequences of intensifiers “an intensifier is either used more than once or it is accompanied by one or more other intensifying items”, e.g. *For a very very very long time; something really really fucking bad*. Sequences consisting of three or more intensifiers appear to be rare.

There are some amplifiers that are characteristic of informal speech. Amplifiers *any* (ex. 21) and *that* (ex. 22) can be found mainly in non-assertive contexts (Quirk et al. 1985: 447).

(21) *Is the team any different from last year?*

(22) *It's not (all) that unusual for women nowadays to join the police force, is it?*

While amplifiers homonymous with adjectives (*real, plain, awful* in ex. 23) are typical of informal speech especially in AmE, their adverbial equivalents (*really, plainly, awfully* also in ex. 23) are preferred in formal style in AmE (Quirk et al. 1985: 446).

- (23) a. *real nice* x *really nice*  
b. *plain silly* x *plainly silly*  
c. *awful good* x *awfully good*

### 2.3.2 Downtoners

Downtoners scale “downwards from an assumed norm”, e.g. *almost impossible, nearly dark, relatively small, barely intelligible, pretty rare, rather late* (Quirk et al. 1985: 445).

Four groups of downtoners can be distinguished, namely approximators (ex. 24), compromisers (ex. 25), diminishers (ex. 26) and minimizers (ex. 27) (Quirk et al. 1985: 597-598).

- (24) *almost, nearly, practically, virtually*  
(25) *sort of, quite, rather, enough*  
(26) *partially, slightly, only, merely*  
(27) *barely, hardly, at all, a bit*

According to Biber et al. (1999: 555-556), there are many downtoners that modify gradable adjectives and “indicate degrees on a scale” e.g. *less, slightly, somewhat, rather, and quite* (meaning ‘to some extent’) as shown in ex. (28).

- (28) *A **slightly** cold start gave way to wonderful contrasts of feeling.*

Like downtoners, other intensifiers indicating lesser degree in the sense that they do not reach the endpoint on a scale include *nearly, pretty, far from* and *almost* as in ex. (29). These may also co-occur with some non-gradable adjectives (Biber et al. 1999: 556).

- (29) *Mr Deane’s glass is **almost** empty.*

#### 2.3.2.1 Restrictions on the use of downtoners

As with amplifiers, certain semantic restrictions apply also to downtoners. Some of the intensifiers can convey diverse meanings such as *quite*. It can be interpreted either as ‘fairly’, ‘rather’, and then it functions as a downtoner (ex. 30), or it can be used in the sense of

‘absolutely’, ‘completely’ (ex. 31), and then it is employed as an amplifier (Quirk et al. 1985: 446).

(30) *That’s quite good.*

(31) *She’s quite right.*

Some downtoners are used to modify an adjective with “a desirable quality” such as *fairly* in ex. (32) (Ibid.). On the other hand, some of them denote “an undesirable quality” such as *rather* in ex. (33) (Ibid.).

(32) *It’s fairly warm in here.* (‘warm enough’)

(33) *It’s rather warm in here.* (‘too warm’)

Another restriction is that *a bit* and *a little* as downtoners of absolute adjectives may occur only “in predicative position and with adjectives with ‘unfavourable’ meaning and an implication of ‘more than wanted’” as shown in ex. (34) (Quirk et al. 1985: 447).

(34) *The weather’s a bit (too) hot.*

## 2.4 Socio-demographic characteristics of intensifiers

The use of intensifiers in present-day spoken British English is influenced by sociodemographic variables which include mainly gender, age, social class and dialect. Many studies have been conducted regarding the effect of the aforementioned variables on the use of intensifiers. However, some of them, such as Argamon et al. (2003)<sup>2</sup>, do not take into account the interaction between individual variables, e.g. between gender and age and social class, or focus solely on a few of them at a time, which is the case of Xiao & Tao (2007)<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand, there exist studies such as the one of McEnery & Xiao (2004)<sup>4</sup> in which the interaction between gender and other sociodemographic variables is investigated. What is more, for some of these variables the differences in intensification rate may be greater than for other variables, but it is by no means clear whether, for instance, gender-based differences are greater than those of age.

---

<sup>2</sup> Argamon, S., Koppel, M., Fine, J., & Shimoni, A. R. (2003). Gender, genre, and writing style in formal written texts. *Text*, 23(3), 321–346. Cited in Fuchs (2017: 347).

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

<sup>4</sup> McEnery, A., & Xiao, Z. (2004). Swearing in modern British English: The case of fuck in the BNC. *Language and Literature*, 13(3), 235–268. doi:10.1177/0963947004044873

### 2.4.1 Gender

Gender is undoubtedly an influential variable, however, its influence becomes apparent only if it is viewed in relation to social class and age. Fuchs (2017)<sup>5</sup> states that gender differences can be described as one of the most fundamental factors influencing the trends in the use of intensifiers (Fuchs 2017: 355). The results of his study suggest that male speakers of all social classes and age groups in 1994 as well as in 2014 used fewer intensifiers than female speakers (Fuchs 2017: 356). Several studies (e.g. Jespersen 1922: 250, Lakoff 1973: 53-54)<sup>6</sup> examining the preferences of particular groups of speakers regarding the use of intensifiers and the frequency of their use confirm that female speakers are prone to use more intensifiers than male speakers. However, the evidence that the rate of intensification is greater in the language of women than in the language of men is not unambiguous. One of the studies holding the opposite view is that of Xiao & Tao (2007)<sup>7</sup> which claims that in the spoken sub-corpora of the BNC 1994, men used slightly more amplifiers than women (Hessner and Gawlitzek 2017: 420).

The evident existence of gender differences in intensifier usage inevitably invites the question of how such differences are brought about. A possible explanation could be that people in Western societies are nurtured in their linguistic styles by traditional norms which prefer gendered behaviour chiefly in realms which have to do with sexuality and procreation (Fahs 2011, Røndahl et al. 2009). It is precisely due to these norms that men are led to be “strong and self-sufficient” and women to be “caring and focussed on the maintenance of social relationships” (Fuchs 2017: 362). According to Christie (2002: online) and Holmes (1995: 6, 2005: 49), the use of intensifiers is connected with a positively polite style, which is attributed just to the language of women. Therefore, the frequent repetition of intensifiers, can “contribute to a stereotypically feminine communicative style” (Fuchs 2017: 362).

#### 2.4.1.1 Gender differences within social classes

As stated above, men across all social classes have a tendency to use intensifiers to a lesser degree than women. In general terms, while in 1994 male representatives of the upper class made use of as many intensifiers as their female counterparts in both middle and working class, in 2014 men used fewer intensifiers than women in all social classes (Fuchs 2017: 356).

---

<sup>5</sup> Fuchs (2017) compares the use of intensifiers in British English in the 1990 and in 2014. His research draws on the spoken sub-corpus of the British National Corpus and on the Spoken BNC2014.

<sup>6</sup> Jespersen, O. (1922). *Language: Its Nature, Development, and Origin*. London: Allen and Unwin.

<sup>7</sup> Xiao, R. & H. Tao (2007) “A corpus-based sociolinguistic study of amplifiers in British English.” *Sociolinguistic Studies* 1(2), 241–273

Nevertheless, the differences between male and female speakers proved not to be of a great significance for all social groups. In 1994, the differences in the rate of intensification between men and women belonging to the same social class were not so significant, which applied to all social classes. By 2014, while the differences between speakers of upper and working class have increased, men as well as female speakers of the middle class have become more alike regarding the use of intensifiers (Ibid.). One of the possible reasons for the decreasing gender differences in intensification rate in the middle class may be that there has been a fundamental change in our perception of various social roles that men and women are ideally supposed to perform in society (Fuchs 2017: 364). Once a strict conception of gender roles, that women behave exclusively in typically feminine ways and men in ways that are stereotypically masculine, is nowadays no longer the norm. On the contrary, it is nothing unusual these days if, for instance, a man fulfils such a social role in society that was previously attributed solely to women (Ibid.).

Apart from gender differences, another substantial trend concerning the usage of intensifiers can be distinguished, namely a change in their usage over time. Specifically, there has been a growth in the use of intensifiers across the board between the years 1994 and 2014 (Fuchs 2017: 355). As the interaction between gender and social class regards, both men and women across all social classes made use of more intensifiers in 2014 than in 1994. More precisely, male as well as female speakers of middle and working class experienced the greatest increases. As far as upper class is concerned, the increase was rather small for female speakers, while male speakers of the same class witnessed the smallest increase between 1994 and 2014 (Fuchs 2017: 355-356).

#### **2.4.1.2 Gender differences within age groups**

Firstly, Fuchs's (2017) study suggests that the differences between male and female speakers seem to be significant in majority of age groups (Fuchs 2017: 356), with the differences being the greatest in the youngest age group and tending to decrease as speakers grow older (Fuchs 2017: 362). Hessner and Gawlitzek (2017: 420-423) state that, apart from the overall female lead in the use of intensifiers, men and women also differ in which subgroup of intensifiers, whether amplifiers or downtoners, they prefer. The results of their study (Hessner and Gawlitzek 2017: 416-417) show that women within all age groups use amplifiers such as *absolutely*, *completely* and *particularly* more frequently than men. As for downtoners such as

*fairly, partly* and *slightly*, they are used more often by men than by women which is true for almost all age groups, even though the differences between both genders were negligible (Ibid.).

Furthermore, there has been a change in the use of intensifiers between particular age groups over time. In 1994, the younger generation had an inclination towards using more intensifiers than the older one, which applied to both genders. In 2014, on the other hand, this pattern was still valid for male speakers, but not for female speakers, who showed a distinct tendency, that is a U-shaped pattern of age-grading (Fuchs 2017: 356-357). It means that when they are young, the intensification rate is high, then it decreases at 30 years of age or more, and is on the increase again when they reach the age of 60 or more (Ibid.). Hessner and Gawlitzek (2017: 416) also mention that the frequency of the use of amplifiers, as for female speakers, is the lowest in the age groups 30-39 and 50-59, which corresponds with the aforementioned tendency.

