Intensifiers in MLE: New trends and developments[1]

Paloma Núñez-Pertejo and Ignacio Palacios-Martínez, University of Santiago de Compostela

Abstract
By the late twentieth century, a multiethnolect generally known as Multicultural London English (MLE) emerged in this city, reflecting many different countries, races and cultures. This paper is corpus-based and is concerned with the system of intensifiers in MLE, examining data primarily from the *London English Corpus* (LEC). In the analysis we draw contrasts between teen and adult language; other variables, such as speakers' gender and ethnicity are also considered. Our findings broadly confirm partially previous studies, showing that *so* and *really* are the most common intensifiers among London teenagers, in contrast to *very*, which is the most frequent in adults. Secondly, we identify in teen talk two new intensifiers which have not been described as such in the literature: *bare* (*it's **bare** addictive*) and *proper* (*they were **proper** strict in school*); these have not been recorded in the language of adults. The paper concludes by discussing the possible reasons for the emergence of these two new intensifiers.

Keywords: intensifiers; Multicultural London English; teen talk; intensification

1. Introduction

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, large European cities such as London, Stockholm, Oslo, Berlin, Paris, Amsterdam and Madrid have seen high rates of immigration from a wide variety of countries, races and cultures, a process which, of course, is repeated in many other urban centres across the world. In London this phenomenon (cf. Fox 2012a) began in the 1950s with a significant influx of immigrants, especially those of non-white ethnicities, and continues today. Such changes in a city's population have had a great impact on its linguascape with the creation of a multiethnolect, also known as *contemporary urban vernacular* (Rampton 2015), *urban vernacular* and *urban youth speech style* (Wiese 2009, 2013; Cheshire, Nortier & Adger

2015; Nortier & Svendsen 2015). In other countries the same phenomenon has been called *Straataal* (The Netherlands; cf. Nortier 2001), *Kiezdeutsch* (Germany; cf. Wiese 2013), *Verlan* (France; cf. Doran 2004) *Kebabnorsk* (Norway; cf. Cutler & Royneland 2015), *Rinkebysvenska* (Sweden; cf. Kotsinas 1988), *Gaul* (Indonesia; cf. Smith-Hefner 2007)*,* etc., and reflects the importance of the *metropolis* as a source of linguistic innovation (cf. Pennycook & Otsuji 2015).

In London the result of this has been the emergence of a new variety, one which is generally known as *Multicultural London English* (MLE; cf. Cheshire et al. 2011). In the popular media it has also been referred to as 'Jafaican', that is, a fake Jamaican/African variety, in reference to the large number of speakers of Caribbean and African origin who have contributed to its development (cf. Kerswill 2014). However, such a perception of the roots of MLE is not wholly accurate. The dialect and language contact situation in London produces a 'feature pool' from the range of input varieties and speakers select different combinations of features, sometimes modifying them into new structures (cf. Cheshire et al. 2011). MLE, then, is the product of a wide range of ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds and is present in some inner London districts, such as Hackney and Tower Hamlets, both notable for high levels of young immigrants. Traditional Cockney is gradually being replaced by this new variety, which has been called the 'new Cockney' (Fox 2015).[2] London, with its pivotal role in the history of English in Britain, can be considered as the centre of linguistic innovation in British English, with features often diffusing from inner to outer London and beyond (cf. Fox 2015: 12-13). Such a process is now being seen in MLE, with evidence of its spread to large cities like Manchester and Birmingham, to the extent that some scholars (Drummond 2017: 640) have suggested the existence of a *Multicultural Urban British English* (MUBE), which shares a number of features across British urban centres. In the emergence of MLE we find two principle factors, language contact and a socially and ethnically diverse young population, i.e. adolescence plus immigration, the perfect combination for language change and innovation (Kerswill et al. 2013).

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[2] In Fox's words "the term 'Cockney' no longer appears to be applied to a particular group of people nor used as an identity marker but, rather, it has become synonymous with a particular accent used by a broad group of people in a wide southeastern area of England" (2015: 8).

In parallel with this, the language of teenagers has been studied extensively over recent decades, adopting a variety of different theoretical and empirical approaches; some of them are of a variationist nature (cf., among others, Romaine 1984; Eckert 1988; Kerswill 1996; Stenström, Andersen & Hasund 2002; Macaulay 2005; Tagliamonte & Derek 2010; Cheshire et al. 2011; Tagliamonte 2016), while some others use an ethnographic approach (cf. Ramptom 1995; Pujolar 2001). This research has tended to show that teenagers are especially innovative in their mode of expression, and are often the precursors of language change (Eckert 1988, 1997; Kerswill 1996; Cheshire et al. 2011; Kerswill et al. 2013; Tagliamonte 2016). In this vein, Tagliamonte (2016: xiv) claims that "teenagers are the innovators and the movers and shakers of language change and they are the hope for the future".

By 'teen talk' or 'teenagers' language' we mean here the language used by speakers aged 12 to roughly 20 years in their everyday interactions and, particularly, when communicating with their peers, since when they address adults (parents, teachers etc.) they tend to make some effort to conform to the standard (Tagliamonte 2016: 3). The following, among others, can be regarded as the most distinctive features of 'teen talk':

(i) Young speakers tend to play with the language and to be lexically creative. They do this through a variety of morphological and lexical devices, such as shortenings (*caff* > cafeteria, *uni*> university, *cuz* > cousin), changing formal features of words by prefixation and suffixation (*megamoney*, *mega story*, *superbike*, *freshie*, *kiddish*), adding new meanings to lexical items (*sick* and *wicked* meaning something good, *bait* meaning obvious or well-known, *butters* as ugly, etc.; cf. Palacios-Martínez & Núñez-Pertejo 2012; Palacios-Martínez 2018a);

(ii) The high frequency of familiarisers (*man*, *brother*, *mate*, *dude*, *boy*, *baby*, etc.) and taboo vocatives (*bastard*, *arsehole*, *dick(head)*, *dumb*, *bitch*, *cow*, etc.; cf. Rodríguez & Stenström 2011; Stenström 2014; Palacios-Martínez 2018b);

(iii) A high number of swear and taboo terms, such as *fucking*, *bloody*, *shit*, etc. (Stenström et al. 2002; Stenström 2006; Rodríguez & Stenström 2011; Stenström 2014);

(iv) A high occurrence of non-verbal sounds and onomatopoeic words in speech, since teens' communication is often laced with anecdotes recounting situations and events featuring friends and colleagues (*crac, urgh, clok, grrr, aargh*; cf. Nordberg 1986; Palacios-Martínez 2014);

(v) New quotatives such as *this is* + pronoun, (*be*) *like, be all,* etc. (Tagliamonte & Hudson 1999; Macaulay 2001; Tagliamonte & D'Arcy 2004; Buchstaller & Van Alphen 2010; Fox 2012b; Palacios-Martínez 2014);

(vi) An abundance of negative polarity sentences and negative vernaculars (third person singular *don't, ain't, dunno, nope,* negative concord structures). Teenagers are more spontaneous than adults in their responses, and use less mitigation (Cheshire 1991; Palacios-Martínez 2010, 2011, 2016, 2017);

(vii) A large proportion of vague words and expressions (Channell 1994), in particular placeholders (*thingy, stuff, thingybob*; cf. Stenström et al. 2002; Palacios-Martínez & Núñez-Pertejo 2015; Núñez-Pertejo 2018) and general extenders (*and things, and stuff, or something, and everything*; cf. Overstreet 1999; Cheshire 2007; Tagliamonte & Derek 2010; Palacios-Martínez 2011);

(viii) A high number of invariant tags and some pragmatic markers (*innit, right, do you get me, you know what I mean*; cf. Andersen 2001; Torgersen et al. 2011; Pichler 2013; Palacios-Martínez 2015);

(ix) Special ways of intensifying language (*it was right embarrassing, I've had a bloody cold for fucking ages, he's well nice*; cf. Ito & Tagliamonte 2003; Paradis & Bergmark 2003; Macaulay 2006; Tagliamonte 2008; Rodríguez & Stenström 2011; Núñez-Pertejo & Palacios-Martínez 2012; Palacios-Martínez & Núñez-Pertejo 2012).

