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Article:

Canny good, or *quite canny*? The semantic-syntactic distribution of *canny* in the North East of England[1]

Claire Childs
(Northumbria University)

Abstract

The word *canny* has long been associated with the dialects of the North East of England, most typically in its adjectival sense. However, it has four distinct functions (adjective, adverb, intensifier and modifier in quantifying expressions), which this paper tracks in a diachronic speech corpus. Although the intensifier (e.g. *it's canny good*) is documented in the *Survey of English Dialects* (Upton *et al.* 1994), it appears in the corpus later than expected with the profile of an incoming form. Results from a judgement task corroborate the corpus trends and show that people's intuitions about intensifier *canny* correlate with age as well as the semantics and position of the following adjective, in such a way that shows the intensifier is not fully delexicalised. The research highlights the value of combining production and perception data in establishing how the origins of a linguistic item affect its distribution in its new function.

Keywords: language change; Tyneside; intensification; grammaticalisation; perception; judgement data; function; frequency

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1. Introduction

Although the dialects of the North East of England[2] have been studied extensively, there has been comparatively little sociolinguistic analysis of the functions of one of the region's better-known dialect words, *canny*. Though commonly cited in its adjectival sense as "a general epithet of approbation or satisfaction" (*Oxford English Dictionary* Online (OED)), in North East English *canny* also functions as an adverb (Griffiths 2004: 24-5), intensifier (Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010; Pearce 2011: 8) and a modifier in quantifying expressions (Allen *et al*. 2007: 23), as illustrated in examples (1)-(4) from the *Diachronic Electronic Corpus of Tyneside English* (DECTE) (Corrigan *et al*. 2010-12):

(1) *Adjective*

a. they seemed *canny* enough [PVC, decten1pvc05]
b. we usually get a *canny* month in September [NECTE2, decten2y07i013][3]

(2) *Adverb*

a. I got to know most people, mm get on *canny* with them [PVC, decten1pvc06]
b. everything's going along *canny* [NECTE2, T_2091_10_3]

(3) *Intensifier*

a. that should be *canny* good [PVC, decten1pvc10]
b. I'm *canny* happy he did do that [NECTE2, decten2y10i012]

(4) *Modifier in quantifying expressions*

a. well I was stationed up there a *canny* while you know [TLS, decten0tls_G054]
b. there's a *canny* few going around [PVC, decten1pvc06]

These functions of *canny* have unique linguistic nuances, discussed later in this section, but share a core meaning of denoting a positive entity. The adjective and adverb express positive evaluation, while the intensifier and modifier in quantifying expressions intensify the property that they modify (a value, quantity or degree), making the property "more positive" in those terms.[4]

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[2] The region comprises Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, County Durham and Teesside (see http://research.ncl.ac.uk/decte/documentation.htm).

[3] DECTE contains interviews from the 1970s Tyneside Linguistic Survey (TLS), the 1994 Phonological Variation and Change (PVC) project and the Newcastle Electronic Corpus of Tyneside English 2 (NECTE2) recordings from 2007 onwards (see section 2). Examples are taken *verbatim*, followed by the corpus and transcript name. DECTE is accessible to researchers with permission at http://research.ncl.ac.uk/decte/corpus.htm.

[4] Intensifier *canny* can reportedly function as either a booster or a compromiser (see section 1.3). When booster *canny* modifies a negative adjective, e.g. *canny bad*, the property becomes "more positive" not semantically but in the sense that the amount or level of *bad*-ness increases. Compromiser *canny* makes a negative adjective less semantically negative, e.g. *canny bad* is less negative than *bad*. In this context, intensifier *canny* could be interpreted as retaining some positive lexical meaning that ameliorates the concept of *bad*.

The adverb is first attested in the late 18th century, followed by the adjective (excluding Scottish senses – see section 1.1) in the early 19th century (OED). Aside from reference to *canny* meaning 'of good size or amount' in North Lancashire, the modifier in quantifying expressions is not documented in the OED, nor is the intensifier. The intensifier is also absent from the 19th-century dialect dictionaries which document the other three functions (Heslop 1892; Wright 1898-1905), but it does feature (with the adjective) in the *Survey of English Dialects* (henceforth SED, Upton *et al.* 1994). The majority of SED informants were men aged 60+, who were consulted in 1950-1961 (Orton 1962: 15), which under the apparent-time construct (Cukor-Avila and Bailey 2013) would suggest that the intensifier was in use from at least around 1900. The evidence therefore points to the intensifier as the most recently-developed function of *canny* and is said to be relatively new to the dialect compared to other intensifiers (Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010; Pearce 2011: 8). This paper therefore addresses two main research questions: (i) How frequent are these four uses of *canny* over time and are they undergoing change? (ii) What do the collocates of intensifier *canny* tell us about the extent of its delexicalisation, i.e. the loss of its original positive lexical meaning as it developed from one or more of the other earlier-attested functions? A diachronic vernacular corpus of North East English speech is required to investigate these questions, hence the use of DECTE. As *canny* is low-frequency (see Table 1, section 2), the study supplements the corpus data with speaker intuition data from a judgement task that asked local people to rate the frequency of sentences containing the four types of *canny*.

1.1. Adjective *canny*

The adjectival meaning of *canny* in (1) is the most well-known, featuring in the linguistic literature on Tyneside English (Beal 2004: 130, 2009: 154; Wales 2010: 74, 79) and Teesside varieties (Llamas 1999: 104; Wales 2002: 64). Its vague definition as "a general epithet of approbation or satisfaction" (OED) reflects the fact that even historically the word was "difficult to convey by dint of definition" (Atkinson 1868: 86). Although *canny* has other adjectival meanings in Scottish English and Standard English, e.g. relating to being cautious, cunning, lucky or wise (OED), these are separate from the adjectival use in the North East. The adjective has long been entrenched in the popular culture of the North East of England (Pearce 2011: 8), to the extent that it would be considered enregistered (Johnstone 2009: 16).

1.2. Adverb *canny*

Adverb *canny* was traditionally used in the phrase *to ca' canny* meaning "to go cautiously, quietly, gently, carefully, warily" (OED). However, in contemporary use it typically is equivalent to the adverb "well" (Griffiths 2004: 25), as in (2).

1.3. Intensifier *canny*

As (3) illustrates, *canny* can also be an intensifier – a use specific to the North East (Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010: 272; Pearce 2011: 8).[5] As Quirk *et al.* (1985: 589) outline, intensifiers indicate "a point on an abstractly conceived intensity scale", either intensifying the property they modify (amplifiers) or lowering it (downtoners). Amplifiers and downtoners can be subcategorised according to the strength of degree they express, as shown in Figure 1.

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[5] In SED, intensifier *canny* was attested in Northumberland and Yorkshire, as the regions were defined at the time. However, the Yorkshire location where the intensifier was recorded is Stokesley (Orton and Halliday 1963: 907), which is in the Teesside postcode area.

Although intensifier *canny* has been considered a booster (Upton *et al.* 1994: 66; Allen *et al.* 2007: 23; Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010: 256), the British Library *Sounds Familiar?* website[6] defines *canny* as "quite, really, very", suggesting that it also functions as a compromiser.

