

***This is so cool!* – A Comparative Corpus Study on
Intensifiers in British and American English**

Sara Romero
University of Tampere
School of Language, Translation and Literary Studies
English Philology
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Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma tutkii kahden englanninkielisen varieteetin välisiä eroja vahvistussanojen käytössä. Tarkoituksena on selvittää vahvistussanojen käyttöä amerikan- ja brittienglannissa ja selittää niiden välisiä käyttöeroja. Lisäksi tutkimus tarkastelee sosiolingvististen tekijöiden kuten iän ja sukupuolen vaikutusta vahvistussanojen yleisyyteen ja esiintyvyyteen eri ikäryhmien ja sukupuolten välillä molemmissa varieteeteissa.

Tutkielman teoreettinen viitekehys tukeutuu aiempaan tutkimukseen vahvistussanojen käytöstä eri varieteeteissa, sekä sosiolingvististen tutkimusaineistoon eri ikäryhmien kielenkäytön ja sukupuolierojen näkökulmasta. Aiempien tutkimustulosten perusteella voidaan olettaa varieteettivaihteluiden sekä ikä- ja sukupuolivariaation olevan suurta vahvistussanojen käytössä. Vahvistussanojen vaihtuvuus on englannin kielessä ripeää, joten tutkimalla suosiossa olevien sanojen yleisyyttä puhutun kielen korpuksissa voidaan päästä käsiksi kielen muutokseen sukupolvien välillä.

Tutkimuksessa selvisi, että varieteettien välinen vaihtuvuus on suhteellisen suurta. Amerikanenglanti suosii eri vahvistussanoja kuin brittienglanti. Etenkin amerikanenglanti osoitti voimakkaan eron sukupolvien välillä, sillä nuoret kielenkäyttäjät suosivat vahvistussanoja huomattavasti vanhempia puhujia enemmän. Sama pätee sukupuolten väliseen eroon; naiset käyttävät vahvistussanoja selvästi miehiä enemmän. Brittienglannissa sukupuolten väliset erot olivat samansuuntaisia, mutta ikäryhmien erot eivät noudattaneet samaa kaavaa. Tutkimus osoitti myös, että tarkastelemalla puhujan valitsemia vahvistussanoja ja niiden esiintymistiheyttä voidaan tehdä johtopäätöksiä puhujan sukupuolesta ja iästä, sillä sanojen käyttö on vahva indikaattori näistä tekijöistä. Vanhempien puhujien käyttämä konservatiivisempi kieli rajoittaa valintaa vahvistussanojen välillä, minkä takia *very* osoitti suurta suosiota näiden puhujien kesken. Vastaavasti nuoret puhujat suosivat uudempia vahvistussanoja, ja käyttivät niitä huomattavasti useammin. Tämä tutkimustulos selkeästi osoittaa, että ikä on merkittävä tekijä vahvistussanojen käytössä.

Tämä vertaileva korpustutkimus on yksi harvoista toteutetuista vastaavista tutkimuksista, sillä korpuksien samanaikaisuus mahdollisti varieteettien keskinäisen vertailun. Jatkotutkimuksiin tarjoutuu useita mahdollisuuksia, etenkin uusien, laajempien korpuksien valmistuessa, jolloin vastaavanlaisella tutkimuksella voidaan nähdä mihin tämänhetkinen kehityssuunta on kutakin varieteettia viemässä. Lisätutkimus osoittaisi myös, miten eri ikäluokat käyttävät vahvistussanoja vanhetessaan. Lisäksi mahdollinen tutkimussuunta on yksittäisten, vastikään suosiota saamien vahvistussanojen, kuten *real* ja *pretty*, tarkempi tarkastelu.

Avainsanat: vahvistussanat, korpuslingvistiikka, ikä, sukupuoli, varieteettierot

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1. Introduction

We can find various examples of adverbs of degree that intensify meaning in English. These adverbs, better known as intensifiers, used mainly to either “boost” or “maximize” a word and its meaning, are frequently employed in the English language (Quirk et al. 1985:590-1). Intensifiers have been the focus of intensive study over the past years due to their capacity to change rather rapidly, as well as offer information on linguistic developments and change (see e.g. Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010), Méndez-Naya (2008), Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005), Lorenz (2002), Stenström (2000), Peters (1994)).

Tagliamonte (2008:362) states that the reason why intensification is so popular and provides researchers with an opportunity to study linguistic change is three-fold; they are “an ideal choice” because of their

- (i) versatility and color
- (ii) capacity for rapid change
- (iii) recycling of different forms

The use of intensifiers is not only dependent on the popularity of a single item, but also tied to the larger context of how people of different ages and genders speak. Indeed, the study of intensifiers in use provides us with an interesting insight into the internal and external factors that affect which intensifiers we employ in our speech. Previous research has shown that intensifier usage is especially prone to change according to sociolinguistic variables, and therefore the focus of this thesis is on intensifiers and their variation according to gender and age, as well as the differentiation between two varieties of English, namely American and British English. This is a corpus-based, quantitative study with qualitative aspects. The research questions of this study are as follows:

1. Which intensifiers are most employed in spoken British English and American English, and do differences arise between the two varieties?
2. How do gender and age affect the frequency of intensifiers in the corpora? Is the effect of either variable more noticeable?
3. How do gender and age affect the choice of intensifiers in the corpora? Is the effect of either variable more noticeable?

4. What possible reasons are there for the supposed differences in the choice of an intensifier or the frequency?

The aim of this study is to contribute to the field of language variation and change, to see if variation occurs between British and American English and if those differences are variety-dependent or if sociolinguistic factors help explain them. The underlying assumption is that intensification varies based on all of these variables, especially when comparing young vs. older speakers as well as women vs. men.

Due to intensifiers' tendency to fluctuate rather rapidly in a language, the accurate account of each variety is best achieved by looking at language in use, i.e. with the help of a spoken corpus. Here, two corpora will be employed: the *Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English* to represent American English, and the *International Corpus of English – Great Britain* for British English. What makes this interesting for me, and hopefully beneficial for others, is the fact that comparisons between these two varieties have not been made that would date back to the same time period as well as focus on actual spoken language. The reason for choosing a comparative study on two varieties rather than focusing on a single variety lies in the notion that this kind of comparison allows us to see if varieties develop entirely independent of one another in this aspect or if they follow similar trends in their intensification. This way we gain a better view of linguistic change taking place in both varieties and can better assess current trends in contemporary English.

The thesis begins with an overview on the phenomenon of intensification in Chapter 2. This chapter discusses the labeling of various intensifiers, provides a historical trajectory of the development of degree adverbs as well as explains how intensifiers are formed and what kinds of linguistic processes are relevant in this context. Additionally, previous research on British and American uses of intensification is introduced. Chapter 3 offers theoretical background on the extra-linguistic variables of age and gender that affect the use of intensifiers. Chapter 4 explains the methodology used in this study in more detail as well as introduces the two corpora and

concordance tools used, followed by a discussion on the reliability and representativeness of this study. Chapters 5 and 6 present the findings of the searches conducted and provide analysis and discussion of the results. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes this thesis with conclusions drawn from the main findings.

2. Intensifiers

Ito and Tagliamonte (2003:257) have shown that intensifiers have a tendency to evolve rather quickly, and that they form an open class of words that allows for new words to be added relatively easily (Quirk et al. 1985:590). One of the main reasons for this process is the fact that degree words become too familiar to the hearer, and hence new, “stronger” words need to be created to fulfill the “speaker’s desire to be original” (Peters 1994:271). Furthermore, as Stoffel (1901:2) points out, “new words are in constant requisition, because the old ones are felt to be inadequate”, which also makes this topic worth researching.

Intensification can occur with a variety of different heads, including finite verbs, adjectives, nouns, participles as well as adverbs, and as such intensifiers comprise a very mixed category (Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010:257). The use of degree words in connection with adjectival heads is, according to many scholars, often the most favored position (Quirk et al. 1972:276; see e.g. Rickford et al. (2007), Macaulay (2002), Bäcklund (1973)). This is also why this study will only consider the adjective premodifying position.

The following sections of this chapter provide information on the theory of intensifiers. I will define the phenomenon grammatically; look at the problem of labeling, delexicalization, and recycling of various intensifiers, as well as account for the historical trajectory of intensifier usage in English. Additionally, the patterns of forming new intensifiers will be discussed as well as the differences in usage between the two varieties of English under scrutiny here.

2.1 Labeling

The definition of an intensifier varies from scholar to scholar, as no unified terminology has widely been accepted. Intensifiers, degree words or degree modifiers, as they are also known as, serve to “convey the degree or the exact value of the quality expressed by the item they modify” (Méndez-Naya 2008:213). Degree adverbs are often divided into two classes – intensives and

downtoners (see e.g. Stoffel (1901)). A number of terms have been used to refer to these linguistic elements by different scholars, and not all differentiate between the two. For instance, Bäcklund (1973:7) calls them “adverbs of degree” and Bolinger (1972:18) uses the term “degree words”.

The word ‘degree’ is often used in connection with this linguistic phenomenon, because this class of words is often said to modify gradable adjectives and to signal different degrees of intensification on an imaginary scale. (Biber et al. 1999:554; Quirk et al. 1985:589). Various books on grammar present somewhat different views on the classification of degree adverbs, which will be discussed below.

Bolinger (1972:17) states that intensifiers can be divided into four classes depending on which part of the scale they occupy; boosters at the high extreme of the scale, as in *terribly*, compromisers at the middle, e.g. *fairly*, diminishers towards the lower part of the scale, e.g. *little* and minimizers that occupy the lowest end of the scale, as in *a bit*.

Both Quirk et al. (1985:567) and Biber et al. (1999:554-5) refer to these elements as adverbs of degree. Both use the term *amplifier* and *downtoner* but Biber et al. also accept the terms *intensifier* and *diminisher*, respectively. Amplifiers “scale upwards from an assumed norm”, whereas downtoners “have a lowering effect, usually scaling downwards from an assumed norm” (Quirk et al. 1985:591). Amplifiers are further divided into *maximizers* (1) which “denote the upper extreme of a scale” and *boosters* (2) which “denote a higher degree” (ibid.).

(1) Maximizers

- a. The photograph I thought was **absolutely** terrible. <ICE-GB:S2A-027 #64:1A>
- b. He wasn't **entirely** happy in this work <ICE-GB:S2A-041 #11:1:A>

(2) Boosters

- c. The old BMW three series was **highly** successful. <ICE-GB:S2A-055 #2:1:A>
- d. That thing was **so** impractical. <SBCSAE 865.541 66.935>

Quirk et al (1985:567) further divide downtoners into four categories of approximators, e.g.

virtually, compromisers, e.g. *kind of*, *rather*, diminishers, e.g. *partly* and minimizers e.g. *hardly*,

barely. They state that downtoners are often used with gradable verbs, which is also why they are not paid much attention to in this study.

Lastly, Huddleston and Pullum's (2002:584, 721-5) view is somewhat more obscure than the other classifications presented here. They suggest that degree adjuncts and degree adverbs, as they call them, can be divided into seven different categories depending on which position they occupy on a similar scale of intensification. From high to low, they are titled maximal e.g. *absolutely*; multal e.g. *deeply*; moderate e.g. *quite, rather*; paucal *a bit*; minimal *scarcely, hardly*; approximating *virtually*; and relative degree modifiers *sufficiently, enough* (ibid.). It is unclear, however, how the last two subgroups are positioned on the scale, since their places are by no means fixed, but rather seen as fluctuating depending on the case.

Certain categories are open to debate, and different scholars disagree on certain aspects of these groupings. Table 1 below provides a summary of the aforementioned classifications, as well as more examples to further clarify this matter.

Author(s)	Terminology	Scaling upwards		Scaling downwards	
Bolinger (1972)	Degree adverbs / Intensifiers	Boosters e.g. <i>She is terribly selfish.</i>	Compromisers e.g. <i>She is fairly happy.</i>	Diminishers e.g. <i>They were little disposed to argue.</i>	Minimizers e.g. <i>He's a bit of an idiot.</i>
Quirk et al. (1985)	Intensifiers	Amplifiers	a. Maximizers e.g. <i>absolutely, altogether, totally</i>	Downtoners	a. Approximators e.g. <i>almost, virtually, practically</i>
			b. Boosters e.g. <i>badly, deeply, highly, so, intensely, really</i>		b. Compromisers e.g. <i>kind of, sort of, quite, rather</i>
					c. Diminishers e.g. <i>quite, somewhat, slightly</i>
					d. Minimizers e.g. <i>barely, hardly, scarcely</i>
Biber et al. (1999)	Degree adverbs / Degree adjuncts	Amplifiers/Intensifiers e.g. <i>more, very, so, too, extremely, awfully, perfectly</i>		Diminishers/Downtoners e.g. <i>less, slightly, somewhat, rather, quite</i>	
Huddleston & Pullum (2002)	Degree adverbs / Degree adjuncts	1) Maximal e.g. <i>absolutely, completely, entirely, fully, perfectly, totally, quite</i> 2) Multal e.g. <i>badly, bitterly, deeply, greatly, immensely, largely, strongly</i> 3) Moderate e.g. <i>moderately, partially, partly, quite, rather</i> 4) Paucal e.g. <i>a bit, a little, little, slightly</i> 5) Minimal e.g. <i>barely, hardly, scarcely</i> 6) Approximating e.g. <i>kind of, sort of, nearly</i> 7) Relative e.g. <i>enough, less/least, more/most</i>			

Table 1. Summary of classifications described in section 2.1.

The problem with intensifiers and their classification is the fact that they can at times be used for both purposes – to both scale something up- and downwards depending on the speaker (Quirk et al. 1985:597). Such difficulties often arise with words such as *quite* and *rather*, which can be used to indicate both functions, depending on the context and interpretation (Quirk et al. 1985:590, 598). Even though these are labeled as downtoners by Biber et al (1999:554) they can also have an amplifying effect. Quirk et al. (1985:567) argue that *quite* can be both a maximizer

and a compromiser. Additionally, they note that the division of degree words into these aforementioned classes can prove very tricky due to the fact that they are used for different effects (Quirk et al. 1972:439). Furthermore, Quirk et al. (1985:590) state that the use of intensifiers can depend on the speaker as well as the speaker's intentions, which makes it harder to analyze degree words in a very straightforward manner.

- (3) And this is also true of uhm this uh **quite** famous caricature of Carlo Name's Triumphant Entry into Leadenhall Street. <ICE-GB:S2A-057 #89:2:A>
- (4) In articulatory terms the secondary articulatory resonance of the liquids in these two words is **quite** different. <ICE-GB:S2A-030 #36:1:A>

As can be seen from the above examples, in both cases the intensifier can be used as an amplifier or a downtoner. In (3) *quite* could have an amplifying meaning (similar to the uses of *pretty*), whereas the example (4) could stand for either 'very different' or 'rather different', depending on e.g. intonation and context. It should be borne in mind that these divisions by various scholars are only vague guides that can be used in semantic analysis to differentiate between words, and can vary from one case to another. This ambiguity may be one of the reasons why downtoners are so often ignored in studies (see e.g. Tagliamonte (2008), Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005)). A similar intensifier as *quite* is *pretty*, which can be both a booster and a moderator. However, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) (2012: s.v. *pretty*, adv. 1a.) defines it as “[q]ualifying an adjective or adverb: to a considerable extent; fairly, moderately; rather, quite. In later use also: very”. It seems that *pretty* has more and more gained an amplifying function over the years rather than the opposite.

As was seen above, the scale on which various degree words are placed varies from one scholar to another. Figure 1 presents an overview of the said scale by using the definitions by Quirk et al. (1985) with the example adjective *nervous*. Maximizers are used to show that the state, quality or other characteristic is “present to the maximum degree”, whereas minimizers work in quite the opposite manner (Peters 1994:271). Boosters are stated to be the class which

has the “highest degree of fluctuation”, and are therefore an especially productive class, as they only imply intensification to “a ‘very high’/more than average degree” (ibid.).

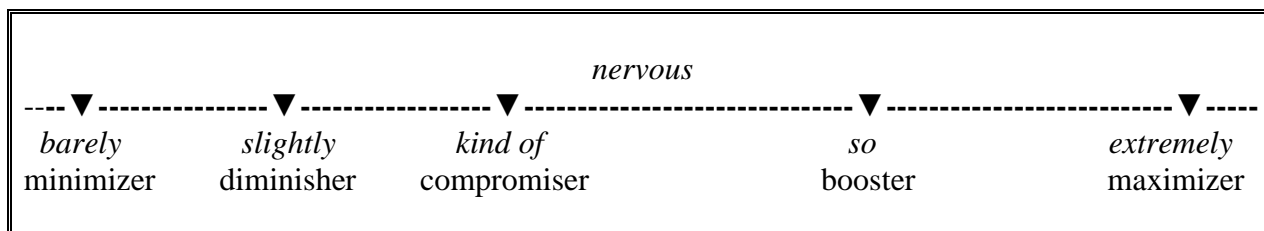


Figure 1. Position of degree words with the adjective *nervous* on an intensifying scale following the definitions of Quirk et al. (1985:589-593, 597-602).

As was described earlier, labeling this linguistic device can be somewhat problematic due to the various views on the topic by different scholars. However, in this thesis, the term *intensifier* is used in its broadest sense to refer to all adverbs of degree without making a distinction between those scaling upwards and those scaling down, unless otherwise specified. When a distinction is made to discuss degree words scaling upwards, the term *amplifier* is used, and for those scaling downwards the term *downtoner* is employed. The subcategories presented above will not be taken into consideration. This is due to the fact that this study does not seek to compare different subdivisions to one another and make distinctions between them (which is at times difficult, if not impossible) but rather looks at the phenomenon to account for its significance in different varieties of English as well as from a sociolinguistic aspect.