This latter feature will be the object of our present study, in which we will pay special attention to two emerging intensifiers in the language of teenagers, *proper* and *bare*, which present some interesting features in this sociolect. In the analysis of the *London English Corpus* (LEC), we have identified a relatively significant number of these adjectives used as intensifiers which are not present in the adult samples. This was the starting point of the present paper, which will be organized as follows. Section Two below will be concerned with the definition and characterization of the language of intensification and the notion of

'intensifier', and also includes a brief review of work in this field. Section Three sets out the methodology used, followed by the results in Section Four. These are structured in three main parts. First, we will provide a general picture of the tendencies in adjective and adverb intensification for both adults and teenagers, which will allow us to understand better the place of *proper* and *bare* in the general area of intensifiers. Second, we will focus particularly on *proper* in the teenagers' language. And third, we will discuss the results for *bare* in the same sociolect. When dealing with these two lexical items, we will also consider the other functions and meanings that they may have such as adjective, verb modifier, quantifier, etc., in order to see how the intensifying value operates within the general system of each word. When possible, the variables of speaker's gender and ethnicity will also be considered separately from that of speaker age, this latter to be given special treatment in that it is central to our concerns here and, of course, to the interpretation of results. In Section Five some final observations and remarks will be offered on the main differences between the language of adults and teenagers with respect to the use of general intensifiers and, more particularly, with respect to the two adjectives in question, *proper* and *bare*. We will also explore the possible origin of these two intensifiers, that is, factors that may account for their emergence and use. Hopefully this will also allow us to talk about possible changes in operation in the language of London teenagers and in MLE in general.

2. Intensification and intensifiers

Intensification is employed in both written and spoken language as a resource to convey a message in a more expressive way, and to strengthen the speakers' views and their attitudes towards what they are saying. The intensifying function is prototypically performed by the so-called 'intensifiers', defined by Bolinger (1972: 17) as any "device that scales a quality, whether up or down or somewhere between the two". "The label 'intensifier' suggests a particular semantic type of adjective modifier, one which corresponds to adverbs of degree; and certainly this is the most common semantic type" (Allerton 1987: 16). They are traditionally divided into amplifiers and downtoners (Stoffel 1901; Quirk et al. 1985: 590), the former scaling an entity upwards from an assumed

norm, and the latter achieving a lowering effect. Semantically speaking, amplifiers can be further subdivided into two main groups: maximizers (*absolutely*, *totally*, *completely*, *entirely*, *utterly*, etc.) and boosters (*very*, *terribly*, *really*, *tremendously*). While maximizers denote an absolute degree of intensity, thus occupying the highest point on the scale, boosters convey a high degree of a certain quality but without reaching this extreme point. Apart from adverbs, some adjectives also fulfil an intensifying function, including *absolute* in 'absolute agony' and *total* in 'total ecstasy'; these are usually referred to as 'intensifying' (cf. Quirk et al. 1985: 429), 'reinforcing' adjectives or 'reinforcers' (cf. Paradis 2008).

Intensifiers are used to convey emotion, an essential element in the human communication process. This may be why they have been the focus of attention in so many studies (Stoffel 1901; Jespersen 1922; Bolinger 1972; Quirk et al. 1985; Altenberg 1991; Partington 1993; Paradis 1997; Lorenz 2002; Nevalainen & Rissanen 2002; Paradis 2003; Traugott 2006; Athanasiadou 2007; Tao 2007; Xiao & Tao 2007; Méndez-Naya 2008a, 2008b; Tagliamonte 2008; Núñez-Pertejo 2013; Calle-Martin 2014; Fuchs & Gut 2016 among others), in the sense that it is one area of language that remains relatively unstable and unsettled, and seems to be particularly sensitive to semantic change. Thus, "by their very nature, intensifiers cannot have staying power since their impact is only as good as their novelty. If you overuse an intensifier it will lose its value" (Tagliamonte 2016: 92). Given that intensifiers "are subject to the whims of fashion" (Tagliamonte 2016: 97), it is an area of language that is constantly under renewal as speakers undergo a constant process of reinventing themselves (cf. Tagliamonte 2016: 92), so when one such form loses its effectiveness, another takes its place.

Most intensifiers, in fact, go through a process of 'delexicalization', that is, "the reduction of the independent lexical content of a word, or group of words, so that it comes to perform a particular function but has no meaning apart from this to contribute to the phrase in which it occurs" (Partington 1993: 183), *very* being a case in point.

Altenberg (1991: 128), Bolinger (1972: 18), Ito & Tagliamonte (2003: 259), and Tagliamonte (2016: 82-83) also refer to the competition, change and recycling of intensifiers, one which has been traced from Old English to the present day. Thus, after *swiþe*, which was the most common intensifier until the thirteenth century, *well* emerged as the new standard term until the fourteenth century, along with *full*, which

was subsequently replaced by *right* and *most* over the course of the fifteenth century. During the sixteenth century *very* took over, "followed some time after by *pretty*, and then *really*" (Tagliamonte 2016: 83); the latter two, together with *so*, are claimed to be more frequent in American English conversations today, unlike *very*, which seems to be more common in British English (cf. Biber et al. 1999: 565-567).

As noted above, adolescents are in general very innovative in their use of the language and are constantly engaged in a process of coining new intensifiers, as these are always perceived as being more expressive than the ones they replace. As Robinson (2010: 102) observes, "[y]ounger generations use a language that is an outcome of a usage "competition" between the forms that they learn from their parents and teachers, and new forms they negotiate in their peer groups". A variety of studies have shown that intensifiers do not always behave in the same way in the spoken language of adults and teenagers, the former group using them almost twice as often as the latter (Stenström et al. 2002; Macaulay 2005; Palacios-Martínez & Núñez-Pertejo 2012). However, there are exceptions, such as in the high frequency of *really* and *so* among teenagers (Lorenz 2002: 153; Paradis & Bergmark 2003: 71), which seem to have replaced *very*, the most popular intensifier so far. Furthermore, none of these phenomena are exclusive to General British English, but can also be found in other varieties (cf. Bauer & Bauer 2002 on New Zealand English, Macaulay 2006 on the speech of Scottish Glasgow adolescents, Tagliamonte 2008, 2016 on Canadian English, and Barnfield & Buchstaller 2010 on the Tyneside area, in north-eastern England, and Fuchs & Gut 2016 on Asian Englishes).

