

SMASHED, SMITTEN, AND SHAKING YOUR GROOVE THANG SYNONYMS FOR SOCIAL SITUATIONS

Michael Burns and **Katherine Wright**

Drunk: bashed, befuddled, boozed up, buzzed, crocked, feeling no pain, flushed, flying, fuddled, glazed, groggy, high, inebriated, juiced, laced, liquored up, lit, lush, muddled, plastered, potted, seeing double, sloshed, stewed, stoned, tanked, three sheets to the wind, tight, tipsy, totaled, under the influence, under the table, wasted

Dating: associate with, attend, consort with, court, deuce it, escort, fix up, go around together, go around with, go out with, go steady, go together, keep company, make a date, see, step around, take out, woo

Partying: beat the drum, bless, blow off steam, carouse, ceremonialize, commend, consecrate, dedicate, drink to, eulogize, exalt, extol, feast, fete, glorify, hallow, have a ball, honour, jubilate, keep, kick up one's heels, laud, let loose, lionize, live it up, make merry, make whoopee, mark with a red letter, memorialize, observe, paint the town red, party, perform, praise, proclaim, publicize, raise hell, rejoice, revel, revere, ritualize, signalize, solemnize

1. *Introduction*

The words shown above are the synonyms given for *drunk*, *dating* and *partying* on the website *Thesaurus.com* <<http://thesaurus.reference.com>>. This is a commonly used website, in fact the first one listed when one is searching for a thesaurus online. We believed that these lists would give us some initial insight into what we could expect to hear from our respondents.

2. *Hypotheses*

Our investigation was a synchronic study of synonyms used for various social aspects of student life. We were comparing students in Canada and the United Kingdom, and we hypothesised that distance would not have a major effect on the lexis of students these days, although there would be a few synonyms used only at one specific institution. We also expected that students would provide us with a vast number of synonyms, including some coined words, and some vulgar words.

3. *Survey*

When constructing our survey, we decided to focus on university students alone. In doing this, we hoped to ensure that a particular generation or age group was at the centre of our investigation and to avoid cross-generation anomalies. Therefore the range of ages for participants was small, and so it was decided that age was not to be analysed as a factor in the vocabulary differences.

In the end, in order to concentrate on national difference, we decided to restrict our study to just two universities, one British and one Canadian. These were the University of Aberdeen (Scotland, UK), and Queen's University (Ontario, Canada). Thus each respondent was a student at one university or the other. We also asked each respondent to provide their country of origin; in doing this, we hoped to be able to notice if this had any influence over language use, or whether the stronger influence was their university and the country they were *now* living in.

Finally, we asked each participant to indicate their gender in order for us to determine whether there were any patterns in the lexicons of each sex.

The survey dealt with three main aspects of student social life: intoxication, dating and going out. For each of these three categories, several different scenarios were offered which respondents could name or describe using one word (the survey is reproduced in the **Appendix**). We hoped to observe patterns emerging between the two universities and to be able to establish whether or not informal language in social situations between peers was similar in Canada and the United Kingdom.

We collected more data than we used in our final analysis, as we decided that in order to keep our study representative, we would use an equal number of female and male respondents. Therefore once we'd received 15 surveys from each gender for each university, we used no more. Therefore we had 15 male students from each university, and 15 female students, giving us a total of 60 (30 plus 30) respondents.

Upon receiving our results, we analysed them from three separate readings. First, we considered the questions themselves, to see any initial patterns arising. Second, we considered the universities and the countries from which the participants originated in order to determine whether or not these had any influence. Finally, we considered the gender of the participants so as to test whether gender had an effect on vocabulary and word usage.

4. *Results*

4.1 *Section 1: Intoxication*

In this section, participants were asked to give the most common words they used to describe themselves in various states of intoxication.

