

A comparison of degree intensifiers across English corpora: Is it ‘flagrant’, ‘blatant’, or ‘sheer’ audacity?

Nozīmes pastiprinātāju salīdzinājums angļu valodas korpusos: drausmīga, kļedzoša vai pilnīga nekaunība?

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Due to its free-adjointing nature, the category of adjuncts is generally viewed as somewhat peripheral to the forefront of grammatical relations. Meanwhile, given the significance of the media in the present world and the ever-growing prevalence of the notion of news values, outlining the criteria conducive to a message becoming news and including values such as *negativity*, *superlativeness*, *prominence*, *timeliness*, *proximity*, etc. (Bednarek, Caple 2014), the broad range of linguistic means encoding intensification, thereby foregrounding a given phenomenon, presents a considerable interest. In this corpus study, we focus on three adjectival emphasisers, *flagrant*, *blatant*, and *sheer*, and examine their use in *adjective + noun* collocations across a variety of English corpora on the *Sketch Engine* tool (Kilgarriff et al. 2014) in the academic and the news registers: the “British Academic Written English Corpus”, the “Cambridge Academic English Corpus”, the “English Language Newspapers Corpus”, the “Brexit WR Corpus”, and the “English Timestamped JSI Corpus 2020–10”. We also consider the nominal element the adjectives in question collocate with, seeking to provide an account as to their differences in English. The findings of the study may have implications both for language classrooms and for more specialized fields, such as media studies.

Keywords: intensifiers; corpus; adjectives; collocations; media; academic; newspaper.

1. Introduction

As it is known, adjectives and adverbs form the category A – the category of adjunctival modifiers, with optionality being their definitional characteristics. Relatively unconstrained in use in terms of positioning and compatibility with elements modified, the category of intensification semantically is primarily associated with adverbs, especially degree adverbs; yet adjectives are viewed as natural intensifiers for nouns they modify (Cacchiani 2017). The present study

focuses on three intensifying adjectives – *flagrant*, *blatant*, and *sheer*. The research question was posed from informal observations that the three adjectives can combine with the same noun, e.g., *audacity*, the latter itself conveying a high pragmatic value:

- (1) *Her conduct in public was marked by a cynical impropriety, a flagrant audacity at which the world rubbed its eyes and wondered.* (Snaith 2020, 127)
- (2) *What makes her resonate so widely and so deeply? According to Jeetendr Sehdev, the author of *The Kim Kardashian Principle: Why Shameless Sells (and How to Do It Right)*, it's a mix of vulnerability and blatant audacity.* (Silva 2020)
- (3) *With the ninth edition of *Red Bull X-Alps* just around the corner – and Suunto once again a main partner – we preview the sheer audacity of the race route.* (Suuntorun 2019)

An Internet source comments on the differences between *blatant* and *flagrant*:

“many offenses can be both *blatant* and *flagrant*, but that doesn’t necessarily mean the words can be used interchangeably. It just depends on what you want to emphasise in your sentence. If you want to highlight the offender’s disdain for public scrutiny, you will probably want to use *blatant*. If you want to highlight the severity of the offense and how abnormal or appalling it is, you will probably want to use *flagrant*. It just depends on what you are trying to emphasise”. (<https://writingexplained.org/blatant-vs-flagrant-difference>)

Since there is no clear perspective on the differences between the three adjectives except the basic grammatical description of *flagrant* and *blatant* as *amplifiers* and *sheer* as an intensifier (Quirk et al. 1985, 429 ff.), we proceed from the assumption that, while attributed to different grammatical classes, the adjectives are nevertheless related through the semantic relation of synonymy, synonyms defined as items whose meanings partially overlap (Partington 1998 and references there). In our case, the minimum common ground of the three adjectives is that of a focus, or *salience*, in the Ontological Semantics terms (Nirenburg, Raskin 2004): all the three place in the forefront the meaning of the noun they modify, with *flagrant* and *blatant* additionally supplementing the noun collocate with an evaluative assessment which, as example (2) above suggests, does not necessarily result in the collocation being perceived negatively. Thus, we seek to further explore the differences between the three adjectives. The comparative corpus-driven analyses have long been known in the relevant literature (Vermeire 1979; Su 2017) however, to date they have not been concerned with the adjectives viewed in this study.

