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Geographic variation of *quite* + ADJ in twenty national varieties of English: A pilot study

Abstract: This paper aims to show how large-scale corpus data can be used for bottom-up modelling of semantic differences between geographical variants of one construction. More specifically, it investigates the geographic variation of *quite* as a degree modifier of adjectives in twenty national written varieties of English. Based on semantic classes of more than 6,000 adjectives in almost 240,000 occurrences of *quite* + ADJ from the Global Web-based English corpus, as well as additional data collected directly from the World Wide Web, the quantitative analyses reveal systematic geographic differences in the use of *quite*. In addition, a distributional Vector Space Model is created that represents the aggregate similarities and differences between the geographic variants of *quite* + ADJ in a clustering solution, which is interpreted with the help of a distinctive collexeme analysis.

Keywords: quite, degree modifier, GloWbE corpus, Vector Space models, geographic variation

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1 Introduction

Traditionally, variational linguistics has mainly focused on social and geographic differences between formally distinct linguistic variants, mostly at the phonological, morphological and syntactic levels. Semantic variation, in particular, its semasiological component (i.e. functional differences between formally similar words and constructions in different varieties), has received less attention in variationist studies (but see an overview of existing approaches in Levshina, forthcoming). Today, the emergence of new large corpora creates new opportunities for quantitative empirical investigation of semantic variation. This paper shows how large-scale data can be used for distributional bottom-up comparison of varieties of English. More specifically, this paper investigates the geographic

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variation of *quite* as a degree modifier of adjectives in twenty national written varieties of English. The analysis is based on a quantitative comparison of the semantic classes of 6,000 adjectives modified by *quite* in almost 240,000 occurrences of the construction.

The adverb *quite* is a polyfunctional modifier. According to the classification of degree modifiers in Quirk et al. (1985), one of the main functions of *quite* is that of a **maximizer**, which is similar to *absolutely*, *completely*, *entirely*, etc. and other adverbs that denote an absolute degree of intensity. An example of this function is given in (1a).

(1) a. *All art is quite useless* (Oscar Wilde)
b. *Quite DELICIOUS! (...) Hunger stricken upon arrival, we waddled happy full bellies back to the hotel. If you are not in a great hurry.... GO HERE!* (a restaurant review from www.tripadvisor.com with five stars out of five)
c. *The paella was quite good although I have had better.* (a restaurant review from www.tripadvisor.com with three stars out of five)

Another function, illustrated by (1b), is that of a **booster**. In this function, *quite* is similar to such adverbs as *very*, *really*, *terribly*, which denote a high degree but do not reach the end of the scale. In addition, *quite* may be used as a compromiser, or, using a term from Paradis (1997), a **moderator,** which denotes "somewhat, moderately, but not very", and thus places the characteristic in question in the middle of the scale, as in (1c). Similar to *fairly*, *pretty* and *rather*, it has a hedging function and indicates that the speaker's attitude is negotiable (Paradis 1997: 86). Note that *quite* as a moderator may play an attenuating (down-toning) or reinforcing role, depending on the context and intonation. In particular, when *quite* is made prominent, e.g. *The restaurant is QUITE good*, it is normally interpreted as an attenuator. When the adjective is prominent, as in *The restaurant is quite GOOD*, it has a reinforcing effect (Paradis 1997: 18).[1]

According to some lexicographic sources, these functions do not seem to be equally represented in different varieties of English. A recurring observation is that the function of a moderator is more typical of British English than of the American variety, whereas the function of a booster is an American English feature. For example, the Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners contains the following usage note:

1 Moderators in the reinforcing function are similar to boosters, but the degree of the characteristic expressed by an adjective is presumably stronger when it is modified by a booster.

> Differences between British and American English: *quite*
>
> In British English *quite* usually means "fairly": *The film was quite enjoyable, although some of the acting was weak*. When American speakers say *quite*, they usually mean very: *We've examined the figures quite thoroughly*. Speakers of British English sometimes use *quite* to mean "very", but only before words with an extreme meaning: *The whole experience was quite amazing* (MEDAL: 1218).

