

Intensification

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Many of the questions elicited forms with intensifiers, and this data was extracted from all the relevant questions, and analysed. In the first instance, the data was considered by type. In this context, if the questionnaire from a particular school contained the response *really cool* in answer to two questions, it was recorded just once for that school.

The data was sorted according to the part of speech of the word intensified. There were a few instances where that caused problems: sometimes the only evidence for the part of speech was the intensifier used. One such case is seen with *fun*: in the response *great fun*, *fun* is clearly used as a noun; in the response *so fun*, it was taken that *fun* was being used as an adjective, since nouns do not usually co-occur with *so*; but with *real fun* it is impossible to tell, given the possibility for many children of saying *real good* (as well as or instead of *really good*) and *real music*. However, the number of instances where this was an issue was small, and does not significantly affect the overall patterns.

Past participles were separated from adjectives in the initial classifications, and grouped with them at a later stage. This may have been an unnecessary distinction to make, but it seemed possible that the range of choices might be different for the two sets, and so they were kept apart. This decision was to some extent vindicated by the data.

Amongst the intensifiers there were both what Quirk et al (1985, 445) call amplifiers (including maximizers (e.g. *totally*, *completely*) and boosters (e.g. *really*, *very*)), and downtoners (e.g. *quite*, *moderately*). The data was further subdivided into these categories. In fact, there were relatively few downtoners in the data as a whole, and they did not appear to be of any interest. (The most frequent by far was *pretty*). There were far more boosters than maximizers in the data. Boosters “scale upwards from an assumed norm” (Quirk et al 1985, 445).

Adjectives were by far the most frequent bases with all types of intensifier.

Adjective Boosters

There were two constructions of much higher frequency than any others: *adj + as* (with 90 schools reporting the pattern) and *so + adj* (also 90).

The *adj + as* pattern was most common with the adjective *sweet*: *sweet as* was reported by 74 of the 90 schools where this construction was reported, and in 45 schools *sweet* was the only adjective reported with *as*. The construction is a little more common in the Northern Region than elsewhere, and more common in the North Island than the South:

	Northern Region		Central Region		Southern Region	
	No.	% of total	No.	% of total	No.	% of total
Schools	57	38	78	52	14	9
Adj + as	43	75	38	49	8	57

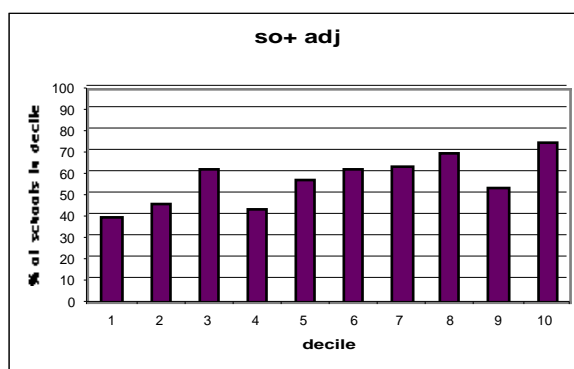
	North Island		South Island	
	No.	%	No.	%
Schools	93	62	57	38
Adj + as	64	71	26	29

The Northern Region shows more variety in the adjectives reported in this construction than other region, and the South Island shows much less variety than the North: in the Northern Region, 27 of the schools (47%) reported the construction with adjectives other than *sweet* or with other adjectives as well as *sweet*. In the Central Region, this was true of only 15 of the schools (19%), and in the Southern Region, for only 3 of the schools (21%). In the North Island, the figures are 37 out of 64 (58%); for the South Island, 7 out of 26 (27%).

Other adjectives reported in this construction were: *bad, buzz, choice, cool, dumb, easy, freaky, funny, good, hard, mad, mean, neat, scared, scary, shame, shameful, shitty, simple, tired*. This suggests that there are no limitations in principle about which adjectives can be used in this construction, but it will be seen that there is nevertheless a much smaller range than is found with the *so* construction, discussed next.

The *so*-construction is just as frequent in terms of the number of schools reporting it, but it is found with a wider variety of adjectives, and in larger numbers within any one school. It was very often underlined or written *sooo* to indicate an emphatic pronunciation.

There are no obvious differences in the use of this construction in different areas of the country: it appears to be the most usual form of adjective booster in use. However, there is a slight tendency for it to be more common in high decile schools than in low decile schools:



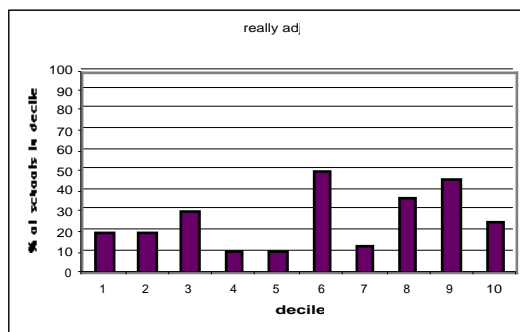
The adjectives reported with *so* were as follows, where the position of *so* in complex constructions is marked by *_*: *annoying, awesome, bad, basic, better, boring, choice, cocky, cool, crud, difficult, disgusting, dumb, easy, easy-peasy, embarrassing, excited, fad, fantastic, freaky, fuckin' hard, fun, funny, good, great, gross, happy, hard, hot, hot shit, lame, lash, like cool, lucky, majorly awesome, mean, modest, not _ easy, not _ good, not _ great, pimps, ruley, sad, scary, shame, shameful, silly, simple, stink, stupid, sweet, ugly, useless, weird, wonderful, yuck*, 56 in all. Interestingly, there were only two tokens of *so sweet* in the entire data, which contrasts strongly with the figures for *sweet as*.