The diachronic trend, an increase in the rate of intensification over time, can also be observed in the interaction between gender and age. That is, male and female speakers across all age groups used more intensifiers in 2014 than in 1994 (Fuchs 2017: 355). As for women of the age group 40 and more, the increase has been greater in comparison with both men falling into the same age group and women under the age of 40. Regarding men aged 40 and less, the increase has been again greater than with women of the same age (Ibid.).

#### **2.4.2 Dialect**

Besides variables such as social class and age, there is also dialect, which plays an important role when it comes to the use of intensifiers. The great growth in intensification rate over time affected almost all dialects spoken in the United Kingdom with the exception of Ireland where the increase was not so significant (Fuchs 2017: 356). There was recorded a higher use of intensifiers by speakers from the South than by those from the North, the Midlands and Wales in 1994. The situation changed in 2014 when the northerners and Welsh speakers almost reached the same level as the southerners. However, the significant dissimilarity between Northern and Southern speakers still persists (Fuchs 2017: 358).

### 3 Material and method

#### 3.1 Material

The source material the present study draws on is the British National Corpus 2014, specifically its spoken component, i.e. the Spoken BNC 2014. With 11.5 million words, it is a comparatively extensive component which “contains transcripts of recorded conversations, gathered from members of the UK public between 2012 and 2016”, more precisely it “comprises 1,251 conversations, featuring a total of 672 speakers”<sup>8</sup>. The conversations between the speakers took place “in informal settings”, that is, primarily “among friends and family members” (Ibid.). The reason for making the recordings in such environment is that such interactions best show how people talk with each other on a daily basis, capturing an authentic language and thus giving us a more accurate picture of how British English is actually used. What is innovative about this corpus is that the speakers who were willing to contribute to the language research were instructed to record the content of their day-to-day conversations with the help of “the built-in audio recording device in their smartphones” (Ibid.). Although there was no restriction given on the number of speakers that could participate in conversations, it was recommended a maximum of four people should be involved. Similarly, in order to achieve the greatest possible spontaneity, there were no prescribed conversation topics, however, the speakers were given a list of topics which they could but did not necessarily have to adhere to. Finally, and probably most importantly, it was emphasised to the speakers that “under no circumstances could they make recordings surreptitiously”<sup>9</sup>. It means that all participants in conversations were well aware that they were being recorded, which, however, in some cases may have detracted from the spontaneity of speech.

#### 3.2 Method

The first step, which had to be performed in order to identify which intensifiers of adjectives are used most frequently, was to search for all the adjectives in the Spoken BNC 2014. In the present study, the decision was made to focus exclusively on adjectives in its positive form (e.g. *big*) and thus to exclude comparative (e.g. *older*) and superlative (e.g. *best*) forms of adjectives. The reason for this is, that we expect a wider range of different intensifiers collocating with

---

<sup>8</sup> For the description of the Spoken BNC2014 see British National Corpus 2014: About the Spoken BNC2014. Available from <http://corpora.lancs.ac.uk/bnc2014/> Accessed on 17 April 2021.

<sup>9</sup> For the description of the Spoken BNC2014 see BNC2014 Manual, p. 4. Available from <http://corpora.lancs.ac.uk/bnc2014/doc/BNC2014manual.pdf> Accessed on 17 April 2021.

adjectives in the positive form than it would be in the case of comparatives or superlatives. As for the adjective *big*, it can be used with a number of intensifiers such as *really*, *so*, *quite*, *pretty*, *that*, *fucking*, *fairly* or *very* (ex. 1). However, its comparative form *bigger* is used only with the intensifiers *so* and *fucking* (ex. 2).

(1) *they're **very big** windows* (S0590, text S263 2782)

(2) *he's a **fucking bigger** woman than I am* (S0203, text SYXU 270)

The adjectives in the positive form were found by entering a query `_JJ` into the corpus. At this point, however, we are not interested in the adjectives themselves, but in what occurs on the position immediately preceding the adjectives. The method was as follows. A frequency breakdown was performed on the 1 Left position, which resulted in generating a list of all words occurring just before the adjective. Then the option to show POS-tags was chosen, and the resulting list was subsequently checked manually in order to identify those tags which could be potential intensifiers. It turned out that there are three POS-tags, which come into question. Therefore, we limited the search to the following POS-tags combinations: RG + JJ, RR + JJ and JJ + JJ. The next step was to identify those examples which always contain the aforementioned combinations of POS-tags. Firstly, we examined the degree adverbs preceding the adjectives (RG + JJ). As before, we performed a frequency breakdown on the 1 Left position and a corresponding list of degree adverbs as potential intensifiers was generated. The same method was applied also for general adverbs (RR + JJ) and adjectives (JJ + JJ). We decided not to deal with those potential intensifiers which have a very low number of occurrences, therefore it was set a frequency limit of at least 10 occurrences for all three combinations of POS-tags. These were consequently unified into a single table and sorted by frequency. Furthermore, it was necessary to merge the duplicate occurrences, as a single word such as *rather* may occur twice; once as a degree adverb (ex. 3) and the second time as a general adverb (ex. 4).

(3) *...yes yes sounds **rather cruel** nailing the shoes to their feet* (S0579, text S6SH 1488)

(4) *yeah but you'd **be rather safe** than sorry wouldn't you?* (S0439, text SKRC 1240)

Then, a random sample of the concordance lines of each potential intensifier preceding an adjective were checked manually to test whether the particular adverb or adjective can really function as an intensifier. However, due to the high frequency of the potentially intensifying

adverbs and adjectives identified in the corpus, it was impossible to separate manually all the intensifying and non-intensifying uses.

## 4 Analysis

In the practical part of this bachelor thesis, the use of intensifiers of adjectives in present-day English will be first analysed from the quantitative point of view in Section 4.1. In this section, using a bottom-up approach, the frequency of the individual intensifiers in the whole Spoken BNC 2014 will be given and commented on. Section 4.2 will then present a qualitative analysis of two selected intensifiers, *super* and *totally*, focussing on their socio-linguistic characteristics, syntactic properties, semantic preference and semantic prosody.

### 4.1 Quantitative analysis of intensifiers

The aim of this section is to give a quantitative characteristic of intensifiers, more precisely to identify which words can most often function as intensifiers of adjectives in present-day spoken British English. Table 1, which was created with the use of the material extracted from the whole Spoken BNC 2014, is a result of performing the steps stated above in the methodology chapter, and it lists 72 most frequently used intensifiers. The table contains a particular intensifier as well as the frequency of its occurrence, which is supplemented by an example of such an intensifying use.

The analysis revealed that intensifiers are to be found under three morphological part-of-speech CLAWS 6 tags (POS-tags) preceding the adjective (tagged JJ). In addition to two adverbial tags, there can be found, interestingly enough, also an adjective, which can fulfil the function of an intensifier of adjectives. Therefore, the items listed in Table 1 include specialized intensifiers, i.e. degree adverbs (RG), general adverbs (RR) and intensifiers of adjectival origin, i.e. general adjectives (JJ).

Moreover, it should be noted that although the list shows the frequency of occurrence of intensifiers, it does not necessarily mean that all search results are in fact the evidence of intensifiers. That is, a particular word preceding an adjective can be used not only in the function of an intensifier, but also as a premodifying adjective in multiple premodification, or as a non-intensifying adverb. For instance, the adjective *crazy* in the sentence *He's crazy good at maths* is used as an intensifier, whereas in the sentence *He sounds insane like a crazy old man*. the same word is used as an adjective expressing a particular character trait.

Interestingly, there seems to be a smooth transition between adjectives and intensifiers, where adjectives, such as *pretty*, *real*, *bloody* or *dead*, can begin to function as intensifiers while still

maintaining their present form. This conversion may pose a problem for the part-of-speech tagger, since it is not possible to distinguish automatically between adjectival and adverbial (i.e. intensifying) uses of such adjectives either lexically or on the basis of word-order. Nowadays, this tendency for adjectives to be converted into intensifiers appears to be significant in the English language. It is particularly noticeable in the example of the word *pretty* which is of adjectival origin, but which has started to behave in an intensifying way. According to the Oxford English Dictionary<sup>10</sup>, the adverbial uses of *pretty* are attested in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, originally with the meaning “to a considerable extent; fairly, moderately; rather, quite”. In later use, the meaning can also be “very”. According to the dictionary, the frequency of the adverb *pretty* ranges between 10 and 100 occurrences per million words in typical modern English usage.

Another example may be the adjective *real* which is, alongside its corresponding adverb *really*, commonly used as an intensifier of adjectives as well. The Oxford English Dictionary lists the meaning of the adverb *real* as “really, genuinely. Also more generally in later use: very, extremely (originally regional (esp. Scottish, Irish English, English regional (northern), and U.S.) and subsequently also colloquial),”<sup>11</sup> noting that “In early use” *real* was “properly an adjective qualifying the following phrase (‘good turn’, etc.), and only later apprehended as an adverb qualifying the adjective (‘good’, etc.)” (Ibid.).

Moreover, there are adjectives such as *massive* or *fucking* which seem to have embarked on this path of transformation as well. As for the word *massive*, we can observe that it is still widely used as a descriptive adjective, i.e. as an adjective denoting some quality or characteristic as in *A massive tidal wave like happened in Sri Lanka a few years ago*. However, it can also occur in the sentence *I’m a massive Muslim.*, in which case it is an intensifying use of this adjective. What is more, intensification can be further found in the reduplication of the word *massive* as in *She said an entire sentence that was like massive massive spoiler*. Such repeated use of the adjective suggests that it is something very intense, very large.

Furthermore, there is one thing worth mentioning and that is how the individual intensifiers are represented in terms of frequency of occurrence. This was examined in both already mentioned groups of adverbs. As for degree adverbs, it is evident that the difference in the frequency of occurrence between intensifiers is considerable. There seems to be a group of intensifiers,

---

<sup>10</sup> ‘pretty’: Oxford English Dictionary. Available online at <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/151025> Accessed 23 March 2021.