Question 1

We first asked our respondents to write down the most common word they used when describing their state after just a few drinks. The most common synonym used at both universities was *tipsy*, with 15 British respondents and 10 Canadian respondents (42%) giving this reply. This was the only word that the two countries shared for this first question, with *giddy* and *hyper* being the other British responses, and *buzzed*, *loose*, *fine*, and *warming up*, being the Canadian responses. **Figure 1** portrays our findings for question 1.



Figure 1 "After the first few drinks": Frequency of responses by British and Canadian students

Question 2

For the second question, we asked our participants which word they'd use to describe their state after quite a few drinks. There was slightly more common ground between countries for this question, with the synonyms *drunk* and *tipsy* being used in both Canada and the UK. There also proved to be a wider range of words being used, so many various words in fact, each given by only one person, that these single responses have been placed under the category of *other*. The word *pished* appeared in the answers, a word which originated in Scotland and has remained there; it is an alteration of the word *pissed* (also a common answer for the question). **Figure 2** below shows our results for this question.

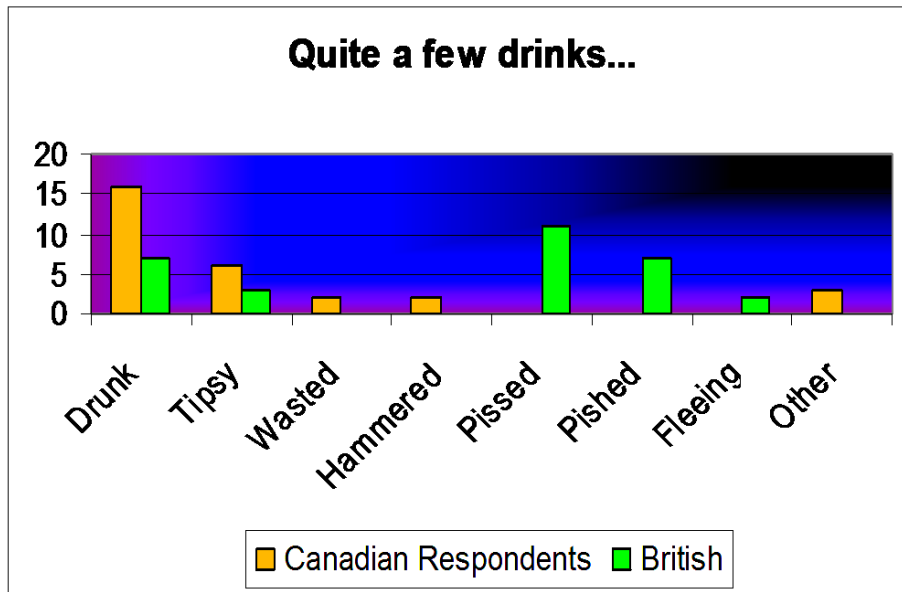


Figure 2 "After quite a few drinks": Frequency of responses by Canadian and British students

Question 3

Our third question asked the students to provide the word they most commonly associated with the state they are in after having a lot to drink, or even too much to drink. **Figure 3** shows our results for the third question.

