Types of English Intensifiers on Social Media

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Abstract

The use of English intensifiers keeps changing and flowing. It also varies according to the speaker's background and style. Quirk, et.al (1992) divides intensifiers into *emphasizers*, *amplifiers* (*maximizers, boosters*), and *downtoners* (*approximators, compromisers, diminishers, minimizers*). This research aims to find out the types of English intensifiers on social media, specifically on Twitter. The most frequently used intensifiers are analyzed specifically to dig deeper into the social aspects in terms of the relation with previous studies. There are 8,975 tweets produced by 23 sample users. The data are clear data, which means that they only consist of English tweets, without replies and retweets. From the 8,975 tweets, there are 194,487 word-tokens and 22,877 word-types. In the data, 92 intensifiers are used 1,633 times. The occurrence of intensifiers consists of 153 *emphasizers*, 480 *maximizers*, 891 *boosters*, *11 approximators*, 38 *compromisers*, 46 *diminishers*, and 14 *minimizers*. This study reveals that the most used intensifier on Twitter is *so*. The use of *so* is quite popular since Tagliamonte & Roberts (2005) also found in their study that the use of 'so' and 'very' were the most frequently used. Besides, this study also corresponds to Setayesh and Vaez-Dalili (2018) that boosters are the most frequently used.

Keywords: English intensifiers, Twitter, emphasizers, amplifiers, downtoners

INTRODUCTION

The use of language reflects the social condition within the speakers. It shows that language use is different from the language itself. The use of language is to fulfill the intention of the speaker. It shows that the sociolinguistic approach is empirical because the language will be seen based on reality. It views language based on its social perspectives as language is a part of the social system.

The English language has parts of speech such as nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs. In a sentence, there should be a verb and a noun meanwhile an adverb is not compulsory. However, an adverb gives plays an important role though it is not always used. An adverb is flexibly used since it modifies verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs. In this case, adverbs can be used to intensify the meaning of the headwords modified. In delivering the message through words, the speakers of a language sometimes intend to scale upwards or scale downwards the meanings.

One of the common ways to intensify words is by adding an adverb. It is because adverbs are flexible. They can modify adjectives, verbs, and even other adverbs. Adverbs combined with adjectives will either boost or downgrade the meaning of the word. For example, the word "absolutely" in "She will be absolutely mad if she finds out about this" shows the intensification of the adjective "mad". It is different from the word "less" in "I think this place is less meaningful for now". The word "less" downgrades the word "meaningful". As intensifier is the part of language that represents the social and emotional conditional of the language users, it surely has various types and usages. Intensifiers change rapidly following the norms and the trend in the language community (Ito & Tagliamonte, 2003, p. 258).

The term of intensifying word is different from one scholar to another. Bolinger (1972: 18) calls them 'degree words' and Quirk et al. (1992: 39) defines them as 'intensifiers'. Meanwhile, both 'degree words' and 'intensifiers' refer to the

linguistic elements used to boost or to downgrade the meaning of words. They express the quality or levels of the words they modify (Bolinger, 1972, p.17; Méndez-Naya, 2008, p.213). Further in this research the term 'intensifier' is used referring to the mentioned definition. They can be used to boost the word meaning such as the use of 'very' in 'you are very smart'. They can also be used to downgrade the meaning of words such as the use of a little' in 'you show a little empathy'.

The function can rely on the purpose of the speakers, such as to impress, to annoy, to persuade, and to change others' perceptions (Setayesh & Vaez-Dalili, 2018: 50). Intensifiers are also called 'degree words' since they have function-levels, namely looking-up intensifiers, neutral intensifiers, and looking-down intensifiers (Bolinger, 1972). In terms of types, Quirk et al. (1992, p. 386) divide emphasizers, amplifiers (consists of maximizers and boosters), and minimizers (consists of approximators, compromisers, diminishers, and minimizers). Besides, Bolinger (1972, p.17) divides into boosters, compromisers, and diminishers. In this research, the distribution of intensifiers is classified based on the taxonomy provided by Quirk et al. (1992, p.386) since there are words list included along with the taxonomy. The use of intensifiers can change rapidly in speech communities and people in the same place tend to use the same intensifiers (Hadiati, 2017, p. 942). Emphasizers are the highest level of intensifiers used to give a heightening effect. They are divided into two types (Quirk et al., 1992, p.377).

Table 1
*Emphasizer*s

Attitudinal Disjuncts	Style Disjunct
actually, certainly, clearly, definitely, indeed, obviously, plainly, really, surely: for certain, for sure, of course	frankly, honestly, literally, simply: fairly, just

Attitudinal disjuncts are used to express truth and style disjuncts are used to express unvarnished truth (Quirk et al., 1992, p. 77). They are also called adjuncts since they cannot appear initially. The second type of intensifier is the amplifier. It is also divided into two types as written in the table below.

Table 2
*Amplifier*s

Maximizers	Boosters
absolutely, altogether, completely, entirely, extremely, fully, perfectly, quite, thoroughly, very, totally, utterly; in all respects, the superlative most	badly, bitterly, deeply, enormously, far, greatly, heartily, highly, intensely, much, severely, so, strongly, terribly, violently, well; a great deal, a good deal, a lot, by far; exclamatory how; the comparative more

The use of maximizers and boosters is slightly different. It looks difficult to distinguish them. They are semantically different. Maximizers are used to modify non-gradable items and boosters are used to modify gradable items such as tall and short (Ghanbaran et al., 2014, p. 545). The third type of intensifier is downtoner. It is divided into four types as follows.

