Is he beautiful, handsome or good-looking?
A study of putative synonymy in three adjectives

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D Master thesis
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ABSTRACT

In this essay, the adjectives beautiful, handsome and good-looking are investigated in order to find out if, and to what extent, the three adjectives are synonymous, as well as when, and how, they differ. The adjectives are also evaluated in relation to gender, which means that any similarities or differences regarding sex that the adjectives display are studied. The analysis is made on the basis of information found in five contemporary dictionaries, one etymological dictionary and one computerized corpus. It is shown that the three adjectives have very few synonymous uses, both as defined in the dictionaries and as suggested in the corpus. However, there are more similarities between the adjectives in the corpus samples than in the dictionary definitions where only the reference to people’s appearances are defined as partly synonymous for all three adjectives. In the corpus, the adjectives might be considered synonymous (once again, only partly so), when in relation to people’s looks, but more so when used about buildings, objects and animals. Both the dictionaries and the corpus data suggest that the adjectives have an unevenly distributed frequency with respect to gender: beautiful is used much more often to describe a woman than a man, and the opposite is true for handsome. The adjective good-looking, on the other hand, is considered gender-neutral in the dictionary definitions, but turns out to be more often applied to men in the corpus samples. However, it is not only in relation to frequency that the three adjectives show differences when describing the different sexes. The connotative meanings of the adjectives also display differences, so that (according to some of the dictionary definitions) for example a handsome woman is seen as having masculine features, whereas a handsome man could be seen simply as attractive, even though there are references to strong features for men as well.

Keywords: synonymy, corpus linguistics, dictionaries, adjectives, gender, beautiful, handsome, good-looking.
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background
In a language, words seem to have many different ways of being related to each other. Some words are connected by their opposite meanings, others by their degree of similarity or their way of often occurring together (Aitchison 2003: 86-87). Synonyms are words that can be seen as being related by having the same or nearly the same meaning (Fromkin & Rodman 1998: 165). Yet, they are not identical, since they usually display differences when it comes to the range of contexts in which they are used (Aitchison 1994: 90-91). Thus, words might be synonymous in one situation, but not in another, which means that their semantic distribution is different. Since the semantic distribution of words depends on their contexts, the question is how a person knows what words fit in what contexts? To a native speaker, this is usually something that comes naturally¹ (Aitchison 1994: 90-91), since s/he has acquired the word in a context when learning it. To a foreign learner, on the other hand, it is more difficult. S/he usually does not have the same kind of situational knowledge in the foreign language. Yet, whether one is a native speaker or a foreign learner who wants to find out in what situations a word is used, there are several ways of trying to find an answer to that. One way is to look up the word in one or several dictionaries. Another way is to read all the literature one can lay hands on (both fiction and non-fiction) and listen to everything that is said in all kinds of situations in order to try to find out how a word is actually used. The first alternative is possible; the second one is most probably not. Studying dictionaries may give a fair idea of the semantic distribution, but it might be the case that the dictionary makers have missed out on something, or even intentionally omitted information which could have been revealed by the second type of investigation. However, there is another alternative to the second, enormous, task of trying to collect all the information about a word. There are numerous computerized corpora, which include a substantial number of words from various contexts. Since they are searchable, there is no need to read everything that is included in them, which makes them a viable option in trying to find out specific information that might have been excluded from the making of the dictionaries. However, there is no need to exclude dictionary definitions, since they are a good way of acquiring compressed information in an easily

¹ Even though a native speaker of course also may use a word wrong, that is, in a way that would seem odd to other native speakers.
accessible way. Therefore, in the search for the way a word is used one might benefit from information from different sources, both from dictionaries and from “real life” language use.

One of the ways in which words may have different semantic distributions is in relation to gender, since language is often marked in that respect. This is seen both in the way women and men speak (Fromkin and Rodman 1998: 438) as well as in what words are used to describe women and men respectively (Fromkin and Rodman 1998: 434-436). It would therefore be valuable to see whether any kind of gender differences is either highlighted in dictionary definitions or shown in corpus data.

1.2 Aim and expectations
The aim of this essay is to investigate whether, and if so, when, the three adjectives beautiful, handsome and good-looking can be regarded as synonymous, but also how, and when, their meanings differ. The concept of ‘synonymy’ is explored as well as the relationship between ‘lexicon’ and ‘meaning’. The study also aims at finding out whether the three adjectives have different connotative meanings when they are used about women and men. The three adjectives were chosen, since they were expected to have a synonymous relationship in certain contexts and also to display a somewhat different distribution in relation to gender.

1.3 Method and material
In order to decide whether the lexemes analysed in this study can be considered synonymous, five different well-known dictionaries are used: the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language Online, the Longman Online Dictionary of Contemporary English, the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary Online, the Oxford English Dictionary Online, and the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. These dictionaries reflect both American and British use of the English language, sometimes all the way from when the word was coined to what is seen as its present-day use. However, in this study the focus is on the contemporary use of the words (here meaning from the twentieth century and onwards), even though some etymological information is mentioned in these dictionaries as well. The information gathered from the dictionaries consists of definitions of word meaning, as well as different expressions and collocations mentioned under the entry. All the information is analysed to map the semantic distribution of the three adjectives and hence provide a picture of in what way the lexemes are similar, and in what way they differ. Most of the etymological information is taken from a sixth dictionary entitled: the Online Etymology Dictionary. This information is
added to see if the meanings of the adjectives have changed over time and whether the possible differences between them spring from a distinction formed a long time ago. To be able to explore the relationship between the dictionary data and what could be thought of as real-life usage, the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) was used. COCA is a corpus based on 360 millions words used between 1990 and 2009, using as its source material evenly distributed samples from spoken language, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers and academic texts, all supposed to reflect contemporary American English. There are other corpora that could have been used, such as the British National Corpus that focuses more on British English. However, in a comparison between the two, the former corpus is to be preferred for this study, since it includes a larger number of words (360 million versus 100 million), has more recent examples (2009 versus 1994) and displays a wider distribution of sources (in the BNC 90 % of the samples are from written sources). It would naturally have been desirable to use both a corpus that reflects American English and another one that focuses on British use, but that would have been beyond the time limits of this essay.

To begin with, random searches were performed in the corpus in order to see what conclusions could be drawn simply from a quick overview. It soon became clear that the three adjectives, especially beautiful, occurred in so many places that analysing all of them would be impossible within the time restrictions of this essay. Since it is possible to search the corpus for examples from each of the years separately, the solution was then to pick one year as the basis for the corpus analysis. Furthermore, one of the advantages with COCA is the ready access to examples that were used not very long ago and it therefore seemed logical to try to find samples that were as recent as possible. Since the section of words used during 2008 in the corpus was not complete at the beginning of the work on this essay, an earlier year had to be chosen. When comparing the words from 2007 and 2006, it became clear that the adjective good-looking, which has the lowest number of hits when compared with the other two adjectives, was represented slightly more often in 2006 than in 2007. For this reason, it seemed more reliable to investigate the three adjectives as they were used during 2006. All in all, the number of hits for beautiful is 2121, handsome generated 413 hits, and good-looking 75 examples.

1.4 List of abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AHD</td>
<td>the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COCA</td>
<td>the Corpus of Contemporary American English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LDCE</td>
<td>the Longman Online Dictionary of Contemporary English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OALD</td>
<td>the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OED</td>
<td>the Oxford English Dictionary Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOLD</td>
<td>the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Word meaning and ways of categorising language

In order to discuss different relations in language, it is necessary to discuss how the meaning of words or, more specifically, lexical items, can be defined. A **lexical item** is a unit which may be larger than a single word, as in the case of collocations, but is still viewed as a “unit of meaning” (Teubert 2007: 28). Its function can be likened to that which most of us think of when we talk about words. Different types of relations in the mental lexicon are also of importance in this context.

Traditionally, word meaning has been discussed in terms of an entity that can be packed into a container and sent across for the hearer to unpack (the conduit metaphor), or in terms of words being building blocks, which, in combination with their place in syntactic structures, create meaning (the building block metaphor) (Cuyckens, Dirven & Taylor 2003: 10-17). The problems with these two views are, however, too important to be overlooked. If the meaning of a word can be discussed in terms of an entity that can easily be unpacked, the question about the listener’s role is not addressed. What happens when a person is supposed to unpack the message? Does the word meaning stay the same? The problem with the second metaphor is that syntactic structures alone do not seem to be able to account for the meanings a word or an utterance can have (Cuyckens, Dirven & Taylor 2003: 10-17).

A way to deal with the problems contained in the conduit and the building block metaphors and to provide an alternative view of word meaning is to start from a different angle: No words within a language exist on their own (Aitchison 1999: 84), since the meaning of a word is neither learnt, nor understood in isolation (Cuyckens, Dirven & Taylor 2003: 21). It seems like words are linked by different types of semantic relations in semantic networks (Aitchison 2003: 84-101). For instance, the meaning of the verb *to sauté* is not found by looking solely at the word itself, but also in its relation to other verbs such as *to deep fry, boil or cook*, and to nouns such as *pan*, and *pot* (Altenberg & Granger 2002: 29). These relations can be described by different relational links. Aitchison (2003: 86-87) lists four possible categories of links between words. Firstly, there is a link called “coordination”, which includes the relations

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2 However, in most cases throughout this essay, the word *word* will be applied, since it is more convenient.

3 Altenberg and Granger exemplify semantic fields by referring to synonymy, hyponymy, incompatibility, antonymy etc (Altenberg & Granger 2002: 29), which in most ways can be seen as counterparts to Aitchison’s four link types, even though they are slightly different. “Incompatibility” and “antonyms”, for instance, would go
between words which are “on the same level of detail” (Aitchison 2003: 86), meaning that salt, pepper and mustard would be coordinates (Aitchison 2003: 87). Antonyms, or “opposites” such as hot and cold, or left and right (Aitchison 203: 86), also fit into a type of relation where the words involved are on the same level, but what counts here is the opposite meanings. Secondly, a link referred to as collocation is mentioned. Collocates are words that are often found together, such as “salt water, butterfly net, bright red” (Aitchison 2003: 86). According to Teubert, they might be regarded as lexical items, since they often form a unit of meaning (2007: 28). Thirdly, Aitchison brings up the term “superordination” (also called hyponymy), which defines a hierarchical relationship where one term is seen as the superordinate of other terms (2003: 86). The relationship between butterfly and insect is one of superordination, where insect is the superordinate word in relation to butterfly. Fourthly, the last link that is suggested, is the one including synonymy, that is, words that have the same meaning (for a more detailed description of synonyms, see 2.2). In different word association studies it is proven that these four links are not equally often used by informants (Aitchison 2003: 86-91). The most frequent link is that of coordinates, followed by collocation. Superordination is not equally frequent as the first two links, and the last category, synonymy, is only found occasionally.

