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A diachronic analysis of the adjective intensifier well *from Early Modern English to Present Day English*

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Abstract

While the use of *well* as an intensifier of most adjectives had supposedly died out by Early Modern English (Fettig 1934: 186, Mustanoja 1960: 327, Stenström 2000: 188, Ito and Taglimonte 2003: 278), no studies have empirically examined its frequency diachronically. The present study traces its use from Early Modern English (1560) to Present Day English, (2014) using five speech-related corpora in addition to various dialectal sources and audio/video clips. Results indicate that this use was retained in some dialects of English despite not being attested in the *Corpus of English Dialogues* nor the *Old Bailey Corpus,* which document predominantly the incipient standard variety. A qualitative analysis of its use reveals a potential diachronic shift in its stress pattern and the scale structure of its intensified heads. Moreover, the present study discusses some of the methodological challenges which arise when using historical corpora to investigate linguistic change, drawing particular attention to sample representativeness and data analysis.

Keywords: intensifiers, linguistic change, historical linguistics, corpus linguistics, history of English

Résumé

Bien que l'on ait cru que l'usage de *well* 'bien/très' comme modificateur intensifiant d'une majorité d'adjectifs avait disparu au temps de l'anglais moderne naissant (Fettig 1934: 186, Mustanoja 1960: 327, Stenström 2000: 188, Ito et Taglimonte 2003: 278), aucune étude n'a

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examiné de façon empirique sa fréquence diachronique. L'étude actuelle trace l'usage de *well* depuis l'anglais moderne naissant (1590) jusqu'à l'anglais moderne (2014) en utilisant cinq corpus de langue parlée, en plus de plusieurs sources audio-vidéo de l'anglais dialectal. Les résultats indiquent que cet usage de *well* a été maintenu dans certains dialectes de l'anglais, malgré son absence du *Corpus of English Dialogues* et du *Old Bailey Corpus*, qui documentent principalement la naissance du dialecte standard. Une analyse qualitative de son usage révèle un déplacement diachronique de son modèle accentuel, et la structure scalaire des têtes qu'il modifie. L'étude actuelle expose quelques défis méthodologiques qui se présentent quand on utilise des corpus historiques pour enquêter sur les changements linguistiques, en attirant l'attention sur la représentativité des échantillons et sur l'analyse des données.

Mots clés: intensificateur, changement linguistique, linguistique historique, corpus linguistiques, histoire de l'anglais

1. INTRODUCTION

Previous synchronic studies have pointed out that in Present Day British English (PDE) the adverbial *well* can function as an adjective intensifier (Stenström 2000; Stenström, Andersen and Hasund 2002; Stratton 2018).[1] Some examples of its use include *they're well nice* (Stenström 2000: 187), *I am well glad* and *this is well knackering* (Stratton 2018: 803). While this use of *well* has been attested throughout various historical stages of the English language, according to Fettig (1934: 15–21) and Mustanoja (1960: 319–328), its highly frequent use declined around the mid-14th century, but remained as an intensifier of participial adjectives and a limited number of regular adjectives, such as *aware* and *worthy* (Stenström 2000: 177). In the present study, regular adjectives are defined as adjectives which are not morphologically derived from verbs (e.g., *happy*, *tall*, *big*) in contrast to deverbal or participial adjectives (e.g., *educated*, *impressed*) which are so derived; the latter being what Biber et al. (1999: 530) refer to as "derived adjectives". Despite this decrease in frequency and constrained distribution, Stenström (2000: 177–190) noted its "revival" among British speakers in a corpus study from the late 20th century.[2] Referring to the use of *well* as an intensifier of regular adjectives as a "revival" suggests that between its decrease in frequency in the mid-14th century (Mustanoja 1960: 319-327), and its apparent resurgence in the late 20th century (Stenström 2000), its use as an intensifier of regular adjectives ceased to exist (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003: 278). However, this is a diachronic question which has not yet been investigated. Because post 15th century grammars and linguistic commentary do not document this intensifying use of *well* (Kühner 1934: 102-104, Kirchner 1955: 85, *Collins COBUILD English language dictionary* 1987: 1655, *Longman dictionary of contemporary English* 1987: 1195), its present-

[1]Abbreviations used: PDE: Present Day British English; EmodE: Early Modern English (1500-1700 CE); LmodE: Late Modern English (1700-1900 CE). Abbreviations of the names of corpora are found at the end of the article.

[2]The term "revival" in reference to the late 20th century use of *well* appears in Denison (1999: 59), Stenström, Andersen and Hasund (2002: 158), Méndez-Naya (2003: 377), and Ito and Tagliamonte (2003: 278).

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day use is often perceived as an "innovation" (Milroy 1992: 198, Paradis 2008: 322, Aijmer 2018: 84). However, a question which emerges is whether this current intensifying use reflects a continued development from Middle English, or whether it is an innovation on the part of modern language users, resulting in the return of same use of *well* seen pre-15th century, but via different paths.

According to Labov (1994: 11), "historical linguistics can be thought of as the art of making the best use of bad data". Since "historical documents survive by chance and not by design", historical linguists are limited to the data which are preserved. However, to exacerbate the problem, only a portion of the preserved manuscripts are represented in historical corpora, an acknowledgement which has led to Lauersdorf's recommendation of using "all the data" in a historical analysis (Lauersdorf 2018a: 112; Lauersdorf 2018b: 211–213). While corpora have undoubtedly revolutionized the methodological plane of historical linguistics (Curzan and Palmer 2006, Curzan, 2008, Rissanen, 2012), they can also present various challenges and shortcomings (Joseph and Janda 2003, Rissanen 2008). Even the texts which are included in corpora can often present issues of faithfulness if they have undergone editorial intervention (Kytö and Pahta 2012: 125-127). Further issues can subsequently arise with corpus annotation and quantification (Stratton, in press). In the present study, the diachronic analysis of *well* is contextualized in relation to these methodological challenges and caveats.

This article addresses two specific questions. Firstly, other than being an intensifier of a limited set of regular adjectives such as *aware* and *able* (Stenström 2000), is there any evidence to suggest that *well* as an intensifier of other regular adjectives really disappeared between Early Modern English (EModE) and Present Day British English (PDE)? Secondly, which methodological challenges arise in investigating its use diachronically, and why is it crucial to account for these before arriving at any conclusions? Section 2 starts by laying out the terminological framework used to describe intensifiers, followed by a review of the literature on *well*, and a review of the literature on the recycling of intensifiers. Section 3 outlines the methodology by introducing the corpora and sources which were used and provides a description of the data collection process. The results are provided in Section 4, which are subsequently discussed in Section 5 in light of the two research questions. The findings and conclusions are then summarized in Section 6.

2. THE INTENSIFIER *WELL*

The following section divides into three parts. First, 2.1 reviews the terminology used to describe intensifiers. Second, 2.2 reviews the previous literature on the diachrony of the intensifier *well*, covering its use from Middle English to Present Day English. Third, 2.3 discusses the ebb and flow of linguistic forms. These three subsections subsequently set the stage for the present analysis.

2.1 What are intensifiers?

The use of intensifiers in the English language has been a topic of much linguistic discourse (Stoffel 1901, Bolinger 1972, Paradis 1997, Lorenz 2002, Nevalainen

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and Rissanen 2002, Ito and Tagliamonte 2003, Tagliamonte and Roberts 2005, Xiao and Tao 2007, Méndez-Naya 2008, Fuchs 2017, Stratton, 2020). Before discussing the intensifier *well*, it is useful to discuss what intensifiers are; there is, however, little consensus regarding the appropriate terminology. Stoffel (1901) originally referred to intensifiers as "intensive adverbs", Bolinger (1972: 18) referred to them as "degree words", and Paradis (1997) referred to them as "degree modifiers". According to the terminology of Quirk et al. (1985: 590), intensifiers can be subdivided into "amplifiers" and "downtoners". The former "scale upwards from the assumed norm", as in *that's very interesting*, whereas the latter scale "downwards from the assumed norm", as in *that's somewhat interesting*. Amplifiers are then further subdivided into "boosters" and "maximizers". Boosters "denote a high degree, a high point on the scale", as in *that's very good*, and maximizers "denote the upper extreme point on the scale" as in *he's completely drunk*.

