Corpus-based comparative study of intensifiers: quite, pretty, rather and fairly

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The study of intensifiers has been of interest both in semantics and sociolinguistics. But as for how the intensifiers used by second-language or foreign-language learners of English, there are far fewer corpus-based researches partly owing to the potential difficulty in compiling a corpus and suitable data-analysing software. The present study examines four general intensifiers like quite, pretty, rather, fairly in the British National Corpus, the Written English Corpus of Chinese Learner and the Chinese Learner English Corpus, comparing the practical use as well as the semantic prosody of the four intensifiers between native speakers and English learners, and found that native speakers and learners showed different preference in use and have different understanding of the intensifiers in question.

KEYWORDS: Intensifier; corpus; semantic prosody

1. Introduction

Douglas, Conrad and Reppen (1998a) investigated into the gender difference in the use of general emphatics by analysing 276 letters from the ARCHER Corpus and additional letters for some under-represented periods, and one of their findings was that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, letters written by females do contain a higher frequency of emphatics. Many following researchers, like Mai Kuha (2005), Scandrett (2012), Masoomeh Hanafiyyeh and Akbar Afgahi (2014), have conducted English-specific and cross-cultural linguistic investigations into the use of emphatics but they use a different term to name words like very, really, so, pretty and real, calling them intensifier. Richard and Tao (2007) conducted a corpus-based sociolinguistic study of 33 amplifiers in British English and reached one conclusion concerning gender that gender on its own is not sufficient as a sociolinguistic variable in defining men’s or women’s language in the Lakoff tradition, but it can interact with other sociolinguistic variable such as age, socioeconomic and education levels, and possibly also race and ethnicity. Ruihua (2013) dealt with semantic prosody of four adverbial intensifiers: terribly, awfully, horribly and dreadfully, drawing on historical and modern corpus data and tracking the changes by comparing their frequency in the company of pleasant and unpleasant words over different historical period.

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According to the former studies of emphatics, intensifiers or amplifiers, most of the studies centred mostly on the sociolinguistic factors. But as for how the amplifiers used by second-language or foreign-language learners of English, there are far fewer corpus-based researches partly owing to the potential difficulty in compiling a corpus and suitable data-analysing software. The present study examines four general intensifiers like *quite, pretty, rather* and *fairly* in the British National Corpus (BNC), the Written English Corpus of Chinese Learner (WECCL) and the Chinese Learner English Corpus (CLEC), comparing the practical use of the four intensifiers between native speakers and Chinese English learners. Meanwhile, the data analysis software the AntConc is used to generate collocates of these intensifiers.

First, the four general intensifiers are chosen as the topic because Chinese learners believe these intensifiers are similar and tend to replace one another in writings. Second, in Chinese, the four general intensifiers like *quite, pretty, rather* and *fairly* are equivalents to *xiāngdǎng*, which is an intensifier less than “very” and often appears before positive, negative and neutral words. Chinese English learners tend to replace the four intensifiers with one another in writing. But in essence, the English equivalents have minor difference from Chinese *xiāngdǎng* in practical use.

1.1. Working definition of intensifiers

The term intensifiers is often used interchangeably with the terms like degree adverbs or degree modifiers, which are used to convey the degree or the exact value of the quality expressed by the item they modify. Quirk et al. (1985) defined intensifiers as “linguistic devices that boost the meaning of a property upwards from an assumed norm”. Bäcklund (1973) gave a detailed descriptive characterization of degree adverbs in English and divided them into eight subclasses in terms of some notions of degree. According to Bäcklund’s division, words like *quite, pretty, rather* and *fairly* belong to the class of moderate degree adverbs.

Though it is true that there are also some other alternative terms for the same groups of adverbs, the term like *degree adverbs or intensifiers* is suffice for the present study.

1.2. The definition and the thesaurus in the dictionary

According to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE), intensifier refers to “a word, usually an adverb, that is used to emphasize an adjective, adverb or verb, for example, the word ‘absolutely’ in the phrase ‘that’s absolutely wonderful’” (Pearson Education Limited 2003a).

