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VERY, REALLY, SO OR PRETTY?
Intensifier use in the British National Corpora
1994 and 2014

TIIVISTELMÄ

Heidi Aronen: *Very, really, so or pretty?* Intensifier use in the British National Corpora 1994 and 2014

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Tarkastelen valinnaisten opintojen tutkielmassani kymmenen eri vahvistussanan käyttöä brittienglannissa. Vahvistussanat ovat adverbeja, joita käytetään vahvistamaan sanojen merkityksiä. Aikaisemman tutkimuksen perusteella vahvistussanat *very*, *really*, *so* ja *pretty* ovat suosituimpia englannin kielen eri varieteeteissa. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on selvittää, miten näiden kymmenen vahvistussanan käyttö muuttuu kahdenkymmenen vuoden aikana ja millaisia eroja niiden käytössä voidaan huomata miesten ja naisten sekä eri ikäryhmien välillä.

Tutkielman teoreettinen viitekehys rakentuu vahvistussanojen käsitteistön ja historian ympärille. Tämän lisäksi käsitellään aikaisempaa sosiolingvististä tutkimusta eri sukupuolten ja ikäryhmien kielenkäytön näkökulmasta. Aikaisempien tutkimustulosten perusteella voidaan päätellä, että eri sukupuolten ja ikäryhmien välillä on eroavaisuuksia vahvistussanojen käytössä ja että kieliyhteisön suosimat muodot voivat vaihdella nopeasti. Tutkimusaineistona tutkielmassa on käytetty British National Corpus -korpuksen 1994- ja 2014-versioita. Tutkimusaineisto on rajattu vaapaamuotoisen puhutun kielen osuuteen, jotta vahvistussanoja ja niiden muutoksia voidaan tarkastella ainoastaan spontaanissa puhutussa kielessä.

Tutkimustulokseni osoittavat, että vahvistussanojen käyttö muuttuu tarkastellun kahdenkymmenen vuoden aikana. Vahvistussanojen käyttö on yleisempää vuonna 2014, mikä on merkki kielenkäytön muuttumisesta vuosien aikana. Vahvistussanat *very*, *really* ja *so* ovat suosituimpia sekä 1994- että 2014-korpusversioissa, mutta niiden käyttö muuttuu selkeästi kahdenkymmenen vuoden aikana. Vahvistussana *very* on suosituin vuonna 1994, mutta putoaa toiselle sijalle vuonna 2014 vahvistussanan *really* noustessa kolmannelta sijalta selvästi eniten käytetyimmäksi vahvistussanaksi vuonna 2014. Tämä muutos on erityisen selkeä naisten puheessa, mikä osoittaa naisten ohjaavan vahvistussanojen käytössä tapahtuvia muutoksia.

Tutkimustulokseni osoittavat eroja myös miesten ja naisten ja eri ikäryhmien välillä. Vahvistussanojen käyttö on yleisempää naisten puheessa, mutta yksittäisten vahvistussanojen välillä huomataan eroja. *Really* ja *so* ovat yleisempiä naisten puheessa, kun taas *pretty* on suosituimpi miesten puheessa. Vahvistussanojen käyttö on yleisesti suosittumpaa nuorten puheessa, mutta eri ikäryhmien vertailu osoittaa myös eroavaisuuksia ryhmien välillä. *Very* on suosittu monessa ikäryhmässä vuonna 1994, mutta vuonna 2014 sen käyttö on yleisintä vain vanhempien puhujien keskuudessa. Nuoret puhujat sen sijaan suosivat sanoja *really* ja *so* molemmissa korpusversioissa. Ikäryhmien välinen vertailu osoittaa, että nuoret puhujat saattavat omaksua helpommin uusia vahvistussanoja puheeseensa, kun taas vanhemmat ikäryhmät saattavat viedä käyttämänsä vahvistussanat mukanaan ikääntyessään.

Tutkimustulosteni ja aiemman tutkimuksen välillä on suuria yhtäläisyyksiä. *Very*-sanana lasku *really*-sanana noustessa on huomattu monessa aiemmassa tutkimuksessa. Tämän lisäksi naisten on tutkittu käyttävän vahvistussanoja enemmän kuin miesten, ja erityisesti vahvistussanojen *so* ja *really* on huomattu olevan selkeästi suosituimpia naisten kielenkäytössä. Tutkimustulokseni ovat myös linjassa aiemman tutkimuksen kanssa siinä, että vahvistussanojen käyttö on yleisempää nuorten puheessa.

Avainsanat: vahvistussanat, korpuslingvistiikka, brittienglanti, sukupuoli, ikä

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ABSTRACT

Heidi Aronen: *Very, really, so or pretty?* Intensifier use in the British National Corpora 1994 and 2014

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This thesis examines the use of ten different intensifiers in British English. As the name suggests, intensifiers are adverbs that are used to intensify the meaning of words. Previous findings have shown that *very*, *really*, *so* and *pretty* are the most popular intensifiers in different varieties of English. The purpose of this thesis is to examine how the use of the ten selected intensifiers changes in twenty years' time and how the use changes in the speech of men and women and in different age groups.

The theoretical framework of the study consists of the definitions of intensifiers and their history. In addition, the theoretical framework also observes previous sociolinguistic research on intensifiers from the perspective of gender differences and language variation in different age groups. In the light of previous research, it is possible to presume that men and women and different age groups use intensifiers in different ways and that popular forms can change rapidly in language communities. The research material of this study consists of the British National Corpora 1994 and 2014. The research material has been restricted to the informal spoken sections of the corpora in order to examine the intensifiers and their changes merely in spontaneous spoken language.

The corpus findings show that the use of the intensifiers changes during the twenty years between the corpora. The use of the intensifiers is more frequent in 2014, which points to a change in language use during the years. *Very*, *really* and *so* are the most frequently used intensifiers both in 1994 and 2014, but their use changes clearly over the years. *Very* is the most popular intensifier in 1994, but its use decreases towards 2014 as *really* rises from the position of the third most frequently used intensifier to the position of the most frequent intensifier in 2014. This is especially noticeable in the speech of women, which suggests that women lead the changes that occur in intensifier use.

The corpus findings also indicate differences between men and women and different age groups. The use of the majority of these intensifiers is more frequent in the speech of women, but there are differences in the use of individual intensifiers. While women prefer the use of *really* and *so*, men use *pretty* more frequently. Moreover, intensifiers are more frequent among younger speakers in general, but a comparison between different age groups suggests that speakers at different ages prefer different intensifiers. *Very* is popular in many age groups in 1994, but as we move towards 2014, the use is popular mainly among older speakers. Younger speakers, on the other hand, resort to *really* and *so* more in both corpora. The comparison between the age groups indicates that younger speakers might adopt new intensifiers into their language use, whereas older speakers might continue using the existing intensifiers as they age.

There are many similarities when comparing the corpus findings and previous research on intensifier use. *Very* giving way to *really* has been noted in a number of studies. In addition, women have been found to use intensifiers more frequently than men, and especially *so* and *really* have been popular among women. Intensifier use being more popular among younger speakers is also in line with previous research on intensifier use.

Key words: intensifiers, corpus linguistics, British English, gender, age

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1 Introduction

Change has often been claimed to be a fundamental characteristic of language (Keller 1994, viii). Language changes and speech differences always reflect changes in society (Gal 1978, 1; Hessner & Gawlitzek 2017, 422), so we may assume that language use has been significantly different, for instance, twenty generations ago.

According to William Labov (1990, 205; see also Trudgill 2000), the most consistent and clearest results of sociolinguistic research are the findings concerning linguistic differences and language changes between men and women. The results can be summarized into two principles:

- I. In stable sociolinguistic stratification, men use a higher frequency of nonstandard forms than women (Labov 1990, 205).
- II. In the majority of linguistic changes, women use a higher frequency of the incoming forms than men (Labov 1990, 206).

The speech of men and women differs in many ways in different societies (Trudgill 2000, 64). One of the best-known authors in the field of linguistics and gender, Robin Lakoff (1975), mentions various stereotypes for women's language in her 1975 classic *Language and Woman's Place*. According to her, women tend to use more tag questions, rising intonation, empty adjectives, intensifiers and indirect requests. The female language is also said to include a greater variety of adjectives, preference for specific words, preference for euphemisms over taboo language, more frequent use of hedges and polite language (Lakoff 1975). Moreover, men are claimed to use more nonstandard vocabulary to appear more masculine (Barczewska & Andreasen 2018, 196). Women with the same trait may be considered less feminine (Barczewska & Andreasen 2018, 197).

Women have often been considered the “innovators in linguistic change” (Labov 1990, 205; see also e.g. Gal 1978; Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005). Further, women are also more associated with intensifier use in comparison to men (Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005, 284). Intensifiers, also called degree modifiers or degree words (see Méndez-Naya 2008), are “adverbs that boost or maximize meaning” (Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005, 280). Bolinger (1972, 17) uses the term ‘intensifier’ for “any device that scales a quality, whether up or down or somewhere between the two”. According to him (1972, 17), we can distinguish four classes of intensifiers: boosters (e.g. *perfect, terribly*), compromisers (e.g. *rather, fairly*), diminishers (e.g. *indifferent, little*), and minimizers (e.g. *a bit, an iota*). Later, Quirk et al. (1985) recognize two subsets of intensifiers, amplifiers and downtoners, and their categories.

Intensifiers are an important linguistic area for research because they change quickly (Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005, 281). Fuchs (2017, 346) states that while gender is known to be an important variable relating to intensifier use, it is somewhat unclear whether differences between male and female speakers are greater than differences between young and old speakers. Biber et al. (2000, 22) observe that corpus-based investigations can provide a useful and supporting perspective on the issues between language and gender. In order to shed light on these issues, the present study investigates the use of ten different intensifiers and their change in the British National Corpora 1994 and 2014. The intensifiers examined are *very, really, so, absolutely, pretty, extremely, totally, completely, dead, and bloody*. My research questions are the following:

1. How do the frequencies of the ten selected intensifiers change from 1994 to 2014?
2. How does the use of the ten intensifiers change in the speech of men and women during 1994–2014?

3. How does the use of the ten intensifiers change in different age groups during 1994–2014?
4. How do the findings correspond with the previous research on intensifier use?

This study is composed as follows: chapter 2 provides an overview of previous studies focusing on intensifiers and language differences between men and women and different age groups. Chapter 3 introduces the theoretical framework for the study, which consists of a description of intensifiers, their history and a process called delexicalization. In addition, the chapter presents theory about language and gender and language and age. The data and the methods of the study are explained in greater detail in chapter 4. Chapter 5 concerns the analysis of the data and the corpus findings. The results are further discussed in chapter 6. Finally, chapter 7 includes a conclusion to the study. The references can be found at the end of the study.

2 Previous Studies

The study of intensifiers has been popular from the beginning of the twentieth century (Méndez-Naya, 2003, 372). Several studies have addressed the question of whether the use of intensifiers differs in different groups of speakers (Fuchs 2017, 350). It has been widely argued that women might use more intensifiers in their speech in comparison to men. As early as at the beginning of the 1920s, Jespersen (1922, 249) states that there are great differences between male and female speakers regarding adverbs. Women have a tendency of using more intensifiers, some of which can even be regarded as more feminine than masculine (Jespersen 1922, 250).

Some of Jespersen's (1922) claims have been criticized for their uncritical acceptance of sexist assumptions regarding differences between male and female speakers (Coates 2013, 12). However, evidence from more recent research has also supported some of these claims. Lakoff (1973, 53–54) observes that the use of the intensive *so*, in particular, is more characteristic of female language than male language, even though it can also be found in the latter, especially in the speech of male academics. Furthermore, Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005) report a clear female lead in intensifier use in their study, as do Tagliamonte (2008), Yaguchi et al. (2010), Hessner & Gawlitzek (2017) and Fuchs (2017).

While the majority of authors agree that there is a difference between male and female speakers in regard to intensifier use, there have also been some opposing theories as to which gender uses different intensifiers more frequently. Fahy (2002) examines gender-specific communication and intensifiers with the help of a computer conference transcript. The results drawn from a database consisting of 44,599 words show that men's use of the intensifiers exceeded that of women on four of the five items that were listed (Fahy 2002, 12). However, the intensifiers examined in the study include words such as *very*, *only*, *every*, *never* and *always*, some of which many scholars do not view as intensifiers (Xiao & Tao 2007, 248). In addition, Xiao and Tao (2007, 266) state that "gender on its own has no explanatory power" and should not, therefore, be considered a sufficient sociolinguistic variable alone.