The article is structured, as follows. In Section 2, we consider the placement of the category of evaluation in contemporary linguistic explorations, seeking to outline a broader social context and motivation for the analysis and implications of use of the selected adjectives. Then we consider the grammatical and structural properties of *flagrant*, *blatant*, and *sheer*, as laid out in traditional

grammars, following the definitions of “WordNet” (2010). As our corpus study is concerned with two text genres – newspaper articles and academic texts, we motivate its relevance along two dimensions. The first dimension is framed by the concept of news values, originally a journalistic term, now incorporated in discursive studies. The second dimension is the previous research on evaluation in the academic register. In Section 3, we present our corpus survey across English corpora: the “British Academic Written English Corpus” (BAWE), the “Cambridge Academic English Corpus” (CAEC), the “English Language Newspapers Corpus” (SiBol), the “Brexit WR Corpus”, and the “English Timestamped JSI Corpus 2020–10” (EJSI). Our conclusions are summarized in Section 4.

2. Theoretical review

1.1. The category of evaluation

Evaluation is a broad lexico-grammatical category actively manifested in language, known under a variety of terms, depending on the applied methodological framework: e.g., *authorial stance* (Hunston, Thompson 2000; Hunston 2010), *stance* (Biber, Finegan 1989; Conrad, Biber 2000), *appraisal* (Martin, White 2005; Mei, Allison 2005; Vinagre, Corral Esteban 2018), *connotation* (Lyons 1977), *subjectivity* (Wiebe et al. 2001), etc.

As a response to the ever-growing demands for objectivity, impartiality, and fairness in the media, and, more specifically, as a reflection of the underlying power struggles in the analysis of discourse, the category of evaluation has come to the fore of the linguistic agenda. Traditionally, the linguistic analysis has evolved around the Saussurean notion of the sign as composed of the signifier and the signified, or form and content (Saussure 1986). Evaluation would normally be found among explorations of the rhetorical functions (Camicciottoli 2013; Dong, Jiang 2019). On the other hand, studies of the educational and academic discourse focus on how evaluation is expressed by native English speakers and non-native learners of English, as well as scholars writing for different disciplines. In the academic register, adjectives are among the most frequently used means to express evaluation, manifested through analysis, interpretation skills, or critical voice (Shaw 2006; Fortanet 2008; Cotton 2010; Bikeliene 2016).

In this study, the evaluative language is understood as “the broad cover term for the expression of the speaker’s or writer’s attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions” (Hunston, Thompson 2000, 5). As the definition suggests, evaluation is manifested simultaneously on the linguistic and social planes (Du Bois 2007), the former concerned with specific lexico-grammatical and syntactic choices, whereas the latter – with the construction of the communicative situation. The latter is characterized by dialogicality and intersubjectivity, whereby the interactants, having a broad range of evaluative, epistemic, and affective devices at their disposal, respond to prior discussion, either aligning or disaligning with it (Hunston 2002; see also Mushin 2001; Du Bois

2007; Keisanen 2007). The power of stance-expressing means is thus manifested “as much in its taken-for-granted-ness as in overt expression of attitude” (Macken-Horarik, Isaak 2014, 67).

Within the linguistic field, the category of evaluation has changed its status from a supplementary position as a component of the sign (e.g., as contributing a connotative meaning) to an independent category, largely due to the social implications of evaluation (Labov 1972). In media research, evaluation is now a formative component in the notions of power, ideology and (de)legitimation (Fairclough 1995; van Dijk 1998, 2001; Molek-Kozakowska 2014). In journalistic research, *news discourse* and the growing journalistic authority are grounded in evaluative criteria. One such criterion is *news values*, roughly defined as a set of components having relevance for the recipient, e.g., *proximity*, *negativity*, etc. (Galtung, Ruge 1965; Cramer 2011; Hanitzsch 2011; Bednarek, Caple 2014). In social networks, evaluation is explored under the notion of *stance* (Thurlow, Mroczek 2011; Shifman 2013). Natural language processing applications explore the components of *stance* for sentiment analysis (Balahur, Turchi 2013).