Accordingly, the adjective intensifier *well* is an amplifier; more specifically, a booster. However, in the present study the more generic label 'intensifier' or 'degree modifier' is used throughout to describe the use of *well* as an intensifier of adjectives. This practice is consistent with previous scholarship on *well* (Stenström 2000, Stenström, Andersen and Hasund 2002, Ito and Tagliamonte 2003, Stratton 2018). However, it should be noted that the adverbial *well* can also function as an intensifier of other parts of speech such as verbs, adverbs and prepositional phrases, the latter two often in metaphorical senses such as *well underway* and *well on track*. The fact that in PDE *well* can intensify regular adjectives as well as verbs may pose a problem for the traditional test used to examine whether a participle is a deverbal adjective. This is because traditionally, participles are considered to have become deverbal adjectives if they can be modified by *very* as opposed to *well*. Therefore, *I am well confused* becomes ambiguous in PDE since it would have been unambiguously considered a passive (i.e., someone/something has confused me well) but because *well* can intensify adjectives *I am well confused* could mean 'I'm very confused' (i.e., copula + intensifier + deverbal adjective).

2.2 The adjective intensifier *well*

Stenström (2000) noted the possible "revival" of the adjective intensifier *well* in a corpus study of British English from the late 20th century, and a more recent study suggests that this intensifier has increased in frequency over the last two decades (Aijmer 2018). While it is currently used as an adjective intensifier, such use is not a new phenomenon, as it has been attested throughout various stages of the history of the English language. Some examples from Middle English are reported in (1). The examples show *well* intensifying regular adjectives, as in *wel old* (1a), *wel joyous* (1b) and *well happy* (1c), which is different from the intensification of participial adjectives, as in *he is well acquainted with the facts* and *I was well impressed*, which are morphologically derived from verbs.[3]

[3]The use of *well* as an intensifier of adjectives is also attested in Scottish Middle English dialects. For instance, the utterances *wyth a welle gret multytud* 'with a very great multitude'

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(1) (a) *in þat forest…þer woned a* ***wel old*** *cherl*
'a very old man lived in that forest'
Walter William Skeat, *William of Palerne* (1375), OED

(b) *he was* ***well joyous***
'he was very happy'
Caxton, *The history of Jason* (1477), Kühner 1934

(c) ***well happy*** *should myn herte be*
'my heart should be very happy'
Caxton, *Blanch* 10, 41 (1489), Kühner 1934

According to Fettig (1934:15-21) and Mustanoja (1960: 319-327), the adjective intensifier *well* became most popular in the 13th century in the South and South Midlands of England when *swiþe* '*very*' lost its popularity. Then, by the mid-14th century, *well* reduced in frequency and eventually gave way to the intensifiers *ful* and *riht* (Fettig 1934: 186). In the 15th century, *well* was reportedly rarely used outside collocations such as *wel worth*, *wel wār* and *wel content* (Fettig: 1934, 186, Mustanoja 1960: 327). To use the words of Fettig (1934: 186), "*in Shakespeares Zeit ist* wel *als Intensiv nur noch selten anzutreffen*" (in Shakespeare's time, the intensifier *well* is found only seldom).[4] Nonetheless, *well* continued to intensify a limited number of regular adjectives such as *aware* and *able*. These collocations (e.g., *well aware* and *well able*) are still considered Standard English today (Stenström 2000: 178). In the present study, this limited set of adjectives which are intensified by *well* is referred to as the vestigial collocations. This description is used to disambiguate the regular adjectives which *well* continued to modify after its decline in frequency in the mid-14th century (e.g., *well aware, well able*, *well worthy*, etc.) from the apparently 'newer' regular adjectives *well* intensifies today in PDE (e.g., *well cute*, *well tacky*, *well jazzy*). The term 'newer' is borrowed from Aijmer (2018: 86) who describes its 21st century use as "the new *well*".[5]

On the one hand, it is possible that these vestigial collocations have remained throughout the history of the English language because they have become fixed due to their high frequency. As Méndez-Naya (2003: 377) points out, a decrease in frequency of intensifiers results in a reduction of collocates, and the collocates which remain are restricted, and exist only because they have become fossilized throughout time. The vestigial collocations (e.g., *well aware*, *well able*, *well worthy*) belong to a

(584) and *for-in-till well gret space thare-by* 'for until a very great space thereby' (656) are found in the 1420s; according to Jamieson's *Etymological dictionary of the Scottish language* (1808), *weill/wele/welle* frequently modified the adjectives *gud* 'good' and *gret* 'great'.

[4]For some examples of these low-frequency tokens in the 15th and 16th century, see Kühner (1934). For instance, *he was not well contente with it*. Other examples of these low-frequency tokens can also be found in *The Cely Papers* (Malden 1900), as in *my lord ys well content that…* (147) and *well content and right glad therof* (152). A reviewer also kindly pointed out that a search in the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence* provides a picture of these surviving vestigial collocations.

[5]For more information on the vestigial collocations, see the OED (*well* adv. IV 16b).

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formal register whereas the 'newer' use of *well* belongs to an informal register (e.g., *well classy*, *well cool*, *well lush*, *well saucy*, *well gross* and *well dodgy*).

On the other hand, however, there is some collocational evidence to suggest that scale structure may have also played a role. This is because what adjectives such as *aware*, *able* and *worthy* have in common is that they have a closed scale structure, that is to say, a scale which has a minimum and maximum value. In contrast, adjectives such as *intelligent* and *rich* have an open scale structure since they do not have a minimum and maximum threshold. In other words, there is no limit to intelligence and wealth, which is also true for *tall*, for instance, since there is no maximal degree of tallness. In contrast, words like *bent* have a closed scale structure, because something is either bent or it is not (i.e., there is a minimum and maximum value). Adjectives which have an open scale structure can be called "relative adjectives" whereas adjectives which have a closed scale structure can be called "absolute adjectives" (Kennedy and McNally 2005, McNally and Kennedy 2002: 85). According to the diagnostics laid out in work by Kennedy and McNally (1999, 2002, 2005), closed scale adjectives permit intensification with *completely* and *fully*, whereas open scale adjectives permit intensification only with *very*. Using slightly different terminology, this difference in scale structure maps onto work by Paradis (1997, 2001, 2008) where absolute adjectives, referred to as "bounded", can be modified by "totality modifiers", and relative adjectives, referred to as "unbounded", can be modified by "scalar modifiers" (Paradis 2008: 321-322). This difference between bounded and unbounded adjectives is conceptually similar to that of open and closed scale adjectives whereby bounded adjectives have "an absolute maximum or…minimum" and unbounded adjectives are "scalar" (Paradis 2008: 322). Therefore, with regard to *well* in semantic terms, it is possible that after its decline in frequency in the mid-14th century, *well* continued to intensify only adjectives with a closed scale/bounded structure. This would account for why *well* continues to intensify adjectives such as *aware*, in most, if not all varieties of English today, whereas, using *well* to intensify adjectives which have an open scale/unbounded structure is infelicitous in non-British varieties of English (Kennedy and McNally 1999: 170, McNally and Kennedy 2008: 85).

A prediction of this scalar explanation is that, once delexicalized, decaying intensifiers recede to certain sectors of the semantic space, that is, intensification of adjectives with only a closed scale structure. While this is an empirical question subject to diachronic analysis, intuitively one might expect that, in receding uses, open scale intensification is less frequent than closed scale intensification, since open scale adjectives operate on a gradable scale which is context-dependent (i.e., the meaning changes contextually). Therefore, this context-sensitivity makes open scale adjectives challenging to define because when the standard of comparison is not fixed, the truth conditions may vary (Kennedy 2007: 2). In contrast, closed scale adjectives consist of two clearly defined minimum and maximum values which provide coordination points for resolving issues of semantic uncertainty (Kennedy 2007: 42). Since intensifiers modulate the threshold of a scale, they are sensitive to an open/closed scale distinction (Kennedy and McNally 1999, Kennedy and McNally 2005). Thus, in short, the lack of context needed when

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intensifying open scale adjectives with *well* may be a reason why the vestigial collocations remain unaffected in the language, while *well* as an intensifier of open scale adjectives reduced in frequency to the point where it was thought to have fallen out of use.