Amplifiers
  Maximisers   e.g. *completely*
  Boosters   e.g. *very*

Downtoners
  Approximators   e.g. *almost*
  Compromisers   e.g. *kind of*
  Diminishers   e.g. *slightly*
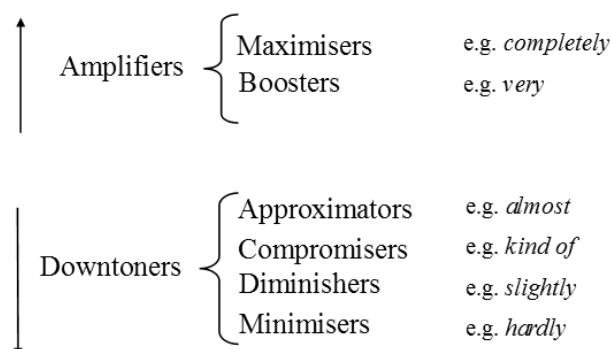 Minimisers   e.g. *hardly*

Figure 1: Types of intensifiers (based on Quirk *et al*. 1985: 590-1, 597-8)

Intensifiers vary with respect to how delexicalised they are, i.e. the extent to which there has been "reduction of the independent lexical content of a word, or group of words, so that it comes to fulfil a particular function" (Partington 1993: 183). The developing function is often grammatical; hence, delexicalisation typically leads to grammaticalisation (Lorenz 2002: 144). As Ito and Tagliamonte (2003: 268) note, "[t]he more delexicalized an intensifier is, the more widely it collocates", occurring in predicative position to a greater extent and with a wider range of adjectives (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003: 271; Tagliamonte and Roberts 2005; Tagliamonte 2008: 373-5). While Pearce (2011: 8) notes that intensifier *canny* has "no apparent restrictions on the semantic domains of the adjectives it collocates with", indicating that it is considerably delexicalised, quantitative analysis is required to substantiate this claim. Such analysis is pursued in this paper using data from an online judgement task testing intensifier *canny* in different linguistic contexts.

Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010) discuss intensifier *canny* in their analysis of the North East English intensifier system. Using a sample of DECTE (16 speakers from each sub-corpus: TLS (1970), PVC (1994), NECTE2 (2007+)), they extracted all intensifiers modifying adjectives and calculated the relative frequency of each intensifier. In the TLS sample, *very* was used the majority of the time (65%), while the other variants were each used at frequencies of less than 10%. In the PVC data, *very* reduced in frequency to 18%, while *dead* (35.9%) and *really* (25.1%) were the most popular variants. However, *dead*'s popularity was short-lived, as it later accounted for only 7.8% of tokens in NECTE2, while *very* (32.4%) and *really* (26.7%) were the most frequent. As for *canny*, it rose from 0.7% in PVC to 1.4% in NECTE2. Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010: 282) suggest that *canny*, and *pure*, a similarly low-frequency variant which first appears in NECTE2 and is also used in Glasgow (Macaulay 2002, 2006), are the "hot new intensifiers in the North East of England". Although intensifier *canny* is not strictly new as it is attested in SED, it is still the newest function of *canny* and developed much later than many other intensifiers that have origins in Old English (e.g. *all*, Buchstaller and Traugott 2006) or Middle English (e.g. *very* and *pure*, OED). Therefore, as Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010: 268) note with respect to *really*, which was first attested in the 18th century but is on the rise in the 21st century, trends that look like

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[6] http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/sounds/case-studies/geordie/lexis/

innovations may be "part of a longer-term process, where variants with a long history are vying for positions across extended stretches of time". This layering and recycling of variants is characteristic of intensifiers (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003; Tagliamonte 2008).

1.4. *Canny* as a modifier in quantifying expressions

Finally, *canny* can be used as a modifier in quantifying expressions, shown in (4). Quantifying expressions (e.g. *a lot, often*) express quantity on a semantic scale provided by the phrase they modify (Doetjes 2004: 83; Neeleman *et al*. 2004: 17). Some quantifying expressions do not select particular phrase types to modify and therefore can express various types of degree including intensity, frequency and duration (Doetjes 1997, 2004, 2007). Other phrases modify only certain scale types, e.g. *several* only occurs with NPs to depict quantity (Doetjes 1997: 11). As (4) shows, *canny* can appear within quantifying expressions depicting various types of degree and has a boosting effect. The phrase denotes a larger quantity or degree when *canny* is present, as supported by references to *a canny wad* meaning 'a hefty sum' (Elmes 2005: 262) and *a canny few* meaning 'a lot' (Allen *et al*. 2007: 23). Modifier *canny* therefore functions similarly to the intensifier, but while *canny* in quantifying expressions can modify nominal classifiers (e.g. *a canny bit*) or ordinary DPs (e.g. *a canny size*), intensifiers cannot (e.g. **a really bit*; **a very size*).

2. DECTE data

As outlined in section 1, to ascertain the frequency of the four types of *canny* and whether they are undergoing change over time, data was collected from DECTE, a diachronic vernacular speech corpus. DECTE contains sociolinguistic interviews conducted with people from the North East of England, the shaded region in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Map showing the North East of England[7]

This study uses interviews from DECTE's three sub-components: the TLS, PVC and NECTE2. A sample of TLS interviews recorded in the early 1970s and the PVC recordings from 1994 form the *Newcastle Electronic Corpus of Tyneside English* (NECTE). Its sister corpus, NECTE2, contains interviews conducted from 2007 onwards. DECTE therefore contains interviews recorded over a 40+-year period, making it an appropriate resource for the diachronic study of North East English.

The interviews feature one speaker (in TLS) or two speakers in self-selected pairs (in PVC and NECTE2) with a student interviewer. The interactions were semi-structured but speakers were encouraged to talk openly about their lives and the local dialect for around 30-60 minutes (Allen *et al*. 2007).

From the DECTE materials up to 2011, every instance of *canny* was extracted irrespective of its function, yielding 404 tokens in total.

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[7] Figure 2 is by "Tha real" [CC-BY-SA-3.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0)], via Wikimedia Commons, available at:
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ANorth_East_England_in_England.png

Table 1: Tokens of *canny* in DECTE

Component	Number of interviews	Total word count	Tokens in conversation	Tokens in metalinguistic commentary
TLS (1970s)	37 in NECTE 51 additional	308,218	19	3
PVC (1990s)	18	206,912	32	0
NECTE2 (2007-11)	363	2,668,992	261	83
TOTAL	469	**3,184,122**	**312**	**92**

The 312 tokens in conversation are those where speakers use *canny* in ordinary interaction, whereas the 92 in metalinguistic commentary are references to the lexical item in discussions about local dialect. Although these 92 tokens were excluded from analysis, their prevalence reflects *canny*'s entrenchment in the North East, as shown in (5) where the fieldworker had asked if there were any local dialect words that people from outside the region might not understand.