As stated above, words do not exist in isolation. In fact, words, and constructions (as in collocations etc), are also, to some extent, idiomatic. This means that to learn a word or a construction, one needs to have knowledge of its usage, that is, how and when to use it (Cuyckens, Dirven & Taylor 2003: 23-25). This knowledge can only be found within the discourse community, which consists of those who have used, and are using the language. The role of the discourse community when it comes to word meaning is extremely important. It is even possible to state that the meaning of a word is based solely on the uses (all “accepted” uses) it has within the discourse community (Teubert 2007:40), and then no more, no less. If word meaning lies in the hands of the discourse community as a whole, it would of course mean that the individual members of the community do not have identical ideas of word meaning. Actually, it means that each speaker holds a somewhat incomplete or different idea of what the meaning of a specific word is, since it most likely would be impossible for one single person to know exactly how a word is used in all situations. Yet, it is not the same thing as to say that having an incomplete idea of a word makes the word void of meaning or useless. Someone using the word may consider the meanings satisfactory, since they may fit

under Aitchison’s “coordination.”
that person’s need. Additionally, it is possible to extend the concept of a word by encountering new uses of it. So, the same person, having thought his/her understanding of a word as complete, might, upon encountering new uses of the word, incorporate the new senses (Allwood 2003: 56), and thus have an even more “accurate”, or at least “broader”, understanding of the word. It may also be said, in relation to the statement that word meaning lies in all the uses it has within a speech community, that there is of course some sort of “censorship” involved in this process. If an individual uses a word in a particular way, but no one else adopts the same, or similar interpretations, then it is not possible to talk about “a use” of that word.

The possibility of constant revision of word meaning would match the idea of a “mental corpus”, as suggested by for example Cuyckens, Dirven and Taylor (2003: 25). The mental corpus includes all the information a person has about language (and hence also about specific words), that is, memories of the language situations s/he have encountered, as well as the generalizations (both grammatical and semantic) drawn from these encounters. Words, in this mental lexicon, are therefore chosen and used in discourse “with respect to their potential to contribute to constructions” (Cuyckens, Dirven & Taylor 2003: 25), which means that words have the potential to be very flexible.

As human beings, we have the ability to create categories to sort the impressions we encounter, and this is also true in relation to words. However, one must be aware of the fact that categories in the mental lexicon are not fixed conceptions, whose meanings and uses cannot be altered. In fact, we have the ability to create categories on the spot as the need arises, so that a person might all of a sudden create a category of “‘things to hold a door open with’” (Aitchison 2003: 73) if that is what is being thought of, or is discussed. Since there is a potential for on the spot categorisation, a word that would normally be associated with certain words can evoke completely different associations if placed in another context. For instance, in word association experiments, moon usually elicited words such as sun, night and star, but when placed next to elephant, hall, whale and stadium, it most often resulted in big. (Aitchison 2003: 85). However, the categories we make up tend to be organized so that some instances are judged as better examples of a certain category. The fact that some examples are considered better than others is supported by the prototype theory, as presented by Rosch (1978). According to this theory, people tend to consider e.g. robins as better examples of the category ‘bird’ than ostriches, or penguins. Still, an animal can be considered a bird if there is enough resemblance to the prototypical bird. This theory also applies to things such as word
classes, so that one could talk about “prototypical adjectives” or “prototypical verbs” (Aitchison 2003: 104).

Finally, what can be added in relation to word meaning, is the types of meaning that can be found in dictionaries and corpuses. As mentioned above, language is a social construct, defined by a discourse community (Teubert 2007: 37). It is made up by everything that is ever communicated in that community and it is something that is consequently constantly evolving (Teubert 2007: 36-38, 40-41, 46). One might therefore not claim to encompass all the meanings either in a dictionary or in a corpus. However, Teubert means that a corpus has a possibility to add to meaning in a way that is not possible for dictionaries. When studying a corpus, it is possible to find that the same expression may be used positively by one person and negatively by another, which is also part of word meaning in a discourse community. Dictionaries, on the other hand, may sometimes present the illusion that it is possible to delimit the meanings of a word in a neat way (Teubert 2007: 42). However, a neat delimitation of words is not possible, which for instance can be seen in that most dictionaries differ even among themselves in their categorisation (Teubert 2007: 22). Secondly, lexicographers tend to separate between dictionary data (such as pronunciation, etymology, word class affiliation and, of course, definitions – *the last example is my interpretation*) and encyclopaedic knowledge (all other type of information – *my interpretation*), when these two should be seen more as an entity (Teubert 2007: 49). When using a word or an expression, it is equally important to know how it is defined, and in what contexts, as it is to know any other kind of information that could be given in a dictionary. A corpus may, for instance, tell us that the expression *weapons of mass destruction* is not only mostly used to designate “biological, chemical and nuclear weapons” (Teubert 2007: 48), but also that this is first and foremost used about the weapons of one’s enemies, rather than one’s own (Teuber 2007: 49). However, as a contrast to Teubert’s ideas, one might of course claim that the dictionary makers often make usage notes, in addition to the other types of information (pronunciation, etymology, word class etc) they usually include.

Word meaning is not an easily described phenomenon. Research has shown that people tend to group words together, in semantic networks and by using different kinds of categories. For any definition of a word to be completely accurate, all the contexts where the word has been used, and is currently used, need to be considered. A corpus cannot contain all these situations in which a specific word has been used; neither is that possible for a dictionary. However, despite the impossibility of a complete idea of the meaning of a word, the goal is, in
this essay and probably in other situations as well, to find meanings that may be considered representative.
2.2 Synonyms

As seen in the previous section, words in our mental lexicon are related to each other in different ways. One way in which they may be connected semantically is by being synonymous. A synonymous relationship means that “words that sound different [...] have the same or nearly the same meaning” (Fromkin & Rodman 1998: 165). Aitchison defines a synonym as a lexical item that “can be interchanged without altering the meaning of an utterance” (1999: 87).

Synonymy may seem as a common phenomenon, but in a strict sense, synonymy is rare. Perfect synonymy can be seen in instances such as rubella and German measles, which both refer to the same thing, but belong to different styles, where one is medical jargon, and the other is a layperson’s denotation (Aitchison 1999: 87-88). On the other hand, one might of course argue that different styles of speech represent a difference important enough to give the words different connotations (and therefore differ slightly in their meaning as well).

According to Fromkin and Rodman, there are not two words that mean exactly the same thing, even though they in their own definition of the concept state that synonyms are items that mean “the same thing” (1998: 165). However, if it should be relevant to discuss synonymy at all, it is probably best to accept that what is referred to as the same meaning is something that is seen as “similar enough” (my interpretation).

Whether two words are synonymous depends on context (Aitchison 1999; 2003: 74-75, 85; Teubert & Čermáková 2007). For instance, in some contexts two words like snap and break have the same meaning and are interchangeable:

(1) He snapped the twig in half.

He broke the twig in half (Aitchison 1999: 87).

In the above sentences the two words mean the same thing, since they are denoting a similar action. But, looking at other examples where these two words might occur reveals a different picture:

(2) He snapped his fingers.

He broke his fingers (Aitchison 1999: 87).

Here, the two terms clearly do not mean the same thing and cannot be regarded as synonymous (Aitchison 1999: 87). Fromkin & Rodman also take the example of deep and
profound to explain the same phenomenon. These words have closely related meanings when “applied to thought”, but when talking about water, only deep is applicable (Fromkin & Rodman 1998:165). This is possible because synonymy is not “logical”, in that there is no logical explanations as to why two words should be considered synonymous in one context, but not in another (Aitchison 2003: 101). Synonymy can therefore not be assessed merely by looking at the definitions of specific words, without knowledge of context.

Another way to define synonymy is to focus upon the “minimal relevant difference” (Murphy 2003: 134) in the relation between two words. In this view, a “synonym set includes word-concepts that all share the same contextually relevant properties, but differ in form” (Murphy 203: 134). Context, both semantic, but, according to Murphy, first and foremost the pragmatic context, will decide what the relevant similarities (“the contextually relevant properties”) consist of (Murphy 2003: 143). The reason for this is that context may create other relevant similarities than what one would think of in the first place. As an example, Murphy refers to the following dialogue:

(1) A: I’m so sick of that Kay and her stupid little doggy that she’s always calling her “little baby-waby”…

B: Little Baby-Waby is a kitty, not a doggy.

A: Doggy, kitty, whatever. It’s all the same to me. It’s a stupid little spoiled beast with a stupid little spoiled mistress (Murphy 2003: 142).

In this dialogue, kitty and doggy, though not normally seen as having the same meaning, can be regarded as synonymous.

Synonymy seems to be a creative phenomenon, like so many other relations within language, evading the restraints of the logical. In spite of the fact that synonymy may seem elusive, a native speaker usually chooses a synonym that is correct (Aitchison 1994: 90-91), that is, it would not sound strange to other native speakers (my interpretation). This may be because of the connections between context and word meaning, where context is highly important both in learning and in interpreting a word (as discussed in 2.1) and where the native speaker already possesses much of this contextual knowledge.

2.3 Corpus linguistics
Corpus linguistics is the term for “the study of language based on examples of ’real life’ language use” (McEnry & Wilson 2001: 1). Nowadays, it is usually used to refer to language studies involving large computerized corpora, even though that is not a necessary characteristic by the above given definition.

There is a certain disagreement among linguists as to whether corpus linguistics should be considered a linguistic branch of its own. Some researchers argue that corpus linguistics is not like any of the other branches of linguistics, in that it is more of a method used when applying other kinds of linguistics (McEnry & Wilson 2001: 2). In accordance with this view, one might study semantics, syntax etc. with the use of corpora, without considering it a separate branch of linguistics. However, other researchers are of a different opinion. Teubert, for instance, presents corpus linguistics as a branch in its own right (2007). He means that corpus linguistics has its own specific aims, such as focusing especially on the message or the meaning of utterances, instead of on the process of understanding, something that would delimit it from, for example, cognitive linguistics (Teubert 2007: 38-39). However, not everything that is connected to a corpus is automatically corpus linguistics (Teubert 2007: 57-58). If the research is merely corpus-based, meaning that a corpus is used to verify or falsify a presupposed idea, corpus linguistics is more of a method. But, if the studies performed are corpus-driven, which means that the linguistic findings are “extracted from corpora, using the methodology of corpus linguistics, then intellectually processed and turned into results”, then there is reason to talk about a linguistic branch of its own (Teubert 2007: 57).

What can be said to be the origin of corpus linguistics is no doubt a matter of the definition of the term itself. If one strictly adheres to the definition of corpus linguistics as the study of real-life language, then it has certainly been in use for a very long time, since people have collected language data and used these to draw conclusions about language long before the use of the term *corpus linguistics* was coined (McEnry & Wilson 2001: 2-4). However, if the focus is on the approximate time of the entrance of the term in the language, then it is much more recent. Some researchers date the beginning of corpus linguistics to the 1960s, which is most likely the decade when the term *corpus* was used for the first time to designate a collection of texts (Teubert 2007: 50, 53). This seems to be a relevant starting point, at least of what one then could call modern corpus linguistics.

The birth of corpus linguistics can be seen as the result of some researchers’ dissatisfaction with standard grammars and the way these grammars described different languages (Teubert

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4 For a more detailed description of the terms ’corpus-based’ and ’corpus-driven’, see Elena Tognini-Bonelli, e.g in Altenberg and Granger pp73-95.
2007: 50-53). Several linguists felt that the descriptions did not fit real-life usage, and that, in order to find more adequate descriptions of grammar something else was needed. Hence, they started compiling real-life language data, looking for evidence of grammatical structures. This resulted in, for example, the widely used grammar *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* by Randolph Quirk, who based his grammar on the data he started collecting in the late 50s. Not all studies during this period focused on grammar, something which can be seen in a linguistic project initiated by John Sinclair, where a corpus was used for lexical studies and whose final report was called *English Lexical Studies* (1970). By the help of a relatively small corpus, he tried to set up a definition of ‘lexical items’, including the concept of ‘collocation’. His research on lexical items initiated an interest in the view of a unit of meaning as stretching beyond the single word.