In our approach, we view the evaluative adjectives under analysis as belonging to this more independently perceived and discursive category of *stance*. In addition to the well-known perception of qualifying adjectives as evaluative, the selected adjectives are markedly subjective (cf. Hewings 2004; Cotton 2010; Marzá 2011). Their effect is most straightforwardly observed with respect to *flagrant* and *blatant*, and, to a somewhat lesser extent, *sheer*: the former two are highly judgmental and thus immediately reveal the negative attitude of the speaker, while the latter accentuates and thereby foregrounds the item it modifies (White 2011).

It is reasonable to hypothesize on the semantic boundaries between the adjectives *blatant*, *flagrant*, *blatant*, and *sheer*. Given their inherently negative meaning, we perceive *flagrant* and *blatant* as lexically richer than *sheer*. While *sheer* may be encoded through the modality of salience, in Nirenburg and Raskin’s (2004) terms, both *flagrant* and *blatant* may be described through a combination of the *salience* and the *evaluative* modalities: for vague evaluative contexts, such as illustrated in example (2) above, or in contexts where the noun has strong negative connotation, which is only enhanced by the modifying adjective, we could expect the meaning of the relevant adjective potentially to be reduceable only to the salience modality. According to this view, both *blatant* and *flagrant* thus share quite similar properties with *sheer*, whose “semantic meaning is limited to but highlighting the meaning expressed by the noun it modifies” (Partington 1998, 33). Next, we hypothesize that *sheer* would be more prevalent in the research corpus. Meanwhile, *flagrant* and *blatant* are expected to be more prominent in the social media and the news corpora: both are known for the high prevalence of stance-taking, with the expressed “concern for the rare and extreme”, in the news values (Cramer 2011, 70), as well as the “sensationalizing capacity” of news headlines through, among other phenomena, “dramatization” (Molek-Kozakowska 2014, 150 ff. and references therein).

2.3. The category of degree intensifiers

2.3.1. Adjectival intensification

In grammar, evaluative adjectives are referred to as intensifiers. Adjectives are also viewed as natural intensifiers for nouns they modify (Cacchiani 2017). Since adjectives and adverbs often stand in complementary distribution, they are sometimes attributed to the same category A (Newson et al. 2006). While this view is not unproblematic (e.g., Payne et al. 2010; McNally 2016), the predicative use being one of the issues, assuming that ideal categorizations are hardly possible, we view the definition of intensification given to adverbs as applicable to adjectives, too.

Adjectival members of the category can be subdivided further into emphasisers, amplifiers, and intensifiers or downtoners (Quirk et al. 1985; cf. Greenbaum 1996). Emphasizers add “a general heightening effect”, amplifiers are adjectives that “scale upwards from an assumed norm”. (Quirk et al. 1985, 429). Both classes are attributive adjectives, with amplifiers being quite a ‘fluid’ category, as its adjectives can become emphasisers in the absence of the extreme degree to be expressed, which semantically may be differentiated based on whether the literal or metaphorical meaning is conveyed. Thus, *total* in *total nonsense* is classified as an emphasiser, but as amplifier in *total destruction*. In addition, unlike emphasisers which are always attributive, the position of amplifiers depends on whether they express a high degree of the following adjective or not. If they do, they are regarded as central and inherent and are used attributively. Downtoners have a “lowering” effect, e.g., *slight* or *feeble* (ibid.).

In his discussion of sentential intensifiers, Greenbaum (1996, 51) notes: “In the absence of evaluative expressions in the context they may be interpreted as conveying either a high degree or a low degree.” Given these descriptions, we view *sheer* as an emphasizer or intensifier (Quirk et al. 1985, 429, cf. Greenbaum 1996), and *flagrant* and *blatant* as amplifiers.

2.3.2. A note on synonymy and collocations

Since the adjectives under analysis can occur in the attributive constructions and express a similar meaning, we categorise them as *descriptive*, or *cognitive synonyms* (Lyons 1977; Cruse 1986). They also form collocations, i.e., word combinations regularly occurring together and placed in terms of their fixedness anywhere between two randomly occurring words and idioms (Van Der Meer 1998). As collocating constituents, the three are characterized by the following properties (cf. ibid., 315): they form smaller-than-clause units with other lexical items, contributing the relevant meaning, and can be used as modifiers. Let us now examine the extent to which the three adjectives can be used interchangeably, or their *collocational overlap* (Partington 1998).