2.2 Historical overview

The history of intensifiers has been the focus of various studies over the past decades. A pioneer of intensifier research is Stoffel (1901), whose works are still referred to in this context. The usage of these adverbs has undergone a relatively fast change in popularity, mostly due to the sake of expressivity as noted above. It is important to take a look at the history of intensifiers to see why the current research done in this field is valuable. The current flexibility and frequency of intensifier use have made intensification a significant indicator of linguistic change.

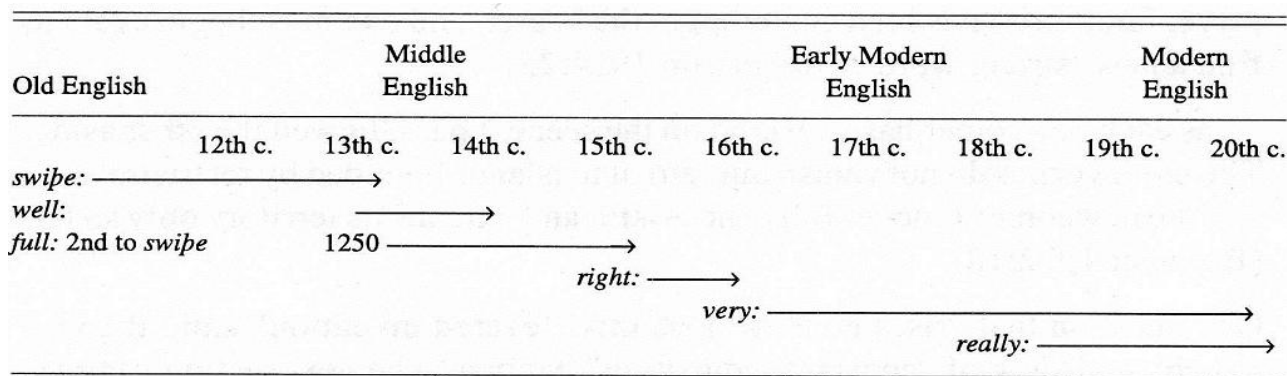


Figure 2. Summary of the shift in popularity of intensifiers in English (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003:260).

Figure 2 presents a summary of popular intensifiers starting from the Old English period in 12th century as described by Ito and Tagliamonte (2003:260). As can be seen, *swiþe* (in example 5) was the most popular intensifier in Old English, but was replaced during the following century by *well* (6) and *full* (7). *Swiþe* originally meant ‘strong’, but later extended its meaning to intensifying ‘extremely’ or ‘very’ (Mustanoja 1960:319-27). *Swiþe*, *well* and *full* were followed by *right* in the 15th century, which was again replaced by *very* (8) and *really* (9). Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010:253) note that *well* and *full* are “minority variants in the system of intensification to this day”, but it is noteworthy that even though new intensifiers may become more popular, the old ones do not necessarily fall entirely out of use. For instance, the use of *well* was recorded in the speech of London teenagers in the late 1990’s (Stenström 2000:180). This reuse and recycling of forms is a reason why Modern English has such a wide array of intensifiers that are “locally idiosyncratic [...] competitors in all contemporary varieties of English” (Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010:254). The following examples are cited in the study by Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005:283) (original sources parenthesized).

(5) Bute a mayden swiþe fayr

‘but a maiden very fair’

[*The Lay of Havelok the Dane*, c. 1280; ed. Walter W. Skeat, 2nd ed., rev. K Sisam (Oxford: Clarendon, 1915), line 111]

(6) Engelond his a wel god lond

‘England is a very good land’

[Robert of Gloucester, *Metrical Chronicle*, 1297; from *Robert of Gloucester’s Chronicle*, ed. Thomas Hearne (Oxford), line 1]

- (7) And Frensh she spak ful faire and fetisshly
 ‘and French she spoke very fairly and prettily’
 [Geoffrey Chaucer, “General Prologue,” *Canterbury Tales*, c. 1386; from *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F.N. Robinson (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), line 124]
- (8) He was a verrey parfit gentil knyght.
 [Geoffrey Chaucer, “General Prologue,” *Canterbury Tales*, c. 1386; from *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F.N. Robinson (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), line 72]
- (9) This last Bill was really frightful.
 [Daniel Defoe, *A journal of the Plague Year*, 1722; repr. as *The History of the Great Plague in London* (London: Noble, 1754), 5]

It has recently been noted that *so* has gained popularity again after the slope of the mid-20th century, as argued by Tagliamonte (2008:391), who noted that it was reported incoming in the early 1900’s and was given new rise again in the 1990’s. Mustanoja (1960:324) claims that the intensifier use of *so* dates back to Old English, and in Middle English it was used in connection with adjectives among others. As will be further discussed in section 2.3, *so* has been gaining popularity especially among young people and females, who are viewed as the leaders of linguistic change (Tagliamonte 2008; Labov 1990:206).

It is indeed clear that intensifier usage has undergone a great deal of changes since Old English. The importance of recycling and renewal become even more apparent when looking at the process longitudinally, but it is not always clear why such changes take place. The aforementioned expressivity surely plays a major role, but tracing the steps back to what else may have triggered the change is not very easy.

2.3 How intensifiers come to be

This section takes a look at how intensifiers are formed in the first place, and how the shift in meaning and function from e.g. an adverb to intensifier takes place. Additionally, the processes of *recycling* and *renewal* are discussed.

2.3.1 Closed and open class of adverbs

Intensifiers can roughly be divided into two categories: the closed and open class of adverbs (Lorenz 2002:144). The closed class comprises of adverbs such as *quite*, *well*, and *very*. New words are relatively hard to add to this class, hence the term ‘closed’ (ibid.). More often than not, this finite class and the intensification function of the words in the class are widely acknowledged, although scholars disagree on their further categorization (cf. section 2.1) (Lorenz 1999:61).

While the closed class is a non-productive set, the open class, as the name implies, is more open to new words, and new intensifiers can be coined “at any time” (Partington 1993:180). Quirk et al. (1985:590) note that the most productive set of intensifiers are amplifiers, and especially boosters. New intensifiers can easily be added to this open class with the help of the {LY}-morpheme; for instance *terrible* > *terribly*, *horrible* > *horribly* (Lorenz 1999:81). Such adverbs usually have an adjectival base. The {LY}-morpheme is highly productive, and according to Nevalainen (2008:291) “it is possible to form adverbs from practically all adjectives by means of the *-ly* suffix”. Other linguistic material can also be applied in the formation of new intensifiers, such as quantifiers and adjectives (Barnfield and Buckstaller 2010:256).

2.3.2 Delexicalization

Although we are able to account for the aforementioned classes of formation, we must consider how the process of this shift in meaning and function takes place. This can be done by looking at the process *delexicalization*, one of the processes of grammaticalization¹. According to Partington (1993:183), “delexicalization can be defined as the reduction of the independent lexical content of a word, or group of words, so that it comes to fulfill a particular function but has no meaning

¹ Some scholars refer to this process only as grammaticalization, not necessarily distinguishing delexicalization as a subprocess (see Méndez-Naya (2008), Hopper and Traugott (2003)). This study uses the term delexicalization due to its popularity among researchers of intensifiers (see Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005), Tagliamonte (2011), Partington (1993), Lorenz (2002)). Grammaticalization is a larger process consisting of several stages (such as delexicalization), but it is still also a continuous process, and it is not always easy to determine at which point on the scale of grammaticalization (or more specifically, delexicalization) an intensifier is.

apart from this to contribute to the phrase in which it occurs”. During this process the word loses its original meaning as it is turned into a word signaling intensification (Tagliamonte and Roberts 2005:284). Delexicalization is a gradual process that may never be complete. Often words work along a continuum with a fully lexical meaning in one end and a fully grammatical one in the other (Lorenz 2002:145). Consequently, not all words undergo full delexicalization. This process is explained in figure 3.

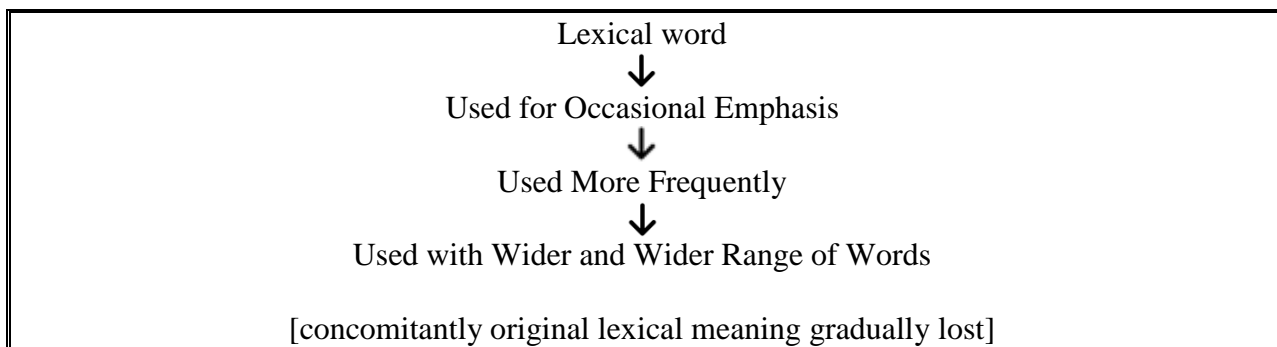


Figure 3. Delexicalization process (Tagliamonte and Roberts 2005:258).

According to Lorenz (2002:146) an example of a full delexicalization process taking place is the word *very* that is no longer used in its historical, modal meaning of “tru(ly), truthful(ly)”, but rather merely to express emphasis. It is also “the most prominent case of grammaticalization”, with a full shift in both function and meaning (idem.145). The intensifier *terribly*, on the other hand, is only partly delexicalized, as it still retains some of its earlier meaning of ‘evoking terror’ as in *terribly frightening*, but can nowadays also be used with other collocations, such as *terribly good* (Peters 1994:270).

Partington (1993:183) states that an indicator of the delexicalization process is the number of collocates; the more words the intensifier collocates with, the more delexicalized an item it is. Hence, new intensifiers should have less collocates, whereas older degree words are used in connection with a wide array of adjectives. Consequently, it can be expected that the frequency of old intensifiers is much higher. Furthermore, Lorenz (2002:144) argues that the context changes along with the semantic change taking place. Another indicator of *very* being delexicalized is the result of Ito and Tagliamonte’s study where *very* collocated widely with various adjective heads

(2003:273). *Very* appears to be free from the restrictions of collocation and is not dependent on “situational context for disambiguation”, which according to Peters (1994:270) further implies the completeness of the process of change. In contrast, some intensifiers are extremely limited in their collocations, a phenomenon known as linguistic fossilization: examples include the word *stone*, as in *stone dead* and *stone cold* (Partington 1993:179-180). Other restrictions include intensifiers’ ability to collocate with various parts of speech: some are limited to adverbs and adjectives, whereas others are used only in connection with verbs (ibid.).

Another way to test an intensifier’s progress on the delexicalization scale is to look at its syntactic function; whether it occupies the attributive (10) or predicative (11) positions, or both (Mustanoja 1960:326-7).

(10) Attributive:

- | | |
|---|----------------------------|
| a. He's um, ... had a real rough year. | <SBCSAE 1305.446 1306.679> |
| b. He had a very distinctive style. | <SBCSAE 606.613 608.517> |

(11) Predicative:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| a. And he's real gentle. | <SBCSAE 1022.203 1023.120> |
| b. He also was very prolific. | <SBCSAE 530.852 533.016> |

Several studies attest to intensifiers preferring the predicative position (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003:272; Tagliamonte 2008:374-5; Macaulay 2006:272; Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010:274-6). Ito and Tagliamonte (2003:271) state that a “higher frequency of use with predicative adjectives over other contexts might reflect an even later development”, which would imply that advanced intensifiers favor the predicative position. Indeed, with the aforementioned *very*, studies have shown it to have progressed from attributive position to predicative over time, giving more boost to its development from an adjective to an adverb, which is said to emphasize its delexicalizational tendency and to have made its modal uses extinct (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003:273). Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010:275-276) tested this hypothesis, and noticed that newer and newly rising variants, such as *proper*, *canny* and *dead*, are used in predicative constructions, whereas older forms are found in both predicative and in attributive positions. The

results are contradictory to Ito and Tagliamonte's findings, and thus Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010:275) suggest further research to see if the usage of predicative constructions with new intensifiers increases as implied by their study.

2.3.3 Renewal and recycling

Other linguistic processes often associated with intensification are *renewal* and *recycling*. Renewal takes place when "existing meanings may take on new forms" (Hopper and Traugott 2003:122). This is generally characterized by coming up with new ways of saying roughly the same things. In order to avoid repetition and increase the expressivity that is one of the reasons why various intensifiers are employed, a large inventory of intensifiers is of help. Renewal is a significant part of intensifier usage, since intensifiers are the focus of "fevered invention and competition that would be hard to come by elsewhere, for their very nature they are unsettled" (Bolinger 1972:18). Méndez-Naya (2003:372) further notes that because intensifiers are used for a markedly emotional function, they are especially inclined to undergo renewal, as their function of boosting decreases over time, due to for instance overuse. This indicates that intensifiers are only used until felt to be inadequate to create a certain kind of impact, and consequently new forms are adopted to place new emphasis on the expression. Hopper and Traugott (2003:122) state that over the past centuries *very* has alternated with e.g. *terribly*, *really*, *pretty*, *surprisingly*, *extremely*, and *highly*, depending on which word was in vogue at the time. Intensifiers are said to provide ample examples of renewal, which is evident in both spoken and written contexts (ibid.). The renewal process of intensifiers occurs relatively frequently, which makes intensifiers extraordinary (ibid.).

Additionally, to argue that it is not only renewal taking place but also recycling I turn to the results of studies conducted in 2008, where it was found that *so* is particularly prone to fluctuation in its popularity (Tagliamonte 2008:391). The intensifier usage of *so* was first recorded in 1853, gained popularity among women in the early 20th century and during the

1990's, and is now again on the rise among Toronto adolescents in 2007, according to Tagliamonte (ibid.). Another similar example is the use of *well* in the 13th century and again among London teenagers in the late 1990's (see section 2.2). It appears that it is possible for intensifiers to go into a hibernation period and eventually resurface.

2.4 Differences in intensifier usage in British and American English

According to Bolinger (1972:19, 21), it is unlikely that an exhaustive list of intensifiers can be created. As argued in section 2.3.1, intensifiers develop almost infinitely, and can be formulated relatively easily from a variety of words. This results in the improbability that any list compiled would be entirely up-to-date. It is clear, however, that some intensifiers are more frequently employed in the English language than others. Variation occurs not just within the choice of an intensifier, but also between different varieties of English. As one of the research aims of this thesis is to look at the differences between British and American English with regard to intensification, it is important to account for other research done in this field.

Various studies have concentrated on finding the most commonly used intensifiers in a given variety of English, but also on seeing what kinds of trends arise in popularity. As was noted in section 2.3, the use of intensifiers has shifted over the past centuries from *right* to *very* to *really*, with *so* quite recently receiving new-found popularity especially among the younger generation. Several scholars have conducted corpus studies to see if such trends in popularity manifest themselves in different corpora, and the findings of some of these studies are discussed below.

Biber et al. (1999) studied the frequency of amplifiers in the *Longman Spoken and Written English Corpus* (LSWE) in the 1990's, the results of which are summarized in table 2².

² Only spoken English results are included here, but the study included written texts as well. Those results were excluded here due to their irrelevance in the light of the research aims of this study.

	<i>so</i>	<i>really</i>	<i>very</i>	<i>pretty</i>
<i>Friends corpus</i>	832 (44.1%)	464 (24.6 %)	269 (14.2 %)	115 (6.1 %)
<i>York English Corpus</i>	96 (10.1 %)	287 (30.2 %)	364 (38.3 %)	30 (3.2 %)

Table 3. Frequency of intensifiers by lexical item in the *Friends* corpus and the *York English Corpus* (adapted from Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005:287) and Ito and Tagliamonte (2003:266)).

Although the results of the *Friends* study are interesting and media language can indeed reflect actual linguistic changes, the study is not without its problems: a scripted comedy series such as *Friends* is not comparable to spontaneous conversation. Despite its shortcomings in this respect, the study offers a view into the 21st century American English, which is, as mentioned, hard to come by elsewhere³. The series took place in 1994-2002 and due to the time frame fitting the corpora used for this study, it provides a reference point, even with its shortcomings.

Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005:296) suggest that the way media uses language is an indicator of how mainstream language use will develop and therefore the popularity of *so* in the *Friends* data indicates it being the new ‘it-word’ for Americans. It should be borne in mind that the findings on television language are not uniform, nor do all studies conform to what Tagliamonte and Roberts suggest (Tagliamonte 2011:41). Barbieri (2008:72-3) further contests the *Friends* study with her own study on American English (carried out by using the LSWE), and calls Tagliamonte and Roberts’ conclusion “premature”. Tagliamonte (2008:371) herself criticizes the study later by mentioning that the speakers are indeed of one age group, namely single adults. Moreover, the television series utilizes “a trendy expressive style”, which may have had an effect on the conspicuousness of *so* (ibid.). Consequently, more research is required in naturally occurring speech in contemporary corpora to see how far along this suggested development is in real life.

