



INTENSIFICATION AS A MEANS OF EXPRESSING EVALUATION IN CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH

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Abstract

Evaluation is a fundamental interpersonal function of language through which speakers express attitudes, negotiate social relationships, and construct meaning. Intensification plays a central role in this process by reinforcing evaluative meanings, conveying emotional involvement, and expressing speaker stance. While traditionally regarded as a grammatical marker of degree, recent linguistic research recognizes intensification as a multidimensional semantic, pragmatic, and cognitive phenomenon. This article examines intensification as a means of expressing evaluation in contemporary English by integrating semantic theory, Appraisal Theory, Cognitive Linguistics, and corpus-based approaches. The study adopts a qualitative research design supported by corpus evidence from contemporary English. The findings indicate that intensifiers extend beyond scalar modification and function as interpersonal resources that strengthen evaluation, express subjectivity, and enhance persuasive communication. The article argues that evaluative intensification should be understood as a cognitive-pragmatic mechanism through which speakers conceptualize experience and influence audience interpretation.

Keywords: intensification, evaluation, appraisal theory, cognitive linguistics, discourse analysis.

1. Introduction

Evaluation represents one of the most significant interpersonal functions of language because it enables speakers to communicate opinions, attitudes, emotions, and judgments about people, events, and situations. Rather than transmitting objective information alone, language allows speakers to express their subjective interpretation of reality. Consequently, evaluative language has become an important area of investigation within semantics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, and cognitive linguistics.

Among various linguistic resources contributing to evaluation, intensification occupies a particularly important position. Traditionally, intensifiers have been described as degree modifiers that strengthen or weaken the meaning of adjectives, adverbs, and verbs (Quirk et al., 1985). However, contemporary research demonstrates that their functions extend far beyond grammatical modification. Intensifiers strengthen interpersonal meanings, express emotional involvement, indicate speaker commitment, and contribute to persuasive communication (Martin & White, 2005; Bednarek, 2006).

Although numerous studies have examined intensifiers from grammatical and semantic perspectives, comparatively little attention has been devoted to their integrated role in constructing evaluation. Existing research often investigates semantic gradience, discourse functions, or cognitive processes separately, leaving the relationship between intensification and evaluation insufficiently explained.

The present study addresses this gap by examining intensification as a multidimensional mechanism of evaluative meaning. Integrating insights from semantic theory, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Appraisal Theory, and Cognitive Linguistics, the article argues that intensification functions not only as a marker of scalarity but also as a cognitive-pragmatic resource through which speakers negotiate interpersonal relationships and construct persuasive discourse.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Background

Research on intensification has developed from traditional grammatical descriptions toward broader semantic and pragmatic interpretations. Early studies primarily viewed intensifiers as lexical items expressing different degrees of intensity. Bolinger (1972) challenged this perspective by arguing that degree words possess independent semantic value and reflect speakers' subjective conceptualization rather than merely modifying lexical meaning. His work established the semantic foundations of modern intensification research.

A comprehensive grammatical description was later provided by Quirk et al. (1985), who classified intensifiers into amplifiers, boosters, maximizers, diminishers, and minimizers according to their scalar functions. Although this taxonomy remains influential, it focuses mainly on grammatical behavior and provides limited explanation of how intensifiers contribute to interpersonal communication.

The functional interpretation of evaluation emerged within Halliday's (1994) Systemic Functional Linguistics, which identifies interpersonal meaning as one of the fundamental metafunctions of language. From this perspective, linguistic choices reflect speakers' attitudes and social relationships rather than objective descriptions alone. Evaluation therefore becomes an essential component of communication.

Building upon Halliday's framework, Martin and White (2005) developed Appraisal Theory, which explains evaluative language through the systems of Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation. Intensification belongs primarily to the Graduation system, where speakers strengthen or weaken evaluative meanings according to communicative intentions. Within this framework, intensifiers regulate not only semantic force but also interpersonal positioning.

Cognitive linguistic approaches provide an additional explanation by emphasizing that people conceptualize qualities and emotions along continuous scales rather than fixed categories (Langacker, 2008). Consequently, expressions such as *very interesting*, *extremely successful*, and *absolutely impossible* represent different conceptualizations of the same phenomenon rather than simple grammatical variation.

Corpus-based studies further demonstrate that intensifier usage varies across discourse types. Spoken interaction typically favors highly expressive forms such as *really*, *so*, and *totally*, whereas academic writing generally employs more restrained evaluative expressions. These differences indicate that intensification is strongly influenced by communicative purpose, audience expectations, and discourse conventions.

Drawing upon these complementary perspectives, the present study conceptualizes intensification as a multidimensional linguistic resource operating simultaneously at semantic, cognitive, pragmatic, and discourse levels. Rather than functioning solely as a degree modifier, intensification enables speakers to construct evaluation, express emotional involvement, negotiate interpersonal stance, and strengthen persuasive force.

3. Methodology



This study adopts a qualitative research design supported by corpus-based observations to investigate intensification as a means of expressing evaluation in contemporary English. A qualitative approach was selected because the primary objective is to examine how intensifiers function in authentic discourse rather than to measure their statistical distribution.