(5) The word *canny* is something that I find myself explaining the meanings of quite a lot. [NECTE2, T_2091_10_28]

Although selecting a socially-stratified, balanced sample of speakers is desirable in sociolinguistic analysis, this is not viable here given the low token numbers in Table 1. The sample therefore includes all 312 tokens of *canny* in conversation from DECTE up to 2011. In line with some previous analyses of adverbial or discourse marker variation (Cheshire *et al.* 2005: 154-9; Macaulay 2002, 2006), the study uses normalised frequency of occurrence for each function of *canny* (in this case, per 100,000 words) as the means of quantification. Comparing normalised frequencies for each relevant stratum of the data (over time and/or within social groups) differs from the approach of Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010), for example, who considered one function of *canny* (intensifier) as a variant of the intensification variable. As the relative frequency of intensifier *canny* compared to other intensifiers within DECTE has already been established by Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010), their observations will be valuable to my discussion of intensifier *canny* as one of four functions of *canny* in North East English.

To compensate for the few tokens of *canny* in the TLS and PVC corpora compared to NECTE2, the normalised frequency of each type of *canny* will not be calculated per corpus, but according to speakers' birth year and age at the time of recording. Speakers' birth year is a proxy for real-time, while consideration of age at the time of recording allows for the study of potential lifespan changes in apparent time (Cukor-Avila and Bailey 2013). Table 2 shows the number of speakers in the DECTE sample[8] stratified according to these two factors. Shading indicates where a particular age and birth year combination is currently impossible (e.g. someone born in 1981-1994 cannot be aged 41+ until 2022 onwards), while dashes show where the combination is possible but not represented in the sample because of the different timeframes and samples of the TLS, PVC and NECTE2 projects.

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[8] The loss of 119,049 words between Table 1 and Table 2 reflects the exclusion of speakers aged 71+ when recorded (all were born in 1921-1940 and, unlike the other cohorts, would be represented by only one cell in Table 2), those born before 1900 (only 3 speakers) and those whose age was unknown. Incidentally, none of these speakers used *canny*.

Table 2: Number of speakers and word counts per birth year and age[9]

		Speaker birth year					
		1901-1920	1921-1940	1941-1960	1961-1980	1981-1994	Total
Age at time of recording	15-20	- -	- -	6 speakers 18,677	19 speakers 117,047	294 speakers 1,226,896	319 speakers 1,362,620
	21-30	- -	- -	15 speakers 49,566	9 speakers 42,844	174 speakers 704,053	198 speakers 796,463
	31-40	- -	21 speakers 67,845	- -	24 speakers 92,908	- -	45 speakers 160,753
	41-50	- -	22 speakers 92,664	20 speakers 82,275	42 speakers 160,492	/////	84 speakers 335,431
	51-60	10 speakers 40,965	5 speakers[10] 29,678	50 speakers 182,868	- -	/////	65 speakers 253,511
	61-70	9 speakers 26,630	11 speakers 63,941	19 speakers 65,724	/////	/////	39 speakers 156,295
	Total	19 speakers 67,595	59 speakers 254,128	110 speakers 399,110	94 speakers 413,291	468 speakers 1,930,949	**750 speakers** **3,065,073**

Diachronic corpora pose methodological challenges, as the gaps in Table 2 demonstrate. Nevertheless, DECTE provides ample data for diachronic analysis, given its time depth, vast word count, large number of speakers and the fact that each populated cell contains at least 5 speakers. The fact that some cells are more populated than others is overcome by calculating frequencies of *canny* per 100,000 words from the total number of words in the relevant cell(s) under study, to normalise the values for comparison.

3. DECTE: Frequency of *canny* and change over time

The first set of analyses concern the use of *canny* over time in DECTE. Figure 3 shows the frequency of each type of *canny* per 100,000 words in the corpus according to speakers' birth year.

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[9] The transcripts were processed to include only the speech of interviewees and word counts were generated using *WordSmith* (Scott 2012).

[10] These five speakers, recorded in 1994, were listed as aged '51-60'. Their birth year must therefore be between 1934 and 1943, which dissects two birth year cohorts. To retain these speakers in the analysis, they are categorised as having been born in 1921-1940.
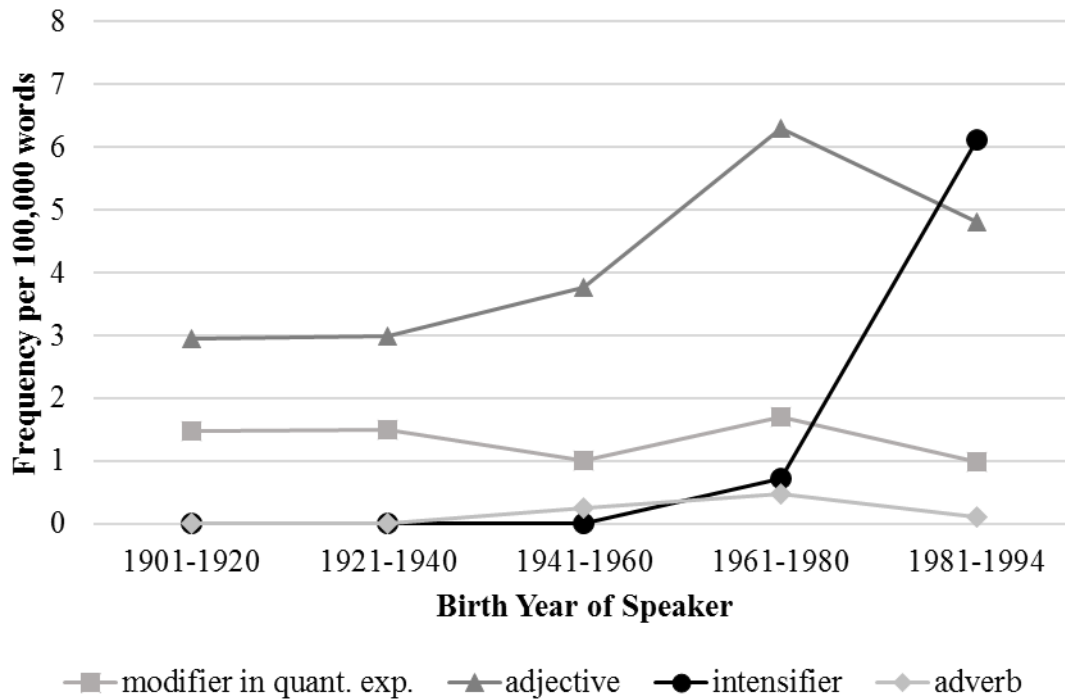
Figure 3: Frequency of *canny* in DECTE according to function and speakers' birth year

In the majority of birth year cohorts, the adjectival function of *canny* is the most frequent of the four uses, but its frequency fluctuates over time. The adjective increases in use from those born in the earliest time periods to those born in 1961-1980, but declines amongst those born post-1980. Most striking, however, is the emergence of intensifier *canny* and its rapid rise in use. *Canny* is not used as an intensifier by speakers born before 1960, only starting to be used by those born in 1961-1980.[11] Its frequency rises sharply in the speech of people born between 1981 and 1994, where it is the most common function of *canny*, even overtaking the adjective which had been dominant previously. The SED informants who reported use of intensifier *canny* would have been born in the late 19th to early 20th century, but it is absent from DECTE prior to speakers born in 1961+, suggesting that for the first two-thirds of the century, the intensifier may have been at such low-level usage that it did not appear in the corpus. Barnfield and Buchstaller's (2010: 282) conclusion that *canny* is one of the "hot new intensifiers in the North East of England" therefore reflects its sudden appearance and increasing frequency in DECTE.