In addition to the vestigial collocations, after its decline in frequency in the mid-14th century, *well* also continued to modify participial adjectives (Ingersoll 1978: 196). However, as Bolinger (1972: 29) points out, *well* does not always function as a marker of degree (or "fulfilment") with participles, as it can sometimes function as an adverb of manner (or "approval"). The examples in (2) illustrate this. In (2a), *well* is contrasted with *poorly* or *badly* and expresses the idea of approval, that is, the book was written well, and we approve of the way in which it was written. Using different terminology, Kennedy and McNally (1999), and Cattell (1999: 61), might describe this "manner" use of *well* as expressing "quality" as opposed to "quantity". Whereas, in (2b), *well* expresses that John was not only mauled by the lion, but to a high degree or intensity, which thus presents a degree reading. When examining the diachronic use of the intensifier *well*, it is therefore important to bear this distinction in mind, since its manner use is not functionally equivalent to its use as a manner adjunct. However, as Bolinger (1972: 9) points out, there are times when it is difficult to distinguish between the two readings. An example given by Kennedy and McNally (1999: 177) is *a well-loaded truck*, which can entail that the truck was loaded in a good manner (i.e., the truck was loaded appropriately) but at the same time can also entail that the truck was loaded to a high degree (i.e., the truck was loaded to the point where there is little to no room left).

(2) (a) the book was **well written** (Approval = Manner)

(b) John was **well mauled** by the lion (Fulfillment = Degree)

2.3 Recycling of intensifiers

In the words of Stenström, Andersen and Hasund (2002: 158), it is "intriguing" that the adjective intensifier *well* is found in British speech in the late 20th century despite it apparently falling "out of use". However, the recycling of intensifiers throughout the history of a language is not uncommon (Mustanoja 1960: 319-327, Peters 1994, Ito and Tagliamonte 2003, D'Arcy 2015). It has been argued that one of the reasons for the constant recycling of intensifiers is what Bolinger (1972: 18) refers to as "fevered invention"; this is, according to Tagliamonte (2012: 334) "a process driven by speakers' desires to be original, demonstrate verbal skills and to capture attention". "The reuse and recycling of forms is a reason why Modern English has such a wide array of intensifiers" (Romero 2012: 10) which are "locally idiosyncratic" (Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010: 254). If speakers overuse intensifiers, the intensifiers begin to lose their novelty, which is why "speakers must reinvent them from time to time" (Tagliamonte 2016: 92). Peters (1994: 271) points out that the recycling and renewal of intensifiers is particularly prominent after EMoDE. Therefore, the fact that *well* decreased in frequency after the mid-14th century (Mustanoja 1960: 319-327) but was found again in PDE (Stenström 2000: 178) is in line with the phenomenon of recycling. As Tagliamonte (2008: 389-391) points

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out, some intensifiers do not disappear but instead remain at the speakers' disposal as low- frequency variants which "are available to be co-opted back into the active system" at any time. Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010: 268-271) illustrate this with the intensifier *dead* which dates back to the 16th century (Blanco-Suárez 2014: 18), but subsequently went below the observable radar, to be then picked up in the 20th century. However, it should be noted that although intensifiers are known to fluctuate and compete in frequency, they are not unique in their ability to be recycled, since various linguistic forms and structures wax and wane throughout time (Hickey 2002: 105-128, Mair 2004: 135-136, Buchstaller and Traugott 2006: 363-364).

A relevant question to ask is how it came to be that *well* was chosen to be "revived" over other functionally equivalent variants. The question of why a particular change takes place in a particular language or variety at a particular time is what Weinreich, Labov and Herzog (1968: 102) refer to as the "actuation problem". To investigate how and why this change took place, it is necessary to investigate the system of intensifiers as a whole, since it is widely understood that a change in frequency of an intensifier can trigger a change or rearrangement of the system of intensifiers within a speech community due to their multi-dimensional nature (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003, Tagliamonte 2008, Méndez-Naya and Pahta 2010). From a variationist standpoint, to answer what actuated its "revival", it is also necessary to examine the social factors such as the sex and age of the speaker, which may condition its use (Tagliamonte and Roberts 2005, Tagliamonte 2008, Fuchs 2017). While the question of why this change took place is beyond the scope of the present study, such macro questions should be examined in future research.

3. Methodology

The following section lays out the methodology, divided into two subsections. First, the sources of linguistic data used in the present analysis are delineated and justified in 3.1. Second, the data collection process, which involves a discussion of the data included or not included in the pool of analysis, is reported in 3.2.

3.1 The corpora

Given that apart from the vestigial collocations, the use of *well* as an intensifier of regular adjectives is not considered Standard English (Stenström 2000: 178), it is likely that its use is more prevalent in spoken language. Moreover, as D'Arcy (2015: 451) points out, "intensification is primarily a dialogic phenomenon, rendering vernacular evidence particularly valuable". For this reason, the present study focuses predominantly on spoken or speech-related language. As with the growing empirical interest in the use of language in fictional television as a means of investigating synchronic variation and change (Tagliamonte and Roberts 2005, Reichelt and Durham 2016, Stratton 2018), the use of speech-related historical texts has also proven to be a fruitful proxy for studying the spoken language of historical times (Jucker 1995, Culpeper and Kytö 2010, Mazzon and Fodde 2012). While studying

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spoken language through an orthographic lens is not ideal (Kytö and Walker 2003), use of speech-related or informal types of production "partly remedy this shortcoming" (Claridge 2008: 247). Moreover, previous research has already investigated the competition between the intensifiers *full*, *well* and *right* in written Late Middle English and Early Modern English medical texts (Méndez-Naya and Pahta 2010). Therefore, because of the lack of attention to speech-related texts, and the fact that spoken language may have captured this change more effectively than written language, speech-related corpora were chosen as the main source of linguistic data in this study.

To explore the use of the intensifier *well* from EModE (1500-1700) to Late Modern English (LModE: 1700–1900) to PDE (1900+), five speech-related corpora were used: the *Corpus of English Dialogues* 1560–1760 (CED), the *Old Bailey Corpus* 1720–1913 (OBC), the *Diachronic Corpus of Present-Day Spoken English* (early 1950s to 1980s and late 1990s, DCPSE), the spoken component of the *British National Corpus 1994* (BNC1994), and the spoken *British National Corpus 2014* (BNC2014). The CED consists of speech-related texts which can be divided into "authentic dialogue" and "constructed dialogue". The authentic dialogue consists of face-to-face interactions, trial proceedings and witness depositions, all of which are records of real speech events. In contrast, the constructed dialogue consists of dialogue from drama, comedy, and didactic works.

The OBC consists of authentic dialogue from courtroom proceedings which were taken down in shorthand by scribes. In light of the absence of physical audio recordings, both the CED and the OBC are arguably as near as one can get to the spoken word during this period and offer a rare opportunity to study speech-based language which was used in EModE and in LModE; (for the CED, see Culpeper and Kytö 2010, and for the OBC, see Huber 2008). The DCPSE is a spoken corpus with a variety of spoken genres, such as face-to-face communication, telephone communication, broadcast interviews and discussions, and spontaneous commentary. The DCPSE contains material from two time periods: the London-Lund material (from the 1950s to the early 1980s) and the *International Corpus of English* (ICE-GB) material (for the 1990s). As for the two BNC corpora, they are collections of orthographically transcribed spoken British English. The original BNC has orthographically transcribed spoken language from approximately 1994, and the Spoken BNC2014 has orthographically transcribed spoken language from approximately 2014. These two corpora were designed in a similar way, given that they are each other's counterparts (Love et al. 2017: 321). A summary of the corpora and their size is reported in Table 1.

In addition to the five speech-related corpora, the data were supplemented with dialectal sources (listed under Dictionaries and Manuscripts) such as the computerized version of Wright's *English dialect dictionary* (see Markus 2007), in an attempt to explore whether the intensifier was retained in peripheral English dialects. This is because while a good selection of corpora was chosen, these corpora represent mostly south-eastern British English and mostly the incipient standard variety. Furthermore, because the use of *well* as an intensifier of most adjectives is considered non-standard (Stenström 2000: 178), it is crucial to also examine data from as many

Corpus	Geographical Area	Word Count	Text Type	Dates	Period
CED	Britain	1,183,690 words	Authentic and constructed dialogue	1560–1760	EModE
OBC 2.0	London	21,023,241 words	Criminal court trial proceedings and witness deposition.	1761–1913[6]	EModE + LModE + PDE
DCPSE	Britain	885,436 words	Recordings of spontaneous speech	1958–1977 and early 1990s	PDE
Spoken component of the BNC1994	Britain	10,585,847 words	Recordings of spoken conversations	1994	PDE
Spoken component of the BNC 2014	Britain	11,209,172 words	Recordings of spoken conversations	2014	PDE

Table 1: The corpora used in the present study

different non-standard British dialects as possible. Some other dialectal sources included were: Sternberg's *The dialect and folklore of Northhamptonshire* (1851), Ferguson's *The dialect of Cumberland* (1873), Tim Bobin's comic dialogue *Tummus and Meary* written in the Lancashire dialect (1819), the *Diary of Joseph Turrill of Garsington* (1863-1876), and *The historians of Scotland* (1872). However, the use of these dialectal sources is ultimately qualitative as opposed to quantitative, since an attestation or entry in these sources reveals little about frequency. What an attestation of the intensifier *well* does reveal, however, is its retention in certain dialects of British English. The *Freiburg English dialect corpus* (FRED), which contains dialectal audio recordings predominantly from the 1970s to the 1990s (so-called "oral histories"), was also included in the present dataset.