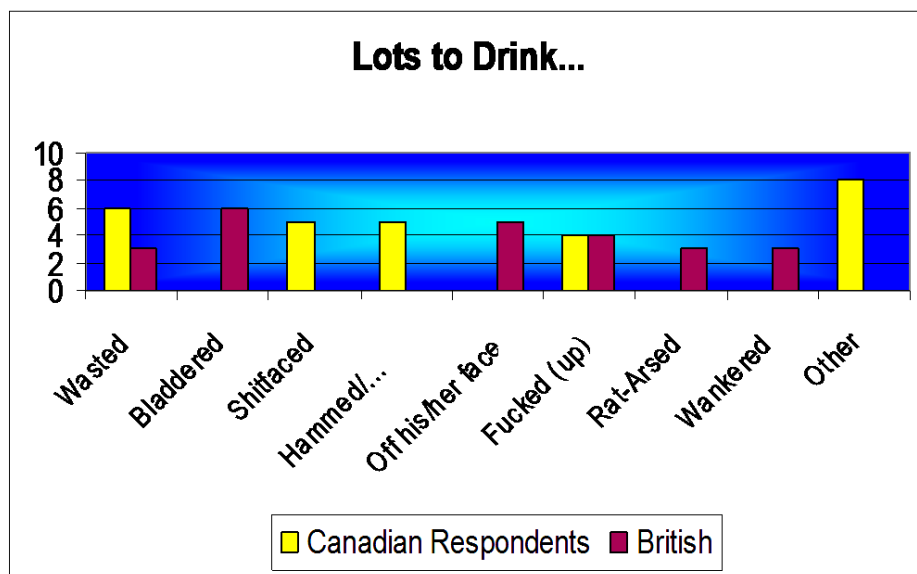


Figure 3 "After lots to drink": Frequency of responses by Canadian and British students

These responses proved to be much more varied, with the *other* category containing the most responses. Responses also started to become much more creative, and in some cases, vulgar. *Fucked* and *wasted* proved to be common in both countries, whilst words specific to countries included *wankered* and *rat-arsed* for the UK, and *hammered*, and *bladdered* for Canadian respondents. Only Canadian respondents seemed to come up with unique answers (*Other* responses), whereas the UK respondents seemed to have a smaller range of common synonyms.

4.2 Section 2: Dating

In this section, participants were asked to give the word they associated with various dating scenarios.

Question 1

The first question asked respondents to provide the word they used when they were interested in dating someone. Respondents in both Canada and the UK used the word *like*, whilst the most popular result was the Canadian-only response of *crush*, which constituted 25% of the overall results. **Figure 4** shows the results for this question.

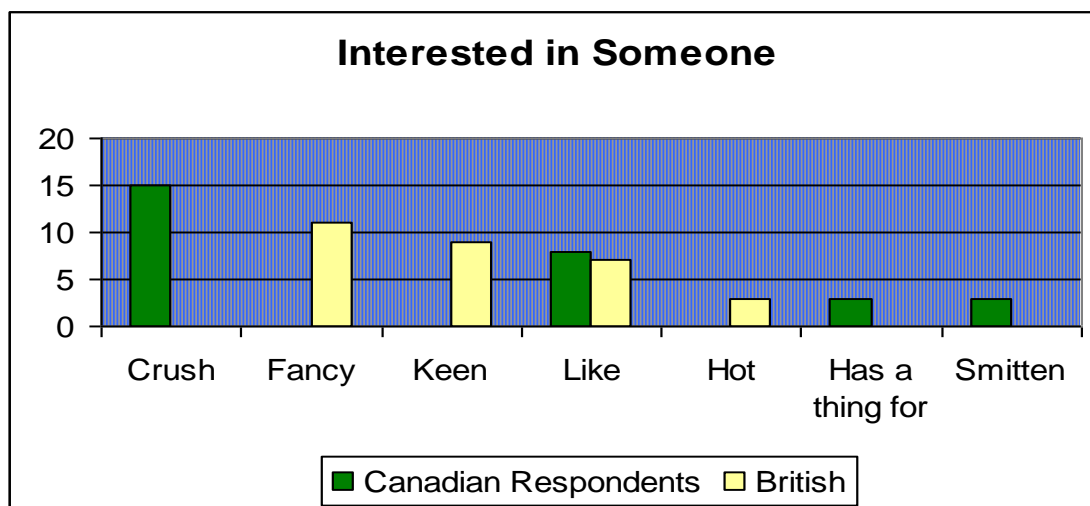


Figure 4 “Interested in someone”: Frequency of responses by Canadian and British students

Question 2

Participants were asked in the second question of the dating section to offer the word they most often associated with short-term relationships. Both *dating* (42%) and *seeing someone* (20%) were shared between the UK and Canada, whilst other terms, including *boyfriend/girlfriend* and *fling*, were not. **Figure 5** below illustrates the results we collected for question 2.