<sup>11</sup> ‘real’, adv.: Oxford English Dictionary. Available at <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/158926> Accessed 23 March 2021.

namely *very*, *so* and *quite*, which make up approximately 74% of all intensifiers of this type. These three degree adverbs are very frequent and it is also the reason why they occupy the second, third and fourth position in the table, respectively. Then, a certain frequency scatter is noticeable between this small group of intensifiers and the following intensifiers. However, the rest of the intensifiers does not reach such a frequency of occurrence as the three aforementioned intensifiers. On the other hand, the situation is somewhat different for general adverbs. In this case we have to do with a group of adverbs that is no longer so specialized. The intensifier *really* with the highest frequency of occurrence occupies the first position in the Spoken BNC 2014 as well as in the table, and then the frequency decreases significantly. We can observe that the frequency scatter in this group of adverbs is greater than it was in the case of degree adverbs, and that there is a much wider range of adverbs, which are represented by a smaller number of tokens, i.e. which have lower frequencies of occurrence.

In addition to the aforementioned findings, we can observe that both amplifiers (ex. 1) and downtoners (ex. 2) are represented among the most frequently used intensifiers of adjectives listed in Table 1.

- (1) *they might have a **totally** different idea to us anyway* (S0013, text S37Y 63)  
*I mean I can't bear it myself I find it **utterly** irritating* (S0270, text S7A6 584)
- (2) *he's always been **fairly** careful with his money...* (S0481, text 1011)  
*it's **nearly** identical to what we've got for you* (S0391, text SNE5 778)

No.	Intensifier	Frequency of occurrence	Example
1.	really	17280	cos people get there <b>really</b> early to get a place to park
2.	very	12724	but it's a <b>very</b> complicated relationship
3.	so	10674	she was <b>so</b> busy doing all the washing
4.	quite	8698	and it's <b>quite</b> popular amongst posh people
5.	pretty	2781	I'm <b>pretty</b> suspicious of smoothies
6.	that	1388	he wasn't <b>that</b> old actually was he?
7.	absolutely	939	oh Michelle's wedding dress was <b>absolutely</b> beautiful
8.	well	747	I've got the dentist tomorrow I'm <b>well</b> scared
9.	fucking	724	I just think that steak there is just <b>fucking</b> amazing
10.	completely	710	let's be <b>completely</b> honest here
11.	right	613	...I said I can't see cos that went <b>right</b> black you see I was sort of semi-conscious
12.	fairly	382	so there should be some <b>fairly</b> nice views
13.	slightly	355	that's right he's the one with the <b>slightly</b> curly hair
14.	totally	310	cos he was <b>totally</b> obsessed with her
15.	particularly	264	well most medicines don't taste <b>particularly</b> nice...
16.	rather	255	this soup is um looking <b>rather</b> watery
17.	real	255	...when people call me there's a <b>real</b> bad echo
18.	whole	204	but you'll start to see people in a <b>whole</b> new light
19.	bloody	199	each minute something <b>bloody</b> interesting is happening...
20.	super	196	...when they're nesting and they're young and they're <b>super</b> protective
21.	proper	195	yeah he's <b>proper</b> addicted
22.	perfectly	164	I'm a <b>perfectly</b> reasonable person
23.	dead	157	no he's <b>dead</b> worried about what you think of him
24.	extremely	157	well she's <b>extremely</b> knowledgeable about all these things
25.	incredibly	149	I mean it seems <b>incredibly</b> dangerous
26.	massive	148	...it was <b>massive</b> ridiculous
27.	terribly	129	they're <b>terribly</b> expensive
28.	kinda	125	it just seemed <b>kinda</b> shallow to me the whole thing
29.	almost	122	the training is <b>almost</b> complete
30.	entirely	109	it is an <b>entirely</b> new topic for us...
31.	relatively	84	it's a <b>relatively</b> small company

32.	extra	75	website which provides <b>extra</b> valuable information
33.	much	72	we're not <b>much</b> good in this country at languages...
34.	this	70	I'm never <b>this</b> mean to anyone I know...
35.	crazy	66	they're really expensive like <b>crazy</b> expensive
36.	massively	55	I'm <b>massively</b> tired...
37.	highly	53	no he is a <b>highly</b> intelligent man
38.	reasonably	53	I was <b>reasonably</b> bright on the science side
39.	nearly	49	...all the parking spaces were <b>nearly</b> full
40.	far	43	this is <b>far</b> superior to a macaroni cheese I remember
41.	properly	43	...he was like <b>properly</b> famous as well at the time
42.	genuinely	42	so I have some <b>genuinely</b> exciting news
43.	fully	41	oh she's a <b>fully</b> qualified carer now...
44.	jolly	40	...it was a <b>jolly</b> good programme I liked that
45.	seriously	40	that's just <b>seriously</b> bad pasta I'm really upset
46.	awful	38	and it's gonna take an <b>awful</b> long time...
47.	especially	38	...I mean it's <b>especially</b> difficult for women...
48.	mega	37	apart from people who are <b>mega</b> famous...
49.	terrible	37	...I felt <b>terrible</b> rigid so I went to the doctor...
50.	amazingly	34	he's an <b>amazingly</b> quiet cat
51.	hugely	33	...in parts of Spain it's <b>hugely</b> popular
52.	overly	33	yeah you become <b>overly</b> sensitive
53.	damn	31	...it's like you look <b>damn</b> hot...
54.	utterly	29	in the morning Sarah is <b>utterly</b> miserable as sin
55.	absolute	27	people that are <b>absolute</b> right
56.	mad	24	with the <b>mad</b> curly hair
57.	all	22	yay I was getting <b>all</b> wet
58.	horribly	21	it's just my back it becomes <b>horribly</b> painful
59.	any	19	no I'll find out whether it's <b>any</b> good...
60.	awfully	18	I said that's an <b>awfully</b> long day
61.	truly	18	...the only one that I feel <b>truly</b> close to...
62.	partly	17	...I feel I am <b>partly</b> responsible for you being poorly...
63.	unbelievably	17	...now my memory is just <b>unbelievably</b> bad...
64.	blooming	16	...some of the girls on there were <b>blooming</b> lovely
65.	heavily	16	...I'm sort of really <b>heavily</b> critical of some of them...
66.	horrendously	14	...she's got this <b>horrendously</b> expensive electric wheelchair...

67.	particular	14	...I've f- forgotten the name of these <b>particularly</b> naughty lads...
68.	deeply	12	I have a <b>deeply</b> suspicious nature...
69.	extraordinarily	11	it would seem an <b>extraordinarily</b> long time...
70.	pure	11	...it'd be <b>pure</b> hot...
71.	virtually	11	it's <b>virtually</b> impossible
72.	frigging	10	it's <b>frigging</b> hot in the summer

Table 1: The most frequently used intensifiers of adjectives according to the Spoken BNC 2014

## 4.2 Qualitative analysis of selected intensifiers

As mentioned in the introductory part of the analysis, this section aims to provide a detailed qualitative analysis of selected intensifiers. The two intensifiers which were chosen for this purpose, namely *super* and *totally* will be examined from three different perspectives in the following subchapters. That is, the socio-linguistic characteristics will be explored, then the syntactic properties will be looked upon, followed by the analysis of the specific intensifier from a semantic point of view.

### 4.2.1 The intensifier *super*

The intensifier *super* was found a suitable candidate for the analysis for two different reasons. Firstly, this word, originally a bound morpheme, has become independent and has started to function on its own as an intensifier. The Oxford English Dictionary<sup>12</sup> mentions *super* only as an adjective (colloquial, chiefly British) meaning “very good or pleasant, excellent, superb, first-class” and as a prefix, which is added to adjectives, “designating things which are higher in quality or degree than what is expressed by the second element”. Another reason for choosing this particular intensifier is that it still has a sufficient frequency of occurrence and thus it can be concluded that the analysis will yield reliable results. *Super* occupies with 196 occurrences the 20<sup>th</sup> position among intensifiers listed in descending frequency in Table 1. However, its frequency of occurrence in pre-adjectival position (including the position before comparative and superlative forms of adjectives)<sup>13</sup> is 201, i.e. 17.597 instances per million words.

<sup>12</sup> ‘super’, adj.: Oxford English Dictionary. Available at <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/194184>; ‘super’, pref.: Oxford English Dictionary. Available at <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/194186> Accessed 4 April 2021.

<sup>13</sup> The query used to identify all the pre-adjectival uses of *super* was `super _JJ*`

#### 4.2.1.1 Socio-linguistic characteristics

The first aspect which will be studied in this subchapter are the socio-linguistic characteristics of the users of the intensifier *super*. Firstly, the distribution of the use of the intensifier across various age groups will be examined, which will be followed by the distribution based on gender. Subsequently, we will deal with the distribution of the usage of *super* based on dialect and the differentiation between speakers based on their social grade will be taken into consideration as well.

As shown in Figure 1, the distribution of *super* among speaker age groups is quite uneven. It has the largest representation in the youngest age group, namely in the group 0-14 years. Another relatively prominent group as the frequency of the use of this intensifier regards are people aged 25-34. On the contrary, older generations no longer appear to have such a need to intensify what they say and therefore the usage of *super* is significantly lower, especially in the oldest age group 60 and more.

As shown in Figure 1, the distribution of *super* among speaker age groups is quite uneven. It has the largest representation in the youngest age group, namely in the group 0-14 years. Another relatively prominent group as the frequency of the use of this intensifier regards are people aged 25-34. On the contrary, older generations no longer appear to have such a need to intensify what they say and therefore the usage of *super* is significantly lower, especially in the oldest age group 60 and more.