The study on the *York English Corpus* complies with other research done in Britain, for instance the study on intensifiers in Tyneside, England by Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010). The longitudinal study looked at changes in intensification across three different corpora, and the

³ For further discussion on American English corpora and difficulties in compiling one, see section 4.1.2.

results show a reversed order of intensifier popularity among the three most common words (*very* – *really* – *so*) both in the 1991-1994 *Phonological Variation and Change in Contemporary Spoken English Project* (PVC) as well as in the 2007-2008 data of the *Newcastle Electronic Corpus of Tyneside English 2* (NECTE2). This further implies that there are differences between AmE and BrE. The oldest of the three corpora, the *Tyneside Linguistic Survey* (TLS), indicates that *so* has indeed gained popularity relatively recently, since in the 1960's the top three consisted of *very* – *really* – *rather* (Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010:263).

The differences in frequencies of usage – or differences in general – between varieties of English are not always easy to explain. All languages are subject to change over time, and as varieties develop in isolation, at least to some extent, they are affected by trends, geography and media among other factors. Essentially, language change is attributed to language innovation, dialect contact and language contact (Trudgill and Hannah 2002:8). Trudgill (2000:147) notes that a new linguistic item may spread to other areas, as long as there are no serious barriers preventing this – either social or geographical. Trudgill (2000:24) further argues that “the greater the geographical distance between two dialects the more dissimilar they are linguistically” – if this is true of dialects within a variety, it should hold true to entirely different varieties of English separated by the Atlantic Ocean.

Social distance and social barriers may be equally important as their geographical counterpart in the spread of linguistic forms (*ibid.*). A linguistic feature does not necessarily spread outside these barriers of social class, age, race and religion, as we will see in the next chapter. Additionally, Trudgill (*ibid.*) states that the social distance between different social groups works in a similar manner as does geographical distance: a feature originating in the highest group may reach the lowest group last. This is much like linguistic innovations spreading from one urban area to the next, until finally reaching rural areas, if at all (Trudgill 2000:148, 150).

3. Extra-linguistic factors

Variation in a language depends greatly on the speaker's extra-linguistic attributes, such as age, ethnic background, social status, and gender. With intensification, such variables seem to be especially important in explaining the differences in usage per speaker (see Macaulay (2002 and 2006), Stoffel (1901), Peters (1994), Paradis (2000)). In the light of this, age and gender are variables that deserve special attention, especially since they are two factors that contribute to the differences in intensifier usage.

3.1 Age

A definite influence on how we speak is our age: people of different ages tend to speak differently, which is especially evident in the speech of teenagers as compared to adults (Stenström 2000:177). Older speakers tend to speak in a more conservative manner, and the conservatism is only increased as the speaker's age increases (Eckert 1997:152). This also explains why young people are more prone to using nonstandard language, swear words and slang (Stenström 2000:177). This may also be partly due to their desire of group identification, which, according to Peters (1994:271), is often signaled by the use of boosters.

Considering this discussion, it is no surprise that studies have shown age to be a factor in intensifier usage as well. Paradis (2000:147) states that adolescents "exaggerate rather than modulate", which also gives us an indication that intensifier usage may be more frequent among younger people, or at least in the use of amplifiers. In Ito and Tagliamonte's study based on the *York English Corpus*, intensifier usage clearly decreased from younger to older (2003:265). Analogous results were obtained in the Toronto data, with the exception of an increase in the age group of 20-29-year-olds (Tagliamonte 2008:367).

Intensifiers have clear stylistic differences, as some, such as *very*, are seen as more neutral, and others, like *real*, *awfully*, *pretty* are seen as more informal than others (Paradis

2000:147). This being the case, informal intensifiers' popularity among adolescents may be due to the youngsters' inclination to using more informal language. Moreover, *very* was the most favored intensifier of over 35-year-olds in studies conducted in York, Toronto and Tyneside, whereas younger people favored *really*, *dead*, and *so* over *very* (Ito and Tagliamonte (2003); Tagliamonte (2008); Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010)).

3.2 Gender

Starting from the mid-18th century, intensifiers have been attributed to female language (see Jespersen (1959)). Lord Chesterfield noted this already in 1754 when he wrote about females and the use of intensifying adverbs: “[n]ot contended with enriching our language by words absolutely new, my fair countrywomen have gone still farther, and improved it by the application and extension of old ones to various and very different significations” (cited in Jespersen 1959:249). The described process of delexicalization took place for instance with the word *vastly*, which was used to describe fine women as “*vastly* obliged, *vastly* offended, *vastly* glad, or *vastly* sorry” (Jespersen 1959:249). Chesterfield himself had heard a woman describe a small box “to be *vastly* pretty because it was so *vastly* little” (ibid.).

Jespersen (ibid.) makes a clear connection between women and intensifiers stating that “the fondness of women for hyperbole will very often lead the fashion with regard to adverbs of intensity”. This is echoed by Stoffel (1901:101) who states that *so* is very frequent especially in feminine speech and characteristic of women due to the fact that “[l]adies are notoriously fond of hyperbole”. Expressions such as “I’m *so* glad you’ve come!” and “The bonnet is *so* lovely!” are “highly characteristic of ladies’ usage” (idem.:102). Furthermore, also children, regardless of gender, are said to employ intensifiers more than men, since they learn their language use from their mothers (ibid.).

Intensifier usage is often considered colloquial and nonstandard (Stoffel 1901:122; Fries 1940:204-6⁴), which is why the popularity of intensification among women is slightly contradictory. According to Trudgill (2000:70), women use standard forms more than men, which does not explain the higher frequency of intensifiers in female speech. However, both Partington (1993:182) and Labov (1984:43) agree that intensifiers convey emphasis and thus it may be expected that women use such expressions more. After all, the female use of intensifiers is said to relate to women's inclination for "emotional" topics (Shuy (2004) quoted in Tagliamonte and Roberts 2005:284).

Despite these general observations on female language, studies lack empirical data. Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005:284) state that since it has never been quantitatively tested to see if women use more of intensifiers in their speech or if they only use the aforementioned emotional speech more, no statistical information and therefore no definite results exist. Regardless of this fact, Labov (1990:206) claims that "[i]n the majority of linguistic changes, women use a higher frequency of the incoming forms than men" and consequently the claims made by Stoffel and Jespersen may very well be accurate.

⁴ Fries uses the term *Vulgar English* to refer to nonstandard intensifiers, such as *so*, *entirely*, *perfectly*, *real*, and *pretty*, among others.

4. Corpora and methods

This chapter presents the methodology that serves as the basis for this thesis. First, I will introduce the topic of *corpus linguistics* and justify my reasons for using corpora in the study. Second, I will present the two corpora that are studied here, and finally discuss in more detail how the searches were conducted and discuss possible problems with this particular method and corpora in general.

4.1 Corpus linguistics

Language is in a constant state of flux. The changes that occur are usage-based, which is why it is often easy to argue why language should be studied in use. Corpus linguistics provides a method to do this, but it is not a field of research on its own, but rather gives the methodological framework for conducting a study. The benefits of using corpus data as opposed to, for instance, observation are numerous. According to Jan Svartvik (1992:8-10, quoted in Lindquist 2009:9-11) the data can be used and thus verified by other scholars, and the data are more objective. On the downside, corpora often contain irrelevant information and mistakes, and cover only certain aspects of a language, completely ignoring other features (*ibid.*). Additionally, Svartvik (*ibid.*) notes that no corpus will ever contain everything that a speaker of a language knows about said language.

As available as electronic corpora these days are, spoken corpora are still harder to come by than written ones. According to Lindquist (2009:11), spoken corpora are under-represented due to technical difficulties and thus they also require more financial resources to complete. This is unfortunate, since people tend to speak more than write, and hence spoken discourse is ideal for studies of linguistic innovations and change (*ibid.*).

4.1.1 The International Corpus of English – Great Britain

One of the two corpora used in this study is the British component of the *International Corpus of English – Great Britain* (henceforth the ICE-GB). The ICE-GB is a part of the ICE project which aims to compile up to 21 one million-word corpora. These national or regional varieties of English include e.g. Philippine, Indian, Jamaican, Singaporean, East African, and Canadian Englishes, in addition to the British variety used in this study. Additionally, Jamaican, Kenyan, South African, Ghanaian, Australian, Nigerian, and Malawian Englishes are in the process of compilation (Nelson et al. 2002:2). The ICE corpora are equal in size, in order to maximize comparability between them. All of the corpora follow a similar structure, which is presented in table 4⁵.

Speech (total length 600,000)	Dialogues (180 texts, 360,000 words)	Private	- direct conversations - distanced conversations	33 %
		Public	- classroom lessons - broadcast discussions - broadcast interviews - parliamentary debates - legal cross-examinations - business transactions	26 %
	Monologues (120 texts, 240,000 words)	Unscripted	- spontaneous commentaries - unscripted speeches - demonstrations - legal presentations	23 %
		Scripted	- broadcast talks - non-broadcast speeches	17 %
Writing (total length 400,000)	Non-printed (50 texts, 100,000 words)	- student untimed essays - student examination essays - social letters - business letters		26 %
	Printed (150 texts, 300,000 words)	- informational (learned, popular and reportage) - instructional - persuasive - creative		75 %

Table 4. The structure of the ICE corpora (adapted from Meyer 2002:35).

⁵ It has been noted that the percentages in table 4 do not add up to a hundred, but rather 99 % (spoken component) and 101 % (written component). The percentages are, however, reproduced as they stand in *English Corpus Linguistics: An Introduction* by Meyer (2002:35), and therefore this discrepancy has been acknowledged here, but not altered.

As can be seen from the table above, the corpus structure is relatively extensive, takes into account several different types of texts and situations and stresses the spoken component. The focus of this study is, however, on the spoken component due to the fact that intensifiers are more common in spoken registers. Although the size of one million words may seem small compared to other, larger corpora such as the *British National Corpus* (BNC), it is adequate for grammatical analyses of different varieties of English, rather than “in-depth lexical studies” (Meyer 2002:33).

The British component was compiled and grammatically analyzed between 1990 and 1998. The texts date from 1990 to 1993. In the analysis of the data in this study, the scripted speech section is excluded in order to ensure the naturalness of speech. The innovative nature of intensification also implies that its use is more frequent in dynamic text types, i.e. spoken, informal contexts among younger speakers (Lorenz 2002:143), which is why the exclusion of scripted material is justified. Additionally, intensifier usage is less frequent in e.g. broadcast talks, and is as such unlikely to produce very many hits. The ICE-GB is not as balanced as I would have hoped at the early stages of conducting my research, but these issues were overcome as much as possible. The representation of each age group and gender is not comparable, but this is taken into consideration in the analysis. This problem is further elaborated on later in Chapter 5.

4.1.2 The Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English

The second corpus is the *Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English* (henceforth the SBCSAE), which is a collection of spoken English across the United States. According to the SBCSAE website⁶, it is a roughly 249,000-word corpus that consists of 60 sets of recorded, naturally occurring spoken interaction. Examples include church sermons, classroom lectures and telephone conversations. The corpus consists of four parts published between the years 2000 and 2005, and was compiled by researchers at the Linguistics Department of the University of California at Santa Barbara in the early 1990's. The corpus forms the main part of the spoken

⁶ The introductory website can be found at <http://www.linguistics.ucsb.edu/research/sbcorpus.html>

component of the *International Corpus of English – USA*, which unfortunately has not been entirely completed yet. To fulfill the requirements of an ICE corpus (see table 4 in section 4.1.1), the SBCSAE has been supplemented with material in order to ensure its representativeness in all genres, but as can be seen, the corpus still lacks in length.

In spite of the SBCSAE's relatively small number of recordings, it is said to widely represent different ethnicities, ages, genders and social standings (see footnote 6). As the corpus is relatively poorly documented, no official information on the balancing of the corpus is, however, available, which is why the representation of such variables may not be equally distributed. This is unfortunate in terms of this study, but the formation of one all-encompassing corpus of American English is unlikely to ever occur. Meyer (2002:51) states that due to the fact that there is such a variety of dialects in the United States, the “attempt to include representative samplings of each of these dialects in the spoken part of a corpus is nothing short of a methodological nightmare”. Nonetheless, the SBCSAE is one of the few available corpora that was applicable for this study in terms of its size and accessibility. The issues in corpus compilation, including how the data was processed to enable as representative results as possible, are further discussed in Chapter 5.

4.2 Discussion on representativeness and breakdown of methods

As regards the representativeness of these two corpora, these problems are acknowledged in the analysis of the data. Both corpora are relatively small in size, which would create issues if I were to try and make broad generalizations of e.g. all dialects spoken in either variety under inspection. However, it is not in the interest of this study to project all obtained findings to apply to all Englishes spoken in America or Britain, but rather to see what trends arise in the use of intensifiers and also if it conforms to what other studies have suggested on the development of intensification. The data for both corpora have been collected in the early 1990's, and thus the

ability to fully compare these two varieties is even more interesting, since the data date to the same period of time.

For lexical studies, it is often preferable to use larger corpora since especially open-class words (such as intensifiers) occur less frequently (Meyer 2002:39-40). However, as intensifiers are mainly a phenomenon of spoken language, the alternatives for corpora for this study were limited from the outset. Spoken English corpora are extremely hard to come by, and thus the SBCSAE and the ICE-GB proved to be the most extensive and suitable for a study this size, even with their limitations. Moreover, several studies have been conducted on smaller data and they have yielded interesting results (see e.g. Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010) and Macaulay (2006)), which supports the choice of the corpora in spite of their obvious shortcomings. As the scripted section of the ICE-GB is excluded, the length is approximately 515,500 words⁷, and the SBCSAE is roughly 249,000. The corpora are not equal in size and thus the frequencies are normalized by 100,000 for ease of comparison in Chapter 5. Although some sections of the SBCSAE are somewhat scripted (e.g. church sermons), they cannot be excluded from the study in a similar manner as with the ICE-GB. This is unfortunate, but such sets of data are unlikely to affect the results of this study, since intensifiers are less common in such contexts and are unlikely to produce many applicable tokens.

Both of these corpora are merely large files of text which cannot be studied as such without the help of appropriate software. The corpora are analyzed by using Wordsmith 5.0 with the SBCSAE, and both Wordsmith 5.0 and ICECUP 3.1. with the ICE-GB, both of which are linguistic concordance tools which provide an efficient way to conduct searches within a corpus. Ideally, such a tool would work in a manner that would provide all and only the applicable tokens of a search, but this is rarely achieved in practice. To evaluate the accuracy of a search Ball (1994:295) discusses two terms: *precision* and *recall*. Precision is defined as “the proportion of

⁷ I arrived at this figure based on the Node Query command {~PAUSE,~PUNC}(leaf) in ICECUP 3.1, which shows the accurate word count for each file separately. The word count for the spoken component of the ICE-GB, excluding scripted sections, is 515,456 words. A similar search was done for each variable and category to find out the total number of words and consequently all frequencies were normalized accordingly.

retrieved material that is relevant” and *recall* as “the proportion of relevant information that was retrieved” (ibid.). Essentially, when undesired tokens arise and the data must be manually sorted, precision is poor. There may also be instances where applicable data are left out of the search whereby recall is decreased.

In order to first acquire the data used in this study, several steps had to be taken. 11 intensifiers were chosen for this study (see figure 4). These were chosen on the basis of their popularity as studied by Biber et al. (1999), Tagliamonte (2008), Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010), Ito and Tagliamonte (2003), and Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005). Controversial intensifiers, such as *too* and *that* were left out of the scope of the study, due to some scholars (e.g. Bäcklund (1973), Bolinger (1972)) classifying them as intensifiers and others (Stoffel (1901), Quirk et al. (1985)) disagreeing with this view. They also would not have provided an adequate number of hits in the data, as the analysis of intensifiers only occurring once or twice in both corpora is hardly worth studying. *Pretty*, even though mentioned in section 2.1 to be able to both tone down and amplify an adjective, is included here, as it is also included in other studies looking at the phenomenon of amplification (see e.g. Ito and Tagliamonte (2003)). Also, *pretty* is often used to replace *very* in Modern English and therefore the downtoning aspect of the adverb was not as apparent in the data as in studies conducted much earlier.

<i>absolutely</i>	<i>totally</i>	<i>very</i>	<i>extremely</i>	<i>bloody</i>	<i>so</i>
<i>completely</i>	<i>really</i>	<i>entirely</i>	<i>pretty</i>	<i>real</i>	

Figure 4. List of intensifiers studied in the thesis.

After the initial search with the intensifier in question was conducted, all occurrences of that intensifier were listed. These were then manually processed to weed out the ones that were not applicable for this study; only the intensifiers that were in adjective premodifying position were taken into account. Other cases of e.g. verb intensification (12, 13) were disregarded, as well as instances where the search word did not qualify as an intensifier, e.g. conjunctive uses of *so* (14), adverbial use (15) as well as exclamatives and questions (16, 17). (18) exhibits the modal meaning of *really*, with its original meaning ‘truly’. Such cases and other forms that have no

intensifying function were naturally excluded. Also, cases such as (19) were ignored, since it is merely an ungrammatical, colloquial use of ‘well’, and thus the intensifier does not modify an adjective, but rather an adverb masqueraded as an adjective.

