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***ON ELEMENTS OF CULTURALLY INFLUENCED
LANGUAGE USE IN THE TOO ADJ TO V
CONSTRUCTION IN AMERICAN AND CANADIAN
ENGLISH***



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The *too ADJ to V* construction:


- *He's too dumb to understand that virtually all Presidents are moderates once in office*
- *Some of Mitt Romney's supporters argue that he's too smart to believe his own bellicose rhetoric*
- *I think I am probably a bit too old to be videoblogging*
- *This is the biggest reason why the average American is too ignorant to vote intelligently*

Source: the Glowbe

- **AdjP: too / M + ADJ / H + to-inf. cl. / Ca**
- a **scalar construction** in which the presence of *too*, a booster-type degree modifier (in terms of Paradis 200:149), specifies such a high degree of the attribute that the ADJ element expresses that it is construed as having a preventive effect on the situation expressed by the V-element (Jensen 2014a, Jensen 2014b) (+ enablement)
- implies a **force-dynamic relation based on the image schema of blockage** (Johnson 1987: 45-46) established between the attribute expressed by the ADJ-element and the event expressed by the V-element (cf. Bergen & Binsted 2004 - notion of an implied pragmatic relationship, Fortuin 2013, 2014; Jensen 2014a, 2014b)


That **relation of prevention / blockage** can be:


- **“natural”**: *too dark to see, too small to be visible, too big to fit into place*
- **culturally-influenced / culturally-filtered / culturally-based** (Jensen, 2014a, 2014b): *too young to comprehend it, too busy to chat, too macho to see a doctor*
 - **young** – co-attracted to cognitive and evaluative verbs *know, remember, understand, recall, appreciate, realize, comprehend, learn, recollect, question, grasp, evaluate, process, and recognize*. This may indicate an underlying force-dynamic relation of YOUNG AGE BLOCKING (OR AT LEAST DIMINISHING) INTELLECTUAL CAPACITY, i.e. this may reflect underlying cultural patterns of behaviour relating to AGE.

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- **polite** – co-attracted to verbs of human interaction and communication (*point (out), ask, add, disagree, inquire, comment, mention, object, question, complain, express, protest, tell, and speak*), indicating that - in certain contexts - acts of communication may be face-threatening in the cultural model of politeness in American culture
 - **busy** – co-attracted to verbs of interaction, communication, and human sociability (*talk, attend, chat, answer, meet, visit, hang, discuss, speak, and play*), suggesting that, in American culture, there may be a tendency to deprioritize social situations when one is busy.
 - **macho** - a high degree of MACHISMO is at odds with emotionality, vulnerability, face-compromising situations, and traditionally feminine chores + associated with unreasonable and non-constructive behaviour in the context of American culture (*too macho to see a doctor, too macho to back out of buying it when he learns the price*)

In a broader theoretical and methodological perspective, the paper builds on the assumptions that:


- verbal behaviour can be reflective of underlying cultural conceptualizations (Jensen 2014, 2015),
- differences in phrasing may reflect more general cultural differences (Murphy 2018), and
- corpus data and the relevant statistical methods can thereby serve as the basis to investigate the language-culture interrelation rigorously, empirically and systematically.

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- Jensen, 2014b: *To determine more precisely the extent to which these relations of blockage are culture-specific, a comparative study would be required which compares the discursive behavior of the construction in American English to its behavior in other varieties of English [...]. Such a study would be extremely interesting in the perspective of cognitive linguistics, cognitive anthropology, and intercultural communication studies.*
 - Pavlović (2020), for American, British and Indian English (IJCL)

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- A vertical blue abstract background with wavy, flowing lines on the left side of the slide.
- This time: American and Canadian English
 - Reason: despite the many shared similarities between the two societies, various authors have pointed out to some subtle differences in the respective communication styles, so it was considered worth exploring whether such differences would show in the preferences for using specific ADJ – V pairs in the given construction in one regional variety as opposed to the other

1.2 Aims

- explore additional instances of what may be considered culturally-influenced co-attracted collexemes in the ADJ and V slots in the given construction in the two English language regional varieties
- examine the thus obtained results in view of the models of cross-cultural communication styles (Lewis, Hofstede, Hall) and similar related literature (Murphy 2018, Stewart, Bennett 2011).