The second generation of corpus linguistics in the 70’s, 80’s and 90’s, focused much on how to compile corpora (Teubert 2007: 54) and many researchers focused on questions concerning how to tag different words and how and if corpora could be reliable. In fact, it is not until very recently that other issues have been properly considered, like the question of meaning, and with it, for example, the role of collocations (Teubert 2007: 57). Still, it is in the area of meaning that corpus studies may prove the most useful (Teubert 2007 48-49). To discover all the units of meaning that exist in a language (where the unit of meaning is larger than single words) is very hard even for a trained linguist, mostly because of preconceived ideas where single words easily are seen as units of meaning (Teubert 2007: 21), but a corpus might shed light on the subject matter by providing real-life examples. Other types of studies which have been aided by the use of corpus linguistics are, for instance, the relationship between grammar and lexis, where lexis has turned out to be “less autonomous” and more dependent on other parts of language (Altenberg & Granger 2002: 4-5). Finally, corpus studies have contributed to the understanding of to what extent factors such as age, sex, regional provenance, social class, register etc are shown in language (Altenberg & Granger 2002: 5).
3. DICTIONARY DEFINITIONS OF BEAUTIFUL, HANDSOME AND GOOD-LOOKING

3.1 Dictionary definitions and use of beautiful.

3.1.1 Etymology of beautiful
The word beautiful originates from Latin bellus, but entered the English language via Anglo-Norman in the thirteenth century in the form of beute, meaning ‘beauty’ (the Online Etymology Dictionary). It was not until the fifteenth century that the form beautiful as in a beautiful woman for the first time was attested, replacing the Old English wite. In classical Latin, bellus meant more or less what it does today, in that it could refer to people that were aesthetically pleasing. Interestingly enough, bellus was used “especially of women and children, or ironically or insultingly of men” (the Online Etymology Dictionary), meaning that the word originally implied a distinction between women and children on the one hand, and men on the other. In some respects, a part of this distinction seems to have been kept through the transfer from Classical Latin, through Vulgar Latin, Old French, Anglo-Norman, and finally into its present-day use of English, although the connotations in relation to this distinction nowadays looks somewhat different. For examples of such a distinction, see the list of synonyms of beautiful in the Longman Online Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDCE) in 3.1.2., where the word is said to be “used to describe someone, usually a woman or child, who is attractive in a very special and noticeable way”.

3.1.2 Contemporary definitions of beautiful
LDCE gives two definitions of beautiful, namely: “someone or something that is beautiful is extremely attractive to look at” and secondly: “very good or giving you great pleasure”. As examples of how beautiful can be used, Longman lists: She was even more beautiful than I had remembered; beautiful bunch of flowers; beautiful music; What a beautiful shot!; The weather was beautiful.

LDCE also makes a usage note on when to use beautiful and when to use any of its many synonyms (in this case the synonyms mentioned are pretty, handsome, good-looking, attractive, gorgeous and stunning, but for the purpose of this study only handsome, good-looking and beautiful are commented on:
Beautiful is used to describe someone, usually a woman or child, who is attractive in a very special and noticeable way. Handsome is usually used to describe a man or boy who is good-looking, with strong regular features. It can also be used to describe a woman, usually an older woman, who has attractive but masculine features. Good-looking can be used to describe anyone who you think is nice to look at.

According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (WOLD), beautiful means “having qualities of beauty: exciting aesthetic pleasure” or “generally pleasing: excellent”. WOLD does not give any examples of expressions where beautiful is used, other than “beautiful mountain scenery”, mentioned among the examples of synonyms and their usage, as seen below. Webster comments on the following synonyms of beautiful: lovely, handsome, pretty, comely, fair (but leaves out good-looking) all being defined as “exciting sensuous or aesthetic pleasure”, but as in the case of the synonyms mentioned in LDCE, only those relevant to this study are quoted:

Beautiful applies to whatever excites the keenest of pleasure to the senses and stirs emotion through the senses: beautiful mountain scenery.
Handsome suggests aesthetic pleasure due to proportion, symmetry, or elegance: handsome Georgian mansion.

The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary Online (OALD) also mentions two meanings of beautiful where the first one is “having beauty; pleasing to the senses or to the mind” and secondly, something that has to do more with performance, namely “very good or skilful”. The following examples of expressions with beautiful are given: “a beautiful woman /face/ baby/ voice/ poem/ smell/ evening”; “beautiful countryside”; “weather/ music”; “She looked stunningly beautiful that night”; “What a beautiful thing to say!”; “What beautiful timing!”

The Oxford English Dictionary Online (OED) gives the most detailed definition of beautiful of all five dictionaries studied. First of all, it says that beautiful has two main meanings (and one more instance where it is used in a more idiomatic way), where the first is: “Full of beauty, possessing the qualities which constitute beauty.” As subcategories of that first definition, OED mentions the following senses, as presented in (i) – (v). (i)“Excelling in grace of form, charm of colouring, and other qualities which delight the eye, and call forth
admiration”, both when it comes to “the human face or figure” or “other objects”. It may also be “used for emphasis or ironically, after the noun it qualifies”. Another closely related meaning is (ii) “Affording keen pleasure to the senses generally, especially that of hearing; delightful”. In modern colloquial use the word is often applied to anything that a person likes very much (and is at times very similar to sense (iv), according to OED itself). Here, OED also lists “beautiful people”, which means either (a) ‘flower people’, ‘hippies’; or (b) ‘wealthy, fashionable people’; the ‘smart set’. Meaning (iii) is ‘Impressing with charm the intellectual or moral sense, through inherent fitness or grace, or exact adaptation to a purpose’ (iv) ‘Relating to the beautiful; aesthetic, rare’. (v) The last example of sense one, is where beautiful is used in combinations as in beautiful-browed, beautiful-minded. Then, as a second main sense OED states that beautiful may have more of a noun-function, meaning ‘beautiful one’ or ‘That which is beautiful’. The beautiful is “the name given to the general notion which the mind forms of the assemblage of qualities which constitute beauty”. Finally, OED has added a separate note on the meaning it has acquired in relation to football, namely ‘the beautiful game’. Probably, this example can be seen as more of an idiomatic expression than a representation of the prototypical meaning of the word.

OED has without doubt also the most extensive number of examples including beautiful. Many of them are examples from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, which in itself is interesting from an etymological viewpoint, but not for the overall scope of this study, and hence they have been omitted. Likewise, many of the more recent examples have been removed, since their number was so impressive. OED focuses on many specific examples, where the source is mentioned. For example, in relation to some of the examples, it indicates that they have been taken from particular novels or magazines. Then, there are other examples which are general expressions without any kind of references provided by the dictionary. General expressions without time references are: “beautiful pears, she makes beautiful soup, a beautiful ride; a beautiful operation in surgery, beautiful people”. A few of the specific examples and their sources in chronological order are listed below:

Far from being one of the Beautiful People, I was in an ugly frame of mind
(Spectator 4 Aug. 131/1 1967).

This way of choosing exemplifications reminds of the corpus, where the examples found are taken from existing texts
‘We had one guy,’ he said, ‘he was so beautiful. A jazz musician who also wrote children's books.’ *(Boston Sunday Herald Mag. 30 Apr. 32/3 1967)*

Maynard was a great leader... He was beautiful for the whole spirit of the band *(Crescendo June 12/2 1968)*.

What the Euro 2004 footy tournament is really all about is getting a few bevs in, ordering a mass takeaway, and inviting all your mates round to bond over the beautiful game. 2004 *(Boys Toys July 42/2)*

The definition given in *the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language Online* *(AHD)* reminds more of the first three dictionaries, giving short and concise descriptions: “Having qualities that delight the senses, especially the sense of sight” and “Excellent; wonderful”. *AHD* does not give any examples other than a “*beautiful child; a beautiful painting*” and “a beautiful mathematical proof”. However, like *LDCE* and *WOLD*, it also submits a commented list of synonyms of *beautiful* and their relation to each other. Several of the comments are accompanied by a quote. Like *WOLD*, *AHD* does not include *good-looking*, but the synonyms that are included are: *beautiful, lovely, pretty, handsome, comely, and fair.*\(^6\)

It says that all the adjectives given relate to “what excites aesthetic admiration”.

*Beautiful is the most comprehensive: a beautiful child; a beautiful painting; a beautiful mathematical proof.*

*Handsome stresses poise and dignity of form and proportion: a very large, handsome paneled library. “She is very pretty, but not so extraordinarily handsome”* (William Makepeace Thackeray).

**3.1.3 Comparison and summary of the dictionary definitions of beautiful**

As seen above, the five dictionaries\(^7\) phrase their definitions of *beautiful* somewhat differently, yet, they seem quite similar. Four of the five dictionaries use two main definitions to describe the meaning of the adjective. Possibly, these two definitions could be phrased as: “something that has the ability to excite aesthetic pleasure (something that is pleasing to e.g. look at)”, and, secondly, “generally pleasing, whether it may be because it is skilful, apt or

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\(^6\) As in the previous cases, only the synonyms that are the same as the words in this study are being commented on.

\(^7\) What is referred to as “the five dictionaries” are the ones that are used to reflect contemporary use, hence the etymological dictionary is not included.
just something you like very much”. The definitions in OED, which are ten in number, do in many ways match the two main definitions found in the other dictionaries, even though in another order. The only definitions which, at a first glance, might be difficult to fit into the main definitions are when beautiful refers to hippies, the smart set and football. There might, however, be connections to the meanings mentioned in the other dictionaries even here. Perhaps stretching it somewhat, it is possible to say that hippies might be connected with specific aesthetic values, that the smart set usually tries to look beautiful and also, if you are successful you might be looked upon as fitting well into society (more like sense two, where adaptation to a purpose is significant). Finally, many football fans would probably refer to football as definitely pleasing to the senses. This could mean that the senses that OED lists separately may be related at least by extension.

Judging by the examples found in the five dictionaries, beautiful can be used in a very wide range of contexts. It might denote e.g. the scenery, food, a way of performing acts, characteristics (without necessarily referring to how a person looks, or to a person at all), and then, perhaps the most obvious alternative, people’s appearance.

Only LDCE makes explicit references to gender in its definitions, but both AHD and OALD give examples which could be seen to confirm the preference of the word beautiful to be used for women and children (in accordance with the etymological information). OED says nothing about whether beautiful has any preferred female gender connotations. Instead, their examples, when it is possible to connect the adjective to a person, refer to men (“‘We had one guy,’ he said, ‘he was so beautiful. A jazz musician who also wrote children's books.’” and “Maynard was a great leader... He was beautiful for the whole spirit of the band”). On the other hand, these instances are not necessarily describing their looks; the second one is most definitely not. From the definitions and examples provided by the five dictionaries studied, it seems as if the adjective beautiful is more often used in reference to women and children when it comes to describing appearances. However, a comparison with other sources to confirm, or refute this idea, is necessary.

3.2 Dictionary definitions and use of handsome

3.2.1 Etymology of handsome

Unlike in the case of beautiful, both WOLD and AHD make remarks on the etymology of handsome, although not in any detailed way. WOLD mentions that the word comes from Middle English handsom, meaning “easy to manipulate”. According to the same dictionary,
the word’s entrance into the English language is said to be in 1530. *AHD* also refers to the word as Middle English *handsom*, adding some additional information about the stem going back to Old English *hand*, and that (if following the link of *–some* within the same dictionary) the suffix comes from OE *–sum*, meaning “characterized by a specified quality, condition, or action”. *The Online Etymology Dictionary* dates *handsome* at an earlier date than *WOLD*, going back as far as somewhere around 1400. It says that the word originally meant “easy to handle, ready at hand”, coming (as did state *AHD*) from the morphemes *hand* and *–some*. However, *the Online Etymology Dictionary* also adds information about the development of *handsome*, wherein the more modern use of the word can be recognised. For instance, the meaning ‘fair size, considerable’ was added in 1577, ‘having fine form’, ‘good-looking’ in 1590, and ‘generous’ (as in ‘handsome reward’) was, according to the same source, first attested in 1690.