LDOCE is also well distinguished from the other dictionaries in the synonymy columns, Thesaurus Columns. When looking up the four intensifiers, the thesaurus column writes,

“rather/quite especially British English more than a little but less than very. British people use these words before adjectives in conversation. In many cases they do not intend to change the meaning. – It’s just something that people say: she seemed rather happy. It’s getting quite late.

fairly rather: fairly is used in both British and American English: the test was fairly easy./ It’s a fairly long way to the next town.

pretty spoken rather. Pretty is more informal than the other words and is used in spoken English: his French is pretty good./We’re in a pretty strong position.” (Pearson Education Limited 2003b)
And in the entry of pretty, the dictionary gives the following notice:

“Register: In written English, people usually avoid pretty and use fairly instead.”

Thus, by referring to the thesaurus, three intensifiers like rather, quite, pretty are often preferred in British people’s conversation or spoken English, while fairly usually occurs in their written English. Then, the dictionary does not give more explanation for what’s the further difference among rather, quite and pretty. And another point needs to be mentioned: in the entry of fairly, one definition is “[+adj./adv] more than a little, but much less than very”, which is the same with rather and quite. Meanwhile, LDOCE also uses fairly to define rather, and rather to define fairly and pretty, which surely causes some misunderstanding to the non-native English learners.

2. Available corpora
There are three corpora to be used in the present study of the four intensifiers: quite, pretty, rather and fairly. The first two are Chinese learner corpora and the BNC is the native English speaker corpus.

2.1. Chinese learner corpora
The native Chinese students’ errors are surely inevitable in the process of acquiring a foreign language like English. What’s more, errors are a sound evidence of their language progress – interlanguage phase. Selinker (1985) coined the term “interlanguage”, implying that between the learner’s source language (first or native language) and target language (second or foreign language), there is an interlanguage, which shares the characteristic of two social dialects of the languages.

In China, there are two English learner corpora which should be taken into consideration while doing learner language competence analysis, CLEC and WECCCL. Both are corpora of students’ written sample, but they vary in the tagging systems and research subjects. The combination of the two corpora makes it possible to obtain representative knowledge of Chinese students’ English competence.

2.1.1. CLEC
Chinese Learner English Corpus, abbreviated as CLEC, is the first learner corpus in China with error taggers. It is a learner corpus constructed by Shanghai Jiao Tong University and Guangdong University of Foreign Studies. The corpus is a collection of English compositions written by Chinese students widely ranging from middle school to the fourth year English majors in universities. The altogether 1070,602-word corpus collected students’ writings without any correction, which enables researchers gain direct knowledge of the students’ interlanguage.

CLEC consists of written samples of 5 different groups of students, ranging from students in senior high school to college students: ST2, ST3, ST4, ST5 and ST6.

ST2 represents the groups of students in senior high school, and ST3 represents the group of freshmen and sophomores, most of whom haven’t taken College English Test Band 4.1 ST4 represents the students of juniors and seniors who have passed CET4 and
are going to take CET6, ST5 representing the students of freshmen and sophomores majoring in English and ST6 the junior and senior English majors.

2.1.2. WECCL

The Written English Corpus of Chinese Learner, abbreviated as WECCL, is developed by both Nanjing University and Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, which started in 2003 and completed in 2005. WECCL has a one million word collection of written samples, from first year to fourth year English majors from nine universities of different levels. The writings are of two types, in-class time limited and after-class time unlimited argumentative, narrative and expositive writings, each usually containing 200–800 words. There are altogether 3578 articles with 1186,215 words, among which there are 3059 argumentations, 529 narrations and 90 expositions. WECCL is a tagged corpus, with a rate of correction up to 95.15%.²

2.2. The native English corpus BNC

The British National Corpus, abbreviated as BNC, is a large corpus which is a 100 million word collection of samples of written and spoken language from a wide range of sources, designed to represent a wide cross-section of British English, both spoken and written, from the late twentieth century. The written part of BNC includes extracts from regional and national newspapers, specialist periodical and journal for all ages and interests, academic books and popular fiction, published and unpublished letters and memoranda, school and university essays.³ The written samples of school and university essays in BNC contain 204,009 words.