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[11] I found no occurrences of intensifier *canny* in the TLS corpus, but Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010: 272) mention that there is one such instance. The example is as follows (Isabelle Buchstaller, personal communication):

well if somebody's well, you know, say <unclear> canny fettle, you know
[TLS, decten1tlsg12]

I interpret this *canny* not as an intensifier but as an adjective modifying the noun *fettle* meaning '[c]ondition, state, trim' (OED). This token was excluded from my analysis because it occurs in metalinguistic commentary (see Table 1).

Canny is also used as an adverb and modifier in quantifying expressions in DECTE at a diachronically stable, albeit very low, frequency. Given the rarity of the adverb and modifier, these functions of *canny* are not analysed further in this paper, but there is sufficient data to analyse correlations between the frequency of adjective and intensifier *canny* and speakers' age at the time of recording. Considering speakers' birth year and recording age together will account for the fact that speakers born in a particular period were not necessarily the same age when recorded (see Table 2), allowing for an examination of apparent-time effects.

3.1. Frequency of adjective *canny*: speaker birth year and age at time of recording

Figure 4 shows the frequency of adjective *canny* in DECTE according to the speakers' birth year and their age when recorded, calculated per 100,000 words from the corresponding cells in Table 2.
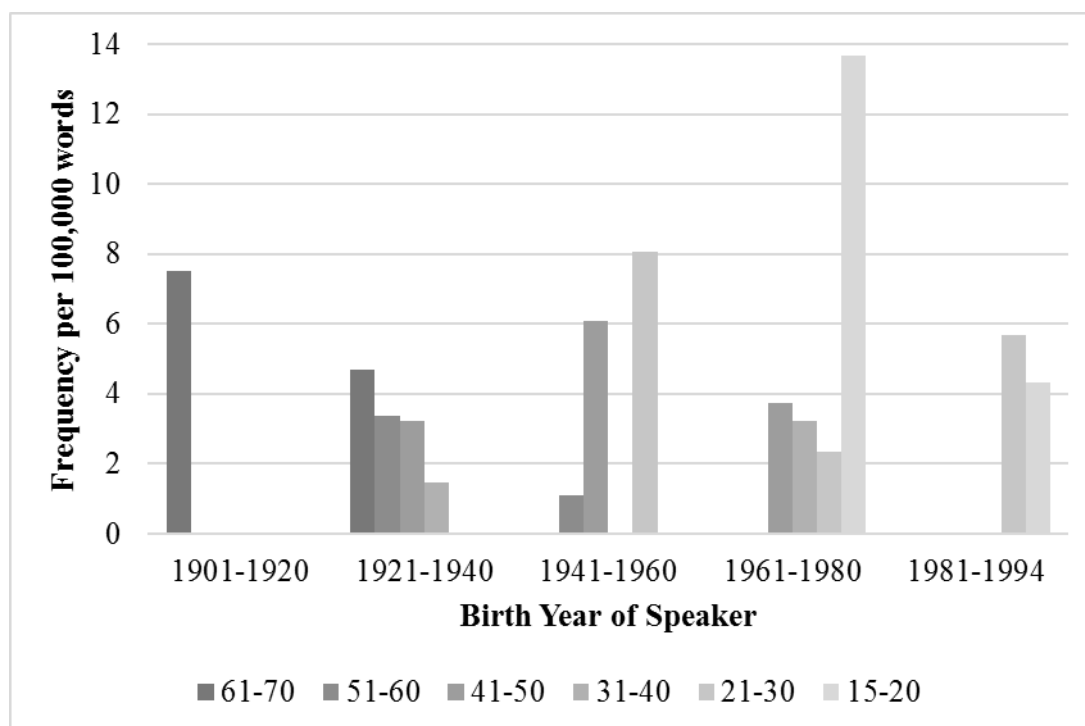
Figure 4: Frequency of adjective *canny* in DECTE according to speakers' birth year and age at time of recording

Adjective *canny* declines steadily in apparent time from the 61-70 year-olds born in 1901-1920 to the speakers born in 1921-1940; the oldest speakers use adjective *canny* the most and its frequency decreases as age decreases. However, this trend reverses dramatically amongst speakers born post-1940. There is an apparent resurgence in use of the adjective amongst those born in 1941-1960. The 61-70 year-olds in this group use the adjective very infrequently, but those aged 51-60 use it much more, as do those aged 21-30. Data from speakers born in 1961-1980 suggests an apparent-time decline in frequency once again, until there is a sudden rise in use amongst the 15-20 year-olds. Data from the final birth year period, 1981-1994, reveals that use of the adjective has decreased again.[12] Thus, the

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[12] The 15-20 year-olds born in 1961-1980 used adjective *canny* 16 times whereas those recorded at the same age but born in 1981-1994 used it 53 times. When the total number of

frequency of adjective *canny* has fluctuated over time, experiencing periods of apparent-time decline as well as resurgence, particularly amongst the younger generations. As was the case for intensifier *dead*, both in the North East (Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010: 271) and Glasgow (Macaulay 2006), adjective *canny* is subject to changing frequency over time, most likely because different age groups prefer particular evaluative adjectives (e.g. *canny, good, awesome*) and these preferences change over time (see also Buchstaller *et al.* 2010 on quotative *all*).