**3.2.2 Contemporary definitions of *handsome***

*LDCE* starts directly with what could be considered a gender aspect (in that it separates the definitions, depending on whether the person defined is being a man or a woman). The first of the five different meanings stated, is “a man who is handsome looks attractive [= good-looking]” and “a woman who is handsome looks attractive in a strong healthy way” (*my italics*). *LDCE* continues by enumerating more definitions of *handsome*, not relating to people, but rather to animals and things. The first of those types of definitions is “an animal, object, or building that is handsome looks attractive in an impressive way”, and then it adds that the three following definitions are valid only if *handsome* is followed by a noun: “a handsome amount of money is large”, “a handsome gift or prize is worth a lot of money”, and finally “a handsome victory is important and impressive”. A few examples that *LDCE* mentions for the word *handsome* in relation to people are “an extremely handsome young man”; “his handsome face”; and “Sam was tall, dark and handsome”. Along these examples, the dictionary refers to the usage note on *beautiful* which includes the word *handsome*, but instead of repeating what was said in 3.1.2, it is to be found as a footnote on the bottom of this page.8 To illustrate the other meanings of handsome, *LDCE* lists “a row of handsome

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8Beautiful is used to describe someone, usually a woman or child, who is attractive in a very special and noticeable way. Handsome is usually used to describe a man or boy who is good-looking, with strong regular features. It can also be used to describe a woman, usually an older woman, who has attractive but masculine features. Good-looking can be used to describe anyone who you think is nice to look at.
Georgian houses”; “He managed to make a handsome profit out of the deal”; “a handsome fee”; “There are some handsome prizes to be won”; and eventually “They won a handsome victory in the elections”.

*WOLD* mentions that its first definition is mostly dialectal, and this would be in the sense ‘appropriate’ or ‘suitable’ To several of the other definitions, *WOLD* also gives synonyms, as in “moderately large : sizable”, “marked by skill or cleverness : adroit” or “marked by graciousness or generosity : liberal”. The last of its meanings referred to is “having a pleasing and usually impressive or dignified appearance”. It also says that yet other synonyms are mentioned under *beautiful*, and as for *LDCE*, these will be found in the footnotes below. The only two *WOLD* examples of instances where *handsome* is used are “a painting that commanded a *handsome* price”; and “*handsome* contributions to charity”.

*OALD*, as *LDCE*, makes definitions of the word *handsome* with references to gender. Firstly, it says that, in reference to men, it means “attractive” with the synonym “good-looking”, and when used of women it also has the meaning “attractive”, but “with large strong features rather than small delicate ones”. Then, more generally speaking, *handsome* may, according to *OALD*, mean “beautiful to look at”. In other contexts, it might also refer to “large in amount or quantity” or “generous”. Examples to clarify the definitions are

- He’s the most handsome man I’ve ever met.
- He was aptly described as ‘tall, dark, and handsome.
- A tall, handsome woman
- The bride and groom made a handsome couple.
- The two of them made a handsome couple.
- A handsome profit
- He was elected by a handsome majority (= a lot of people voted for him).
- A handsome cheque
- She paid him a handsome compliment.
- It was very handsome of him to pay for the meal.

In the extensive list of definitions contained in *OED*, several of them are marked as “obsolete”, but mostly in combination with other remarks such as “dialectal” or “except US”.  

9 Beautiful applies to whatever excites the keenest of pleasure to the senses and stirs emotion through the senses: *beautiful* mountain scenery. Handsome suggests aesthetic pleasure due to proportion, symmetry, or elegance: *handsome* Georgian mansion.

10 In relation to these two first definitions, there is a reference to the word *beautiful*.
Where the meaning solely is marked as obsolete, it has not been included in this survey, but all the other instances, where a combination with another remark has been used, are listed in the presentation that follows. The first of the meanings is “Handy, ready at hand, convenient, suitable”, something which can be recognised from the earliest etymological descriptions, and to which *OED* not surprisingly adds “obsolete or dialectal”. The next definition is used when referring to “action, speech, etc.” and is “appropriate, apt, dexterous, clever, happy: in reference to language, sometimes implying gracefulness of style”. This meaning is also marked as obsolete, except for in the USA. Another of the definitions in *OED* is supposed to apply to “an agent”, and then mean “apt, skilled, clever”. This is also a definition that is said to be obsolete, with the exception of the USA “or as associated with other senses”. *OED* continues by giving a definition of handsome as “Proper, fitting, seemly, becoming, decent”. Also: handsome is used as “Of fair size or amount; ‘decent’, fair, considerable, moderately large”, yet it is a sense that, according to the dictionary, is unusual if used today. *Handsome* is further defined as “considerable” if applied to “a sum of money, a fortune, a gift, etc.”. In relation to this definition, *OED* adds that, by association, this last meaning currently also has a stronger sense, namely “Ample, generous, liberal, munificent”. Additionally, the adjective may mean “Ample, strong, severe, ‘fine’” if used “Humorously, of a reproof or punishment”. When referring to someone’s conduct, *OED* renders a definition which gives handsome the meaning ‘Fitting’, ‘seemly’, ‘becoming’; ‘courteous’, ‘gracious’, ‘polite’, and adds “Now in stronger sense, denoting a quality that evokes moral admiration […] Generous, magnanimous”. A specialised sense, that is mentioned to be either obsolete or archaic, is used “Of military exploits” and is “Soldierly, gallant, brave, admirable”. The two final definitions given by *OED* are “Having a fine form or figure (usually in conjunction with full size or stateliness); ‘beautiful with dignity’ (J.) ‘fine’”, referred to as “The prevailing current sense”, and finally a colloquial use, originating from the USA: “Used, sometimes ironically, to address, or as a designation of, a handsome person”. The examples from *OED* are, as its definitions, many. The only trouble is that merely four of them are from the twentieth century (all the others being from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century), which makes them rather uninteresting to this study, since it deals mainly with current uses of the three adjectives. Therefore, only the four examples that can be considered to reflect a present-day usage are listed here. One should perhaps also mention that these examples are all belonging to *OED* category where *handsome* is used ironically, either as a way of talking to, or of, a handsome person.
‘Teach him how to salute,’ the officer had said and Hand~some had stepped up to him and hit him (J. Dos Passos *Three Soldiers* (1922) VI. ii. 334 1921).

‘Hy, Toots. Hy, handsome,’ said her brother (S. Lewis *Bethel Merriday* i. 13. 1940).

Be a sport, handsome: no one's seen anything but you (E. Waugh *Brideshead Revisited* I. v. 104. 1945).

Laurent turned to him and sneered. ‘Okay, handsome,’ he said (‘H. Calvin’ *It's Different Abroad* ii. 7. 1963).

*AHD* gives five definitions of *handsome*. Firstly, it says that it might mean “Pleasing and dignified in form or appearance”.

Secondly, it may also be “Generous or copious”.

Thirdly, *AHD* states that *handsome* sometimes has the sense “Marked by or requiring skill dexterity”.

The fourth definition is “Appropriate or fitting” and fifthly, it may simply mean “Large”. As examples of these definitions *AHD* lists “a handsome reward”; “did some handsome maneuvers on the skating rink”; “a handsome price”; “a handsome location for the new school”; and “won by a handsome”.

### 3.2.3 Comparison and summary of the dictionary definitions of *handsome*

The number of definitions of *handsome* found in the five dictionaries studied range from four to eleven but, as in the case of *beautiful*, some of these meanings that are specified in, for example, *OED* may be considered to belong to the more general definitions in the other dictionaries. As a consequence, it may be possible to state that the dictionaries actually present eight meanings of the adjective, which are enumerated below. However, these meanings might be reduced even further, which will be done after all eight have been listed.

Two of these eight initial meanings are found in all the dictionaries (as well as in the etymological dictionary). The first is a sense that relates to something that is beautiful to look at, often with some information added implying additional qualities, such as poise and dignity (*AHD*), stateliness and full size (*OED*), and symmetrical and proportional pleasantness (*WOLD*).

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11 Here, it adds: “see synonyms at *beautiful*”. These were: “Beautiful is most comprehensive: a beautiful child; a beautiful painting; a beautiful mathematical proof”. “Handsome stresses poise and dignity of form and proportion: a very large, handsome paneled library. *She is very pretty, but not so extraordinarily handsome*”

12 Here, The AHD refers its readers to synonyms found at the entry liberal. The ones that presumably are taken into consideration are these explanations of liberal: “Tending to give freely; generous: a liberal benefactor” and “Generous in amount; ample: a liberal serving of potatoes”.

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The second sense retrieved from all the dictionaries (once again including the etymological dictionary), is a definition indicating that the adjective may mean ‘large’. However, WOLD has a variant of the definition that is somewhat more restrained when it uses “moderately large : sizable”. This last sense is also found in OED, but OED adds that that particular meaning is not often used today. Possibly included in the same sense, is when OED defines handsome as meaning “considerable”, which is said to be used of “a sum of money, a fortune, a gift, etc.”. In relation to this definition, OED adds that this meaning presently also has a stronger sense, namely “ample, generous, liberal, munificent” (which would be a definition of its own). Handsome meaning ‘generous’ is also found in AHD, as well as in the etymological definition.

Handsome might also, according to some of the dictionaries studied, mean “important and impressive”. This is used in a positive way, which can be seen e.g. in the example that LDCE lists where victory is described as handsome.

Three of the dictionaries (WOLD, AHD, OED) bring up a meaning of handsome that indicates that the thing described is “skilled, apt” or that skill dexterity is what is needed. WOLD and AHD which are American dictionaries make no further comment about this definition, whereas OED, which is a British based dictionary, adds that the meaning referred to here is obsolete (when referring to an agent, but the other dictionaries do not bring up the additional information “agent”), with the exception of the USA, or “as associated with other senses”.

AHD and WOLD give a definition of handsome as being “appropriate or fitting”, where WOLD adds that this sense is mostly dialectal. OED also brings up appropriateness, together with apt, dexterous, clever, happy (but this time including that it is “of action, speech, etc.”) and says that when used in reference to language it is “sometimes implying gracefulness of style”. However, this sense is, according to OED, obsolete, with the exception of the USA. OED also points out two other definitions that involve appropriateness. The first one is “Proper, fitting, seemly, becoming, decent”. The second one is used of someone’s conduct and means ‘Fitting’, ‘seemly’, ‘becoming’; ‘courteous’, ‘gracious’, ‘polite’, to which is added that this sense is nowadays used in a “stronger sense”, meaning ‘generous’, ‘magnanimous’, a definition that, as seen above, is also present in several other dictionaries, but under separate headings.

OED is the only dictionary that includes a definition of handsome that refers to the very first use of the word, namely “ready at hand”, but, not surprisingly, it adds that this use is
either “obsolete or dialectal”. However, as one can see from the three other definitions brought up in the etymological description, most of the meanings of handsome have actually been kept into present-day use.

OED, having by comparison the largest number of definitions, understandably includes meanings that the other dictionaries do not bring up. The ones that cannot be found anywhere else are: “Ample, strong, severe, ‘fine’” if used “Humorously, of a reproof or punishment” and finally when it is “used, sometimes ironically, to address, or as a designation of, a handsome person” (a use that is commented as “colloquial”). Finally, a meaning that OED itself mentions as a highly specialised sense, being either obsolete or archaic, is “Soldierly, gallant, brave, admirable” used “Of military exploits”.