3.2 Data collection

When analyzing the frequency of a given linguistic item across corpora, in the traditional corpus approach, tokens are normalized by a common denominator, such as per million words (D'Arcy 2015: 458). However, this method has come under

[6]The *Proceedings of the Old Bailey* contains data from 1674 to 1913. However, in this study, the Old Bailey Corpus 2.0 was accessed via CQPweb, which contains language data from 1720 to 1913. This study uses the data from 1761 since the CED already covers the time window from 1720 to 1760.

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criticism in variationist work since it does not account for the number of times a linguistic form could or could not have occurred (Tagliamonte 2012: 19, Wallis 2013: 7, D'Arcy 2015: 458, Gries 2015: 110, Fuchs 2017: 351). This inclusion of both occurrence and absence of intensifiers within a functionally equivalent context is referred to as "circumscribing the variable context" (Poplack and Tagliamonte 1989: 60) or defining "the envelope of variation" (Milroy and Gordon 2003: 180). With respect to *well*, this means contrasting the number of times it intensified adjectives (e.g., he is *well* tall) against the number of times it could have intensified adjectives (e.g., he was ∅ tall). Since "the absence of the unit in question can be an intentional choice to not use it" (Gries 2018: 287), an accountable analysis considers both occurrence and absence. Recent research has found that the decision to use either the number of words in a text/corpus or the number of functionally equivalent contexts in a text/corpus as a means of analyzing frequency can shape the conclusions of an analysis (Biber et al. 2016). In light of this, while work on intensification cogently argues for the variationist approach (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003, Tagliamonte and Roberts 2005, Tagliamonte 2008, D'Arcy 2015), because the quantitative method may significantly affect the outcome, both units of analysis are reported in the present study. The chosen NF (normalized frequency) for the present study was per 100,000 words.

The OBC, the CED, the BNC1994 and the BNC2014 were publicly available online. These corpora were accessed via the *CQPweb* interface.[7] A license was required for the DCPSE, and this corpus was accessed via CD-ROM. To search the corpora, different types of POS (Part of Speech) tagging were used according to the quantification method adopted (i.e., frequency normalization vs variationist approach). For frequency normalization, a search query was run to search for all instances where *well* occurred before an adjective in the corpora. Since the POS tagging varied from corpus to corpus, the queries differed from each other. For instance, in the spoken component of the BNC1994, the query *well _AJ0* was necessary, whereas in the OBC and the CED the query *well _JJ* was necessary. Instances of ambiguity (i.e., when it was not clear whether *well* was functioning as an adjective intensifier or whether it was as an interjection) were omitted from the present dataset.[8] To ensure that instances of intensification were not missed due to incorrect tagging, a general search query for the lexical entry 'well' was also run in each corpus without any POS tagging. This search query compiled all instances of *well* regardless of its form or function, which were subsequently checked and contrasted manually with the search of *well* which did include POS tagging. In doing so, it became clear, for instance, that in the CED *woorthie* was incorrectly tagged as a noun,

[7] *CQPweb* (Hardie 2012) is a publicly available online corpus analysis system which acts as an interface to the Corpus Workbench software (CWB).

[8] An example was "well good" at the beginning of a sentence or utterance which could be a statement about how good something is, or the interjection/discourse marker *well* followed by *good*. On many occasions, looking to the left or right for contextual clues helped determine its function (e.g., *well good luck*, and *I did the washing. Well good because the clothes were dirty*).

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which meant that *well woorthie* did not appear in the initial search query *well _JJ*. These missed instances were then added to the pool of analysis.

For the variationist approach, a search query was run in order to collect all adjectives in the corpora. The adjectives intensified by *well* which, due to incorrect tagging, did not appear in the concordance lines, were also added to this pool of analysis, and a sample of the tagged adjectives was checked for tagging accuracy. This procedure was important since automatic taggers are not error-free and are more prone to errors on historical language given that the taggers are typically modeled on modern standard English (McEnery and Hardie 2012: 30, Stratton, in press). Following Ito and Tagliamonte (2003) and subsequent variationist work on the intensification of adjectives (Tagliamonte and Roberts 2005, Tagliamonte 2008, D'Arcy 2015), non-gradable, comparative and superlative adjectives, in addition to negative contexts, were manually removed from the pool of adjectives.[9] According to Biber et al. (1999: 508), adjectives can be divided into "descriptors" and "classifiers". Since classifiers are non-gradable (e.g., *additional*), they were also removed from the pool of adjectives. The remaining adjectives were then coded based on whether they had been intensified by *well* or not. Therefore, the variationist approach to measuring frequency allowed for a direct comparison of the frequency of the intensifier *well* proportionate to the number of times adjectives could have been intensified by *well* per corpus.

4. Results

The following section reports the empirical findings of the use of the intensifier *well* from 1560 to 2014. The frequency of *well* as an intensifier of regular adjectives and the vestigial collocations are reported in Section 4.1. The frequency of *well* as a modifier of participial adjectives (divided into manner and degree) is provided in Section 4.2.

4.1 *Well* + regular adjectives

A graphical representation of the normalized frequency of the vestigial collocations (e.g., *well aware*, etc.) and the normalized frequency of *well* as an intensifier of regular adjectives from 1560 to 2014 is provided in Figure 1. The bold line indicates the frequency of the regular adjectives intensified by *well*, and the lighter line indicates the frequency of the vestigial collocations. The only instances in the speech-related corpora of *well* intensifying regular adjectives before the 20th century were the vestigial collocations. Examples are provided in (3)–(4). Therefore, these five speech-related

[9] Although intensification of comparative adjectives was removed due to functional inequivalence, it is worth noting that *well* is unique in its use as an intensifier of comparative adjectives (Kennedy and McNally 1999: 170). Unlike *well* in the examples which follow, the adjectives could not be felicitously intensified by *very*: *that's well better than the elbow one* (Spoken BNC2014) and *I thought they'd have well weirder stuff* (in the British TV Show *Idiot Abroad*, season 3, episode 3).

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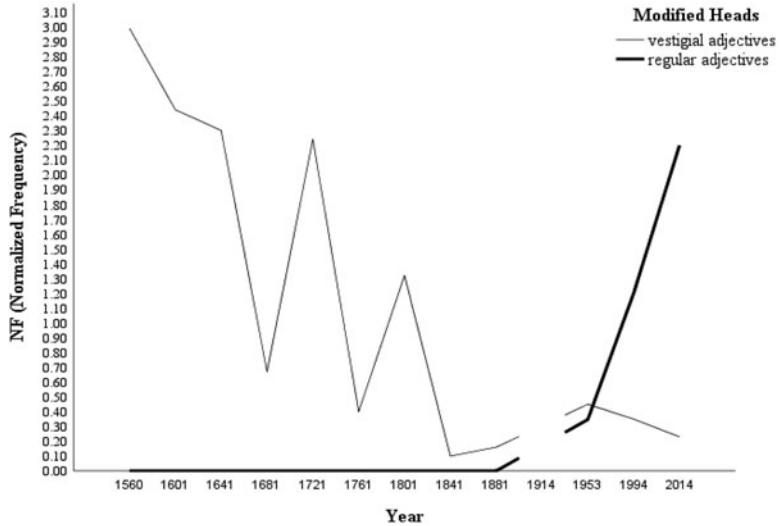

Figure 1: The normalized frequency of the adjective intensifier *well* from EModE to PDE[10]

corpora create the impression that the use of *well* as an intensifier of other regular adjectives (beyond the vestigial collocations) is a late 20th century development.