With regard to the two adjectives of interest to us here, *proper* and *bare*, to our knowledge there are no monographic studies in the literature on their use as intensifiers, which may be indicative of the current emergence of new uses and functions in this area of intensification. Moreover, general reference grammars of English devote very little space to these two items. Thus, Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 144) contrast the postpositive nature of *proper* meaning 'in the strict sense of the word' (e.g. *the next day the fair **proper** would begin with stalls around the quayside*) with the attributive use (e.g. *That is not a **proper** job*), and the ascriptive sense (e.g. *His behaviour was considered **proper***). When used as an attributive adjective, it usually denotes the degree to which the property expressed in the head nominal applies in a

given case (2002: 555). The references in general grammars to *bare* as an adjective showing a special use, or meeting particular grammatical features, are practically non-existent. Quirk et al. do mention the use of this word as a verb (1985: 100), which, according to Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 1643), is the result of a process of conversion from the adjective.

3. Methodology

This paper forms part of a broader study on the spoken language of young British people. The findings discussed will be based primarily on data extracted from the *London English Corpus* (LEC), which was compiled by Cheshire and members of her team in the area of London between 2004 and 2010 (Cheshire et al. 2011). This corpus includes the *Linguistic Innovators Corpus* (LIC) and the *Multicultural London English Corpus* (MLEC). The data for the first corpus was collected between 2004 and 2007 in the districts of Hackney (inner London) and Havering (outer London), and both teenagers and adult speech are represented. MLEC was compiled between 2007 and 2010 and it contains data not only from young speakers but also from small children as well as from adults, and covers parts of the districts of Islington, Haringey and Hackney in north London (See Tables 1a and 1b). Such an organisation of the corpus allows comparisons across the different age groups of speakers, in that their sociolinguistic profiles tend to be very similar. Additional data will be drawn from COLT (The *Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language*), compiled at the University of Bergen (Norway) and DCPSE (The *Diachronic Corpus of Present-Day Spoken English*).

The COLT corpus is part of the *British National Corpus* (BNC). It was compiled in 1993 and consists of 431,528 words from a total of 377 spontaneous conversations produced by teenagers in the London area, amounting to a total of 55 hours of recorded speech.

Data extracted from COLT will be contrasted with comparable samples taken from DCPSE with the purpose of drawing correspondences between our findings and adult mainstream British English. To ensure the best comparisons, texts classified as informal face-to-face conversations (403,844 words) and assorted spontaneous

speech (21,675 words) were selected from DCPSE, amounting to a total of 425,519 words.

Table 1a. Corpora used in the analysis

Corpus	Number of speakers	Speaker age	Speaker gender		Speaker ethniticity		
			M	F	A	NA	MR
COLT (The *Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language*)	33	13 to 17	21	12	-	-	-
DCPSE sample (The *Diachronic Corpus of Present-Day Spoken English)*	1,268	26 to 92	-	-	-	-	-
LIC (*Linguistic Innovators Corpus*)	100 21	13 to 21 +70 years	57 11	43 10	60 21	40 -	- -
MLEC (*Multicultural London English Corpus)*	18 20 27 25 8 29[3]	4-5 8-9 12-13 16-19 20-25 40-50	10 8 15 12 5 10	8 12 12 13 3 19	18 6 11 4 2 8	- 13 14 17 6 21	- 1 2 4 - -

[3] We include here the number of speakers according to the information provided by the compilers. Note, however, that in all these corpora there are some speakers whose personal details are not recorded and who are labelled as 'unknown', at least in the *Sketch Engine Interface*. This applies especially to the *Linguistic Innovators Corpus* (LIC) and the *Multicultural London English Corpus* (MLEC). In the case of DCPSE no information is provided regarding the speaker's gender and ethnicity. In COLT, data are available concerning the speaker's social group but speaker's ethnicity is not specified. The initials M and F stand for male and female, respectively, while A and NA represent Anglo and Non-Anglo, and MR mixed race.

Table 1b. Corpora used in the analysis

Corpus	Geographical area	Number of words	Collection method and material	Compilation date
COLT (The *Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language*)	London (Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Camden, Barnet, Havering, etc).	431,528	subjects recorded themselves. Spontaneous conversations	early 1990s
DCPSE sample (The *Diachronic Corpus of Present-Day Spoken English)*	Britain	425,519	recordings of spontaneous speech (face to face and assorted conversation exchanges)	25% (1958-1977) 75% (early 1990s)
LIC (*Linguistic Innovators Corpus*)	London (Hackney and Havering)	1,089,903	sociolinguistic individual, pair and small group interviews recorded by two British fieldworkers from London	2004-2007
MLEC (*Multicultural London English Corpus)*	London (Islington, Haringey and Hackney)	621,327	sociolinguistic individual, pair and small group interviews recorded by a British Asian fieldworker from Birmingham and one British field-worker	2007-2010

All the examples included in the study have been transcribed following their own corpus conventions and they are followed by an

identification code indicating the corpus from which they were taken: LI for LIC, ML for MLEC, CO for COLT and DC for DCPSE.

In the case of the *London English Corpus,* for data collection we used the *Sketch Engine Interface*, which allows us to make automatic searches for the intensifiers in question by entering each of the items in the search box and then ticking the rest of the boxes depending on the different variables considered. All those examples that did not meet our requirements, e.g. cases in which the items did not convey an intensifying function, were discarded. This process was done manually. Also, where a speaker repeated the same intensifier, a typical feature of speech, this was counted as just one example:

(1)   loads of friends round you getting troiled and . yeah [dunno] getting ***proper proper*** pissed out. (LI)

Four specific issues arose during our analysis. The first had to do with the nature of the spoken production itself, which tends to include incomplete and truncated sentences which are difficult to interpret and analyse, either because the context given is not sufficient or because relevant information is missing:

(2)   video's the only one //unclear// liked. ***proper*** I didn't really like video much. (LI)
(3)   she's doing a project she's got to be ***bare*** //unclear// yeah //laughs// no she's doing. (LI)

Second, a problem arose regarding the criteria used for our classification of the data, which in some cases differ from those used by others in the field (Paradis 2003), since we restricted our study to those lexical items which functioned only as adjective and adverb intensifiers, excluding other cases where they may have functioned as pragmatic markers or their scope went beyond the adjective or adjective phrase.

Third, when analysing the data according to the age variable, we had to disregard those examples which are not ascribed in the corpus to a particular speaker and were labelled as 'unknown' (see footnote 3), since in these cases the age variable could not be controlled. Nevertheless, these tokens were indeed included in the calculation of overall global

frequencies of the two lexical items in question, since in this case the speaker's age and gender are not relevant.

Fourth, some difficulties were found with corpus transcriptions, since in a few cases the verb *bear* with the meaning of 'tolerate', 'endure' is transcribed as *bare*:

(4)   if he can **bare** her uhm it's cos we're fucking walking. (LI)

As explained above, we will first provide a general overview of the intensifier system in each of the corpora selected and then we will focus in particular on *proper* and *bare*. To obtain a full picture of their role as intensifiers, other functions attested of these two items will also be discussed.