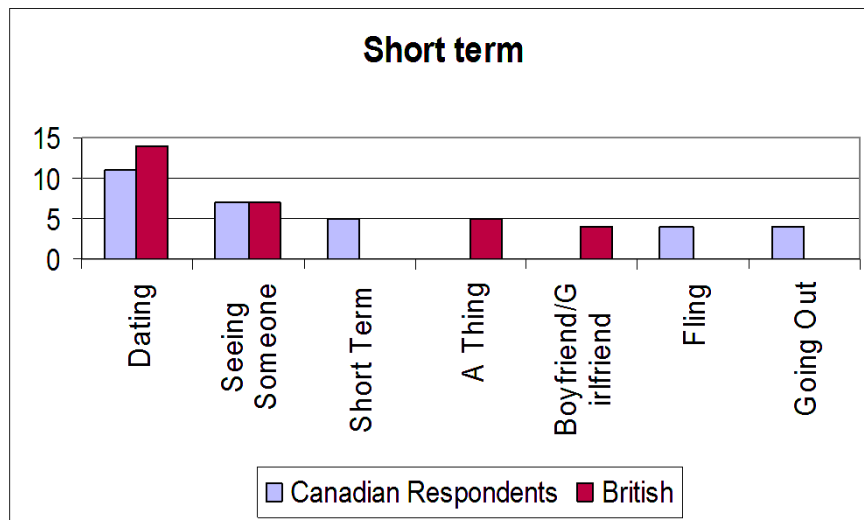


Figure 5 Short-term relationship: Frequency of responses by Canadian and British students

Question 3

We asked participants for the word which they most often used when referring to a long-term relationship. *Boyfriend/girlfriend* was by far the most commonly used term in both countries and accounted for 43% of the results for this question. Most other responses occurred fewer than five times, and none of these was offered by both Canadian (*a serious relationship, going out, going steady with*) and British (*together*) respondents.

4.3 Section 3: Going Out/Partying

In section 3, respondents were asked to give the word they typically used for various scenarios concerning going out and partying.

Question 1

For our first question of this section, we asked our participants to provide the word they used for meeting up with a group of friends. *Hanging out, get together* and *chill* were used in both countries, whereas *social* was given only by Canadians, and *gathering* only by UK students. The term *hanging out* appeared to be just coming into use in the UK; for Canadian students, however, it was as common as *gathering* was for UK students.

Figure 6 below shows the results we collected for question 1.

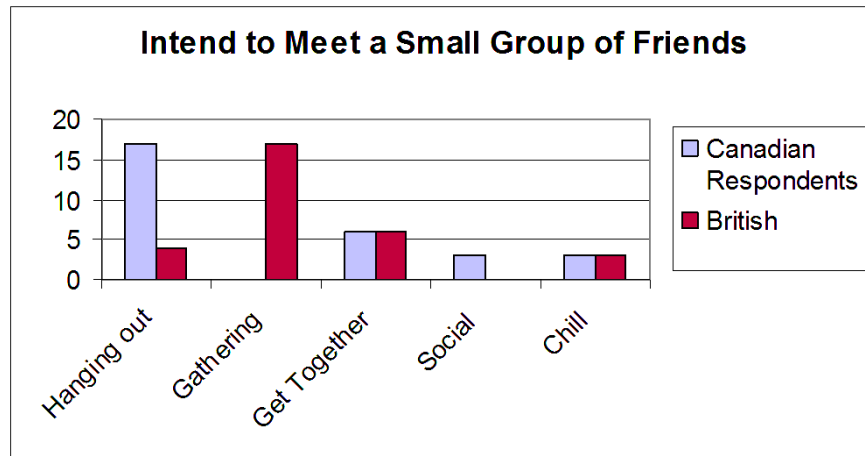


Figure 6 “Intend to meet up with a small group of friends”: Frequency of responses by Canadian and British students

Question 2

We then went on to ask the students what they would call a party at a house. There were several responses to this, but the most common in both countries was *house party* (58%), with a few repetitions of responses from the previous question such as *gathering*. **Figure 7** shows our results for this question.