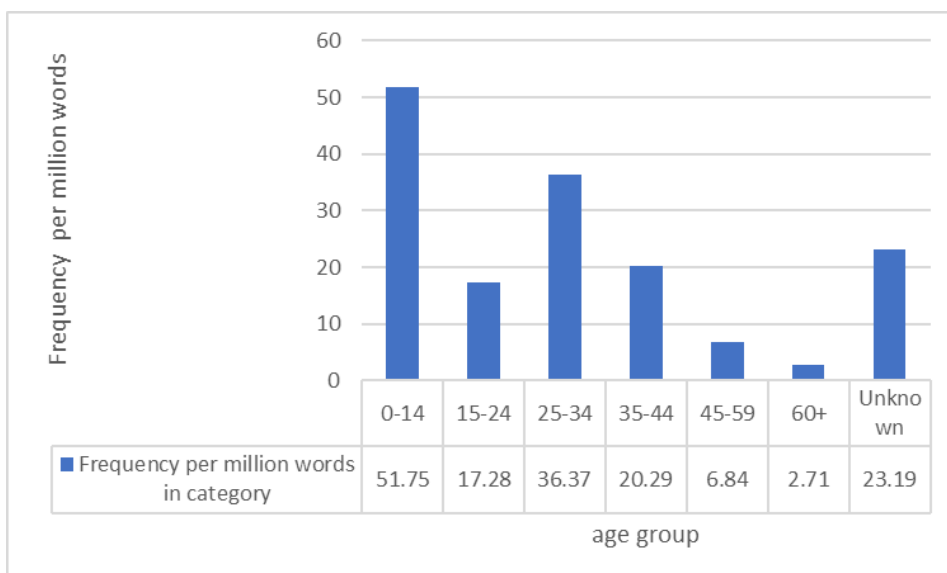


Figure 1: Distribution of the intensifier *super* across age groups

Regarding gender differences, there is a very small difference<sup>14</sup> between male and female speakers as for the frequency of the use of the intensifier *super* (see Figure 2). Although women in the corpus use *super* a little more than men, in this case we deal with a word which is neither typically masculine nor typically feminine. Nevertheless, this finding confirms the general tendency for women to make use of more intensifiers than men in their speech, which was already proved by previous studies (see section 2.4.1). Within the female group of speakers, it is the women aged 25-34 that use the intensifier *super* most frequently (56.15 occurrences per million words). Male speakers, on the other hand, overuse *super* as an intensifier when they are younger, up to 14 years old (114.70 instances per million words).

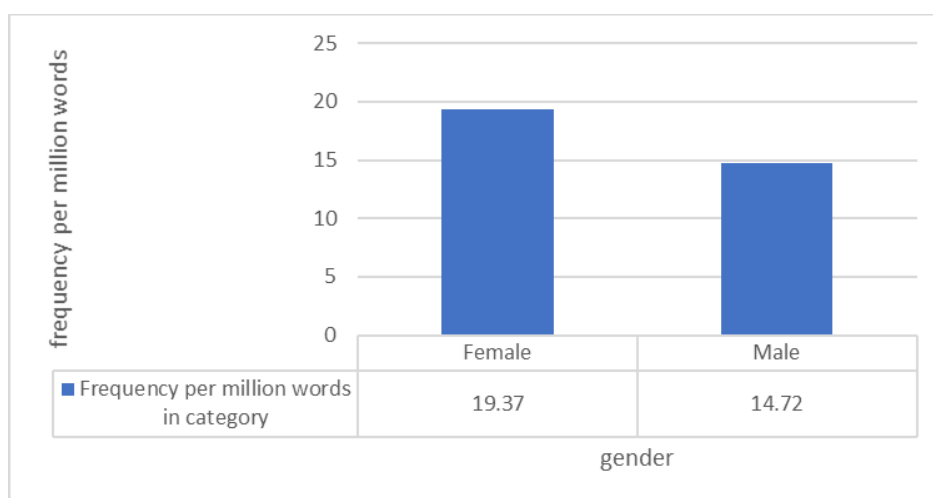


Figure 2: Distribution of the intensifier *super* across genders

As regards the distribution of the intensifier *super* according to speaker dialect, in Figure 3 we can observe that there is a high relative frequency of the usage of *super* with the speakers who are marked as non\_uk. The non\_uk is a very small group in the Spoken BNC 2014, comprising only 11 speakers. These are of no interest to the present study and therefore will not be taken into account. Otherwise, it seems that speakers from the south of England use *super* much more frequently in comparison to those from the north of England or midlands. Fuchs (2017) in his study reached the same conclusion (see section 4.2.2). Nonetheless, the results must be interpreted with great caution as there is a comparatively large number of speakers in the corpus who do not specify their dialect (167 speakers).

<sup>14</sup> The difference between the frequency of *super* in female and male speech is not statistically significant on the 0.05 level of significance (significance was calculated using Calc: Corpus Calculator, available from: <https://www.korpus.cz/calc/> Accessed 3 April 2021).

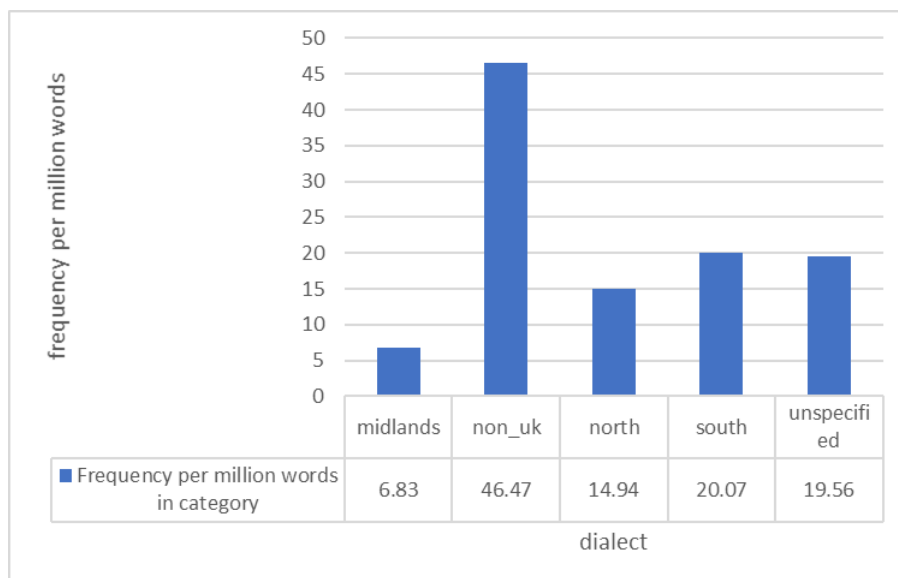


Figure 3: Distribution of the intensifier *super* based on dialect

Finally, the distribution of the intensifier *super* in terms of speakers' social grade can be seen in Figure 4, which shows that *super* has a marked predominance in group C2 which is the designation for skilled manual workers.<sup>15</sup> There is a considerable frequency scatter between this group of speakers and the rest of the social groups. Nevertheless, the frequency differences between the following groups designating a particular occupation are not so huge. These include supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative and professional grade (C1), then there are intermediate managerial, administrative and professional jobs (B), followed by more prestigious jobs, i.e. higher managerial, administrative and professional (A). Subsequently there are state pensioners, casual and lowest grade workers, unemployed with state benefits only (E) and then semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers (D) follow.

<sup>15</sup> For the description of social grade codes used in the Spoken BNC2014 see BNC2014 Manual, pp 27-31, available from <http://corpora.lancs.ac.uk/bnc2014/doc/BNC2014manual.pdf> Accessed 3 April 2021.

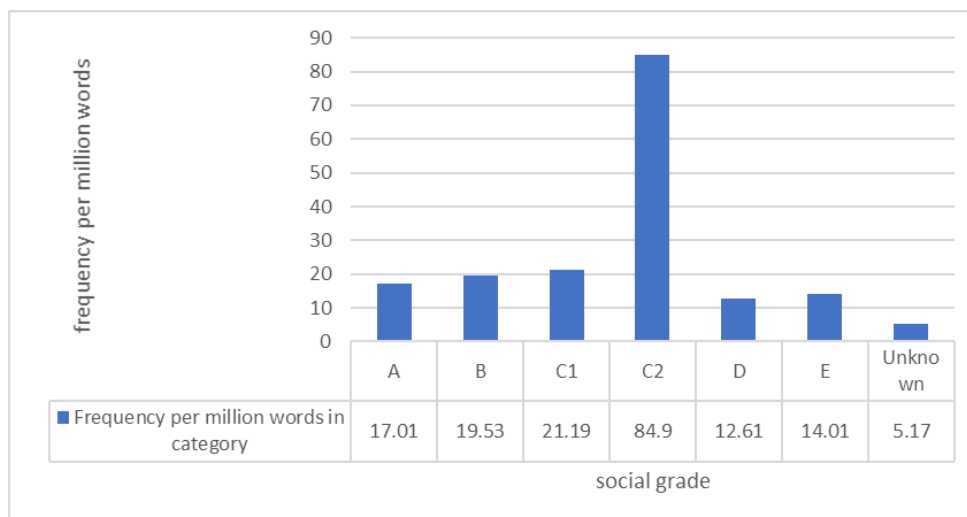


Figure 4: Distribution of the intensifier *super* based on social grade

#### 4.2.1.2 Syntactic behaviour

The behaviour of adjective phrases, and thus of adjective phrases comprising the intensifier *super*, can be described also from a syntactic point of view. In general, two basic syntactic functions of adjective phrases can be distinguished, namely attributive and predicative. The first aspect that we will focus on within the syntactic characteristics of the intensifier *super* will therefore describe in what percentage of cases the adjective phrase containing this particular intensifier occurs in the attributive position as in ex. (3) and when it can be assumed to occur in the predicative position as in ex. (4). As pointed out by Ito and Tagliamonte (2003: 261), the use of the adverb “with predicative adjectives to convey simple intensification” can be considered the final stage of the development towards ‘delexicalization’, and the proportion of predicative uses of *super* may thus indicate the stage it has reached on the way towards becoming an intensifier proper.

(3) ...*they’re wearing **super tight** trousers* (S0084, text S6J2 587)

(4) *the cat was **super happy**...* (S0541, text S7RW 730)

The first step is to determine the number of cases (out of the total of 201 occurrences of *super* in pre-adjectival position) in which *super* pre-modifies adjectives in the attributive position. We assume, that, if the intensifier functions along with the adjective as a premodifier, it should be followed by a noun as can be seen in ex. (5). This phrase as a whole functions as a noun phrase, where *super* as well as *smart* are tagged as general adjectives (JJ) and together they fulfil the function of the premodifier of the singular common noun *person* (NN1).