2.4. The senses of *blatant*, *flagrant*, and *sheer*

Below the definitions of *blatant*, *flagrant*, and *sheer* are given as formulated on the website Lexico.com, jointly run by Oxford University and Dictionary.com, accompanied by a representation of relational networks of each of the adjectives (Figures 1–3), based on the data of Princeton University’s “WordNet” (more on Visuwords™ see Breckon 2015):

- Blatant* – (of bad behaviour) done openly and unashamedly (<https://www.lexico.com/definition/blatant>)
- without any attempt at concealment; completely obvious; conspicuously and offensively loud; given to vehement outcry (WordNet 2010)
- Flagrant* – (of an action considered wrong or immoral) conspicuously or obviously offensive. (<https://www.lexico.com/definition/flagrant>)
- conspicuously and outrageously bad or reprehensible (WordNet 2010)
- Sheer* – nothing other than; unmitigated (used for emphasis) (<https://www.lexico.com/definition/sheer>)
- complete and without restriction or qualification; sometimes used informally as intensifiers; not mixed with extraneous elements; very steep; having a prominent and almost vertical front; so thin as to transmit light (WordNet 2010).

Given the interchangeable use of the adjectives, our quest is to examine their semantic range in present-day English corpora.

3. Methodology

Our corpus study examines the use of the three adjectives across the two registers – the academic and the news register. Three news corpora have been selected as they encompass a variety of news types from press to social media over the period of 1993 and 2020:

- 1) the “English Language Newspapers Corpus”, compiled of newspaper (broadsheets as well as tabloids) articles from such English-speaking countries as the UK, USA, India, Hong Kong, Nigeria, and the Arab world;
- 2) the “Brexit WR Corpus”, which contains news, blogs comments, forums, and Twitter posts;
- 3) the “English Timestamped JSI Corpus 2020–10”, which stores feeds of news articles from RSS-enabled sites all over the world.

Our analysis of the academic register is based on the data extracted from two corpora: the “British Academic Written English Corpus” and the “Cambridge Academic English Corpus”. The former was compiled as a pattern of British academic English and comprises pieces of proficient assessed student texts from a vast number of disciplinary areas at undergraduate and master’s levels. CAEC is made of undergraduate and postgraduate level written and spoken academic

language from both the UK and US. The texts vary from lectures and seminars to essays and textbooks.

In this paper, the typicality of collocations with frequency ≥ 2 is determined by the logDice association score (cf. Rychlý 2008). This statistic measure has an advantage over both the Mutual Information (MI) score and the t-score as it has a fixed maximum value (14), is not affected by a corpus size, is neither low-frequency nor name-bias, nor downgrades collocations with frequent individual constituents (for an extensive comparison of the three scores, see Gablasova, Brezina, McEnergy 2017).

The logDice score rarely exceeds 10; therefore, the ranges 5–10 will be seen as an indicator of a strong collocation, with the scores below and above the range boundaries being indicative of weak and very strong collocations respectively.

4. Findings and discussion

Below we discuss our findings regarding the three selected adjectives in the news and academic registers. We consider visualisations, strength of collocates, and their frequency, and seek to determine the semantic range of the adjectives.

4.1. The news register

4.1.1. *Sheer*

Figures 1–3 provide visualisations of the nouns modified by the adjective *sheer* as found in SiBol, Brexit WR, and EISI respectively. The circle size indicates the frequency of the collocation; the lower the logDice score of the collocation, the farther the respective circle from the centre.