3.2. Frequency of intensifier *canny*: speaker birth year and age at time of recording

If intensifier *canny* is undergoing change from below, young people (the prototypical innovators) are expected to use it the most (Labov 2006: 206-8). This is indeed the case in DECTE, as revealed in Figure 5, which displays the frequency of intensifier *canny* per 100,000 words according to speakers' birth year and age when recorded.
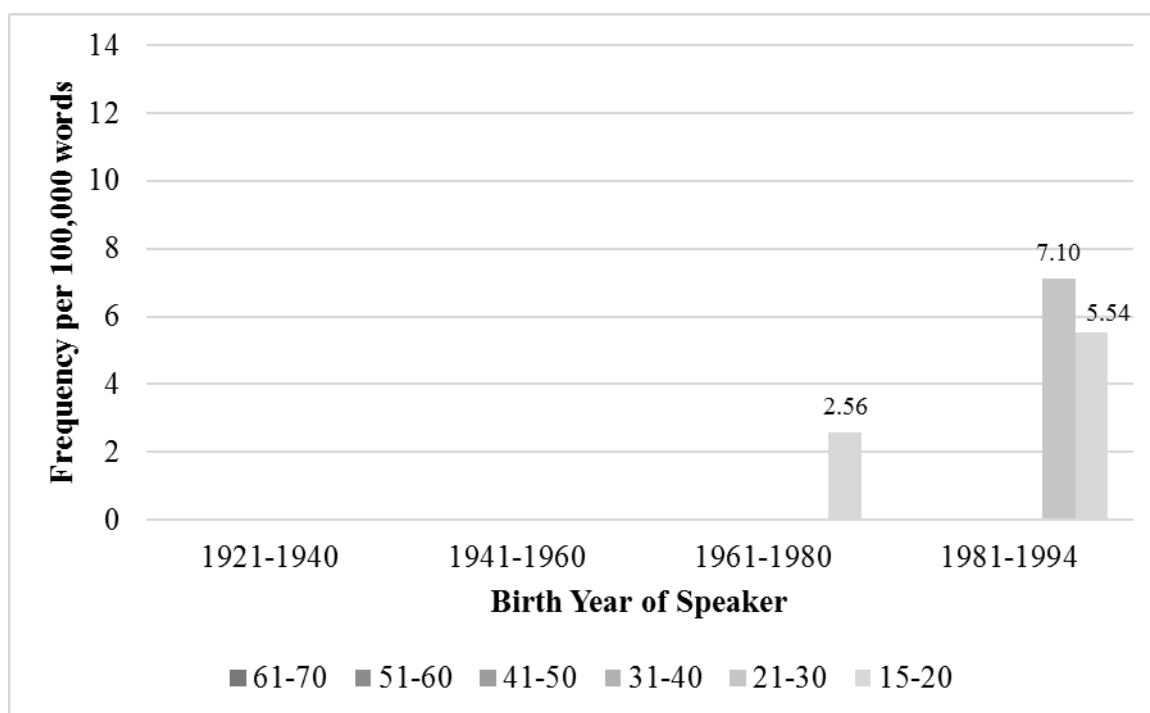
Figure 5: Frequency of intensifier *canny* in DECTE according to speakers' birth year and age at time of recording

Figure 5 shows that the first users of intensifier *canny* in DECTE were born in 1961-1980 and aged 15-20 when recorded, using it 2.56 times per 100,000 words. Amongst speakers born later, in 1981-1994, the frequency increases again. People aged 15-20 born in 1981-1994 use it more than twice as often as those of the previous generation, while the 21-30 year-olds use it even more. Therefore, unlike intensifier *dead* in the North East of England (Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010) and Glasgow (Macaulay 2006), which declined in frequency amongst young speakers from the 1990s to the 2000s, intensifier *canny* appears to be on the rise. The

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words produced by each group is considered and the frequencies normalised, the trend reverses to 13.6 and 4.3 instances per 100,000 words respectively, thus highlighting the necessity of normalised frequencies in drawing comparisons (see Pichler 2010).

DECTE data also reveals another social dimension to its use – intensifier *canny* is used more by young men than young women, as Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010: 272) observed.

Table 3: Frequency of intensifier *canny* according to speakers' birth year, age and sex

Group	Birth year	Age	Sex	Word count	Tokens of intensifier *canny*	Frequency per 100,000 words
1	1961-1980	15-20	M	49,296	2	4.06
			F	67,751	1	1.48
2	1981-1994	21-30	M	432,860	44	10.16
			F	271,193	6	2.21
3	1981-1994	15-20	M	522,000	56	10.73
			F	704,896	12	1.70

In Group 1, male speakers use intensifier *canny* over twice as often as the female speakers. This distinction between the sexes increases further; male speakers use the intensifier more than four times as often as the women in Group 2, and over six times as often in Group 3.[13] Female use of the intensifier is fairly stable, while men appear to drive the increase in use from Group 1 to 2. As the frequencies in Groups 2 and 3 are similar, the intensifier is not especially associated with the 15-20 year-olds, but those aged 30 and under. Diachronic changes where one intensifier overtakes another as the most frequent are typically female-led (Tagliamonte 2005, 2008; Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010) and women may use particular intensifiers more than men (e.g. *so* and *really* in Tagliamonte and Roberts' (2005) *Friends* data), but other variants are more popular amongst men, e.g. *pretty* in Toronto (Tagliamonte 2008). The strong association of *canny* (regardless of function) with the traditional North East dialect may lead to the form having covert prestige for male speakers, which could explain their lead in using it for the newest function of intensification.

4. Judgement task

The results so far have shown that while adjective *canny* has fluctuated in frequency diachronically, the intensifier is a newer function that has recently increased in use. Intensifier *canny* is therefore anticipated to have collocational tendencies associated with less grammaticalised intensifiers, as outlined in section 1.3. To supplement the corpus results and test these correlates of intensifier *canny*, data was collected using an online judgement task similar to those used in previous investigations of North East English (Buchstaller and Corrigan 2011a, 2011b; Buchstaller *et al*. 2013; Childs 2013). The questionnaire required participants to rate sentences containing *canny* according to how often they thought they would be heard locally. This method indirectly taps into people's intuitions but avoids making them feel self-conscious about their own language (Buchstaller and Corrigan 2011b: 155). Previous studies using this judgement task implemented a scale of 1-4:

(6)
>   1 – This type of sentence would never be used here – it seems very odd;
>   2 – This type of sentence is not very common here but it doesn't seem too odd;
>   3 – I have heard this type of sentence locally but it's not that common;

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[13] The number of speakers that used the intensifier are as follows: Group 1 (1/9 men; 1/10 women); Group 2 (17/105 men; 5/69 women); Group 3 (19/125 men; 9/169 women).

> 4 – People around here use this sentence a lot.

(Buchstaller and Corrigan 2011a, 2011b; Buchstaller *et al*. 2013; Childs 2013)

While there is a clear contrast between a rating of 1 and 4 in (6), the distinction between 2 and 3 is less obvious. The present study therefore adopted a more intuitive and familiar scale (Never, Very Rarely, Rarely, Occasionally, Frequently, Very Frequently) which perhaps demarcates more equal intervals than the scale in (6).[14] The instructions specified that participants should rate the sentences according to their frequency "in the North East of England".

Section 2: Sentences

Below you will see a series of sentences in **bold font** which feature the word *canny*. Please rate these sentences according to how frequently you think you would hear that type of sentence in the North East of England.

Example: Jill asked me if I was ok. I said, "**I'm canny**".

If you thought that the above sentence type, "**I'm canny**", would be heard frequently in the North East, you would select the 'Frequently' option in the grid below.

There are no right or wrong answers and I am interested in your immediate reactions to each of these sentence types. Please respond to each sentence on an individual basis and remember to only rate the sentences in **bold**.

	Never	Very Rarely	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	Very Frequently
Jenny complained that her bag was too heavy to carry but her sister said, "**It's canny light**".	○	○	○	○	○	○
I told my mother that Diane is always really kind and helpful to everybody. I said, "**She's canny**".	○	○	○	○	○	○

Figure 6: Instructions for indirect judgement task[15]

The test sentences were arranged in a random order in groups of eight (each with the labelled scale at the top) and formatted in bold. They were introduced by a short scenario so that participants did not imagine vastly different contexts, which would result in less reliable judgements (Schütze 1996: 112, 153).

Questionnaires sometimes feature "distractor" sentences to encourage participants to rate each sentence independently (Buchstaller and Corrigan 2011b: 153). My survey purposefully did not include such sentences. If distractors had been included, participants may have mistakenly thought that they should rate all of the *canny* sentences similarly and the increased length of the questionnaire could cause fatigue and inaccuracy.