- (5) *super smart person* (S0554, text S784 1718)

In order to find out which nouns occur on the position immediately following the key word, i.e. the adjective phrase with the intensifier such as *super annoying* or *super talented*, a query ‘super \_JJ\*’ was entered into the corpus and a frequency breakdown was performed on the 1 Right position. Then we chose the option to show POS-tags and we were searching for those tags denoting nouns. It was found that there are 40 instances of the phrase ‘*super + adjective + noun/one*’<sup>16</sup>, as in ex (6).

- (6) a. ...*a super fast blender does everything in five seconds* (S0144, text SEPP 535)  
b. *just as long as you had a super rare one yeah* (S0436, text SMGY 537)

The concordance was checked manually, and one line had to be discarded (ex. 7) since it did not meet the aforementioned criteria. The word *travelling* is a non-finite verb form (the participle), and the adjective phrase *super happy* is used predicatively.

- (7) *if you are super happy travelling and that’s the thing that makes you happy that’s what you have to go for* (S0135, text SYTD 216)

The total number of attributive uses of the adjective phrase comprising *super* is 39, i.e. 19.4% of the occurrences of *super* in pre-adjectival position. We also found out that the nouns that the intensified adjective phrase modifies most frequently are those denoted as NN1, which means singular common nouns as in ex. (8 a). Premodifying adjectives intensified by *super* include *annoying*, *fast*, or *loud*. Two instances of the rather old-fashioned<sup>17</sup> expression *super duper* were found to function as pre-modifiers (ex. 8 b).

- (8) a. *hey mum I’m a super speedy eater.* (S0655, text SDAB 512)  
b. ...*where the other super duper telescope can see this one can see even further* (S0247, text S4VJ 102)

It can therefore be assumed that the intensifier *super* is more likely to be used predicatively, which is the typical behaviour of adjective phrases with premodifiers. To test this, we ran the query searching for the POS-tags preceding the sequence ‘*super + adjective*’ (excluding the premodifying uses).<sup>18</sup> Verb forms are the most frequent class preceding the sequence indeed,

---

<sup>16</sup> The POS-tags denoting nouns comprised NN1 (singular common noun), NN2 (plural common noun), NN (common noun neutral for number), NNT1 (temporal noun); PN1 is a tag used for indefinite pronouns, including *one*.

<sup>17</sup> The speaker’s age is 61. Cf. *super-duper*: Oxford Learner’s Dictionary. Available from <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/super-duper?q=duper> Accessed 8 April 2021.

<sup>18</sup> [word="super"] [pos="JJ.\*"] [pos!=".N.\*"]

with 114 occurrences of copular verbs (*be, become, feel*). Other frequent word-classes include cases of multiple intensification in predicative position (e.g. *it's super super practical*, S0330, text SDA8 361) and the use of *like*, again with the adjective phrase in predicative function (e.g. *it's like super chilly*, S0037, text SABB 101). We can conclude that adjective phrases comprising the intensifier *super* perform the predicative function more frequently than the attributive function.

The second aspect within the syntactic behaviour of intensifiers that will be explored in this section is their occurrence with other intensifying elements. As was already mentioned in section 2.3.1.1, it is possible to combine intensifiers into sequences and thus, to add a greater amount of emphasis to what we intend to convey. Specifically, in the case of the intensifier *super*, a single intensifier as in ex. (9) as well as multiple intensifiers such as in ex. (10) may occur on the position preceding *super* and an adjective.

(9) ...*it's like it's **super super weird** and there's like I mean it's hard to explain you*  
(S0326, text SP2X 277)

(10) ...*so she's like **super super super hung-over** and like leaves this party...* (S0328, text SNPA 600)

Moreover, *super* may be preceded by other intensifiers. However, only the combination of *super* with the intensifier *really* was found, in three instances, as can be seen in ex. (11 a). *Super* was also found in combination with the intensifying *fucking* following it (ex. 11 b).

(11) a. *it's fine if books have no plot if they're **really super engaging** and have really engaging characters* (S0619, text S7HR 413)

b. *so like fuck loads of chilli like **super fucking spicy** they were just good...*  
(S0624, text SZKE 126)

#### 4.2.1.3 Semantic collocation analysis

The final subchapter will examine the semantic environment of the intensifier *super*. There are in fact two aspects within the semantic analysis which are taken into account and which will be explored in this section as well. That is, semantic preference which means that an intensifier has a tendency to co-occur with adjectives which share some semantic feature (see section 2.3.1.1) and semantic prosody, i.e. evaluative meaning, namely, whether the adjectives an intensifier collocates with are rather positive or negative in meaning. There are 112 different

types of adjectives in the corpus, which are premodified by the intensifier *super*. However, we selected the first 35 adjectives for the analysis, i.e. the adjectives which have at least two occurrences. These adjectives are listed in Table 2. The total number of 35 adjectives premodified by *super* also includes two instances of multiple intensification of adjectives, which have already been mentioned in section 4.2.1.2, specifically, it is the reduplication of the intensifier *super* and a sequence of two intensifiers *super* and *fucking*.

No.	Adjective	No. of occurrences	Percent
1.	super	33	16.42
2.	rich	7	3.48
3.	cool	6	2.99
4.	busy	4	1.99
5.	excited	4	1.99
6.	fast	4	1.99
7.	nice	4	1.99
8.	duper <sup>19</sup>	3	1.49
9.	easy	3	1.49
10.	fit	3	1.49
11.	friendly	3	1.49
12.	hungry	3	1.49
13.	old	3	1.49
14.	annoying	2	1.00
15.	bright	2	1.00
16.	cheap	2	1.00
17.	cute	2	1.00
18.	exciting	2	1.00
19.	famous	2	1.00
20.	fresh	2	1.00
21.	fucking	2	1.00
22.	funny	2	1.00
23.	happy	2	1.00
24.	hard	2	1.00
25.	long	2	1.00
26.	loud	2	1.00
27.	quick	2	1.00
28.	quiet	2	1.00
29.	smart	2	1.00

<sup>19</sup> The expression *duper* in itself is not an adjective which would be intensified by *super*; it only occurs in the corpus in combination with *super* (3 instances); however, *super-duper* is mentioned in the dictionary as “an adjective formed by compounding” that is “used for emphasis”, meaning “especially large, powerful, etc.; very good or impressive; exceptional, marvellous, super”: Oxford English Dictionary. Available at <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/194264> Accessed 9 April 2021.

30.	straight	2	1.00
31.	strong	2	1.00
32.	talented	2	1.00
33.	weird	2	1.00
34.	wrong	2	1.00
35.	young	2	1.00

Table 2: The list of the first 35 adjectives (ranked by frequency) premodified by the intensifier *super* in the corpus

Another way to explore the adjectival collocates of *super* is to consider the ‘effect-size’ statistic, i.e. the strength of the collocation. We have employed the Log Ratio statistics<sup>20</sup>, i.e. “a measurement of how big the difference is between the (relative) frequency of the collocate alongside the node, and its (relative) frequency in the rest of the corpus or subcorpus”<sup>21</sup>, suggesting the importance of the specific collocate of *super*. The collocates with the highest Log Ratio scores are: *duper, super, talented, rich, friendly, smart, excited, hungry, fast, bright, loud, fresh, busy, famous, exciting, quiet, fit, strong, cute, quick, easy, cool*.

Regarding the semantic features of the analysed adjectives collocating with the intensifier *super*, in Table 2 we can find evaluative adjectives which can be conceived as a particular point on a scale such as *cool* (ex. 12) or *exciting* (ex. 13).

(12) *the ones that you sort of thought were **super cool** they’ve like aged like really badly* (S0194, text S5XD 1874)

(13) *yeah it’s **super exciting** though putting all these things* (S0619, text S94U 194)

This category comprises also adjectives *easy, quiet* and *young* (ex. 14-16) and their antonyms *hard, loud* and *old*, respectively (ex. 17-19).

(14) *oh don’t wanna go through the paperwork er though (S0629) but it’s like **super easy*** (S0624, text SZKE 17)

(15) *hermetically sealed like it’s really...**super quiet*** (S0541, text S7RW 730)

(16) ***super young** he’s like unbelievably competent but he* (S0624, text SZKE 486)

<sup>20</sup> Log Ratio – an informal introduction: Available from <http://cass.lancs.ac.uk/log-ratio-an-informal-introduction/> Accessed 13 April 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Adjectival R1 collocates of *super* with the minimum frequency of the node and collocate 2: [https://cqpweb.lancs.ac.uk/bnc2014spoken/collocation.php?qid=004ox6&maxSp=5&collAtt\\_pos=1&calcAtt=w\\_ord&stat=8&spBegin=1&spEnd=1&minTogether=2&minColloc=2&collocSolo=&tag=JJ](https://cqpweb.lancs.ac.uk/bnc2014spoken/collocation.php?qid=004ox6&maxSp=5&collAtt_pos=1&calcAtt=w_ord&stat=8&spBegin=1&spEnd=1&minTogether=2&minColloc=2&collocSolo=&tag=JJ) Accessed 13 April 2021.

- (17) *no I think yoga does help it definitely helps my stretching and it definitely makes me feel better...but it's **super hard*** (S0439, text S382 1250)
- (18) *...**super loud** alarm or super annoying alarms or* (S0530, text S43M)
- (19) *no kids...she's old though...well not **super old**...she's fifty this year* (S0041, text SXRR 20)

Furthermore, there are adjectives which describe qualities such as *cute*, *strong* or *fast*. Specifically, there is a group of adjectives denoting personal qualities which include *nice*, *friendly*, *bright*, *funny*, *smart* (ex. 20-24).

- (20) *...you know we'll be s- like **super nice** to you...* (S0439, text SKGU 504)
- (21) *...everyone's just super **super friendly** so far...* (S0471, text SGSK 409)
- (22) *it's really weird like he's **super bright** but like there's something about him...* (S0330, text SDA8 367)
- (23) *...**super funny** you were being so funny all night* (S0328, text SBM6 2794)
- (24) *nah your kids are gonna be **super smart** though* (S0144, text SEPP 1617)

Finally, there are also adjectives describing a particular condition such as *rich*, *busy*, *famous* or *talented*. The condition can be either temporary as in ex. (25) or permanent as in ex. (26).