Previous studies also present evidence regarding age as a sociolinguistic variable. Age and language use have been an important field for research because there is evidence of differences in language use over our lifespan (Xiao & Tao 2007, 253). The results indicate that teenagers prefer to intensify language more than older speakers, and they are more emphatic in their use of intensifiers (Palacios-Martínez & Núñez-Pertejo 2012; Xiao

& Tao 2007). Furthermore, previous findings show that teenagers' speech is often characterized by certain adverbs such as *really* and *so*, whereas *very* has a secondary role (Palacios-Martínez & Núñez-Pertejo 2012, Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005, Tagliamonte 2008). Adults, on the other hand, tend to use a greater number of other intensifiers in their speech, such as *absolutely*, *completely*, *extremely* and *totally* (Palacios-Martínez & Núñez-Pertejo 2012, 791).

3 Theoretical Framework

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework for the study. Section 3.1 concerns intensifiers in general. After that, section 3.2 provides an overview of language and gender where the topic is discussed from the point of view of sociolinguistic research. Finally, section 3.3 focuses on language and age as a sociolinguistic variable and gives an overview of the topic from a sociolinguistic perspective.

3.1 Intensifiers

This section provides an overview of intensifiers. In section 3.1.1, a detailed definition of intensifiers is presented. Section 3.1.2, in turn, includes a description of the history of popular intensifiers over centuries. Finally, in section 3.1.3, a process called delexicalization is described and explained in detail.

3.1.1 Definition of 'intensifier'

The term 'intensifier' has been widely used in the literature. The term has often been connected with items such as *very*, *extremely* and *terribly*, and their function is to "scale

the qualities conveyed by gradable adjectives” in different phrases (Méndez-Naya 2003, 373). Some scholars have limited the word merely to words that are used to indicate a high degree, but sometimes intensifiers are also used to denote both a higher and a lower level (Méndez-Naya 2003, 373). Instead of applying the term to merely adjectives and adverbs, the term has also been applied in a broader sense to involve all words that express a higher or a lower degree (Méndez-Naya 2003, 373; see also Quirk et al. 1985). In this broader sense, the italicized words in the example sentences below would be viewed as intensifiers:

- (1) I *greatly* admire his paintings. (verb modifier) (Méndez-Naya 2003, 373)
- (2) The play was a *terrible* success. (noun modifier) (ibid.)
- (3) The article was *extremely* interesting. (adjective modifier) (ibid.)
- (4) He was driving *very* quickly. (adverb modifier) (ibid.)
- (5) He is *much* in favour of the US attack on Afghanistan. (PP modifier) (ibid.)

Quirk et al. (1985, 589–590) distinguish two subsets of intensifiers: amplifiers and downtoners. Amplifiers include maximizers (e.g. *completely*) and boosters (e.g. *very much*) (Quirk et al. 1985, 589). Downtoners, in turn, consist of approximators (e.g. *almost*), compromisers (e.g. *more or less*), diminishers (e.g. *partly*) and minimizers (e.g. *hardly*) (Quirk et al. 1985, 590). Figure 1 below gives an overview of the two subsets of intensifiers distinguished by Quirk et al. (1985).

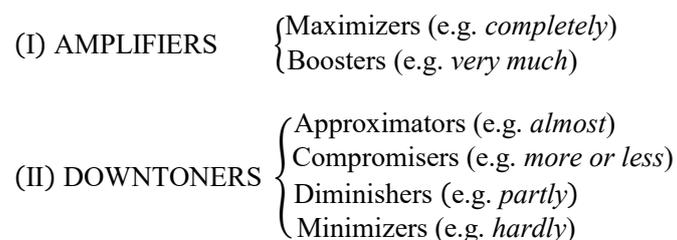


Figure 1. Two subsets of intensifiers (adapted from Quirk et al. 1985)

Bolinger (1972, 17) also recognizes some of these and states that it is possible to distinguish four classes of intensifiers “according to the region of the scale that they occupy”. These are boosters, compromisers, diminishers and minimizers. Quirk et al.’s (1985) later, slightly more comprehensive, division, however, includes two main subsets and their categories. Amplifiers, divided into maximizers and boosters, scale upwards from an assumed norm, which requires for the item or the unit to which the intensifier is connected to be gradable (Quirk et al. 1985, 590). The following adverbs, for example, belong to maximizers, and they indicate “the upper extreme of the scale”: *absolutely, completely, extremely, entirely* and *totally* (Quirk et al. 1985, 590). Boosters, on the other hand, signal “a high degree” or “a high point on the scale” and can include some of the following words: *badly, deeply, greatly* and *so* (Quirk et al. 1985, 590, 591).

Downtoners, in turn, bear a lowering effect and usually scale “downwards from an assumed norm” (Quirk et al. 1985, 590). Downtoners can be divided into four categories, one of which is approximators (*almost, nearly, practically*) that manifest an approximation to the force of the word (Quirk et al. 1985, 597). In addition to that, downtoners also include compromisers (*kind of, sort of, quite*) that have a lowering effect, diminishers (*mildly, partly, slightly*) that scale downwards and mean “to small extent”, and minimizers (*barely, hardly, little*) that are negative maximizers and mean “(not) to any extent” (Quirk et al. 1985, 597).

In this study, the variable context is circumscribed to all adjectives. An adverb can premodify an adjective, in which case “the modifying adverb is a scaling device called intensifier” (Quirk et al. 1985, 445). Intensifiers bear the degree of intensity of the adjective, for example *very tall* and *so beautiful* (Quirk et al. 1985, 435). Intensification in

adjectives is manifested by their acceptance of lexical intensifiers (Bolinger, 1972, 21), and intensification cooccurs with gradable adjectives (Quirk et al. 1985, 445).

3.1.2 History of intensifiers

From a historical viewpoint, the dominant intensifier back in the twelfth century, in Old and Early Middle English, was *swiþe* meaning ‘very much, exceedingly’ (D’Arcy 2015, 452; Méndez-Naya 2003, 378; see also Mustanoja 1960, 325). In the 1250s, however, the use of *swiþe* began to decline as other intensifiers, namely *well*, *full* and *right* became more popular (Mustanoja 1960, 325). During the second half of the 14th century, *swiþe* could only be found occasionally, and after 1450 it was no longer seen as an intensifier (Mustanoja 1960, 325). *Well*, on the other hand, was recorded as an intensifying adverb as early as in the Old English period (Mustanoja 1960, 327). It was outstandingly favored as an adjective and adverb intensifier during the Middle English period but was surpassed by *full* and *right* towards the end of the 14th century (Mustanoja 1960, 327). *Full*, in turn, was already popular in the Old English period, *swiþe* being the only more popular intensifier (Mustanoja 1960, 319).

Swiþe, however, began to lose its position in 1250, and this was when *full* also grew in popularity and was the most frequent intensifier of adjectives and adverbs (Mustanoja 1960, 319). In the 15th century, *full* continued to be frequent but began to give way to *right* (Mustanoja 1960, 320). Even though new intensifiers became more popular, the old ones did not disappear (Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005, 282). *Full* could still be found quite often in the 16th century, although in the second half of the century, *very* was visible much more frequently (Mustanoja 1960, 320). *Very* and *pretty* began to be used as intensifiers in the 15th century, although *very* has been recorded and used as an adjective since the

13th century (Mustanoja 1960, 326–327). *Very* surpassed its predecessors in popularity in the second half of the 16th century (Mustanoja 1960, 327). *Really*, on the other hand was portrayed as a new intensifier in the 18th century, and after that *very* and *really* coexisted as the most popular intensifiers for a long time (Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005, 283). The use of *so* as an intensifier can be found in the early 1900s, and its use has been mentioned alongside *pretty* and *real* (Tagliamonte and Roberts 2005, 383). Figure 2 below gives an overview of popular intensifiers over the centuries in English.

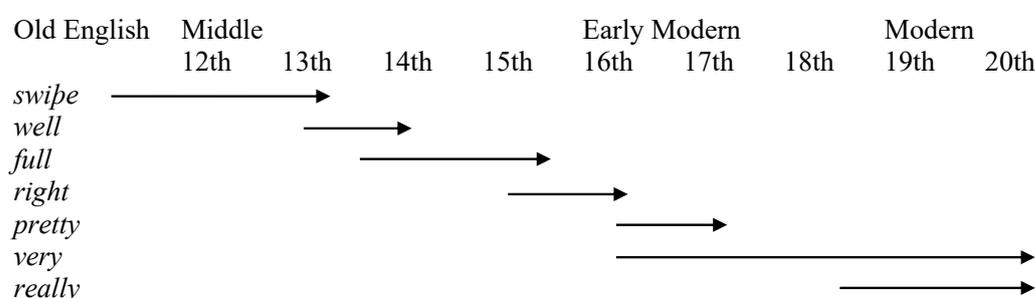


Figure 2. Summary of the shift in popularity of intensifiers in English (Ito & Tagliamonte 2003, 260; for more information, see Mustanoja (1960))

3.1.3 Delexicalization

The developmental path for intensifiers has been regarded as ‘delexicalization’ in the literature (D’Arcy 2015, 453). Delexicalization is one of the general processes of grammaticalization (Ito & Tagliamonte 2003, 261). Partington (1993, 183) defines delexicalization as follows:

delexicalization can be defined as the reduction of the independent lexical content of a word, or group of words, so that it comes to fulfil a particular function but has no meaning apart from this to contribute to the phrase in which it occurs.

Delexicalization usually contributes to an item's tendency of having a more grammatical role, and the more grammaticalized the intensifier is, the more it also loses the lexical restrictions and increases in frequency (Lorenz 2002, 144).

Very, for instance, has little meaning on its own, which is why it mainly occurs as an intensifier nowadays. Lorenz (2002, 145) considers *very* to be “the most prominent case of grammaticalization”. *Very* originates from Latin *verus* through Old French *verai* and Middle English *verray* (Lorenz 2002, 145) bearing the meaning ‘real, true’ (D’Arcy 2015, 453; Mustanoja 1960, 327). Towards the end of the 14th century, *verray* was also found before an attributive adjective, for instance, in the following sense: “*that is a verrai gentil man*” (Gower CA iv 2275, from Mustanoja 1960, 326). In the example, *verray* is an adjective, but its persistent occurrence in this syntactical position may have led to the development of this adjective into an adverb (Mustanoja 1960, 326–327). Gradually, the function of *very* began to change, and both its meaning and function shifted to an adverb and degree modifier (D’Arcy 2015, 453).

Swipe, in turn, originates from the Old English adjective *swiþ* meaning ‘strong, powerful’ with an adverb-forming suffix *-e* (Méndez-Naya 2003, 378). At first, *swiþe* could be found as an adverb in adjunct role, and it was used with verbs that associated with its lexical meaning ‘strongly, powerfully, violently’ (Méndez-Naya 2003, 387). After that, it acquired a degree reading, and it came to be used more widely with different verbs (Méndez-Naya 2003, 387). Finally, *swiþe* developed its intensifier function through the use of participles which were mainly adjectival in Old English (Méndez-Naya 2003, 387).

3.2 Language and gender

In the Victorian era, “speaking properly” was connected with female speech and with being a lady (Romaine 2000, 79). It was, for example, considered much worse for women to “drop their /h/s” than for men to do the same, and talking properly was considered as equally important as dressing up right or putting on makeup (Romaine 2000, 79–81). At the beginning of the 20th century, Jespersen (1922) devoted a chapter of his widely cited book on language to ‘The Woman’ and remarked that women have a weakening effect on language, and that there was a danger that the language would become languid if women’s way of speaking was dominant (Romaine 2000, 101; see also Jespersen 1922, 247). Fuchs (2017, 347) states that earlier research on the differences between men’s and women’s language included broad generalizations of particular feminine and masculine communicational styles where female language was considered indirect, conciliatory, facilitative and collaborative, whereas the male language was characterized as direct, aggressive, competitive and autonomous. Romaine (2000, 102) criticizes many earlier studies for simply counting the number of instances without paying attention to the context that the instances were used in when searching for gender differences in language use. She states that a great part of language is ambiguous and almost always depends on some context and that there are only a few gender differences in language that do not depend on any context at all (Romaine 2000, 102).

It is only quite recently that scholars have become interested in gender (Coates 2013, 4). Coates (2013, 4–5) suggests three reasons for this. First, in traditional dialectology, the informants that were chosen were often non-mobile, older and men. Although many researchers began to include informants from both sexes, studies focusing solely on male speakers continued to be made. Second, while a reaction against mainstream linguistics

caused a growth in the number of studies focusing on nonstandard varieties, such as ethnic minority groups or adolescents, women were not perceived as a minority group. Third, men have been seen as the dominant sex in societies, women being more invisible, and all important positions were held by men.