Yet, there is a lack of evidence about the use of *quite* in other varieties of English. The main aim of the paper is to fill this gap, at least partly, by investigating the use of *quite* + ADJ in the varieties represented in the Global Web-based English corpus (Davies 2013).[2]

The structure of the remaining part of the paper is as follows. Section 2 outlines the history of *quite* and discusses the adjectival classes that can be used to diagnose the functions of the modifier. The corpus data are introduced in Section 3. Section 4 examines the quantitative distribution of the modifier across the varieties represented in the corpus. Section 5 offers an analysis of the differences between different variants of *quite* + ADJ with regard to its main semantic functions. A cluster analysis of *quite* in twenty varieties of English, based on a Vector Space Model, followed by a distinctive collexeme analysis of the main clusters, is presented in Section 6. Finally, Section 7 summarizes the main findings and charts a path for future research.

2 *Quite*: Distributional cues and history

2.1 Adjectival classes as contextual cues

The previous sections introduced different functions of *quite*. Is it possible to operationalize these subtle differences as distributional cues, which could be used in a corpus-driven study? Although in many cases one needs a broader context and intonation for distinguishing between the functions, one can infer much about the meaning of *quite* from the semantic class of a modified adjective. We will follow Paradis' (1997) classification of adjectives, which, as she demonstrates, are relevant for distinguishing between the functions of *quite*. She uses the following classes:

2 Although *quite* is used in a number of other functions – as a modifier of verbs, other adverbs or even as an interjection *Quite!* in British English – these cases are not discussed in this paper.

Table 1: Functions of *quite* depending on adjective classes.

Adjective class	Function
Scalar	booster (*quite good*) AmE
	moderator (*quite good*) BrE
Limit	maximizer (*quite different*) BrE and AmE
Extreme	maximizer (*quite brilliant*) BrE

A. Scalar adjectives (e.g. *good*, *nice*, *interesting*, *difficult*, *rich*), which denote a property that can have different degrees on the scale. With these adjectives *quite* can function as either a moderator (British English) or a booster (American English).
B. Limit adjectives, which imply a clear boundary (e.g. *sure*, *cooked*, *clear*, *different*, *wrong*, *dead*). With these adjectives, *quite* is a maximizer both in British and American English.
C. Extreme adjectives, which describe a high degree of some quality (e.g. *extraordinary*, *huge*, *scorching*, *marvellous*, *astounding*). This function has been observed only in British English. With these adjectives, *quite* is regarded as a maximizer, as well.

Table 1 summarizes the functions of *quite* when it modifies different types of adjectives in British and American English according to the above-mentioned lexicographic sources and Paradis (1997).

Unfortunately, these classes do not always serve as reliable cues because an adjective can behave as a member of more than one class. For example, limit adjectives are sometimes used as scalar ones. It is possible to hear both *absolutely true* and *very true*, *absolutely sure* and *very sure*, *totally empty* and *very empty* (Paradis 2001). In spite of such coercion, most adjectives do seem to have a bias towards one class. This bias can be identified with the help of diagnostic tests, which will be provided in Section 5.

2.2 A brief history of *quite*

The adverb *quite* comes from an adjective *quit* with the meaning "freed, released". In Middle English, the adverb was used in the meaning "completely, altogether, unreserved, without impediment" e.g. *quit and clene* "completely, freely", or "quickly", e.g. *to hell go quit* "to go quickly to hell". Originally, it modified only verbs:

(2) *Sir Trystam hurtelyd unto that knyght and smote him quyte frome his horse*. (MED: 99)

Already in Shakespeare and Milton's works, *quite* occurred in the sense "completely, entirely" (Stoffel 1901: 40). In the course of the 18th century, *quite* developed a modal meaning, as in *You're quite wet, I declare! I didn't know it was raining* (Stoffel 1901: 43). It was used emphatically to strengthen the truth value of the sentence, similar to the emphasizers *actually* and *really* in contemporary English. In some contexts, it could express the speaker's surprise and even sarcasm: *I've heard your daughter is quite admired* or *You have been quite witty recently*. In contemporary British English, however, it seems more correct to speak about the semantic prosody of surprisal than about a true modal meaning (cf. Bolinger 1972: 103–105).

According to Douglas Harper's Online Etymology Dictionary of English,[3] the weaker meaning of *quite* ("rather, "fairly") in the function of a moderator is attested in British English from the mid-19th century. Fluidity of adjective classes, which was mentioned in Section 2.1, was probably an important factor in the development of the moderating function. The bridging contexts might have been those that contained scalar adjectives with a strong bias, representing the borderline cases between scalarity and absoluteness, e.g. *quite beautiful*, *quite lovely*, *quite ludicrous* (Paradis 1997: 87).