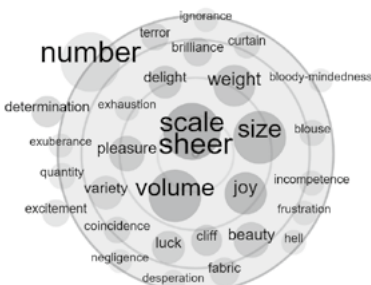


Figure 1. Nouns modified by *sheer* in SiBol



Figure 2. Nouns modified by *sheer* in the Brexit WR corpus

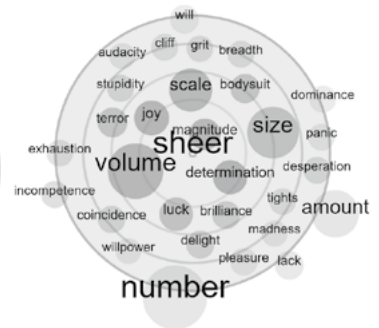


Figure 3. Nouns modified by *sheer* in EISI

The SiBol and EJSI corpora share three out of five strongest noun collocates of the adjective *sheer*: *scale*, *volume*, and *joy* (Table 1):

SiBol	Brexit WR	EJSI
<i>scale</i> (9.22)	<i>panic</i> (11)	<i>determination</i> (8.38)
<i>volume</i> (8.86)	<i>horror</i> (10.32)	<i>joy</i> (8.29)
<i>size</i> (8.79)	<i>desperation</i> (9.98)	<i>volume</i> (8.28)
<i>joy</i> (8.77)	<i>Nigeria</i> (9.69)	<i>magnitude</i> (8.26)
<i>weight</i> (8.19)	<i>existence</i> (9.58)	<i>scale</i> (8.24)

Table 1. Five strongest noun collocates (logDice) of the adjective *sheer* in the news register

The Brexit WR corpus stands out with its unique strongest collocations. Collocations formed with *panic* and *horror* are very strong, and the other three (formed with *desperation*, *Nigeria*, and *existence*) are close to the higher edge of the range. The fourth most common collocate – *Nigeria*, – however, is an erroneous marking (intended *turmoil*), as we exemplify with a concordance line in (4) below:

- (4) *When I think of the sheer turmoil Nigeria has been through in June alone, never mind 1 year, I clutch my stability like pear...* (Brexit WR #4889116)

This technical correction made; we can conclude that strongest noun collocates belong to the predominantly negatively connoted experiential field.

In the news register, *sheer* most frequently collocates with *number*, *scale*, *size*, and *volume* across all corpora, irrespective of the news type or time period (Table 2):

SiBol	Brexit WR	EJSI
<i>number</i>	<i>Panic</i>	<i>Number</i>
<i>scale</i>	<i>Size</i>	<i>Volume</i>
<i>size</i>	<i>Horror</i>	<i>Size</i>
<i>volume</i>	<i>Desperation</i>	<i>Amount</i>
<i>force</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Scale</i>

Table 2. Five most frequent noun collocates of the adjective *sheer* in the news register

4.1.2. *Blatant*

The adjective *blatant* forms a considerably different number of collocations in the studied corpora, highlighting the unlawfulness of a given human activity (Figures 4–6).

Thus, it is not surprising that *disregard* and *lie* occur among five strongest noun collocates (logDice) of the adjective *blatant* in all the three news corpora (Table 3).



Figure 4. Nouns modified by *blatant* in SiBol



Figure 5. Nouns modified by *blatant* in Brexit WR



Figure 6. Nouns modified by *blatant* in EJSI

SiBol	Brexit WR	EJSI
<i>disregard</i> (9.59)	<i>untruth</i> (11.92)	<i>disregard</i> (11.24)
<i>violation</i> (9.09)	<i>porkie</i> (10.09)	<i>lie</i> (10.33)
<i>cheating</i> (8.81)	<i>disregard</i> (10.02)	<i>hypocrisy</i> (9.19)
<i>handball</i> (8.8)	<i>lie</i> (9.77)	<i>disrespect</i> (9.01)
<i>lie</i> (8.7)	<i>breach</i> (9.71)	<i>falsehood</i> (8.66)

Table 3. Five strongest noun collocates (logDice) of the adjective *blatant* in the news register

Two other most frequent collocates of *blatant* include *violation* and *attempt* (Table 4).