Since then, the situation has been changing gradually. Coates (2013, 5) regards the publication of Robin Lakoff's 1975 book *Language and Woman's Place* as a symbolic moment regardless of the fact that it has been widely criticized for its pervasive arguments and lack of empirical material. Lakoff draws attention to women's use of intensifiers and claims that female speakers tend to use such expressions to intensify their emotions (Lakoff 1975, 55). Furthermore, Coates (2013, vi) argues that in the early 1990s, scholars documented the differences between women's and men's languages and attempted to find inequalities. William Labov (1990, 205) states that the findings regarding the linguistic differences between men and women are among the clearest and most consistent results of sociolinguistic research. Biber et al. (2000, 21; see also Romaine 2000, 122) argue that in settings where both genders are present, women often speak remarkably less than men, that women focus on the personal/interactional angles of conversation and that women tend to be more tentative than men and use more hedges, possibility modals and 'ego-centric sequences'. In addition, Romaine (2000, 78) argues that there are strong correlations between gender and social stratification. Female speakers tend to favor more standard forms of language regardless of other social variables such as class or age in comparison to male speakers (Romaine 2000, 101).

However, there has been a postmodern shift in the way we perceive language and gender in today's world (Coates 2013, vi). Gender is no longer perceived as given but rather as something we 'do', and diversity and plural masculinities and femininities are

emphasized instead of focusing on a binary division between ‘men’ and ‘women’ (Coates 2013, vi). Nonetheless, the evidence at present suggests that men and women do have differences in their interactive styles: one robust finding is that women pursue more standard forms of language, while men prefer nonstandard forms (Coates 2013, 68). Furthermore, women have a tendency of using more hedges and give more compliments to others, and they use more linguistic forms associated with politeness (Coates 2013, 110). Men, on the other hand, are more inclined to talk and swear more and use aggravated directives in their speech (Coates 2013, 110).

3.3 Language and age

Speaker age has long been one of the most important social categories within sociolinguistics, and many of the theories about how language varies are related to the question of how speaker age reflects language use (Bigham 2012, 533). Contrasting perspectives of age and aging have opened a path for various different types of age and consequently, the definition of age has become rather challenging for sociolinguistics (Murphy 2010, 2). In her widely cited study, Eckert (1997) states that chronological age is not sufficient enough when explaining linguistic behavior as it fails to correlate well enough with the facts that concern linguistic change. She (1997, 154–155) mentions that,

as social and biological development do not move in lock step with chronological age, or with each other, chronological age can only provide an approximate measure of the speaker's age-related place in society.

Instead, Eckert (1997) distinguishes between chronological age, social age and biological age. Seeing that the stretch of ages is so expansive, it has been problematic for scholars to arrive at a fine-grained age distinction with any statistical significance, which is why

they have often relied on chronological age regardless of its complexity (Eckert 1997, 154; see also Murphy 2010, 4).

To this day, a number of studies have been conducted focusing on childhood and adolescence, as these stages of life have been seen as the most interesting due to the fact that language acquisition is in the early stages of development in childhood and that adolescence includes new opportunities and experiences that can affect the linguistic behavior of individuals (Murphy 2010, 10; see also Eckert 1997). Research focusing on adulthood, however, seems to have been more neglected (Murphy 2010, 11). Indeed, Eckert (1997, 165) states that adulthood “has emerged as a vast wasteland in the study of variation” and that adults have often been considered a homogeneous age group. The retiring and retired age group has drawn the least attention in the study of variation (Eckert 1997, 165), and studies that have been focusing on adulthood have rarely included the elderly (Murphy 2010, 12).

In the traditional approach in examining age and language, scholars have emphasized the extensive change that happens in the language from birth to adolescence, whereas they have recognized little or no change in adulthood or in late old age (Murphy 2010, 8). Furthermore, Eckert (1997, 160) states that scholars have a much greater knowledge of the age differences in the early years in comparison to later years and that the farther we move on the lifespan the less is known about age. Murphy (2010, 10) notes that research has been dismissing a developmental perspective that considers variation and change life-long and that variation in all stages of life represents the language of that particular group at that particular time.

However, more recent approaches have indicated that change and growth happen in all stages of life, that is from birth to death (Murphy 2010, 8). Wagner (2012, 379)

states that recent longitudinal studies have indicated that adults may change their way of speaking as they become older and that these changes may take place at various levels of the grammar. Wagner (2012, 379) also refers to the earlier established term ‘age grading’ for the stage where

the individual responds to the pressures of the standard language market by marking the transition to middle adulthood with more conservative speech patterns than they had previously employed as adolescents and young adults.

This phenomenon has been noted in a number of recent studies (see e.g. Tagliamonte & D’Arcy 2009, Barnfield & Buchstaller 2010, D’Arcy 2015, Fuchs 2017). Bigham (2012, 534) continues that while the transition period between high school and college has long been viewed as an important life-stage from a psychological perspective in the life of an individual, a period called ‘emerging adulthood’ has more recently been seen as a time when quick and complicated changes occur in beliefs and behaviors. Researchers have started to recognize that due to different events in adult life, such as marriage, divorce and promotion, that may have an effect on the social relations and social attitudes, it is inevitable that change takes place during these years (Murphy 2010, 8, 11).

4 Data and Methods

In this section, the data and the methods of the study are explained in detail. First, the sources for the data, The British National Corpora 1994 and 2014, are presented in section 4.1. Thereafter, the methodological approach is discussed in section 4.2. Finally, the statistical approach of the thesis, the chi-squared test, is explained in section 4.3.

4.1 Data studied

The data used for this study comes from the spoken sections of the British National Corpora 1994 and 2014 (henceforth the Spoken BNC1994/2014). The BNC1994 is a compilation of samples of both written and spoken British English from a broad variety of sources. According to the official website of the BNC (Burnard 2009), it includes a total of a 100 million words from the later part of the twentieth century. The written part of the BNC1994 covers 90% of the total amount of data, leaving 10% for the spoken language section (*ibid.*). The building of the corpus occurred between 1991 and 1994 (Love et al. 2017, 321).

The Spoken BNC1994 is divided into two parts: the demographically-sampled (DS) part (c. 40%) and the context-governed part (c. 60%) (Aston & Burnard 1997, 31; Love et al. 2017, 321). The demographically-sampled section of the Spoken BNC1994 (henceforth the Spoken BNC1994DS) includes a total of 4.2 million words of informal, spontaneous conversations, and the volunteers who recorded their conversations were chosen according to sex, age group, social class and geographic region (Aston & Burnard 1997, 31, 32). The context-governed part contains 6.1 million words and includes more formal encounters that are categorized by topic and type of interaction (Aston & Burnard 1997, 31). Only the demographically-sampled section is used in the present study as it focuses solely on informal speech. Barczewska and Andreasen (2018) also mention that while there are many online corpora available for linguistic analysis, there are only a few that distinguish between the sex of the speakers. Additionally, the BNC1994 gives the user the opportunity to categorize the instances according to age, social class, genre, dialect and education (Burnard 2009). For these reasons, the BNC1994 is used for the study.

To be able to investigate how intensifier use in British English may have changed over the last two decades, the Spoken BNC2014 is used alongside the Spoken BNC1994DS in the present study. The Spoken BNC2014 is a large compilation of samples of contemporary British English presenting different real-life contexts (British National Corpus 2014). The Spoken BNC2014 contains data from the years 2012 to 2016, and it includes 11.5 million words of transcribed content with 668 speakers in 1,251 recordings (Love et al. 2017, 320). The data collected occurred in informal contexts, which makes the corpus comparable to the Spoken BNC1994DS (Love et al. 2017, 324). In addition, the user has access to a large amount of metadata in the Spoken BNC2014, such as age, gender, accent/dialect and occupation (Love et al. 2017, 330–332). The metadata for age and gender is relevant in the present study. When it comes to age, the speakers in the Spoken BNC2014 have been categorized according to two age-based schemes, one of which follows the same categorization as the Spoken BNC1994: 0–14, 15–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45–59, 60+, and Unknown (Love et al. 2017, 330). This simplifies comparison between the two corpora. This categorization will also be used in the present study.

In order to make the Spoken BNC2014 data size more comparable to that of the Spoken BNC1994DS, the ‘core set’ function of the Spoken BNC2014 will be used in the study. The core set includes a set of 250 speakers with ca. 6.1 million words, and it has been compiled to create a better quantitative balance across the different social categories in comparison to the complete Spoken BNC2014 (British National Corpus 2018, 26–27). The purpose of the core set is to enable variationist sociolinguistic analysis between the Spoken BNC1994DS and the Spoken BNC2014 (British National Corpus 2018, 26). To summarize, the data for this study is derived from the Spoken BNC1994DS with 4.2 million words and the core set of the Spoken BNC2014 with 6.1 million words.

The material in the study consists of the instances that the search string produces for the ten individual intensifiers that are investigated in the study. The intensifiers examined are *very, really, so, absolutely, pretty, extremely, totally, completely, dead, and bloody* (more on the selection of these intensifiers in section 4.2). According to previous research (see e.g. Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005, 285) adjectives are the most commonly intensified forms in the language, which is why the variable context was circumscribed to all adjectives in this study.

4.2 Methods employed

As a first step, I decided which intensifiers to investigate. This decision was based on findings of previous research on frequent intensifiers in adjectival use. I familiarized myself with previous studies on intensifiers in different varieties of English and compiled a table with different data sets and intensifiers listed. Ten different data sets from previous studies were considered here, and intensifiers from different varieties were taken into account. The data sets include variation in Great Britain in Tyneside, London and York; in the U.S.A, and in Toronto. However, the focus of the data sets lies on British English. The time period for the data sets ranges from 1940s to 2008, focusing on the 1990s–2000s time period, which is the most relevant period of time considering this study. The data sets are not identical in the number of intensifiers listed, nor are the intensifiers the same in each case, but I was able to identify ten intensifiers that occurred most frequently in the previous studies. This is what the selection of intensifiers is based on in the present study. The data sets and the intensifiers are presented in table 1 below.

Table 1. The distribution of the examined intensifiers in different data sets¹

Data sets	<i>very</i>	<i>really</i>	<i>so</i>	<i>absolutely</i>	<i>pretty</i>	<i>extremely</i>	<i>totally</i>	<i>completely</i>	<i>dead</i>	<i>bloody</i>
Tyneside 1960s–1970s (TLS) (Barnfield & Buchstaller 2010)	65%	8.6%	2.9%	2.9%						
Tyneside 1990s (PVC) (Barnfield & Buchstaller 2010)	18%	25.1%	7.5%	4.1%					35.9%	
The USA 1990s (CSPA) (Yaguchi et al. 2010)	58%	10.2%	2.5%	1.9%	5.9%	1.6%				
London 1990s (and the UK 1958–1977) (DCPSE) (Núñez-Pertejo & Palacios-Martínez 2018)	58%	6.9%	17.9%	5.6%	3.4%	1.5%	1.2%	1.7%	0.1%	0.3%
London 1993 (COLT) (Núñez-Pertejo & Palacios-Martínez 2018)	15.9%	22.6%	23.8%	1.1%	2.9%	0.5%	0.8%	1.2%	0.1%	11.2%
York 1997 (Ito & Tagliamonte 2003)	38.3%	30.2%	10.1%	3.2%	3.2%		1.4%	1.2%		1.2%
Toronto 2000s (Toronto English Corpus) (Tagliamonte 2008)	6.6%	13%	6.1%	0.1%	5%	0.14%	0.4%	0.3%		
Tyneside 2007–2008 (NECTE2) (Barnfield & Buchstaller 2010)	32.4%	26.7%	9.1%	4.7%					7.8%	
London 2008 (SCoSE) (Palacios-Martínez & Núñez-Pertejo 2012)	13.1%	46%	26.2%		13.1%					
London 2007–2010 (MLEC adult/young) (Núñez-Pertejo & Palacios-Martínez 2018)	50.6% /15.7%	26.9% /23.6%	12.3% /24.3%	1.4% /0%	2.5% /0.9%	0% /0.2%	1.4% /0%	2.6% /0.6%	0% /0.2%	0.2% /1.6%

The next step was to use a search string for each intensifier both in the Spoken BNC1994DS and in the core set of the Spoken BNC2014. As the crosstab function of the Spoken BNC2014 is not yet accessible, the searches were performed by restricting each query according to speaker sex in both corpora. This way, it is possible to examine intensifier use according to both speaker sex and speaker age at the same time. This also excluded instances that were categorized as “n/a (multiple)” or instances that were not categorized according to the sex of the speaker. The search string for the Spoken

¹ In addition to the examined intensifiers in table 1, the data sets also include other intensifiers that are not listed in table 1. Therefore, the row sums are not always 100%.