(3) Vestigial collocates:

(a) You are **well worthy** to haue a good and sufficient Master CED 1605

(b) You must be **well aware** that the marriage can not be valid OBC 1821

(c) I at first thought it was a person intoxicated, but Smith did not move, because he was **well aware** that we could not get out OBC 1836

(d) I was **well aware** his niece was living with him OBC 1839

(4) Regular adjectives

(a) Steve was **well serious** on it DCPSE 1992

(b) Ron's **well chuffed** with his car BNC1994

(c) ….and I'm **well cool** BNC1994

(d) …luckily it had been emptied, it was still **well mucky** BNC1994

(e) that's **well dirty** BNC2014

(f) it's **well easy** to do it actually like BNC2014

(g) his used to be **well big** BNC2014

(h) you can make some **well good** toasties on it BNC2014

[10]The gap from 1914 to 1953 (present in all three figures) illustrates the period not covered by the speech-related corpora, since an unbroken line would suggest continuous documentation.

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The NF (normalized frequency) of *well* as an intensifier of regular adjectives in 1990–1992 was 0.75 per hundred thousand words (or 3 tokens), 1.29 per hundred thousand words (or 43 tokens) in 1994, and just over 2 per hundred thousand words (or 163 tokens) by 2014.[11] In contrast, as expected, the vestigial collocations do not disappear from the language. Based solely on the speech-related corpora, the fact that this use of *well* (as an intensifier of regular adjectives) appears to resurface around the late 20th century corroborates the findings of Stenström (2000) who observed its apparent "revival" among speakers in the geographical region of London. The frequency measured by number of possible intensifiable contexts is provided in Figure 2. Strikingly, the normalized frequencies in Figure 1 depict a distribution whereby the vestigial collocations suddenly spike in frequency after the time around which the adjective intensifier *well* was supposed to have decreased in frequency. However, the spike in frequency in the late 18th century is leveled out when the measure of frequency is based on the variationist paradigm. One reason the normalized frequency spikes from 1761 to 1841 is the significant change in number of words from the CED to the OBC, even though this increase in the number of total words does not account for the ratio of intensifiable contexts.

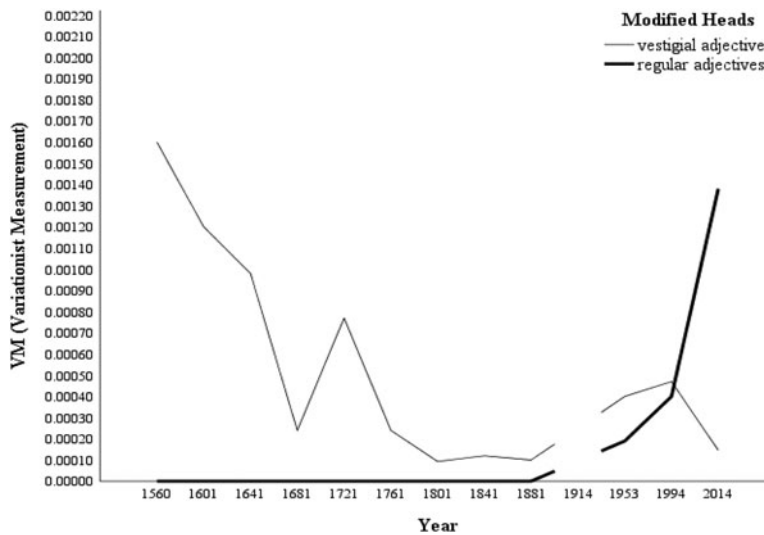

Figure 2: The frequency of the adjective intensifier *well* from EModE to PDE as measured by intensification rate

[11]Absolute counts for the vestigial collocations: 1560–1599 (6 tokens), 1600–1639 (5 tokens), 1640–1679 (6 tokens), 1680–1719 (2 tokens), 1720–1760 (5 tokens), 1761–1800 (19 tokens), 1801–1840 (7 tokens), 1841–1880 (6 tokens), 1881–1913 (8 tokens), 1953–1987 (4 tokens), 1994 (38 tokens), 2014 (26 tokens).

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Based on previous literature (Fettig 1934, Mustanoja 1960), the OBC figures stand out as being unexpectedly high. Potential skewing through highly formulaic, possibly legalese language in the OBC could, however, be a contributing factor. Nevertheless, the overall diachronic trend shows a decline in frequency. Figure 2 presents the more anticipated picture, namely that the highly frequent vestigial collocations decrease in frequency after Middle English but increase toward the late 20th century.[12]

In short, the data from the speech-related corpora suggest that other than the use of *well* in a few vestigial collocations, *well* did not resurface as an intensifier of regular adjectives with an open scale structure (e.g., *well big, well cool*, *well dirty*) until the late 20th century. If the analysis were to stop here, one might conclude that the answer to the first research question (i.e., did the use of *well* as an intensifier of regular adjectives really disappear?) is yes. However, by looking further into various dialectal records, it becomes clear that *well* was in fact retained as an intensifier of regular adjectives in some British dialects. Some attestations from the EDD are reported in (5).

(5) (a) it were **well waird** to take a mell and knock out his harns,
'it was well weird….' EDD, Ferguson *Prov.*, 1641, No. 390

(b) This appeareth to be **well hard**
'This appears to be well hard' EDD, Ruce *Sermons*, 1631

(c) A'd get **well drunk**, if a tho't it ud do my head good[13]
'I'd get well drunk if I thought it would do my head good' EDD, J.P.K. ed. 1843.

Beyond the EDD, Kühner (1934) documents the sentence "came *well wet* to the Callander" from 1566; and the sentence "I should think they are *well drunk* by this time" can be found in the *Diary of Joseph Turrill* in 1867. The collocation *well dry* is also attested in the OED and "the letter was carried to Westminster before the ink was *well dry*" is attested in 1643/1644 in the newspaper *Mercurius Aulicus*. The fact that *well* is found intensifying these adjectives is not surprising given that *wet* and *dry* have both "relative and absolute uses" (Kennedy and McNally 2005: 370). In the examples found in Kühner (1934) and *Mercurius Aulicus*, *wet* and *dry* have a closed scale structure, (i.e., they have an absolute interpretation). This use is also attested in the *OED: A new English dictionary on historical principles* (1928: 285), dating back to examples from 1728 such as *he was once well warm*. Looking into the Lancashire dialect, one finds that *welly* (a dialectal form of *well*) was retained as an intensifier of adjectives; two examples from the comic dialogue of Bibbon's 1819 *Tummus and Meary*, written in the Lancashire dialect, are provided in (6a–b).

[12]The search query ("*well*" _JJ) in the OBC revealed the collocations *pretty well perfect*, *pretty well sure* and *pretty well tipsy*. However, the function of *well* in the collocation *pretty well* is not typically viewed as an intensifying one (Bäcklund 1973: 184). Instead, its function is thought to be similar to the function of *very much*, that is, a compound or phrasal intensifier. These collocations were therefore omitted from Figures 1 and 2.

[13]In *The dialect of Cumberland* (1873: 50), *well* is also attested modifying *fuzzed* which also means 'drunk'. In instances where *well* modifies adjectives denoting 'drunk', *well* functions as a degree marker since the sober-to-drunk continuum is a matter of degree.

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(6) (a) I steart like o wil cat un wur **welly gaumless** *Tummus and Meary*: 16
'I start like ..... and was well gaumless'

(b) I tell the Meary, I'r **welly moydart** *Tummus and Meary*: 19
'I tell Mary I was well puzzled'

As for the variant *welly*, two points are worth noting. Firstly, *welly* is thought to have undergone semantic change in some English dialects (Ferguson's *The dialect and folklore of Northamptonshire* 1851: 121). While it still functioned as an intensifier in the Lancashire dialect, it scaled down the meaning of an adjective (i.e., downtoner) as opposed to scaling up its meaning (i.e., amplifier). Therefore, an example like *welly killed* is functionally equivalent in meaning to 'almost killed'. The second point is that *moydart*, as in (6b), appears to be more of a participial adjective rather than a regular adjective due to the dental suffix <t> which is a feature of past marking in Germanic languages (see German *spielte* 'played' and English *walked* [wɔːkt]). The OED attests the regional verb *moider* meaning 'to confuse or bewilder' (*moider,* v. 1) which is in line with Tim Bibbon's translation of (6b). Therefore, (6b) can be interpreted as being 'confused to a high degree' (i.e., *very confused*).