The analysis is grounded in four complementary theoretical frameworks: Bolinger's theory of degree words, Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, Martin and White's Appraisal Theory, and Cognitive Linguistics. These approaches provide an integrated perspective for explaining the semantic, interpersonal, and cognitive functions of intensification.

Examples of evaluative intensifiers were selected from contemporary English discourse represented in major linguistic corpora, including the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), the British National Corpus (BNC), and the News on the Web (NOW) Corpus. The collected examples were analyzed according to their semantic function, evaluative polarity, emotional intensity, and pragmatic role within discourse.

The analytical procedure involved identifying evaluative constructions containing lexical intensifiers, classifying them according to their scalar function, and interpreting their contribution to speaker stance, emotional involvement, and persuasive meaning. This interdisciplinary methodology enables a comprehensive understanding of intensification as both a semantic and interpersonal resource.

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis demonstrates that intensification performs considerably more than the grammatical function of increasing degree. Instead, it operates as a multidimensional linguistic mechanism that strengthens evaluation, expresses emotional involvement, and constructs interpersonal meaning.

The findings indicate that evaluative meaning results from the interaction between lexical semantics and scalar modification. For example, the adjective *good* simply expresses a positive evaluation, whereas *extremely good* conveys stronger speaker commitment and invites the listener to perceive the evaluation as more convincing. Similarly, expressions such as *absolutely brilliant* and *utterly unacceptable* simultaneously communicate evaluation, certainty, and emotional engagement.

These observations support Bolinger's (1972) argument that degree words possess independent semantic value rather than functioning merely as grammatical modifiers. Intensifiers therefore influence not only the intensity of lexical meaning but also the speaker's conceptualization of reality.

The study also confirms the relevance of Halliday's interpersonal metafunction. Speakers employ intensifiers to negotiate relationships with their audience, emphasize opinions, and increase persuasive force. Consequently, evaluative language cannot be understood without considering the interpersonal functions performed by intensification.

Appraisal Theory provides further evidence that intensifiers primarily operate within the Graduation system. By increasing or decreasing evaluative force, speakers regulate emotional expression and interpersonal alignment. For instance, *slightly disappointed*, *rather disappointed*, and *deeply disappointed* represent different degrees of emotional evaluation rather than simple lexical variation. The selection of a particular intensifier reflects the speaker's communicative intention and desired persuasive effect.

The findings further reveal that intensifier usage varies according to discourse type. Spoken English frequently employs highly expressive forms such as *really*, *so*, and *totally* because conversational interaction requires immediacy and emotional involvement. In contrast, academic discourse generally favors more formal intensifiers such as *highly*, *particularly*, and *significantly*, which maintain objectivity while still allowing evaluation. Journalistic discourse combines both strategies, using intensifiers to attract readers' attention and strengthen argumentative claims.

From a cognitive perspective, intensification reflects the human tendency to conceptualize experience along continuous scales rather than absolute categories. Speakers naturally perceive qualities such as importance, beauty, certainty, or danger as matters of degree. Intensifiers therefore function as linguistic representations of cognitive scaling, enabling speakers to communicate subtle differences in evaluation.

The analysis also demonstrates the close relationship between intensification and persuasion. Strong evaluative expressions influence audience interpretation by increasing speaker credibility and emotional impact. Consequently, intensification becomes an important rhetorical strategy in political speeches, media discourse, advertising, and everyday conversation.

Overall, the findings indicate that intensification should be viewed as an integrated semantic, pragmatic, and cognitive resource. Rather than serving merely as grammatical markers of degree, intensifiers contribute to the construction of evaluation, interpersonal alignment, emotional expression, and persuasive communication across diverse discourse contexts.

5. Conclusion

The present study has examined intensification as a linguistic resource for expressing evaluation in contemporary English from semantic, pragmatic, cognitive, and discourse-functional perspectives. The analysis demonstrates that intensifiers perform considerably more than the grammatical function of indicating degree. They reinforce evaluative meanings, express emotional involvement, construct speaker stance, and enhance persuasive communication.

The findings support the view that evaluation emerges through the interaction of lexical meaning, scalar modification, discourse context, and communicative intention. Consequently, intensification should be regarded as a multidimensional cognitive-pragmatic mechanism rather than a purely grammatical phenomenon. The integration of semantic theory, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Appraisal Theory, and Cognitive Linguistics provides a comprehensive explanation of how intensifiers contribute to the construction of interpersonal meaning in authentic discourse.

Furthermore, the study highlights the relationship between intensification and subjectivity. Speakers select different intensifiers not only to modify semantic strength but also to express attitudes, negotiate interpersonal relationships, and influence audience interpretation. This explains why intensifiers are particularly frequent in persuasive discourse, media communication, political rhetoric, and everyday interaction.

The study also demonstrates that the use of intensifiers varies across discourse types. Spoken communication tends to employ highly expressive boosters, whereas academic

discourse generally favors more restrained evaluative forms. Such variation reflects differences in communicative purpose, audience expectations, and discourse conventions.

Overall, the findings contribute to contemporary research on evaluative language by demonstrating that intensification functions as an essential interpersonal resource rather than merely as a marker of scalarity. Future studies may extend this research by investigating cross-linguistic variation, diachronic change, multimodal communication, and experimental approaches to evaluative processing.

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