

Estimating the language use and status of intensifiers **QUITE**, **BLOODY**, and **FUCKING** in spoken British English

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Summary

Research question: is there a difference between **QUITE**, **BLOODY**, and **FUCKING** in terms of:

1. Intensifier status, e.g.

- In terms of use by social class
 - Higher class versus lower class?
 - Middle class versus rest?
- In terms of use by age groups
 - Young versus old?
 - Working age versus rest?

2. Language use, e.g.

- Is one used more often?
- Are they quantificationally ambiguous?

Methodology: investigation in two parts.

- Intensifier–adjective constructions, e.g.
 - **QUITE**/**BLOODY**/**FUCKING** + *good/brilliant/empty*

- **Part A:** a corpus investigation across social class and age groups.
- **Part B:** an interpretation questionnaire presented to native Britons

Results:

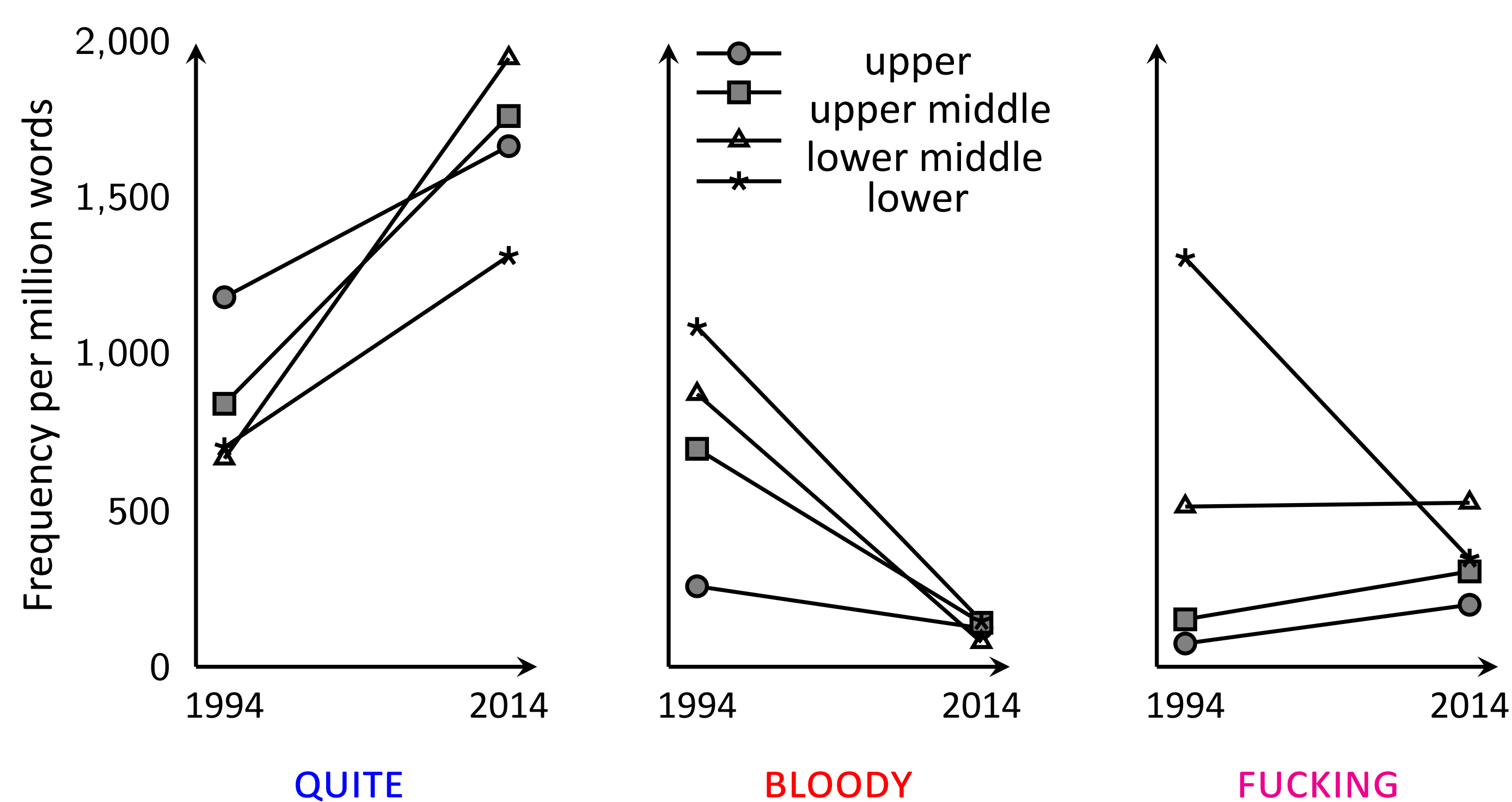
- No intensifiers are clearly ambiguous.
- **QUITE**
 - The oldest and most frequent one.
 - The least expressive one.
- **BLOODY**
 - The archaic and least frequent one.
 - The disputably expressive one.
- **FUCKING**
 - The newest and frequent one, but less so.
 - The most expressive one.