The Brigham Young University (BYU) suite of corpora recently released a TV corpus which contains orthographically transcribed informal British English from 1950 to 2018. Using this corpus, one encounters the intensifier *well* in the 1980s (7a–e). Because these tokens can be checked with the audio, the prosody makes it clear that *well* was functioning as an intensifier, not a discourse marker. The examples in (7a–b) show that *well* was used as an intensifier of adjectives in 1987 and 1988. Anecdotal evidence also supports that *well* was used this way in the early 1980s. For instance, one online metalinguistic thread reports that *well* was used frequently in Lancashire from 1980 to 1982.[14] This anecdotal evidence is backed up with the fact that the British punk band *The Blood* released a song in 1983 titled *I'm well sick*. In the chorus they sing *I'm well sick*, *I'm well sick*, *I'm sick as a pig*. Not only is it clear in the song from the stress that *well* is intensifying *sick*, but the simile *I'm sick as a pig* indicates the songwriter's wish to intensify the degree of sickness. In the sitcom *Hale and Pale*, the use of *well* is mocked in a three-minute skit in an episode aired in 1989. The mocked examples are reported in (7f–g). In summary, while the use of *well* as an intensifier of regular adjectives was not documented in the five speech-related corpora, which might suggest that it was not used very frequently, its use did not completely disappear from English dialects.

(7) (a) that was **well brill**! *Doctor Who*, 1987, season 24, episode 13[15]

(b) it was **well naughty** *Red Dwarf*, 1988, ep. *Thanks for the Memory*

[14]<forum.wordreference.com/threads/well-gay-well-tough-well-harsh.1527326/>.

[15](7a) can be found at <dailymotion.com/video/x6swgdn> (around 14 minutes, 40 seconds), (7b) can be found at <youtube.com/watch?v=uHmK9JOFFKE> (around 5 minutes, 27 seconds) and (7e) at <dailymotion.com/video/x6t066o> (around 3 minutes, 5 seconds). (7f–g) can be found at <youtube.com/watch?v=oSJSDwe2wVY>. *Hale and Pale* also have a comic song called *well 'ard* (e.g., 'who's well hard? I'm well hard') <youtube.com/watch?v=rAwC1c8emV8>.

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(c) I thought you told me this man was **well hard** *Screen Two*, 1989, ep. *The Firm*

(d) I know you are **well gutted**, Roxy *Screen Two*, 1989, ep. *The Firm*

(e) It's **well safe** *Doctor Who*, 1989, season 26, ep. 5

(f) I heard you're hard. I heard you is **well hard** *Hale and Pale*, 1989, season 2, ep. 6

(g) I heard on the street you broke big John's legs in 29 places. What they're saying was and what I heard was, his legs was **well broked** *Hale and Pale*, 1989, season 2, ep. 6

4.2 Well + participial adjectives

The frequency of *well* as a modifier of participial adjectives from 1560 to 2014 is reported in Figures 3 and 4. As mentioned, because *well* does not always function as a marker of degree, especially with participles, it is necessary to differentiate its use as a degree modifier from its use as a manner adjunct. However, there are several instances where the reading is ambiguous. After excluding the ambiguous tokens, the distribution of the data indicates that the use of *well* as both a marker of manner and a marker of degree gradually decreases after Middle English. Figure 3 presents the data using normalized frequencies, and Figure 4 presents the data following the variationist approach.

(8) 16th century
Manner:

(a) they were **well brought vp** in the Court

(b) before the musicke was **well tuned**
Degree:

(c) they are **well experienced**

(d) I am **well satisfied**
Ambiguous:

(e) it hath been **well debated** and consider'd by us all

In the beginning of the EMoDE period, *well* was frequently used, with participles, as both an adverb of manner and a marker of degree (see Figures 3 and 4). In (8a), *well* has a manner reading because it describes how the subject ('they') was brought up, namely 'well' as opposed to 'badly'. The same is true for (8b) since music can be tuned 'well' or 'poorly' meaning that *well* expresses the quality of the tuning (i.e., the manner). However, in (8c), *well* functions as a marker of degree since it is not possible to modify *experienced* in terms of binary approval. Instead, *well* intensifies the degree to which 'they' are 'experienced', be it somewhat experienced, very experienced, or extremely experienced (here they are *well experienced*). The same is true for (8d). If someone is *satisfyd* 'satisfied', they are already content. Therefore, *well* intensifies the degree of satisfaction (e.g., 'highly satisfied').

For *well* to intensify a participle, the verb from which it comes has to be gradable, that is, capable of being understood in terms of "more" or "less". This is especially clear with stative verbs such as *to love*, *to please*, *to know* and *to appreciate* (OED, s.v. well. adv and n4, 13c, d). In contrast, event verbs such as *to arrive* are

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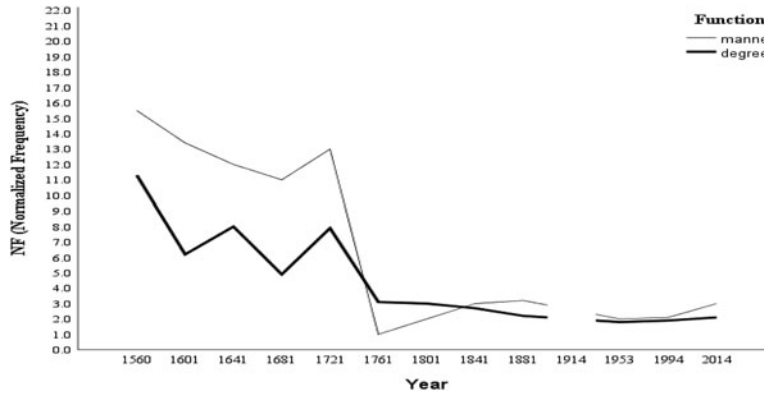

Figure 3: The normalized frequency of *well* as a modifier of participial adjectives from EModE to PDE

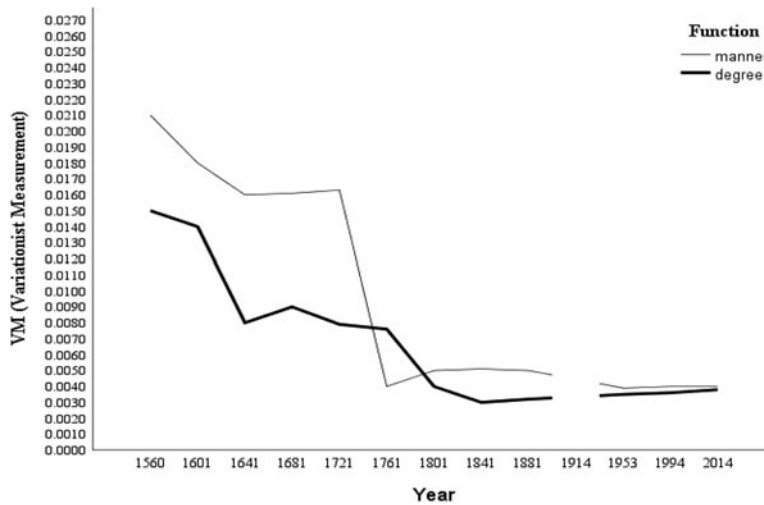

Figure 4: The frequency of participial adjectives intensified by *well* from Early Modern English to PDE

typically non-gradable. The reason stative verbs are typically gradable is that their scales are usually abstract. As McNally and Kennedy (2008: 242) ask, is there a maximal degree of liking or loving? Moreover, according to McNally and Kennedy (2002: 6), participles which typically permit modification can be modified by *fully*. The fact that one can say *he was fully satisfied* confirms the degree reading of *well* in (8d) and moreover indicates closed scale intensification. There were, however, examples where the function of *well* was ambiguous. This is the case in (8e) because something can be debated 'well' or 'poorly', but something can also

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be debated to high or low degree. For further early 16th century attestations of unambiguous examples of *well* as a degree marker, such as *we were wel affrayd then* (see *OED: A new English dictionary on historical principles*,, vol. 10, 1928: 284).

(9) 17TH CENTURY
Manner:

(a) The trees are **well placed**

(b) A **well reputed** Gentleman

(c) he's a very **well bred** man
Degree:

(d) who was **well contented** to haue taken a nappe
Ambiguous:

(e) you seem a person **well qualified**

(f) Thou shalt be **well rewarded** for thy labour

(g) as I am by my counsell **well informed**

The degree use of *well* with participles continues until its present-day use and can thus be seen in the 17th century with examples such as *well contented* and *well satisifed*. Examples in (9e–g) are ambiguous. For instance, in (9e), people can be *qualified* in an appropriate manner and there are different degrees to which someone can be *qualified*. In (9f), *well* is ambiguous because, on the one hand, you can be rewarded 'well' or 'poorly' depending on how much of a reward is given. If the reward involves receiving a large sum of money, one is well rewarded (i.e., being 'well rewarded' is predicated to an individual, namely 'thou'). If the reward is simply a pat on the back or some applause, then the reward is likely a poor one (i.e., approval = manner). On the other hand, being rewarded is something which is inherently positive. If someone is rewarded, one would not expect it to be necessary to mention that they were rewarded in a positive manner (i.e., 'approval') but instead *well* would likely refer to the degree to which one was rewarded. This is because you can also be rewarded to different degrees (e.g., given thousands of dollars, or millions of dollars, or billions of dollars). *Well* is also ambiguous in (9g) since someone can be informed in the appropriate or correct manner, but can also be informed to a high degree (i.e., not just informed, but well informed).