- (12) Uh this is comes **entirely** from Marks and Spencer 's. <ICE-GB:S1A-020 #288:1:C>
 (13) Neal has a huge carve at that but deceived **totally** by the change of pace. <ICE-GB:S2A-013 #75:3:A>
 (14) **So really** there are two separate cases? <ICE-GB:S2A-061 #64:1:A>
 (15) Oh and, .. you know how I get when my heart just beats **really** fast? <SBCSAE 358.566 361.062>
 (16) Oh **absolutely** and you know so much about them. <ICE-GB:S1A-020 #36:1:D>
 (17)... **Really**? <SBCSAE 411.137 411.975>
 (18) I wasn't **really** interested in this sort of life at all. <ICE-GB:S1B-026 #10:1:B>
 (19) It works **pretty** good. <SBCSAE 728.313 730.555>

Lastly, a spoken corpus is likely to contain interruptions, unclear expressions and reformulations, in which cases a potential intensifier use was disregarded (20).

- (20) It's **very** [3interesti- -- <SBCSAE 984.33 986.10>

In the SBCSAE each speaker has been given a pseudonym, to which the compilers of the corpus have matched the speaker's biographic information. To retrieve the age and gender of each speaker, I searched through the list of pseudonyms and wrote down the description to each token. Not all tokens had both pieces of information required for my study, and thus the number of applicable tokens varies in Chapter 5. With the ICE-GB, the initial search was conducted with Wordsmith 5.0 to retrieve all tokens that were then included in sections 5.1.1 and 5.2. ICECUP 3.1, which is exclusively designed for ICE corpora, was used to retrieve sociolinguistic data on the speakers to enable analysis on age and gender. As with the SBCSAE, some tokens were left out due to the fact that not all tokens had speaker demographic information listed, and ICECUP 3.1 deleted these tokens from sociolinguistic variable searches, and only returned the hits that were applicable.

It is relatively safe to assume that recall is very good in my study. The fact that my searches only included individual words instead of complex search strings improves recall tremendously. The problem of assessing recall lies in not actually knowing what a researcher is

missing “without analyzing the entire corpus by hand”, but this is essentially only a problem of large corpora and complex searches (Ball 1994:295). With the SBCSAE certain formatting of the word in question did not enable the retrieval of that token, such as “extr=emely” <SBCSAE 558.105 560.235> or “v=ery” <SBCSAE 412.212 413.987>. Unfortunately, there is no way to test all possible combinations of markings done by the transcribers and thus some tokens may not be included in the data. All of such noticed instances were naturally manually added to the data and included in the study, but it is unlikely that I caught all of them.

When a search such as the one described above, which is used in this study, includes all possible occurrences of a word – intensifiers or not – precision is often poor. Precision is easily increased by improving the search string which thus affects the output accuracy of a search, but this is not possible with the SBCSAE due to its lack of grammatical tagging that eliminates the use of search strings such as INTENSIFIER + ADJECTIVE. Additionally, increasing precision might limit the search criteria, which would result in poorer recall (ibid.). For practical corpus linguistics, it is more important to have good recall than good precision, and thus in this study the lack of precision was not an issue. The SBCSAE and the ICE-GB are by no means large corpora, and thus the weeding out of irrelevant hits was not a very taxing problem to overcome. Despite this, having a person sort out the data means that human errors are possible and even likely to occur, even though the data was checked multiple times.

5. Corpus data analysis

After the theoretical chapters of this thesis, I now move onto analyzing and classifying the data retrieved with Wordsmith 5.0 and ICECUP 3.1. To begin with, the analysis takes a look at each corpus individually, and accounts for each variable separately, except for the syntactic analysis in section 5.2, but comparative aspects are included as well. The data used for each variable varies, due to imperfect information provided by corpus compilers. Essentially, three sets of data from each corpus were processed for this analysis; (1) the set consisting of all applicable tokens used for sections 5.1, 5.2 (*et passim*), and their subsections; (2) the tokens which included the speaker's age (used in the analysis of the age variable in section 5.3); and (3) the data that had the speaker's gender listed in the corpus demographic description (used for gender variation analysis in section 5.4). Naturally, these sets are explained in more detail below. The most interesting issues in terms of variation between AmE and BrE are discussed after the individual analysis is conducted, and therefore only an overview of major differences in usage will be given in this chapter.

5.1 General considerations of frequency

This section gives an overview of the tokens obtained from both corpora. These are dealt with separately, but some main observations on the differences that have arisen between the varieties will be commented on.

5.1.1 The ICE-GB

As has been noted earlier, the data in the ICE-GB used here consists of direct conversations, phone calls, legal presentations, demonstrations, and the like. The total number of words in the sections included is roughly 515,500. All frequencies have been normalized by 100,000. The total

number of applicable tokens in the data set (1) is 1920, with a normalized total frequency of 372,45.

Intensifier	N	Per 100,000
<i>Very</i>	1196	232,01
<i>Really</i>	227	44,03
<i>So</i>	194	37,63
<i>Pretty</i>	71	13,77
<i>Absolutely</i>	69	13,39
<i>Completely</i>	47	9,12
<i>Totally</i>	45	8,73
<i>Extremely</i>	43	8,34
<i>Entirely</i>	19	3,69
<i>Bloody</i>	6	1,16
<i>Real</i>	3	0,58
Total	1920	372,45

Table 5. Frequency of 11 intensifiers by lexical item in the ICE-GB.

Table 5 shows the total distribution of all intensifiers studied here. The top five is occupied by *very*, *really*, *so*, *pretty* and *absolutely*, but the frequency of *very* is over five times as great as the frequency of *really*, and twice as high as the next four most popular intensifiers combined. The popularity of *very* is striking, and a definite signal that the usage of this intensifier is not becoming redundant even though intensifiers are prone to renewal and change. *Very* has been used as an intensifier since the 16th century, and has outlived various other intensifiers. Several scholars consider it to be the most frequent of all intensifiers (Bäcklund (1973:158); Fries (1940:201); Biber et al. (1999:565-7); Ito and Tagliamonte (2003:266)), but it has also shown a great deal of decline among the younger generations (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003:267).

Surprisingly, the difference between *really* and *so* is not a very drastic one, and therefore it is likely that *so* is also gaining popularity among the British, and not just in America. Interestingly enough, in Biber et al.'s ((1999); see table 2) study, *so* was more popular than *really*, which may be due to their data being larger. A larger data set might bring more insight into such small differences between intensifiers, as here. However, *really* is shown to be the most common intensifier among teenagers in the *Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language*

(COLT) (Stenström et al. 2002:140), in the BNC in the context of young, informal speech (Lorenz 2002:153), as well as in the *York English Corpus* (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003:267) and had teenagers been included in this study, the results might have been very different.

The {LY}-based intensifiers *completely*, *totally*, *extremely* and *entirely* are all outshadowed by the preponderance of *very*. These are indeed relatively new forms that have originated their intensifying function with verbs and participial heads, but have later spread to adjectival heads (Nevalainen 1994:245). *Bloody*, on the other hand, is a well-known English intensifier, but its popularity is clearly not as great as anticipated. With only six tokens in the entire spoken part of the corpus, it is safe to say that *bloody* is no longer as widely used. Similar results were obtained by Ito and Tagliamonte (2003:266). Surprisingly, *bloody* is one of the most commonly used adjective intensifiers by British teenagers in the COLT corpus, according to Stenström (1999:69), but again, this may be symptomatic of the fact that the ICE-GB does not include speakers under 18. Paradis (2000:154) further suggests that teenagers use “other means of reinforcement” instead of the most common intensifiers, such as swear words, and adults use intensifiers that are not as stigmatized as *bloody* and hence the frequency of *bloody* is low.

The top five in table 5 is almost completely identical to the study on York English (see table 3 in section 2.3). This is not a surprise, since the data was collected roughly at the same time, and the English spoken in York is said to have “retained a somewhat conservative character while at the same time representing a relatively standard northern variety of British English” (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003:262). Additionally, neither corpus has teenage speakers included (youngest being 17 in the *York English Corpus*, and 18 in the ICE-GB) which further emphasizes the uniformity of the two data sets.

5.1.2 The SBCSAE

The majority of the SBCSAE’s data is from face-to-face conversations, giving those that use the corpus a very authentic look into American English. The total number of words in the corpus is

roughly 249,000 and the tokens were normalized in a similar manner as in the ICE-GB. The overall analysis consisted of 820 tokens, the normalized total frequencies of which can be seen in table 6.

Intensifier	N	Per 100,000
<i>So</i>	213	85,54
<i>Very</i>	200	80,32
<i>Really</i>	176	70,68
<i>Real</i>	101	40,56
<i>Pretty</i>	94	37,75
<i>Totally</i>	14	5,62
<i>Completely</i>	8	3,21
<i>Absolutely</i>	7	2,81
<i>Extremely</i>	6	2,41
<i>Entirely</i>	1	0,40
<i>Bloody</i>	0	0
Total	820	329,32

Table 6. Frequency of 11 intensifiers by lexical item in the SBCSAE.

According to Fries (1940:201) *very* is “the most frequently used function word of degree” in AmE in the 1940’s, but this view was contested by Labov (1984:44) in the 1980’s with the statement that *really* is “one of the most frequent markers of intensity in colloquial conversation”. According to them, the change in popularity appears to have shifted from *very* to *really* over that time period, but the SBCSAE does not support these notions. The differences are albeit small, but it appears that *so* has become the 20th century favorite for Americans as suggested by Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005:296), closely followed by *very* and then *really*. Tagliamonte (2008:369) notes that in Toronto *very* was “declining rapidly” and goes as far as to say that it is an outgoing form altogether (2008:382). In contrast, however, Rickford et al.’s (2007:10) 2005 study on the *Stanford Tape Recorded Corpus* listed *really* as the most popular intensifier (relative frequency of 52,3) followed by *so* and *very*, whereas here, *really* is only the third most popular intensifier. All in all, the differences between *so*, *very* and *really* in the SBCSAE are very small

and the frequencies are much more evenly distributed than in BrE: no single intensifier dominates as clearly as *very* does in BrE.

Really is, however, more popular in AmE than BrE. Ito and Tagliamonte (2003:267) state that *really* is increasing in the youngest age group, but hardly ever used in the older ones in BrE, indicating that a rapidly changing situation is taking place in York. This linguistic change may be further along in AmE, and thus the usage of *really* is more frequent in AmE. Further analysis of age as a factor in the choice of an intensifier will be conducted in section 5.3.

What is significant about table 6 as compared to table 5 is the drastic difference between usage of *real* in BrE and AmE. In the ICE-GB, *real* provided only 3 tokens in total, whereas in AmE the use of it is significantly more popular (normalized frequencies of 0,58 and 40,56, respectively). The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) (2012: s.v. *real*, adv.) labels the word as “colloquial” and its usage to be mainly restricted to Australia and North America, which is why this result was to be expected. Additionally, Lorenz (2002:144) states that *real* is hardly ever seen in the position under scrutiny here in BrE, i.e. the adjective intensifying function. In Biber et al.’s study (1999:543; see table 2), *real* occurred fourteen times per twenty million words in AmE, and only once per twenty million words in BrE. In the *York English Corpus* *real* did not provide enough hits to even be analyzed on its own, which is a pity, since it would have been interesting to compare the results to see if *real* was entirely as non-existent in the conservative York English as it is in the ICE-GB (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003:266). Similarly in the study on Toronto English, *real* is stated to occur, but “much less frequently than *really*” and in that particular study those two intensifiers were combined rather than studied in their own right (Tagliamonte 2008:369, footnote 9). *Real* is stated to be widely used with a variety of adjectival heads in AmE (Biber et al. 1999:153), which indicates that it is a somewhat delexicalized item in this variety, although it has not lost its original lexical meaning. This statement is verified by the SBCSAE, as *real* premodifies a myriad of adjectives (21-26):

(21) It's real gooey...	<SBCSAE 1132.691 133.692>
(22) Costco has some real reasonable ones.	<SBCSAE 888.324 889.820>
(23) He was real young.	<SBCSAE 280.005 280.818>
(24) It didn't taste real clammy.	<SBCSAE1440.839 1442.847>
(25) He had a lot of real .. wacky ideas on big levels.	<SBCSAE 653.590 657.735>
(26) He's real wishy-washy.	<SBCSAE 1560.33 1561.53>

Stenström et al. (2002:151) note that in the COLT corpus, British teenagers had adopted this intensifier into everyday language as well, and it was being used with both very common adjectives as well as less common ones such as *fucked*, *funny*, *loud*, *pissed*, and *randy*, among others. They conclude that this is an indication that *real* has spread to the British teenage language, and is “on its way to enter British English” (ibid.). Stenström et al. (ibid.) also mentioned that in their data, the teenagers that did use *real* as an intensifier were mostly (upper) middle class and thus may have had more exposure to American English which is why such forms were present in their speech. In the ICE-GB, however, this tendency is not, at least yet, visible.

Other differences of significance are *absolutely* and *pretty*. *Absolutely* has the frequency of 13,39 in BrE, but only 2,81 in AmE, and *pretty* similarly 13,77 in BrE and 37,75 in AmE. Additionally, as expected, the SBCSAE did not provide any hits for *bloody*, emphasizing its status as an intensifier whose usage is mainly restricted to the British Isles. Overall, the relative frequency of these 11 intensifiers is slightly greater in the ICE-GB than in the SBCSAE, with normalized frequencies of 372,45 and 329,32, respectively.

5.2 Syntactic positions

According to Mustanoja (1960:326-7), one of the most straightforward ways of looking into the delexicalization stage of an intensifier is to consider their distribution based on the adjective function. Tagliamonte (2008:373) further suggests that by comparing the use of attributive and predicative positions, we can see evidence of the delexicalization process, whereby a “[h]igher frequency of use with predicative adjectives or equal distribution across both might reflect a later

point in an intensifier's development". This somewhat vague statement is contested by the fact that this description may only apply to old intensifiers, whereas newer ones systematically seem to favor the predicative position (Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010:275-6).

This chapter takes a look at both attributive (27-29) and predicative (30-32) positions across both AmE and BrE to see if there are any differences between varieties and also if these corpora used here conform to results obtained in previous studies.

- (27) Uhm it 's a **pretty** terrifying affair. <ICE-GB:S1B-042 #184:1:B>
 (28) It 's got a **bloody** great Sony sticker there. <ICE-GB:S1A-008 #151:1:A>
 (29) We're at two to- .. **totally** different social levels. <SBCSAE 788.608 791.274>
 (30) But the lady was **really** nice. <SBCSAE1503.489 1505.175>
 (31) Then the wind died down, and it was **completely** calm.
 <SBCSAE 585.285 587.460>
 (32) The road on the right was **very** uneven and caused the loaded lintels to joggle
 about on the forks. <ICE-GB:S2A-067 #26:1:A>

So is excluded from this analysis, as it occupies only the predicative position with construction such as **a so good girl* being purely ungrammatical. A summary of both varieties' distribution is provided below, after which three intensifiers are discussed in more detail.

Figure 5 shows which adjective position each intensifier is used with in percentages in the ICE-GB. As can be seen, the predicative position is favored with all items, except for *bloody* (33-34), which is used equally in both positions. However, since the number of tokens for this intensifier is so low, the result may be purely coincidental.

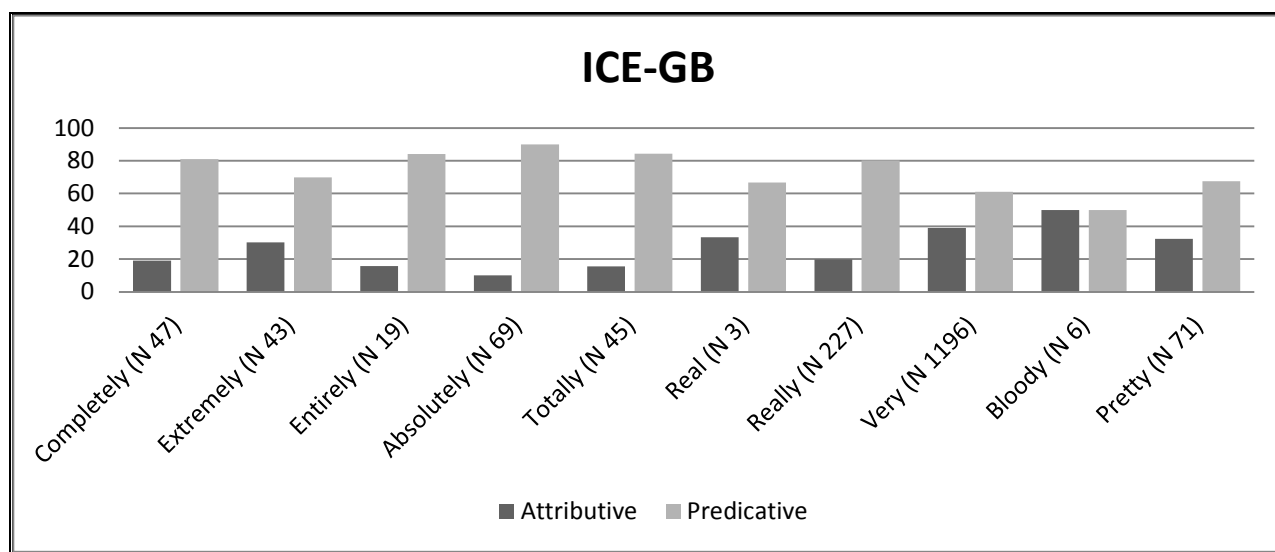


Figure 5. The distribution in syntactic positions of all intensifiers studied in the ICE-GB.

- (33) It 's a **bloody** good film <ICE-GB:S1A-049 #221:1:A>
 (34) It still sounds **bloody** ridiculous <ICE-GB:S1A-030 #10:1:A>

Figure 6 shows a similar trend in overall usage in AmE, and as we can see the predicative position is again favored in all instances.