2.3. Methodology

Different corpora adopt different tagging systems. In BNC, intensifiers like quite, pretty, rather and fairly are tagged as AV0, while in WECL, they are tagged differently, quite, pretty and rather as RG, fairly RR. As for CLEC, it is an error-tagged corpus, but not a grammatically tagged corpus, so the grammatical distinction has to be done manually.

In Table 1, the grammatical category of words like quite, fairly and rather is definite, while pretty can be used both an adjective and an adverb. In CLEC, there are only eight occurrences, which result in the alteration of pretty.

The three corpora vary in the amount of word collection, so if a comparison of raw counts cannot be used to conclude that a word is more common used than the others. In this case, the number of occurrences of a word should be converted to a standard scale, in this case per 100,000 words (Douglas, Conrad and Reppen 1998). When the counts are normed as in Table 2, pretty has 34.31 occurrences per 100,000 words in BNC, 11.63 occurrences in WECL and 7.47 in CLEC.

Table 1. Lemma list of quite, pretty, rather, fairly in CLEC.⁴

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lemma</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>SFI</th>
<th>ST2</th>
<th>ST3</th>
<th>ST4</th>
<th>ST5</th>
<th>ST6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quite</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>0.8845</td>
<td>271.3512</td>
<td>64.3</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretty</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.9546</td>
<td>40.5046</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rather</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>0.8779</td>
<td>184.678</td>
<td>62.7</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0.8822</td>
<td>22.851</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Comparison among BNC, WECCL and CLEC

First, a survey of adverbial intensifiers like *pretty*, *quite*, *rather*, and *fairly* is conducted into the BNC, the WECCL and the CLEC. For making a comparison between the use of the adverbial intensifiers of the English native speakers and the English learners, the query of the four words is restricted to the *Genre:W:essay:school or Univ*, when the search is conducted into the BNC. As for the two learner corpora, the software AntConc is used, by which the exact word number is used to get the norm frequency.

By comparison, it is striking to see that Chinese English majors, as data from WECCL indicate, tend to use both *rather* and *fairly* far fewer than English native students, and comparing with the other intensifiers, the English majors prefer *quite* to the rest three intensifiers in their writings. The general results in CLEC show that students in general have a higher usage of *quite* and *rather* in their writings, among which *quite* is taken as the most preferable intensifier. There is also another thing to notice that Chinese English learners in general tend to use less *pretty* and *fairly*, but more *quite* and *rather*.

Comprehensively, the occurrences of *quite* and *rather* are higher than the other two intensifiers *pretty* and *fairly*. Among which, *pretty* is less likely used as an intensifier both in the writings of native English students and Chinese English learners. Compared with the native English students, the Chinese English learners seldom use *fairly* as an intensifier in their writing. But as Table 1 shows, the higher English proficiency the learners have, the more use of *fairly* in their writings.

### Table 2. An investigation of intensifiers like *pretty*, *quite*, *rather*, *fairly* into BNC, WECCL and CLEC.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intensifiers</th>
<th>Frequency counts</th>
<th>BNC (204,009 words)</th>
<th>WECCL (1,289,303 words)</th>
<th>CLEC (1,218,517 words)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Raw frequency</td>
<td>Raw frequency</td>
<td>Raw frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Norm frequency</td>
<td>Norm frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pretty</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quite</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rather</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fairly</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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3.1. Comparison of word list