4. Results

4.1. Adjective and adverb intensifiers across all the corpora: Comparisons between adult and teenagers data

Our findings partially confirmed previous studies here, in the sense that adults on the whole use more intensifiers than teenagers (Paradis 2000; Stenström et al. 2002; Macaulay 2005; Palacios-Martínez & Núñez-Pertejo 2012). This is clearly observed in all the corpora except for LIC; the fact that the adult sample is formed by speakers over 70 years may account for this. From a statistical point of view, the differences between adults and teenagers are significant when comparing DCPSE and COLT, $X^2= 23.59$, df=1, p=<.0001 (more intensifiers in adult speech), and in comparing LIC (adult) and LIC (young), $X^2= 41.46$, df=1, p<.0001 (more intensifier use in teens). However, this does not apply to MLE (adult) and MLE (young) since $X^2= 0.89$, df=1, p= 0.3297.

Table 2. Main adjective intensifiers across all the
corpora considered (NFs per 10,000 words)

| Corpus size	DCPSE (adult) 425,519		COLT (young) 431,528		MLE (adult) 236,254		MLE (young) 239,802		LIC (adult) 223,768		LIC (young) 866,135	
	N	F	N	F	N	F	N	F	N	F	N	F
really	199	4.68	574	13.30	174	7.36	147	6.13	53	2.36	890	10.27
very	1661	39.03	406	9.41	327	13.84	98	4.08	239	10.68	264	3.05
so	514	12.08	606	14.04	80	3.39	151	6.0	198	8.84	952	11.00
all	20	0.47	40	0.93	1	0.04	1	0.04	0	0	4	0.05
pretty	97	2.28	74	1.71	16	0.68	6	0.25	8	0.35	84	0.97
enough/nuff	0	0	8	0.18	1	0.04	0	0	0	0	14	0.16
bare	0	0	0	0	1	0.04	40	1.66	0	0	42	0.46
proper	0	0	0	0	0	0	22	0.96	0	0	82	0.94
dead	3	0.07	3	0.07	0	0	1	0.04	7	0.31	2	0.02
right	0	0	15	0.35	0	0	0	0	3	0.13	10	0.11
fucking	66	1.55	412	9.55	6	0.25	138	5.75	0		281	3.24
bloody	9	0.2	285	6.60	1	0.04	10	0.42	3	0.13	80	0.92
well	3	0.07	25	0.58	5	0.21	2	0.08	5	0.22	76	0.88
absolutely	161	3.78	27	0.62	9	0.38	0	0	11	0.49	10	0.11
totally	35	0.82	21	0.49	9	0.38	0	0	9	0.40	18	0.21
completely	49	1.15	31	0.72	17	0.72	4	0.17	0	0	2	0.02
extremely	43	1.01	12	0.28	0	0	1	0.04	0	0	2	0.02
Total	2860	67.21	2539	58.83	646	27.34	621	25.89	536	23.95	2813	32.47
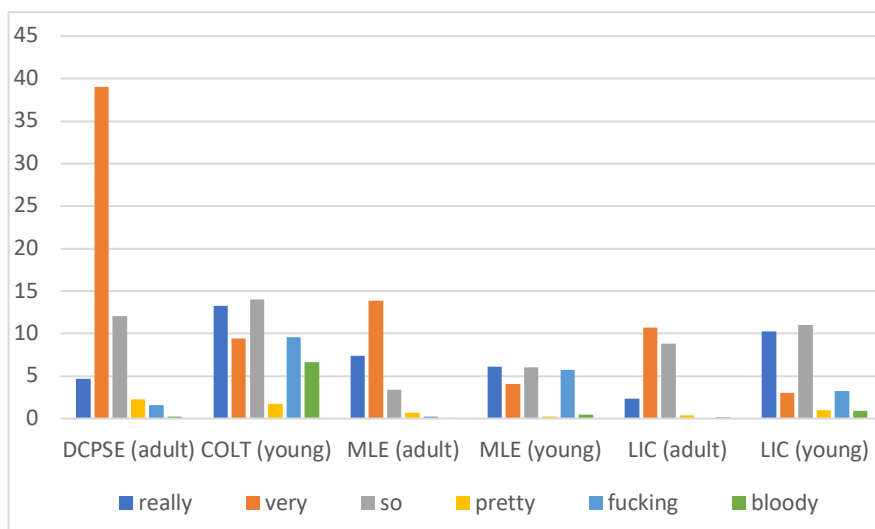
Figure 1. Most frequent adjective intensifiers across all the corpora considered

However, the numerical frequency of intensifiers in the two groups of speakers is of less immediate concern to us here than how they are actually used in speech. Thus, in all the teen corpora *really* and *so* are the most common while *very* occupies a secondary role; in contrast, in the adult data *very* is the most frequent followed by *so* and *really*. Apart from this, adverbs with *-ly* such as *absolutely*, *completely, totally* and *extremely* have a greater presence in the adult data. Moreover, special intensifier uses of *right* and *well* are also recorded in the teenagers' data across all the corpora (*right* in COLT and *well* in COLT and LIC):

(5) yeah it was ***right*** embarrassing. (CO)
(6) she was like "oh yeah that boy's ***well*** nice". (LI)

In this respect, we might note the language of adolescents in LIC, in which *well* reaches a high frequency, over four times more than in the expression of their adult counterparts, which confirms Tagliamonte's claim (2016: 84) that "old intensifiers do not fade away, but endure across centuries". As expected, *fucking* and *bloody* as taboo intensifiers are far more common in teen talk than in the expression of adults. The opposite applies to *pretty*, with a greater use among adults, who tend to use it more often in general, although curiously, in LIC young, speakers

use this intensifier almost three times more than in the adult sample (see Tagliamonte 2016: 89-92 for similar results on Canadian English and the TV series *Friends*, but not on her British English data).

The examples of *enough/nuff* as intensifiers in COLT and LIC young are also of interest, since they are not recorded in the other corpora with this value and function and, contrary to their usual post-head modifier position (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 397), they occur directly before the adjective they modify, as in:

(7)   It's ***enough*** easy you can get any drug easily. (LI)
(8)   It's ***enough*** funny I'm telling ya! (CO)

Finally, the data from the LIC and MLE corpora show that *bare* and *proper* are increasing considerably in use as intensifiers, although they are wholly restricted to young speakers. Notice how in MLEC, compiled between 2007-2010, the normalized frequency for *bare* as an intensifier is 1.66, over 3 times higher than that reported for LIC (0.46), this corpus compiled between 2004 and 2007. However, normalized frequencies for *proper* in the two corpora are almost the same: 0.96 in MLEC and 0.94 in LIC, hence showing no significant difference over the period. The following sections will deal with these two intensifiers in more detail. As mentioned above, attention will also be paid to other functions of these two items attested in the data.