- (25) *...been sorry we're erm **super busy** lately...* (S0344, text SD3R 358)
- (26) *...and these kids were like **super talented*** (S0261, text SBQZ 533)

As for semantic prosody, the adjectives the intensifier *super* collocates with have mostly (in 29,91 percent of cases) a positive connotation. These include adjectives such as *excited*, *cheap* or *fresh*. On the other hand, there are only 4 adjectives, namely *busy*, *hungry*, *annoying* and *wrong*, which are regarded as negative in meaning (5,48 percent). However, there is also a couple of adjectives where it is not possible to unambiguously determine whether their meaning is positive or negative, for instance *straight* in ex. (27).

- (27) *...you need to have a knowledge of a **super straight** language which would be English Portuguese Dutch French any of those colonialist languages...* (S0192, text S96L 2660)

#### 4.2.2 The intensifier *totally*

The intensifier *totally* occurs on the position before an adjective in the total of 313 cases (that is 27.402 instances per million words) and, as with *super*, the number also includes the occurrence of *totally* before comparatives and superlatives.<sup>22</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary<sup>23</sup> lists two adverbial uses of *totally*, firstly it can be used in the sense of „In a total manner or degree; wholly, completely, entirely, altogether"; secondly, the meaning can be "In a body, collectively, in one lot" which is, however, regarded as "*Obsolete. rare*" usage. In addition, *totally* is designated in the dictionary as "*colloquial (originally and chiefly U.S.)*". "In weakened use", it can function "as an intensifier", either "(modifying an adjective)", meaning "very, extremely" or "(modifying a verb)", meaning "definitely, absolutely". The first usage of *totally* as an intensifier dates back to 1972 and is therefore considered as relatively recent. It was shown by Pertejo and Martínez (2014: 226) that while *totally* functions as a modifier of adjectives most frequently, it can also be used as a modifier of verbs, prepositions or nouns, and it can stand on its own, as a discourse marker. The present analysis is, however, restricted only to *totally* in pre-adjectival position.

##### 4.2.2.1 Socio-linguistic characteristics

Regarding the distribution of the intensifier *totally* across age groups, it is the oldest age group 60 and more which uses *totally* noticeably more often than the remaining age groups. The frequency scatter between this prominent age group and the following groups comprising younger speakers appears to be considerable, as can be seen in Figure 5. The most striking difference in the frequency of the use of *totally* is, however, between the oldest age group and the youngest speakers aged 0-14 who use it to a very limited extent. Overall, the results confirm earlier findings of Pertejo and Martínez (2014: 218) that "[as] regards *totally*, [...] adults do resort to it more often than teenagers." Moreover, older speakers (45-60+) use *totally* to intensify a much broader range of adjectives (84 types, as opposed to 22 types), including adjectives not used with the intensifier by younger speakers (0-24), such as *totally independent, weird, brilliant, dependent, naive, obsessed, opposite, refined, unnecessary, unrealistic, white*.

---

<sup>22</sup> The query used to identify all the pre-adjectival uses of *totally* was *totally* \_JJ\*

<sup>23</sup> 'totally', adv.: Oxford English Dictionary. Available at <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/203802> Accessed 14 April 2021.

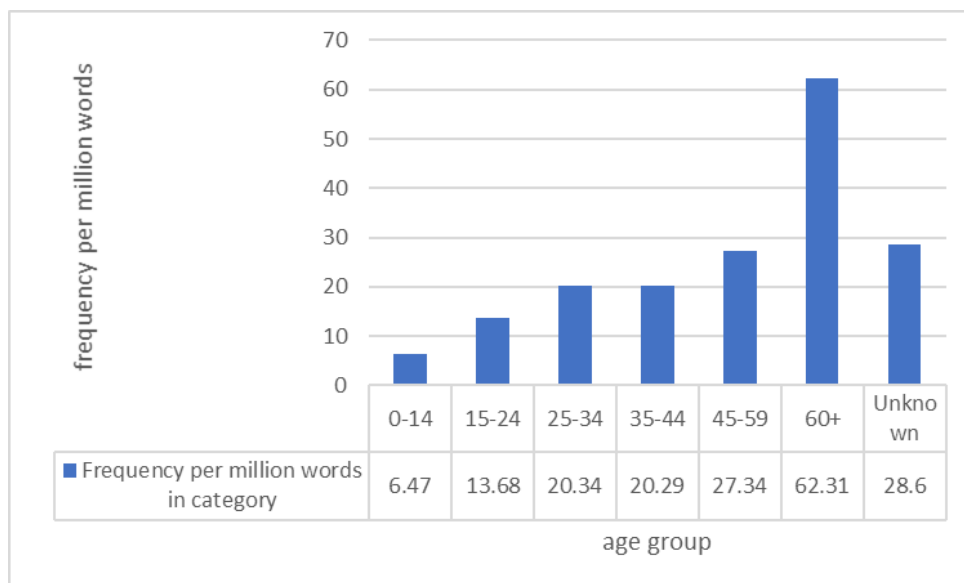


Figure 5: Distribution of the intensifier *totally* across age groups

In figure 6 we can observe that the intensifier, more precisely, amplifier *totally* seems to be more popular among male speakers than among their female counterparts, with the difference in the frequency of its use being statistically significant (on the 0.05 level of significance).<sup>24</sup> Although this finding contradicts the conclusion of Hessner and Gawlitzek that women of all ages use amplifiers more often than men (see section 2.4.1.2), at the same time it can be concluded that it represents a continuation of the 1994 trend mentioned by Xiao & Tao, namely that men at that time tended to use more amplifiers than women (see section 2.4.1). Within the male as well as the female group of speakers, it is the oldest age group 60 and more which uses the intensifier *totally* most frequently. As for men, it is 80.50 occurrences per million words and as regards women, the number of occurrences per million words is lower, only 31.87. Moreover, male speakers in the youngest age group 0-14 seem not to use the intensifier *totally* as this group is not represented in the corpus.

<sup>24</sup> The difference is statistically significant on the 0.05 level of significance (significance was calculated using Log-likelihood test in Calc: Corpus Calculator, available from: <https://www.korpus.cz/calc/> Accessed 13 April 2021).

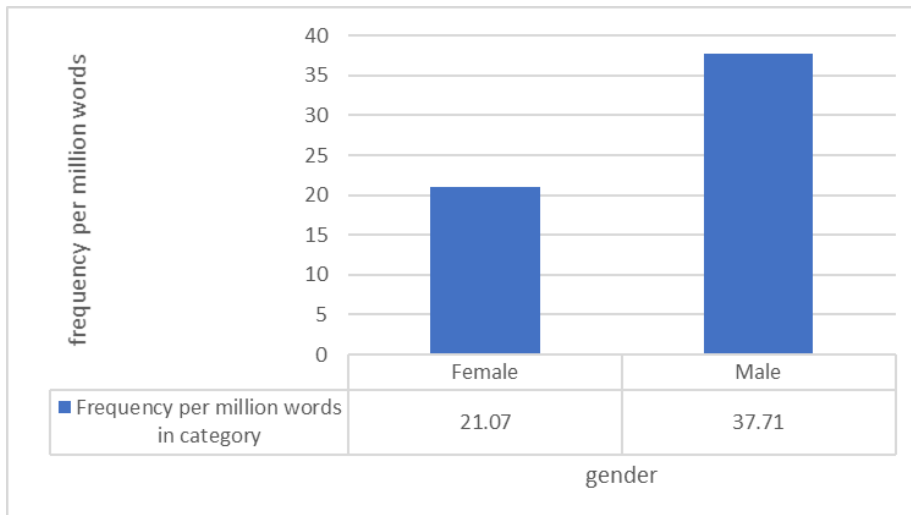


Figure 6: Distribution of the intensifier *totally* across genders

With regard to the distribution of the usage of *totally* based on dialect, it is most frequently used by speakers from Scotland. On the contrary, it appears the least in the speech of Welsh people. The frequency scatter between the group of Scottish speakers and the groups of speakers of other dialects seems to be huge, as shown in Figure 7. Similarly as in the case of *super*, there is also a tendency for speakers from the south of England to use the intensifier *totally* more often than speakers from the Midlands, the north of England and Wales. However, the difference in the frequency of the usage of *totally* between speakers from the south of England and those from midlands appears to be negligible. Furthermore, it turns out that the conclusion of Fuchs's study that Welsh speakers nearly approached those from the South in the usage of intensifiers does not apply here (see section 2.4.2).

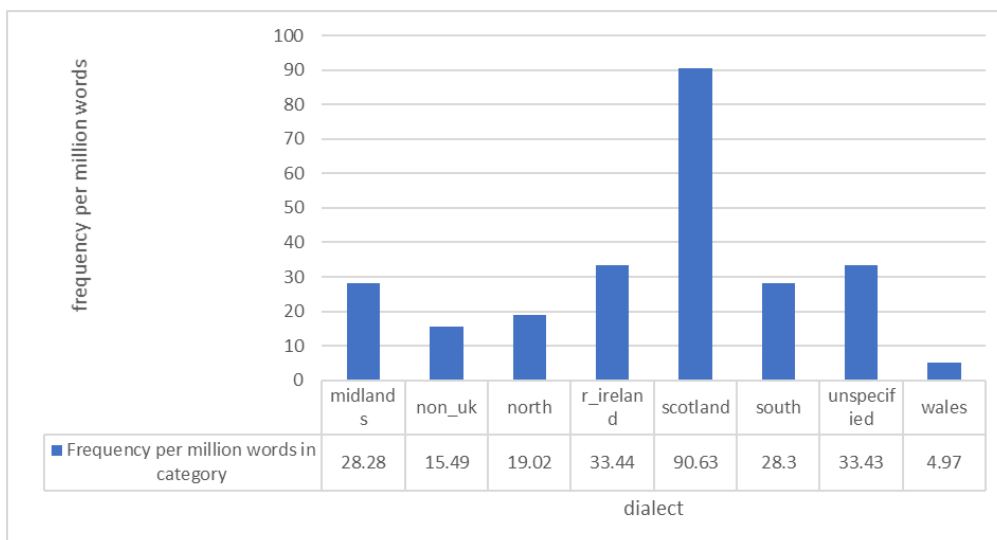


Figure 7: Distribution of the intensifier *totally* based on dialect

As for the distribution of *totally* based on speakers' social grade, it is most frequently used by the group of skilled manual workers (C2) and at the same time it is the least often used by semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers (D). As can be seen in Figure 8, there seems to be a substantial frequency scatter between the C2 group and the remaining social groups.