Really was reported as an adjective booster in 42 schools, less than half the number for *as* and *so*. It was not reported at all from Northland, was fairly widely reported by Auckland schools, but much less frequently from the central North

Island. There was another significant hole in reports from the Wellington region, and also from Christchurch. The distribution figures in relation to the three main regions are:

	Northern Region		Central Region		Southern Region	
	No.	% of total	No.	% of total	No.	% of total
Schools	57	38	77	51	14	9
<i>Really</i> Adj	19	45	18	43	5	12

There is not a great deal of regionalisation here. However, again there is some sign of uneven patterning with respect to decile:



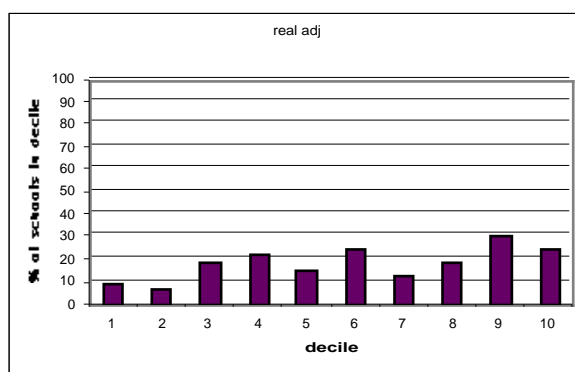
Really is much commoner in high decile schools than in low decile schools.

There is quite a wide range of adjectives attested with *really*: *aggro*, *annoying*, *awesome*, *bad*, *choice*, *classy*, *cool*, *cross*, *different*, *dumb*, *easy*, *embarrassing*, *fun*, *good*, *hard*, *horrible*, *interesting*, *jealous*, *neat*, *not hard*, *nervous*, *popular*, *shameful*, *shitty*, *silly*, *sore*, *stink*, *stressy*, *stupid*, *uncomfortable*, *useless*, *wicked*, 32 in all. Note the absence of *sweet* from this list.

Real + adj was reported from 28 schools. These were essentially dotted the length and breadth of the country, although they were less common in the South Island than the North:

	North Island		South Island	
	No.	%	No.	%
Schools	93	62	57	38
<i>Real</i> Adj	20	71	8	29

This cannot be attributed to the different distribution of school deciles in the two islands since (perhaps surprisingly) *real*+adj is, if anything, a high-decile form:

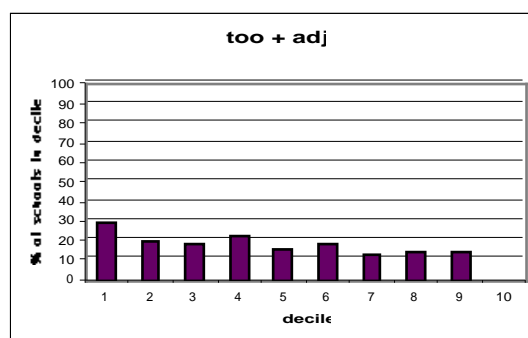


Real is used with a variety of adjectives: *angus* (also spelt *angis*), *awesome*, *bad*, *choice*, *cool*, *crusty*, *easy*, *funny*, *fussy*, *gay*, *good*, *groovy*, *hard*, *mad*, *moody*, *stink*, *sweet*, *weird*, 18 in all. Considering that it is used only about half as often as *really*, this should probably be taken as indicating that they occur with the same potential range of adjectives.

Too was reported from 24 schools. While there were holes in the distribution, they did not appear to be patterned. However, it is more frequent in the North Island than the South:

	North Island		South Island	
	No.	%	No.	%
Schools	93	62	57	38
<i>Too</i> Adj	19	79	5	21

This may be related to the decile distribution of schools: *too*+ adj has a slight tendency to be a low-decile construction:



The adjectives found with *too* are: *bad*, *big* (*a deal*), *cabbage*, *crusty*, *difficult*, *easy*, *fast*, *good*, *hard*, *not_ bad*, *proud*, *sad*, *slow*, *stink*, 14 in all. Note the preponderance of adjectives with negative connotations. (It also occurred with the past participle *embarrassed*.)

There are also quite a large number of low-frequency amplifiers reported. For most of these, no attempt was made to distinguish between adjectives and past participles, because numbers of reports were so low. The low-frequency forms were: lexical adverbs (e.g. *terribly*) (12), *very* (17), *bloody* (8), *way* (7), *all* (6), *fucking* (5), superlative *ever* (4), *just* (2).

Very occurred with the following adjectives: *bad, difficult, embarrassed, embarrassing, fun, good, hard, mad, not_good, not_well, squashed, shameful, sore, ugly*. *Not_well* and *not_good* were the most frequent collocations. *Very* was not reported at all from Northland, and from only one school in the Central North Island area. It was commonest in Hawkes Bay and Wellington. It does not appear to be socially variable.

The lexical adverbs, some of which are maximizers rather than boosters, were *horribly (bad), incredibly (crappy), terribly (awful, excited), totally (gross, cool, awesome, dreadful), wickedly (hard, awesome)*. The most frequent was *totally*, especially with *cool*. This pattern was found dotted round the country, with no evidence of regional or social patterning. Lexical adverbs were more common with past participles, treated below.