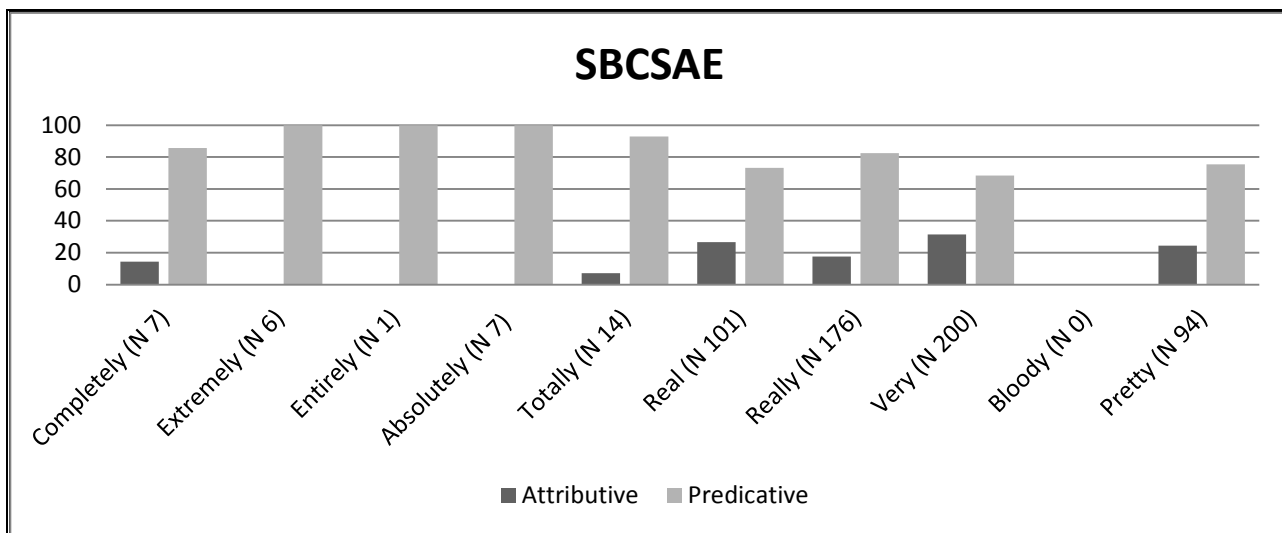


Figure 6. The distribution in syntactic positions of all intensifiers studied in the SBCSAE.

These results are not very unexpected, since the tendency is that predicative positions are favored among those intensifiers whose delexicalization process is progressed to a point where their usage is not restricted by position. With intensifiers formed with the {LY}-morpheme, the intensifying function has been present from the outset, whereas words such as *very*, *really* and *pretty* have developed their intensifying function over the course of time. As discussed in section 2.3.2 *very* has shifted in meaning from ‘true, truly’ to a purely intensifying function, gradually becoming used first in the attributive and then the predicative position. Similarly, *pretty* is now used as an intensifier, but still retains its original function of an adjective whereas *very* does not. Another similar word to *pretty* is *real*, which in AmE is clearly more employed in the predicative position (35-37).

- (35) Yeah... I think it'll be **real** interesting. <SBCSAE 6.325 7.710>
 (36) She was a little, tiny thing, and **real** thin. <SBCSAE 1514.9271515.932>
 (37) I'm not his biggest customer, ... but I've been **real** steady and **real** loyal. <SBCSAE 905.415 907.421>

According to the OED (s.v. *real*, adv.), the first uses of *real* as an intensifier were in the attributive position in 1645 and in the predicative only in 1885. It would appear that even though the position is chiefly predicative today, its delexicalization may be following a similar path as has been discussed in connection with *very* and *really* above. If the shift from attributive to predicative took place between those years, the broadening in syntactic position is, according to Tagliamonte (2003:273), a sign of progress on the delexicalization continuum. Furthermore, as described in section 5.1.2, what further supports the delexicalization of *real* is its ability to collocate with a variety of adjectival heads, although its original meaning is still widely known and used.

If we look at *very* and *really* in more detail (figures 7 and 8), we see that there is some variation between these intensifiers as well as between AmE and BrE, but the results are remarkably consistent. *Very* is most used in both positions, with a slight increase in BrE versus AmE. Ito and Tagliamonte (2003:272-273) looked at the delexicalization of *very* and *really* in the *York English Corpus* and stated that according to their data, *very* is more delexicalized due to a stronger differentiation between these positions, whereas *really* is more employed with both types of adjectives in all age groups. For them, this was an indication that *very* was more delexicalized than *really*. The results obtained here are entirely contradictory to those of Ito and Tagliamonte's, as *very* is much more evenly distributed between positions. Although no differentiation is made here according to age, it does seem that in the corpora used here, predicative position prevails much more clearly than it does in the *York English Corpus*. Furthermore, these differences are slightly more drastic in the SBCSAE than in the ICE-GB.

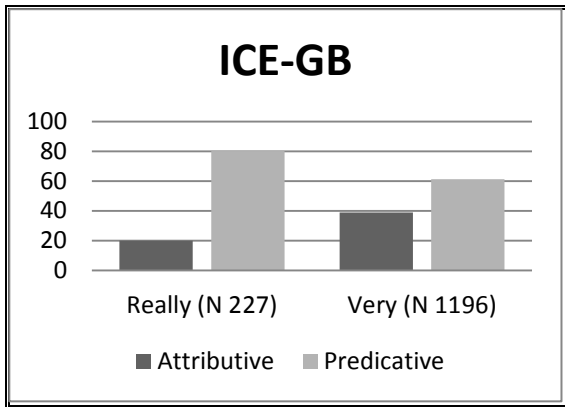


Figure 7. Distribution in syntactic positions of *really* and *very*, in the ICE-GB.

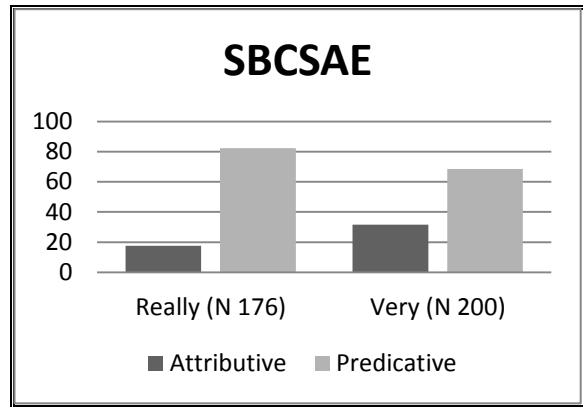


Figure 8. Distribution in syntactic positions of *really* and *very* in the SBCSAE.

One of the defining factors to look at in the delexicalization process is the original meanings of words such as *very* and *really*, as the modal meanings become more and more obsolete as the intensifier moves further along on the delexicalization continuum. However, even though investigating the syntactic position offers proof of the spreading of the word's usage, it seems slightly controversial with more recent intensifiers which are clearly less used with attributive adjectives to begin with.

Older intensifiers such as *very* and *really*, as we have seen, are used in the attributive position as well, but increasingly the system of intensification seems to prefer predication. The preponderance of the predicative position throughout both corpora is staggering, and although some adverbs may have entered the language through the attributive position, they are consistently more employed in the predicative one. Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010:275) noted this to be a growing trend in their longitudinal study as well, as the rate of predicative intensification increased by 90 per cent from the oldest corpora to the latest. Therefore, this new trend of favoring predication so overwhelmingly over attribution gives even more weight to Barnfield and Buchstaller's (2010:275-276) conclusion that it may after all be the case that new intensifiers enter the language purely through the predicative position, and the spread to attributive position will eventually mean increased usage among speakers and not the other way around as was the case with intensifiers such as *very*. The findings presented here corroborate their claim. The statement made at the beginning of this section by Tagliamonte (2008:373) does

seem too vague to be used as a guideline to see how intensifier positions vary. Indeed, to determine the stage of an intensifier's delexicalization, other factors, such as extralinguistic variables' influence on usage and collocational patterns, may be more effective in shedding light over the process.

5.3 Variation according to age

This section discusses the effects of age on intensifier usage. Age is seen as a significant factor in language use, and especially with intensifiers it seems to affect not only the choice between intensifiers but also the frequency of items intensified. In order to look at linguistic change in a variety, age provides means for it: "speaker age provides insight into the progress of a change" (Tagliamonte 2008:364). More specifically, Tagliamonte (*ibid.*) argues that if a form is favored in the youngest age groups, that serves as an indication that a form is incoming, and reversely, if an item usage decreases from older to younger the likelihood is that the item is becoming obsolete (*ibid.*).

As was explained in Chapter 5, the obtained data varies according to variables due to imperfect information in the corpora. As regards age, 754 tokens were analyzable in the SBCSAE and 1111 in the ICE-GB. In total, 66 tokens were outside of this analysis in the SBCSAE, and 809 in the ICE-GB. This is obviously not an ideal situation in terms of this study, but such issues are ultimately in the hands of those compiling a corpus. The problems that may arise due to this include representativeness, since the number of speakers decreases and thus the distribution of different ages may be skewed. However, with the SBCSAE the balancing of the corpus is not published information and therefore this matter is very hard to evaluate without knowledge of the corpus compilation statistics. With the ICE-GB, normalization was possible in each category, which helps overcome this issue.

One of the research aims of this study was to look at differences between different age groups, and therefore the data was divided into four age groups; 18-30, 31-43, 44-56, and 57+. This was done in order to see what trends arise between different ages, and a systematic grouping of 12 year intervals was deemed appropriate. The SBCSAE speakers are not distributed very evenly, but this grouping appeared to give at least a slightly more representative sample of the number of speakers in each category. With the SBCSAE all underage speakers were excluded from this analysis, so that comparability and uniform division into similar age categories was possible, as the ICE-GB only includes speakers of 18 and over. There were only a few tokens with underage speakers in the SBCSAE, and thus this did not affect the total number of applicable tokens by very many items.

5.3.1 The SBCSAE

When looking at the data obtained from the SBCSAE, several trends arise as regards speaker age. All the intensifiers studied here that provided more than 8 tokens showed that those intensifiers were widely used across different ages (examples include 38-41; age and gender listed after each example). However, the usage of these items was not evenly distributed, and interesting results were certainly obtained.

(38) *very*

- a. We'll write **very** short letters to one another. <SBCSAE 595.757 597.494> F/23
- b. We still need to be **very** careful about it. <SBCSAE 615.286 617.650> F/37
- c. You both seem **very** truthful and honest. <SBCSAE 1207.562 1209.198> M/53
- d. He also was **very** prolific. <SBCSAE 530.852 533.016> M/66

(39) *completely*

- a. We have an attitude, you know, even what Ray's attitude with .. with Bar is **completely** .. unheard of. <SBCSAE 381.74 383.59> M/27
- b. Then the wind died down, and it was **completely** calm. <SBCSAE 585.285 587.460> M/40
- c. He put a new cord on it,... and, new belt, and a new bag, a **completely** new bag <SBCSAE 711.93 713.18> F/ 50
- d. Now this yellow part is forever under water. Underneath that lake out there, and **completely** useless. <SBCSAE 340.500 341.699> M/74

(40) *totally*

- a. She's pregnant. She's **totally** pregnant. <SBCSAE 384.93 385.88> M/30
 b. I gotta clean up in here, this place is just **totally** trashed.
 <SBCSAE 61.403 63.273> F/37
 c. It's been a year, over a year, that he's been **totally** clean.
 <SBCSAE 807.690 808.980> M/51
 d. It's based, as it is, on the concept, that human nature is **totally** depraved.
 <SBCSAE 152.107 154.104> M/65

(41) *really*

- a. He is a **really** nice looking young fellow. <SBCSAE 542.325 544.284> F/28
 b. I've got a **really** bad dental problem. <SBCSAE 66.539 68.549> F/37
 c. ...and his wife was **really** happy. <SBCSAE 598.626 600.203> F/50
 d. And we're sitting up to Schultz's, at this end of the bar, and there was a guy on
 the other end of the bar, **really** .. loud, you know.
 <SBCSAE 1564.726 1566.188>M/71

Overall, when we look at figure 9, we see that the use of intensifiers decreases from younger to older, percentage-wise. A steady decline is visible, and even remarkable when comparing the youngest and oldest of age groups. The 18-30-year-olds use these ten intensifiers more than twice as frequently as the oldest age group with a percentages of 41,6 and 14,8, respectively. 31-43-year-olds use the ten intensifiers 25,4 and 44-56-year-olds 17,9 per cent of the time. This is consistent with the findings of Tagliamonte (2008:367) and Ito and Tagliamonte (2003:265) as it was initially hypothesized that younger speakers are more likely to employ intensifiers than older generations.

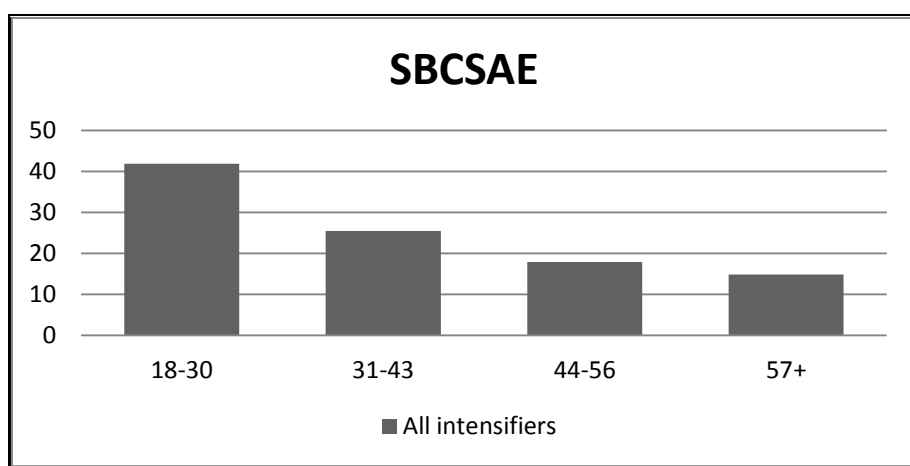


Figure 9. The overall distribution of intensifiers among age groups in the SBCSAE.

The five most common intensifiers are discussed in more detail below. The distribution of *very*, *really*, *so*, *pretty* and *real* is shown in figure 10. There is a general tendency of the top 5

intensifiers in AmE to decrease in usage from the youngest to the oldest age group, except of *pretty*, *very* and *real*. Both *real* and *pretty* appear to have a slight increase from the 31-43 age group to the 44-56 category, after which it declines drastically. Indeed, this is interesting but with *real* this may partly be explained by one Texan speaker who appears to consistently favor *real* over all other intensifiers in her speech. In general, AmE speakers in informal contexts are said to leave out the *-ly* ending quite easily, but this absence of the morpheme varies according to different dialects, and especially the more stigmatized forms are more frequent in Southern varieties (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006:378). Therefore, the extensive use of a single intensifier by a particular speaker may skew the results here, albeit her choosing this particular intensifier may be influenced by her place of residence. With *pretty*, no similar explanation in the data itself was found. Studies on frequency easily disregard the individual speaker, but because of the nature of the SBCSAE data, conclusions such as above can be drawn.

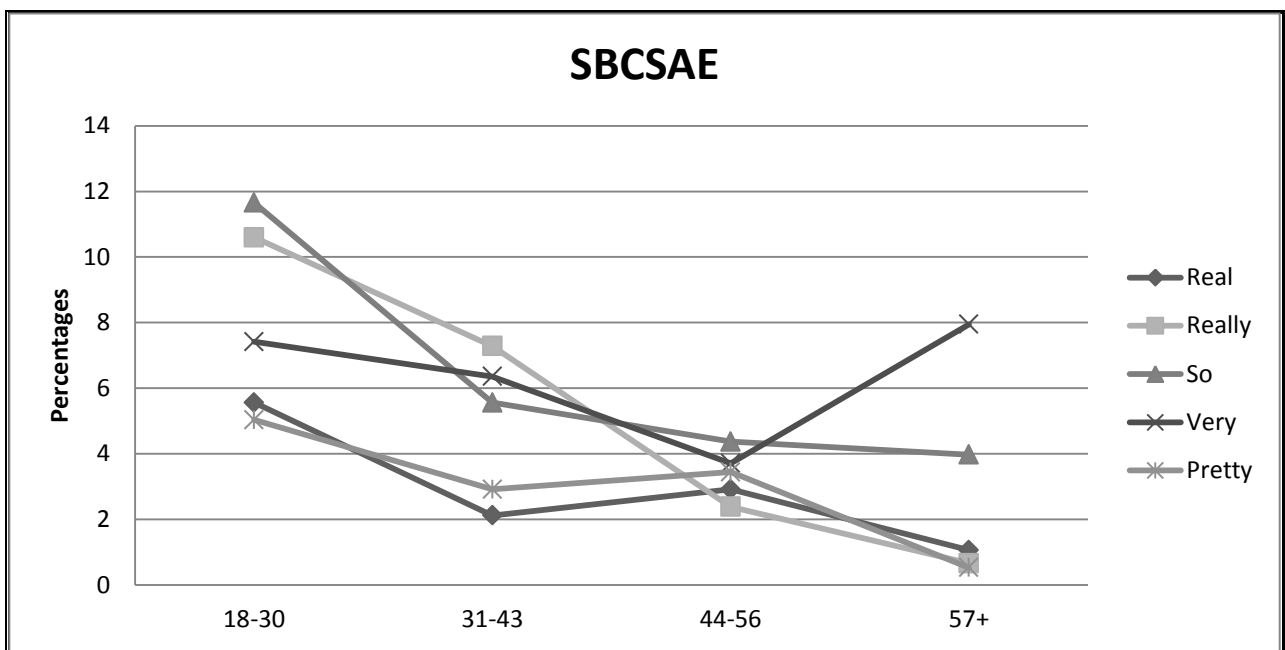


Figure 10. The distribution of *real*, *really*, *so*, *very*, *pretty* according to age in the SBCSAE.