BNC1994DS was “[intensifier] * (_AJ0)” (e.g. “very * (_AJ0)”). The corresponding search string for the Spoken BNC2014 was “[intensifier] * (_JJ)”. The tags “_AJ0” and “_JJ” were used to restrict the search to an adjective that was directly following the intensifier. After that, each query was examined by using the categorization tools in the corpora. The instances were categorized according to “yes”, “no” and “unclear” depending on whether the intensifier was followed by an adjective or not or whether the instance was unclear. Every false instance was removed, and merely the instances categorized as “yes” were considered and analyzed. Then, the distributions of the instances were processed as I divided each intensifier query into categories according to the age of the speaker.

4.3 The chi-squared test

Statistics helps the researcher to make “generalizations about a population of interest based on a limited sample” (Levshina 2015, 1). Statistics indicates how correct the results are if they are interpreted correctly (Jenset 2008, 1). The chi-squared test is a broadly used statistical test for comparing count data, such as frequencies in corpora (Oakes 2009, 163). It is commonly used in linguistics due to its capability to handle almost any kinds of nominal data (Jenset 2008, 5). For these reasons, the chi-squared test is used in the present study.

When beginning the chi-squared test, it is important to use the raw frequency counts instead of any normalized frequencies, as using any other ratios would affect the obtained values (Oakes 2009, 165). First, the values examined are to be set out in a contingency table where the row total, column total and grand total values can be counted (Oakes

2009, 163–164). Second, the expected values need to be calculated using the following formula (Oakes 2009, 163):

$$\text{Expected frequency} = \frac{\text{Row total} \times \text{Column total}}{\text{Grand total}}.$$

After this, the overall chi-values for each cell are calculated with the following formula (Oakes 2009, 164):

$$\frac{(\text{Observed value for that cell} - \text{Expected value for that cell})^2}{\text{Expected value for that cell}}.$$

Next, the values in each cell are summed together to create an overall chi-square value (ibid.). After this, it is essential to obtain a value called the degrees of freedom. This is dependent on the size of the contingency table and can be calculated as follows (Oakes 2009, 164):

$$\text{Degrees of freedom} = (\text{number of rows} - 1) \times (\text{number of columns} - 1).$$

This study mostly contains 2 by 2 tables, which results in one degree of freedom. Using this information, it is possible to obtain the critical values for the chi-squared statistic in a chi-squared table (Oakes 2009, 164). If the overall chi-squared value is > 3.84 with one degree of freedom, the corresponding p -value is 0.05 and we can be 95% certain that the difference has not occurred by random chance.

If a p -value is smaller than the critical values (usually 0.05 or 0.01), the researcher has grounds to assume that the result has not occurred by random chance (Levshina 2015, 12). Consequently, it is possible to presume that there is an actual difference between the examined groups. However, if a p -value is greater than the critical values, one cannot conclude that there is an evidence that the groups truly differ (ibid.). The critical values

0.05 and 0.01 are called the significance level, which is to be decided before conducting the statistical analysis (ibid.). Generally, the level 0.05 is used as a “trade-off” by most linguists, and one should have a strong reason for choosing otherwise (Levshina 2015, 13). Thus, the critical value 0.05 is considered the highest p -value with which the results can still be viewed as statistically significant in the present study.

5 Corpus Findings

This chapter includes an analysis of the findings that the search strings produced in both the Spoken BNC1994DS and in the core set of the Spoken BNC2014. First, the overall results of the findings will be presented and compared in section 5.1. Second, the results will be presented according to the categories sex and age in sections 5.2 and 5.3, respectively. Finally, the findings are analyzed according to the two categories simultaneously in section 5.4. The number of hits and the frequencies per one million words (pmw) are shown when discussing the results.

5.1 Overall results

The total number of words in the Spoken BNC1994DS is 4,233,962. However, only the male and female sexes are included in the searches, excluding the unknown and multiple speakers, which reduces the total number of words to 3,718,438. This word count is used to calculate the normalized frequencies for the Spoken BNC1994DS hits in Table 2. The total number of words in the core set of the Spoken BNC2014 is 6,169,296, which already excludes all unknown and multiple speakers, making the word count usable as it is. This word count is used to calculate the normalized frequencies for the Spoken BNC2014 hits

in Table 2. All frequencies are normalized by 1,000,000 words throughout the analysis of the corpus findings.

The Spoken BNC1994DS results show that *very* is clearly the most frequently used intensifier and *extremely* the least used intensifier in the 1994 data. When it comes to the 2014 data, the situation changes as *really* is clearly the most frequently used intensifier and *very* holds the second place. The change of *really* is remarkable, as it has risen from the third place to the first during the twenty years between the corpora. As in the 1994 data, *extremely* is least frequently used also in the 2014 data. A more detailed distribution of the results is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. The distribution of the results in the 1994 and the 2014 data

1994			2014		
Intensifier	No. of hits	Frequency pmw	Intensifier	No. of hits	Frequency pmw
<i>very</i>	3,747	1,007.68	<i>really</i>	8,663	1,404.21
<i>so</i>	1,855	498.87	<i>very</i>	6,860	1,111.96
<i>really</i>	1,577	424.10	<i>so</i>	5,684	921.34
<i>bloody</i>	347	93.32	<i>pretty</i>	1,193	193.38
<i>absolutely</i>	273	73.42	<i>absolutely</i>	469	76.02
<i>pretty</i>	270	72.61	<i>completely</i>	347	56.25
<i>dead</i>	102	27.43	<i>totally</i>	154	24.96
<i>totally</i>	88	23.67	<i>dead</i>	113	18.32
<i>completely</i>	76	20.44	<i>bloody</i>	89	14.43
<i>extremely</i>	32	8.61	<i>extremely</i>	73	11.83
Total	8,367	2,250.14	Total	23,645	3,832.69

As Table 2 depicts, the intensifier use is clearly more frequent in 2014. The total frequency differences also reach statistical significance ($p < 0.001$), which implicates that these intensifiers are more popular in 2014 than in 1994. This is also in line with Fuchs' (2017) findings. The same three intensifiers, *very*, *so* and *really*, are used most frequently in both data sets as has been previously noted by other scholars (see e.g. Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005; Ito & Tagliamonte 2003). The use of almost all the examined intensifiers is more frequent in the 2014 data, with the exceptions of *bloody* and *dead*, which decline in frequency towards 2014. The increased usage is statistically significant for *really*, *very*,

so, *pretty* and *completely* ($p < 0.001$). This implicates that speakers have started to use intensifiers more in their speech. *Very* giving way to *really* is consistent with previous findings (see e.g. Ito & Tagliamonte 2003; Barnfield & Buchstaller 2010). In addition, Méndez-Naya (2008) states that *really* has become significantly more popular since the late 1990s. This may explain its popularity in the 2014 data.

In the 1994 data, *so* is the second most frequently used intensifier, whereas it is the third most used intensifier in the 2014 data. The growth in the use of *so* is, thus, slow in Great Britain in contrast to, for example, North America (cf. Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005; Tagliamonte 2008). In addition, Tagliamonte (2008, 369) reports a clear increase in the use of *pretty* in Canadian English, stating that it is competing “robustly with both *very* and *so*”. Regardless of *pretty* following directly after *so* in the 2014 data, the distance between these two intensifiers is relatively large both in 1994 and 2014. Consequently, *pretty* is still used significantly less frequently than *so* or *very* in British English. Indeed, Tagliamonte (2008, 370) considers the increase in the use of *pretty* “a North American phenomenon”, which is also seconded in this study.

The use of *bloody* and *dead* deviates from the uses of the other intensifiers. The decrease in the usage is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$ for *bloody* and $p < 0.01$ for *dead*), which means that there is a low probability that the change occurs by random chance. Macaulay (2006) also reports a dramatic decrease in the use of *dead* since 1997 in Glasgow teenage speech as a result of the simultaneous increase in the use of *pure*. The same occurs in Tyneside in Barnfield and Buchstaller’s (2010) study around the same time. The significant increase in the uses of *really*, *very*, *so* and *pretty* in the present study could, then, affect the uses of the less frequently used intensifiers, such as *dead* and *bloody*, as well.

5.2 Speaker sex

In the Spoken BNC1994DS, the total number of words in the male sex category is 1,454,344, whereas it is 2,264,094 in the female sex category. As for the core set of the Spoken BNC2014, the male sex category includes a total of 2,558,141 words and the female sex category 3,611,155 words. These word counts are used to calculate the normalized frequencies in Tables 3 and 4 in this section.

When categorizing the results according to the sex of the speaker, the results can be analyzed in greater detail. As Table 3 below depicts, the use of *very*, *so*, *really* and *extremely* is more frequent among the female speakers in the Spoken BNC1994DS. The use of *bloody*, *pretty*, *absolutely*, *dead*, *totally* and *completely*, on the other hand, is more frequent in the speech of men in the 1994 data. *Very*, *so* and *really* together comprise 82% of the intensifier use for male speakers and 88% for female speakers. A more detailed distribution of the hits is presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. The distribution of the results according to the sex of the speaker in the Spoken BNC1994DS

Speaker sex: male			Speaker sex: female		
Intensifier	No. of hits	Frequency pmw	Intensifier	No. of hits	Frequency pmw
<i>very</i>	1,452	998.39	<i>very</i>	2,295	1,013.65
<i>so</i>	516	354.80	<i>so</i>	1,339	591.41
<i>really</i>	482	331.42	<i>really</i>	1,095	483.64
<i>bloody</i>	150	103.14	<i>bloody</i>	197	87.01
<i>pretty</i>	137	94.20	<i>absolutely</i>	157	69.34
<i>absolutely</i>	116	79.76	<i>pretty</i>	133	58.74
<i>dead</i>	42	28.88	<i>dead</i>	60	26.50
<i>totally</i>	39	26.82	<i>totally</i>	49	21.64
<i>completely</i>	31	21.32	<i>completely</i>	45	19.88
<i>extremely</i>	10	6.88	<i>extremely</i>	22	9.72
Total	2,975	2,045.60	Total	5,392	2,381.53

As Table 3 depicts, the ranking of the intensifiers is almost the same for the male and female speakers apart from one intensifier. Another similarity between the sexes is the

considerable distance between the first and the second intensifier. When comparing the second and the third position, however, the distance is significantly smaller, and after this the frequencies decrease noticeably. These findings are consistent with Hessner and Gawlitzek's (2017) results.

When comparing the frequencies of the different intensifiers, it looks as if men use six intensifiers more frequently than women, whereas women's use of four intensifiers is more frequent than men's. In other words, men seem to use intensifiers more versatilely than women in 1994. These results are consistent with Fahy's (2002) findings, as men's uses of the intensifiers exceed women's on six of the ten items in the present study. The total frequencies suggest, however, that women use intensifiers more frequently than men in 1994, which is also statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). This is also in line with what has been previously stated about females leading the intensifier use (Jespersen 1922; Lakoff 1973; Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005; Yaguchi et al. 2010; Hessner & Gawlitzek 2017; Fuchs 2017). On the other hand, the differences between the male and female speakers are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) merely for *so*, *really* and *pretty* ($p > 0.05$ for the others), which suggests that women, in reality, use *so* and *really* more frequently than men, whereas men prefer the use of *pretty* more than women. The other differences can possibly be considered examples of random variation.

While the results suggest that the use of *so* and *really* is quite clearly more frequent among female speakers, the use of *very* is only slightly more frequent in female speech, and the difference between the male and female speech is not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). These results corroborate previous findings. Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005) highlight that *very* is used almost equally by male and female speakers, whereas *really* and *so* are significantly more favored in the speech of women. Tagliamonte (2008, 383) also

mentions that diffused and highly delexicalized intensifiers such as *very* (see also section 3.1.3) might have a more equal distribution between the speaker sexes and that *very* has no clear association to women's language use. In addition to this, *bloody* has often been viewed as an intensifier favored among male speakers in comparison to female speakers (Xiao & Tao 2007), which is also accurate in this study. However, the difference between the male and female speakers in the use of *bloody* is not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$).

When examining the data in the core set of the Spoken BNC2014, the results depict a change in the use of the intensifiers. Now, women tend to prefer the use of *really*, *very*, *so*, *absolutely*, *completely* and *dead* more than men. Men, however, have a tendency of using *pretty*, *totally*, *bloody* and *extremely* more frequently than women. The three most frequently used intensifiers, namely *really*, *very* and *so*, account for 85% of the intensifier use for the male speakers and 92% for the female speakers. The distribution of the hits is presented in greater detail in Table 4 below.