Bloody was no doubt under-reported because of the classroom situation. It was found with *awesome, awful, easy, hideous, hopeless, marvellous, stupid, useless*. It does not appear to be socially or regionally variable.

Way (as in *It was way cool*) was found with *awesome, better, cool, too hard*, with *better* the most common environment. All the reports were from the North Island.

All (as in *all sweet*) was reported with *aggro* (though the part of speech of this is not beyond question), *good, munted up, mushy, sweet*. Only one report came from the South Island. The reports came from schools of deciles 2–6. This may or may not be significant, given the small number of reports.

Fucking was probably under-reported for the same reason as *bloody*. It occurred with *cool, crusty, easy, hard, marvellous*, and showed no sign of regional or social patterning.

Superlative *ever* (e.g. *best ever*) was found only with *best* and *hardest*, sometimes with attributive adjectives (e.g. *the hardest test ever*), and sometimes with predicative adjectives.

Just occurred with *full of it* and *great*. It is not entirely clear that it is an amplifier. There were three of these forms which occurred sufficiently frequently with attributive adjectives to make it worthwhile distinguishing the predicative from the attributive use. The figures for the attributive use were *adj as* (12), *really adj* (17) and *a real adj* (10).

Really adj occurred attributively with *awesome game, bad movie, cool game/insect, good movie/stories, suck movie, stink movie, wicked game*, and in the possibly mis-reported *in a really pooey with me*.

Attributively, *adj as* was found in the following environments: *awesome as movie, bad as game, choice as game, cool as game/movie, massive as angus, mickey as game; primo as game*, and also in *a cool as stink game*. All these reports were from the North Island. Note that this is consistent with the findings for the predicative pattern, which found that the South Island reported very little use of this construction except in *sweet as*. Furthermore, within the North Island, only one report fell outside the Northern Region. This would thus appear to be a Northern form. (The fact that most of the reports were with *game* is not of consequence, but merely a reflection of the fact that this is the environment in which it was elicited by the questionnaire.) During school visits in the North Island, children were asked overtly about the attributive use of the construction. 11 of the 20 North Island schools rejected the attributive use completely, and only two schools of the 6 outside the Northern Region accepted it. This provides confirmation of the general patterns observed in the original data.

A *real* adj was reported with *cool game/movie*, *good movie*, *legend game*, *neat game*, *rad game*, *stink game*, and while there were large gaps in the reports, (e.g. none from Northland or Southland-Otago), there is no clear evidence of regionalisation. However, like *real* predicatively, this is predominantly a high-decile form.

Many of these same forms were used with past participles, and these were distinguished from adjectives as far as is possible (and we are well aware of the fuzzy borderline between the two). The attempt to make the distinction was justified by the fact that the list of intensifiers is not the same for the two kinds of base. In particular, the *as*-construction is not reported with past participles. The constructions reported with past participles were: *so* (28), *shit-* (18), lexical adverbs (18), *really* (12), *real* (3) and *bloody* (2).

So occurred with the following: *bummaged*, *bummed out*, *embarrassed*, *excited*, *frightened*, *fucking scared/shamed*, *just- scared*, *pissed off*, *scared*, *screwed*, *shamed*, *shamed out*, and was found scattered round the country, with no evidence of regional or social patterning.

Lexical adverbs were more frequent with past participles than with adjectives. The commonest was *totally*, but a number of others were also attested: *absolutely* (*hammered*, *broken*, *freaked*), *atrociously* (*damaged*), *completely* (*stuffed*), *seriously* (*fucked*), *totally* (*muntified*, *munted*, *embarrassed*, *shamed out*, *buggered*, *screwed*, *bummed out*, *mucked up*, *trashed*) *wickedly* (*freaked out*, *smashed*). There were some holes in the distribution: e.g. none reported from Northland, but these do not appear to be significant, and there is no sign of social patterning.

Shit- was used only with *scared* in this data, and should perhaps not have been included at all. However, semantically it has a similar effect, and its distribution was worth investigating. It has a tendency to be a Northern form, rather than Central or Southern:

	Northern Region		Central Region		Southern Region	
	No.	% of total	No.	% of total	No.	% of total
Schools	57	38	77	51	14	9
<i>Shit-scared</i>	9	50	8	44	1	5

It was not reported from any schools in the lowest two deciles, which, given the tendency to be a Northern Region form is perhaps surprising, and may be significant.

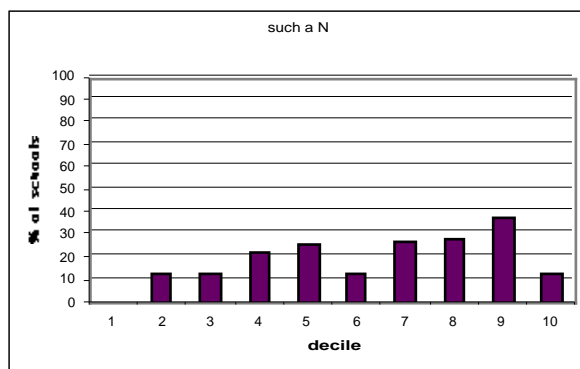
Really was reported with *bummed out*, *embarrassed*, *excited*, *frightened*, *munted*, *pissed off*, *pleased*, *scared*, *shamed*. There were no reports from Northland, and none in the Central North Island, compare with the distribution for *really* with adjectives. However, *really* with past participles does not show the same tendency to be a high-decile form.