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- give a contribution to cognitive-functional approaches, that insist on exploring intralingual and interlingual lectal variability (in this case the variability in the preferences of use of the ADJ-V pairs in the given construction in that two regional dialects of English), including those aspects of that variability that may be culturally conditioned (cf. Geeraerts & Kristiansen, 2014).

2. THE METHOD AND THE CORPUS

COLLOSTRUCTIONAL ANALYSIS - a statistical analysis that measures the degree of attraction or repulsion that words exhibit to syntactic constructions (collostruction = collocation + construction).

- developed by Stefan Th. Gries and Anatol Stefanowitsch
- an extension of existing collocation-based methods; as opposed to such methods, which focus on purely linear co-occurrence preferences and restrictions pertaining to specific lexical items, collostructional analysis is adapted to the investigation of the lexis-grammar interface and heavily relies on strict quantification and inferential statistics.
- grounded in the methodological framework of quantitative corpus linguistics and the theoretical framework of Construction Grammar (including but not limited to Goldberg's CG)

- The basic goal in performing a collocation analysis is to establish which lexical items are “typical” of a given grammatical construction, i.e. the appearance of which lexical items is statistically significant for the construction in question
- Gries 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, Gries and Stefanowitsch 2004a, 2004b, 2010, Flach 2015, 2017, Gries et al. 2005, 2010, Hilpert 2006, 2012, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, Stefanowitsch 2005, 2006, 2013, Stefanowitsch and Gries 2003, 2005, 2008, 2013 and Wulff et al. 2007, inter alia.
- The statistical test used: originally – Fisher Yates’ exact test; after criticisms levelled at such a test in Schmid & Küchenhoff (2013), inter alia, the odds ratio also tends to be used instead (cf. Sommerer & Baumann, 2020)

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- 3 types:
 - Simple collexeme analysis
 - **Distinctive collexeme analysis**
 - Covarying collexeme analysis

➤ Distinctive collexeme analysis

establishes which collexemes are over- and underrepresented in two (e.g. regional) language varieties at a statistically significant level, i.e. which of them exhibit a strong preference for one variety as opposed to the other(s)

Its specific subtype: **distinctive analysis of covarying collexemes** (Pavlović 2020) = **distinctive co-varying collexeme analysis** (Stefanowitsch / Flach 2020)


establishes which pairs of collexemes (such as the ADJ-V pairs in the construction under investigation here) are over- and underrepresented in two (or more) language varieties at a statistically significant level, i.e. which of such pairs exhibit a strong preference for one variety as opposed to the others

The statistic used in the present paper: the *odds ratio* and its natural logarithm (rather than the p-value of the FYE test used originally in CoLA)

The odds ratio:

- is frequency adjusted (it is not affected by corpus sizes)
- is bi-directional – reliance-based (from lexemes to cxs) and attraction-based (from cx to lexemes) odds ratio scores are invariably identical
- yields effect sizes rather than p-values as measures of attraction
- is not reliant on the stochastic nature of the data and the assumption about randomness of linguistic data (in this case the assumption that occurrences of pairs of lexemes and the construction are unrelated)

cf. Schmid / Küchenhoff (2013)



Odds ratio (OR) of 1 corresponds to the null hypothesis that there is no attraction (in this case between the pairs of ADJ-V collexemes and the construction in question)

Then the natural logarithm of the OR is calculated.