SiBol	Brexit WR	EJSI
<i>violation</i>	<i>lie</i>	<i>disregard</i>
<i>attempt</i>	<i>untruth</i>	<i>Violation</i>
<i>lie</i>	<i>liar</i>	<i>Lie</i>
<i>disregard</i>	<i>porkie, disregard, breach*</i>	<i>Attempt</i>
<i>discrimination</i>		<i>Racism</i>

Table 4. Five most frequent noun collocates of the adjective *blatant* in the news register. (*The collocations share the same frequency)

4.1.3. *Flagrant*

Visual representations of nouns modified by *flagrant* in the SiBol, Brexit WR, and EJSI are provided below in Figures 7–9 respectively and are indicative of an uneven tendency.

Since the only collocate of *flagrant* in Brexit WR is *abuse* ($f \geq 2$), five strongest noun collocates (logDice) of the adjective can only be compared between SiBol and

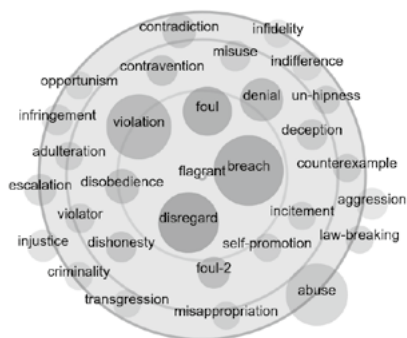


Figure 7. Nouns modified by *flagrant* in SiBol



Figure 8. Nouns modified by *flagrant* in Brexit WR



Figure 9. Nouns modified by *flagrant* in EJSI

EJSI. *Flagrant* tends to form strong collocations with the nouns *disregard*, *breach*, *foul*, and *violation* in general news corpora. The differing instances – *denial* in SiBol and *disobedience* in EJSI, – are similar in that both suggest deviation from the norm, whether it be standard or expected behaviour.

SiBol	Brexit WR	EJSI
<i>disregard</i> (9.95)	<i>abuse</i> (9.12)	<i>disregard</i> (10.73)
<i>breach</i> (9.27)		<i>foul</i> (9.46)
<i>foul</i> (9)		<i>disobedience</i> (8.61)
<i>violation</i> (8.19)		<i>violation</i> (8.3)
<i>denial</i> (7.93)		<i>breach</i> (7.87)

Table 5. Five strongest noun collocates (logDice) of the adjective *flagrant* in the news register

SiBol	Brexit WR	EJSI
<i>breach</i>	<i>Abuse</i>	<i>Violation</i>
<i>violation</i>		<i>disregard</i>
<i>abuse</i>		<i>Breach</i>
<i>disregard</i>		<i>Abuse</i>
<i>foul</i>		<i>Foul</i>

Table 6. Five most frequent noun collocates of the adjective *flagrant* in the news register

Abuse is the most likely noun to be modified by the adjective *flagrant* in news register (Table 6). It is also notable that the general news corpora share all five most frequent noun collocates.

4.2. Comparison

Table 7 below shows that the adjectives *blatant* and *flagrant* share six noun collocates: *misuse*, *violation*, *disregard*, *foul*, *breach*, and *denial*. All the nouns, except the noun *denial*, form strong collocations with both adjectives.

Noun	Raw frequency with <i>blatant</i>	Raw frequency with <i>flagrant</i>	logDice for <i>blatant</i>	logDice for <i>flagrant</i>
<i>misuse</i>	25	4	7.9	6.1
<i>violation</i>	191	89	9.1	8.2
<i>disregard</i>	92	72	9.6	10.0
<i>foul</i>	19	36	7.3	9.0
<i>breach</i>	27	112	6.9	9.3
<i>denial</i>	2	22	3.9	7.9

Table 7. Nouns modified by *blatant/flagrant* in SiBol

The scarce number of extracted collocations with *blatant* and *flagrant* from Brexit WR resulted in no shared noun collocates.

The EJSI corpus data provided us with the longest list of shared noun collocates, many which, however, formed only weak collocations with the adjective *flagrant* (Table 8).