There is much variation between the intensifiers themselves in each age group. The most popular one is *so* in the 18-30 and 44-56 categories, but *really* for 31-43-year-olds and *very* for the oldest group. The sudden leap with *very* in the 57+ category is partly due to a 101-year-old

artist who, according to the SBCSAE website “gives a public lecture at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, shortly after her 101st birthday” (see footnote 6). The speaker tells stories of her life and also answers some questions the audience asks. Her style of telling the story is indeed very emphatic, which is probably a factor in her exorbitant use of *very* (42):

(42) ...And I entered his .. **very** simple little room, I looked around it, and I remembered there were **very** coarse curtains, and the sun shone through them, made them like gold, and I stood in his room, ... and he was **very** nice gentlemanly man, he didn't quite know what to do, so he came, and looked at me, ... And, I saw a painting on his .. wall, and I saw a glass of water on the table, and, ... he wasn't saying anything.

<SBCSAE 318.941 322.259 – SBCSAE 351.83353.886>

However, even when these tokens by her were omitted, the tendency remained: there is a slight increase in usage from the previous age category, but the percentage remains at 5.1, so an overall decrease from the youngest age group is noticeable. However, at a 5.1. value, *very* is the most employed intensifier by the oldest age group, followed by *so* with the other three remaining at almost identical percentages. It appears that *very* is not currently actively used by younger Americans who replace it with other forms. Older speakers tend to use more conservative forms as opposed to those employed by others, and therefore the fact that *very* is so much more popular in the older age group is an indicator of it being characteristic of older speech. As popular as *very* is, it is unlikely to be an outgoing form altogether, as Tagliamonte (2008:364) argued, but rather suffering from overuse and its conservative character among the youth and is therefore replaced with alternative forms. It is possible for the intensifier to reach a hibernation period of sorts, and at a later point gain more popularity again. Such recycling of forms is not unheard of, and is even likely to occur with a variety of intensifiers, as can be seen with *dead*, *well* and *so* (see section 2.3.3; also Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010); Stenström (2000); Tagliamonte (2008)).

Overall, these five intensifiers (and all intensifiers in general) in the SBCSAE are most employed by the youngest age group. This is not surprising, since intensifier usage is especially common among young adults and adolescents. However, *so* and *really* are the two most common ones in the youngest group, but both suffer a steep decline in the older age groups. *Really* is more

popular in the 31-43 age group than *so*, but the situation is reversed in the last two categories: *so* is somewhat more used among the over 44-year-olds.

These findings echo the results obtained by Tagliamonte (2008) and Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005) on Toronto English and the television series *Friends*. It is very clear that *so* and *really* are on the rise among the younger generations, which would imply of their relatively recent popularity in AmE. Especially *really* shows a very steep decline towards the older groups. These intensifiers have surely spread to other generations too, but not as extensively as e.g. *very*, which is used more throughout all generations. What is noteworthy about *very* is its clearly less frequent use in the younger generations as compared to the older ones. Indeed, it would appear that *very* is losing ground but by no means as significantly as suggested by the aforementioned scholars. In this sense, there is a generation gap between speakers of different ages, as by looking at the intensifiers one employs, we can draw conclusions of what age group a person is; *so* is used by younger speakers, *really* preferred by those over 30 and finally *very* used most in the oldest age group.

Based on the data, it appears as if *very* on its own is not sufficient in all instances either, since examples such as (43) were found where it was intensified by *so*.

(43) You're **so very** kind. <SBCSAE 1260.639 1262.033> M/68

Due to intensifiers' inclination to renewal and change whenever an expression is seen as inadequate for the purpose of "speaker's desire to be 'original', to demonstrate their verbal skills, and to capture the attention of their audience", the repetition of different intensifiers is often a very efficient way to achieve this (Peters 1994:271). Especially considering the fact that in the above example (43), the speaker is a 68-year-old male. The use of the intensifier *so*, whose usage is not as frequent among people of that age, may have easily caught the attention of the listener to further emphasize the compliment given. Overall, the repetition of an intensifier is a well employed means to further emphasize the adjective. For instance, examples of double intensification such as (44-48) were frequent, especially with *very*:

- (44) And so he said, way I understood it would, let's say five-hundred would would cover the eight-hundred, which is **very very** helpful service...
<SBCSAE 1183.11 1184.86> M/45
- (45) And I have realized that, so many times with friends, with whom I was **very very** intimate.
<SBCSAE 1280.330 1283.160> F/82
- (46) I think I'm gonna go get my,... my **very very** bright spouse.
<SBCSAE 1222.017 1226.869> M/68
- (47) And, apparently it was **very very** muddy.
<SBCSAE 447.887 450.273> F/29
- (48) Being terrified is a **very very** scary word. <SBCSAE 740.755 743.715> M/40

Contrary to the above examples, the females in the youngest age group also appear to repeat their most favored intensifiers *so* and *really* in order to further boost their adjectives (49-51). Similar examples were practically non-existent in other groups, apart from one token by a 36-year-old male (52).

- (49) I'm **so** tired.... **So so so** tired. <SBCSAE 244.299 248.034> F/22
- (50) That's **really really** nice. <SBCSAE 646.540 648.015> F/24
- (51) But he's just **really really really** strange. just **really really really** strange.
<SBCSAE 1509.96 1515.32> F/19
- (52) And **really really** dry. <SBCSAE 19532.14 533.19> M/36

These repetitions were, however, restricted to these two most popular intensifiers employed by the youngest age group, as compared to *very* used more widely across all ages.

Furthermore, in contradiction to what other studies have shown, *so* is more frequent in the oldest age group than what was the case in e.g. Toronto (Tagliamonte 2008:372, figure 3). This is interesting considering the fact that *so* is a very North American item, but also shows that there is clear variation among varieties of English as regards intensification. It may very well be that *so* is spreading from the younger generations to the older ones at a faster rate than in BrE or Toronto English which would result in findings such as here.

5.3.2 The ICE-GB

In the ICE-GB, the normalization of each category was especially important in order to be able to obtain reliable results. As the number of words in each category varies tremendously, all tokens

were normalized by 100,000 based on the total number of words in that category. Table 7 provides an overview of the number of words uttered in each age category.

Age group	No. of words
18-30	100,875
31-43	23,223
44-56	50,316
57+	43,306
Total	217,720

Table 7. Number of words in each age category in the ICE-GB.

The overall tendency of how intensifier usage varies between age groups is not as straightforward as in the SBCSAE. Figure 11 shows a similar descending trend from younger to older, except for a very noticeable peak in the 44-56 category. This is indeed interesting, but the explanations for this are hard to find.

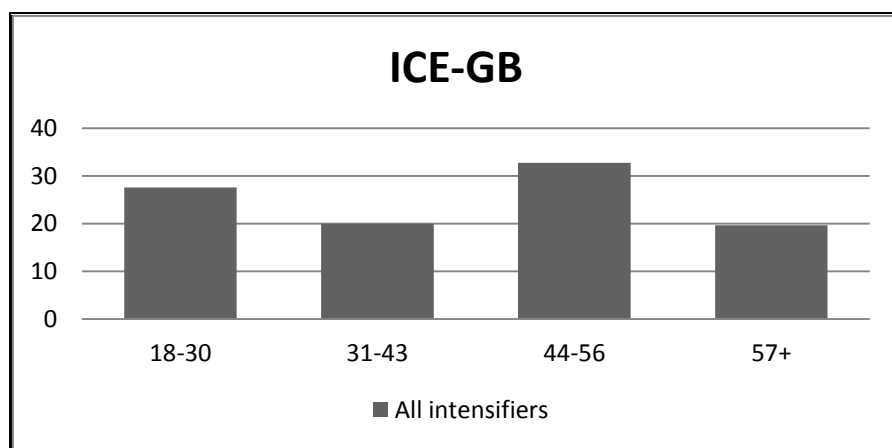


Figure 11. The overall distribution of intensifiers among age groups in the ICE-GB in percentages.

It is clear that intensifiers are used at all ages, and even at almost identical percentages in the age groups 31-43 and 57+. All of the 11 intensifiers that were analyzed were found to be used by all age groups, except for *real* and *bloody* (with 3 and 5 tokens total, respectively). Examples include 53-56, with gender and age group listed at the end:

(53) *extremely*

- a. You were talking about this guy at Embankment tube station who stood there in in skintight jeans and he was apparently he was really **extremely** gay.

<ICE-GB:S1A-085#17:1:B> F 18-30

b. my honourable friend is entirely right to draw attention to the fact that uh any conversion by the party opposite to the virtues of responsible trades unionism is **extremely** short-lived and skin-deep as well.

<ICE-GB:S1B-055 #57:1:B>M 31-43

c. You are obviously an **extremely** ambitious man.

<ICE-GB:S1B-043 #12:1:A>M 44-56

d. It 's an **extremely** odd occupation. <ICE-GB:S1B-048 #80:1:B> F 57+

(54) *absolutely*

a. Andy you could mix uh milk and like uh uh uh and vodka uhm you know instead of one of those tequila slammers because that 's **absolutely** vile cos it all separates.

<ICE-GB:S1B-079#226:1:G>M 18-30

b. So from the six eighties uhm we find quite a a major shift from symbolic representations to **absolutely** accurate physical representations.

<ICE-GB:S2A-060 #94:1:A> F 31-43

c. He 's **absolutely** charming Will. <ICE-GB:S1A-027 #236:1:A>F 44-56

d. George Brown had an **absolutely** first-rate intellect, strong personality and accompanying it of course appalling faults.

<ICE-GB:S1B-067 #133:1:D> M 57+

(55) *so*

a. You 'd never think she did anything **so** scientific.

<ICE-GB:S1A-019 #256:1:A>F 18-30

b. All that is is absolutely **so** ham. <ICE-GB:S1A-043 #309:1:A>M 31-43

c. Yes well I used to find it **so** exciting. <ICE-GB:S1A-044 #387:1:A>F 44-56

d. Now why are these differences **so** important?

<ICE-GB:S2A-021 #44:1:A> M 57+

(56) *pretty*

a. It was **pretty** stimulating stuff and I really enjoyed it.

<ICE-GB:S1A-034 #78:1:B> M 18-30

b. And uhm, that 's all I 've been doing really... Been **pretty** busy.

<ICE-GB:S1A-096 #45:1:B> F 31-43

c. ...and that 's **pretty** stern and **pretty** rough stuff.

<ICE-GB:S1B-036 #54:1:E>M 44-56

d. It 's **pretty** difficult.

<ICE-GB:S1A-051 #3:1:B> F 57+

The peak in figure 11 is difficult to explain by looking at the data, since individual speakers cannot be tracked down to see if there are only a few people responsible for such heightened use as in the SBCSAE, or if indeed several speakers in that category are that fond of intensification. This is an interesting finding nonetheless, and entirely contradictory to other studies conducted as well as results obtained from the SBCSAE.

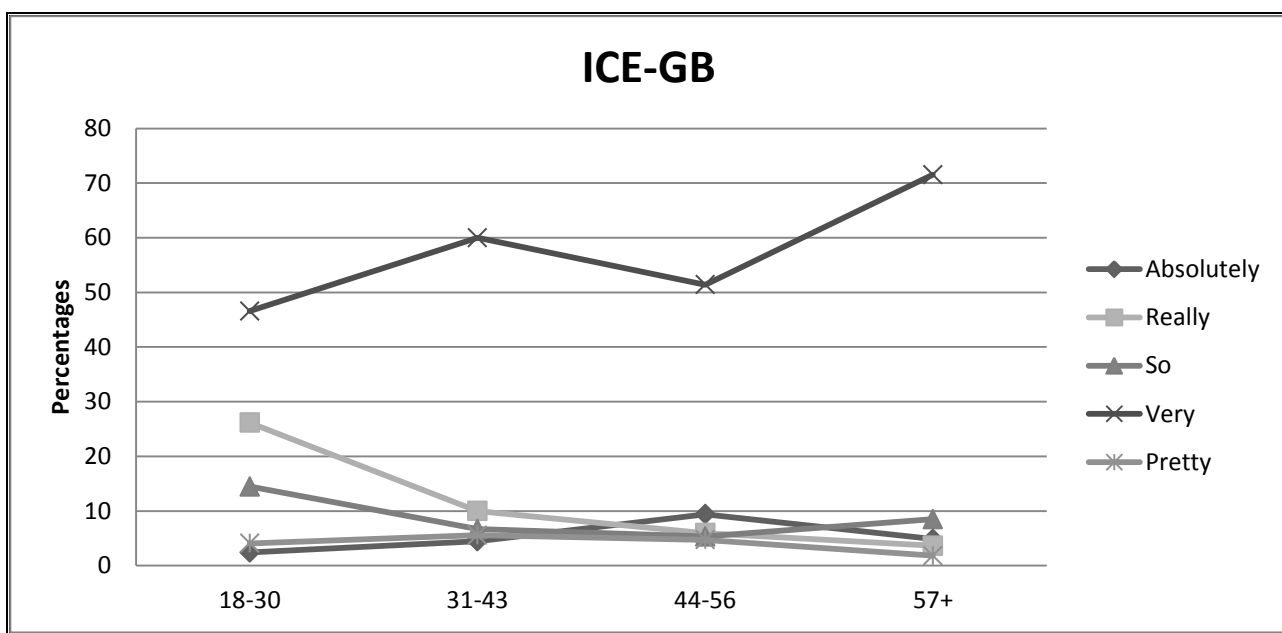


Figure 12. The distribution of *absolutely*, *really*, *so*, *very*, *pretty* according to age in the ICE-GB.

Although intensifiers were widely used across all age groups, the one intensifier that dominates in the ICE-GB is *very*. There is a slight fall in the age group 44-56 (see figure 12), but the usage increases from younger to older, much like in the SBCSAE. Consequently, as popular as *very* is overall in BrE, the speakers of 57+ use *very* almost exclusively: namely, 71 per cent of the time. In the 57+ age group, the rest of the top 5, i.e. *absolutely*, *really*, *so*, and *pretty* are clear minorities. The groups 31-43 and 44-56 show a similar trend, although *very* does not dominate as clearly, but rather the four remaining intensifiers in the top five have been employed slightly more than in the 57+ category. The age group 44-56 uses *absolutely* the most.

(57) if you ever got married I'd be **absolutely** devastated. <ICE-GB:S1A-050 #156:1:B>

(58) Yes it is <,> **absolutely** horrid. <ICE-GB:S1A-054 #212:1:B>

(59) And the other thing **absolutely** de rigueur is deodorant because it's sort of all presenting an ideal world <,>so hair on the face and smelly armpits don't do.

<ICE-GB:S1A-065 #241:1:A>

The collocates for *absolutely* are varied in the ICE-GB, including *clear*, *vital*, *terrible*, *inevitable*, *fascinating*, *adamant*, *stupendous*, *irate*, *smooth*, *idiotic*, *horrible*, and *sound* in addition to examples (57-59); both negative and positive adjective collocates are found. Interestingly enough, among the 57+ speakers, the collocates are far more restricted and only appear to boost adjectives of positive associations (60-63).

- (60) Anyway on this occasion the pastry I thought was going to be **absolutely** superb.
 <ICE-GB:S1A-057 #315:1:B>
- (61) It was **absolutely** wonderful.
 <ICE-GB:S1A-057 #290:1:B>
- (62) You know hardly any hair and close-cropped to her head, **absolutely** perfect features,
 and very thin and elegant.
 <ICE-GB:S1A-037 #150:1:B>
- (63) **Absolutely** gorgeous isn't it.
 <ICE-GB:S1A-057 #284:1:A>

In the context of delexicalization, the fact that this intensifier is only associated with positive adjectives may be an indication that the spreading of collocates of *absolutely* is only taking place among younger speakers and older speakers are more limited in their choices.

Whereas the three older groups clearly prefer *very* over any other intensifier, the choice is not as evident in the youngest group, although *very* does prevail there too. However, younger speakers have a wider selection of intensifiers to choose from, as they are not so constrained by the tendency to avoid stigmatized forms (Stenström 2000:177). Therefore, among the youth, there is a heightened popularity of *so* and *really*, both of whose usage steeply declines when looking at older age groups.

5.4 Variation according to gender

As has been discussed above, another factor that seems to make a difference in the use of intensifiers is gender. Men and women tend to speak differently, and as regards intensification, women's preference for hyperbole is likely to correlate with an increased preference for the use of intensifiers as compared to men.

The SBCSAE does not list the number of words in the data by gender, and therefore the data obtained cannot be normalized accordingly. This is unfortunate, but again, a defect in the way the corpus was compiled. For the ICE-GB, this information is available. In the male data, the total number of words is 357,543, whereas in the female set it is 156,923. Consequently, the male data set is over twice as large as its female counterpart, which may skew the results even when normalized as the overall small amount of female speech is not as representative of the speech of British women in general. The numbers above were used to normalize the data when merely

looking at the gender variable, but for analysis based on both gender and age, a new set of numbers for normalization had to be used (explained thoroughly in section 5.4.2).

Overall, men and women use intensifiers at very similar percentages in both the ICE-GB and the SBCSAE. Figure 13 clearly shows that in both sets of data, females use intensifiers roughly over 60 per cent of the time whereas men the remaining 40 (62,9 % vs. 37,1 % in the SBCSAE and 60,4 % vs. 39,6 % in the ICE-GB). American women use intensifiers slightly more than British females, but the percentages are startlingly similar. Clearly, intensification is a widespread characteristic of female English language use, regardless of the variety.