The natural logarithm of 1 is 0, with the values above zero indicating positive, and the values below zero – negative attraction

OR scores can be interpreted directly (e.g. the OR of 90 for a lexical item indicates that that lexical item is 90 times more likely to occur in the given construction / dialect, rather than in another)

THE CORPUS

GloWbE - The Corpus of Global Web-based English

<https://www.english-corpora.org/glowbe/>

- contains about 1.9 billion words of text from twenty different English-speaking countries, 2012-13

For the purposes of this paper: only AE and CE sections

THE CORPUS

GloWbE - The Corpus of Global Web-based English

<https://www.english-corpora.org/glowbe/>

Country	Code	General (may also include blogs)			(Only) Blogs			Total		
		Web sites	Web pages	Words	Web sites	Web pages	Words	Web sites	Web pages	Words
United States	US	43,249	168,771	253,536,242	48,116	106,385	133,061,093	82,260	275,156	386,809,355
Canada	CA	22,178	81,644	90,846,732	16,745	54,048	43,814,827	33,776	135,692	134,765,381

The general approach in the paper

- Corpus-driven

- see what results the given kind of statistical analysis yields and how they correlate to the views given in the relevant literature

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. CULTURAL MODELS

- schematic cognitive models that are intersubjectively shared by the members of a community, and guide its members' understanding of the world and people's behaviour; they mediate and regulate the behaviour of the community members.
- based on universal cognitive principles, but are culture-specific, but their specifics are culture-specific. Given that they are behaviour-mediating and -regulating, we can assume that underlying cultural models surface in behaviour, including verbal behaviour. Thus, analysis of corpus data may, in addition to patterns in verbal behavior itself, reveal emergent cultural models

Cultural model theory and its application in analysis of cultural and communicative phenomena and social behavior:

- Rice (1980),
- D'Andrade (1981, 1987),
- Holland & Skinner (1987),
- Keesing (1987),
- Quinn (1987),
- Quinn & Holland (1987),
- Sweetser (1987),
- Li et al. (2004),
- Gries & Stefanowitsch (2004),
- Ungerer & Schmid (2006),
- Fryberg & Markus (2007),
- Kronenfeld (2008, 2014)
- Schneider (2014).

2.2 Studies in corpus linguistics that address culturally-contextualized language use

- Leech & Fallon 1992 (reveal large-scale divergences and convergences between British and American English, e.g. American culture in 1961 was characterized by masculinity as a cultural value while family was a more important cultural concept in Britain; BROWN and LOB corpora)
- Ooi 2000 (Singaporean English and Malian English collocations in a newspaper corpus; a number of cultural concepts specific to these two cultures and the context(s) in which they exist);
- Elsness 2013
- Gries & Stefanowitsch 2004
- Fina 2011

2.3. Models of cross-cultural communication styles

- high and low context cultures (Hall 1959, 1966, 1976, 1983).
- cultural types – linear-active, multi-active and reactive (Lewis 1995, 2005)
- value dimensions that cultures can be characterized by (power distance, masculinity, individualism, etc.) (Hofstede, 1980, 1991)
- Criticism of some of such models: Piller (2007)

4. THE RESULTS



AMERICAN ENGLISH

Top 20 most distinctive ADJ-V pairs in AE in the *too ADJ to V* construction (sorted by log(OR) values)