Real was reported with *embarrassed*, *shamed*, *stoked*. Two reports are from Auckland and one from Southland, all from middle-decile schools. Again, there appear to be differences between this and the use with adjectives.

Bloody was used with *embarrassed* and *scared*.

Some of the same forms were also used to intensify nouns, but the commonest form with nouns is one not available for adjectives and past participles. The forms recorded were: *such a* (30), *all* (17), *just* (8), *really* (3), *real* (2).

Such (a) was mostly used with nouns with negative senses: *bragger, bullshitter, bum, cow, crap, dick, dork, fag, faker, fright, fuckwit, goody-good, idiot, liar, showoff, skite, wagger, wimp*, but also sometimes in positive contexts e.g. with *fun*, and sometimes with an compulsory accompanying adjective in *such a cool game/story; such a bad mood; such a better writer than me* [sic]. While there are some gaps in the distribution, this construction does not appear to be regionalised. However, there is a slight tendency for this construction to be high decile:

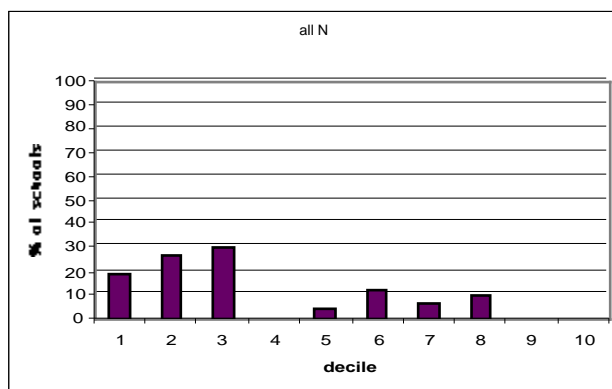


All (as in *all bullshit*) occurs almost exclusively with nouns with a negative sense: it was reported with *angus, bullshit, class, crap, lies, gacks/garks, kaka, plaque, shit, teko*. *Teko* is Maori for 'lies', and *kaka* Maori for 'shit'; *gacks/garks* is probably a corruption of *kaka*. This construction is strongly regionalised, both to the Northern Region and to the North Island.

	Northern Region		Central Region		Southern Region	
	No.	% of total	No.	% of total	No.	% of total
Schools	53	35	77	51	14	9
All N	11	65	4	24	1	6

	North Island		South Island	
	No.	%	No.	%
Schools	93	62	57	38
All N	14	82	3	18

This form is also predominantly low-decile, and may be a feature of Maori English, although further evidence would be needed to prove that link:



Just was reported in the following phrases: *just a dumb speech, just a da bomb girlfriend, just da bomb, just the baddest, just a snob, just a cry-baby, just a showoff*. The classification of *da bomb* as a noun is somewhat dubious, as *just a da bomb girlfriend* shows, and it should be noted that this accounted for 3 of these reports. All but one of the reports of this construction came from the North Island, but with such small numbers, not too much should be made of this.

Really poses classification problems. The three forms classified as nouns were *crap* (twice) and *fun*, and some doubt hangs over both, since *fun* is frequently used as an adjective, and this comes from the area of the country where *fun* is most frequently attested as an indubitable adjective. *Crap* can also be used as a modifier: *That's a crap picture* is attested, although *crappy* is far more usual.

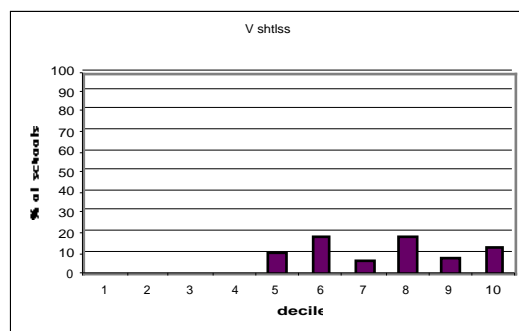
The two forms attested with *a real* were *ballsup* and *showoff*.

Verb amplifiers include a large number of different constructions, none of them of high frequency. The forms reported were: *really* V (13), V *shitless* (13); V *majorly* (9); *majorly* V (6); V *big time* (5); V *good/bad/badly* (3); *just* V (3); *totally* V (2); V *a lot* (2).

Really V was used in these phrases: *really don't want; really don't like; really don't care; really choked; really enjoyed; really liked; really suck(ed); really run; really rocked; really hurt; don't really like; don't really care; really messed up; really pissing me off*.

The number of negative constructions is noticeable. There are some substantial holes in its distribution, with just over half the reports from Northland and Auckland, no reports between Auckland and Taranaki, and only two from the South Island. There is no sign of social patterning.

V *shitless* occurred only with *scared*, and like *shit-scared*, could possibly have been ignored. It was reported scattered across the country, but was reported only from higher decile schools:



Majorly was reported following these verbs: *screwed up, tripped up, boasting, sucked, blew me up, mucked up, stuffed up*. It is interesting that the majority are phrasal verbs, but there is insufficient data to be sure whether this is of any significance. There is no sign of regional or social patterning.

Majorly can also precede verbs, and was attested in this position with: *forgot, sucked, embarrassed, stuffed up, sucks, damaged*. There is no evidence to suggest that there is any difference in the verbs in the two constructions, and the two are probably in free variation, and could have been subsumed under one group. This would not have affected the patterning.