(10) 18TH CENTURY
Manner:

(a) let me see if it be **well made**

(b) she is a good honest **well behaved** girl

(c) there was a **well dressed** woman
Degree:

(d) I am **well assured** that this is my property

(e) I am **well satisfied**

(f) I am **well convinced**
Ambiguous:

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(g) Once we were both so **well heated**

(h) I have heard Frankland say she was to be **well rewarded** for this fact

(11) 19TH CENTURY AND 20TH CENTURY
Manner:

(a) I believe he was **well equipped**

(b) That was a **well timed** run

(c) Because the story is so good and so **well written**
Degree:

(d) you seem **well acquainted** with the technical phrases

(e) Park Lane is a place pretty **well frequented**
Ambiguous:

(f) I think we should be [er be] **well prepared** to foot the bill

(g) I can say to my honourable friend, the member for Rydale who takes such a close interest and is so **well informed** [er] on these matters

(h) two **well baked loaves**, please

(12) 21ST CENTURY
Manner:

(a) he's a **well behaved** kid and he gets involved with a lot of stuff

(b) oh I'll be **well behaved** today

(c) you know it looked **well kept**

(d) I'm like oh that's **well written** I like that
Degree:

(e) I was like **well impressed** cos it's taken her twenty years to buy me a book

(f) if my parents got a divorce I'd be **well upset**

(g) …bet you're **well spoilt**

(h) Oh shit man was **well worried**

(i) [NAME] and I are going to be **well screwed** by the time we may eventually end up having children
Ambiguous:

(j) they'll be **well drained**

(k) make sure you're **well hydrated** beforehand

(l) I am **well confused** with all of this stuff man

In the 18th century, both the manner and degree use of *well* decreases in frequency, but the level of ambiguity remains. To focus on only one example from the 19th century, the function of *well* in *well baked loaves* (11h) is ambiguous because it could be referring to the degree to which the loaves are baked, or it could be referring to the acceptability of the baking. Interestingly, before the 20th century, *well* appeared to have a preference for intensifying mostly closed scale participial adjectives (e.g., *satisfied*, *assured*), but by the late 20th and early 21st century,

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well is frequently found intensifying deverbal adjectives with an open scale structure (e.g., *impressed*, *upset*, *terrified*, *worried*).[16] McNally and Kennedy (2002: 6) state that "participles associated with open-scales, such as *worried*, do not permit modification by proportional modifiers, nor do they permit modification by *well*". While this may true for North American English, this is no longer true for British PDE. The open-scale examples in (12e–i) illustrate this. Therefore, to summarize the diachronic data regarding scale structure, *well* appears to transition from an intensifier of mostly closed scale adjectives (both deverbal and non-derived adjectives) to an intensifier which widely permits open scale intensification.

5. Discussion

According to the five speech-related corpora, other than modifying a limited number of adjectives at a low frequency from 1560–1913, the use of *well* as an intensifier of other regular adjectives was not attested until the late 20th century, which corroborates the initial observation of Stenström (2000: 188). However, when looking into dialectal sources it becomes clear that *well* as an intensifier of regular adjectives (i.e., adjectives other than *aware*, *able*, *capable*, etc.) had in fact been retained. This might suggest that although its use as an intensifier of regular adjectives did not completely disappear in all British dialects, it was – despite its lack of attestation in the speech-related corpora – used at a low frequency. The fact that its use was retained in some peripheral dialects is not unusual since socially, politically or geographically isolated dialects tend to be less affected by linguistic changes in mainstream communities, thus preserving relic features (Tagliamonte 2013: 5).

The absence of such use in the speech-related corpora relates to a widely acknowledged methodological challenge in corpus and historical linguistics, namely that the lack of attestation in a corpus (or corpora) does not necessarily mean that something does not or did not exist (Rissanen 1989). Since researchers in historical linguistics are largely restricted to the texts and sources which are at their disposal, using these as the sole source of evidence of a language at a given point in time can be misleading, since these texts are not representative of all varieties. This was the case with *well* in the speech-related corpora which are available for historical English. Had it been assumed that these corpora were representative of the historical periods in question, one might have arrived at a very different conclusion. Given that the selected corpora mostly represent the incipient standard variety of English, other varieties, in which the use of *well* as an intensifier of regular adjectives was retained, were not represented. In this respect, the present findings illustrate the importance of Lauersdorf's injunction to use "all the data" in a historical analysis (Lauersdorf 2018a: 112, Lauersdorf 2018b: 211-213).

[16] According to the diagnostics in Kennedy and McNally, predicates such as *satisfied* and *assured* have a closed scale because they permit modification by endpoint-oriented modifiers (e.g., *completely/fully satisfied/assured*). In contrast, *impressed*, *upset*, *terrified* and *worried* supposedly do not permit such modification, but do permit *very*.

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Stenström (2000: 177) reported a conversation led by an adolescent who explicitly discussed his intensifying use of *well*, recounting their mother's confusion with its use, as in (13). The very fact that many speakers were unfamiliar with this use in the late 20th century, and the fact that in non-British varieties of English this use of *well* is infelicitous (Kennedy and McNally 1999: 170), suggests that many British speakers in the 20th century were not exposed to this usage. In Bolinger's 1972 monograph, *Degree Words*, some infelicitous examples of the use of *well* as an adjective intensifier were provided such as *it is well unlikely* (41). The majority of these examples are now considered felicitous today in British English, according to the two BNC corpora and native speaker intuitions. Aijmer (2018: 84) also reported that speakers "experienced" this "new" use of *well* as something which is innovative even though it was used in Old and Middle English. This perception of novelty is therefore an example of the "recency illusion", whereby recently noticed linguistic forms or structures are thought of as new despite having existed for centuries (Zwicky 2005).

(13) "My mum says, I go yeah **that's well nice**, and she goes erm **well nice**…(?)… That's it yeah I know I'm always saying well, **well cool** and I keep on saying that, I've said it like, about so many things when we're home, and she goes, **what is this you always saying well with everything**" (Stenström 2000: 177)

Since the data in present study indicate that its intensifying use was retained in some dialects, it is possible that this retained dialectal use spread in the 20th century to the point where speakers who did not have it in their repertoire experienced it as something new. This synchronic novelty would have added a layer of originality in speech communities where it was uncommon to use *well* in this way, a somewhat expected development in light of what is known about the motivations for changes in the intensifier system when current variants lose their intensifying effect (Stoffel 1901: 02, Tagliamonte 2008: 391). However, at the same time, generally speaking, it is not common for diffusion to work from remote varieties outward since linguistic change typically spreads from urban center to urban center, and may or may not spread to rural sectors (Trudgill 1972, 1974; Chambers and Trudgill 1980: 176, Labov 2001: 285). For this reason, one also has to entertain the possibility that the current intensifying use of *well* is not the same as its previous Old and Middle English attested form. In other words, the speakers who are found using it in the 20th and 21st century may have developed its use through some mechanism such as analogy, such that the vestigial collocations give rise to "new" ones, for example, *well aware* → *well bad* (Stenström, Andersen and Hasund 2002: 158-159; Aijmer 2018: 85) and not due to the dialectally retained use of *well* spreading outward. In his article on ebb and flow, Hickey (2002: 125) warns researchers away from readily assuming that the use of present-day forms which existed historically were "transmitted unchanged throughout history". If this analogical mechanism is the case with *well*, the present study might provide new insight with respect to the longitudinal ebb and flow of intensifiers. This notion is backed up by the several scholars who have explicitly suggested that the 20th and 21st century intensifying use of *well* is in fact an innovation among adolescents at least from a synchronic

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standpoint (Milroy 1992: 198, Paradis 2008: 322, Aijmer 2018: 84). While the origin of the current use of *well* is not entirely clear, there is some prosodic evidence to suggest that its present-day use is not entirely the same as its previously attested one.