ADJ	V	CE observed	AE observed	CE expected	AE expected	p-value	Odds ratio (OR)	lowest value of 95% CI	log(e)(OR)	highest value of 95% CI
stupid	understand	4	95	26.603	72.397	3.87E-09	0.114	-3.496	-2.175	-1.201
stupid	be	2	46	12.946	35.054	0.00011	0.117	-4.283	-2.144	-0.801
short	spend	1	20	5.675	15.325	0.0236	0.135	-5.728	-2.004	-0.17
stupid	vote	1	19	5.405	14.595	0.0228	0.142	-5.679	-1.953	-0.113
stupid	know	5	87	24.737	67.263	1.80E-07	0.155	-3.014	-1.864	-0.977
blind	see	2	33	9.449	25.551	0.00336	0.163	-3.963	-1.811	-0.447
dumb	see	1	15	4.325	11.675	0.0869	0.18	-5.456	-1.716	0.156
late	say	1	14	4.055	10.945	0.0854	0.193	-5.391	-1.647	0.236
smart	fall	1	14	4.055	10.945	0.0854	0.193	-5.391	-1.647	0.236
stupid	do	1	14	4.055	10.945	0.0854	0.193	-5.391	-1.647	0.236
important	let	1	13	3.785	10.215	0.131	0.207	-5.322	-1.573	0.323
stupid	get	2	26	7.563	20.437	0.0172	0.207	-3.737	-1.573	-0.187
dense	understand	1	12	3.515	9.485	0.207	0.225	-5.248	-1.493	0.418
stupid	think	1	12	3.515	9.485	0.207	0.225	-5.248	-1.493	0.418
young	make	1	12	3.515	9.485	0.207	0.225	-5.248	-1.493	0.418
stupid	see	3	35	10.257	27.743	0.0055	0.231	-3.091	-1.465	-0.309
late	ask	1	11	3.245	8.755	0.2	0.245	-5.168	-1.406	0.523
lazy	write	1	11	3.245	8.755	0.2	0.245	-5.168	-1.406	0.523
stupid	read	1	11	3.245	8.755	0.2	0.245	-5.168	-1.406	0.523
lazy	look	4	44	12.948	35.052	0.0028	0.245	-2.75	-1.405	-0.394



CANADIAN ENGLISH

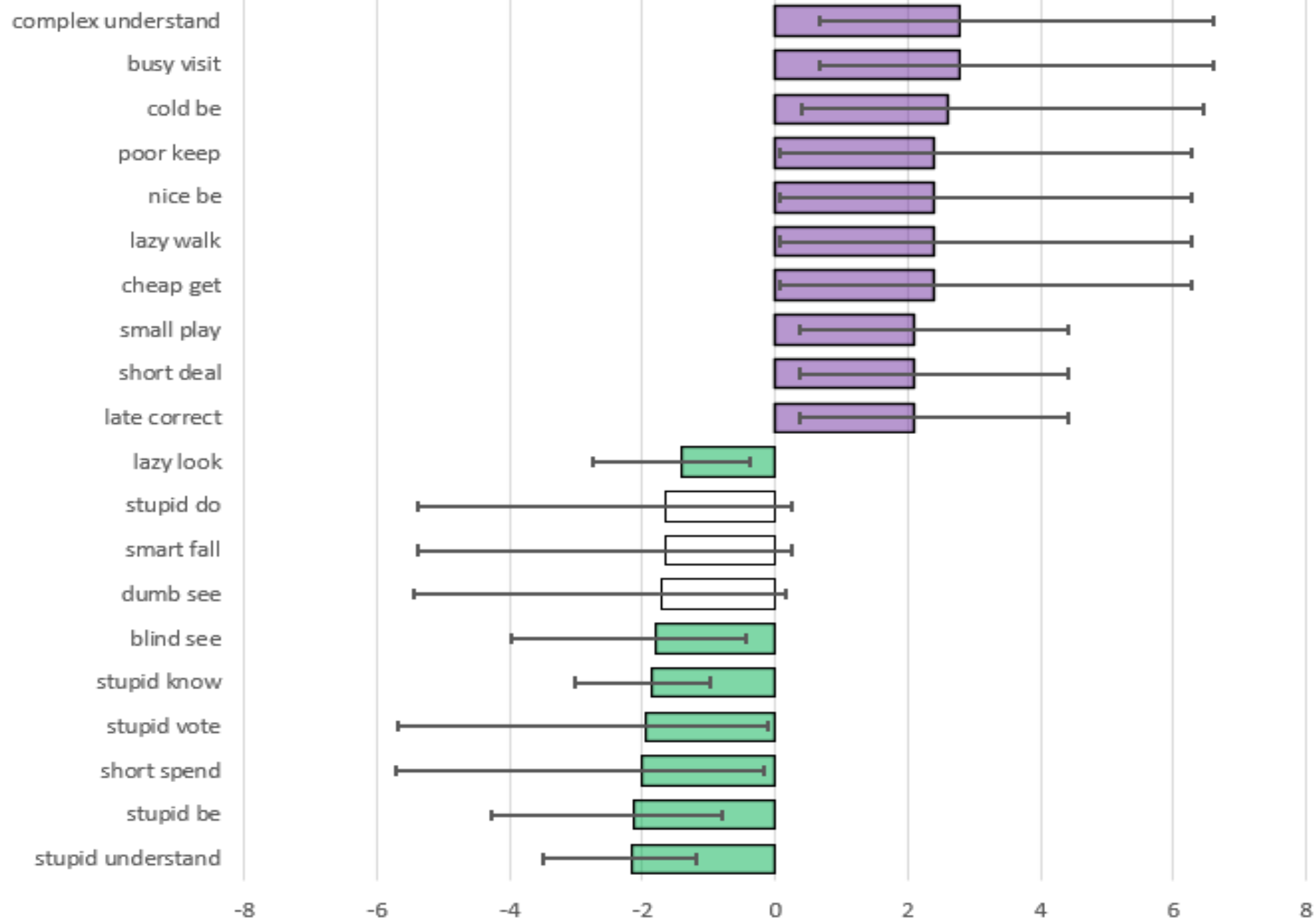
Top 20 most distinctive ADJ-V pairs in CE in the *too ADJ to V* construction (sorted by log(OR) values)