Noun	Raw frequency with <i>blatant</i>	Raw frequency with <i>flagrant</i>	logDice for <i>blatant</i>	logDice for <i>flagrant</i>
<i>lie</i>	299	9	10.3	5.8
<i>attempt</i>	202	10	7.2	3.0
<i>attack</i>	51	5	4.1	0.8
<i>interference</i>	55	6	7.2	4.3
<i>bias</i>	51	7	6.7	4.0
<i>act</i>	59	10	3.3	0.8
<i>example</i>	54	9	5.3	2.8
<i>display</i>	30	7	4.1	2.1
<i>hypocrisy</i>	65	9	9.2	7.7
<i>disrespect</i>	57	9	9.0	7.8
<i>misuse</i>	23	6	7.5	6.7
<i>abuse</i>	80	49	6.1	5.4
<i>intervention</i>	8	5	3.3	2.7
<i>disregard</i>	399	162	11.2	10.7
<i>denial</i>	13	7	6.2	6.0
<i>violation</i>	350	309	8.4	8.3
<i>penalty</i>	14	14	4.1	4.2
<i>contradiction</i>	12	6	6.6	6.9
<i>breach</i>	70	87	7.3	7.9
<i>foul</i>	10	43	6.3	9.5

Table 8. Nouns modified by *blatant/flagrant* in EJSI

According to Table 8, several collocates have almost an equal number of occurrences with both *blatant* and *flagrant*: *violation*, *penalty*, *breach* semantically all refer to transgression of rights, or its consequence.

In SiBol, *blatant* and *sheer* share four noun collocates, all of which form strong collocations with the former and weak collocations with the latter adjective (Table 9):

Noun	Raw frequency with <i>blatant</i>	Raw frequency with <i>sheer</i>	logDice for <i>blatant</i>	logDice for <i>sheer</i>
<i>disregard</i>	92	3	9.6	2.6
<i>misuse</i>	25	2	7.9	2.1
<i>lie</i>	94	6	8.7	3.3
<i>violation</i>	191	15	9.1	4.4

Table 9. Nouns modified by *blatant*/*sheer* in SiBol

In the news register, only the adjective *blatant* can be used in the predicative position (5):

- (5) “and “it is what it is”; oh, and it’s important that you have all three phrases “in your heart”. Elsewhere he’s a bit more **blatant**, encouraging swearing at babies and comparing Koran-burning pastor Terry Jones to Yosemite Sam. Just by visiting. (SiBol # 294747151)

Noun	Raw frequency with <i>flagrant</i>	Raw frequency with <i>sheer</i>	logDice for <i>blatant</i>	logDice for <i>sheer</i>
<i>disregard</i>	72	3	10.0	2.6
<i>violation</i>	89	15	8.2	4.4

Table 10. Nouns modified by *blatant*/*sheer* in SiBol

4.3. Academic register

4.3.1. Sheer

In the academic register, *sheer* forms collocations predominantly with abstract quantity nouns (Figures 10 and 11).

Tables 11 below features five strongest and five most common collocates of *sheer*, the abstract noun *fantasy* unexpectedly appearing among nouns of quantity in the former group. Within the grouping of five most common collocates are the nouns *number*, *amount*, and *size*.



Figure 10. Nouns modified by *sheer* in CAEC

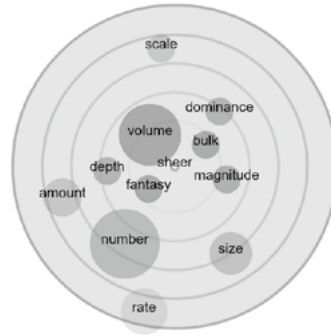


Figure 11. Nouns modified by *sheer* in BAWE

Strongest noun collocates (logDice)		Most frequent noun collocates	
CAEC	BAWE	CAEC	BAWE
<i>number</i> (8.89)	<i>volume</i> (9.38)	<i>number</i>	<i>number</i>
<i>quantity</i> (8.82)	<i>bulk</i> (9.28)	<i>size</i>	<i>volume</i>
<i>size</i> (8.04)	<i>fantasy</i> (9.26)	<i>quantity, variety, scale,</i>	<i>rate</i>
<i>variety</i> (7.95)	<i>magnitude</i> (8.74)	<i>amount, frequency</i>	<i>size</i>
<i>scale</i> (7.64)	<i>depth</i> (8.31)		<i>amount</i>

Table 11. Five strongest (logDice) and five most frequent noun collocates of the adjective *sheer* in the academic register

4.3.2. *Blatant* (and *flagrant*)

The use of *blatant* in the academic register is very limited (Figures 12 and 13).