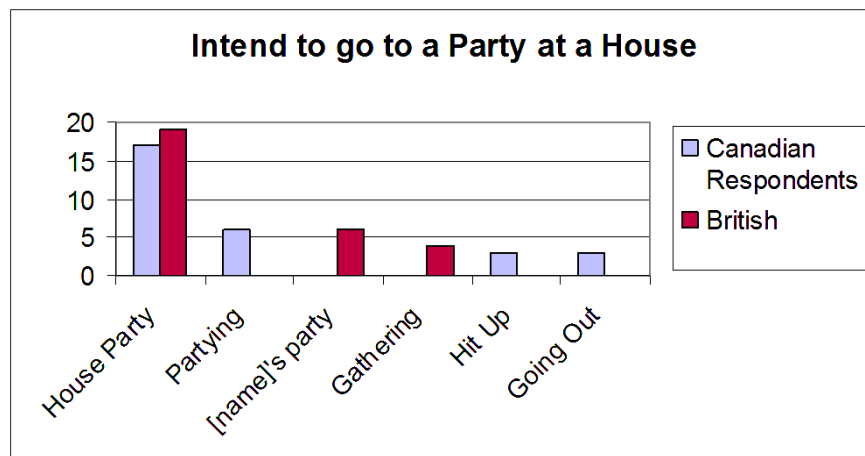


Figure 7 “Intend to go to a party at a house”: Frequency of responses by Canadian and British students

Question 3

This question asked respondents which word they commonly used when intending to go out to a club. *Clubbing* was the most popular result for both Canada and the UK, followed by, simply, *going out*. British students, however, used these two popular

terms more often than Canadian students. **Figure 8** below shows the results for our third question.

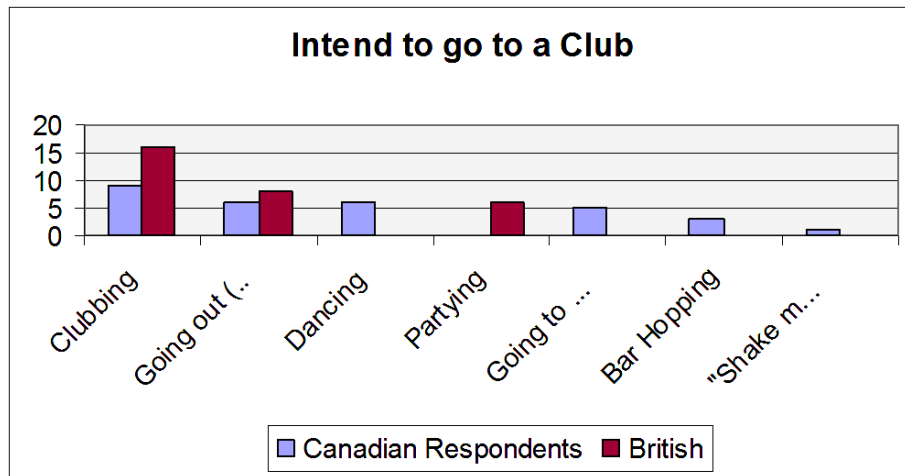


Figure 8 "Intend to go to a club": Frequency of responses by Canadian and British students

Question 4

In this question, we asked our participants to provide the word which they used when intending to go out but only have a few drinks. *A couple* and *a few* were terms used by British and Canadian respondents, again, however, more commonly by UK students. As in the *Intoxication* section of this survey (see 4.1 above), it seemed that students tended to get creative with their lexis when discussing drinking alcohol. **Figure 9** illustrates the results that we gathered for this question.