There were 5 reports of *V big time*, all with *mucked up* or *stuffed up*, but there is no evidence of other patterning.

V modified by *good, bad, or badly* was reported in the following: *lie (=tell untruth) good; mucked up badly, sucks bad*. These are so diverse that no generalisation can be made.

Just V occurred with *faking, bunking, so scared*, and *just about shit my undies*. These forms came from Hawkes Bay and Taranaki, but numbers are too small for any conclusions about regionalisation.

Totally V was reported in *totally stuffed it* and *totally sucked*. *V a lot* was reported in *bragging a lot* and *mucked up a lot*. Both came from Timaru.

Adverb boosters (including with prepositional phrases) were reported occasionally. The forms used were *really* adv (10); *so* adv (8); *too* adv (8); *very* adv (4); *so* Prep Phrase (3); *real* adv (2).

Really occurred with *bad, badly, good, suckful, well*. The forms which look like adjectives in this list were clearly used adverbially (e.g. *it went really bad*). There were large gaps in the distribution: none between Auckland and Hawkes Bay, and none south of the Nelson district, but with such small numbers, not too much can be made of this.

So was found with *bad* and *much*, and in the phrases *so much fun, so many stuff-ups, so badly faked that*. Again, there were large gaps in the distribution, but with such small numbers of forms, that is almost inevitable.

Too was found with *seriously, much*, and in the phrases *a too much game*, and *not too well at all*.

Very was reported from 4 schools, and was used with *well, not very well, much*.

So was used with the phrase up herself in three schools, all in different locations in the country.

Real adv was used with *bad* and *well*.

It will be seen that many of these forms occur with each part of speech, although with different frequencies. If we disregard the part of speech, the overall frequencies of the recurring intensifiers are as follows: *so* (139), *as* (102), *really* (97), lexical (including *totally*, *majorly*) (47), *real* (45), *too* (32), *such* (30), *very* (21), *all* (23), *just* (13). (It must be pointed out that these figures are those for the number of schools reporting that form, where a report with a different construction counts as a different report, but a report with several bases of the same part of speech does not count as a different report.) However the figures for the total number of different bases reported from each school are also instructive: *so* (247), *as* (160), *really* (141), lexical (51), *real* (53), *too* (42), *such* (52), *very* (26), *all* (31), *just* (15). While there are some minor changes in the frequency order, the main effect of counting the responses in this way is to make it clear the enormous difference in the frequency with which these forms are actually used.

There was also a small amount of data relating to downtoners: intensifiers which reduce the impact of the form they modify. The forms with *just* above should perhaps be classified in this group, rather than as boosters, but nothing hangs on that aspect of the classification. The forms occurring with adjectives were: *pretty* (31), *a bit* (9), *that* (9), *quite* (7), *neg very* (2), *kind of* (2).

Pretty occurred with *bad*, *bummed out*, *buzz*, *cher*, *cool*, *easy*, *funny*, *good*, *hard*, *legendary*, *pissed off*, *psych*, *shitty*, *snazzy*, *strange*, *stink*, *stupid*, *sweet*. There is a strange gap in the lower North Island, but otherwise, there is no sign of significant patterning.

A bit occurred with *weird*, *exciting*, *embarrassed*, *harder*, *shamed*, *tricky*, *bummed out*, *annoying*, *scared*. The large gaps in the distribution are probably not of any significance.

That occurred with *not_easy*, *not_bad*, *not_hard*, *not_all_great*, *hard*, *not_great*. The most significant feature of this list is that all but one report was in a negative context. There was no sign of regional or social variation with this form.

Quite occurred with *easy*, *pleased*, *good*, *straightforward*, *well*, with *well* reported from several schools. Again, there is no evidence of any patterning worth comment.

Not very accompanied *good* and *well*; *kind of* accompanied *funny* and *embarrassing*, and both reports of this came from Southland-Otago.

There were also a very small number of reports of qualified intensifiers with parts of speech other than adjectives: *nearly* V (18); *pretty* adv (2).

The verbs with *nearly* were all elicited by the question about nearly falling out of a tree, and all concerned the near physical consequences of this, eg. *shit myself*, *peed my pants*, *had a heart attack*. They were spread throughout the country, and most deciles.

Pretty occurred with *quick* and *bad* in adverbial contexts.

Thus while the data on intensification is of some interest in the light it sheds on the forms which are commonly in use, there is also some regional and social variation in evidence. This data was not a primary focus of the questionnaire, but simply something which appeared as a by-product. The fact that it also shows variation is likely to be a sign of just how prevalent the variation is.