4.2. Proper *and* bare

4.2.1. Proper

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), the adjective *proper* is of 'multiple origins' since it is partly a borrowing from French (*proper*) and partly a borrowing from Latin (*proprius*). It seems that it was introduced in English via Old French from the Latin form. It is first attested around 1225 with the meaning of 'suitable for a specified or implicit purpose or requirement; appropriate to the circumstances or conditions; of the requisite standard or type; apt, fitting; correct, right' (*OED*, s.v. *proper* adj. I.1). An example from our material is: *It wasn't done in the **proper** way* (LI). Other senses of this adjective are also recorded in the OED with the meaning of 'conforming to recognized social standards or etiquette; decent, decorous, respectable, seemly',

frequently in predicative use (OED, s.v. *proper* adj. I.2), e.g. *cos yeah it's not it's not **proper** it's not done yet* (ML). A third common meaning is that of 'strictly or accurately so called; in the strict sense of the word; genuine, real' (OED, s.v. *proper* adj. III.7c), e.g. *I got like … a white brother as well innit that's my best friend **proper*** (ML). Note how in this case it is possible to find this adjective in a postpositive position, as in the example given.

The OED also records the use of this lexical item as an intensifier of nouns in 'depreciative or derogatory contexts' (OED, s.v. *proper* adj. III.d, e.g. *She looked like a **proper** harlot, poor little thing, in her fishnets and her leather mini*, A. Carter *Wise Children*, 1992, i.39). This use is not found in our material.

In the LEC corpus, that is, taking both LIC and MLEC data, we record 407 valid cases from a total of 448 instances, with the remaining 41 tokens discarded because they were mainly repetitions or unclear cases (cf. the section on methodology above). The examples considered in our analysis are distributed according to the speakers' age group as follows:

Table 3. Distribution of *proper* according to the speakers' age group in LIC and MLEC (NFs per 10,000 words)

AGE GROUP	NUMBER OF TOKENS	NF
4-5	0	-
8-9	2	0.194
12-13	13	1.289
16-19	252	2.507
20-30	5	0.785
40-50	11	0.637
+ 70	12	0.536
unknown	112	-
Total	407	

The results presented in Table 3 which only refer to the LEC material, since *proper* as intensifier was only attested in this corpus, clearly show that *proper* obtains the highest frequency among teenagers. Thus, in the 16-19 age group the normalized frequency per 10,000 words is 2.507. This is followed by the 12-13 year-olds, with a frequency of 1.289, while in the young adult group this number decreases to 0.785. These figures are considerably lower in the case of the 40-50 and over 70 age groups,

with a proportion of 0.637 and 0.536, respectively. Note how the number of examples which cannot be assigned to any particular speaker is quite high, 121 tokens, 27.52% of the total, and it is for this reason that our results should be regarded as tentative. This also explains why normalized frequencies cannot be calculated here since it is extremely difficult to come up with the total number of words corresponding to this subset.

In light of these data, we can then say that in broad terms the general use of *proper* is strongly associated with the teenagers' group and describes a gradual declining as the speakers' ages rise.

In the analysis of our data, the following functions of *proper* were observed:

Adjective
As with most of the central adjectives in English, it occurs in attributive, predicative or postpositive position while it also shows gradation. Attributive use is by far the most common (9), followed by the predicative, as in (11) and (12):

(9) My brother is a slang person he he don't talk to you in ***proper*** English. (LI)

The attributive in (9) seems to fulfil the definition of proper as 'apt' or 'fitting', although it may also convey an intensifying meaning in itself if the speaker means 'real' English. Similar examples are quite common in the interactions of teenagers. So, someone is '*proper* cockney', some people use '*proper* words', we live in a '*proper* house', someone has a '*proper* job', etc. We also find cases in which it modifies not only a noun but a whole noun phrase formed by an adjective and a noun:

(10) He kind of made the school to be like a ***proper*** good school; ***proper*** good stuff; a ***proper*** tiny box room. (LI)

In the example above, the repetition of *proper* also helps to convey this intensifying function. Such an attributive use of the adjective contrasts with the predicative use in the following:

(11) Think myself as a Londoner some people go "oh yeah you are ***proper*** innit." (LI)

It is quite possible that in (11) 'Londoner' is implicitly understood from the previous clause, although this is not the case in (12), in which *proper* clearly stands on its own with the meaning of 'right', 'correct':

(12) Everything is ***proper***, ain't it? (CO)

Adjective intensifier

(13) I was really ***proper*** nervous. (LI)

Note how in this example *proper* occurs together with another degree adverb, *really*. We will return to this issue in the section that deals with the use of *proper* as an intensifier.

Verb modifier

(14) I can't extend my arm ***proper*** I can't reach up now. (LI)

When modifying a verb, it seems that *proper* often replaces *properly*, as in (14); the speaker is saying that she cannot extend her hand far enough (properly) to reach the other speaker. However, in some other contexts it may function as an intensifier:

(15) She ***proper*** hates him now. (LI)

The position with respect to the main verb seems to make a difference: when the intensifier precedes the verb, its intensifying function is more clearly observed than when it follows it, as in this latter case it is equivalent to an adverb of manner rather than to an adverb of degree. However, pre-verbal position is definitely more common than post-verbal; from a total of 88 tokens in which *proper* functions as a verb modifier, only in 4 cases is it found after the verb (*revise **proper**, dress **proper**, see it **proper**, extend it **proper***) as a short form for *properly*.

Modifying a prepositional phrase
There are very few examples in our data here, and they seem to be restricted to a number of prepositional phrases introduced by *out of* and *into*:

(16) My mate was ***proper*** *out of her face*. (LI)
(17) I dunno he's ***proper*** *into drugs*. (LI)

Other
In this category we have included cases in which the function of *proper* is not so clearly delimited. At times, it seems to function as a pragmatic marker (Brinton 1996) since the speaker runs out of words and resorts to *proper* as a filler word:

(18) With a boxing glove on it you know ***proper*** like. Conventional Essex boy. (LI)

It may also be regarded as a quotative or as part of a quotative (19), since it serves to introduce reported speech, that is, the words and thoughts of other speakers, although in these examples it is often accompanied by *like*:

(19) and then she was ***proper*** like. "yeah man yeah you know you get this and that." (LI)

Table 4 presents the different functions of *proper* according to age group.

Table 4. Functions of *proper* according to the age group variable in the *London English Corpus*

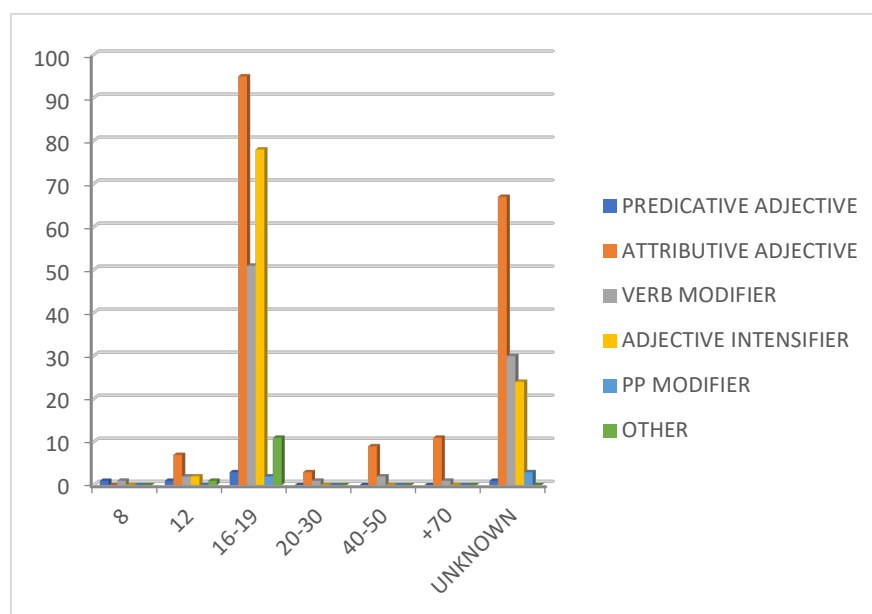| AGE GROUP	8	12	16-19	20-30	40-50	+70	unknown	TOTAL	%
predicative adjective	1	1	3	0	0	0	1	6	1.5
attributive adjective	0	7	95	3	9	11	67	192	47.2
verb modifier	1	2	51	1	2	1	30	88	21.6
adjective intensifier	0	2	78	0	0	0	24	104	25.5
PP modifier	0	0	2	0	0	0	3	5	1.3
other	0	1	11	0	0	0	0	12	2.9
Total	2	13	252	5	11	12	112	407	100