If one would like to compress the meanings mentioned above even more, it might be done in the following way: i) Large – in a positive sense (impressive, considerable, by association: generous); ii) pleasing to look at; iii) apt, skilled, clever (polite, seemly); and finally iv) ready at hand (“obsolete or dialectal”), leaving the word to be defined in four main categories.

As seen in the definitions and examples mentioned, handsome can be used in many different contexts, denoting people, houses, sums of money (in the form of rewards, prices, profits, cheques and contributions), manoeuvres, compliments etc. When referring to people, handsome may have the meaning of “pleasing to look at”, but also that someone is being “apt, skilled or clever” (according to OED currently only used in the USA, or by association). Finally, it may hint at a person’s conduct as being e.g. “polite”, “seemly”, which is nowadays more often used in the sense of ‘generous’. When handsome is reported in relation to objects, it often has the meaning ‘large’ (and by association also “generous” or “impressive”) or “aesthetically pleasing”, often “due to proportion, symmetry, or elegance”, as claims WOLD.

Addressing the question of gender in relation to handsome, it seems as if the dictionaries are somewhat more inclined in their definitions to stating differences than in the case of beautiful. At least two of them address the issue directly, and several examples are of “handsome men”. However, almost as many examples are used using handsome to describe women. Of course, this is nothing that contradicts the existence of a gender difference in the use of the word per se, since handsome, according to the dictionaries that bring up a gender difference, is also used about women, but in another way. A handsome man might still be seen as a prototypical man, while a handsome woman can be seen as less feminine. Interestingly, three of the dictionaries do not mention gender in their definitions, but since two

13 Of course one might equally well say that it is used differently for men!
of them points at a significant difference, it is still possible to say that the dictionary
definitions, as a whole, mean that the difference exists. However, to find out whether there is
a real and significant difference in the use of handsome relating to men and women, once
again, further research is necessary.

3.3 Dictionary definitions and use of **good-looking**.

3.3.1 Etymology of **good-looking**
There is only very scarce information about the etymology of **good-looking** in the Online
Etymology Dictionary. In fact, the only information that is possible to retrieve from this
source about the word **good-looking** is under the entry **good**, where one finds out that the
adjective first appeared in 1780. However, **WOLD**, being the only of the five main
dictionaries that brings up something concerning the etymology of **good-looking**, refutes this
fact and gives an earlier date when the word was attested, namely in 1762.

3.3.2 Contemporary definitions of **good-looking**
Overall, the definitions of **good-looking** are very few in number, compared to the dictionary
descriptions of **beautiful** and **handsome**. **LDCE**, for example, only reports one definition of
the adjective, and that is “someone who is good-looking is attractive”. The example given of
how to apply the word in context is “a really good-looking guy”. However, there is some
more information to be found concerning the word, as mentioned in under **beautiful**, which is
that “Good-looking can be used to describe anyone who you think is nice to look at”, as
opposed to **beautiful** and **handsome** which have other more detailed meanings as well.\(^{14}\)

**WOLD** states briefly that good-looking means “having a pleasing or attractive
appearance”. Here, no examples at all are brought up.

According to **OALD**, **good-looking** is used “especially of people” and has the meaning
“physically attractive”, as opposed to “ugly”. As examples of this meaning, it relates “a good-
looking man / couple” and “She’s strikingly good-looking”. There is a reference to the entry
beautiful, but there are no comments about the relation between **beautiful** and **good-looking**
under either of the entries.

\(^{14}\)Beautiful is used to describe someone, usually a woman or child, who is attractive in a very special and
noticeable way. Handsome is usually used to describe a man or boy who is good-looking, with strong regular
features. It can also be used to describe a woman, usually an older woman, who has attractive but masculine
features. Good-looking can be used to describe anyone who you think is nice to look at.
OED has, surprisingly enough, also only one definition of the word. It says that *good-looking* means “Having a good appearance; esp. with reference to beauty of countenance. (Cf. the older well-looking)”. The examples are three in number, but they are all dated before the 20th century, which disqualify them for being included in this essay, for reasons already mentioned above.

Finally, AHD defines *good-looking* as being “Of a pleasing or attractive appearance” with a synonym that is studied in 3.2, namely “handsome”.

### 3.3.3 Comparison and summary of the dictionary definitions of *good-looking*

Being rather limited in number, there are not many things to be concluded from the definitions of *good-looking* in the dictionaries studied. One thing, however, is that it seems to be used almost exclusively about people, both by looking at the definitions as such, as well as the instances used to exemplify them.

### 3.4 A comparison between the dictionary definitions

Having looked at the dictionary definitions of the three adjectives, the question is now to what extent they are interchangeable and to what extent they seem to differ. The interchangeability between the three words initially appears to be on the level of when referring to a person that is pleasing to look at, since all words have definitions that include that aspect. However, after a closer look, the words at times seem to have different meanings and connotations in relation to a person’s looks, which makes them not completely synonymous. *Good-looking* could, according to LDCE, be used of “anyone who you think is nice to look at”, without mentioning any additional information. *Handsome*, on the other hand, is mostly used when the kind of beauty described by the adjective is referring to strong, regular features, especially masculine ones. This is true of women, as well. When the gender aspect is found in the dictionaries *handsome* is said to be used either to denote men or boys, or (older) women with attractive, but masculine features. Finally, *beautiful* refers to someone that is aesthetically pleasing to look at and is used mainly of women and children, at least according to some of the dictionaries.

*Good-looking* has the most limited meaning of all three adjectives studied, as seen by the brief descriptions of the word, and the few examples brought up to exemplify its meaning. This means that the comparison between *good-looking* and the other adjectives finishes with
the aspect of people’s appearances, as discussed above. Beautiful and handsome, on the other hand, have a few more definitions and examples as presented in the five dictionaries. Both beautiful and handsome are words which may not only describe a person’s looks, but also other characteristics of people and things. In a more general sense, both adjectives have the meaning “pleasing to look at”, but, with somewhat different additional meanings. Regarding beautiful, this includes pleasing to the senses and the mind, and hence in a rather wide sense, whereas in the case of handsome, it is more related to proportion, symmetry and full size and can be seen as somewhat more restricted. If the two words could be considered synonymous in this sense, must be a question of context. However, it does not appear as an obvious instance of synonymy.15

Another aspect where the two adjectives show similarities, is in relation to what is labeled “apt”, “skilled” and “fitting” in the definitions of handsome, and as “very good”, “skilful” or “adaption to a purpose” in beautiful. It is applicable both to people, actions and things (where it is often used about abstract nouns). The difference in the definitions is for example that the dictionaries use a greater number of the definitions for these aspects when it comes to handsome than regarding beautiful, which indicates that the meanings are more specified in the former case. OED has three separate explanations for these aspects in relation to handsome, whereas it only has one for beautiful. Still, in the cases where the two adjectives only differ when it comes to form, and are similar in all other contextually relevant properties (which, however, might be difficult to decide on the basis of the dictionary examples only), then there is reason to label them synonyms.

So far, the aspects discussed have been cases of synonymy, or at least near synonymy. However, there are more definitions that are brought up together with the two adjectives that are not cases of synonymy. Some examples of such instances are when handsome is said to mean “generous”, “considerable” (both of these meanings could be seen as connected to the other kinds of senses with size etc. discussed in earlier definitions) and “ready at hand”.

Nevertheless, if one absolutely wants to find similar senses to the meaning ‘generous’ it might be possible. Assume that one would refer to a person’s character as beautiful as in a beautiful character. This could indicate that the person is generous, or at least it would be improbable that someone referred to in that way would be greedy or niggardly, but the question is whether this is enough for handsome and beautiful to be considered synonyms in the “generosity

---

15 One must not forget that in this, and in the following comparisons, what is labeled synonymous or not is only involving two out of three adjectives, and hence they will not be mentioned e.g. in the abstract of this essay, where the focus is upon synonymy in relation to all three adjectives.
sense”. Since the beautiful character might refer to a great deal of aspects, and not generosity alone, it does not seem to be a case of synonymy, in any of the definitions discussed in 2.2.\textsuperscript{16} Another case of non-corresponding senses between beautiful and handsome is the collocation “beautiful people” meaning ‘the smart set’ or ‘hippies’ as well as “the beautiful game” in reference to ‘football’. No such meaning is included under handsome.

Handsome is also found to be more connected to the aspect of money than beautiful. No doubt this is because the former adjective often has the meaning ‘large’ or ‘generous’, which by association connects handsome to concepts such as ‘reward’, ‘profit’, ‘price’ etc. Beautiful, on the other hand, is, at least in the examples mentioned in the dictionaries, more often used to denote the weather, the landscape, nature in some form, parts of the day (“evening”) and music.

In the etymological information mentioned for the adjectives, it is possible to see that the first uses of beautiful and handsome have more differences than likenesses (no definitions are given of good-looking). Beautiful referred to people that were aesthetically pleasing, but mostly about women and children, and about men in a derogative manner. Handsome was first connected with things that could be easily handled and had nothing to do with looks whatsoever. Later, the adjective also started to designate for example something that had a fine form and was good-looking. This means that the differences (but also the similarities to some extent when referring to what is nice to look at) found in the present use of the adjectives at least in part can be derived from their original meanings.

Deducing from the information found in the five dictionaries, the three adjectives do indeed display similarities. The only similarity found in relation to all three adjectives is when it comes to the description of a person’s looks, in that it may indicate someone that is pleasing to look at. However, if judging by the additional information about the connotative meanings of the three adjectives, any real synonymy seems improbable. Having said this, it may of course be cases where the three adjectives could be synonymous, if used in a specific context. Beautiful and handsome share more similarities than either of these words and good-looking. This is probably partly due to the fact that they have several ways of being used in a context, whereas good-looking only seems to have one. When comparing beautiful and handsome, there seems to be a putatively synonymous relationship between the adjectives when used in relation to aptitude and skillfulness. However, once again context is decisive in assessing the

\textsuperscript{16} Either as “meaning the same thing” or as “sharing all relevant properties but one”.

28
degree of synonymy, but the conclusion is nevertheless based on the definitions and examples given.