The two academic register corpora provided only three noun collocates at the frequency level $f \geq 2$: *promotion* (logDice 11.3) and *manipulation* (logDice 9.14) in CAEC, and *disregard* (logDice 11.3) in BAWE (Table 12).

Somewhat unexpectedly, not a single instance of the adjective *flagrant* was found in the CAEC corpus, while all the five instances in BAWE exemplify four very strong unique collocations: *valour* (12.41), *malpractice* (11.54), *disregard* (10.82), and *breach* (10.19) and one strong collocation *implicit* (10.0).

In the academic register, only one instance of a predicative use of *blatant* was found (6):

- (6) *of women in society through protagonist Nora. Though her fight against societal restraints fails to be as **blatant** as that of protagonist Edna in Chopin's The Awakening, it is clear that Nora 'cannot be herself in contemporary society.* (CAEC #3110650)

Thus, we see that the adjective *blatant* shares semantic properties and can be interchangeably used with the adjective *flagrant* in the news corpora, and, albeit in a very limited way, also appears in the academic corpus. In the news corpus, both



Figure 12. Nouns modified by *blatant* in CAEC



Figure 13. Nouns modified by *blatant* in BAWE

Noun	CAEC		BAWE	
	Raw frequency	logDice	Raw frequency	logDice
<i>promotion</i>	2	11.3		
<i>manipulation</i>	2	9.14		
<i>disregard</i>			2	11.3

Table 12. Noun collocates of the adjective *blatant* in the academic register

blatant and *flagrant* are used both in social and political contexts, but *blatant* shows greater flexibility in serving as a modifier for nouns denoting social or political wrongs of varying scale and ranging from *lie* to *racism*. The predicative position is also a focal one. The occasional use of *blatant* in the academic register, on the one hand, and modification of nouns referring to large-scale political phenomena in the news register suggest that the use of *blatant*, while strong on the negative evaluative pole, signals impartiality and objectivity. As *flagrant* is widely used in the news register, albeit with phenomena of lesser scope, and does not appear in the academic register, we conclude that it is representative of a more individualized and subjective perspective. The fact that *blatant* appears in the predicative position, while *flagrant* does not in our selection, suggests that *blatant* is a more *central* adjective relative to *flagrant*, following Quirk et.al criteria of centrality (1985). Finally, modifying nouns of quantity both in the news and the academic registers, and showing ability to modify both negatively and positively connoted nouns, *sheer* indeed reveals its properties as an intensifier.

Let us return to our initial research question on the use of the noun *audacity* with all the three adjectives. In the analysed corpora, *audacity* forms collocates only with *sheer*. LogDice coefficient indicates *sheer audacity* being stronger in the academic (8.46 in BAWE) than in the newspaper register (6.68 in SiBol). On the basis of the discussion above, we conclude that the three adjectives are positioned in the rightward spectrum of the impartiality – sensationalism scale in the following order: *sheer* – *blatant* – *flagrant* (see also Molek-Kozakowska 2014; Haw 2020). Further relation of *blatant* and *flagrant* to sensationalism may be the subject for future research.

5. Conclusions

In this study, we have explored the collocations formed by three intensifying adjectives *flagrant*, *blatant*, and *sheer* in the news and the academic registers. We have sought to demonstrate the significance of these adjectives as active participants in the construction of evaluation and stance. Corpus findings help outline the lexico-semantic areas covered by nouns each of the adjectives collocates with and can be applied both in language classrooms and in more specialized fields, such as media studies. Besides an account of the general usage peculiarities of the adjectives in question, the study may have implications for explorations along the impartiality – sensationalism scale.

Abbreviations

BAWE	<i>The British Academic Written English Corpus</i>
Brexit WR	<i>The Brexit Corpus Without Retweets</i>
CAEC	<i>The Cambridge Academic English Corpus</i>
EJSI	<i>The English Timestamped JSI Corpus 2020–10</i>
SiBol	<i>The English Language Newspapers Corpus</i>

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Kopsavilkums

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Atslēgvārdi: pastiprinātāji; korpusi; īpašības vārdi; kolokācijas; plašsaziņas līdzekļi; akadēmisks; laikraksts.



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