As for American English, the meaning "very, to a great extent or degree, considerably", which characterizes *quite* in the function of a booster, was mentioned in the 19th century dictionaries along with the older function of a maximizer.[4] This function was perceived as typically American and colloquial. As a consequence, it was frowned upon by British normativists (Stoffel 1901: 43).

To summarize, both the British and American variants of *quite* have developed weaker meanings, although they still perform the function of a maximizer. This weakening seems to have been more dramatic in British English. Moreover, the British variant has acquired the maximizing function with extreme adjectives (*quite terrible, quite excellent*).

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3 See http://www.etymonline.com/, last access 23.04.2014.

4 Although treating *quite* as a booster has a long lexicographic tradition in American lexicography (Stoffel 1901: 48), my native American English informant expressed doubts that *quite* means "very" when it is used with scalar adjectives (*quite nice*, *quite good*, etc.). In her opinion, it expresses the speaker's surprise, similar to the modal meaning that emerged in British English in the 18th–19th centuries (see Stoffel 1901: 43). Although this observation seems to be in line with the historical development of *quite*, an investigation of this hypothesis is beyond the scope of this pilot study.

3 Data

The present study is based on the data from the Global Web-based English (GloWbE) corpus created by Mark Davies (2013). The corpus is the largest available corpus of varieties of English. It contains 1.9 billion words in 1.8 million web pages from 20 different English-speaking countries. The corpus was compiled automatically in 2012 using ngrams to generate random web pages. The country was specified by using Google's Advanced Search by the region, all over the web and in Google Blogs. See the corpus home page for more information.[5]

The online interface of GloWbE was used to extract all contexts with *quite* followed immediately by an adjective. The data set contained 237,951 occurrences of this combination. The number of adjectival collocates of *quite* was 6,096 lemmas. Some hits were spurious, e.g. *quite sometime*. Such instances, which are due to parsing errors, were removed. Note that *quite* + ADJ accounts for almost half of all instances of *quite*, ranging from 41.3% to 52.6% in different national subcorpora.

It is important to emphasize that the GloWbE subcorpora represent online written English produced in the corresponding countries. Of course, one cannot be sure that all writers of the GloWbE texts are proficient speakers of the corresponding varieties. However, we hope that the effect of possible 'outliers' is neutralized by the large size of the subcorpora.

4 Quantitative differences in the geographical distribution of *quite*

This section compares the total frequencies of *quite* + ADJ in the national subcorpora. The normalized frequencies of the construction (per 100,000 words) are displayed in Figure 1.

As one can see in Figure 1, the greatest relative frequency (17.73 occurrences per 100,000 words) of the construction is observed in the Singapore subcorpus, followed by Great Britain, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand. The lowest relative frequency is observed in the Ghana subcorpus (7.83). The North American varieties (the USA and Canada) have low normalized frequencies, as well, similar to the subcorpora of Nigeria, Kenya and Jamaica. The distribution reflects to some extent the historical relationships between the varieties. Namely, the Englishes of the Southern Hemisphere exhibit a high similarity to British English (e.g. Trudgill

5 http://corpus2.byu.edu/glowbe/ (last access 22.04.2014)

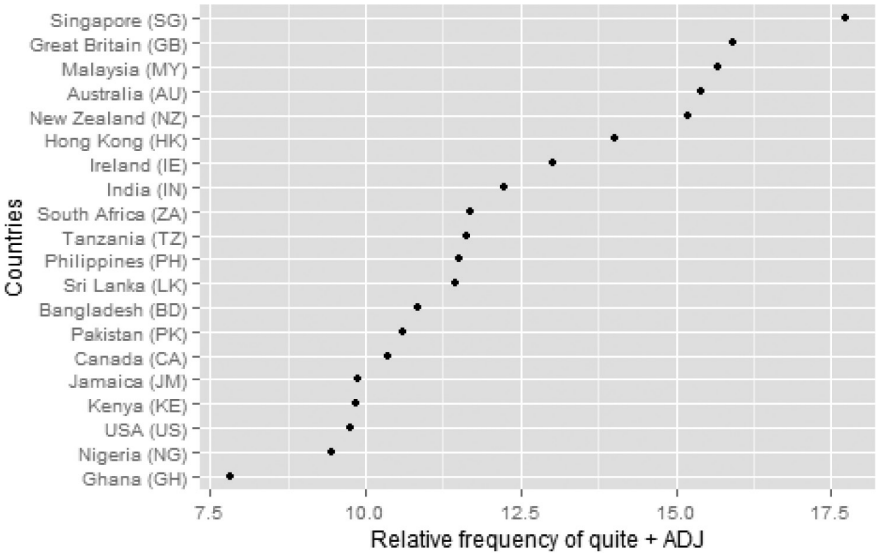

Fig. 1: Normalized frequencies of *quite* + ADJ (per 100,000 words) in twenty geographic varieties of English.

and Hannah 1982) because they were 'exported' relatively late, during the 18th and 19th centuries. The North American varieties are less similar to British English because English was exported to North America already in the 17th century, where it has been developing relatively independently since the end of the 18th century.