Finally, the differences and similarities that have been outlined in this section are valid for the dictionary definitions. Whether these deductions hold against a comparison with the information in a computerized corpus remains to be seen.
4. CORPUS DATA ON THE ADJECTIVES BEAUTIFUL, HANDSOME AND GOOD-LOOKING

As a contrast to the information found in the dictionaries, the corpus has no set definitions to analyse in order to give an idea of the possible meanings of the adjectives. Here, what is provided is a great number of examples. Therefore, the approach to the corpus data needs to be somewhat different. Firstly, it is deemed important to find out when and for what the adjectives are used. This is done in investigating the contexts in which the adjectives are used; meaning that all the instances where beautiful, handsome and good-looking occur are studied to detect connections between the adjectives and the types of situations in which these words can be found. This results in the creation of association-based categories, where the adjectives are grouped together on the basis of their possibility of fitting into the same category. The categories invented are not clear-cut, since some instances containing the adjective most likely could fit into several categories. Such fuzziness is to be expected, considering the nature of categories of words in general and these categories specifically. To begin with, as is discussed in section 2.1, words are related to each other in different ways, which, in itself, opens up for a possibility of many types of category affiliation. Additionally, these categories are made up by the present writer, which means that they are a result of one person’s associations. The second aspect that is studied in the analysis of the three adjectives is the immediate surroundings of the words, the collocates. This aspect is important, since a word does not exist in isolation (Cuyckens, Dirven & Taylor 2003: 21), and since the collocates reveal more of how a word is used together with other words (Teubert 2007: 20-21). Thirdly, it is judged relevant to find out if something can be said about the frequency of the different adjectives. Frequency is interesting for at least two reasons. By using simple frequency counts one can see whether or not the word can be considered usual. Together with specific words, especially nouns, frequency may reveal whether the word combination is a matter of collocation. Fourthly, the adjectives are investigated as to see whether there exists a difference in how the words are used in relation to gender. All these four factors; the situations where the adjectives are used, the collocations, the frequency and the gender aspect, are examined in order to detect whether or not there exists a synonymous relationship between the three adjectives.
4.1 Corpus data on beautiful

The word beautiful is found in 2121 samples in the corpus, which is undoubtedly the highest score for the three adjectives. When analysing the samples, a few association-based categories emerge as possible groupings of beautiful. Beautiful can be used about animals, buildings, children, cities, clothes and shoes, food, language, men, music, nature, objects, parts of the day and of the year, people in general (disregarding of gender, sometimes meaning the smart set), things that are aesthetically pleasing either to the mind, to all senses or mainly to the eye, the ear or the nose and the taste, things that have to do with skills and women. Additionally, a category is referring to “general positive, encouraging comments and conclusions” (also used ironically). Finally, two categories are also made up of words that do not fit into one single category, or, for different reasons cannot be analysed. (Some of them are, for example, meaningless strings of words, perhaps the result of a computer translation or just some other kind of mistake in the transcription. Others are ambiguous to the extent where it is seen as extremely difficult to put them into any of the other categories). However, these two last groups of words are not further analysed in this essay, since the examples included in them are not seen as adding relevant information.

Not all categories of beautiful have equally many instances included in them. This is shown in the table below, where the categories are listed according to the number of examples they contain.\(^\text{17}\)

Table 4.1 All categories of beautiful

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nature</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Things that are aesthetically pleasing to the eye</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Objects</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Things that are (aesthetically) pleasing to the mind</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>People in general</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Buildings</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Parts of the day</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{17}\) 33 examples were not possible to classify, 37 samples were ambiguous. If adding the figures above, together with the ones in the category for ambiguous and non-categorised samples, one will find that the number of examples actually exceeds the number of given hits in the corpus. This might be a result of the fact that the text in one hit sometimes includes examples of more than one category, which means that the same hit has been used in two categories.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Cities</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Clothes/shoes</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Food</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Aesthetically pleasing to all senses</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>General positive comments</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Aesthetically pleasing to the ear</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Aesthetically pleasing to the nose/taste</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Studying the list, it is possible to say that “women” is undoubtedly the single largest category for the adjective *beautiful*. However, a large number of examples are about nature, things that are aesthetically pleasing to the eye, objects, buildings and things that are aesthetically pleasing to the mind, meaning that they are not about people, but about inanimate things (even if nature, including plants and flowers etc, possibly can be seen as “alive”). The “nature” category contains examples which refer to landscapes, gardens, beeches, parks, woods, sunsets, reefs, meteorites, weather, trees etc. Most of the categories include things that are pleasing to the eye, in one way or another. However, the creation of a specific category called “things that are aesthetically pleasing to the eye”, is done in order to be able to group words that do not easily fit into any of the other categories. Often, the samples within the “to the eye”-category are about patterns, sights, styles, displays, colours, design, etc, that specifically seem to refer to the act of seeing. This might look like in the below example:

> the architect Michael Gottlieb Bindesboll were all willing to renounce comfort in favor of its beautiful, clean Greek and early Roman republican, not imperial, design. The spread (MAG Antiques)

The category “objects” includes several art objects, paintings, sculptures etc., as well furniture, beddings and fabrics, vehicles (cars, ships, yachts), books, jewelry, and many other types of objects and artefacts. In “things that are aesthetically pleasing to the mind” the things being described as *beautiful* are ideas, thoughts and things that are not tangible in a physical way. For example:

> really reaching back and making sacrifices to bless other people. That is a beautiful message. And I know, in fact, that the church there put on (SPOK NBC Today)

> she says she suffered during her 13-year marriage. The whole Lorian Peralta-Ramos. " It
was heart-wrenching for the whole thing appeared to be beautiful, but the undertone was dark and ugly, recalls Ginyard. " On the (MAG Essence)\(^\text{18}\)

In the category labeled “buildings” one finds examples which, at first sight, might not be thought of as being included in this category. These are: A “retreat”, since it here refers to a house:

on the existing foundation. " Eventually, the renovations not only resulted in a beautiful retreat, they also sparked a book by Lane. Titled The Happy Hocky Family (MAG CountryLiving)

The name of a magazine, since it contains the noun “house” referring to houses and homes: Star Next Door "), who writes regularly for Food &; Wine, House Beautiful and the New York Times, approached his latest assignment for Town &; Country with (MAG Town and Country)

Landmarks, because of their “building-like” structure in this sample:

the Golden Gate Bridge is not the George Washington Bridge. San Francisco's uniquely beautiful landmarks should be protected and revered, not sold to the highest bidder. (NEWS San Francisco)

Rooms and apartments, since they are contained in a building:

there is nothing about the room that suggests an individual presence, but it is beautiful nonetheless, with a bed in one corner, prayer mat tucked beneath it, (Fic New England Rev)

there, inevitably, friends and family would have gathered at her side in your beautiful seaside apartment, trying to shield her from something she could not escape. Your (Fic New Yorker)

However, most of the words included in this category are instances where there is a clear reference to a building of some sort:

\(^{18}\) As is seen in this example, the reference to the thing described is not “pleasing to the mind”, but the meaning of beautiful is still something positive.
now, on the two pristine tennis courts laid out so perfectly behind her equally beautiful, perfect house. She'd spent countless hours on those courts. Alden took (Fic BkGen: Not so snow white)

on Washington Avenue across from the Miami Beach Convention Center (MBCC). This beautiful Art Deco building has been thoroughly renovated and hosts many Broadway shows. # For (PSA Journal)

Looking more closely into the largest of the categories, “women”, there are quite a few things to remark. Firstly, more than 30 of the samples mention young women or girls as in the examples below:

Don was wearing sunglasses—as was Lenore—so he felt no compunction about looking at the beautiful young woman, with long black hair, wearing pink shorts and a red tank (FIC Analog)

Charlize Theron is hot, and Scarlett Johansson is cute too. They are beautiful girls who are in the limelight but still have something cool and quiet about them (MAG Cosmopolitan)

Then, there are of course also samples, which evoke the opposite, even though their number is not equally large:

Ms. McClanahan is right—the world does need beautiful older women, and age can be sexy. (MAG Ms)

Many of the corpus examples are about mothers, or mothers-to-be:

have just stepped out of one of her period films. I think she looks beautiful. Beautiful and glowing in her pregnancy. (SPOK ABC GMA)

But she knew how to be just like her beautiful mother, and I wanted to be her. I wanted to become her. (FIC Southern Rev)

Some samples seem to focus on “inner beauty” as well:
just love women. *Even if someone is visually unattractive, I'll find something beautiful about them.* I'm that guy. My friends will say Why are you (MAG *Cosmopolitan*)

You can meet Shayna and 10 minutes later, love her. *She is so beautiful inside.* Last October, Rick took Shayna up for her 10th jump. (Spoken *Ind Oprah*)

she " felt like crap " when she was fat, *she also always felt beautiful inside*-like Susan Lucci. She's lovely now, with squared-back shoulders and a soft (MAG *Prevention*)

It might not be possible to say whether the instances of *beautiful* where women are described in the corpus reflect something that can be seen as an idealized look (even if some of the samples themselves claim that such a thing exists). Still, there are a few tendencies that can be observed. The adjectives *young* and *blonde*, for instance, occur more frequently than the adjectives *old* and *dark* (or *black/brown*). There are also features that are mentioned more often than others as a description of a beautiful woman. Among these are “high cheekbones” and a look that is referred to as “chiseled” as in the examples below:

had come up to us afterward and said,' I didn't realize how beautiful Elizabeth is!' *She was fulfilling society's idealized model look-she looked chiseled,* (MAG *Town and Country*)

of Rejuvenex, one could never be sure, Don supposed. She was strikingly *beautiful, with high cheekbones* and animated eyes, and hair that she wore in dreadlocks (FIC *Analog*)

candlelight as if her heart were on fire. # My mother is a very beautiful Tutsi woman. She has *high cheekbones*, a narrow nose, a sweet mouth (FIC *New Yorker*)
Despite the higher frequency of some particular types of appearances, there is still a great deal of differences in how the women, said to be beautiful, are described. For instance, there are many forms and shapes mentioned of the women considered beautiful:

important to not focus on size, focus on proportion. There are so many beautiful women of every size. It's just about, you know, creating balance (Spoken NBC Today)

Alice sparkles in the heat, perfectly slim, well curved - an armful of beautiful girl. The fall air is under thirty-three degrees and pleasant, and I feel (FIC: Fantasy Sci Fi)

bad, we are going to the spa for Watsu, where a large and beautiful woman named Shannon will float us around a pool one at a time, twist (FIC Ploughshares)

she has been pregnant for four. Katie is small, compact, and muscled-bone-crushingly beautiful with her icy Scandinavian eyes and long Mexican lashes. It's almost too much (FIC VirginiaQRev)

Peru and neither knew nor cared who Sam was; he'd simply found her beautiful and charming. He loved her ample curves as much as she hated them, (FIC BkSf: Some Like It)

There are also women of all nationalities and skin and hair colours:

sitting cross-legged on the linoleum. " Myself, " piped up Ingrid, a beautiful, fair-skinned Swiss woman who hadn't uttered a single word before now, " (FIC Fantasy Sci Fi)

father, while his mother was dark-haired - a mixed-race who was tall and very beautiful. And with a single glance, Raven understood things he could only guess at (FIC Fantasy Sci Fi)
"He kissed the back of Tiara's hand." You are a beautiful, sweet, toffee Latina. What should I call you, dear lady? (FIC BkGen: Caramel Flava)

the worst part of Phoenix, unofficially adopted one of my first clients, a beautiful young black woman named Shanda Rawlings, given her a job in my storefront office (Fiction BkGen: One Last Look)

# Nothing. # INT. HOTEL MONDRIAN - DUSK # Gondo Ken and a beautiful Asian woman, named EMORETTA, on the large bed in the very best suite (Fiction Mov: F)

even after they had ordered everyone to be quiet. She was lean and beautiful in a quintessentially Caucasus way, with fine skin and dark hair and brown eyes (MAG Esquire)

Then, more to the point, he blubbered in the arms of his beautiful blonde wife. # Remember, Hamlet didn't get the girl or the claret (MAG MensHealth)

a smile. But tears soon began to fill his eyes. She was more beautiful than he remembered. Her ash blond hair was stylish but short and "practical (Fiction BkGen: Kindred Spirit)

The category “men” is also mentioned in the list above. The examples, even though considerably fewer, display likenesses with the ones contained in “women”. For instance, both groups contain more references to young than old. Additionally, the persons described as beautiful are not only judged according to their looks, but also sometimes to their inner qualities, as in a beautiful brother, when talking about a group of Muslims. The aspect of inner beauty is found more often in relation to women, but then again men are not referred to equally often as women in connection to beautiful in the first place. In the category “men”, there is also an aspect of androgyny:

This description of young male beauty is a poetic analog to the portraits of beautiful youths, many androgynous, that gained popularity in the early part of the sixteenth (ACAD Art Bulletin)
has had a love of "hyperurban" environments ever since. Theyskens himself is beautiful, and it's *the kind of beauty that transcends masculine and feminine borders*, (MAG Bazaar)

When searching the corpus for collocates, a query was performed where the aim was to find nouns that occurred directly after the adjective. The results that were achieved are shown in the table below. Had all the collocates been included, the list would have shown 100 different collocates. Here, it is not considered relevant to include all of these hits (most of the non-included instances occur two or three times), so the ones included below are found more than five times.