Table 4. The distribution of the results according to the sex of the speaker in the core set of the Spoken BNC2014

Speaker sex: male			Speaker sex: female		
Intensifier	No. of hits	Frequency pmw	Intensifier	No. of hits	Frequency pmw
<i>really</i>	2,557	999.55	<i>really</i>	6,106	1,690.87
<i>very</i>	2,495	975.32	<i>very</i>	4,365	1,208.75
<i>so</i>	1,498	585.58	<i>so</i>	4,186	1,159.19
<i>pretty</i>	695	271.68	<i>pretty</i>	498	137.91
<i>absolutely</i>	180	70.36	<i>absolutely</i>	289	80.03
<i>completely</i>	105	41.05	<i>completely</i>	242	67.01
<i>totally</i>	77	30.10	<i>totally</i>	77	21.32
<i>dead</i>	39	15.25	<i>dead</i>	74	20.49
<i>bloody</i>	38	14.85	<i>bloody</i>	51	14.12
<i>extremely</i>	36	14.07	<i>extremely</i>	37	10.25
Total	7,720	3,017.82	Total	15,925	4,409.95

As in the 1994 results, the use of *really*, *very* and *so* is still more frequent in the speech of women than in the speech of men in 2014. Similarly, the use of *pretty*, *bloody* and *totally* is more frequent among male speakers both in 1994 and 2014. The use of the other

intensifiers changes during the twenty years. While *extremely* was more used by women in 1994, it is more used by men in 2014. Furthermore, the use of *absolutely*, *dead* and *completely* was more frequent in male speech in 1994, but it is more frequent in female speech in 2014. Thus, women seem to use intensifiers more versatily than men in 2014. Women's higher frequency in the intensifier use can also be seen in the total frequencies, which is also statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

However, the differences between the speaker sexes do not reach statistical significance in all cases. The differences between the female and male speakers in the uses of *really*, *very*, *so* and *completely* in the 2014 data are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). This suggests that women, in reality, use these intensifiers more frequently in their speech. When it comes to the male speakers, the more frequent use of *pretty* and *totally* in the 2014 data is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$ for *pretty* and $p < 0.01$ for *totally*). Therefore, it is possible to conclude that there is a low probability that these changes between the speaker sexes would have occurred due to random chance. These results are also in line with previous findings: women tend to prefer *really*, *very* and *so* more than men (see e.g. Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005; Tagliamonte 2007; Fuchs 2017), whereas men use *pretty* more often than women (see e.g. Tagliamonte 2008; Hessner & Gawlitzek 2017).

As Table 4 above illustrates, the ranking of the intensifiers is exactly the same for both sexes. When it comes to the male sex, the distance between the most frequent intensifier, *really*, and the second most frequent intensifier, *very*, is not nearly as great as could be seen in the 1994 data (see Table 3). In fact, the uses of these two intensifiers are almost equal, and the small difference does not reach statistical significance ($p > 0.05$). These findings contradict Hessner and Gawlitzek's (2017) results. However, similar tendencies

cannot be detected when examining the female use of these intensifiers. The use of *really* is clearly more frequent in comparison to the other intensifiers.

5.3 Speaker age

In the Spoken BNC1994DS, all age groups combined, the total word count is 3,657,427 words. The Spoken BNC2014 (core set) equivalent is 6,169,296. Since the normalized frequencies need to be calculated for each age group separately, the age group-specific word counts need to be considered. The age group-specific word counts are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5. The word counts in each age group in the 1994 and 2014 data sets

Age group	The Spoken BNC1994DS	The core set of the Spoken BNC2014
0–14	355,673	306,335
15–24	500,619	1,538,950
25–34	690,720	798,731
35–44	705,882	1,072,189
45–59	733,141	1,491,718
60+	671,392	961,373
Total	3,657,427	6,169,296

The speaker age category provides information on the use of the intensifiers in particular age groups. As Table 6 below illustrates, the use of all the ten intensifiers varies in all age groups in the 1994 data. The intensifier use is most frequent at age 15–24. This is also statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Younger speakers intensifying language more than older speakers is consistent with previous findings (see e.g. Xiao & Tao 2007; Fuchs 2017). *Very* is clearly the most frequent intensifier among older speakers, whereas *so* and *really* are preferred by younger speakers. The distribution of the results in the Spoken BNC1994DS is presented in greater detail in Table 6 below. The gray color indicates most frequent use in the age group.

Table 6. The distribution of the results according to the age of the speaker in the Spoken BNC1994DS (raw frequency / normalized frequency per million words)

	<i>very</i>	<i>so</i>	<i>really</i>	<i>bloody</i>	<i>absolutely</i>	<i>pretty</i>	<i>dead</i>	<i>totally</i>	<i>completely</i>	<i>extremely</i>	Total
0–14	220 / 618.55	236 / 663.53	211 / 593.24	12 / 33.74	11 / 30.93	24 / 67.48	11 / 30.93	4 / 11.25	1 / 2.81	4 / 11.25	734 / 2,063.69
15–24	389 / 777.04	341 / 681.16	564 / 1,126.61	40 / 79.90	46 / 91.89	42 / 83.90	44 / 87.89	24 / 47.94	17 / 33.96	5 / 9.99	1,512 / 3,020.26
25–34	747 / 1,081.48	342 / 495.14	285 / 412.61	59 / 85.42	38 / 55.02	56 / 81.07	19 / 27.51	18 / 26.06	11 / 15.93	1 / 1.45	1,576 / 2,281.68
35–44	662 / 937.83	264 / 374.00	212 / 300.33	82 / 116.17	61 / 86.42	43 / 60.92	16 / 22.67	19 / 26.92	16 / 22.67	5 / 7.08	1,380 / 1,955.00
45–59	811 / 1,106.20	314 / 428.29	148 / 201.87	84 / 114.58	59 / 80.48	52 / 70.93	6 / 8.18	14 / 19.10	12 / 16.37	6 / 8.18	1,506 / 2,054.18
60+	860 / 1,280.92	323 / 481.09	130 / 193.63	61 / 90.86	50 / 74.47	48 / 71.49	6 / 8.94	7 / 10.43	17 / 25.32	7 / 10.43	1,509 / 2,247.57

As Table 6 depicts, *very* is the most frequently used intensifier in the age groups 25–34, 35–44, 45–59 and 60+. The preference of *very* in the older age groups and its secondary role in the younger age groups is consistent with previous findings (see e.g. Ito & Tagliamonte 2003; Barnfield & Buchstaller 2010; Palacios-Martínez & Núñez-Pertejo 2012). *Very* was also clearly the most frequently used intensifier in the 1994 overall results (see Table 2 in section 5.1), which is why its popularity in many age groups is not surprising. According to Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010, 267), the use of *very* was frequent in all age groups in the 1960s but remains now favored merely among older speakers. However, *very* is also popular among speakers in the age group 25–34. This may be explained by the tendency of younger speakers to intensify language more in general (see e.g. Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005, 284; Xiao & Tao 2007, 253). In addition to *very*, also *bloody* and *absolutely* are more frequently used by the older age groups than the youngest age group. These differences between the age groups are also statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

When it comes to the age groups 0–14 and 15–24, *so* and *really* are the most frequently used intensifiers, whereas they are clearly less frequent among the older age groups. This is in line with previous findings (see e.g. Ito & Tagliamonte 2003; Palacios-Martínez & Núñez-Pertejo 2012). Even though the distance between *very* and *really* is large and *very* is clearly the most frequently used intensifier in the overall results in 1994 (see Table 2 in section 5.1), the age-specific results indicate that *really* has found its place in the speech of teenagers and young adults already in the 1994 data. Furthermore, the younger speakers have a stronger preference for *pretty*, *dead*, *totally*, *completely* and *extremely* in comparison to the older age groups. However, the differences between the different age groups are not statistically significant when it comes to *pretty* and *extremely* ($p > 0.05$).

In order to examine any possible changes that may have taken place during the twenty-year time period, the 2014 results also need to be analyzed according to the age of the speaker. As Table 7 below depicts, the intensifier use is most frequent at age 0–14. This finding is also statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). In 1994, the use was most frequent at age 15–24, which has now changed. The result is still in line with previous findings (see e.g. Fuchs 2017). The results suggest that *really* and *so* are still more frequently used by younger speakers, especially teenagers and young adults, whereas *very* is still more frequent in the speech of older speakers. The distribution of the results in the core set of the Spoken BNC2014 is presented in Table 7 below. The gray color indicates most frequent use in the age group.

Table 7. The distribution of the results according to the age of the speaker in the core set of the Spoken BNC2014 (raw frequency / normalized frequency per million words)

	<i>really</i>	<i>very</i>	<i>so</i>	<i>pretty</i>	<i>absolutely</i>	<i>completely</i>	<i>totally</i>	<i>dead</i>	<i>bloody</i>	<i>extremely</i>	Total
0–14	804 / 2,624.58	325 / 1,060.93	436 / 1,423.28	63 / 205.66	5 / 16.32	14 / 45.70	2 / 6.53	0 / 0.00	2 / 6.53	5 / 16.32	1,656 / 5,405.85
15–24	812 / 527.65	1,387 / 901.26	2,245 / 1,458.79	378 / 245.62	80 / 51.98	100 / 64.98	28 / 18.19	51 / 33.14	9 / 5.85	17 / 11.05	5,107 / 3,318.50
25–34	689 / 862.78	617 / 772.48	893 / 1,118.02	266 / 333.03	60 / 75.12	55 / 68.86	22 / 27.54	19 / 23.79	9 / 11.27	5 / 6.26	2,635 / 3,298.98
35–44	215 / 200.63	287 / 268.09	776 / 723.75	228 / 212.65	66 / 61.56	89 / 83.01	23 / 21.45	12 / 11.19	26 / 24.25	23 / 21.45	1,745 / 1,627.51
45–59	1,235 / 827.90	392 / 262.87	863 / 578.53	139 / 93.18	125 / 83.80	63 / 42.23	34 / 22.79	19 / 12.74	19 / 12.74	8 / 5.36	2,897 / 1,942.06
60+	643 / 668.84	1,284 / 1,335.59	471 / 489.92	119 / 123.78	133 / 138.34	26 / 27.04	45 / 46.81	12 / 12.48	24 / 24.96	15 / 15.60	2,772 / 2,883.38

In comparison to the 1994 data, *very* is now the most frequently used intensifier merely in the age group 60+, whereas it was the most frequently used intensifier in four age groups in 1994. This suggests that other intensifiers may have begun to take its place in the younger age groups. Tagliamonte (2008) also reports a high frequency in the use of *very* among 50–91-year-olds, which is seconded in the present study. However, *very* is also popular among 0–14-year-olds. This may be explained by children spending time with their parents or other older speakers who may have an effect on their intensifier use (Xiao & Tao 2007, 253). Furthermore, the intensifiers *absolutely*, *totally* and *bloody* are most frequently used in the age group 60+. *Totally* was clearly used most frequently by speakers in the age group 15–24 in 1994, but it has distinctly become most frequently used by the oldest age group in 2014. According to Palacios-Martínez and Núñez-Pertejo (2012, 791), adults have a tendency to prefer intensifiers such as *absolutely*, *completely*, *extremely* and *totally* in their speech more than younger speakers. This usage could be due to the fact that different *-ly* adverbs are often connected to more literary language and

would, therefore, sound odd in the informal speech of teenagers (Palacios-Martínez & Núñez-Pertejo 2012, 792). In the present study, this claim is supported by the usage of *absolutely*, *completely*, *totally* and *extremely*, since they are all most frequently used by adults or older speakers in the 2014 data.

Of the ten intensifiers, *so* was most frequently used at age 0–14 in 1994. In 2014, however, *so* is the most frequently used intensifier in the speech of 15–24-year-old, 25–34-year-old and 35–44-year-old speakers. In the 2014 data, *really* is the most popular intensifier among 0–14-year-olds. While the growth of *so* in the overall results was not as rapid as the growth of *really* during the twenty years between the two corpora (see Table 2 in section 5.1), the growth of *so* is extremely noticeable when examining the younger age groups separately. In fact, *so* has risen from the position of the third most frequently used intensifier to the position of the most frequently used intensifier among the age group 15–24. Surprisingly, *really* is the third most used intensifier in this age group and has suffered a great decrease in its use regardless of its rapid growth in the overall results. The rapid increase of *so* is in line with some of the previous findings concerning American and Canadian teenagers, in particular (see e.g. Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005; Tagliamonte 2008; Tagliamonte 2016a).

During the twenty years between the two corpora, the use of *pretty* has increased significantly in every age group. The most frequent use of *pretty* has shifted from the age group 15–24 to the age group 25–34. This change is also statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Thus, *pretty* is nowadays preferred in the speech of younger adults and adults. These results are in line with previous findings, as *pretty* has been found largely among adult speakers (see e.g. Núñez-Pertejo & Palacios-Martínez 2018). However, Tagliamonte (2016b) reports a high frequency in the use of *pretty* also among teenagers and

children at the age of 8–14, which can also be seen in the 1994 results in this study. In addition, Tagliamonte (2016b) found that *pretty* surpassed *very* in the speech of teenagers, but this cannot be seen in the present study.