ADJ	v	CE observed	AE observed	CE expected	AE expected	p-value	Odds ratio	lowest value of 95% CI	log(e)(OR)	highest value of 95% CI
busy	visit	6	1	1.894	5.106	0.00211	16.196	0.675	2.785	6.61
complex	understand	6	1	1.894	5.106	0.00211	16.196	0.675	2.785	6.61
cold	be	5	1	1.624	4.376	0.00673	13.493	0.411	2.602	6.455
cheap	get	4	1	1.353	3.647	0.021	10.792	0.0651	2.379	6.273
lazy	walk	4	1	1.353	3.647	0.021	10.792	0.0651	2.379	6.273
nice	be	4	1	1.353	3.647	0.021	10.792	0.0651	2.379	6.273
poor	keep	4	1	1.353	3.647	0.021	10.792	0.0651	2.379	6.273
late	correct	6	2	2.165	5.835	0.00648	8.098	0.369	2.092	4.41
short	deal	6	2	2.165	5.835	0.00648	8.098	0.369	2.092	4.41
small	play	6	2	2.165	5.835	0.00648	8.098	0.369	2.092	4.41
ashamed	come	3	1	1.082	2.918	0.0632	8.091	-0.432	2.091	6.049
big	sit	3	1	1.082	2.918	0.0632	8.091	-0.432	2.091	6.049
eager	talk	3	1	1.082	2.918	0.0632	8.091	-0.432	2.091	6.049
early	take	3	1	1.082	2.918	0.0632	8.091	-0.432	2.091	6.049
easy	feel	3	1	1.082	2.918	0.0632	8.091	-0.432	2.091	6.049
exhausted	think	3	1	1.082	2.918	0.0632	8.091	-0.432	2.091	6.049
expensive	change	3	1	1.082	2.918	0.0632	8.091	-0.432	2.091	6.049
good	play	3	1	1.082	2.918	0.0632	8.091	-0.432	2.091	6.049
hard	call	3	1	1.082	2.918	0.0632	8.091	-0.432	2.091	6.049
hard	meet	3	1	1.082	2.918	0.0632	8.091	-0.432	2.091	6.049



the graph

The ten most distinctive ADJ-V pairs in the *too ADJ to V* construction in CE and AE



The results in the graph can generally be considered statistically significant expect in the three cases (the ones not filled in with colour) where the 95% confidence interval (CI) line includes the zero point:

stupid – do,

smart – fall, and

dumb – see,

in which cases neither regional variant can be considered to be either attractor or repellor of such ADJ – V pairs.