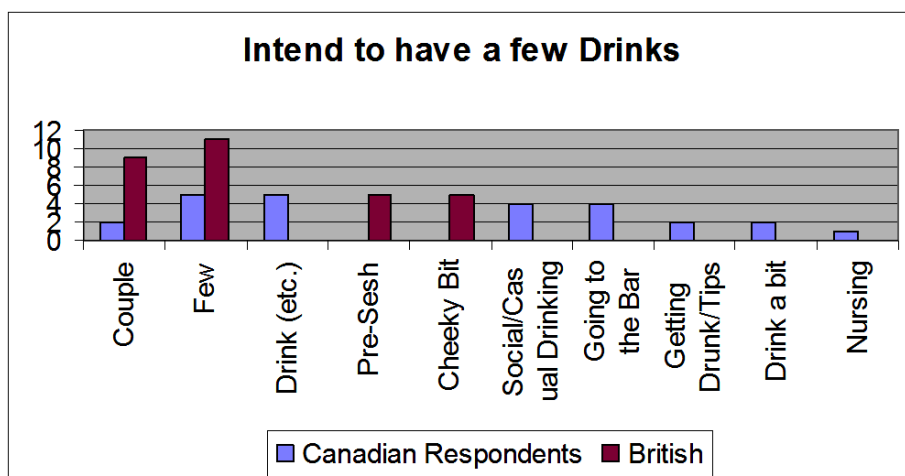


Figure 9 "Intend to have a few drinks": Frequency of responses by Canadian and British students

Question 5

For our final question, we asked our respondents which word they used when discussing going out intending to drink a lot. *Get hammered* and *get wasted* were given by both Canadian and UK students, although this time, it was the Canadians who were more likely to respond with one of these shared and most popular terms: over 50 per cent of Canadian respondents said *get wasted* or *get hammered*. Most other Canadians used a term not given by more than one person, whereas the British offered a variety of terms each used by at least two students. **Figure 10** shows the results our fifth question in the going out and partying section.

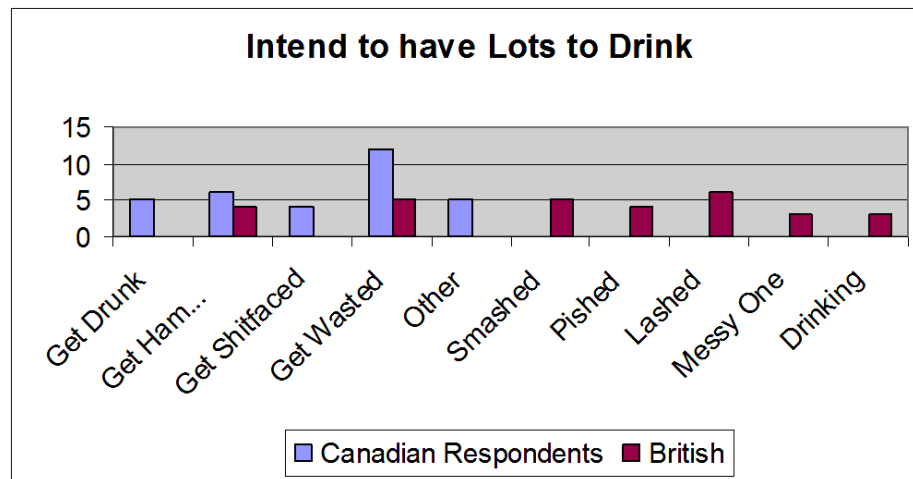


Figure 10 "Intend to have lots to drink": Frequency of responses by Canadian and British students

5. Results By Gender

When comparing our results by gender, we had expected to see some sort of pattern in each of the categories. However, no significant pattern could be found. There was a minor discrepancy in the number of different words used by males and females in the categories dealing with consuming alcohol, with males as a group having a more copious vocabulary for describing their state, or intention to get to a certain state, of intoxication. Additionally, when males gave a variety of answers to a certain question, they also began to use more vulgar terms. This slight trend seemed to occur when dealing with higher amounts of alcohol being consumed. It was almost as respondents became drunker when responding to our questions.