In the 1994 data, the use of *bloody* was most characteristic of speakers over 35 years, which is still the case in the 2014 data. *Bloody* does not seem to be favored in the speech of children in the age group 0–14 in either data set. Similar results have been found by Xiao and Tao (2007) who state that *bloody* and *dead* are infrequent in children’s language use. As for the intensifier *dead* in the present study, it is more frequent in the speech of children than older speakers in the 1994 data, which is not line with Xiao and Tao’s (2007) findings. In the 2014 data, however, there are no instances of *dead* in the age group 0–14, which, in turn, supports Xiao and Tao’s (2007) findings.

5.4 Speaker sex and speaker age

In order to obtain even more comprehensive results when it comes to the use of the ten intensifiers between men and women and different age groups, it is essential to examine the distribution of the hits according to all these categories simultaneously. Consequently, the word counts for each age group and both speaker sexes need to be considered. In Table 8 below, the total word counts for each age group and both speaker sexes are presented in both corpora. These word counts are used to calculate the normalized frequencies in Tables 9 and 10 in this section.

Table 8. The word counts in each age group and both sexes in the 1994 and 2014 data sets

Age group	The Spoken BNC1994DS		The core set of the Spoken BNC2014	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
0–14	201,236	154,437	136,952	169,383
15–24	179,148	321,471	630,434	908,516
25–34	239,020	451,700	423,847	374,884
35–44	272,154	433,728	297,753	774,436
45–59	273,372	459,769	453,131	1,038,587
60+	259,352	412,040	616,024	345,349
Total	1,424,282	2,233,145	2,558,141	3,611,155

When categorizing the hits this way, it is possible to examine which sex uses a particular intensifier more in a specific age group. In examining these results, the focus lies on those intensifiers that show a higher frequency and those that showed a statistically significant difference between male and female speakers in section 5.2. As the raw and normalized frequencies are much smaller and more equal for those intensifiers that did not show a statistical difference between the two sexes, it is possible that the differences occur due to random chance rather than actual changes in language use.

As illustrated in Table 9 below, male speakers have a higher frequency in the use of five intensifiers, which also occurs in the speech of women in the Spoken BNC1994DS. A more detailed distribution of the results is shown in Table 9 below. The gray color indicates most frequent use of the intensifier.

Table 9. The distribution of the results according to the sex and age of the speaker in the Spoken BNC1994DS (raw frequency / normalized frequency)

	0-14		15-24		25-34		35-44		45-59		60+	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
<i>very</i>	126 / 626.13	94 / 608.66	147 / 820.55	242 / 752.79	261 / 1,091.96	486 / 1,075.94	222 / 815.71	440 / 1,014.46	358 / 1,309.57	453 / 985.28	315 / 1,214.57	545 / 1,322.69
<i>so</i>	107 / 531.71	129 / 835.29	85 / 474.47	256 / 796.34	72 / 301.23	270 / 597.74	81 / 297.63	183 / 421.92	80 / 292.64	234 / 508.95	69 / 266.05	254 / 616.45
<i>really</i>	107 / 531.71	104 / 673.41	111 / 619.60	453 / 1,409.15	83 / 347.25	202 / 447.20	83 / 304.97	129 / 297.42	44 / 160.95	104 / 226.20	37 / 142.66	93 / 225.71
<i>bloody</i>	6 / 29.82	6 / 38.85	11 / 61.40	29 / 90.21	28 / 117.15	31 / 68.63	46 / 169.02	36 / 83.00	23 / 84.13	61 / 132.68	30 / 115.67	31 / 75.24
<i>absolutely</i>	6 / 29.82	5 / 32.38	19 / 106.06	27 / 83.99	15 / 62.76	23 / 50.92	25 / 91.86	36 / 83.00	33 / 120.71	26 / 56.55	13 / 50.12	37 / 89.80
<i>pretty</i>	15 / 74.54	9 / 58.28	20 / 111.64	22 / 68.44	28 / 117.15	28 / 61.99	21 / 77.16	22 / 50.72	25 / 91.45	27 / 58.73	23 / 88.68	25 / 60.67
<i>dead</i>	5 / 24.85	6 / 38.85	19 / 106.06	25 / 77.77	10 / 41.84	9 / 19.92	5 / 18.37	11 / 25.36	0 / 0.00	6 / 13.05	3 / 11.57	3 / 7.28
<i>totally</i>	1 / 4.97	3 / 19.43	11 / 61.40	13 / 40.44	8 / 33.47	10 / 22.14	8 / 29.40	11 / 25.36	9 / 32.92	5 / 10.88	1 / 3.86	6 / 14.56
<i>completely</i>	1 / 4.97	0 / 0.00	6 / 33.49	11 / 34.22	7 / 29.29	4 / 8.86	9 / 33.07	7 / 16.14	5 / 18.29	7 / 15.23	3 / 11.57	14 / 33.98
<i>extremely</i>	1 / 4.97	3 / 19.43	3 / 16.75	2 / 6.22	0 / 0.00	1 / 2.21	0 / 0.00	5 / 11.53	2 / 7.32	4 / 8.70	1 / 3.86	6 / 14.56

In Table 3 (see section 5.2), the results suggested that male speakers used six intensifiers more frequently than female speakers, whereas female speakers' use of four intensifiers was more frequent than male speakers'. However, the results in Table 9 suggest that the use might be more equal when different age groups are taken into account. When examining the frequencies alone, the results indicate that women have a higher frequency than men in the use of *very*, *so*, *really*, *completely* and *extremely* at certain ages. Men, on the other hand, have a higher frequency in the use of *bloody*, *absolutely*, *pretty*, *dead* and *totally* at certain ages.

When analyzing the 1994 results in Table 3 (see section 5.2), it was discovered that the differences between male and female speakers were statistically significant merely for *so*, *really* and *pretty* and that the other speaker sex differences may have resulted due to random variation in the sample. The same tendencies can also be found in the results presented in Table 9 above. The use of *very* is most frequent among women in the age group 60+. The use of *very* was also found to be most frequent at age 60+ when the results were analyzed according to the age of the speaker in Table 6 (see section 5.3). However, the difference between the male and female speakers in this age group is not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). Thus, the use of *very* in this age group may, in fact, be more equal than the frequencies depict. When looking at the frequencies, men in the age groups 45–59, 25–34, 15–24 and 0–14 use *very* more frequently than women, whereas women, in addition to the age group 60+, use it more frequently in the age group 35–44. This suggests that men use *very* proportionally more at different ages. When examining the statistical significances, it is possible to conclude that merely the differences between the male and the female speakers in the age groups 35–44 ($p < 0.01$) and 44–59 ($p < 0.001$) are statistically significant. This suggests that women at the age of 35–44 use *very* more than men, and men at the age of 44–59 use *very* more than women in the 1994 data. Otherwise it can perhaps be concluded that the use of *very* is quite equal between the two sexes in 1994.

The use of *so* is more frequent among women in all the age groups, and its use is most frequent in the age group 0–14. The differences between the male and female speakers are statistically significant in every age group ($p < 0.01$ for 35–44, $p < 0.001$ for the others). This suggests that *so*, in reality, is used more frequently by female speakers at all ages in 1994. Even though *so* seems to be frequent also among women at the age of 60+,

the differences between the majority of the younger and older age groups are statistically significant ($p < 0.01$), which suggests that the more frequent use in the younger age groups does not occur by random chance. In addition, the difference between women in the age groups 60+ and 25–34 is not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). This also indicates that *so* is preferred in the younger age groups in the 1994 data. On the other hand, the frequent use at age 60+ points to a phenomenon referred to as ‘age grading’ (see section 3.3). This occurs when speakers have a high frequency in the use of the intensifier at a young age, which drops at 30 or older years and rises again at 60+ (see also Fuchs 2017).

The intensifier *really* is clearly most frequently used among women at the age of 15–24 in 1994. Even though *really* was positioned as the third most used intensifier in the overall results in the 1994 data (see Table 2 in section 5.1), its popularity is clearly noticeable among younger female speakers. The popularity of *really* in the age group 15–24 was also discovered in the age-specific results in the 1994 data in Table 6 (see section 5.3). As Table 9 depicts, the age group 15–24 seems to favor *really* much more than any other age group. These differences among women in these different age groups are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). However, when examining the frequencies of *really*, it can be seen that *really* is used more frequently by men at the age of 35–44. However, the difference is insignificant. Otherwise the use of *really* is more frequent among women in the other age groups. When examining the statistical significances, it can be discovered that the differences between the male and female speakers are statistically significant merely in the age group 15–24 ($p < 0.001$) and 60+ ($p < 0.05$), which suggests that women actually use *really* more frequently than men in these two age groups in 1994. Women’s higher frequency in the use of *really* in the remaining age groups could, then, be considered random variation.

As was discovered when analyzing the results according to the sex of the speaker in 1994 in Table 3 (see section 5.2), the use of *pretty* was more frequent in the speech of men than women. The results in Table 9 above suggest the same, as *pretty* is used more frequently by men than women in every age group. However, these differences are statistically significant only in the age group 25–34 ($p < 0.05$), which indicates that men at this age prefer the use of *pretty* more than women do. When examining the frequency differences inside the male sex category, it is possible to conclude that the frequencies do not differ greatly from each other and that the differences are not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). Therefore, it is challenging to conclude whether the use of *pretty* actually is most frequent in the male speech at this age or whether the variation occurs by random chance. Nevertheless, it is safe to come to the conclusion that men at this age use *pretty* more than women in the 1994 data.

When it comes to the slightly less frequent intensifiers, the use of *bloody* is most frequent among men at age 35–44. As Table 9 depicts, the use of this intensifier differs between men and women in different age groups. However, merely the speaker sex differences at ages 25–34 ($p < 0.05$) and 35–44 ($p < 0.01$) are statistically significant. The other variation between the sexes could occur due to random chance, which is why it is possible to conclude that men use *bloody* more than women only at these ages. As for *absolutely*, the differences between the male and female speakers are statistically significant merely in the age group 45–59 ($p < 0.01$), which indicates that men have a higher frequency than women in the use of this intensifier at this age. When it comes to *dead* and *extremely*, the differences between the speakers in the age groups are not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). As for *completely* and *totally*, men prefer them more than women do at the age of 25–34 ($p < 0.05$ for *completely*) and 45–59 ($p < 0.05$ for *totally*).

To be able to compare the 1994 results to the 2014 results, the above examination is also conducted in the core set of the Spoken BNC2014. When examining the results, the high frequency intensifiers are emphasized, as well as those intensifiers that showed a statistically significant difference between the male and the female speakers in the 2014 results in section 5.2.

As Table 10 depicts, women have a higher frequency than men when it comes to six intensifiers, whereas men have a higher frequency than women in the use of four intensifiers. A clearer distribution of the results is shown in Table 10 below. The gray color indicates most frequent use of the intensifier.