5 Qualitative differences in the use of *quite* + ADJ in varieties of English: the main functions

5.1 The maximizing function of *quite*: limit adjectives

This section investigates the qualitative cross-national differences in the main functions of *quite* + ADJ with the help of the adjective classes that were presented in Section 2. The first function to be discussed is the use of *quite* as a maximizer with limit adjectives.

Limit adjectives, such as *right*, *wrong*, *dead*, *alive*, *correct*, *incorrect*, imply an 'either – or' distinction without a transitional zone. Saying that X is neither correct, nor incorrect sounds paradoxical. In addition, limit adjectives can

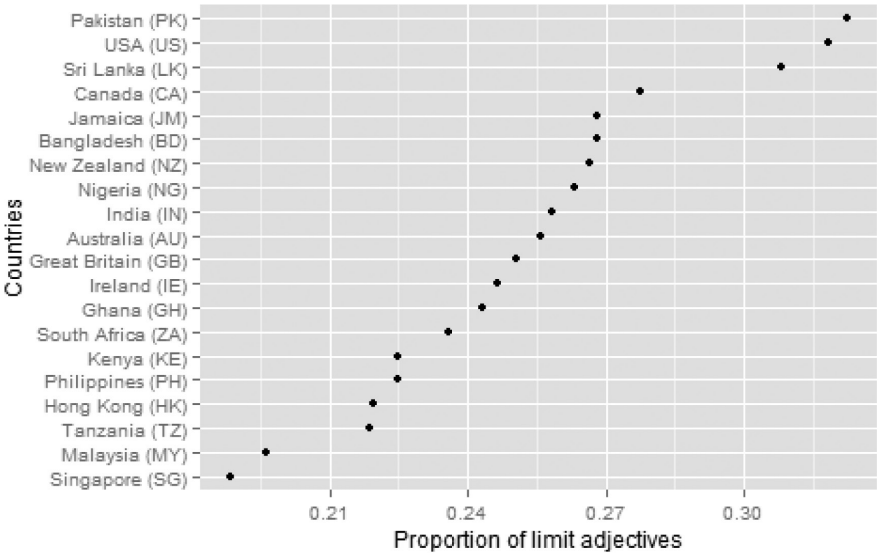

Fig. 2: Proportions of limit adjectives (token frequencies) in *quite* + ADJ in twenty geographic varieties of English.

combine with approximators (e.g. *almost correct*), but not with boosters (?*very correct*), moderators (?*moderately correct*) or diminishers (?*slightly correct*) (Paradis 1997). These properties were used to identify limit adjectives among the adjectival collexemes of *quite* in every subcorpus. Among over 6,000 adjectives, 449 were identified as having a strong bias towards the class of limit adjectives. Next, the proportions of such adjectives in the overall frequencies of *quite* + ADJ in every variety were computed. The results are shown in Figure 2. It demonstrates that the South Asian and American variants of *quite* have the highest proportions of limit adjectives in their use, whereas the Southeast Asian and East African varieties have the lowest proportions. Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa are in the middle. There is quite some variation in the proportions: the minimum value is 0.188 (18.8%) in the Singapore variety, and the maximum is 0.322 (32.2%) in Pakistani English.

To summarize, the function of *quite* as a maximizer with limit adjectives plays a more prominent role in the varieties that emerged earlier (North America and South Asia, which was colonized around the mid-18th century) and those varieties that have been influenced by them (Jamaica). This finding ties in with the fact that the function of *quite* as a maximizer is the oldest among the functions discussed in this paper (see Section 2).