One final thing we noticed is that females tended to have slightly more varied responses when it came to relationships. However, these varied responses were definitely not as vulgar as the male responses to alcohol-related questions. The

variations in responses from the females were more descriptive, which might support the common idea that women have more interest in relationships and dating, and that males enjoy alcohol (in the age group studied, anyway).

6. *Problems Encountered*

Although we took as many precautions as we possible to ensure an accurate survey, with the benefit of hindsight we were able to analyse several problems which we encountered. First, the majority of respondents from Canada came from Ontario. Similarly, the majority of respondents from the UK came from England. In fact, the respondents predominantly came from two small sections of the regions surveyed, so the results cannot be considered an accurate sample of the entire UK and Canada.

Perhaps on account of the topic of the survey and their age range, many respondents did not take the survey quite as seriously as we had initially hoped. Many students responded with synonyms that didn't relate to the question at hand, or with personal jokes that they shared with those conducting the survey.

The survey itself could have been improved. For example, when composing it, we didn't want to influence the answers by providing a set of synonyms to choose from. However, the questions could have been more precise, maybe offering one example in each case so as to prevent participants from becoming confused by multiple meanings in the cue words. We also suggested to respondents that they might answer in a sentence if it helped them, with the idea of simply extracting the word we needed. However, this was not possible in some cases, and therefore these surveys were not used. Other surveys had to be dropped from the analysis because we had too many of one gender or from one university or because the respondent had simply not responded as we had hoped.

7. *Conclusions*

Our hypotheses for the survey proved to be correct: despite the distance, there were lexemes which were used by both Canadian students and British students in the contexts we provided, including *tipsy*, *wasted*, *fucked (up)*, *hammered*, *seeing someone*, *hanging out*, and *clubbing*. There were also some words specific to one university. As expected, students provided us with many coined and vulgar words. There was perhaps more variation in terms between UK and Canadian students than anticipated.

There was a gender-based difference in the use of offensive language, with the males inclined to use it more; however, both sexes used quite a variety of different words, many of which went into the single-response category of *other*. The wide variety of language offered may partly be due to the respondents' desire not to repeat themselves, as certain situations may recur frequently.

Students tended to become more eccentric and creative with their lexis as the situations they were presented with became increasingly extreme. It seemed that participants wanted to inject a sense of humour into situations, perhaps to make anecdotes that reflected upon them appear funnier.

References

Ball, Courtney and Jennifer Van Harten. (2003). You Were *What* Last Night? A Look at Synonyms for Intoxication. In W. Guyitt (Ed.) *Strathy Undergraduate Working Papers on Canadian English* (Vol. 4, pp. 29-45).

Appendix Comparing Synonyms Survey

We are studying Canadian English in our Linguistics course at Queen's University, and would greatly appreciate your participation in this survey. Our aim is to compare synonyms for various social situations in Scotland and Canada.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You can opt out at any point during the survey.

The survey is anonymous, but we will need to know some general information about you.

First language (the language you first learned and still know):

Mother's first language:

Father's first language:

I spent my teenage years in (city, county/province or country if not UK/Canada):

The university I study at is:

Age:

Sex:

*Please write the word which you use most frequently for each situation.
Try not to think about it too much, there's no right or wrong answer and our survey
needs to be as accurate as possible. If you find it easier to answer with a sentence
containing the word, feel free to do so.*

Intoxication

First few drinks -
Quite a few drinks -
Lots to drink -

Dating

Interested in someone –
Short term –
Long term –

Going Out/Partying

Intend to meet up with a small group of friends –
Intend to go to a party at a house –
Intend to go to a club –
Intend to have a few drinks –
Intend to have a lot to drink –