Table 10. The distribution of the results according to the sex and age of the speaker in the core set of the Spoken BNC2014 (raw frequency / normalized frequency)

	0-14		15-24		25-34		35-44		45-59		60+	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
<i>really</i>	246 / 1,796.25	558 / 3,294.31	810 / 1,284.83	2,027 / 2,231.11	688 / 1,623.23	1,131 / 3,016.93	214 / 718.72	1,111 / 1,434.59	240 / 529.65	995 / 958.03	359 / 582.77	284 / 822.36
<i>very</i>	173 / 1,263.22	152 / 897.37	685 / 1,086.55	702 / 772.69	279 / 658.26	338 / 901.61	286 / 960.53	1,441 / 1,860.71	391 / 862.89	1,129 / 1,087.05	681 / 1,105.48	603 / 1,746.06
<i>so</i>	110 / 803.20	326 / 1,924.63	572 / 907.31	1,673 / 1,841.46	270 / 637.02	623 / 1,661.85	141 / 473.55	635 / 819.95	130 / 286.89	733 / 705.77	275 / 446.41	196 / 567.54
<i>pretty</i>	49 / 357.79	14 / 82.65	241 / 382.28	137 / 150.80	178 / 419.96	88 / 234.74	77 / 258.60	151 / 194.98	57 / 125.79	82 / 78.95	93 / 150.97	26 / 75.29
<i>absolutely</i>	2 / 14.60	3 / 17.71	36 / 57.10	44 / 48.43	32 / 75.50	28 / 74.69	10 / 33.58	56 / 72.31	31 / 68.41	94 / 90.51	69 / 112.01	64 / 185.32
<i>completely</i>	8 / 58.41	6 / 35.42	36 / 57.10	64 / 70.44	14 / 33.03	41 / 109.37	17 / 57.09	72 / 92.97	17 / 37.52	46 / 44.29	13 / 21.10	13 / 37.64
<i>totally</i>	0 / 0.00	2 / 11.81	16 / 25.38	12 / 13.21	3 / 7.08	19 / 50.68	5 / 16.79	18 / 23.24	19 / 41.93	15 / 14.44	34 / 55.19	11 / 31.85
<i>dead</i>	0 / 0.00	0 / 0.00	10 / 15.86	41 / 45.13	14 / 33.03	5 / 13.34	3 / 10.08	9 / 11.62	5 / 11.03	14 / 13.48	7 / 11.36	5 / 14.48
<i>bloody</i>	2 / 14.60	0 / 0.00	3 / 4.76	6 / 6.60	5 / 11.80	4 / 10.67	2 / 6.72	24 / 30.99	6 / 13.24	13 / 12.52	20 / 32.47	4 / 11.58
<i>extremely</i>	5 / 36.51	0 / 0.00	9 / 14.28	8 / 8.81	2 / 4.72	3 / 8.00	11 / 36.94	12 / 15.50	5 / 11.03	3 / 2.89	4 / 6.49	11 / 31.85

Women using six intensifiers, namely *really*, *very*, *so*, *absolutely*, *completely* and *dead*, more than men was also discovered in Table 4 when examining the differences between the two sexes in the 2014 data (see section 5.2). As for men, the use of *pretty*, *totally*, *bloody* and *extremely* was more frequent, as can also be seen in Table 10 above. However, it was found that the speaker sex differences in the uses of *really*, *very*, *so*, *pretty*, *completely* and *totally* were statistically significant in the 2014 data.

Beginning the analysis with *really*, it is clearly used more frequently by female speakers in all the age groups. The differences between male and female speakers are also statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) in every age group, so it is possible to conclude that women in all age groups use *really* more than men. This differs from the 1994 results, as the differences between men and women in the use of *really* were statistically significant only in two age groups. Thus, the popularity of *really* among women was visible already in 1994, but it becomes much more significant as we move towards 2014. When it comes to the frequencies of *really* inside the female sex category, the results depict that *really* is used most frequently by women at age 0–14. This was also found when analyzing the results according to the age of the speaker in Table 7 (see section 5.3). In order to be certain of this result, the statistical significances need to be examined. The differences in the female frequencies between the age groups are statistically significant for every age group but 0–14 and 25–34. *Really* is also extremely frequent in the age group 25–34, so it is not possible to draw the conclusion as to which of these two groups uses *really* more frequently in reality. In comparison to the 1994 results, *really* was used most frequently by women at age 15–24. The 2014 results depict, however, that women at ages 0–14 and 25–34 use it most frequently in 2014. Tagliamonte (2008, 383) reports a clear increase in the use of *really* from older speakers to younger speakers. This can also be detected in

the present study. Moreover, she (ibid.) mentions that women's use of *really* exceeds that of men the most at ages < 13, 17–19 and 20–29. In the present study, however, it can be concluded that women use *really* more than men at all ages. Therefore, the findings are partially in line with each other.

The use of *very* varies much more between the female and male speakers in different age groups than the use of *really*. As Table 10 illustrates, the use of *very* is more frequent in the speech of men at ages 0–14 and 15–24, whereas women use it more at ages 25–34, 35–44, 45–59 and 60+. This suggests that women use *very* proportionally more than men in 2014, which differs from the 1994 results. The differences between the male and female speakers are statistically significant in every age group ($p < 0.01$ in the age group 0–14, $p < 0.001$ in the other age groups), which indicates that both men and women can use *very* more frequently than the other sex at certain ages. The results being statistically significant also suggests that women use *very* more frequently than men in more age groups, which is an evidence of women favoring this intensifier more in comparison to men. This result differs from the 1994 results where it was discovered that women use *very* more at age 35–44 and men at age 44–59. Now, men use it more frequently than women at much younger ages, whereas women prefer it at older ages. These results correspond partially to what Tagliamonte (2008) reports on the use of *very* in Canadian English. According to her (2008, 383), women at ages 40–60+ use *very* more than men, but there is minimal to no difference between the speaker sexes at younger ages. The results of the study at present show similar tendencies when it comes to the older age groups, but the results differ in the younger age groups as men are clearly more inclined to use *very* than women.

The intensifier *so* is more frequently used by female speakers in every age group. The differences between men and women are statistically significant in each age group ($p < 0.05$ in 60+, $p < 0.001$ in the other age groups). Thus, it is possible to conclude that women use *so* more frequently than men at all ages in 2014. This result is also similar to what was found when examining the 1994 data. When looking at the female frequencies in the use of *so*, the results show that *so* is used most frequently at age 0–14. The use of *so* decreases systematically towards the older age groups. *So* is also very frequent in the age groups 15–24 and 25–34, which is why the differences need to be examined more thoroughly. The chi-squared test results show that the frequency difference between the age groups 0–14 and 15–24 does not reach statistical significance ($p > 0.05$). When it comes to the age groups 0–14 versus 25–34 and 15–24 versus 25–34, the frequency differences show a statistical significance ($p < 0.05$). As for the other age group combinations, the results are also statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). This way, it is possible to come to the conclusion that the female frequency differences between the two youngest age groups may be due to random variation in the sample, whereas the differences between the younger and older age groups in general may have to do with actual differences in language use. The results suggest, thus, that *so* is preferred by younger females, which was also the case in the 1994 data. This is also in line with what has been detected in previous findings on intensifier use (see e.g. Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005; Tagliamonte 2008). Tagliamonte (2008, 383) states that women at ages 13–29 are leaders in the use of *so*. The findings in the present study suggest the same.

As can be seen in Table 10, men have a higher frequency in the use of *pretty* than women in every age group. The differences between the two sexes are also statistically significant at all ages ($p < 0.05$ at 35–44, $p < 0.01$ at 45–59 and 60+, $p < 0.001$ in the

other age groups). This differs greatly from the 1994 results, as the differences between men and women were statistically significant merely at age 25–34. This suggests that male speakers have begun to resort to the use of *pretty* more than women at all ages in 2014. As in the 1994 data, also in the 2014 data the use of *pretty* is most frequent among men in the age group 25–34. In the 1994 data, however, this result was not statistically significant, and it was not possible to conclude that men used *pretty* the most at this particular age. In the 2014 data, the situation is slightly different. The differences between the three youngest age groups (0–34) are not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), which suggests that the visible variation between these age groups may occur due to random chance in the sample. The differences between the three younger age groups and the three older age groups are, on the other hand, statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). Therefore, it could be possible to conclude that the use of *pretty* is most frequent among men at age 0–34. This is also in line with Tagliamonte’s (2008, 383) findings. She (*ibid.*) reports that men, especially at younger ages, are leading the use of *pretty* in Canadian English. In the light of the results in the present study, the phenomenon seems to occur in British English as well. In addition, Núñez-Pertejo and Palacios-Martínez (2018) found that *pretty* could be associated with adult speakers, which is here supported by *pretty* being very popular in the age group 25–34.

The use of *absolutely* and *completely* was found to be more frequent in the speech of women in 2014 (see Table 4 in section 5.2). In contrast, the use of *totally* and *extremely* was more frequent among male speakers. Of these four intensifiers, the differences between the male and female sexes were statistically significant for *completely* and *totally*, which suggested that the results concerning these two intensifiers were unlikely to have occurred by random chance. As Table 10 above depicts, *absolutely* and *completely* are

most frequently used among women at ages 60+ and 25–34, respectively. The differences between the male and female speakers are statistically significant in both cases ($p < 0.01$). In addition, the chi-squared test shows that also the speaker sex difference for *absolutely* is statistically significant at age 35–44 ($p < 0.05$). These findings suggest that women prefer *absolutely* and *completely* more than men at these ages. This differs greatly from what was discovered in the 1994 data, as men were found to use both *absolutely* and *completely* more than women at certain ages (see Table 9 in this section). Now females seem to lead the intensifier use concerning these intensifiers.

As for *totally* and *extremely*, both were found to be more frequent in male speech in the 2014 results (see Table 4 in section 5.2). When examining the speaker sex and speaker age categories simultaneously in Table 10, it is possible to detect similar tendencies. The most frequent use of *totally* occurs among men at age 60+, which is also statistically significant ($p < 0.01$), the age group 45–59 excluded. This finding suggests that the use of *totally* is most frequent among men at ages 45–59 and 60+ when examining the male speaker category alone. However, the speaker sex difference for *totally* is not statistically significant in the age group 60+ ($p > 0.05$). Instead, the chi-squared test indicates that the speaker sex differences are statistically significant at age 25–34 ($p < 0.001$), when women use it more, and at age 45–59 ($p < 0.01$) when men's usage is more frequent. In the 1994 data (see Table 9 in this section), it was discovered that men use *totally* more than women at age 45–59, which still continues in the 2014 data. As for the use of *extremely*, it is most frequent in the speech of men at age 35–44. This frequency difference is also statistically significant between every age group but 0–14. Therefore, it could be possible to conclude that men use *extremely* the most at ages 0–14 and 35–44. When it

comes to the differences between the speaker sexes, men's higher frequency is statistically significant at ages 0–14 ($p < 0.05$), 35–44 ($p < 0.05$) and 45–59 ($p < 0.05$). Women, on the other hand, use *extremely* more frequently than men at age 60+ ($p < 0.01$).

The intensifiers *dead* and *bloody* suffered a great decrease in their use when comparing the 1994 and 2014 overall results (see Table 2 in section 5.1). It was discovered that men use *bloody* more than women both in 1994 and 2014 (see Tables 3 and 4 in section 5.2) but that the differences were not statistically significant in either data set. However, the simultaneous speaker sex and speaker age categorization showed that men use *bloody* more than women at age 25–44 in the 1994 data (see Table 9 in this section). In the 2014 data, the use of *bloody* is most frequent among men at age 60+. This variation inside the male sex category is also statistically significant between the age groups ($p < 0.05$), 0–14 excluded. Therefore, it can be concluded that men at age 60+ use *bloody* most in their speech if the youngest age group is not taken into account. The differences between the male and the female speakers are also statistically significant in the age groups 35–44 and 60+ ($p < 0.05$), which suggests that men's use of *bloody* is more frequent than that of women at these ages.

When it comes to *dead*, the results obtained in Tables 3 and 4 (see section 5.2) show that men have a higher frequency in the use of *dead* in the 1994 data, whereas women use it more frequently in the 2014 data. However, these results were not statistically significant. While it is not possible to conclude which sex uses *dead* more frequently in general, the simultaneous sex and age categorization provides greater details in the use of this intensifier. As can be seen in Table 10, the use of *dead* is most frequent among women at age 15–24, which is also statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). This also depicts a change

between the 1994 and 2014 data, as the variation between the speaker sexes was not statistically significant at any age in 1994. Now, it is possible to come to the conclusion that women resort to *dead* more than men do at this age.

6 Discussion of the Results

In this chapter, the corpus findings are summarized and discussed. The corpus analysis revealed interesting changes in the use of the examined intensifiers. Ten intensifiers, namely *very*, *really*, *so*, *absolutely*, *pretty*, *extremely*, *totally*, *completely*, *dead*, and *bloody*, were analyzed in the Spoken BNC1994DS and in the core set of the Spoken BNC2014. Overall, the results suggest that the intensifier use is more frequent in 2014 than in 1994. In other words, the results depict a clear increase in the use of the intensifiers across time. As the two corpora have been compiled to be comparable, it is unlikely that the increase would be due to differences in the composition of the two corpora (Fuchs 2017, 360). Therefore, Fuchs (2017, 360) suggests that the overall increase in the 2014 data could be due to a rise in the use of informal language in Great Britain. This could also explain the general rise in the present study. Moreover, women are using intensifiers more frequently than men both in 1994 and in 2014. Women intensifying language more than men has been noted in a number of previous studies (see e.g. Jespersen 1922; Lakoff 1973; Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005; Yaguchi et al. 2010; Hessner & Gawlitzek 2017; Fuchs 2017). When it comes to intensifier use at different ages, the results suggest that younger speakers both in 1994 and 2014 intensify language more than older speakers. This finding is in line with several previous studies (see e.g. Xiao & Tao 2007; Fuchs 2017).