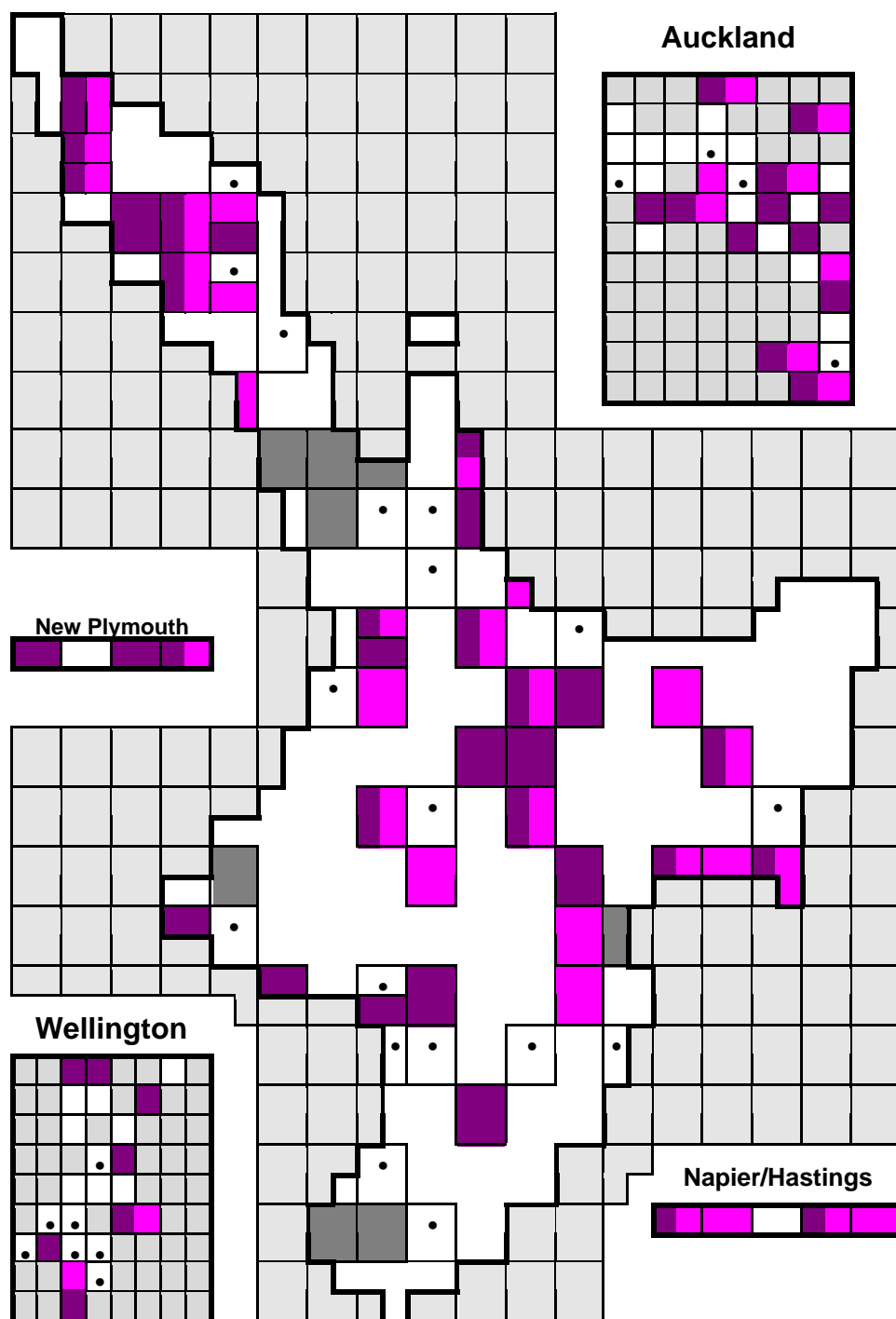
Unfortunately, these results were not available in time to be included in the statistical analysis. Two maps pertaining to the *as*-construction follow. The first compares the distribution of the adjective *sweet* and other adjective bases occurring in this construction; the second shows the attributive vs. the