The prosodic evidence is as follows. One cannot help noticing that the stress in 21st century utterances such as *that's well funny* is different to the stress in instances such as *he's well aware* [*of the facts*]. When *well* intensifies regular adjectives other than the vestigial ones, it is stressed (e.g., *he's wéll hard* or *that's wéll stupid*) whereas in the residual use (e.g., *he's well 'aware*) it is the adjective which is stressed, not *well*. The OED mentions this too: "in this use sentence stress usually falls on *well* rather than the following adjective" (*well*, adv. and *n*. IV16c.). By "in this use" the OED refers to the use of *well* as an intensifier. Therefore, in British English stress can now determine the function of *well* when it appears adjacent to a participial adjective. For instance, in the example *he is well educated*, if *educated* is stressed (i.e., *he's well éducated*) it is understood as 'he is educated in a good manner'. In contrast, if it is *well* that is stressed (e.g., *he's wéll educated*), *well* has a degree reading (i.e., *he is very educated*). In FRED, *well* in the collocation *well educated* (e.g., *they was well educated you see* [Male NNT_003, Nottinghamshire, DOB 1902]) always expressed manner and was unstressed. The fact that when *well* intensifies the "newer" regular adjectives it is stressed, whereas when it intensifies adjectives such as *aware* and *able* it is not stressed, provides some support to the notion that the "revived" use of *well* did not emerge due to dialectal diffusion. If its present-day use did emerge due to spreading, one might expect the stress to be the same. This difference in stress may therefore show "layering", that is, the co-existence of old forms alongside new ones (Hopper 1991: 22-23). While one cannot completely rule out the possibility that *well* was always stressed when functioning as an intensifier of regular adjectives, the fact that it is not stressed in non-British varieties of English where *well* can intensify adjectives such as *aware* and *worthy* (i.e., the vestigial collocations) suggests that the change in stress is innovative. Nevertheless, the present-day use may be an overlapping product of diffusion and an innovative extension.

Stratton (2018) analyzed the intensifier *well* in the British TV show *The Inbetweeners*. In the examples given, *well* was stressed (e.g., *this is wéll knackering*, *that was wéll Jimmy Savel*, *that's wéll racist* and *you'll be wéll jel*). This can be verified by listening to the audio-video recordings from the show. It is also worth noting that the present-day use of *well* tends to be stressed when intensifying prepositional phrases (e.g., *that's wéll out of order*). One way of testing whether *well* was always stressed would be to find texts which rely on poetic stress or contain a metrical tradition which would indicate whether it was stressed or not. However, to date, texts with such a metrical pattern in which *well* was also attested as an intensifier have not been found. Nevertheless, it is clear from the stress in the examples in (7), which were taken from audio-video recordings of British TV shows from the 1980s, that *well* was stressed, not the adjective (e.g., *it was wéll brill* and *it was wéll naughty*).

In examining the diachronic use of *well*, several methodological challenges arose. For instance, while POS tagging can identify instances where adverbs

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appear adjacent to adjectives, it reveals little about the function of the adverb itself and does not provide the suprasegmental information necessary for determining whether *well* was functioning as an intensifier. This is a challenge for studying historical phonology in general, since researchers are subject to studying phonology through an orthographic lens and, depending on the time period, have little to no available phonetic recordings to work with (Stratton, in press). As Curzan and Palmer (2006: 25) point out, computers can search texts much faster and much more reliably than humans can locate valuable linguistic data, but ultimately computers cannot read data qualitatively in the same way humans can. In the case of *well*, assuming the output from a computer search to be correct without manual qualitative division of its two functions (degree and manner), would have given inaccurate and skewed frequency data.

Another methodological issue which appeared in the present study was the question of quantification. Despite the fact that the variationist paradigm has become the norm in synchronic variationist analyses, many historical and corpus-based studies continue to use frequency normalization as the baseline for comparison. As the data in Figures 1 and 2 indicate, the frequency of *well* differs depending on the approach adopted. As useful as frequency normalization can be over absolute frequency measurements, it can skew the data. Frequency either increases or decreases based on the size of the corpora (e.g., in the OBC) since the number of words are used as the baseline for comparison, as opposed to the number of accountable contexts in which a variant could or could not have occurred. Just because a corpus contains more words does not necessarily mean there are more intensifiable contexts. Therefore, in line with previous recommendations (Tagliamonte 2012: 12), I advocate the use of the variationist approach when measuring frequency in historical studies, which contributes to recent discussions of this nature (Biber et al. 2016).

6. Conclusion

In analyzing the diachronic frequency of *well*, the present study discussed some of the broader methodological challenges of historical linguistics. That a lack of attestation does not necessarily equate to a lack of existence was clearly the case with *well.* Although five widely used corpora were selected, these did not capture its retained dialectal use. This thus illustrates the importance of using "all the data" in a historical analysis (Lauersdorf 2018a, 2018b). Following previous research (Biber et al. 2016), the present study also compared frequency normalization with variationist quantitative methods and found differences in distribution. Even though the same data were analyzed, the measurements sometimes created different trajectories, with frequency normalization distorting the picture somewhat.

As for the more local question of *well*, despite its decrease in frequency in the mid-14th century, its use as an intensifier of regular adjectives did not completely disappear from all dialects of British English. Nevertheless, although it was retained, one cannot make definitive claims regarding its frequency in dialectal sources. One might

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hypothesize however, based on its absence in the speech-related corpora, that this use of *well* was not very frequent. Notwithstanding, regardless of whether it was retained at a high or low frequency, "once a word has evolved to have an intensifier function it remains in the reservoir of forms that a language user may deploy to boost meaning from that point onwards regardless of whether it actually becomes one of the favoured forms or not" (Tagliamonte 2008: 391). While it is possible that its present-day use is a product of the dialectal retention spreading outward, this type of diffusion is not particularly common. The alternative explanation paints a picture of innovation where the mainstream distributionally-restricted use developed new functions in the 20th and 21st century. However, one wonders whether multiple causation is at play, since both spreading and innovation could have served as contributing factors in its present-day development.

Irrespective of how *well* emerged, it is clear that its use changes in frequency. If its frequency from Middle English were plugged into the data from the present study, one would potentially observe a diachronic U-shape distribution. However, admittedly this would not account for its retention in dialectal uses. In addition to a change in frequency, the distribution of its intensified heads indicates that intensification of both open and closed scale adjectives (both deverbal or non-deverbal) becomes permissible. Given that the stress pattern lines up with the scale structure differences, it is possible that these are recent developments to the mainstream use of *well* as opposed to a continuation of the retained one. In the absence of phonetic recordings, it is unclear whether the current differences in stress were always a property of *well*. Even though the acknowledged methodological challenges in historical linguistics leave some questions unanswered, the findings from the present study contribute to the growing body of literature on intensifiers, and more specifically lend support to the notion that intensifiers can rise and fall at repeated intervals throughout time.

Corpora

BNC1994: *Spoken Component of the British National Corpus 1994*. Compiled by Tim Benbow, Simon Murison-Bowie, Della Summers, Rob Francis, John Clement, Lou Burnard, Geoffrey Leech, and Terry Cannon. <cqpweb.lancs.ac.uk/bncxmlweb>.

BNC2014: *Spoken British National Corpus 2014*. Compiled by Robert Love, Claire Dembry, Andrew Hardie, Brezina Vaclav and Tony McEnery. <cqpweb.lancs.ac.uk/bnc2014spoken>.

BYU: *The TV Corpora*. 2019. Compiled by Mark Davis (part of the Brigham Young University suite of corpora). <corpus.byu.edu/tv/>.

CED: *A Corpus of English Dialogues 1560-1760*. 2006. Compiled under the supervision of Merja Kytö and Jonathan Culpeper. <https://cqpweb.lancs.ac.uk/engdia/>.

DCPSE: *The Diachronic Corpus of Present-Day Spoken English*. 1990–1993. Survey of English Usage. Compiled by Sean Wallis, Bas Aarts, Gabriel Ozon and Yordanka Kavalova. <www.ucl.ac.uk/english-usage/projects/dcpse/index.htm>.

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FRED: *The Freiburg English Dialect Corpus*. 2000–2005. Compiled under the supervision of Bernd Kortmann. <//www.anglistik.uni-freiburg.de/seminar/abteilungen/sprachwissenschaft/ls_kortmann/FRED/>.

OBC: *The Old Bailey Corpus. Spoken English in the 18th and 19th centuries*. Compiled by Magnus Huber, Magnus Nissel, Patrick Maiwald and Bianca Widlitzki. <corpora.clarin-d.uni-saarland.de/cqpweb/obc2/>.

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