**Table 4.2 Frequency collocates of beautiful**

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Woman/women</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Girl/girls</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Day</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Place</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>People</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Things</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Face</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Thing</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Baby</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Sight</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Country</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Eyes</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Flower</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Piece</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Creature</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Objects</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Scenery</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interestingly, for the gender aspect, the most usual nouns occurring in the near vicinity of *beautiful* are those that are referring to *woman* and *women*. (Together with *girl, girls* and *daughter*, they make up 105 out of 283 samples.) This is something that is being confirmed in the number of examples that are found in the category “women”: 542 samples out of 2121 are
used about women (including 45 about women’s body parts/facial expressions etc), meaning that there seems to be a complete agreement between the categories and the collocations as to what gender is most often connected with the adjective. Men are not mentioned in the list of collocates above, but had all the collocates been listed, the collocation beautiful man would have occurred 3 times, and beautiful men 2 times. When performing the corpus search, it was restricted to the first noun to the right of beautiful. Allowing one more word in between, the number of collocates with beautiful man would have amounted to eight, with the adjective young as an additional modifier. The query beautiful men, however, gives no extra hits, even if the context is extended with one more word to the right. The absence of men among the collocates is not reflected in the list of categories, where men stand for 88 instances, as seen above. This discrepancy might be explained by the fact that when men are described as beautiful in the corpus samples, the word that is used for the male person does not usually stand directly to the right of the adjective.19

4.2 Corpus data on handsome
The adjective handsome generates 413 hits in the corpus. An analysis of these hits evokes the following categories: “animals”, “buildings”, “children”, “clothes”, “food”, “men”, “money”, “nature”, “objects”, “people in general”, “places”, “symmetry and geometrical form” and “women”. The categories are shown in the table below, together with their number of examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Buildings</th>
<th>Money</th>
<th>Objects</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>People in general</th>
<th>Animals</th>
<th>Clothes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19 There is also the possibility of an error in the search function in the corpus.
20 Summarising the number of instances found in the categories and comparing these with the number of hits mentioned in the beginning, results in two different figures. The sum of all the instances of handsome included in the categories is 404, whereas the number of hits in the corpus is 413. The reason for this discrepancy is that some of the same examples are found more than once (but counted as different hits by the corpus), and are not counted twice in the same category.
As can be seen in table 4.3, one category without doubt exceeds the others regarding the number of examples included. The category “men” is alone approximately three times larger than all of the other categories together (302 versus 102). However, relatively many samples are also found in the categories “buildings”, “money”, “objects” and “women”. A few examples can be given to illustrate what the samples included in the categories look like. The category “men” first and foremost relate to men’s appearances:

Danny Burlando, at a casino one night last year. *He was handsome*, and he was a charmer. But as far as Deb was concerned, (SPOK CBS 48 Hours)

me, and let’s go have lunch " or something like that. *Handsome*? Yes, sure, absolutely -- nice-looking *man*. But soon, (SPOK CBS 48 Hours)

real-life Stella in "Glamour " magazine who overcame heartbreak with the help of a *handsome African warrior*. (SPOK ABC GMA)

However, the looks of a handsome man might be further analysed. For instance, many of the instances where men are described as handsome, also indicates their height. Often the man that is described as *handsome* is also tall, as seen in the example below. At times, the opposite is true, but those occasions are rather rare.

stepped outside. *With his 6-foot frame* and satiny-brown skin, he was just as handsome as I recalled. # I’d run out so quickly that I had forgotten (FIC *Cosmopolitan*)

With his sunglasses on he could be mistaken for the *tall, dark, and handsome type*. But sooner or later he had to take them off. It was (FIC BkJuv: *Dantes Equations*)
and thought: I could never love a man that small, though he was handsome in a fine-boned, flawless-featured way. He played songs for me, his tiny (FIC NewEnglandRev)

Additionally, quite a few examples of the handsome men indicate youth, but quite a few of them also include men who are middle-aged, as well as old:

duty. Watch this, my sister said to us. She smiled at a handsome young man by the little hut at the great gate. My sister walked up (FIC SouthernRev)

space, " Raimbaut said. He sounded grim, or as grim as a handsome teenage boy in a beach robe can sound. " Aintellect, see if Margaret (FIC Analog)

he lived in the old Barry house. He was a middle-aged man, still handsome. The shiftless population of Barry's Ford looked up to him as to an (FIC Marvels & Tales)

be very avant-garde. " Ross was a courtly Southerner of the old school, handsome and hetero, almost sixty, much married and much divorced. He owned and (FIC BkGen: Exiles in America)

on it long as silver boar bristles. She regarded her reflection, remembering the handsome old boatman who had given her a wink as he oared her and the kids (FIC Southern Rev)

Other examples of what the instances included in the categories look like can be seen below. From the category “buildings”, which typically refer to houses and similar buildings:

luck. # From Montbard, I walked along a canal to a collection of handsome stone buildings with red tile roofs, just outside Buffon's namesake village. It (ACAD Natural History)

However, there are samples within this category which might be seen as less typical. The one included below is placed in this category since it is part of the interior of a house:

Somerset's dining room is almost rebelliously unsentimental. Polished but well-worn hardwood floors and handsome wood wall paneling give the space a sense of neutral dignity. Prints of Edward (News San Francisco)
In the category “money”, the samples found relate typically to things like prices, income, salary, commissions, profit, amount etc. For example:

the building, beer-making equipment, and our last batch of Finest Foam for a *handsome price* to a gentleman of Sicilian extraction. With the proceeds we bought gilt-edged bonds (Fiction *Fantasy Sci Fi*)

it, and spent millions every year on the well-being of others, and *a handsome amount* on his own. He had never married, had no children, enjoyed (Fiction BkGen: *Tixic Bachelors*)

The last illustration of what can be found in the categories is given for “objects” (a category which also includes cars, books, sconces and other art related objects):

peculiar red-bronze light he never wanted to see again. Tommy cleaned out Hannah's *handsome old French armoire* and gave Goodwill the piles of clean, mended clothing and the (FIC *Fantasy Sci Fi*)

We boarded this *handsome 125-foot-long, three-deck yacht* at Sandestin's Baytowne Marina just in time to catch one (NEWS *Atlanta*)

A game net, celebration photos and commemorative newspaper pages, all displayed in *handsome custom frames*, hang on a wall in Billy Donovan's home office. The (MAG *Sporting News*)

A look at the collocations of *handsome* results in the list presented in the table below. The collocations included are found at least 3 times.

**Table 4.4 Frequency collocates of handsome.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Man</th>
<th>29</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Face</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Guy</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Features</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Profit</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Stone</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparing the two tables above, the following things can be noted: The category “men” and the collocation handsome man both head the lists. The proportions between them might, however, seem at odds. Within the category table, “men” occurs approximately 14 times more often than the examples in the second category (“buildings”). For the collocates, the difference between the first and second most frequent collocate is by no means equally large. However, this can be slightly modified if looking at what the collocates designate. As mentioned before, the categories are based on associations. If matching the collocates with the categories it can easily be seen that the collocations involving guy, boy and husband fit neatly into the category “men”. What might not be equally obvious, but nevertheless equally logical, is that the collocates above involving face and features also would be sorted in the same category, since they are also about men. The category entitled “men” has 35 instances where things like face and different body features are mentioned. Another thing that can be observed from the comparison of the two tables, is that the list of collocates almost exclusively is a list of nouns referring to people, whereas the categories are more miscellaneous.

Considering the gender aspect, not much more needs to be added, at least not regarding frequency. Handsome is undoubtedly used much more often about men than about women in the corpus. The examples of handsome regarding women are not very many, but if one would like to draw some conclusions about the samples that are represented, the following things can be remarked: Age is mentioned a few times, but not a particular age category, as can be seen in the examples below:

dinoflagellate breakfast. Back to Louise, yes. The feline veterinarian was a handsome woman of no particular age or race. Her voice had a lovely accent that (FIC Fantasy Sci Fi)
she could afford to say it, since she was youthful looking as well as handsome. She added that the Oyster Shell would be their bar from now on (FIC Arkansas Rev)

path to the door of her office. Sixty-two years old, Georgette was a handsome whippet-thin woman with short wavy hair the color of steel, hazel eyes, and (Fiction BkJuv: No Place Like)

A few samples suggest wealth and perhaps stylishness:

the tall fellow, but that wasn't clear at first. She was a handsome woman, tanned, dressed in chic casual clothes, with a lot of jewelry (FIC Arkansas Rev)
Troy and Cleopatra, an event that could truly be called monumental. When a *handsome lady in a fashionable little hat and veil* approached me, I held out my

(FIC BkSF: *Freaks*)

Another sample focuses on someone who is probably highly attractive:

nothing, however, to the costume of the creature seated to our left--the *extraordinarily handsome woman* with the flashing dark eyes and the black curls. That is the great (FIC BkGen: *Jane Barq*)

To sum up, it seems safe to say that *handsome* mostly is used in the corpus to designate men’s appearances, and only to a minor extent a few other categories, of which first and foremost the categories “buildings”, “money”, “objects” and “women”.

### 4.3 Corpus data on *good-looking*

A search in the corpus on the adjective *good-looking* from the year 2006 results in 75 hits. The association-based categories that can be seen relative to the adjective are: “animals”, “buildings”, “countries”, “food”, “men”, “objects”, “people in general”, “pleasing to the eye” (and not fitting under any of the other categories) and “women”. These categories can be listed as follows. As with the two other adjectives, the table below is a list of categories, together with the number of examples within these categories.

| Table 4.5 All categories of *good-looking*, including the number of instances |
|---|---|
| 1 | Men | 40 |
| 2 | Women | 15 |
| 3 | People in general | 6 |
| 4 | Objects | 5 |
| 5 | Animals | 2 |
| 6 | Buildings | 2 |
| 7 | To the eye | 2 |
| 8 | Food | 1 |
| 9 | Countries | 1 |

Examples from the most common category “men” may look like this:
wonder why guys aren't looking at me. I think, That's a good-looking guy and he didn't even turn around! But I'm a realist. (MAG Sat Even Post)

executioner, they told one another, was already waiting on the scaffold: a good-looking, well-made young fellow, wasn't he? In the cart a splash of (FIC BkGen: Game Patience)

It is difficult to draw any conclusions from the 40 samples of good-looking men. The focus seems to be on outer appearances only, and they might be used rather often in slightly more informal context, indicated for example by the word guy. (See also the list of collocates below.) Apart from these tendencies, not much else can be concluded.