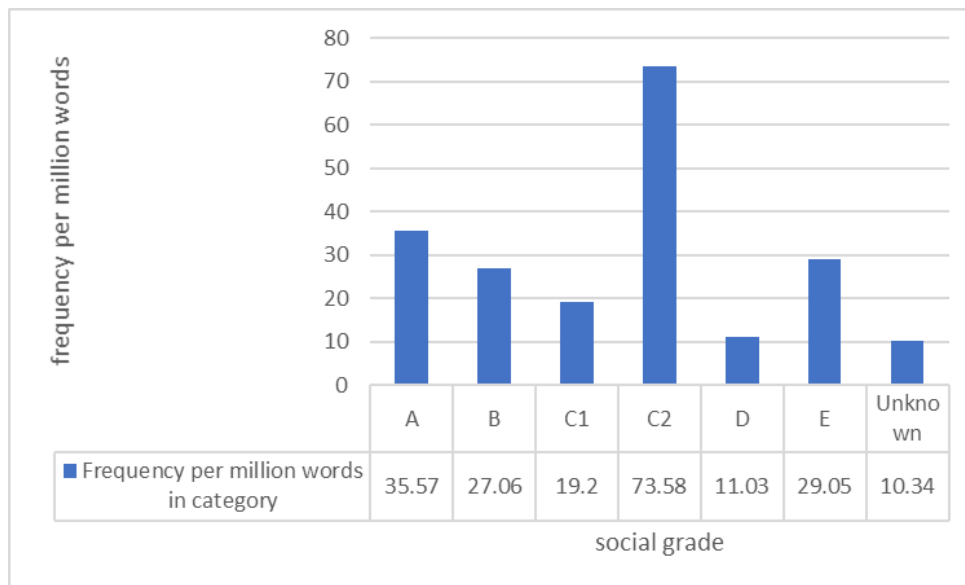


Figure 8: Distribution of the intensifier *totally* based on social grade

#### 4.2.2.2 Syntactic behaviour

For the purposes of identifying in what percentage of cases the intensifier *totally* integrated into the adjective phrase appears in the attributive (ex. 28) and in the predicative position (ex. 29), the same method as with *super* was applied.

(28) ...*she's a **totally different** person it just it isn't her...when she's with him* (S0337, text S985 1215)

(29) *but at the same time like it's **totally normal** that she's gonna feel like this* (S0084, text S48K 164)

Firstly, we were searching for nouns which are premodified by the adjective phrase with *totally* and we found out that there are 46 such cases, as can be seen in ex. (30).

(30) *um which is **totally naked sculpture*** (S0115, text SGAX 375)

However, two lines (ex. 31 and ex. 32) had to be excluded since in both cases, the adjective phrase containing *totally* does not premodify any noun.

(31) *the cabbage whites lay their eggs all over it and they were **totally ruined*** (S0114, text S7QU 56)

(32) *...no you're **totally ridiculous*** (S0012, text S2PY 657)

Thus, there are 44 cases in which the adjective phrase comprising the intensifier *totally* occurs in the attributive position, i.e. we can find 14.4% of the occurrences of *totally* in pre-adjectival position. In almost all cases, *totally* along with the adjective modifies singular common nouns (NN1; e.g. *a totally rich man*, S0012, text S5TE 214). There were only two instances found where the intensified adjective phrase modifies plural common nouns (NN2; e.g. *through totally different directions*, S0372, text S35K 2165). Premodifying adjectives which are intensified by *totally* include *honest*, *independent*, or *fine*.

According to the above mentioned finding, it seems that the predicative use of the intensifier *totally* prevails over the attributive use. However, the test<sup>25</sup> was made in order to verify this assumption as in the case of *super*. It turned out that the sequence '*totally* and the adjective' is most frequently preceded by verb forms (there were 210 occurrences of copular verbs, *be*, *feel*, *get*, *go*, *look* and *sound*). It can therefore be concluded that adjective phrases containing the intensifier *totally* occur more frequently in the predicative position than in the attributive position.

As for the occurrence of *totally* with other intensifiers, such combinations appear to be rare. Firstly, there is the reduplication of the intensifier *totally* as in ex. (33).

(33) *I'm **totally totally excited*** (S0084, text SJLT 763)

Furthermore, *totally* may co-occur with other intensifiers, namely *really* (ex. 34)<sup>26</sup> and *that* (ex. 35).

(34) *but the Basque language was **really totally different*** (S0248, text SRDJ 208)

(35) *but n- not **that that totally unpleasant** but there is smoke around yeah but er amazing yeah* (S0281, text SU6F 257)

However, each of the aforementioned intensifiers is represented in the corpus by a single example.

---

<sup>25</sup> A query [word="totally"] [pos="JJ.\*"] [pos!=".N.\*"] was entered into the corpus searching for the POS-tags preceding the sequence '*totally* + adjective' (excluding the premodifying uses).

<sup>26</sup> The position of *really* in the example allows an alternative interpretation as a subjunct (cf. Quirk et al. 1985: 578).

#### 4.2.2.3 Semantic collocation analysis

The total number of adjective types in the corpus which are premodified by the intensifier *totally* is 135. As before, only those adjectives which have at least 2 occurrences were selected for the purposes of analysing semantic preferences and semantic prosody of *totally*. Thus, in Table 3 we can see the list of the first 37 adjective types premodified by *totally*.

No.	Adjective	No. of occurrences	Percent
1.	different	94	30.03
2.	wrong	17	5.43
3.	fine	10	3.19
4.	empty	6	1.92
5.	normal	6	1.92
6.	awesome	4	1.28
7.	bald	4	1.28
8.	independent	4	1.28
9.	ridiculous	4	1.28
10.	weird	4	1.28
11.	crazy	3	0.96
12.	honest	3	0.96
13.	insane	3	0.96
14.	irrelevant	3	0.96
15.	obsessed	3	0.96
16.	opposite	3	0.96
17.	sure	3	0.96
18.	white	3	0.96
19.	aware	2	0.64
20.	bizarre	2	0.64
21.	bored	2	0.64
22.	brilliant	2	0.64
23.	cool	2	0.64
24.	dependent	2	0.64
25.	devoid	2	0.64
26.	excited	2	0.64
27.	illegal	2	0.64
28.	inappropriate	2	0.64
29.	naive	2	0.64
30.	new	2	0.64
31.	nonsensical	2	0.64
32.	ready	2	0.64
33.	refined	2	0.64
34.	self-contained	2	0.64
35.	selfish	2	0.64

36.	unnecessary	2	0.64
37.	unrealistic	2	0.64

Table 3: The list of the first 37 adjectives (ranked by frequency) premodified by the intensifier *totally* in the corpus

As in the case of *super*, Log Ratio statistics was employed in order to examine the adjectives *totally* collocates most strongly with. The following adjectives are the ones with the highest Log Ratio scores: *devoid, nonsensical, self-contained, refined, unrealistic, irrelevant, dependent, bald, unnecessary, naive, independent, obsessed, inappropriate, insane, selfish, empty, different, bizarre, illegal, awesome, opposite, aware, bored, wrong, normal, ridiculous, crazy, honest, fine, white, weird.*

With respect to the semantic features of the adjectives co-occurring with *totally*, evaluative adjectives such as *awesome* (ex. 36) or *brilliant* (ex. 37) are to be found in Table 3.

(36) *...I will actually speak to her and see if she knows any more about it...because that would be like a **totally awesome*** (S0084, text S7Z8 190)

(37) *they're **totally brilliant** and they're thoroughly enjoying what they're playing...* (S0278, text SHTW 420)

Evaluative adjectives furthermore encompass a group of adjectives *weird, crazy, insane* and *bizarre* (ex. 38-41) describing situations which are very strange and unusual or shocking.

(38) *that is to- that is **totally weird**...I mean I can't even do that at sixty* (S0446, text S6JP 1444)

(39) *it's **totally crazy** but that's really interesting you saying that to me* (S0624, text SLH6 1060)

(40) *one point two five million (S0329) that's **totally insane**...* (S0326, text SMYJ 378)

(41) *...they became extinct bizarre **totally bizarre*** (S0485, text SFXE 775)

Then there are adjectives denoting personal qualities such as *naive* (ex. 42), *self-contained* (ex. 43) or *selfish* (ex. 44).

(42) *then you're aware you know some people are **totally naive**...* (S0092, text S6R4 623)

- (43) *so you're **totally self-contained**...you do your own things* (S0239, text SMEB 1617)
- (44) *...as soon as it's over they're like right well I can just be **totally selfish**...* (S0084, text SEGU 202)

The intensifier *totally* often collocates with adjectives with a negative prefix such as *irrelevant*, *illegal*, *inappropriate* or *unrealistic* (ex. 45-48).

- (45) *It's **totally irrelevant** in that context...* (S0180, text SHBJ 375)
- (46) *which is **totally illegal** but they're gonna do it anyway* (S0372, text S35K 2025)
- (47) *even if they could read it the content was **totally inappropriate*** (S0131, text S2XV 325)
- (48) *and it's not rather on the optimistic side it's **totally unrealistic*** (S0241, text SP2Y 1779)

In most cases (55.62 percent), the adjectives collocating with *totally* are neither purely positive nor negative. These include e.g. *different*, *normal*, *opposite*, *aware* or *ready*. The remaining adjectives which have a clearly negative connotation such as *devoid of*, *inappropriate* or *selfish* slightly prevail (8.63 percent) over those with a positive connotation such as *cool* or *excited* (4.48 percent).