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[14] Likert scales are ordinal as it is never guaranteed that options on the scale are at equal intervals (Wagner 2010: 28), though they are commonly considered interval because "*it is assumed* that the distances between the scale values are equal" (VanderStoep and Johnston 2009: 54). I treat the scale as interval here to calculate average ratings for comparative purposes, as done in previous studies (Buchstaller and Corrigan 2011a, 2011b; Buchstaller *et al*. 2013; Childs 2013).

[15] The questionnaire was created at http://obsurvey.com.

4.1. Hypotheses

The judgement task tested all four functions of *canny* but was primarily designed for the investigation of intensifier *canny*'s degree of grammaticalisation. The sentences containing intensifier *canny* were created to test three hypotheses relating to the adjectives with which the intensifier collocates: the adjective's semantics, syntactic position and corpus frequency.

4.1.1. Hypothesis 1: Adjective semantics

Less grammaticalised intensifiers are more restricted by their lexical origins (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003; Tagliamonte 2008). Intensifier *canny* is the newest of the four functions of *canny* in North East English but its origins are unknown: did it develop from the adjective, adverb or modifier in quantifying expressions? Intensifiers commonly develop from adverbs, which are often related to existing adjectives (Nevalainen 2000: 449), so this path of development may be most feasible. Alternatively, the intensifier may have developed from the modifier in quantifying expressions, since both boost the property that they modify. Either way, the four functions of *canny* have a similar core meaning, denoting positive evaluation (adjective, adverb) or boosting an existing property to have a more positive measurable value (intensifier, modifier in quantifying expressions). Intensifier *canny* is therefore expected to retain shades of a positive lexical meaning, favouring collocation with adjectives denoting a positive attribute or a more positive quantity. Therefore, the first hypothesis tested in the judgement task is that sentences where intensifier *canny* modifies more positive adjectives will be perceived as more frequent in the North East of England than those where the intensifier modifies non-positive adjectives.

4.1.2. Hypothesis 2: Adjective position

Intensifiers tend to occur in predicative position, exemplified in (7), to a greater extent than attributive position, shown in (8) (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003: 272; Macaulay 2006: 272; Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010: 274). In Ito and Tagliamonte's (2003: 272-3) York (UK) data, the more grammaticalised intensifier *very* exhibited a greater distinction in its percentage of use between the favoured predicative position and the alternative, attributive position, than the less grammaticalised intensifier *really*. In contrast, Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010: 276) found that older intensifiers tended to occur in predicative position a smaller percentage of the time than newer variants. Although these two sets of results appear contradictory, this is likely due to differences in how the variable was quantified: Ito and Tagliamonte (2003) extracted adjectival heads (intensified or not) from their corpus, while Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010) extracted intensifiers modifying adjectival heads.

(7) It's *canny* good

(8) It's a *canny* good film

The second hypothesis tested in the judgement task is that sentences with intensifier *canny* will be rated as more frequent when the intensifier and adjective are in predicative position than attributive position.

4.1.3. Hypothesis 3: Adjective frequency

As the participants were asked to judge how frequent certain sentence types are in the North East of England, higher ratings of perceived frequency may be given when intensifier *canny* modifies an adjective that has high frequency in real speech. The argument behind this is that high-frequency linguistic items and collocations have stronger and more accessible mental representations than low-frequency ones (Bybee 2007: 10). Studies comparing the frequency of syntactic phenomena and their linguistic constraints in corpus data with results from speaker intuitions have demonstrated remarkable correspondence between the two (Hoffmann 2006; Bresnan and Ford 2010; Mollin 2014). As such intuitions are "in all likelihood based on frequency information stored in the mental lexicon" (Mollin 2014: 212), the third hypothesis is that adjectives that are more frequent in speech overall will be perceived to occur with intensifier *canny* more than less frequent adjectives.

4.2. Questionnaire design

As noted in section 4.1, the questionnaire consisted of a series of sentences testing all four types of *canny*, but this section focuses solely on the subset of 20 test sentences containing intensifier *canny*, listed in Table 4.

Table 4: Intensifier test sentences

Semantic category	Adjective	Position	Sentence
Value	good	attributive	It's canny good
		predicative	It's a canny good film
	bad	attributive	It's canny bad
		predicative	It's a canny bad film
Dimension	big	attributive	It's canny big
		predicative	It's a canny big stadium
	small	attributive	It's canny small
		predicative	It's a canny small park
Position	far	attributive	It's canny far
		predicative	It's a canny far away building
	close	attributive	It's canny close
		predicative	It's a canny close building
Speed	fast	attributive	It's canny fast
		predicative	It's a canny fast car
	slow	attributive	It's canny slow
		predicative	It's a canny slow car
Physical property	heavy	attributive	It's canny heavy
		predicative	It's a canny heavy bag
	light	attributive	It's canny light
		predicative	It's a canny light bag

The sentences tested intensifier *canny* in collocation with 10 adjectives that form binary pairs of opposites in a number of Dixon's (1977) semantic categories, which have been used to assess the semantic distribution of intensifiers previously (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003; Macaulay 2006; Tagliamonte 2008; Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010). These pairs were chosen to test Hypothesis 1 – that adjectives with more positive meanings (in terms of

evaluation or quantity) will be deemed to occur with intensifier *canny* more often than adjectives with non-positive meanings. The first adjective within each pair above was coded as more positive because it depicts a more positive evaluation or quantity than the other. For example, when quantifying we typically think of "how old", "how big", "how fast", "how heavy" and "how far" something is, rather than "how young", "how small" etc. (see Jackson 1990: 52).

To address Hypothesis 2, each adjective was tested once in attributive position and once in predicative position. Aside from the change in position, the structure of the test sentences was kept as consistent as possible. Each sentence had the same subject and verb (*it's*). The attributive sentences were *it's canny*+adjective, while the predicative sentences were *it's a canny*+adjective+noun. For each of the binary pairs except one, the noun was the same in each position.[16]

Under hypothesis 3, sentences with intensifier *canny* modifying higher frequency adjectives will be considered more common in the North East than those modifying less frequent adjectives. To address this hypothesis, a measure of the adjectives' frequency in local language use was required. Tokens of the 10 test adjectives listed in Table 4 were extracted from the 2007-2011 NECTE2 files using *AntConc* (Anthony 2014) to establish their frequency. Some exclusions were made to ensure that the adjective tokens included in the count had the same meaning as the adjectives in the test sentences. Tokens with proper nouns (9a) or adjectives in compounds (9b) were excluded, because these are relatively fixed phrases. Cases where the target word did not function as an adjective (9c) were also removed.

(9)

a. How can you not like **Black** Beauty? [NECTE2, N2_2009_SEL2091_037a]
b. Yes, they're **old**-fashioned. [NECTE2, N2_2011_SEL2091_029a]
c. I mean **light** doesn't cost anything [NECTE2, decten0tlsg72]

From the remaining tokens, each adjective type was coded as "frequent" if it had a raw frequency of over 500 instances or "infrequent" if the frequency was under 200, because these were the most natural cut-off points in the data, as evident from Table 5. Table 5 shows the binary pairs of adjectives, the frequency of *canny* with each adjective in NECTE2, the overall adjective frequency in NECTE2 and the binary classification of the adjectives in terms of frequency and positive/non-positive meaning respectively.