Meara (1996, 3) notes that “learners with big vocabularies are more proficient in a wide range of language skills than learners with smaller vocabularies.” Laufer and Hill (2000, 44) state that “The level at which good first language readers can be expected to transfer their reading strategy to L2 is 3000 word families or about 5000 lexical items”. Researchers like Goulden, Nation and Read (1990), Laufer and Hill (2000, 44), Milton (2009), and Nation (2010) mention the minimum vocabulary of L1 or L2. Consequently, a threshold of 3000 word families is needed for minimum comprehension. LDOCE marks all the words that are in the Longman Communication 3000 in red accompanied by special symbols: W1, W2 and W3 for words that are in the top 1000, 2000 and 3000 most frequent words in written English, and S1, S2 S3 for the top 1000, 2000 and 3000 most frequent words in spoken English. What’s more, analysis of the Longman Corpus Network shows that 3000 most frequent words in spoken and written English account for...
86% or more of what he or she reads. Then, a survey of word list is conducted into the three corpora to see their ranks in the word list, respectively.

Many researchers, like Nation (1990) and Laufer (1992), believe that EFL learners with a certain amount of high frequency English words can deal with reading task well. According to LDOCE, both quite and rather are marked as S1, W1, fairly S1, W2 and pretty S1, W3. From the comparison of word list in the three corpora in Table 3, it’s obvious to notice that quite and rather stand far prior to pretty and fairly. In LDOCE, both pretty and fairly belong to W2 for the native English students, W3 for the native Chinese students in CLEC, fairly W2 while pretty W3 in WECCL. This indicates that the native English students are likely to acquire the four intensifiers earlier than their Chinese peers. And the native Chinese students, ranging from senior high school students to college English majors, are prone to acquire quite and rather earlier than pretty and fairly as intensifiers, which is opposite to the native English students. However, the results of pretty and fairly retrieved from WECCL indicate that English majors are more likely to use fairly rather than pretty as an intensifier, which can also be proved in the frequency difference displayed in Table 2.

3.2. The distribution of the four intensifiers in CLEC and BNC

As for the distribution of the students’ use of the four words, a comparison is also made to see whether the students’ knowledge of the vocabulary vary between native English students and native Chinese students or vary with their proficiency in English. Here in the comparison, only two corpora are needed, one CLEC and the other BNC. For students of high school to a college student, their ages are varying within the range of 15–24. In CLEC, ST2–ST6 are written samples of students of 15–24 years old. Figure 1 displays difference in the theoretical hits per million of the four words in the students’ writings. The native English students use quite more often than their Chinese peers. The Chinese native students underused each intensifier in their writings, fairly in particular. But the frequency pattern seems quite similar to each other: in both of their writings, quite is the most often used intensifiers and rather ranks the next. And compared with the native English students, the native Chinese learners greatly underuse both quite and fairly in their writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corpus</th>
<th>Pretty</th>
<th>Quite</th>
<th>Rather</th>
<th>Fairly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CLEC</td>
<td>2238</td>
<td>484</td>
<td>658</td>
<td>2903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WECCL</td>
<td>2573</td>
<td>423</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>1720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BNC</td>
<td>1293</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>1935</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Ranks of pretty, quite, rather, fairly according to the word list.

Figure 1. Comparison of use of pretty, quite, rather, fairly in CLEC and BNC.
4. Investigating the distribution of the four intensifiers in CLEC and BNC

Olohan (2004) investigates intensifiers such as quite, rather, pretty and fairly in translated versus native English fiction in an attempt to uncover the relationship between collocation and moderation, finding that pretty and rather, and more marginally quite, are considerably less frequent in the TEC-fiction subcorpus; but when they are used, there is usually more variation in usage, and less repetition of common collocates, than in the BNC-fiction corpus. It indicates that non-native’s output may differ from that of the native English speakers. So in order to gain some knowledge of this, an investigation is conducted into the use of the four intensifiers by native English students and native Chinese students.

In Figure 2, the five different groups of students vary a lot in the use of quite and rather. Comparing with pretty and fairly, all of them are more likely to use quite and rather to intensify their statements.