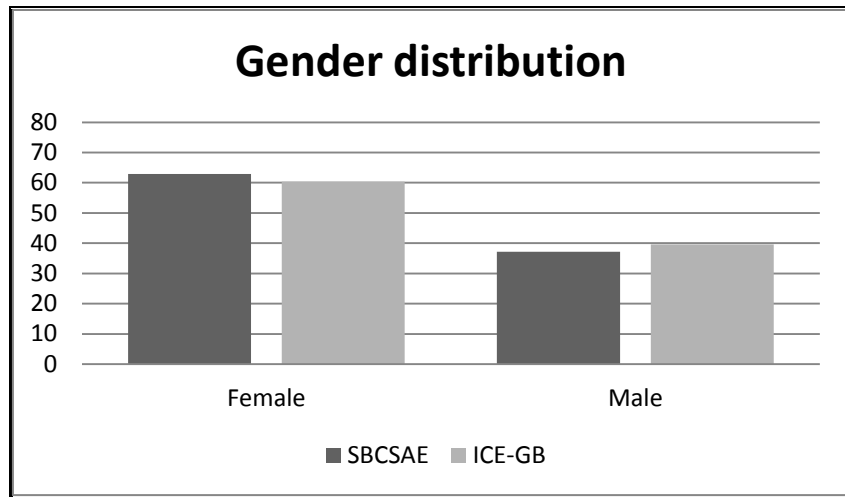


Figure 13. Percentages of male and female use of intensifiers in the ICE-GB and the SBCSAE.

Figure 13 does confirm what other scholars have stated about the use of intensification as regards one's gender: looking at this variable we can conclude that using intensifiers is a very clear feature of what can be characterized as typical female speech (cf. Stoffel (1901), Jespersen (1959)). Men, on the other hand, are less prone to using them. The matter is not, however, as straightforward as this leads us to think. When we look at the gender variable in more detail, the distribution is not as clear as here: looking at age and gender at the same time in both data results in very different outcomes. This is the focus of the following sections.

5.4.1 The SBCSAE

It has already been established in the previous section that the women recorded for the SBCSAE use intensifiers slightly more than their British counterparts, and significantly more than American men. When we look at the distribution per age group, the results show a more interesting differentiation between the genders.

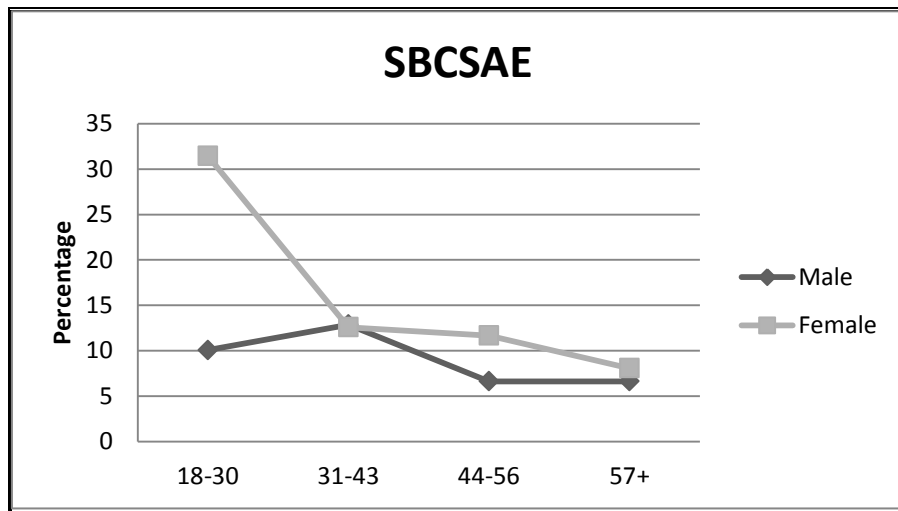


Figure 14. Male and female intensifier usage per age group in the SBCSAE.

In figure 14 we see drastic differences between men and women in the youngest age group in AmE. The SBCSAE shows a tendency that was expected from the outset; women use intensifiers more. The females in the 18-30 group use them 31,4 per cent of the time, but the percentages drop drastically when looking at older age groups: the 31-34 group only uses them 12,6 per cent of the time and 44-56-year-olds 11,7 per cent. As was hypothesized, the 57+ group uses intensifiers the least with an 8,1 per cent value. These results give even more weight to the previous analysis on the correlation between age and intensifier usage. According to Labov (1990:206), women and young speakers tend to be the instigators of linguistic change: in this particular instance, the fact that they employ intensifiers so much more than other age groups and men in general, it is no wonder the spread of new intensifiers is likely to start with them.

American men do not exhibit the same kind of behavior, as there is a small increase in usage in the 31-43-year-olds, where both genders appear to use intensifiers at the same percentage, with only a 0,3 per cent difference of men using intensification more. The two oldest

age groups both use intensifiers at the level of 6,6 per cent. The declining pattern of usage based on one's age is not as clear as with women, although older men use intensifiers with much less frequency. There is no one explanation to the sudden increase in the group 31-43, but had it been possible to normalize the data, the results may have varied greatly. Overall, men and women in the oldest age group employ intensifiers at a very similar level, indicating less of a gender gap but emphasizing the generation gap between older and younger speakers. In the youngest age group the women's preference for intensification is staggering, but the differences even out as the speakers get older. Indeed, it appears that age is a more defining factor than gender in determining which kind of intensifiers one uses and at what frequency after one hits their 30's, at least in the SBCSAE.

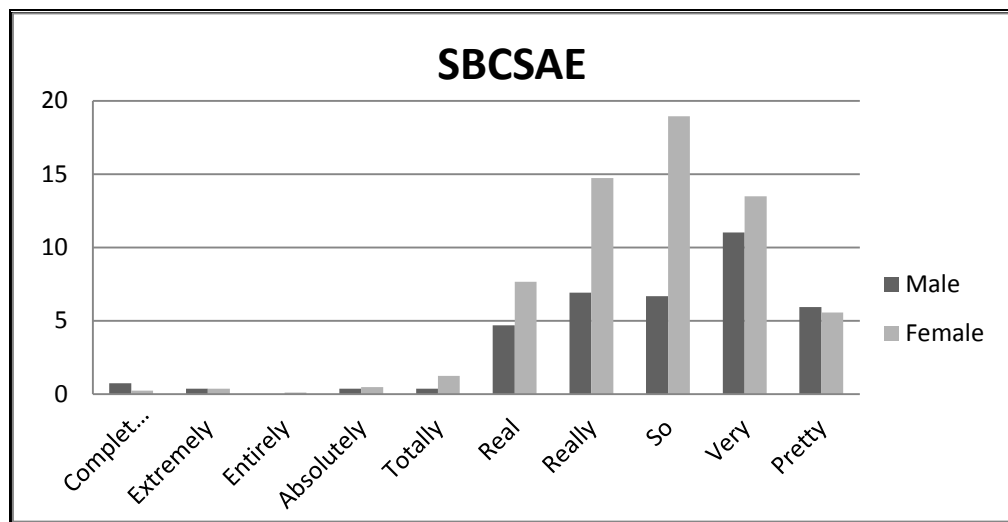


Figure 15. Distribution of intensifier usage according to gender in the SBCSAE.

When considering the use of individual intensifiers according to gender, as in figure 15, it is noticeable that females use almost all intensifiers studied far more frequently than males. The difference is especially great with *so* and *really*, whereas *very* is preferred the most by men and is almost equal to women's usage. In fact, women use *so* almost three times and *really* twice as often as men do. In the *Friends* data, similar results were found: *so* was twice more frequent with women than men, and hence this correlation between females and *so* was seen as an indication of "incoming change" (Tagliamonte and Roberts 2005:289). As mentioned earlier, the series was filmed after the collection of data for the SBCSAE, which indicates that this newly rising trend

Tagliamonte is referring to had already taken place in actual AmE (remember the series took place between 1994 and 2002 – the SBCSAE’s data comes from early 1990’s). The importance of intensifier studies conducted on actual spoken data cannot thus be underestimated.

Interestingly enough, men have a different choice of preference in the SBCSAE than women: *very* is the most popular intensifier followed by *really*, *so* and *pretty*. In the light of the previous discussion, the social connotations of *so* being characteristically female may be so strong that men gravitate towards more neutral intensifiers. Moreover, *pretty* is slightly more popular among men than women. Could it be that because of women’s preference for hyperbole, *pretty*, being the only intensifier which could be used for modifying purposes as well, is therefore more popular among men? In the study on Toronto English, *pretty* is used to scale up but with less emphasis than other intensifiers (Tagliamonte 2008:370), and the same appears to apply to American speakers (64-67).

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| (64) No, cause Joel was helping and that kitchen is too small for three people and Joel's a pretty husky guy. | <SBCSAE 831.743 833.103> M/30 |
| (65) He's pretty good at that stuff. | <SBCSAE 718.211 719.474> M/60 |
| (66) And sometimes that is really pretty nice. | <SBCSAE 181.446 182.709> M/40 |
| (67) Well that's pretty frightening concept. | <SBCSAE 324.025 326.665> M/27 |

Furthermore, Tagliamonte (idem.:388) speculates that young Canadian men use *pretty* as a reaction to the popularity of *so* among women, which implies that both men and women are the leaders of a change in progress, but just not the same change. This seems plausible, as *so* is so clearly marked as female speech in the SBCSAE as well with *pretty* being favored among the men. *Pretty* is also one of the intensifiers that is favored more by men than women in the ICE-GB. This is an interesting finding, although the data sizes are admittedly small. A more specific look into *pretty* in its own right may be called for in further studies on intensification, due to its quite recent increase in popularity.

What would have been very interesting to look at was variation according to age and gender with *very*, *really* and *so* in more detail, but this proved unfruitful as the genders for the most part followed a similar pattern – the only real distinction was the fact that women’s

percentage was much greater. Also, the normalization of each age group and gender proved impossible since no data exists on the word counts for these categories. However, overall the differences between genders do not appear to fluctuate much between generations in AmE, as the age trends already established in section 5.3 hold true: younger age groups prefer *so* and *really*, whereas older ones resort to *very*. This applies to both genders with merely varying frequency.

5.4.2 The ICE-GB

When age and gender variables were combined for the analysis of the ICE-GB data, the amount of data was even more limited. Hence, the numbers in table 8 had to be used when both variables were studied simultaneously.

Age group/ Gender	Male	Female	Total in each age group
18-30	43,324	57,551	100,875
31-43	18,734	4,489	23,223
44-56	39,547	10,769	50,316
57+	35,995	7,311	43,306
Total	137,600	80,120	217,720

Table 8. Number of words in each age and gender category in the ICE-GB.

What is noteworthy about these numbers is the fact that the number of words uttered in the female categories of ages 31-43 and 57+ is especially low. The data included in the ICE-GB consist of speech sets of roughly 2,000 words in each, which means that the 31-43 age group is likely to consist of only two sets, and the 57+ of three. That is not a representative sample of the speech of British females in those age groups, but unfortunately the problems in the data can merely be acknowledged and normalized for better comparison. The issue is likely to have an effect on the results, but the statistics of the corpus have been taken into consideration as much as possible when discussing the said results.

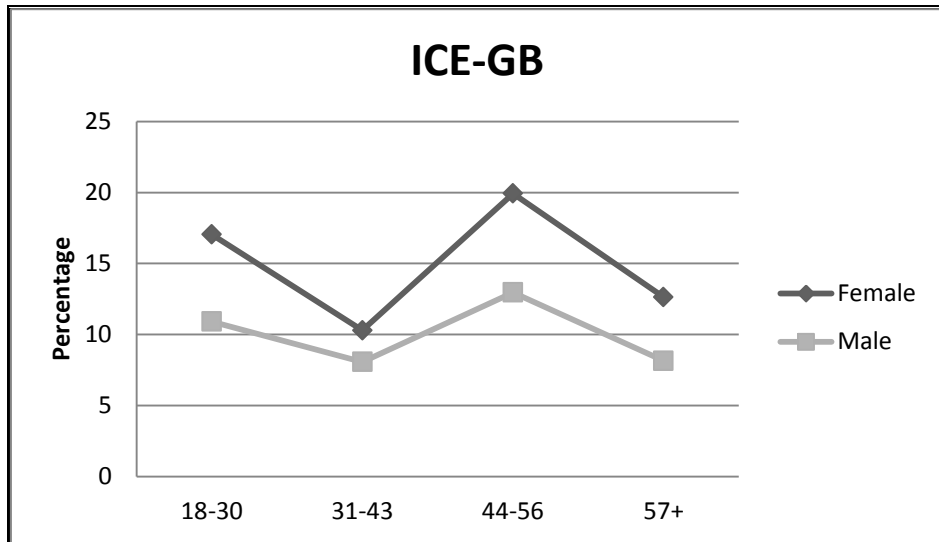


Figure 16. Male and female intensifier usage according to age group in the ICE-GB.

Figure 16 presents the distribution between men and women by age group in the ICE-GB, and as can be seen, the graphs follow a uniform line. This is interesting since although men do use intensifiers less in BrE, the distribution between age groups is similar to that of women's. Compared to the SBCSAE, gender differences are much smaller in BrE, and no special emphasis can be put on the intensification of young females, at least not in this overall figure. The peak in group 44-56 is reminiscent to the one in figure 11 and again, no particular explanation to this is found in the data itself.

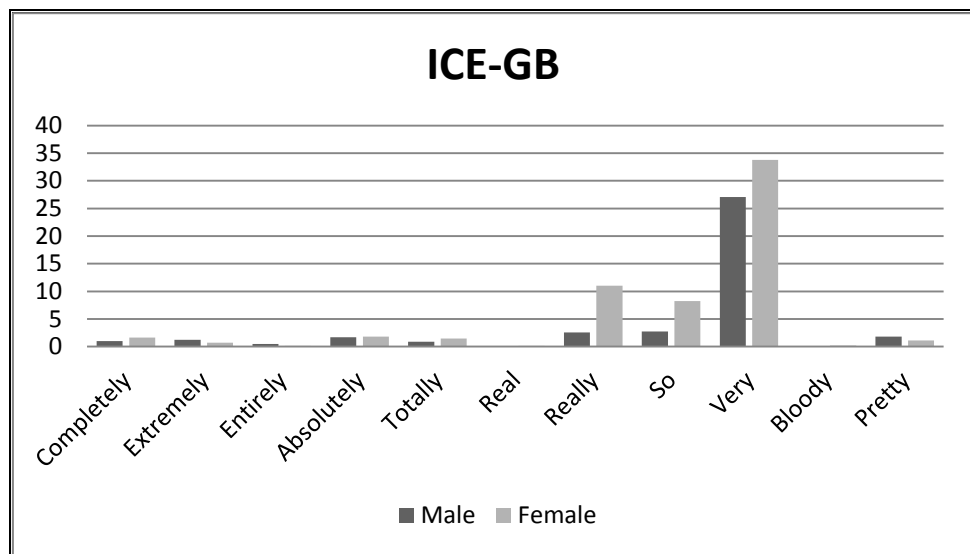


Figure 17. Distribution of intensifier usage according to gender in the ICE-GB.

There is more room for analysis if we only look at the gender variable from the perspective of individual intensifiers. In the SBCSAE the men's top three is *very* – *really* – *so*,

whereas in the ICE-GB the situation is slightly different: *very* dominates so clearly that it is used over ten times as frequently as *so* and *really*. Figure 17 shows that the women's top three is the same as the overall top three of the ICE-GB. *Very* is still staggeringly popular, but the differences are smaller than with men: it is only 3 times as popular as *really* and four times as *so*. It is apparent that women have a slightly wider array of intensifiers to choose from, whereas men resort to *very*. When we compare these findings to those of the SBCSAE's, we see that British speakers are much more limited in their intensifiers, as all other alternatives are used with under two per cent frequency – the SBCSAE has five intensifiers that are over the four per cent frequency level.

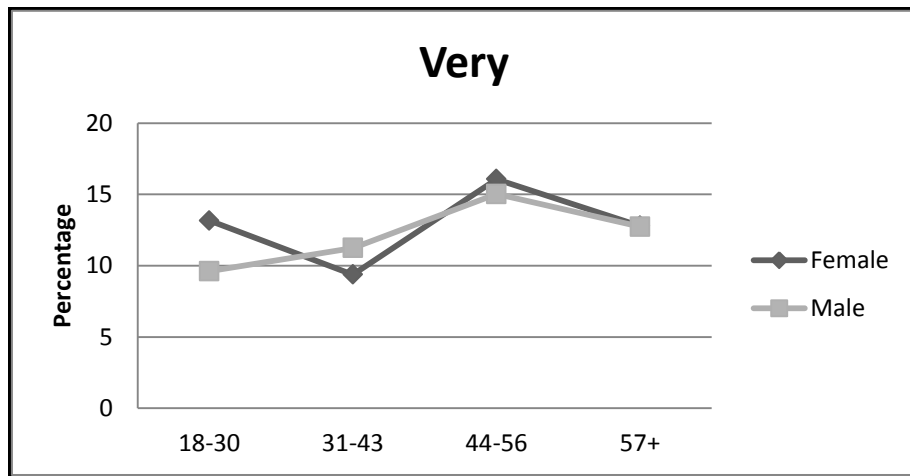


Figure 18. Distribution of *very* by speaker gender and age.