Turning to the analysis of the individual intensifiers, the results show great changes in their use. *Very* is the most frequent intensifier in the speech of both men and women in 1994. In 2014, however, it is found in the second place. This pattern is also visible in both male and female speech. Women use *very* more than men both in 1994 and 2014, but the difference reaches statistical significance merely in 2014. Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005) report that *very* is used almost equally by men and women, which is in line with the 1994 results in the present study. However, Tagliamonte (2007) and Fuchs (2017) state that *very* is found more frequently in the speech of women, which is consistent with the 2014 results in this study. However, the chi-squared test implicates that women use *very* more frequently than men at age 35–44 and men use it more than women at age 44–59. In 2014, men use *very* more frequently at much younger ages, whereas women prefer it at older ages. According to Tagliamonte (2008), women at age 40–60+ use *very* more frequently than men, which is in line with the result obtained in this study. When it comes to speaker age, the results suggest that *very* is used most frequently among older speakers both in 1994 and 2014. It is the most frequent intensifier in the four oldest age groups in 1994, but in 2014, *very* is the most frequent intensifier merely at age 60+. This suggests that Britons might have begun to prefer other intensifiers over *very*. The preference of *very* in the older age groups and its secondary role in the younger age groups is consistent with previous findings (see e.g. Ito & Tagliamonte 2003; Barnfield & Buchstaller 2010; Palacios-Martínez & Núñez-Pertejo 2012).

The use of *really* in the corpora is particularly interesting. In 1994, it is found in the position of the third most frequently used intensifier. Towards 2014, however, *really* experiences a great increase in its use and is clearly the most frequently used intensifier in 2014. *Very* giving way to *really* has also been found in a number of previous studies (see

e.g. Ito & Tagliamonte 2003; Barnfield & Buchstaller 2010; Fuchs 2017). Female speakers resort to *really* more often than male speakers both in 1994 and 2014. In 1994, it can be concluded that women use *really* more than men at ages 15–24 and 60+. In 2014, women’s use of *really* exceeds that of men in every age group. Thus, women’s preference for *really* is visible already in 1994, but it is much more significant in 2014. Women’s higher frequency in the use of *really* has been noted in several previous studies (see e.g. Ito & Tagliamonte; Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005), which are in line with the present study. Moreover, *really* is preferred the most in younger age groups, which has also been found in previous research (see e.g. Lorenz 2002; Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005; Tagliamonte 2008; Palacios-Martínez & Núñez-Pertejo 2012; Hessner & Gawlitzek 2017).

Even though *so* drops from the position of the second most used intensifier in 1994 to the third most used intensifier in 2014, its increased usage is still noticeable towards 2014. However, the growth is slow in Great Britain in comparison to North America (see e.g. Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005 and Tagliamonte 2008). The use of *so* is more frequent in female speech both in 1994 and 2014. This is also the case in every age group, which suggests that the use does not change remarkably during the twenty-year time period. While *so* is found to be most frequent at age 0–14 in 1994, its most frequent use shifts to the age group 15–24 in 2014. Among women, the use of *so* drops systematically towards the older age groups. These results indicate that *so* is most frequent among young female speakers. Similar results have also been found earlier (see e.g. Lakoff 1973; Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005; Tagliamonte 2008; Palacios-Martínez & Núñez-Pertejo 2012).

Pretty rises from the sixth most used intensifier to the fourth most used intensifier during the twenty-year time period. Tagliamonte (2008, 369) mentions that *pretty* is competing with *so* and *very* in Canadian English. This phenomenon cannot be detected in

British English in the present study. Indeed, Tagliamonte (2008, 370) considers the popularity of *pretty* “a North American phenomenon”, which is also evident in the results of the present study. The use of *pretty* is more frequent in male speech both in 1994 and 2014, which has also been found in previous research (see e.g. Tagliamonte 2008; Hessner & Gawlitzek 2017). During the twenty years between the corpora, men have clearly begun to include *pretty* more in their speech, as it is more frequently used by men at all ages in 2014. When it comes to the speaker age, the most frequent use of *pretty* shifts from the age group 15–24 to the age group 25–34 during the twenty years. Thus, it is possible to conclude that *pretty* is preferred among young adults and adults. These results are in line with previous findings, as *pretty* has been found largely among adult speakers (see e.g. Núñez-Pertejo & Palacios-Martínez 2018). However, Tagliamonte (2016b) reports a high frequency in the use of *pretty* also among teenagers and children at age 8–14, which can also be seen in the 1994 results in this study. In addition, Tagliamonte (2016b) found that *pretty* surpassed *very* in the speech of teenagers, but this cannot be seen in the present study.

Very, *really*, *so* and *pretty* are the most frequently used intensifiers in the present study. Their frequencies have caught the attention of various scholars before. *Really* has been understood to be popular due to its long history, as it has been widely used as early as in the 1850s (Hessner & Gawlitzek 2017, 421; Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005, 288). Furthermore, Méndez-Naya (2008) states that *really* has become significantly more popular since the late 1990s. This may explain its popularity in the 2014 data. *Very* and *pretty*, on the other hand, have been popular since the Early Modern English times and are both very versatile, which might affect their popularity (Hessner & Gawlitzek 2017, 421). Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005) found that *very* gave way to *really*, which, in turn, began

to give way to *so* in American English. Future research will have to show whether this is also going to happen in British English. *So* is more popular than *really* at age 15–44 in the 2014 age-specific results in the present study, which certainly points to a change in its use compared to the 1994 results. Furthermore, Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010) and Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005) suggest that the popularity of *really* among Britons has been influenced by American English, which gives evidence to believe that the same might happen to *so* in the future.

Unlike the other intensifiers examined, *bloody* and *dead* suffer a great decrease in their use during the twenty years between the corpora. The significant increase in the uses of *really*, *very*, *so* and *pretty* could possibly explain the decrease in the use of some other low-frequency intensifiers. Similar patterns can be seen in Macaulay's (2006) and Barnfield and Buchstaller's (2010) studies where the use of *dead* suddenly drops due to the high frequency of another intensifier. However, this phenomenon cannot be detected when it comes to the four remaining low-frequency intensifiers, namely *absolutely*, *completely*, *totally* and *extremely*. The use of these four intensifiers increases in frequency towards 2014, but the changes do not reach statistical significance, which is why it is not possible to draw clear conclusions as to how the frequencies of these intensifiers actually change during the twenty years.

Despite the decrease of *bloody*, its use remains consistent during the twenty years: it is preferred by speakers over 35 years, and it cannot be found in the speech of children. In fact, *bloody* is most frequent at age 35–44 in 1994, whereas it is most frequent at age 60+ in 2014. Similar pattern can also be found with *absolutely*. There is approximately twenty years between these two age groups, so these results suggest that the speakers might have taken the use of *bloody* and *absolutely* with them as they age, which is also

shown by the frequencies in the age groups between the two corpora. Similarly, the most frequent use of *pretty*, *totally*, *completely* and *extremely* occurs at an older age in 2014 in comparison to 1994. This points to a pattern where younger speakers might adopt new intensifiers into their language use, whereas older speakers resort to the existing ones as they age. Since the present study only focuses on the ten intensifiers and does not investigate any newcomers, however, it is not possible to generalize this pattern.

Regardless of the low-frequency intensifiers being somewhat challenging to analyze or the results not being statistically significant enough to generalize, the results show similar tendencies as have been found in previous research. According to Palacios-Martínez and Núñez-Pertejo (2012, 791) adults prefer the use of intensifiers such as *absolutely*, *completely*, *totally* and *extremely*. These intensifiers are not found as often among younger speakers perhaps due to the fact that different *-ly* intensifiers are often connected to more literary language and would sound odd in the spontaneous speech of teenagers (Palacios-Martínez & Núñez-Pertejo 2012, 792). In the present study, it is possible to see similar patterns in the use of these intensifiers in the 2014 data.

The size of the two corpora is a matter that needs to be addressed in the present study. First, the total word counts are not the same in both corpora. No two corpora can be exactly identical (Fuchs 2017, 360), but a larger word count can still provide a more reliable source for examining a language phenomenon. In the present study, the core set of the Spoken BNC2014 contains approximately 2.5 million words more than the Spoken BNC1994DS. Therefore, it could be argued that the 2014 data set might give a slightly more reliable picture of the intensifier use in Great Britain. Second, the age-specific word counts differ to a great extent: in the Spoken BNC1994DS, for example, the number of the total words in the age group 45–59 is twice as large as that of the age group 0–14. In

addition, the age group 15–24 includes over a million words more than the age group 0–14 in the core set of the Spoken BNC2014. These differences need to be considered when interpreting the findings, as one age group can be more represented than the other one. However, the normalized frequencies and the chi-squared test increase the reliability of the results in the present study. In order to obtain even more detailed results of the intensifier use in Great Britain, one could perhaps resort to somewhat larger corpora or compare the results between several different corpora focusing on British English.

The present approach includes another limitation that needs to be discussed. The present study looks at gender as a binary variable. In reality, however, it is possible that individuals see themselves in various other ways that cannot be categorized into two distinctive groups. This might also affect their language use. In addition, Biber and Burges (2000, 23) state that it is essential to take the sex of the addressee into account as well, as same-sex conversations can differ greatly from cross-sex conversations. However, the two corpora used do not provide such information (Fuchs 2017, 365), which is why these factors could not be considered in the present study. On the other hand, using this approach gives the opportunity for others to replicate this distinction in other studies and compare the results.

7 Conclusion

This thesis has investigated the use of ten intensifiers, namely *very*, *really*, *so*, *absolutely*, *pretty*, *extremely*, *totally*, *completely*, *dead* and *bloody*, and their change in the British National Corpora 1994 and 2014. The purpose of the thesis was to examine how the frequencies of the ten selected intensifiers change from 1994 to 2014 and how the use of

these intensifiers changes in the speech of men and women and in different age groups during 1994–2014. In addition, this thesis has aimed at discovering how the findings correspond with the previous research on intensifier use. The thesis has looked into the use of these intensifiers in the spontaneous, informal speech of Britons.

The overall frequency comparisons show that British English speakers generally use these intensifiers more frequently in 2014, with a few exceptions. This points to a rise in the use of informal language in Great Britain, as has been noted in previous research (see e.g. Fuchs 2017). The use of all the intensifiers, except for *bloody* and *dead*, increases during the twenty years between the corpora. *Very*, *really* and *so* are the most frequently used intensifiers in both data sets, but the use of these three intensifiers changes noticeably during 1994–2014. *Very* holds the first place in 1994, but as we move towards 2014, *very* gives way to *really*, which shifts from the position of the third most frequently used intensifier in 1994 to the most frequently used intensifier in 2014.

Women can be seen leading the change from the use of *very* to the use of *really*, as *really* is clearly more frequent in female speech. Women being the leaders in the changes that occur in intensifier use has been noted in previous research (see e.g. Jespersen 1922; Ito & Tagliamonte 2003; Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005; Tagliamonte 2008; Barnfield & Buchstaller 2010; Murphy 2010). Overall, the results depict that women intensify language more than men both in 1994 and 2014. Naturally, there are also differences between individual intensifiers. Women use *really*, *so* and *very* more frequently than men both in 1994 and 2014, although the more frequent use of *very* is found to reach statistical significance merely in 2014. *Pretty*, on the other hand, is more frequent in male speech both in 1994 and 2014. As *very*, *really* and *so* together comprise over 80% of the intensifier use for both men and women in 1994 and 2014, the remaining intensifiers are often left with

lower frequencies that do not reach statistical significance. It is, therefore, challenging to make broad generalizations of the use of all the selected intensifiers.

In 1994, the use of these intensifiers is most frequent at age 15–24, which changes towards 2014 where 0–14-year-old speakers intensify language the most. Consequently, younger speakers intensify language more than older speakers in both corpora. This phenomenon has been addressed in previous studies as well (see e.g. Xiao & Tao 2007; Fuchs 2017). When it comes to the different age groups, another interesting pattern can be discovered. The most frequent use of *bloody*, *absolutely*, *pretty*, *totally*, *completely* and *extremely* occurs at an older age in 2014 in comparison to 1994, which suggests that the speakers may have taken the use of these intensifiers with them as they age. Younger speakers, on the other hand, might adopt new intensifiers into their language use.

Suggestions for further research can also be done on the basis of this thesis. First, more sociolinguistic variables, such as social class, education or dialect, could be considered in addition to gender and age. This way, it would be possible to obtain even more comprehensive results on intensifier use. Another interesting aspect would be to investigate whether British English encounters a similar rise in the use of *so* as has been found in, for example, American English. This way, we could perhaps determine whether Britons follow the patterns first introduced by Americans. Second, these ten intensifiers could be examined in other registers as well, such as written language. In addition, it would be interesting to learn which intensifiers are preferred in written registers in comparison to spoken registers. Third, a similar study on the changes between two corpora could be conducted in other English varieties to see if they follow similar tendencies in intensifier use.

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