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[16] The exception was 'dimension'. If the adjective used to describe the noun was in some way unexpected to the participant, they may rate the sentence lower on the scale. Therefore, for dimension, two different nouns were chosen that are typically considered big (*stadium*) and small (*park*) respectively.

Table 5: Adjective frequencies and meaning

Adjective	*canny*+adjective frequency in NECTE2	Adjective frequency in NECTE2	Frequency classification	Positive adjective?
good	27	6788	Frequent	+
bad	4	1682		-
big	2	2266	Frequent	+
small	1	465		-
far	1	586	Frequent	+
close	1	610		-
fast	1	197	Infrequent	+
slow	0	69		-
heavy	0	105	Infrequent	+
light	0	38		-

If the analysis of intensifier *canny* had been solely corpus-based, statistical analysis would be restricted by the low number of tokens for each *canny*+adjective collocation in NECTE2. However, the use of intuition data allows for closer and more robust quantitative analysis of the factors that affect the frequency of intensifier *canny*.

4.3. Questionnaire sample

The questionnaire was distributed online via email, social-networking sites and forums of local interest. Participants read a description of the survey and provided demographic information that was subsequently used to check their eligibility for the study and classify their age, sex and social class. Eligible participants had been born and raised in the North East of England and not lived elsewhere for more than 7 years, in line with criteria used in other studies of this nature (Corrigan *et al*. 2012; Buchstaller *et al*. 2013). As shown in Table 6, 48 eligible participants were selected to form a balanced, socially-stratified sample.

Table 6: Questionnaire sample

		Working class	Middle class
Male	**15-30**	4	4
	31-50	4	4
	51+	4	4
Female	**15-30**	4	4
	31-50	4	4
	51+	4	4
TOTAL		**48**	

The three age categories were chosen to enable comparison with DECTE where speakers were categorised into particular age groups. The participants' social class was ascertained by considering their education and occupation information in conjunction with the *Standard Occupational Classification 2010* (Office for National Statistics 2010).

5. Judgement task: Perceived frequency of adjective and intensifier *canny*

The results of the corpus analysis in section 3 revealed that while the frequency of adjective *canny* fluctuated over time, intensifier *canny* behaved like an incoming form: its first attestation in the literature and use in DECTE was much later than all other types of *canny* and in the corpus it was only used by those aged 30 and under. The results of the judgement task corroborate these findings. Average ratings for each types of *canny* were calculated by converting the rating scale to a scale of 1 to 6 (1 - Never, 2 -Very Rarely, 3 - Rarely, 4 - Occasionally, 5 - Frequently, 6 - Very frequently). Therefore, the higher the average rating, the higher the perceived frequency. Chi-square tests revealed that the distribution of ratings for each type of *canny* according to age was significant only for the intensifier (χ^2=146.94, d.f.=10, p<0.001). Table 7 displays the average ratings per age group for the sentences testing intensifier *canny* versus those testing adjective *canny*,[17] for comparison with the corpus results.

Table 7: Perceived frequency of intensifier and adjective *canny* per age group

Age	Intensifier average rating (scale 1-6)	Adjective average rating (scale 1-6)
15-30	4.22	4.31
31-50	4.04	4.34
51+	3.07	4.10

The perceived frequency of adjective *canny* is similar for all three age cohorts. Thus, despite its inconsistent frequency in DECTE, speakers in different age groups today are, on average, equally familiar with the form. The average ratings of intensifier *canny* display a different trend: its perceived frequency declines from the youngest group to the oldest. These findings are in line with those from DECTE where only speakers aged 30 and under used it. Combining these two sets of insights shows that speakers' intuitions about the frequency of intensifier *canny* reflect its actual frequency of use in their own age group.

Intensifier *canny* is therefore becoming increasingly adopted by speakers: it (i) first emerges in DECTE in the speech of those born in 1961 onwards; (ii) has only ever been used by speakers aged 30 and under in the corpus; (iii) is perceived as more frequent in the North East of England by younger speakers. Thus, while the attestation in SED may suggest that intensifier *canny* has been a feature of the dialect for longer, it is only in the past few decades that it has surged in use, as the longitudinal data and speaker intuitions show. The next section aims to establish whether intensifier *canny*'s collocational behaviour is consistent with that of an incoming form and presents results of a multivariate analysis which tests the hypotheses formulated in section 4.1 regarding the adjectives with which intensifier *canny* collocates.

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[17] 13 sentences tested adjective *canny*:

- *He was [intensifier] canny* with the intensifiers *dead, really, so, proper, pretty, right* and *very*.
- *The dog's canny; The table's canny; It's canny; She's canny* (x2).

6. Multivariate analysis: Intensifier *canny*

The frequency ratings for intensifier *canny* from the questionnaire were analysed in a mixed-effects logistic regression in *RBrul* (Johnson 2009). *RBrul* requires a binary dependent variable (logistic regression) or a continuous one (linear regression). It is not ideal to treat the judgement ratings as a continuous variable, because the responses belong to an ordinal scale. Forcing an ordinal variable into a linear regression would violate its underlying statistical assumptions, potentially leading to erroneous results (Heeringa *et al.* 2010: 204). While it would technically be possible to run multiple logistic regressions, e.g. using "Never" as the application value versus the other ratings, followed by a model with a rating of "Very Rarely" as the application value versus the rest, etc., this would not be particularly informative or interpretable. The rating scale was therefore converted to a binary one.[18] Though collapsing categories means that it is no longer possible to see fine-grained distinctions between the ratings, this is viable "if the categories of the dependent variable can be legitimately collapsed into two categories without losing too much information" (Andersen 2004: 941). Splitting the rating categories into a dichotomous variable is meaningful, as any response in the upper half of the scale (Occasionally, Frequently, Very Frequently) can legitimately be deemed "frequent" compared to those in the lower half (Never, Very Rarely, Rarely), which were deemed "infrequent". The application value was "frequent", meaning that a weight greater than .50 for a factor represents a favouring effect towards higher ratings of frequency.

The first fixed effect included in the model was participant age, coded as 15-30, 31-50 and 51+. The second fixed effect was the semantics of the adjective (positive vs. non-positive) in interaction with adjective frequency (frequent vs. infrequent) to prevent collinearity in the model, since more positive adjectives could potentially be more frequent. The final fixed factor was the syntactic position of the adjective: attributive or predicative. Participant was included as a random effect to account for any inter-speaker differences in the judgements.

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[18] Collapsing categories may increase the likelihood of a Type II error (false negative), leading to erroneous acceptance of the null hypothesis (Gorman and Johnson 2013). However, as Johnson (2009: 369) notes, "[m]any researchers would probably endorse a conservative approach, arguing that it is better to overlook something that does exist than to report something that does not".