As indicated in Figure 1, quite and rather are more often used than pretty and fairly as intensifier in the both groups of students’ writing. Then, the next is to find out whether they differ in the practical use, such as the syntactic structures, the collocates or other aspects.

Syntactically, both quite and rather are regarded as specifiers to the phrases like NP, VP, PP, AP and AdvP, like quite/rather+ NP, quite/rather+ VP, quite/rather+ PP, quite/rather+ AP and quite/rather+ AdvP, while pretty and fairly can only specify adjectives and adverbs, namely AP and AdvP.

4.1. Comparison of quite and rather in CLEC and BNC

By looking closely at the syntactic structures of quite and rather into both BNC and CLEC, the difference in the output between the native English students and the native Chinese students can be shown in an objective way.

In BNC and CLEC, quite+NP includes quite (a/an) (adj.) noun, quite a few (of noun), quite a lot (of noun) and quite the +adj./noun. The cluster of quite a bit (of noun) does not appear in CLEC. And in both corpora, the highest frequency goes to quite or rather proceeding the adjective heads, quite+AP 304 in BNC (restricted to the Genre:W: essay:school or Univ) and 166 in CLEC, rather+AP 118 in BNC and 63 in CLEC. The data shown in Table 4 indicate that the native English students and the native Chinese student have the similar preference in using quite and rather, namely, using quite and rather to intensify their statement or description.

![Figure 2. Comparison of use of pretty, quite, rather, fairly in different groups of students in CLEC.](image)
Except that, *rather* and *quite* are regarded synonyms, both in meaning and syntactically. The following table lists the immediate right adjective collocates of *rather* and *quite* in BNC and CLEC.

According to Table 5, the native English students and the native Chinese students tend to use *quite* and *rather* to modify different adjectives. Comparing with BNC, Chinese learners prefer to collocate *quite* with positive words like *different, good, happy, important* etc. and use *rather* to modify negative words.

In the Longman dictionary, "the adjective collocates of *quite* from the entries: obvious, content, distinct, exceptional, likely, normal, perfect, ridiculous, right, scared, shocked, sure, surprised, unaware, unnecessary, useless, *expensive*, similar, extraordinary, willing, cold, absurd, *unlikely, unusual*, simple, straightforward, clever" the adjective collocates of *rather* from the entries: *excessive, expensive, unlikely, unusual, relieved*.

Comparatively, *quite* is more often used as adjective modifiers than *rather*, seen in the two corpora and the entries in the dictionary. But according to the examples presented in the Longman dictionary, *quite* and *rather* do not differ in prosody, but in the degree of common use. Differing from *quite*, the word *rather* also often occur in the clusters like *would rather do sth. (than do), rather than sth.* etc. In CLEC, the students of higher grade tend to use “would rather”, “rather than” clusters more in their writing, which shows the similar preference as the native English students.

### 4.2. Comparison of *pretty* and *fairly* in CLEC and BNC

Different from *quite* and *rather*, *pretty* and *fairly* can only modify adjectives and adverbs. What’s more, non-native English educators usually distinguish *pretty* and *fairly* in terms of semantic prosody. Since Stubbs (2002) came up with the idea of semantic relations between node and collocates, namely, the collocational meaning or semantic prosody, researches on semantic prosody have been conducted. Partington (2004) made distinctions of semantics prosody like favourable, neutral and unfavourable, while Xiao and Mcenery (2006) use positive, neutral and negative semantic prosodies to analyse the near synonyms between Chinese and English.

And according to the Longman dictionary, “the adjective collocates of *fairly* from the corpus:

- accurate, certain, clear, close, constant, easy; good, high, large, low, new, obvious, quiet, recent, regular, short, simple, small, stable, standard, strong, sure, typical

And the adjective collocates of *pretty* from the corpus:

- bad, big, clear, close, good, hard, little, obvious, strong, sure, tough".