## 5 Conclusions

The first subsection of the analytical part of the present thesis is the quantitative analysis of intensifiers, which provides us with an overview of the adjectival intensifiers most frequently used among the speakers of present-day spoken British English. The resulting list comprising 72 most frequently used intensifiers of adjectives (see Table 1, section 4.1) was extracted from the material from the Spoken BNC 2014. The majority of the intensifiers included in the list are general adverbs occurring under the POS-tag RR (altogether 44 occurrences out of a total of 72, e.g. *absolutely*, *much*). Degree adverbs (RG, e.g. *pretty*, *this*) and general adjectives (JJ, e.g. *whole*, *crazy*) are represented roughly equally (10 and 18 occurrences, respectively). It follows that a specific word in pre-adjectival position may not necessarily have merely intensifying function, however, it can function e.g. as a non-intensifying adverb. Furthermore, there are adjectives to be found in the list such as *bloody* or *dead*, which appear to represent a rather significant tendency in contemporary English language, that is, a conversion of adjectives into intensifiers while still preserving their current form. Nowadays, more and more adjectives seem to be adopting this type of behaviour, the adjectives *massive* and *fucking* being among them. It can also be observed that the list includes both amplifiers (e.g. *totally*) and downtoners (e.g. *fairly*).

The second subsection of the analytical part gives a detailed qualitative analysis of two intensifiers which were selected from the list of intensifiers, namely *super* and *totally*. Both intensifiers are described according to the criteria mentioned in Section 4.2 and then compared. The first aspect to be examined are the socio-linguistic characteristics of speakers using the intensifiers *super* and *totally*, specifically the age variable. As for *super*, the difference in the usage of *super* between the youngest group of speakers 0-14, in which the intensifier enjoys great popularity, and the oldest age group 60+, which hardly uses *super* in its speech, is enormous (see Figure 1). The intensifier *super* thus fulfilled our assumption that, apart from the common intensifiers, new ones will appear. A detailed analysis proved that *super* is, indeed, used more frequently by younger speakers. Regarding the intensifier *totally*, we can observe that it is used most often by the oldest age group 60+ and that its usage decreases along with the decreasing age of speakers (see Figure 5). Both *super* and *totally* have a representation in all age groups, however, the distribution of its usage between the individual age groups is quite uneven as can be seen in Figure 9.

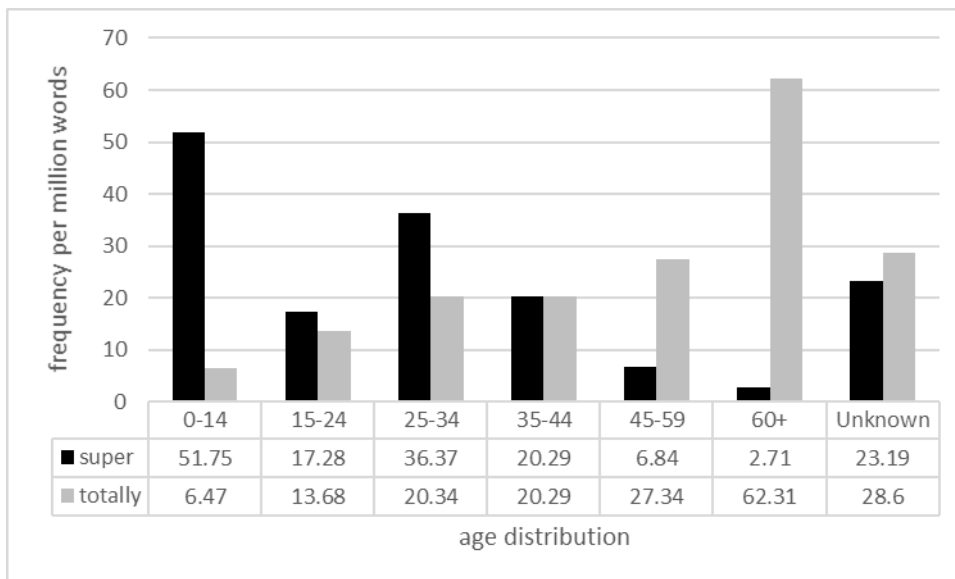


Figure 9: Age distribution of the intensifiers *super* and *totally*

With respect to gender as the second variable examined, in Figure 10 we can observe that, regarding the intensifier *super*, the difference in its usage between male and female speakers is not statistically significant, despite women using *super* a little more often than men. However, the situation with the intensifier *totally* is quite the opposite. Not only are male speakers prone to use *totally* more often than female speakers, but also the difference in the frequency of its usage is statistically significant.

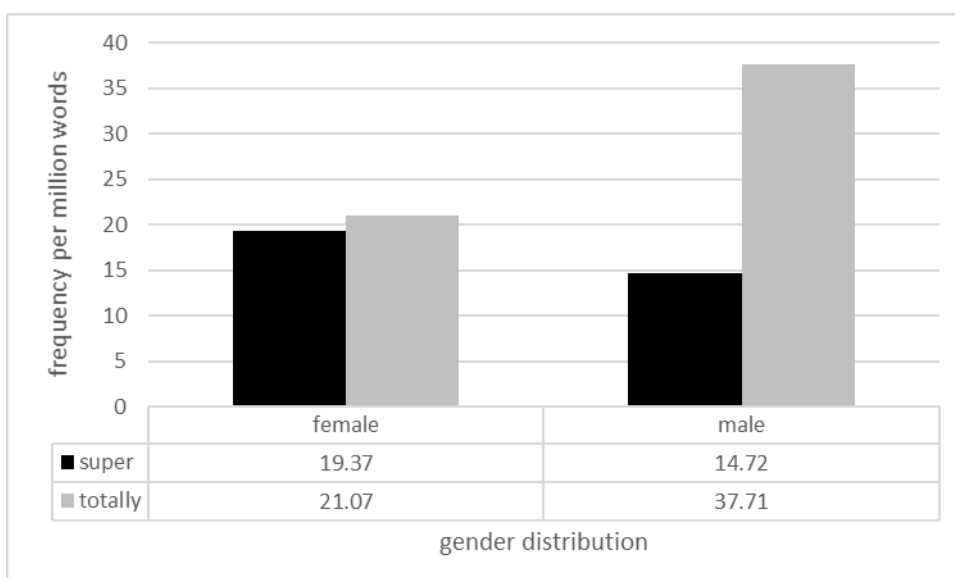


Figure 10: Gender distribution of the intensifiers *super* and *totally*

Regarding the distribution of the usage of *super* and *totally* based on dialect, the comparison proved difficult, as the frequency numbers are comparatively small and not all categories are available for both intensifiers. Nevertheless, *super* is most frequently used by speakers from the south of England, although the lead seems to be negligible compared to speakers from the north (see Table 3). On the other hand, *totally* is markedly preferred by speakers from Scotland, rather than by those belonging in the remaining groups (see Table 7). As regards the distribution of usage based on speaker' social grade, *super* as well as *totally* is most popular with group C2, i.e. skilled manual workers. At the same time, the lowest frequency of usage was recorded in group D, i.e. in the group of semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers, which again applies to both intensifiers (see Table 4 and Table 8).

Secondly, the syntactic behaviour of *super* and *totally* is explored and contrasted. It turns out that both intensifiers are alike regarding the collocation with either attributive or predicative adjectives. It was concluded that the intensifier *super* as well as *totally* is more likely to intensify adjectives used predicatively than those used attributively, which is typical of intensifiers. As for the occurrence with other intensifiers, we found out that a single intensifier as well as multiple intensifiers may occur on the position before *super* and an adjective. The combination of *super* with different intensifiers appears to be rare since the only combinations found were those of *super* and *really* preceding it and *fucking* following it. The situation is similar with *totally*, where the occurrences are scarce as well; it appeared only in combination with another intensifier *totally* and the intensifiers *really* and *that*.

Finally, the semantic environment of both intensifiers is taken into account. As for *super* and its semantic preference, it mostly collocates with evaluative adjectives (*exciting*) and with adjectives denoting qualities (*friendly*). Regarding semantic prosody, in most cases it collocates with adjectives having positive connotation (*easy*). Similarly to *super*, *totally* co-occurs with evaluative adjectives (*brilliant*) as well as with those denoting qualities (*self-contained*). Moreover, it co-occurs with adjectives with a negative prefix (*irrelevant*). As regards semantic prosody, *totally* most often collocates with neutral adjectives (*opposite*).

The results suggest that the range and uses of intensifiers are changing in present-day English, and it would be interesting to explore them in more detail.

## References and sources

Quirk et al. (1985) *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. New York: Longman.

Biber, D. et al. (1999) *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*. Harlow: Longman.

Núñez Pertejo, P. and I. Palacios Martínez (2014) “That’s Absolutely Crap, Totally Rubbish: The Use of the Intensifiers Absolutely and Totally in the Spoken Language of British Adults and Teenagers.” *Functions of Language* 21.2, 210-237.

Jindrová, Pavlína (2017) *Adverbial intensifiers of adjectives in today’s British English*. BA thesis. ÚAJD FF UK.

Fuchs, R. (2017) “Do women (still) use intensifiers more than men? Recent change in the sociolinguistics of intensifiers in British English.” *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics* 22:3, 345-374.

Hessner T. and I. Gawlitzek (2017) “Totally or slightly different? A Spoken BNC2014-based investigation of female and male usage of intensifiers.” *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics* 22:3, 403-428.

## Online references

Oxford English Dictionary. Available online at <https://www.oed.com/> Accessed on 23 March 2021.

The British National Corpus 2014: User manual and reference guide. Version I.I. Available from: <http://corpora.lancs.ac.uk/bnc2014/doc/BNC2014manual.pdf> Accessed on 3 April 2021.

Cvrček, V. 2019. Calc: Corpus Calculator. Praha: FF UK. Available from: <https://www.korpus.cz/calc/> Accessed on 3 April 2021.

British National Corpus 2014: A new resource for research and teaching on the contemporary English language. Available from: <http://corpora.lancs.ac.uk/bnc2014/> Accessed on 17 April 2021.