Table 8: Results of mixed-effects logistic regression of the factors affecting the perceived frequency of intensifier *canny*+adjective

Ratings = "frequent"				
Centred input probability		0.685		
Total N		960		
Deviance		879.63		
	Factor weight	%	N	Log odds
Participant age				
15-30	.72	74.4	320	0.962
31-50	.62	68.8	320	0.500
51+	.19	40.9	320	-1.462
Range 53				
Adjective semantics & frequency				
Positive and infrequent	.71	72.9	192	0.870
Positive and frequent	.60	67.7	288	0.424
Non-positive and infrequent	.38	55.7	192	-0.482
Non-positive and frequent	.31	51.0	288	-0.812
Range 40				
Adjective position				
Predicative	.67	70.8	480	0.717
Attributive	.33	51.9	480	-0.717
Range 34				
Participant	Random st. dev. 1.808			

The results of the multivariate analysis in Table 8 show that all three fixed predictors were significant. Participant age is the strongest predictor of reported frequency for intensifier *canny*, over and above the linguistic factors and any intra-speaker variation. Both 15-30 and 31-50 year-olds favoured higher frequency ratings for intensifier *canny* than those aged 51+, whose average rating was also substantially lower in section 5. These results tally with the DECTE trends: intensifier *canny* was first used in the corpus by speakers born post-1960, and the participants showing greatest familiarity with the intensifier are aged 50 and under, who were recruited in 2012 and therefore born in 1962 onwards. Although intensifier *canny* was only used by those aged 30 and under in DECTE, people aged 31-50 who completed the judgement task still favoured higher ratings of frequency. Thus, even though speakers of this age did not use the intensifier in DECTE, they are still familiar with its use, perhaps due to interactions with the younger generation or low-level usage that is not observable in the corpus. As is often the case with changes from below (Labov 2006: 207), the reason behind this sudden adoption of intensifier *canny* is unknown, but *canny* appears to have been "recycled" (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003; Tagliamonte 2008; Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010), existing as a low-level intensifier for at least a century (as the SED evidence suggests) and only in the past few decades becoming an increasingly-used variant, though still infrequent compared to other intensifiers.

The second strongest predictor of perceived frequency is the semantics and frequency of the adjective that intensifier *canny* modifies. Positive adjectives favoured higher ratings in the judgement task while non-positive adjectives disfavoured higher ratings, regardless of the adjective's frequency. These results contradict Hypothesis 3, under which higher frequency

adjectives would be considered more frequent with intensifier *canny*. However, the findings support Hypothesis 1, as adjectives depicting more positive meanings were judged to collocate with intensifier *canny* more often than those with non-positive meanings. Recall that the positive adjectives denoted either a positive evaluation or a more positive quantity, which bears great similarity to the core meanings of *canny* in all of its functions: denoting a positive evaluation (adjective, adverb) or a more positive quantity/degree (intensifier, modifier in quantifying expressions). Therefore, the fact that intensifier *canny* is perceived to favour more positive adjectives strongly suggests that the intensifier has retained aspects of its lexical meaning in its present-day semantic distribution. If it was further grammaticalised, one would expect a higher perceived frequency with non-positive adjectives than in Table 8. Intensifier *canny* may therefore be at a similar stage of grammaticalisation as the maximiser *perfectly* which has positive lexical origins and tends to collocate with positive items (Altenberg 1991: 145), or parallel cases of intensifiers with negative lexical origins that collocate with negative items, such as *terribly* and *dreadfully* (Partington 1993: 184). Intensifiers such as *wicked*, which has negative lexical origins but no significant propensity to favour positive, neutral or negative adjectives (Ravindranath 2011), and *very*, the fully-grammaticalised intensifier (Méndez-Naya 2003), are further advanced than *canny* in this regard.

The final predictor that was significant in the model is the syntactic position of the adjective. Adjectives in predicative position favoured higher ratings of perceived frequency, whereas those in attributive position were deemed less frequent. This result is consistent with observations that intensifiers tend to occur in predicative position (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003: 272; Macaulay 2006: 272; Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010: 274). Therefore, the judgements accurately reflect the syntactic distribution of intensifiers in language use.

7. Conclusion

The analysis of the word *canny* in the North East of England has revealed how it has four functions with a core semantic meaning depicting a more positive value, either in terms of evaluation (adjective, adverb) or a scalar property (intensifier, modifier in quantifying expressions). The frequency of these uses varies diachronically in DECTE, according to both speakers' birth year and age at the time of recording. Adverb and modifier *canny* are consistently rare diachronically, but the adjective fluctuates in frequency over time and across age groups. Even though intensifier *canny* was attested in SED, in DECTE it appears later than expected, with the profile of an incoming form. First used by speakers born after 1960 and only those aged 30 and under (especially men), the corpus data showed that the intensifier is becoming more frequent. Results from the judgement task corroborate these findings, as there were significant effects of participant age in the frequency ratings for intensifier *canny* – young people favoured higher ratings of frequency while those aged 51+ did not. Therefore, while *canny* may have had the intensifier function since at least the beginning of the 20th century (as SED would suggest), the results from DECTE and the judgements converged to show that the intensifier was used with greater frequency by speakers born post-1960 and that its frequency is rising. These trends highlight the fluctuating nature of intensifiers, whereby apparently-new innovations can have much earlier origins but exist at low frequency in the repertoire of forms available to speakers, ready to be used more often in future (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003; Tagliamonte 2008; Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010: 268).

Two linguistic factors were also significant in the multivariate analysis: a combined factor of adjective frequency and semantics (i.e. whether the adjective depicts a positive evaluation/quantity) and adjective position. The factor weights for the former showed that adjective frequency had no effect but semantics did, as intensifier *canny* was judged to occur most often with positive adjectives. The collocational tendencies of intensifier *canny* are therefore affected by its original positive lexical meaning, showing that it is not fully delexicalised. This restricted distribution reflects intensifier *canny*'s status as a newer intensifier compared to many others in the system, as well as its low frequency overall, which may slow expansion into new linguistic contexts. Intensifier *canny* was also judged as more frequent in predicative than attributive position, reflecting the distribution of intensifiers in real speech as reported in previous research. Therefore, just as the questionnaire participants gave judgements matching the age-related trends in DECTE, they were able to discern the linguistic distribution of intensifiers, demonstrating the correspondence between corpus data and speaker intuitions in this regard (Hoffmann 2006; Bresnan and Ford 2010; Mollin 2014). Judgements are therefore a valuable tool for accessing speaker intuitions about the functions of dialect forms, allowing researchers a window into the processes of grammaticalisation that incoming intensifiers undergo which cannot always be observed using vernacular speech corpora alone, particularly with low-frequency items that would be difficult to analyse reliably using multivariate techniques.

Although the different functional developments of a linguistic item forge their own path in the dialect, the linguistic distribution of these uses can still be affected by their shared lexical origin, as demonstrated with intensifier *canny*. If the North East English intensifier system is in a state of to-ing and fro-ing, will intensifier *canny* ever increase in use to the extent that it is a true competitor to the most popular variants *very*, *really* and *so*? Will it remain a low-frequency local variant, or even recede? The question of which of these possibilities comes to fruition remains for future research.

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