Figure 2. Functions of *proper* according to the age group variable in the *London English Corpus*

As expected, *proper* functions mainly as an attributive adjective (47.2%), then as an adjective intensifier (25.5%) and verb modifier (21.6%). The figures for the remaining functions are low and of little relevance for us.

If we consider age groups, it is again in the teenagers where *proper* as an adjective intensifier is found, with no examples at all recorded in the other groups.

Proper as adjective intensifier
This intensifier is found only in positive polarity utterances and occurs with adjectives of both negative (*dumb, dark, rude, hard, boring, injured, skinny, pissed, damaged, drugged, nervous, upset, confused, battered*) and positive semantic prosody (*confident, good, funny, nice, legal*). A small number of examples are also recorded with adjectives which can be considered as neutral (*similar*, *full*) although these are rather marginal. Here are some examples:

(20) They were ***proper*** *strict* in school. (LI)
(21) He's ***proper*** *dumb*. (LI)
(22) She was like ***proper*** *drugged up* and everything. (LI)
(23) I was like ***proper*** *confident*. (LI)
(24) That is ***proper*** *good*. (LI)

On the whole, the proportion of adjectives expressing negative semantic prosody is far higher than with a positive orientation. It is also important to note that most of these adjectives serve to describe a human quality or condition which in most cases is portrayed by the speaker as negative. We can say, then, that young speakers resort to the use of *proper* to describe and accentuate a person's negative traits. This intensifier occurs most frequently with *bad* (five tokens), *nice*, *strict* (four), *pissed* (three), and *serious*, *good, skinny* and *full* (two).

We also observe some cases in which the speaker loads a number of intensifiers into the same utterance, *proper* being one of them. Through the accumulation of intensifiers the intention is to reinforce the message. This phenomenon has also been reported in previous studies (Núñez-Pertejo & Palacios-Martínez 2014; Palacios-Martínez & Núñez-Pertejo 2015) and can be regarded as a defining feature in the expression of young speakers. Notice how in the sequence of intensifiers, *proper* always occurs in first position:

(25) The teacher used to get ***proper*** *really badly* pissed off by Charlotte. (LI)

(26) His mouth was just like ***proper** really badly* damaged. (LI)

Apart from its collocations, we also looked at the variables of gender and ethnicity. That is, we wanted to see the extent to which the use of this intensifier could be determined by the speaker's gender or ethnic origin (speakers whose family originally came from Britain vs. speakers whose family did not originally come from Britain). Table 5 summarises the main results:

Table 5. Distribution of *proper* as adjective intensifier according to speaker's gender, origin and ethnicity in the *London English Corpus*

Speaker	Sex	Anglo vs. Non-Anglo[4]	Tokens
Joan	female	√	1
Michelle	female	√	2
Kate	female	√	1
Donna	female	√	1
Emily	female	√	4
Kelly	female	√	2
Sophie	female	√	2
Lisa	female	√	2
Stephanie	female	√	1
Blane	female	√	1
Jake	male	√	1
Ian	male	√	3
Derek	male	√	1
Lewis	male	√	6
Errol	male	√	1
Kieran	male	√	4
Jerome	male	√	1
Sandra	female	X	1
Isabella	female	X	2
Hadiya	female	X	2
Bisa	female	X	1
Tina	female	X	3

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[4] The Non-Anglo group is formed by speakers of different ethnic origin such as Afro-Caribbean, Congolese, mixed race, Colombian, Moroccan, Portuguese, South Africa, etc. However, and due to the low number of tokens per ethnic group, a more fine-grained distinction and analysis would not be possible.

Sulema	female	X	1
Aimee	female	X	1
Angela	female	X	1
Eugene	male	X	1
Rufus	male	X	1
Grant	male	X	1
Alex	male	X	1
Rashid	male	X	1
Dom	male	X	2
Dexter	male	X	1
Omar	male	X	1
Mahir	male	X	1
Sadik	male	X	1

From a total of 78 tokens attested as adjective intensifier in the 16-19 age group, only 57 examples were considered because for the remaining 21 no precise information regarding these two variables was provided in the corpus, thus making the analysis impossible. The figures obtained show that we cannot really speak of significant differences between male and female speakers, since the number of examples for male and female speakers was 28 versus 29, respectively ($X^2= 0.03$, df=1, p= 1). However, differences seem to be more clearly marked for ethnicity, since the number of examples computed for speakers with a British background was 34, versus 23 for speakers with a non-British background, although this difference is in fact not statistically significant ($X^2= 0.68$, df= 1, p= 0.2987).

These two findings should be taken with caution, since the tokens are not distributed evenly among all the speakers. That is, there are some speakers, particularly in the group with a British background (see, for example, Lewis and Kieran), who tend to use this intensifier more often. Furthermore, it should also be borne in mind the existence of a high number of examples that could not be ascribed to any particular speaker. In light of this, we believe that neither gender nor ethnicity clearly condition the use of this intensifier in the group of London teenagers.

4.2.2. Bare
According to the OED, *bare* is an adjective of Germanic origin (OE *bær*), with the common meaning of 'without covering', 'unclothed',

'naked', 'nude', 'open to view' (OED, s.v. *bare* adj. A.I., e.g. *Robbers, who stripped him as **bare** as my hand*, *Arab. Nights* (Rtldg.) 229), 'stripped of surroundings, contents, property', 'empty' (OED, s.v. *bare* adj. A.II, e.g. *Mother Hubbard, When she got there the cupboard was **bare***, *Nursery Rime*), and 'without addition, mere, simple' (OED, s.v. *bare* adj. A.III, e.g. *Nature indeed furnishes us with the **bare** Necessaries of Life,* J. Addison, *Spectator* 69). The example that follows from LIC records this meaning of 'unclothed', 'naked', ascribed to the first use just reported in the OED:

(27) cover your arms up you're not supposed to walk around with ***bare*** arms. (LI)