Overview of results

- The ADJ-V pairs predominating in **AE** those where the V-element denotes
 - lack of good judgement or intelligence (*stupid, dumb, blind, dense*),
 - presence of good judgment (*smart*)
 - presence of negative personal traits, such as lack of diligence and hard work (*lazy*)

As such, the pairs distinctive for AE appear to be quite direct and *ad hominem*

In addition,

- There are pairs with the adjectives *important* (*important-let, Elections are too important to let them be run by amateurs*) and *young* (*young-make, He is too young to make that judgment guided by experience*)

In contrast, the ADJ-V pairs distinctive for **CE** are more semantically diversified and typically do not address one's judgement or intelligence, construed as either bad or good, or one's personal traits, except in rare cases (*lazy – walk*)

They ascribe difficulty in passing judgement to external circumstances rather than limitations in one's intelligence (*complex – understand*)

They also testify to caution in passing judgement (rather than labelling one as stupid, etc.) and to the relation towards others that is supportive rather than demeaning

- *hard – call: It was a unanimous decision by the guests that it was too hard to call a winner*
- *good – play: He is too good to play second fiddle to Gibson*

In addition, the ADJ-V pairs in CE often tend to be more general

- *cold – be (It is too cold to be outside)*
- *big – sit (The little boy is growing to be too big to sit and cuddle any more)*
- *exhausted – think (too exhausted to think about doing the dishes)*
- *nice – be (too nice to be real)*

The most distinctive pair is *busy-visit*, which may imply there may be a tendency to deprioritize social situations (interaction, communication, and human sociability) when one is busy.

There is a pair denoting embarrassment, which is also absent in AE

➤ *ashamed* – *say* (*Many are too ashamed to come out and say "I have a mental illness"*)

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Both varieties attract the pairs with the adjective *short* (*short – spend* in AE and *short – deal* in CE), which in all cases in the corpus in both varieties relates to life as the subject referent:

Life is too short to spend it making people happy,

Life is too short to deal with such behaviour

Both varieties also attract the pairs with the adjective *late* (*late – ask* in AE and *late – correct* in CE):

Too late to say we told you so! But we told you so!

The bright side is that it's not too late to correct that mistake

Just CE attracts an ADJ – V pair *early* (as the antonym of *late*):


Maybe it's too early to take the test


While both Americans and Canadians can be prepared to act fast, Canadians sometimes apparently take a longer time to think things through


In Jensen's (2014a) terms, this draws on different cultural models of temporal appropriateness of evaluation or assessment.


5. DISCUSSION

There are indeed some correlations that can be established between the results obtained, on the one hand, and the typical communication styles in the two societies as presented in the literature, on the other hand.

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- A vertical blue abstract graphic on the left side of the slide, featuring a gradient from light blue at the top to dark blue at the bottom, with a wavy, ribbon-like shape in the middle.
- The USA is described (Hall 1976, Lewis 2005, 2006, Hofstede' 1991, 2001, Stewart & Bennet 1991, Murphy 2018) as a low-context, linear-active culture with just slight elements of multi-active cultures, with high individualism, and relatively low power distance.
 - The typical US communication style is argued to be informal, direct, blunt, tough, pushy (sometimes to the point of being aggressive), problem-oriented, explicit, personal, informal, overly opinionated, bragging, immodest, tending towards the exaggerated, boastful and sensational

- 
- This appears to be in line with the predominance of the *ADJ – V* pairs in which the ADJ element is *stupid*, *blind*, *dumb*, *dense*, *smart*, and also in line with absence of such pairs where the ADJ element is a lexeme such as *ashamed*.


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- Similarly to the USA, Canada is also a low-context culture with relatively low power distance, with somewhat lower, but still relatively high, individualism
 - On the other hand, as opposed to the US culture, which is generally linear-active with just slight elements of multi-active cultures, Canadian culture occupies a place in-between linear active and reactive cultures (the latter being those of the Japanese and Finnish cultures, among others)


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- A vertical blue abstract graphic on the left side of the slide, featuring a gradient from light blue at the top to a darker blue at the bottom, with a wavy, ribbon-like shape in the middle.
- typical Canadian communication style is argued to be low key, modest, understated, subdued, tolerant, trustful, trusting and egalitarian, impartial, tolerant, calm, conservative, democratic – with everyone free to air their own views, compromise-inclined, with ostentation, boasting, rhetoric, overly tough talk and being overly opinionated, intense and individualistic being frowned upon (sources – the same as above)
 - “To be outniced as a Canadian is very upsetting“