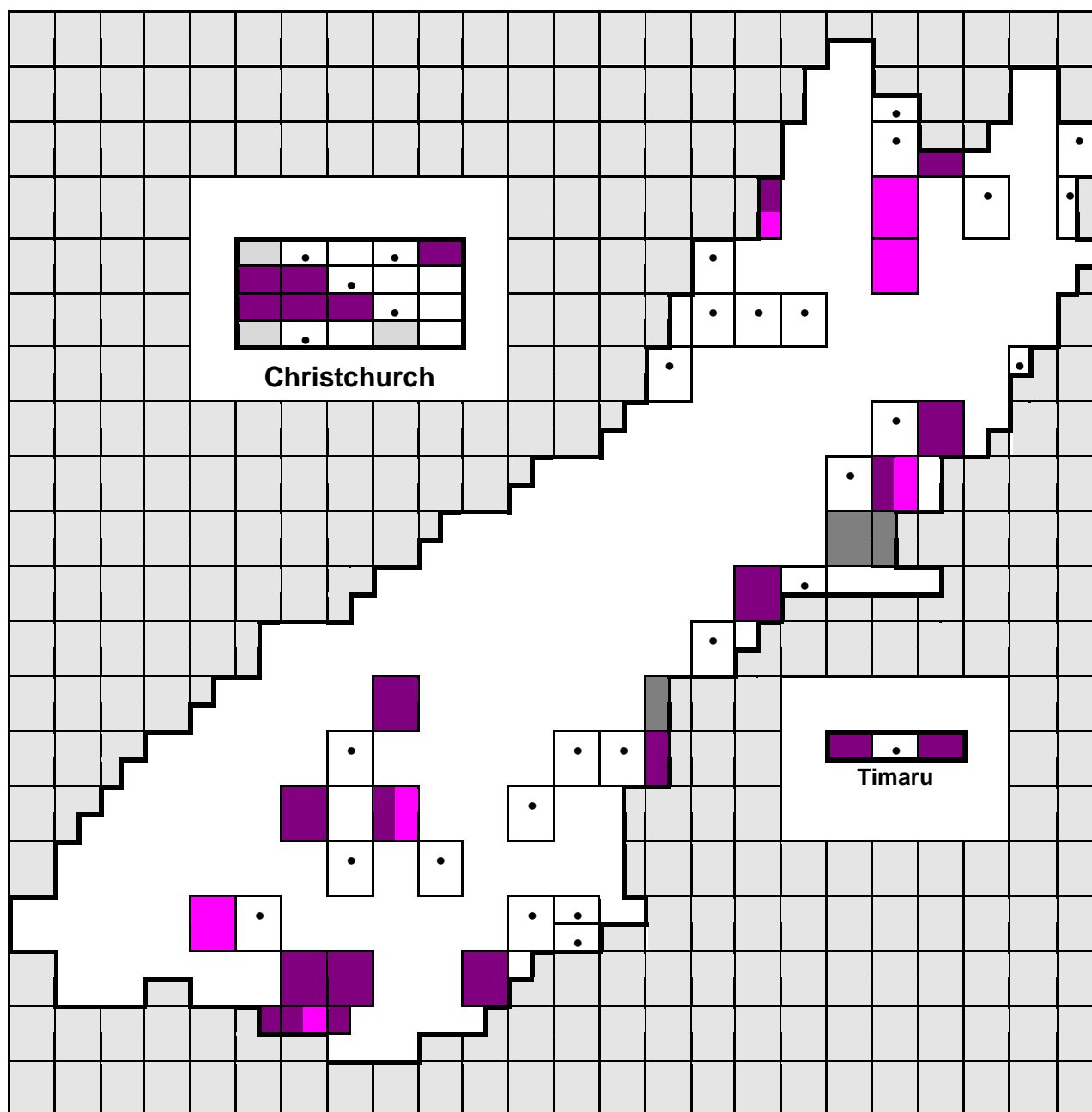
predicative use, and also isolates the use of *sweet as* in the sense ‘don’t worry about it’ (called ‘no worries’, for brevity’s sake) from other predicative uses. This was done because in that context, the possibility of using bases other than *sweet* is very limited, and it seemed possible – though it did not prove to be so – that there might be an implicational hierarchy of uses:

‘no worries’ > other predicative uses > attributive use

While it seems that the attributive use only occurs when one of the predicative uses is also present, the other implication relation does not appear to hold. It must also be noted that the category ‘predicative’ includes both actual predicative uses: *That’s sweet as* and implied predicative uses, where *Sweet as* is the entire utterance.