Bare is also recorded as a verb (cf. OED, s.v. *bare* v. 1, e.g. *He bows, he **bares** his head*, Tennyson, *Becket*, iii. iii. 133), as an adverb (now rare; cf. OED, s.v. *bare* adv. B., e.g. *ʒet breued watʒ hit* ful ***bare*** A *meruayl among þo menne. Sir Gawain & Green Knight*), and with a nominal function, which is also rare (cf. OED, s.v. *bare* n. C., e.g. *If euer I toucht any **bare** on her aboue her knee,* F. Beaumont & Fletcher, *King and No King,* ii. sig. D1). Of these three uses, none is recorded in our material. By contrast, other uses of *bare* attested in our data are not recorded in the OED, e.g. 'quantifier' *bare* (see below) and 'intensifier' *bare* (see below). However, *Green's Dictionary of Slang* traces the former use, 'quantifier' *bare*, to Barbadian and black English usage (cf. Coleman 2012: 41), while Drummond (2017: 645) also ascribes the use of the slang word *bare* to Jamaican.[5]

In LEC we find a total of 334 valid tokens of *bare* (264 + 70 unknown) from a total of 384. The remaining ten tokens were discarded because they were mainly repetitions, unclear cases with not enough context provided, or even mistranscriptions (*bare/bear*; cf. the section on methodology above). The 334 valid tokens were distributed according to age group as follows:

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[5] The slang nature of *bare* seems to be quite pervasive, since it was included in a list of banned words published by a school in south London, together with *coz, extra, innit, like*, etc. (*The Guardian*, 15/10/2013; <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/oct/15/london-school-bans-pupils-slang-innit>).

Table 6. Distribution of *bare* according to age group in LEC (NFs per 10,000 words)

AGE GROUP	NUMBER OF TOKENS	NF
4-5	2 (MLE)	0.47
8-9	14 (MLE)	1.36
12-13	30 (MLE)	2.98
16-19	214 (88 MLE: 6.33; 126 LIC: 1.45)	2.13
20-30	1 (MLE)	0.16
40-50	2 (MLE)	0.11
+70	1 (LIC)	0.04
unknown	70	-
Total	334	

As with *proper*, the use of *bare* is most frequent among speakers aged 12-13 and 16-19 years old (NFs: 2.98 and 2.13, respectively), that is, adolescents and teenagers. These are followed by the speakers aged 8-9 (NF: 1.36), and the speakers aged 4-5 and the young adults (20-30), with only two and one token attested (NFs: 0.47 and 0.16, respectively). Notice the high number of unknown cases that amount to a total percentage of 20% and which do not allow us to come to conclusive results. In spite of this, once again, the age factor seems to be highly significant, since the use of *bare* is strongly associated with teenagers and becomes less frequent as the speakers become older, most noticeably in the +70 group of speakers (NF: 0.04).

We will now turn to the different uses and functions of *bare* in the LEC data, with special emphasis on its intensifying use.

Adjective
Used as an adjective, which is a rather infrequent use in the corpus with only two tokens recorded, *bare* is always found attributively:

(28) whereas when you went to Jamaica you had this [yeah] this wide open space mm . water, **bare** feet mhm all that experience. (ML)

Quantifier
This is a very interesting function (also referred to as *adjective*; cf. Coleman 2012: 41, or *determiner*), and the most frequently attested one in the corpus, with a total of 194 tokens out of 264. Used in this way, which is typical of "contemporary British slang" (Coleman 2012: 41), *bare* means 'many', 'a lot of', 'loads of', thus conveying some sort of

quantifying meaning. It may accompany a single noun or a full noun phrase, and the nouns it modifies can be both countable, as in (29) and (30), and uncountable, as in (31) and (32):

(29) er I got . others as well/ got bare ***bare*** *friends* okay. (ML)
(30) two boys come behind me and tried to put their hand in my pocket . and /take my phone well the bus is just long/ and then the bus is bait like . you just see ***bare*** *people*. oh I just hate London transport. (LI)
(31) I can hear ***bare*** *noise*. (LI)
(32) not unless it's like tiny blood /x like ***bare*** *blood*. (ML)

It is worth mentioning that quantifier *bare* typically modifies the noun *people*, as in (30) above, and it also occurs in phrases such as *bare black people*, *bare Nigerian people*, *bare white people*, *bare Asian people*, etc., all of them from LIC.

Especially noticeable is the use of the form *bares*, also with the meaning of 'many'. There are six tokens of this use in LIC, all in the 16-to-19 age group and belonging to the same speaker (Rufus, Black South African), as in examples (33) and (34) below:

(33) when it comes to money I don't even know where I get money to be honest . I just . end up with money innit . ***bares*** of it I don't even know. (LI)
(34) oh yeah yeah yeah I had a b in history you know . and geography . had a . the mx subjects were /maths science english/ I failed ***bares*** mm I didn't get an any c's. (LI)

In (33), the antecedent of *bares* is *money*, which is uncountable, while in (34) it refers to *subjects*, a countable noun in the plural.

Other
Under 'other' we have grouped just three tokens, two of which show what can be considered a 'metalinguistic' use of *bare*, as in (35), while the third is found preceding quotative *like* (36):

(35) we've brought out . some slang slang words . that mean the same as their slang words but we say it in a different way . they're like "what are you saying do you understand? what do you mean

""***bare*** ?"" and like that and we're like "what do you mean what?"
they're like "oh shut up" . "***bare*** . what . what do you mean you're
bare? You've got clothes on" . and we're like "no man we don't
mean that we mean loads" . they're like "why don't you just say
loads then?" (LI)

(36) one boy comes to my house my mum's got my mum's bow-legged .
and he was ***bare like*** "ah love your legs" my mum was like "don't
come back to my house." (ML)

In (35) the speaker, Jess, explains that *bare* does not mean 'naked' but is
used with a quantifying sense, thus meaning 'loads', as in examples (29)
to (32) above.

Table 7 shows the distribution of all these uses and functions of *bare*
in terms of age:

Table 7. Functions of *bare* according to the age group variable

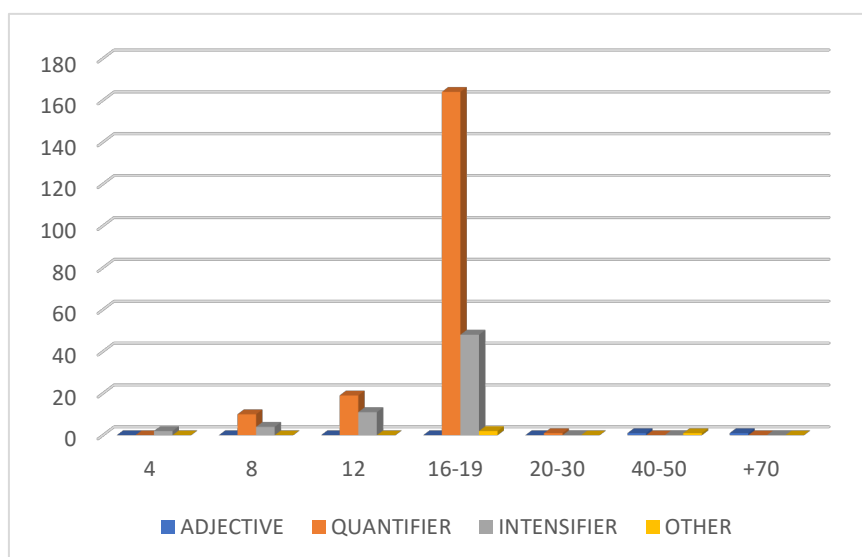| AGE GROUP	4	8	12	16-19	20-30	40-50	+70	TOTAL	%
adjective (always attributive)						1	1	2	0.75
quantifier		10	19	164	1			194	73.49
adjective intensifier	2	4	11	48				65	24.62
other				2		1		3	1.14
TOTAL	2	14	30	214	1	2	1	264	100

Figure 3. Functions of *bare* according to the age group variable

Bare is most frequently attested as a quantifier in the corpus, with more than 73% of the total, followed by the intensifier function (24.62%). Other uses (adjective, other) are far less common, with five tokens attested, amounting to only 1.89% of the total. As can be seen, most uses of *bare* are concentrated in the 16-19 group of speakers, followed by the 12-year olds, as already mentioned, while the number of tokens clearly decreases for the three groups of adult speakers considered.