- This appears to be in line with:
 - the absence of the ADJ – V pairs in which the ADJ element is *stupid, blind, dumb, dense, smart*, i.e. those that directly address one's judgement or intelligence
 - the presence of the pairs attributing problems in passing judgement to external circumstances rather than limitations in one's intelligence (*complex-understand*)
 - the presence of the pairs indicating the relation towards others that is supportive rather than demeaning (cf. the examples with *hard – call* and *good – play* above)
 - the use of the pairs that are more general rather than *ad hominem* (like in the examples with *cold – be, big – sit, exhausted – think, nice – be* above).

6. CONCLUSIONS

- The most distinctive ADJ-V pairs in the two varieties do differ and this might indeed reflect subtle differences in underlying cultural conceptualizations
- This is important for the following reasons:
 - The results confirm the value of systematic empirical investigation of language-culture interrelation, such as carried out by the authors referred to above; they show that the employment of a rigorous statistical method applied to empirical data from a massive corpus, the results of which are interpreted qualitatively, may indeed produce a number of insights into culturally conditioned intralingual cross-cultural lexical variability that might otherwise have gone unnoticed.


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- A vertical blue abstract graphic on the left side of the slide, featuring a gradient from light blue at the top to dark blue at the bottom, with a wavy, ribbon-like shape in the middle.
- such results present a contribution to the recontextualizing approach to language taken in cognitive-functional linguistics (see Geeraerts & Kristiansen, 2014), within which usage-based construction grammar and the collocation method, which this paper relies on, have developed
 - Methodologically, the choice of distinctive collexeme analysis of covarying collexemes has catered well to the needs of this study. Namely, the covarying collexeme analysis would not have shown the ADJ-V pairs that are distinctive for each of the varieties in cases when both are addressed together rather than individually.


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- In addition, such a type of distinctive collexeme analysis has so far been applied only in Pavlović 2020 and Stefanowitsch / Flach 2020, so that the present analysis might serve as yet another, hopefully sensible, example of its use


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- Also methodologically, the choice of odds ratio (and its natural logarithm) can be said to have helped avoid the pitfalls of using the FYE test (especially in view of the fact that the subcorpora used are relatively large and disproportionate – the AE and the CE parts contain approx. 387 and 135 million words, respectively, creating problems for the validity of the FYE test (the FYE test p-value is not frequency adjusted and tends to decrease with the rise in corpus size)).

Caveats

- The correlations identified are not to be mistaken for actual cause-effect relations. More specifically, the models of cross-cultural communication styles presented cannot possibly be used to predict how the given construction will actually be used across regional varieties for at least two reasons:
 - the use of the given construction depends on many other factors in addition to the dominant communication styles (including simple accidents)
 - the very models of intercultural and cross-cultural communication styles themselves are also partially problematic.

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- Many examples have been overlooked because of the focus on a limited number of the most distinctive ADJ – V pairs. The same applies to various other aspects of the use of the given construction, such as its use in negation, the animateness / inanimateness of the subject referent, the semantic role of the subject referent, etc.

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- A vertical blue abstract background on the left side of the slide, featuring a gradient from light blue at the top to a darker blue at the bottom, with a wavy, ribbon-like texture in the middle.
- The GloWbE itself is not unproblematic
 - it is web-based (as its name says), i.e. the actual examples it contains come exclusively from the internet
 - the lexical frequencies extracted from it, as from any other corpus, and the application of statistical tests to such frequencies, need not accurately reflect the real state of affairs. Namely, some of those frequencies may be over- and underrepresented, which also poses a challenge to inferring cultural conceptualizations from linguistic patterns of co-occurrence.



Further research in the area, using additional models and theories addressing language-culture interrelation and the development of even more advanced e-corpora, may help reduce such problems.

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