As with the other two adjectives, the words are sometimes used figuratively, to create an unexpected effect. In the sample below, also in the category “men”, the person being referred to is a man, but what actually is being discussed is a range (mountain):

the Presidents is like being Brad Pitt's brother Doug: You're pretty damn good-looking, but nobody's pointing a camera at you. Such is life for this (MAG Backpacker)

An example may of course also be of what a person is not:

and other gifts. "I personally don't think I'm that sexy or good-looking. I try not to focus on that. I try to give them my (NEWS San Francisco)

The category “women” is the second most usual category used for good-looking. The good-looking women referred to in the samples are not described in a uniform way⁴, neither do they lend themselves to being categorized in any subgroups. They may, for instance, be described in the following ways:

job tending bar. But then the bar fired her. Annalise is really the good-looking one-she has enormous, sad-dog eyes, and she holds her cigarettes in a limp-wristed (FIC Masach Rev)

brother gets through with Gaul there won't be any gold, wine, or good-looking women left to steal. ” "It'll be another ten years before there (FIC BkGen: SP)
something that would certainly dissipate as she grew older. Jenny was also carelessly good-looking, with an eccentric sense of fashion that competed with her beauty. In addition (FIC BkGen: Aftermath)

is not the last woman on the planet. " # Ashlee Simpson, the good-looking sister? # Ashlee Simpson was kidding, I think, when she told the (NEWS Chicago)

Then, there are also samples where both a man and a woman are said to be good-looking:

think it's fatal to let a good-looking husband go off on location with a good-looking actress. Fatal, " she says. " There's no way I would (MAG Bazaar)

Examples from the category “people in general” may refer to anyone, as in the first of the below samples where there is a non-specific sense use of the word “you” or “us”:

you're not good enough, you're not smart enough, you're not handsome or pretty enough, and we believe it. Some grownup tells us something about (SPOK PBS Tavis)

Or, the instances may be put in this category because of the impossibility of deciding the gender of the person or persons being spoken of, either by looking at the sample in itself, or by the extended context.

us as drawling mulleted hicks in whole-body Carhartt, and hated us more. The handsome newscasters shivered in their furlined parkas, sat at our diner, trying to eavesdrop (FIC Ploughshares)

The last category exemplified here is “objects”, where the things mentioned are: car, rod, yacht, mountain bike and gun.

The collocates for good-looking are not very homogenous. The first two collocations that are found when searching the corpus for nouns directly after the adjective have five and four instances, respectively. The remaining 19 collocates all have one hit each. This means that a list of the collocates with more than one occurrence would be very short:

| Table 4.6 Frequency collocates of good-looking. |
It seems difficult to draw very many conclusions from such a short list of collocates. One might say that there appears to be a tendency of good-looking to be used to designate men, but the question is whether it is possible to base an assumption on nineteen examples. However, if one looks at this list of collocates together with the table of categories, there might be reason to say that there is a tendency for good-looking to be applied more to men, than to women. In conclusion, it can be said that good-looking is not a very frequent adjective in the corpus, that it is applied somewhat more often to men than to women, that it seems to be used rather often in less formal language, and finally, that the focus in relation to the persons being referred to as good-looking, is on outer appearances only.

**4.4 A comparison of the corpus data**

As already stated earlier, there is a large difference in the number of hits that are generated by searching the corpus. Beautiful is found 2121 times, handsome 413 times, and good-looking, 75 times. Obviously, this has bearing on the analysis. It is of course a great deal easier to draw any conclusions when presented with a larger number of samples, even though one could say that the difference in frequency itself offers something to be analysed. Despite the unequally distributed number of samples, some of the association-based categories are found in relation to all the three adjectives. These are the categories that refer to human beings (“women”, “men”, “people in general”), with the exception of “children”, which cannot be found together with the adjective good-looking. Additionally, the categories “objects”, “buildings”, “animals”, and “food” are related to all three adjectives. Often, the adjectives are used to denote similar things when referring to the same categories, meaning that a good-looking car and a beautiful car in the “objects” category are used synonymously. The same thing is true for “buildings”, and “animals” whereas the examples found in relation to “food”, differ more. Of course, there are slight differences even in the categories “objects”, “buildings” and “animals”, especially as the number of instances always is higher for beautiful than for the other two adjectives, but there are nevertheless more similarities than differences.

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21 When used about buildings, the number of hits is greatest for beautiful, but, comparing the percentages, the image given is slightly different. Buildings are mentioned in approximately two per cent of all instances of good-looking, three per cent of beautiful and five per cent of the handsome examples.
Some categories display greater difference in how the adjectives are used, but they may still share properties. This can be seen in the categories “women”, “men”, and “people in general”. When referring to outer appearances, all three adjectives seem to mean “pleasing to look at”. Thus far, they may even be considered synonyms. However, the three words also differ. It is shown in the previous sections that the distribution of the adjectives according to what sex is being described, is very varied. Beautiful is paired with women in an overwhelmingly large part of the examples. Handsome, on the other hand, is used much more about men than any of the other categories. Good-looking is used more often of men than of women, but it is possible that the low number of hits might interfere with an adequate interpretation.

The gender issue may be seen, not only in frequency, but also in what the adjectives depict when used for men and women respectively. For instance, a beautiful man often seems to be young, (something which is true also for women), but at times also less masculine. To deduce from the corpus samples that a woman depicted as beautiful is seen as less feminine is not possible. Perhaps one might even claim that the opposite must be concluded when it is used for a woman, since the adjective is often used for mothers, a role highly connected to femininity in our society. A handsome man is in the typical example also tall; he is often young, but not much more often than middle-aged or old. A handsome woman is of any age, but possibly also wealthy. A man or a woman referred to as good-looking is simply nice to look at.

The collocates used for the three adjectives have already been discussed in the previous sections. The frequency of these collocates appears to confirm the data presented in the categories, with the exception of beautiful men, where the category contains 88 instances, but where man and men together only amount to five instances of collocation.

As mentioned in the beginning of this section, the adjectives have not an equal number of hits in the corpus. This also means that the number of categories is different. The categories that the three adjectives share have already been listed above, but there are also categories that are unique to one adjective. Good-looking has no such unique category, once again probably a logical result of it being used much less often than the other two. One category only found in relation to handsome is “money”, but also “symmetry and geometrical form”. Beautiful has several categories not found for the other two adjectives. Only beautiful is used to give

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22 This is not about people, since it then could have been argued that symmetry is indeed a quality that counts when related to a person’s appearances.
general positive comments about things, but also to refer to music, parts of the day, inner qualities\textsuperscript{23} and to skills.

By way of conclusion, one might say that in some respects, the three adjectives are indeed synonymous, since they mean “the same thing”. This is true of most instances referring to buildings, animals and objects. However, other categories that are found for all adjectives not only show likenesses, but also differences. Such categories are “women” and “men”, where they might refer to a person being aesthetically pleasing to look at with all three adjectives, but where this meaning might be extended to refer to inner qualities (as for \textit{beautiful}) or where what is meant by the combination of the adjective and the category evokes different associations.

\textsuperscript{23} Not listed as a category of its own, but mentioned in the categories ”men” and ”women”.
5. CONCLUSION
The question to be answered in this essay is when, and if, the three adjectives beautiful, handsome and good-looking can be considered synonymous, and when, and how they differ. The comparison also includes gender, meaning that the use of the three adjectives for men and women is considered as well. In order to answer these questions, both dictionary data as well as corpus data are investigated. The data found in the dictionaries and in the corpus do not match in all aspects. This may be due to their different structure and purpose or to the difference in when and how they are compiled. Where the dictionaries provide definitions, followed by examples to clarify these definitions, the corpus has an enormous number of examples, leaving the actual defining process to the one searching it. The dictionaries consulted most likely build their definitions on a usage that stretches over many years, whereas the searches performed in the corpus were restricted to one year, 2006, a difference which might have affected the result.

What can be seen in both the dictionaries and in the corpus is that the three adjectives may refer to a person that has a pleasing appearance. The information in the dictionaries (when considering all the dictionaries together and not in isolation) and the corpus also show that there is a difference in how the words are used in relation to what sex they denote. Handsome is used more often about men, whereas beautiful is undisputedly more often used to refer to women. This is something that can be seen particularly in the corpus samples, since they indicate the number of examples, as well. However, the dictionaries and the corpus seem to give a somewhat different idea when it comes to how these aspects are developed or further described. In the dictionaries, a handsome woman has masculine features and is usually an older woman. These connotations are not reiterated in the corpus samples. Age is at times addressed, but only to refer to women of all ages. The masculine features might be difficult to detect in a text, if they are not stated explicitly, and hence their absence in the corpus may possibly be due to a reliance of the speakers or writers on the listeners’ or readers’ preconceived ideas to fill in what is not being stated overtly. However, that is a matter of speculation, and is very difficult to either verify or falsify. It may simply be that no such attributing of specific features is intended in the corpus samples. From the dictionaries, it can be deduced that beautiful is not typically connected to men, but apart from the etymological dictionary, no effeminate features are being referred to. In the corpus, on the other hand, some of the samples of beautiful men indicate that the person described is somewhat less masculine,
and in any case, often young. *Good-looking*, that is sparsely mentioned, both in the dictionaries and in the corpus, can be said to be described fairly similarly in the two sources. The main difference is that the corpus indicates that the adjective *good-looking* is used more often about men, and perhaps also in more informal contexts (as it is often used together with the word *guy*).

The dictionaries seem to indicate a greater difference between some of the areas in which the adjectives are used, than the corpus. One example is about buildings. In the dictionaries, it is stated that *handsome* is often used to imply size, proportions, symmetry etc, when used about buildings. In the corpus, the examples referring to buildings do not seem to differ in their meanings, whether they are described using *handsome*, *beautiful*, or *good-looking* (if disregarding the number of instances, since *good-looking* only is used twice together with “buildings”). Of course, this might be a result of the fact that there are no images in the corpus that clarify in what visual situations the examples are used (many of the corpus examples are from spoken language). There is always a possibility that there is a distinct difference between how the adjectives are used about buildings, but that only the sight of them would have made that clear.

The areas in which the adjective *beautiful* is used show a large resemblance between the dictionaries and the corpus. The dictionaries mention collocates such as *weather*, *music*, *flowers*, *countryside*, *ride*, *poem*, *voice*, *mathematical proof* etc., all which seem to match the categories created from the corpus samples. In relation to *handsome* they differ more. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the focus in the dictionaries on full size is not seen as much in the corpus. Neither can the uses of *handsome* to denote a reproof or punishment in a humorous way, or as about language, be found in the corpus. *Good-looking* is described in somewhat more detail in the corpus than in the dictionaries. In the corpus *good-looking* is mentioned in relation to several different areas, even though the examples are very few, whereas the dictionary examples only refer to one area, namely people.

In the corpus samples, a higher degree of similarity is found between the categories “objects”, “buildings” and “animals” than for any of the other categories. The meaning of the expressions in these categories does not seem to change much depending on what adjective is used. If defining synonymy as relation by contrast, meaning that all contextual relevant properties are the same, except that of form, then there seems to be synonymy between the three adjectives when applied to these three categories.

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24 *OED* says that this last use is obsolete, with the exception of the USA. The chance of finding this use is therefore not very big, but since the corpus used is American the probability must at least be more than zero.
It turns out that the answers to the initial questions are not clear-cut. Certainly, there are areas where both the dictionary and the corpus data on the three adjectives display similarities. One such area is when describing a person’s appearances. However, as shown in the analysis above, it is difficult to label the adjectives synonymous in this respect, at least if all the connotative meanings are to be considered. (Partial synonymy seems to be a more appropriate term here.) Of course there may be occasions where the context allows for synonymy, but that is probably not the most prototypical situation. There are other areas where the three adjectives display more direct similarities, but that is more often seen in the corpus samples than in the dictionary definitions, at least if all three adjectives are involved. The situations in which the three adjectives may be seen as synonymous are in relation to “buildings”, “objects” and “animals”, since they often seem to refer to the same thing within these categories. Finally, as has been emphasized in this essay, context is decisive in detecting synonymy. This means that all putatively synonymous words must be evaluated within their relevant contexts, without which not much can be said.
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LDCE the Longman Online Dictionary of Contemporary English

OALD the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary Online
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