Part A: BNC comparison 1994–2014

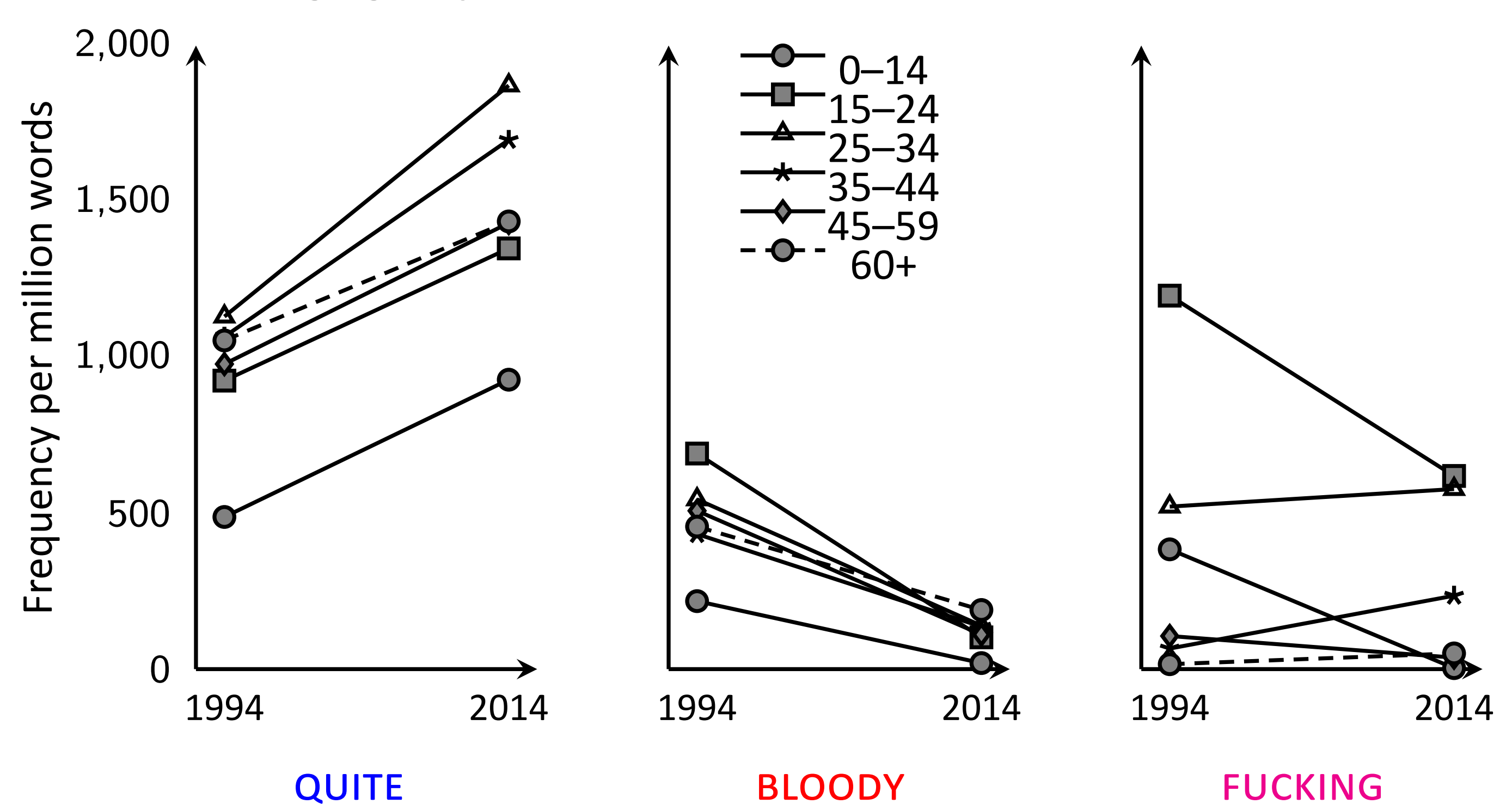
Methodology:

- 2 corpora: the spoken BNC1994 and BNC2014
- Frequency data for each intensifier by

1. Social class



2. Age groups



Part B: interpretation questionnaire

Prolegomena:

- Intensifiers quantify, but to different degrees: either **moderating** or **maximizing**
- Different levels of expressivity: **FUCKING** > **BLOODY** > **QUITE**
- Adjective type: **scalar**, **extreme**, or **limit** adjective
- 9 possible combinations (3 intensifiers × 3 adjective types) with each specific predictions

Methodology:

- Participants: 27 native Britons (data from 20 used)
- Questionnaire design: one sentence with two quantificational alternatives, e.g.
 - The electricity bill is *quite huge*
 - **Moderating:** The electricity bill is *fairly huge*
 - **Maximizing:** The electricity bill is *absolutely huge*

Results:

