

EXPLORING OVERLAPPING CATEGORIES IN BESTSELLING WHODUNITS. A CASE STUDY¹

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1. INTRODUCTION. CORPUS LINGUISTICS AS A NEW MEANS TO EXPLORE LANGUAGE

With the aim of helping our undergraduate students of English Philology become familiar with the applications corpus analysis may provide the linguist with our case study focuses on a fuzzy area, which is the overlap between certain adjectives and adverbs, such as *fast* and *quick*. The analysis of the different co-occurrences of these overlapping categories with real data from our corpus has contributed, to a great extent, to the creation of more comprehensive teaching materials.

Over the last few decades, work on corpus linguistics (Hunston and Francis, 2000; Tognini-Bonelli, 2001; Stubbs, 2002; Sinclair, 2004) has emphasised the strict correlation between form (syntax) and meaning (semantics) in grammar. Likewise, among its various benefits, corpus work has shown the systematic interconnections between lexical items and their environment.

Tognini-Bonelli (2001: 24) highlights the fact that the use of corpus for language analysis has largely contributed to stress the mutual dependency between lexical and grammatical choices which extends the boundaries of a given initial unit, giving rise to the creation of extended units of meaning. In this respect, a careful look at the most recurrent multi-word units in the corpus under study becomes a must for a comprehensive description of language.

This issue as regards the fluidity between lexis and syntax seems to have strayed a long way from traditional linguistics, which showed a sharp separation between the already mentioned fields. Theoretical and applied linguistics have lately focused their attention on the fact that both form and meaning should not be studied as separate domains of language. Peters (1983: 90) suggests that:

the relationship between syntax and lexicon may therefore be more fluid than is usually supposed: Under some circumstances an expression may be retrieved from the lexicon as a single unit; under others it may be constructed from partially assembled pieces in the lexicon, requiring somewhat more syntactic processing [...] **Syntax and lexicon are thus seen to be complementary in a dynamic and redundant way.** The same information may be present in both, in different forms [...]

All in all, the lexicon has gradually gained a crucial relevance in linguistic studies to the extent that nowadays a general trend towards lexical approaches to language can be traced. These approaches have undoubtedly contributed to the development of linguistic frameworks and have also empirically shown that native production is characterised by the use of recurrent chains of words.

Needless to say that such frequent strings of words could not be identified without the help of computer-assisted methods, which are crucial in the identification of patterns and word meaning. With the advent of concordancers and statistical programs, lexicographers and language analysts –among others– have been able not only to store large quantities of data, but also to identify significant collocations, which would have been otherwise impossible.

Thus, the value of these linguistic software tools have proven to be of invaluable help for lexicography and should not be underestimated as they provide the user in a few seconds with patterns of word co-occurrence that could have easily passed unnoticed without the assistance of computerised methods.

2. AIMS

As part of a project consisting in the compilation of specific sub-corpora from best selling whodunits, we are currently interested in working on particular sets of words in order to create comprehensive teaching materials for our subjects on *Descriptive English Grammar*. In this paper we aim at shedding light on those cases where *fast* and *quick* seem to differ in their lexico-grammatical patterning. So we find it rather

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useful to have at our disposal some computational tools to help us search for word combinations that might be observed in our corpus.

The choice of best selling whodunits to compile our corpus was motivated by two main purposes; on the one hand, show large quantities of real language in use and on the other, offer contemporary texts by authors students could be familiar with. It seemed to us that well-known detective novels could draw learners' attention more easily.

This study also attempts at illustrating a lexical approach to grammar which entails a new descriptive perspective; that is, we aim at throwing some light on the usefulness of a lexical approach to grammar. Under this umbrella, clear meanings are associated with certain syntactic patterns. In Francis' words,

syntax is driven by lexis: lexis is communicatively prior. As communicators we do not proceed by selecting syntactic structures and independently choosing lexis to slot into them. Instead, we have concepts to convey and communicative choices to make which require central lexical items, and these choices find themselves syntactic structures in which they can be said comfortably and grammatically (1993: 143).

The present article explores this approach to lexis by means of a case study which deals with the lexico-grammatical patternings of *fast* and *quick* in our compiled corpus. The analysis of their various senses and collocational patterns will give us a detailed account of the behaviour of these overlapping categories in our fiction texts. The findings of this study will definitely help teachers create teaching materials which focus on those areas that have proven to be more problematic for second and foreign language learners.

3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY FOR THE CURRENT STUDY

The corpus used for the study is made up of 16 novels written by D. Brown, T. Clancy, M. Crichton, J. Grisham, J. Case, P. Cornwell and N. Gaiman². It contains a total of 2,636,835 tokens and has been analysed with the assistance of *WordSmith Tools*.

Among the main implications of the already mentioned lexical approach to grammar, it seems worth-mentioning the fact that the importance of lexical collocations in vocabulary learning –as well as teaching– is undeniable, since the control of frequent word combinations and multiword units is necessary in language production in order to show near-native competence. Although non-native speakers of a language might find collocational patterns easy to identify, they will encounter certain difficulties when producing their own combinations of words.

As Tognini-Bonelli (2001), Wray (2002) and others point out, human intuition seems a poor guide to collocations, frequency and phraseology because it is fatally compromised by both psychological and cultural factors. On the contrary, the use of data obtained from a corpus is the only reliable authority. As human intuition is mainly based on one's partial knowledge of the language, it should be overcome.

We should bear in mind that corpora inform us about the way the language looks as a result of what we do with it, that is the way components of lexical entries behave. As regards this issue, it must be noted that the use of corpora is a useful methodological tool for the accurate description and analysis of words. Within this framework, words can be studied as part of a chain, which will allow the researcher to observe, identify and even generalise as for semantic categories, frequent collocates, etc. is concerned.

For the processing of our corpus of bestselling whodunits we have used *WordSmith Tools*. This software shows for every instance of a head word in the corpus KWIC concordance lines within a collocation span of five adjacent words to the left and five to the right. Also, it enables to have a quick access to the source text each line comes from by simply right-clicking on "View Text". Among the various operations performed by this program, it should also be mentioned that the frequency of co-occurrence with the node word is calculated for each collocate and that concordance lines can be sorted, edited, exported, saved as .txt format, etc.

Furthermore, this software has been extremely useful in the identification of the collocates of *fast* and *quick* as well as their classification in terms of grammatical position, word class and semantic category, and has also contributed to making generalisations from the observation of the different contexts they appear in.

² Our corpus consists of the following novels: *Angels and Demons*, *The Da Vinci Code*, *Deception Point* by Dan Brown; *Rising Sun* by M. Crichton; *Isle of Dogs*, *Cruel and Unusual*, *Southern Cross* and *Black Notice* by P. Cornwell; *The Syndrome* by J. Case; *Patriot Games* by T. Clancy; *Neverwhere* by N. Gaiman; *A Painted House*, *The Last Juror*, *The Summons*, *The King of Torts* and *The Pelican Brief* by J. Grisham.

4. JUSTIFICATION FOR USING A CORPUS-DRIVEN APPROACH

Traditionally, language has been described in language classrooms by means of setting rules and offering some examples to reinforce such pre-established rules. However, these rules hardly reflect real instances of language. Therefore, our research team considers that a new approach that emphasises the close interrelationship between lexis and syntax and offers examples of real language in context will be extremely beneficial for language teaching. In this context, corpus linguistics can help a great deal to compensate the existing mismatch between traditional descriptions and real language instances.

For our study, thus, we have followed a **corpus-driven approach**, which has enabled us to examine carefully the information drawn from corpus evidence, state hypotheses based on such evidence and make some generalisations as regards the use of *fast* and *quick* in context. Rather than setting some recurrent rules about the contexts where these two words may appear and trying to validate them by means of corpus data (corpus-based approach), within the framework of a corpus-driven approach, theoretical rules are built up in the presence of the evidence obtained from our corpus: “*the theoretical statements are fully consistent with, and reflect directly, the evidence provided by the corpus*” (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001: 84).

5. OVERLAPPING CATEGORIES. A CASE ANALYSIS OF THE USES OF *FAST* AND *QUICK*: MEANINGS AND PATTERNS

This section explores some overlap found between the adjective and adverb categories. Some words such as *fast* and *quick* may fall into two different word classes depending on their behaviour in a given context. According to Hunston and Francis (1999: 197), words do not have classes *per se*. On the contrary, we label them as belonging to a given class depending on the function they perform in a sentence. So we rely on word classes to help us categorise words that behave in a similar way. Take the following examples:

- (1) Cowboy finished him off with a **fast** ball.
- (2) I knew my father would not drive **fast**, not at night, on our dirt road, with Gran and my mother with him.

The word *fast* in (1) is premodifying the noun *ball*, whereas in (2) the same word is modifying the lexical verb *drive*. This syntactic behaviour allows us to label *fast* as an adjective in (1) and as an adverb in (2). We can thus argue that word class is determined by pattern.

The examples of *fast* and *quick* in our corpus have proven to be rather useful in order to illustrate overlapping categories as this pair of words is very common in fiction texts. This frequency has enabled us to examine a wide range of patterns where these words appear as well as analyse the differences between them.

At a first glance, there is a preference for *fast* over *quick*. In terms of number of tokens, our corpus shows 518 tokens for *fast* and 317 for *quick*. As we will see, however, this difference can be explained by the fact that the word *fast* collocates with a wider range of patterns in comparison with its counterpart, *quick*. If we have a careful look at the morphology of the words under study, some similarities between them stand out: as central adjectives, both inflect for *comparative* (-er) and *superlative* (-est) forms (*fast, faster, fastest* || *quick, quicker, quickest*). As adverbs, however, they differ substantially. The word *fast* can also be used as a simple adverb without undergoing a process of derivational suffixation (*fast* + -ly > **fastly*). On the other hand, *quick* shows its own particularities when being used as an adverb. All the examples below show two word forms, the base form (*quick*) and the deadjectival form (*quickly*) as adverbs. This dimorphism will be analysed in much more detail in the following sections.

- “Pull over and you make it **quick** and don’t talk to nobody or do nothing to [...]”
 Pony decided he needed to do something **quick**.
 If Nicola had asked Mr. DeJarnette to convert to Hinduism he would have **quickly** done so.
 He moved **quickly** toward the door.

Moving now on to syntax, we observe that *fast* and *quick* are used attributively and predicatively as central adjectives whereas they serve as adverbials when being used as adverbs. Finally, as far as semantics is concerned, the co-occurrences of *fast* and *quick* have revealed that despite being interchangeable in some semantic domains (*fast walk* ~ *quick walk*; *fast way* ~ *quick way*; *fast response* ~ *quick response*, to name a few instances), some other collocates show a preference for co-occurring with either *fast* (e.g., *fast food, fast track, fast cars*, etc.) or *quick* (*quick glance, quick look*, etc.)

5.1 Quick and fast as attributive adjectives

Although both adjectives do appear in attributive positions, it is quite noticeable that the number of occurrences of *quick* as an attributive adjective (211) outnumbers by far the tokens of *fast* (52). The fact that these two adjectives are very close in meaning makes it necessary to analyse them in the light of the collocates they appear with. In other words, a grammatical description of these adjectives needs to take into account the type of noun phrases they are premodifying; otherwise it would be impossible to trace differences between them.

The adjective *quick* in attributive position collocates with a wide range of nouns that embrace a large list of semantic domains, namely nouns referring to speaking or producing orally a message; mental processes, ways of thinking; means of visual and hearing perception; meals, ways of eating and / or drinking; movements, paths; actions; ways of laughing; exchange of goods and ways of touching or holding things, among others.

FAST + NOUN (attributive adjective) → 52 tokens

<p>Machines / instruments / devices (5) ball cars elevator chopper computer</p>	<p>Fixed expressions (14) buck food (11) times (2)</p>	<p>Ways of looking (2) forward scan peek</p>	<p>Movement (6) moving (2) pace walk motion rate</p>
<p>Ways / Paths (13) track(6) route(2) access lane(2) way(2)</p>	<p>People (5) driver worker Eddie(2) friends</p>	<p>Others (7) breaking sealing life result service response(2)</p>	

Table 1. Collocates of the adjective *fast* as an attributive adjective

QUICK + NOUN (attributive adjective) → 211 tokens

Oral expressions (35)		“Thinking” nouns (20)		Ways of looking (40)	Nouns related to verbs of “eating / drinking” (12)	Movement / Paths (45)			
account interrogation conversation protest hello(2) history(3) message response	order(2) plea bargain prayer(3) retort scream summary(2) version word(2)	tongues story(2) call question(3) verdict direction indictments thanks	analysis matter decision(2) discard evaluation guess study	settlement(8) approval mind temper thinking	perusal(2) hearing check glance(12) look(18) scan(3) visual stare impression	bite(3) dinner(2) intake lunch(2) sandwich sip(3)	circuit exit(4) ride(2) shake move(2) movement nod pass	run(2) search(2) motion(2) stop(2) tour(2) trip(3) turnaround turn	visit(2) walk(2) stride(2) match route(2) way(5) step reach
Actions (13)		Ways of “laughing” (5)		Nouns referring to “trading” (3)	Ways of “holding / touching” (7)	Others (31)			
job kiss paragraph shopping tutelage action lines	succession sprays notes method service work	laugh(2) smile(2) smirk	deal sell trading	jerk(3) rub snatch strike rapping	breath(3) briefing buck(3) bath/shower lawsuit left ritual flight recess second	session wedding format math(4) death butchering release helicopter click ads hand			

Table 2. Collocates of the adjective *quick* as an attributive adjective

Although the list of nouns *quick* co-occurs with is very long, Table 2 shows that the high frequent collocates are not that many. Particularly frequent are those collocates referring to ways of looking, mainly *quick look* and *quick glance*. As it can be seen in Table 1, no instance of *fast* can be found in combination with this type of nouns. Compare the following examples:

- (7) Adrienne gave the Dutchman a **quick glance**, up and down.
 (8) Her grandfather was downstairs asleep on the couch. I'll just take a **fast peek!** Tiptoeing across the creaky wood floor to his closet, Sophie peered on the shelves.

Examples (7) and (8) show that the adjective *quick*, unlike *fast*, tends to refer to actions that take or last only a short time. As for *fast*, it also refers to actions that happen very soon and without delay, but it tends to entail some kind of movement. A *quick glance* in example (7) above implies to look at the “Dutchman” quickly and then look away immediately, whereas a *fast peek* in example (8) implies a *quick look* but also moving secretly to a place to take that look.

Another remarkable feature of this pair of adjectives is the fact that with the only exception of *response* (*quick response* ~ *fast response*), the rest of the nouns referring to either conveying messages (*quick summary*, *quick question*, *quick prayer*); expressing mental processes (*quick decision*, *quick settlement*); ways of touching, holding, pulling or moving something suddenly (*quick jerk*, *quick rub*, *quick snatch*, *quick rapping*) collocate with *quick* rather than *fast*. On the contrary, when dealing with devices and machines described as being able to move at a high speed (*fast cars*, *fast balls*, *fast elevators*), the adjective *fast* is more frequently used, as the examples below show:

- After a **quick hello** and the offer of coffee, they sat down for business.
 The dispatcher made a **quick decision**.
 With a **quick jerk** of his head he scattered the gang, and Clay sped away.
 The old man was a **fast driver**, and within minutes they were on the expressway.
 Cry Research made the **fastest computers** in the world.
 Thomas is reputed to have quite a penchant for **fast cars**, design clothes and jewelry.

Compound lexemes such as *fast food* deserve special attention as they show a high degree of semantic unity. If we analyse the relationship between the two bases of the compound *fast food*, we realise that the combination of both refers to a whole concept: a type of food that is prepared and served fast after ordering it. We have already stated that the adjective *fast* tends to refer to actions that happen very soon and without delay. Thus, the fact that the adjective here (*fast*) refers to “preparing and serving something fast” explains the use of *fast* rather than *quick*.

Notice the difference between *spicy / hot / disgusting food* and “*fast food*”. The former refers to different characteristics of food; that is, *spicy* as opposed to *tasteless*, *hot* as opposed to *cold* and *disgusting* as opposed to *delicious*, whereas the relationship between *fast* and *food* is highly condensed. In other words, these two words in combination have acquired a more specialized meaning; the meaning of *fast food* is not simply a juxtaposition of the meaning of its constituents. On the contrary, this structure has become a complete unit of meaning.

5.2 *Quick* and *fast* as predicative adjectives

Contrary to what we stated for the discussion of *quick* as an attributive adjective, our corpus does not show many instances of *quick* in a predicative position. Figures (211 tokens as an attributive adjective and 62 as a predicative) confirm that this adjective is far from usual as a complement of copular verbs. However, the comparison of both the predicative and the attributive uses of *fast* shows that figures are not so different; i.e., the number of occurrences of *fast* as an attributive adjective (52) do not differ considerably from its predicative use (54).

As regards the copular verbs used in our corpus to associate some attribute with the Subject of a clause (SVCs), we should note that the presence of the verb *be* functioning as a copula is very visible. The verbs *get* and *seem* can also be traced but to a much lesser extent. In fact, *get / seem + quick* appears once and *get / seem + fast*, twice.

All predicative uses (54) of *fast* and most uses (61) –but for one exception³– of *quick* perform the syntactic function of Subject predicatives establishing an intensive relationship with the nominal expression that appears in Subject position. What is perhaps quite remarkable in this respect is the specific noun phrases each of these adjectives refers to. Once again, there is a general preference for the adjective *fast* to characterize nominals related to either something or someone in motion (e.g., cars,

³ “There was just enough gravel in the road to **keep our steps short and quick**, but the soles of our feet were like the leather of my baseball glove.”

dwarves, etc.) or to things that happen with great speed (e.g., a game, the speed of sound, etc.), whereas the adjective *quick* tends to select nominals related to actions that last only a short time (e.g., fights, farewells, response, answers, strokes, etc.) Consider the following examples:

Cars were relentless and *fast*.

The **dwarf** was preternaturally *fast*: he rolled, he struck, he bounced, he dove.

The second **pitch** was even *faster*. Bob's swing was a little slower.

It's a bigger problem because the **game** is *faster* and more complicated.

"You suppose the **speed of sound** is *faster* in metal than it is in air, maybe?" Jackson asked.

Family fights are *quick* and bitter, especially when money is at stake.

His farewells were *quick*.

It also seems important to draw attention to the precise environment of these two adjectives in predicative position. 14% of the instances of *fast* and 26% of the instances of *quick* appear in coordination with another adjective which provides a broader picture of the nominals associated with *fast* and *quick*. See Table 3 below:

FAST + NOUN	QUICK + NOUN
<p>BE { <i>fast</i> + sure / nervous, / expressive / agile relentless, dark, small + <i>fast</i></p>	<p>BE { <i>quick</i> + bitter / soundless / clean / unpleasant / facile / agile / energetic / brutal / unanimous / anxious / professional / startling low / simple / soft + <i>quick</i></p>
<p>GET { cold & <i>fast</i></p>	<p>SEEM { <i>quick</i> & muscular</p>

Table 3. Adjectives in coordination with the predicative adjectives *fast* and *quick*

As far as the collocational profile is concerned, we should also focus on the adverbs that usually precede the node words *fast* and *quick* in the concordance. Some of these adverbs carry their own semantic prosody (e.g., *spectacularly fast*, *remarkably fast*, *preternaturally fast*, *unravelling fast*, *particularly quick*) but some others –the most frequent ones– behave as intensifiers of degree; *very*, *pretty*, *enough*, *too* and *so* –as the following examples illustrate:

The crew's movements seemed **spectacularly fast**.

That was remarkably *fast*.

What he was not, though, was **particularly quick** on the uptake.

Fortunately, Glick was **pretty fast** too.

The door had a pneumatic self closing mechanism, but apparently that wasn't **fast enough** for Dr. Tim.

Indeed, the transition was **so fast**, it made Adrienne think of a bird of prey (...)

Possum started running, but Smoke was **too fast** for him.

There may be only one or two killers, but they had a lot of help. It was **too quick** and clean and well organized.

The shots were **very quick**.

Perhaps the most noticeable difference with *fast* lies in the fact that the pattern "**Vcopula + quick**" typically occurs with a clausal complement ("*To-infinitive*" clause) –especially when being intensified by *too* and *so*–. See some examples below:

Why would the IRS be **so quick [to respond]**?

'We don't got rats in the cooler', Myrtle was **quick [to defend]**.

"Good, then why were you **so quick [to assume]** the blood came from the victim?"

'Lock him up right this minute', Pigeon was **quick [to volunteer]**.

His right hand shot forward with a punch that was almost **too quick [to be seen]**.

Somewhat interestingly, the adjective *quick* can also occur as a **detached predicative**⁴, a syntactically free modifier of a noun phrase. According to Biber, this type of structure is very common of fiction and tends to appear in initial position. In fact, our corpus only shows one example that is being repeated all through the texts:

⁴ Using Biber's *et alii* terminology (1999: 520-521)

[**Quick as a cat**], **Billy Sisco** threw a left jab that popped Hank in the jaw.

5.3 *Quick* and *fast* as adverbs

We will now address an issue that cannot be overlooked as it provides a revealing insight into the behaviour of *quick* and *fast* in our corpus. This concerns the uses of these node words as adverbs. Some of the prototypical characteristics of adjectives, such as grade and modification, can also be applied to adverbs.

On the one hand, *fast* and *quick* show comparative and superlative forms –the former by means of inflectional suffixes (*faster*, *fastest*) whereas the latter by means of the pre-modifiers *more* and *most* (*the more quickly*, *the most quickly*). On the other hand, they can also be modified by other adverbs as the following examples illustrate:

Rods formed **almost faster** than the eye could follow.
The traffic stopped **pretty quick**.

In this respect it should be underlined that it is very common to find the adverb *fast* in combination with modifying adverbs of equality (*as fast as*):

I wanted to hurry, to sprint down the middle of the road and get home **as fast as possible**, but I was terrified, and my feet were heavy.
She would run past the cemetery **as fast as** she could because she had never liked her.

It has already been pointed out that in some cases an adverb has the identical form as its related adjective. This homomorphism is particularly clear in the case of the node word *fast*. Somewhat surprisingly –at least at first sight–, the frequency of *fast* as an adverb is substantially higher in comparison with its uses as an adjective –both in attributive and predicative positions–. Evidence from our corpus reveals that in 79% of occurrences *fast* is used as an adverb, 10% as an attributive adjective and 11% as a predicative adjective. Admittedly, these outstanding figures indicate a strong tendency for *fast* to be used as a modifier of a verb.

Such a finding reinforces our argument that the word *fast* as an adjective typically occurs with nouns related to actions that take place at a great speed and movements. Similarly, as an adverb, it refers to a wide range of verbs that describe the same actions, ways of movement and the like. Some other verbs such as *race by*, *chase up something*, *leave a place*, *fly*, *accelerate*, *fall* –to name but a few up to a total of 135– complete this long list. Table 4 below reports the most frequent verbs that co-occur with *fast*.

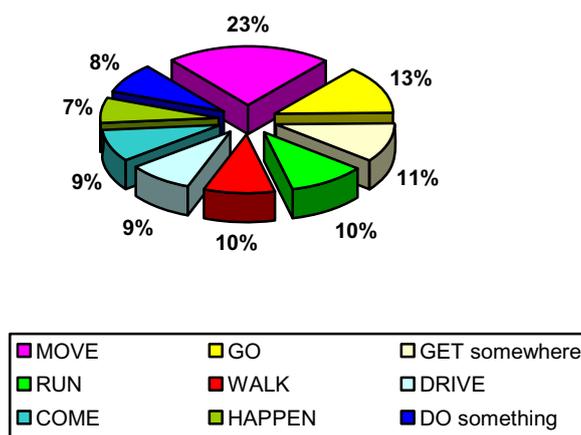


Table 4. Verbs that most frequently collocate with the adverb *fast*

Another worth-mentioning collocate of the adverb *fast* present in our corpus is the predicative adjective *asleep*. In this case the adverb functions as a modifier of the adjective rather than as an adverbial referring to a whole clause:

Formulating this plan was the last thing I remember before falling **fast asleep**.
When we left, your wife and daughter were **fast asleep** and we left strict instructions that they should not be disturbed.

Despite its low frequency (40 tokens as opposed to 401 of the adverb *fast*), the form *quick* as an adverb deserves special attention as it does not constitute a prescriptively correct form. Unlike *fast*, this word form does not show homomorphism since the adjective *quick* by a process of derivational suffixation (*-ly*) becomes an adverb with the form *quickly*. Traditional prescriptive grammars would have never accounted for the form *quick* as an adverb. A corpus-driven approach, on the contrary, takes real language as the starting point. Then, by a careful examination of items and their environment patterns of use are built up. Following this approach, examples such as the ones below are not left unaccounted for:

You got a homicide here, wrap it up and get it over with. **Do it quick** an do it neat.
 He said the resumes were flooding in. **Gotta move quick!**
 “The hell you don’t wanna be. **I knew quick enough** you wasn’t Jessie, ‘cause you don’t sound like her.”
 “And my car’s broke down, so I need you to come over and **pick me up quick as you can**. I’m gonna have a few brethren with me.”
 “[...] then I might be best off speaking to him another time. Wooh, **I’d better light up quick before they come out.**”

As it can be easily deduced from the examples above, informally adjective forms are used as adverbs. Obviously, these uses are not considered to be standard English but should be taken into account since they typically occur in fiction works and are especially characteristic of colloquial American English (Biber *et alii*, 1999). This element of colloquialness also seems to be confirmed by the frequent use of phrasal verbs (e.g., *wrap something up*, *get something over with*, *break down*, *come over*, *pick somebody up*, *light up*, *come out*), as well as contracted forms (e.g., *wanna*, *‘cause*, *gonna*). In terms of semantic preference, thus, a number of words and expressions certainly confirm this feeling of informality.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Much of the recent literature on corpus linguistics (Hunston and Francis, 2000; Tognini-Bonelli, 2001; *et alii*) emphasises the very close relationship between syntax and semantics. The main aim of this paper was illustrating this close relationship by means of the analysis of two overlapping categories in English: *fast* and *quick*. Thanks to the observation of a corpus of best-selling whodunits, their most frequent collocates and the semantic rules underlying different syntactic structures have been described. As a result, it has become evident that, despite these two words may be interchangeable in certain contexts, there are certain semantic rules which seem to determine the grammatical structure of the clause they belong to, or their most suitable and typical collocates.

The analysis of the corpus reveals that *fast* outnumbers *quick* as regards the total amount of appearances. Nonetheless, these data may not be surprising at all because *quick* starts in disadvantage –*quick* is not prescriptively considered an adverb, and therefore there is a clear tendency for native speakers not to use it as such. Consequently, it becomes necessary these two words be considered depending on their grammatical function –either adjective or adverb.

Quite interestingly, when the two words are analysed according to their grammatical category, it is *quick* which outnumbers *fast* when they are adjectives. This advantage in number lies in the fact that *quick* is much more common than *fast* when they are attributive adjectives. Furthermore, when in a predicative function, there is not much difference between them –there are 62 tokens of *quick* and 54 of *fast*. This similarity in number also extends to the syntactic function they perform within the clause. Nearly all the examples of *quick* and *fast* found in the corpus are functioning as subject predicatives. There is just one case where *quick* is an object predicative.

As regards their collocates as adjectives, *quick* is found in combination with nouns belonging to a wider range of semantic fields. Despite its greater diversity, the frequency of appearance together with a given type of noun is quite unbalanced. In general terms, *quick* tends to refer to actions that last for a short period of time, whereas *fast* normally refers to things or persons in motion, and things characterised by their great speed.

It is also interesting to comment on the type of modification these two words allow when they are adjectives. As regards pre-modification, both behave in a similar way. Intensifying adverbs are the most typical pre-modifier. Concerning post-modification, the main difference between *quick* and *fast* lies in the fact that there is a tendency for *quick* to be post-modified by a *to-infinitive* clause, but there are no instances of such post-modification in the case of *fast*.

The most interesting results of the present study are provided by the analysis of *quick* and *fast* as adverbs. Following a prescriptive approach, these two words would never be considered overlapping categories because the word *quick* can only function as an adjective and not as an adverb –it needs to add the suffix “-ly” for it to be considered an adverb. Very interestingly, though, some cases where *quick* is being used as an adverb have been found within the corpus. Although its use is not very common, it seems to have a

very concrete context of appearance: colloquial spoken American language. The explanation of such a use goes beyond the simple answer of it being an unconscious grammatical error produced by analogy.

The use of a corpus-based approach is of great value for various reasons. Firstly, it is a way of trustworthy describing what native speakers of a language –English in this case– use in different contexts. One of the most significant findings in our study corroborates this first reason. The present study has revealed the actual use of *quick* as an adverb in colloquial spoken register. The fact that computer-assisted corpus analysis provides linguists with large amounts of *real* data makes this accurate and detailed description of the language possible.

Secondly, corpus-based analysis is not just advisable but necessary in the writing of any type of book whose aim is describing different aspects of a given language. The real data it provides should be a must in the confection of reliable descriptive grammars which serve as reference books to many different people such as linguists, university teachers, university students, etc.

Finally, this recent approach to language provides teachers with very interesting data and offers them the possibility of designing materials⁵ that are more appealing to their students and that trigger a more significant learning.

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⁵ Please see further research on this issue in Laso, N. J. & Giménez, E. (forthcoming) "Bridging the Gap between Corpus Research and Language Teaching".