5.2 The maximizer function of *quite*: extreme adjectives

As mentioned above, the British English *quite* in the function of a maximizer combines with extreme adjectives, such as *terrible*, *excellent*, *huge*, whereas this use is not typical of American English. To test this observation, extreme adjectives were selected from the total list of collexemes. Extreme adjectives have the following diagnostic properties (Paradis 1997): they do not combine with boosters (?*very brilliant*), moderators (?*fairly brilliant*) or diminishers (?*slightly brilliant*). Unlike limit adjectives, extreme adjectives do not combine with approximators (?*almost brilliant*). Their opposites are antonyms (*brilliant – terrible* or *stupid*), not complementary attributes (*dead – alive*). The analysis yielded 140 adjectives of this kind. An example is given below:

(3) *The sound quality is* ***quite excellent*** *with every act here. All the musicians involved were* ***quite magnificent***. [Great Britain: General; source: http://www.soulwalking.co.uk/DVDs.html]

The proportions of the adjectives in the total use of the construction are displayed in Figure 3.

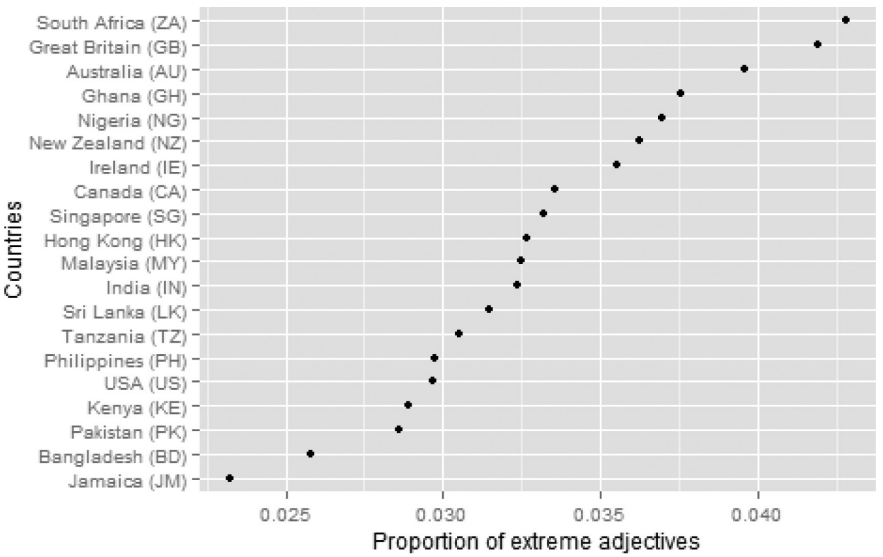

Fig. 3: Proportions of extreme adjectives (token frequencies) in *quite* + ADJ in twenty geographic varieties of English.

The overall proportion of such adjectives is small, ranging from 2 and 5% of all occurrences of the construction. Interestingly, the highest proportion of extreme adjectives in the construction is observed in the South African variant (0.043, or 4.3%). It is closely followed by Great Britain (0.042, or 4.2%). Next are the West African countries, as well as Australia, New Zealand and Ireland. The Jamaican subcorpus yields the lowest proportion (0.023, or 2.3%). The USA and South Asian varieties, as well as the East African varieties, have relatively low proportions of the extreme adjectives. Thus, the lexicographic sources are in principle correct, although the function seems to be rare in all varieties.

5.3 *Quite* as a moderator: contrast of *quite* and *very*

It is difficult to find formal contextual cues that can help one pinpoint the subtle differences between *quite* as a moderator "fairly, rather" and as a booster "very". Both functions are typically observed when *quite* modifies a scalar adjective, such as *good*, *large* or *difficult*. In spoken British English, these functions can be at least partly distinguished with the help of phrasal stress (see Section 1). Unfortunately, in written data such cues are not available. Instead, this subsection will focus on the contexts where *quite* contrasted with the booster *very*, as in the following example:

(4) *49% of the people in their late fifties/early sixties say that they are* ***very good or quite good*** *gardeners*. [Great Britain: General; source: http://grow.spogagafa.com/it-may-be-small-but-its-mine-and-its-fun/]

In such examples the contrast between *quite* and *very* is explicit: *quite* denotes a weaker degree than *very* and therefore serves as a moderator.

Since even the large GloWbE corpus returned very few hits of such contrastive contexts, the Google Advanced Search option for regional search was used to retrieve the World Wide Web frequencies of exact expressions "quite or very" or "very or quite" followed by ten gradable adjectives (*bad*, *common*, *difficult*, *easy*, *good*, *happy*, *interesting*, *likely*, *nice* and *useful*). The raw frequencies were normalized to take into account the different sizes of the national segments of the Internet. The offset was the number of pages that contain *the* in a given country (pages written in English). Since the definite article is the most frequent word in English, it can be used as an estimator of the relative size of national Internet segments. The normalized frequencies, which represent the number of

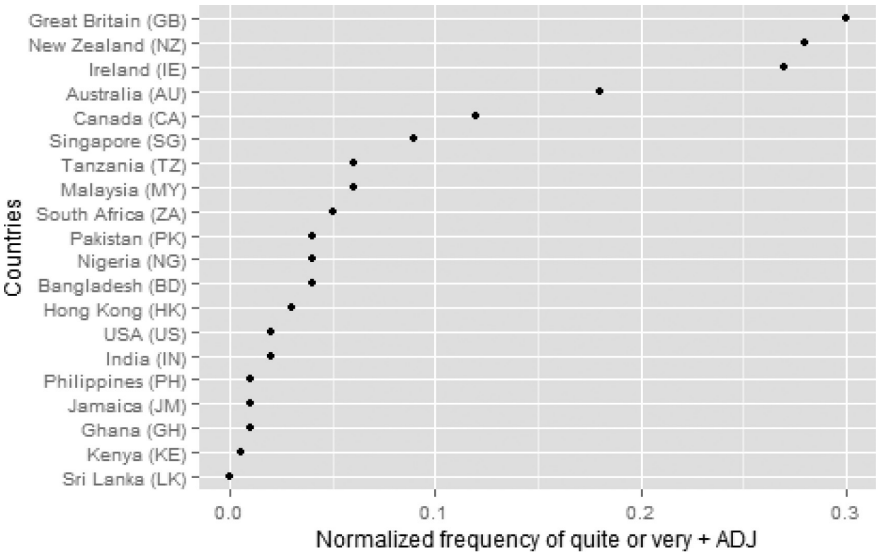

Fig. 4: Normalized frequencies of *quite or very* + ADJ or *very or quite* + ADJ in Google, per million pages (Advanced Search by region).

exact matches of the expressions per million pages that contain *the*, are shown in Figure 4.

The figure shows that Great Britain[6] has the highest relative frequency of this expression. It is followed by New Zealand, Ireland, Australia and Canada. This time, South Africa is different from the United Kingdom and Australia, displaying a modest frequency. No occurrences were found in the Sri Lanka segment. The USA has a low relative frequency of these expressions.

To conclude, it seems that the contrast between *quite* and *very* is indeed greater in the British variety than in the American one, as one could expect on the basis of lexicographic information. Moreover, we also find that the varieties more closely related to contemporary British English share the contrast. Similar to *quite* as a maximizer with extreme adjectives, the function of a moderator is on average better represented in those countries to which English was exported later than in those where English spread earlier.

6 More precisely, the search was performed for the entire United Kingdom.

6 Qualitative differences in the use of *quite* + ADJ in varieties of English: beyond the main functions

6.1 A Vector Space Model of geographic variants of *quite* + ADJ

The previous section explored the differences between the varieties one variable at a time. In this section we will investigate the aggregate differences and similarities based on all collexemes of *quite* with the help of a Vector Space Model. Originating in Computational Linguistics (e.g. Schütze 1992; Lin 1998), Vector Space Models are now used in lexical semantics and other theoretical disciplines. The reader can find a linguist-friendly introduction in Levshina and Heylen (2014)

In this study, distributional vectors were constructed for each of the twenty geographical variants of *quite*. However, unlike in traditional Vector Space Models, the context window was only one word on the right from *quite* (usually, the context windows are from 3 to 15 words, and they are symmetric), and the contextual features contained only adjectives. The starting point was a matrix with co-occurrence frequencies of twenty geographic variants of *quite* (columns) and 6,096 immediately following adjectives (rows). The frequencies were then weighted with the help of the Positive Pointwise Mutual Information (PMI) association measure (Bullinaria and Levy 2007), so that 'surprising' co-occurrences get more weight, and highly frequent combinations do not dominate the results.

Next, the cosine measures of similarity were computed between the vectors with the PPMI scores, and they were transformed into distances by subtracting the cosine values from 1. After that, a hierarchical clustering analysis based on the complete clustering method was performed. The result is shown in Figure 5.

One can identify the following interpretable clusters on the dendrogram:

– The predominantly L1 varieties (Great Britain, the USA, Canada, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand) form a separate cluster on the left.[7] This cluster is

7 Although South African English (SAEng) is often considered a native English variety, it is not in this cluster. The variety is, however, not homogeneous. According to the Electronic World Atlas of Varieties of English (Kortmann & Lunkenheimer 2013), White SAEng is indeed a high-contact L1 variety, whereas Black SAEng and Indian SAEng are indigenized L2 varieties.