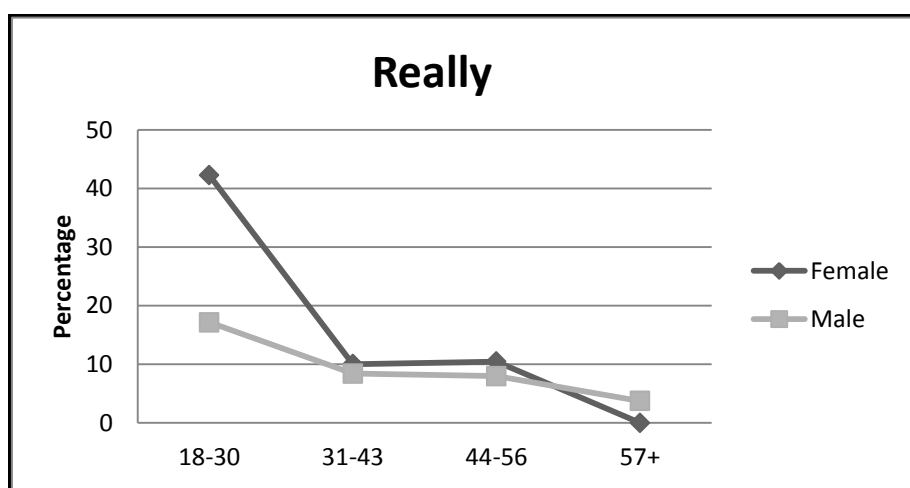


Figure 19. Distribution of *really* by speaker gender and age.

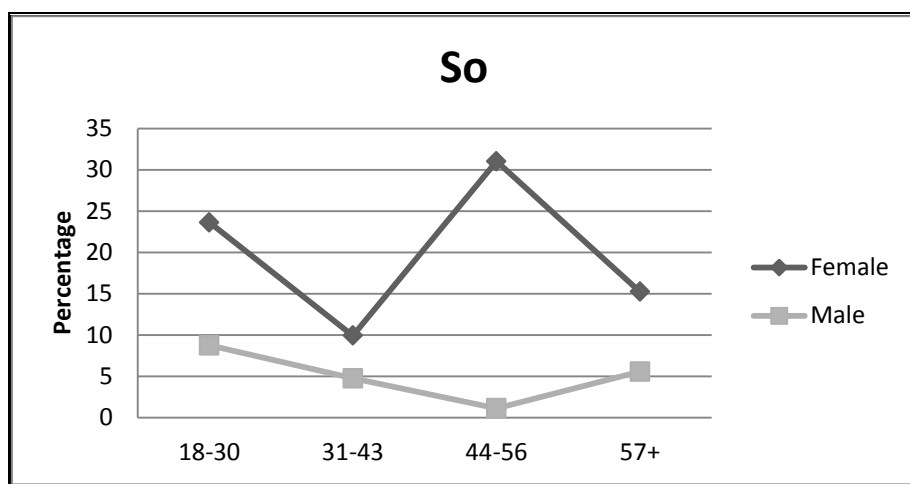


Figure 20. Distribution of *so* by speaker gender and age.

In the study on Toronto English, it was hypothesized that the heightened use of the incoming form *so* was seen to be pushed forward by young females, but the general favorite *really* was not as systematic in its usage and it fluctuated tremendously between age groups and genders (Tagliamonte 2008:388). Contrary to Toronto English, BrE seems to be behind in this development and *really* is especially popular among young females, but the popularity of it drops significantly after that (see figure 19). This would imply that according to Tagliamonte's theory (ibid.), *really* is becoming the new it-word for the British since it is used so heavily by young females. *So* exhibits a similar behavior of popularity among the youth, albeit with less frequency, but it is also surprisingly frequently used in the 44-56 group and the 57+ group employs it more than *really*. Intriguingly, the overall popularity of *so* fluctuates unsystematically according to age, whereas *really* is declining rapidly. Men do not exhibit much of a favorite among the youngest age group, as all three intensifiers are used at roughly the same percentages with *really* being slightly more popular than *so* and *very*, but the older a male gets, the more they start preferring *very*. This finding is consistent with previous theories on the popularity of *very*.

As interesting and fruitful as it is to look at individual variation at the level of gender and age, it must be borne in mind that due to the limited demographic data available these results are somewhat skewed. According to figures 18-20, it would appear as if *very* was overall less popular than *really* and *so*, which we know based on earlier findings to be entirely inaccurate. With *very*

alone, 608 tokens were outside of this particular analysis, which means that over half of the initial number of tokens could not be analyzed. Hence, this brief view into the intensifier usage according to both sociolinguistic variables is only suggestive of what current trends are in BrE.

6. Discussion

In order to fully understand the phenomenon of intensification, we must look at both internal factors of syntactic function as well as external factors. External influence of age and gender play a much larger role, both in the choice of an intensifier as well as in the frequency of using one, especially in AmE. In BrE, the similarities between male and female use of intensification per age group were interestingly similar, but issues in corpus compilation are likely to skew the results to some extent. With the ICE-GB, especially the small size of certain age groups and the discrepancy between female and male data do not give the best possible representative sample of BrE. Additionally, because the ICE-GB struggles with issues of providing demographic information of their speakers, a large amount of data had to be excluded. Namely, 42,14 per cent of all intensifiers in adjective premodifying position had to be disregarded in the ICE-GB, whereas only 8,05 per cent in the SBCSAE – had this not been the case, the number of tokens would have almost doubled.

Nonetheless, these problems were overcome as much as possible with the normalization of results, which provided a way to compare results in percentages and provide insight into the differences in AmE and BrE as regards intensification. Interesting results were obtained, including the differences in popularity per variety. The staggering preponderance of *very* in BrE does not leave much room for speculation whether another form is on the rise or not. *Really* appears to be the one to which British young adults turn to, if not *very*, but even then, *very* remains the most popular one at the value of 46,6 per cent vs. 26,2 for *really* and 14,5 for *so*. These results differ from those of Biber et al.'s ((1999); see section 2.4), since in that study *so* was the second most popular intensifier. As their corpus was much larger, it may better represent BrE than the ICE-GB, but would still not explain the similarities in the results obtained here and in the *York English Corpus*, NECTE2 and the PVC, especially in terms of the rise of *really* among young females.

In AmE, the data are similar to studies conducted on Toronto English and the television series *Friends*. Although the differences in percentages of each intensifier are much smaller than in the ICE-GB, the tendency is evident: AmE employs *very* a great deal less than BrE, and prefers *so* and *really* especially in the two youngest age groups. What highlights the differences between these two varieties is the fact that certain intensifiers are only found in AmE and vice versa: *pretty* is more widely used in AmE and *real* is exclusively American, whereas *absolutely* has a much higher frequency in BrE.

When looking at how gender affects the use of intensification, it becomes increasingly more difficult to explain the differences between the varieties. The SBCSAE conforms to the hypothesis of young females using intensifiers more than other age groups and men, which is understandable as intensification has long been seen as a characteristic of women's language. Contrary to this, however, the ICE-GB exhibits entirely different results as the graphs of male and female usage follow similar trends with an unsystematic fluctuation between age groups. The issues in corpus compilation explain some of the peculiarities of this matter, but the results do appear to contradict all other studies that were used in this thesis. Indeed, the problems the corpora have are extremely unfortunate and hinder much of the analysis that was desired at the outset and therefore drawing conclusions from the analysis on gender and age variation combined can only be tentative.

In AmE, the gender aspect does not determine the use of an intensifier as greatly as first anticipated. In the youngest age group the females are extremely more active in their intensification, but after that the results even out to almost similar levels. There does not appear to be a similar gap between genders as there is with age after the 18-31-year-old group, and consequently age is a much more defining factor in intensifier usage than gender.

There is no doubt that the group of intensifiers that are used in English today is especially prone to fluctuation and variation in popularity, but these adverbs of degree do not all stand the test of time and become as widely used and accepted as e.g. *very* has. Not all intensifiers

collocate as widely as *very* does, which is already a limiting factor in the spreading of an intensifier, which, as mentioned, is a gradual process that may never be complete. Collocation may give us more insight into how an intensifier is used, whether it is in terms of how it has spread or if it is only used in context with certain kinds of adjectives. The collocational patterns of intensifiers would have been very interesting to look at here, but due to the limited availability of theory I did not feel I had enough support to conduct such semantic studies. The well-known model by Dixon, where monomorphemic adjectives have been categorized into seven groups, is often used by e.g. Tagliamonte (see 2003:268-270; also Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010:276-8); Rickford et al. (2007:10)), but this is controversial, as Dixon only uses these categories for simple adjectives of color, physical property, human propensity, age, value, speed, and dimension (Dixon 1982:15-6). For instance, adjectives such as *familiar*, *strange*, *curious*, *important*, *easy*, and *difficult* are excluded from his analysis and thus could not be categorized (idem.:16, footnote 11). Therefore, the results obtained by Tagliamonte (et al.) do not seem entirely reliable as they do not specify any other criteria for their adjective categorization than that of Dixon's but yet have an extensive amount of data to study – had I only included adjectives verified and studied by Dixon, I would not have had very many to analyze and therefore this endeavor would have been doomed from the outset. Needless to say, the results of studies on intensification following Dixon's model are therefore not seen as valuable in terms of this thesis. Furthermore, the in-depth analysis of all the adjectives in the ICE-GB and the SBCSAE that were relevant would have been much outside the scope of this study, nor feasible due to the small size of corpora used.

Rather than describing various intensifiers as 'outgoing' and 'incoming' based on the ages when people employ them, as theorized by Tagliamonte (2008:382) I am more inclined to see these results as symptomatic of language change that is the result of aging, or age-grading (cf. Chambers 2003:206-11). *Very*, as popular as it is, is seen as a more "neutral, common core item" that can still be used in all age groups (Paradis 2000:147), but due to older people preferring more conservative forms over those that are more stigmatized or characteristic of the speech of young

adults, the preponderance of *very* at ages 44 and up especially in AmE makes sense. Younger generations have a wider array of intensifiers from which to choose from, whereas older speakers tend to stick to using *very*. This shift was more noticeable in AmE than BrE, but even more so based on the results obtained from the ICE-GB I do not agree that *very* would be an outgoing form. There are no signs of this, and as Méndez-Naya (2003:389) points out, the popularity of *very*, even though its expressivity is clearly long gone, is likely due to the fact that it is completely grammaticalized.

The use of the other, newer, forms often employed in the age group 18-30, such as *so* and *real*, is likely to be part of a larger linguistic context of how young adults speak, rather than being a specifically intensifier-dependent phenomenon. The fact that older speakers do not take part in trends such as using a larger variety of intensifiers is not a new discovery, as Sankoff ((1994), quoted in Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010:267-8) refers to this as “lifespan change”. The results obtained here lead me to believe that as it often is the case that new forms enter the language through a heightened use by teenagers and young adults, these forms are indeed somewhat restricted to age. It is for this reason that the overall spreading of e.g. *so* to all age groups as much as *very*, is unlikely, or at least will require a significant amount of time for it to lose its stigma of adolescent speech, and become as neutral as *very* is. The signs of *so* undergoing delexicalization are present as it is widely collocated and employed, which indicates that if the process is eventually completed, it may remain in the lexicon permanently and not be replaced by other forms.

Consequently, it will be interesting to see if the generation that is now employing *so* in AmE moves on to preferring *really* and eventually *very* over *so* as they themselves become older and move from one age group to another, or whether the intensifier “ages” with them and therefore produces results in similar studies as here where *so* has indeed spread to older age groups. If not, it would further indicate that intensifier usage is part of the larger phenomenon of language variation according to gender and especially according to age, and not merely

dependent on the individual intensifiers themselves and the stages of their delexicalization processes. The sociolinguistic aspect in determining the sustainability of an intensifier is likely to be as important as its progress on the delexicalization continuum; it is unlikely that an intensifier could become popular and long-lasting without both factors in play.

Recent developments of how the situation has changed since the time of the collection of the data in the 1990's can only be hypothesized until new spoken corpora on BrE and AmE become available and longitudinal studies with real-time evidence can be used. In the SBCSAE *so* and *really* are far more popular than other intensifiers in the youngest age group, which could eventually lead to them being more widely used throughout all ages, but drastic projections of future developments cannot naturally be made. In BrE, possible future areas of interest lie in determining if *very* will continue as popular as it is, and if not, will *really* be the next fully grammaticalized item as hypothesized by Lorenz (2002:157). Also, it will be interesting to see what happens to the newly recycled form *well* in BrE – will it spread further from teenage talk to the lexicon of those outside of that group or fall back into exile.

Intensifier use in English is clearly a change in progress, but it appears that these data sets provide information that is too fresh to be analyzed yet without any points of reference from the 21st century to see how the situation develops from here. This is especially true with AmE as there are practically no older data available to which these results could be compared and no similar studies on spoken data as regards age and individual analysis of separate intensifiers exist. Indeed, longitudinal studies in the future will provide means to answer the question of how fast the suggested change is taking place and how intensifier usage evolves over time. Furthermore, it has become clear during this study that the differences between these two varieties are vast and it is very hard if not impossible to make generalizations that would apply to both. Here, I must agree with Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010:274), who claim that “developmental trends in the system of intensification are not generalizable across varieties”. These trends are, for this exact reason, of special interest in this field as the changes taking place do not happen universally.

Consequently, it will be fascinating to see how varieties' intensifier use develops and if those developments spread to other varieties over time – not merely from AmE to BrE and vice versa, but also to New Zealand, Australian, and Jamaican Englishes, among others.

7. Conclusion

This study has examined the use of intensifiers in BrE and AmE with special interest in the sociolinguistic variables of age and gender. The results clearly demonstrate the unstable character of intensifier usage; they are extremely subject to fashion, and vary from one generation and gender to another. Differences in varieties were evident, as in the SBCSAE the frequency of intensification showed a clear decrease from younger to older. Conversely in the ICE-GB, a peak in 43-56 age group was noticeable. Furthermore, as American speakers overall top three of preference of intensifiers was *so – very – really*, it was *very – really – so* in BrE.

In the SBCSAE, not only does intensifier usage vary according to the speaker's age and gender, but follows a rather interesting pattern. Indeed, there appears to be several different, coexisting systems of intensification in place in AmE, as the most employed intensifier in an age group is different in each one: *so* in the 18-30 group, *really* in 31-43, a mixture of intensifiers in the 44-56 group and *very* in the 57+ age group. The youngest age groups are much more versatile in their use of intensifiers, as they do not seem as constrained by the norms of conservative, neutral talk as older generations. In AmE, the older a speaker gets, the fewer options they appear to have, and therefore resort in almost all cases to using the very general, fully delexicalized *very*. The use of *really* and *so* is a sign of the speaker being much younger, with *so* enjoying special popularity among the young. Analogous results have been found in other contemporary studies on North American English, which indicates a new found popularity of *so* in adolescent speech.

BrE demonstrated a different pattern altogether, as *very* dominated in all age groups. Other forms were on the rise in the youngest age group, but the frequency of *very* was staggering. It is clear from the results that the said intensifier is by no means on its way out of the lexicon of the British, but rather overwhelmingly popular and overriding all other intensifiers quite contrary to AmE. There is, however, an increase in frequency towards the oldest age group similar to the SBCSAE, which corroborates the claim that older speakers use conservative, neutral intensifiers rather than shibboleths or other, newer alternatives to *very*.

In both varieties, women used intensifiers more than men and differences in the choice between genders arose; in AmE men preferred more conservative forms than women. Women have a clear preference for hyperbole which explains the preponderance of female usage, and therefore the popularity of *pretty* among men is an interesting finding. As *pretty* is located much further down on the intensifying scale than the intensifiers women prefer, it may very well be the reason why *pretty* was the only intensifier employed more by men. Conversely in BrE, men followed a similar graph according to age as women, but with less frequency. Overall, the differences between genders were mainly restricted to frequency, but in AmE men appeared to use more conservative forms than women.

The choice of an intensifier is more dependent on the speaker's age than gender. The generation gap in using intensifiers was especially prominent in the SBCSAE, and based on one's choice of which intensifier to use and frequency of using them, we can roughly conclude the speaker's age. Interestingly, contrary to other similar studies, I am more inclined to see this as a result of the way language use and vocabulary change according to one's age, rather than as a wider, intensifier-dependent phenomenon. Indeed, the findings of this study confirm that various age groups have a very different way of speaking, and it is only natural that these differences affect the way people of various ages use intensifiers. What is of special interest in the future is to see what changes take place as the youngest age group ages: will they change their preference from *so* to *really* to eventually *very* when they move from one age group to another, or will their current favorite *so* age with them and remain in their vocabulary even after adolescence and young adulthood. In the case of the former, it would further provide support to the notion that intensifier usage is dependent on a larger linguistic context of the way people speak and not on the intensifier itself.

The internal factor of syntactic position did not appear to be as significant in the delexicalization process as initially thought, as all intensifiers studied here favored the predicative position. Indeed, contrary to other studies conducted, the results obtained here indicate this

position to be the one through which newer intensifiers enter the language, and not vice versa. A more accurate account of the delexicalization process of the studied intensifiers may have been achieved by looking at collocation, but this was outside the scope of this analysis.

In addition to collocation, other possibilities for further research arose while conducting this study. These include a closer look at *real* and *pretty* in their own right, as well as longitudinal studies with future corpora to see where the apparent change is taking each variety. It can only be desired that these future corpora do not lack as much critical information as the ones studied here, to better enable comprehensive, reliable and accurate accounts of spoken English. The search for such a corpus and the answering of the questions raised by this study, however, I leave for others.

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