Intensifier
Used as an intensifier, *bare* collocates with adjectives of both positive (*good*, *nice*) and negative (*dangerous*, *scary*, *vexed*, *boring*) semantic prosody, especially with the latter, which seem to be more frequent (*stoned*, *pissed*), as was the case with *proper* (see above). However, the number of tokens is in general quite limited: five in the case of *good* and two for *nice*, *vexed* and *stoned*. Finally, *bare* also occurs with neutral adjectives but in a lower proportion, e.g. *long*, *big*, *low*, *high*, etc. Here are two examples:

(37) they're good looking yeah **bare** *good looking* man . are there so
    many. (LI)
(38) there's another teacher innit . we didn't like him . and then he was
    bare *mean* innit? (LI)

There is a single instance (out of a total of 65 tokens as adjective
intensifier considering all age groups) in which *bare* modifies not an
adjective but a prepositional phrase:

(39) when I was in year nine I loved maths . but then when I got up in
    the upper I got **bare** *out of maths*. (LI)

Apart from collocations, gender and ethnicity were also considered, as
illustrated in Table 7.

Table 7. Distribution of *bare* as adjective intensifier according to
speaker's gender, origin and ethnicity

Speaker	Sex	Anglo vs. Non-Anglo[6]	Tokens
Donna	female	√	3
Kate	female	√	2
Emily	female	√	3
Marina	female	√	4
Kelly	female	√	1
Mandy	female	√	1
Stacey	female	√	1
Dale	male	√	4
Kieran	male	√	3
Dave	male	√	1
Dean	male	√	2
Zack	male	√	1
Howard	male	√	2
William	male	√	5
Barry	male	√	3
Bisa	female	X	1
Isabella	female	X	1
Tammy	female	X	1

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[6] Please see footnote 4.

Lucinda	female	X	1
Courtney	female	X	1
Chelsea	female	X	2
Aimee	female	X	1
Angela	female	X	1
Rufus	male	X	5
Roshan	male	X	3
Junior	male	X	1
Tau	male	X	1
Mahir	male	X	2
Dumaka	male	X	1
Christopher	male	X	5
Rasgur	male	X	2

In terms of gender, 24 tokens are recorded for female speakers and 41 for males, and although this might suggest that the use of *bare* as an intensifier is more a male feature, these differences are not statistically significant (X^2= 0.04, df=1, p= 0.6714). Furthermore, there are several male individuals in the data (William, Rufus, Christopher) who tend to use it notably more often than others.

As regards ethnicity, 36 tokens are ascribed to speakers whose family originally came from Britain, while the remaining 29 correspond to speakers whose family did not originally come from Britain, thus there is no significant difference between these two groups of speakers (X^2= 0.18, df=1, p= 0.522) here. Therefore, and despite the apparently Jamaican origin of *bare* as a slang word, its use seems to be widely spread and well-established among white British adolescents. Moreover, we have recorded instances of the intensifying use of *bare* on internet forums where speakers of a Jamaican origin participate, and also in the lyrics of songs of some hip-hop and reggae artists whose music is influenced by the Afro-Caribbean music, such as the artist Bounty Killer, who uses it in the song *Bare gyal ah mad ova me*. Furthermore, in the Jamaican component of the *Corpus of Global Web-Based English* (GloWbE) we have also recorded a few examples of *bare* as an intensifier (*bare unpleasant*, *bare young*, *bare classic, bare batty*).

5. Conclusion

Our study confirms the innovative nature of *Multicultural London English* (dialect contact between different varieties of English, young age) and its interest from a sociolinguistic perspective.

This paper also bears out, although only partially, previous results regarding the differences in the use of intensifiers between adult and young speakers. The analysis of our data reveals the existence of two new intensifiers in MLE, *proper* and *bare*, which are clearly associated with young speakers. In fact, usage seems to be more closely associated with speakers of a young age (16-19 age group), since it starts to decline as the age of speakers increases. This innovation, to our knowledge, has not previously been recorded in the literature. Note also how the uses of these intensifiers are acquired at an early age, since examples of *bare* and *proper* are recorded in children of four and twelve, respectively.

The use of these two adjectives as intensifiers is not merely anecdotal since in both cases it corresponds to 25% of the total; that is, one out of four tokens of the two words has an intensifying force in MLE. Moreover, our figures indicate that in comparing the data obtained from LIC, compiled in 2004-2007, with that of MLEC, compiled between 2007-2010, their use persists over time, and in the case of *bare* it even increases substantially. These two intensifiers can both collocate with adjectives of positive and negative semantic prosody, although the latter is far more prevalent.

MLE teenagers very often resort to *proper* as intensifier to accentuate a person's negative traits. In the analysis of *bare* we also identified its high frequency as a quantifier, which may be assumed to be the origin of the intensifier function. Moreover, in line with what is known to be a relatively frequent feature of the language of teenagers, we have here a case in which the speakers play with opposites, that is, the general meaning of *bare* is *naked*, *nude*, *uncovered* and is used in the contrary sense. As mentioned above, the same applies to other words, such as *sick* and *wicked*, for 'good', 'cool'. In broad terms, teenagers generally do this to go against the prevailing norms, and also as a way of reinforcing their identity as a group distinct from adults. The former phenomenon might be seen as a case of 'amelioration', that is, a semantic change that happens when a word's meaning improves or becomes more positive over time (Crowley & Bowern 2010: 200). In the case of *bare*

we cannot really speak of a long evolution over time, yet the semantic change is clear.

No conclusive findings were obtained regarding the role of the gender and ethnic variables, since the number of tokens is quite limited. Our results do seem to indicate that the intensifying use of *proper* is more typical of speakers with a British background, and that male speakers tend to use *bare* as intensifier more often than females. However, these differences were not statistically significant.

The emergence of these two intensifiers is connected with the nature of MLE, in which the coexistence of multiple varieties of English and the mutual influence of its speakers (many of them at a young age) play an important role.

Young speakers of MLE are perfectly aware of *bare* as being clearly distinctive in their lexicon. Its pervasiveness is so conspicuous that in some schools its use has been banned along with certain other words, such as *innit*, *coz*, *extra*, *like*, etc. (cf. footnote 5). It would be interesting to explore the issue of whether these two intensifiers are also found in other varieties of English and, more particularly, in other large cities of Britain such as Manchester and Birmingham, in line with the emergence of *Multicultural Urban British English* or MUBE (see the introductory section above).

From a methodological point of view, research instruments other than corpora, such as forums, song films and TV series, could also be explored as further sources of data.

Sources

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