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Table 4. Norm frequency of syntactic structures of *quite* and *rather* in CLEC and BNC.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syntactic structures</th>
<th>+NP</th>
<th>+VP</th>
<th>+PP</th>
<th>+AP</th>
<th>+AdvP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BNC (204,009 words)</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLEC (1,218,517 words)</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5. The most common collocates of *rather* and *quite* in students’ essays in BNC and CLEC (frequency counts normed per million words, collocates with frequencies less than 3.3 per million words excluded).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLEC</th>
<th>BNC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quite</td>
<td>Rather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right collocate</td>
<td>Freq. per million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6. The most common collocates of *pretty* and *fairly* in students’ essays in BNC and CLEC (due to the fact that most of the collocates appear only one in each of the corpus, only the raw frequency count is provided).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BNC</th>
<th>CLEC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretty</td>
<td>Fairly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right collocate</td>
<td>Raw freq.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odd</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long</td>
<td>Tough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>Well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate</td>
<td>Accurate; easy; charismatic;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smart</td>
<td>Average; cheap; constant;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soon</td>
<td>Well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tall</td>
<td>Peaceful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The collocates listed are those that appear only once in each corpus, with the frequency counts provided in the Raw freq. column.

*Note: The full list of collocates includes terms such as "level", "impartial", and "minor" in BNC, and "popular", "stable", and "prosperous" in CLEC, among others.*
From Table 6 and the Longman corpus, it’s hard to sense the semantic prosody difference between *pretty* and *fairly* as the non-English instructors usually mention in their instructions: *fairly* is the weakest intensifiers compared with *pretty*, *quite* and *rather* and it often co-occurs with positive words. In terms of intensifying degree, *pretty* or *rather* is stronger than quite, which is followed by *fairly*.

Native English students tend to use *fairly* more in their writing without distinguishing it as an intensifier modifying only positive words, while native Chinese students regard both equal to each other and tend to use it to modify positive words, like *cheerful*, *optimistic* etc. both *fairly* and *pretty* can be used in writing.

5. Conclusion
The four intensifiers are investigated into three corpora, one native speaker corpus BNC and two learner corpora, CLEC and WECCL. The investigation helps to clarify the difference in acquisition by native English students and native Chinese students as well as the preference in the syntactic use of the four intensifiers in their writing. And in the survey, there is no obvious evidence in the native corpus to indicate the semantic prosody of *fairly*. Furthermore, intensifiers like *quite* and *rather* do not vary in the semantic prosody but in the degree of common use. Among the four intensifiers, *pretty* is the least likely to be used as an intensifier in writing.

One point to notice is that WECCL is an English major-only corpus which limits the general research on how the native Chinese students acquire English and it is unable to provide an objective and scientific general prospect on students’ language acquisition. And though CLEC, as a general corpus, can provide an objective prospect on the students’ language acquisition, it is insufficient to show the development of learners’ language acquisition, due to the different topics the subjects are given. In recent years, with the development of computer technology, many online writing correction systems are put into practice, which have done much help to the Chinese college students’ English acquisition. But still there are no systematic learner corpora like WECCL and CLEC for further study. Hence, it is urgent to develop a learner corpus which can reflect the development of native Chinese learners of English.

Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author. The paper was completed with the suggestion from my supervisor Mz Cho Youngsoon.

Notes
1. College English Test or CET is a national college English test in China to evaluate the college students’ real English proficiency. It is divided into two bands, Band 4 and Band 6, held twice a year.
3. Referring to the website: http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/, retrieved on 4 December 2015.
4. In the table, F stands for frequency, D for dispersion and U for the theoretical hit per million. SFI refers to the standard frequency index.
5. As is shown on the screen of the software AntConc, there are altogether 1218,517 word tokens. Thus, based on the normalization calculation equation mentioned in Douglas, Conrad...
and Reppen (1998), the norm frequency of pretty can be normed like this: (8/1218,517)×1,000,000 = 7.47.


7. Chinese students tend to equal different with the Chinese expression yúzhòngbùtóng, which is positive in prosody.

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References