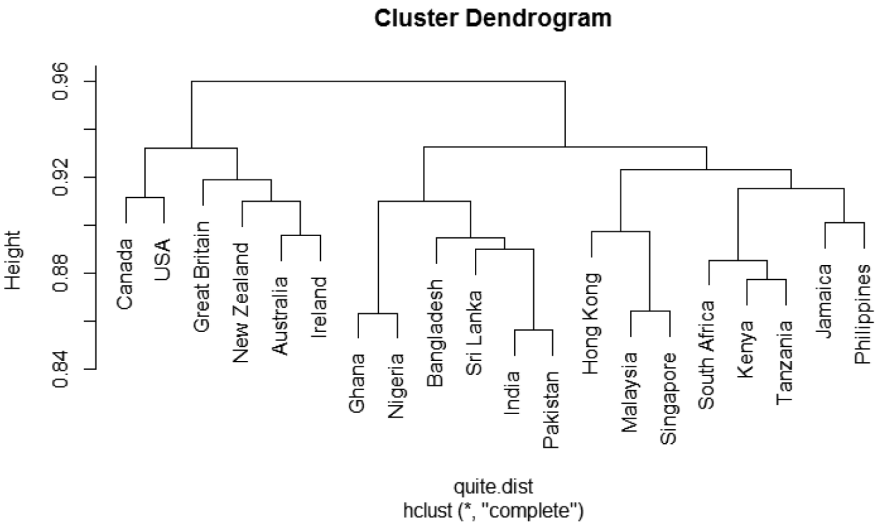

Fig. 5: A hierarchical cluster analysis of twenty geographical variants of *quite* + ADJ, based on a Vector Space Model.

further subdivided into a cluster with the USA and Canadian vectors on the left, and the vectors corresponding to Great Britain, New Zealand, Australia and Ireland on the right.

- The West African varieties (Ghana and Nigeria) and the South Asian varieties (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka) form two separate subclusters of a larger cluster. Note that the Indian and Pakistan vectors are particularly similar, since they merge very early.
- Another cluster is formed by the Southeast Asian varieties: Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong. The Philippines, which are also located in Southeast Asia, are not found in this cluster, however. Its absence is due to its pronounced allegiance to American English (see below), which sets it apart from the other Southeast Asian varieties of English.
- The final large cluster includes the South African and two East African varieties, spoken in Tanzania and Kenya in the left-hand subcluster, and the Jamaican and Philippine vectors in the right-hand subcluster. The two latter varieties have been influenced predominantly by American English recently: Jamaica due to its geographic location in the Caribbean, and the Philippines due to the fact that they were under control of the USA for a few decades. Interestingly, both countries have been under the Spanish rule.

6.2 Distinctive collexeme analysis of the clusters

Which features can explain the similarities and differences between the regional variants of *quite* revealed by the hierarchical cluster model? To find it out, a procedure similar to distinctive collexeme analysis was used to identify the adjectives that were distinctive of each cluster (Gries and Stefanowitsch 2004). For each adjective *X* and cluster *Y*, four frequencies were obtained, which are shown in Table 2.

After that, the Fisher exact test *p*-value was computed for every adjective in every cluster. Next, they were negatively log-transformed (the logarithm with base 10) if the observed frequency of the adjective in a given cluster was greater than the expected value – in other words, if this adjective was overrepresented in the varieties that constitute the given cluster.

Table 3 displays the top ten collexemes in every cluster. All of them are highly distinctive, with the distinctiveness scores above 3, which corresponds to $p < .001$.

Table 2: Frequencies needed for computation of distinctiveness scores.

	Cluster *Y*	**Other clusters**
Adjective *X*	*a*	*c*
Other adjectives	*b*	*d*

Table 3: Ten top-ranking distinctive collexemes in every cluster.