Map 1: *sweet as* vs. other adjectives with *as*



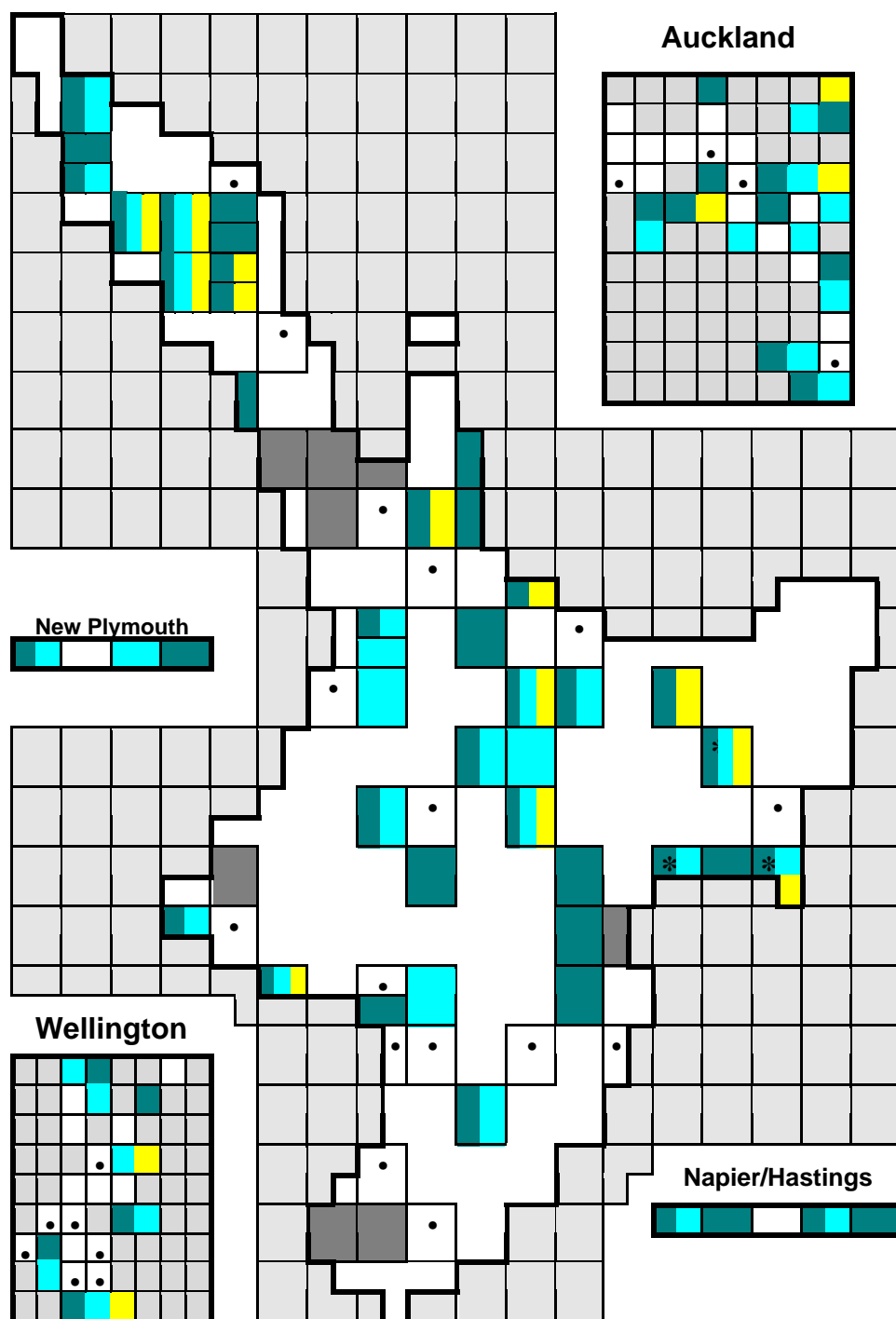


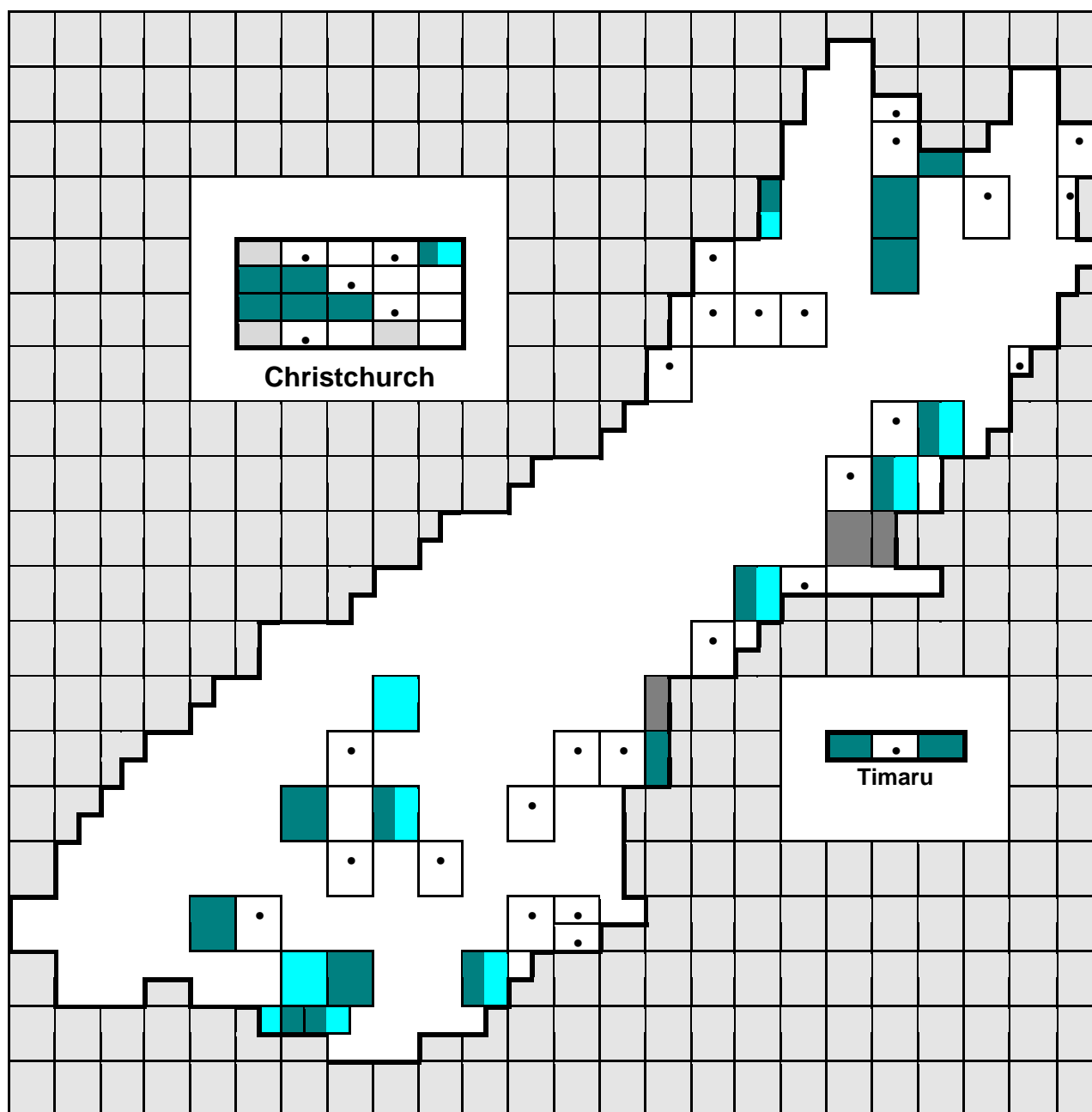
Key

Note that the insets are not to scale, nor all on the same scale for practical reasons. Each box represents one school in both urban and rural areas.

	sweet as		See urban map insert
	other adj + as		as construction not reported






Map 2: Environments for adj+as: predic, attrib, 'no worries'





Key

Note that the insets are not to scale, nor all on the same scale for practical reasons. Each box represents one school in both urban and rural areas.

	(implied) predicative		See urban map insert
	“no worries”		
	attributive	*	large number of adjs involved in predic