L1 varieties	**West Africa**	**South Asia**	**South East Asia**	**South and East Africa**	**Jamaica and Philippines**
right	*unfortunate*	*evident*	*nice*	*chilly*	*popular*
happy	*reserved*	*natural*	*packed*	*high*	*expensive*
sure	*interesting*	*popular*	*expensive*	*hot*	*affordable*
wrong	*intriguing*	*common*	*disappointed*	*encouraging*	*fine*
correct	*commendable*	*simple*	*fun*	*steep*	*erect*
different	*presumptuous*	*opposite*	*good*	*taxing*	*commendable*
extraordinary	*challenging*	*famous*	*pricey*	*cool*	*torque*
separate	*understandable*	*impossible*	*surprised*	*malnourished*	*well-liked*
ready	*grave*	*obvious*	*spacious*	*impressive*	*young*
likely	*encouraging*	*confident*	*troublesome*	*rocky*	*challenging*

Due to space restrictions, only one tendency will be discussed, which seems to be the most striking. As one can see from Table 3, the adjectives *right*, *sure*, *wrong*, *correct* are among the top five distinctive collexemes in the L1 cluster. An analysis of all highly distinctive collexemes with the distinctiveness score of 3 and above (279 in total) reveals that adjectives that represent a human epistemic state (*sure*, *aware*) and the speaker's epistemic attitude to a proposition (*true*, *correct*, *evident*) are particularly distinctive of the L1 varieties. Consider the following examples:

(5) *If it is actually real (and with each passing day, it looks more likely that it will be real), I'm not* ***quite sure*** *what was going through Sir Jony's mind when he designed it*. [Great Britain: General; source: http://www.gizmodo.co.uk/2012/08/this-may-not-be-the-iphone-5-but-it-sure-looks-like-one/]

(6) *Some of the things you say Jessamyn are* ***quite correct*** *– but I don't think this post was in any way hateful.* [USA: General; source: http://www.patheos.com/blogs/badcatholic/2011/12/two-lesbians-raised-a-baby-and-this-is-what-they-got.html]

Combinations of *quite* with epistemic adjectives are often used for face-saving strategies to soften the disagreement (*I don't think they're quite right*) or to express (partial) agreement. This intersubjective, interactive use of *quite* + ADJ is more common in the L1 cluster. This fact can be explained by the differences in the domains of English use in the L1 and L2 varieties. In the L1 countries, English covers all situations of communication, whereas the other countries tend to use English more often in formal situations, rather than for direct interpersonal communication.

However, the presence of geographically and historically related varieties in the other clusters suggests that the differences cannot be accounted for by the domain of use. Further research is needed to explain these geographical patterns.

7 Conclusions and perspectives

This study has compared the use of *quite* + ADJ in twenty national varieties of English. The quantitative analyses, which were based on large-scale web-based corpora, have revealed the following:

1. The relative frequencies of *quite* + ADJ vary across the national varieties of English. These differences can be explained, at least partly, by historical factors. Namely, the varieties that are very closely related to British English (Australia, New Zealand) and which emerged relatively late tend to use the

construction more frequently than the varieties in North America and South Asia, to which English was exported earlier.

2. The maximizing function of *quite* with extreme adjectives, e.g. *quite excellent*, *quite terrible*, and the moderating function, as in *QUITE good* (meaning "fairly good"), are more prominent in British English and the closely related varieties of the Southern Hemisphere. In contrast, these functions are less common in the USA, Jamaica and South Asia, which were colonized earlier. Instead, the older function of *quite* as a maximizer with limit adjectives is more prominent in this group, e.g. *quite dead*, *quite correct*.
3. In addition, one can see more subtle differences in the collocational preferences of *quite* in different regions. The L1 varieties overall more frequently use epistemic adjectives, especially the ones that express the speaker's attitude directly (*sure*, *right*, *wrong*, *correct*). Such exemplars of *quite* + ADJ are typically observed in interpersonal argumentative contexts and are used for face-saving purposes. This may be explained by the cultural differences in the domains of English use in these countries, more specifically, by the fact that the L2 varieties of English tend to be used in more formal situations (business, politics, administration, education, etc.), whereas the L1 varieties are used in all domains, including interpersonal communication.

Since this is only a pilot study, much remains to be explored. First, Desagulier (2012) is correct in observing that the constructional environment of *quite* can be highly relevant for the meaning of the modifier. For example, one can expect differences between *quite a(n)* + NP and *a quite* + NP, as well as between the attributive and predicative uses of adjectives. Second, one should take into account the onomasiological perspective and compare the division of labour between the modifiers in different varieties. The role of language contact also needs to be established. Finally, the corpus data should be contrasted with experimental evidence from different countries, which could link degree adjectives to nonverbal quantitative scales, similar to the experimental study in Australia reported in Rohrmann (2007), where the intensifier *quite* turned out to correspond to the score 5.9 on the scale from 0 to 10. This could tell us in which country of the world it is safe to order a meal in a restaurant if it is known as 'quite good'.

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