Table 3

*Downtoner*s

Compromisers	Diminishers	Minimizers	Approximators
Especially, sort of,	Mildly, moderately,	barely, hardly,	almost, nearly, practically

especially, rather, enough, sufficiently, more or less	partially, partly, slightly, somewhat; in part, in some respects, to some extent; a little, least (of all)	little, scarcely, in the least, in the slightest, at all	(informal), virtually, as good as, all but

Downtoners are used to scale downwards. Sometimes, they are not only used to downgrade the quality but also to make certain words sound more gentle from the assumed norm (Kennedy, 2003, p. 469). The use of downtoners sometimes looks like a filler to give some time to the speaker to think of what is going to be said next. Downtoners indirectly depict speakers' levels of confidence.

Further, (Murphy, 2010, p. 111) states that an intensifier is the language unit that can change rapidly from time to time depending on the trend and the generation of speakers. The background of the speaker also affects the shift of intensifiers, for example, speakers' age, education, and gender.

Variations in the use of intensifiers occur both within the native speakers and non-native speakers. For native speakers, the variation comes from the fluency and daily communication. Meanwhile, for non-native speakers, the variation possibly comes from the language contact with their native language. The social factor affecting language use is a result of grammatical rules and the norms which are used in the community (Latifah et al., 2017, p. 96).

The study of intensifiers had been conducted in several aspects. First, the study of intensifiers concerning speakers' gender was conducted by Sardabi and Afghari (2015) entitled "Gender Differences in the Use of Intensifiers". The research focused on the gender difference of intensifier usage between women and men in Ireland according to the gender perspective proposed by Lakoff. The data of the research were 1,224 sentences which contain 6 types of intensifiers namely xeili, aslan, vagean, hatman, faghat and "others". It was found that high school female students used intensifiers the most.

Second, Genc and Armagan (2018) also researched gender-bound language use in Turkish and English. The study entitled "A Cross-Cultural

Investigation of Gender-Bound Language Use in Turkish and English Plays: Implications for Foreign Language Education". The study analyzed the use of intensifiers, hedges, and questions. It focused on the differences and similarities across cultures and gender. It was conducted to give further exploration to Lakoff's proposition regarding gender-bound language use. The data were gathered from Turkish plays. Both studies employed Lakoff's theory about the relation between language and gender.

There were also scholars who attempted to compare the use of intensifiers from some aspects. Setayesh and Vaez-Dalili (2018) conducted a corpus-based contrastive analysis of intensifiers used in research articles written by native speakers and by non-native English speakers. The study entitled "A Corpus-based Contrastive Analysis of the Frequency of Intensifiers in Native and Iranian Nonnative English Speakers Applied Linguistics Research Articles (Ras)".

The next study entitled "A Comparative Analysis of the Intensifiers Quite, Rather, and Pretty Used by Americans and British People: A Corpus Study" conducted by Stardy (2019) also compared the use of quite, rather, and pretty used by American and British people.

Similarly, it also employed a corpus-based contrastive analysis. The result highlighted that the use of those three intensifiers by both parties was quite similar. It was in line with the study conducted by Setayesh and Vaez-Dalili (2018) that also emphasized no significant difference in the number of intensifiers used by natives and by non-natives.

Different from the first and second studies, the third study was conducted by Zhiber & Korotina (2019) entitled "Intensifying adverbs in the English language" focusing on the use of intensifiers in daily spoken language and intensifiers in newspapers. It was concluded that newspapers rarely used intensifiers since the

language was mainly formal. They suggested that the less formal language, the more intensifiers t found.

From the previous studies, something is missing. None of the scholars were interested to analyze the use of intensifiers in social media. Thus, the last study highlighted that the more formal language, the fewer intensifiers found. On the other hand, Quirk et al. (1992) also provide a words list of intensifiers that are also including the formal terms. It is interesting to explore more. If a spoken language has more intensifiers compared to the written, then what happens in social media? It is known that social media mainly contain spoken language in a written form.

Twitter is one of the social media that contains many downloadable utterances compared to other social media. Twitter is a place where people of various ages, backgrounds, and nationalities can freely write and post their ideas. Twitter as a word bank contributes to a language shift in daily life.

Based on the problem stated previously, this study focuses on what types of intensifiers are found on Twitter and how they are distributed. It is important to know that Quirk's types of intensifiers are graded based on their semantic meaning. This article will not focus deeply on one or three specific words. On the other hand, the study is restricted to analyzing how many times intensifiers are used by popular Twitter users and whether the types are varying or monotonous. Further, it is described whether there is any similarity with the result shown by previous studies. It is important to reveal how popular intensifiers are. This limited study serves as the basis of studying intensifiers in spoken-but-written English before we go further on intensifier variations or in-depth analysis of the most popular intensifiers used on social media which are possibly conducted as the further study.

METHODOLOGY

There were three stages namely data collection, data analysis, and the presentation of the result

(Sudaryanto, 2015). This was descriptive qualitative research which the objective was to interpret and to describe the types of intensifiers used on Twitter. The data were lexical items although the context was also examined to help to categorize the data.

The data were gathered from four 23 popular Twitter users. It was possible that the words they used would be followed and used by other users. Further, the words would keep spreading widely since they were influencers. The 23 users were used as the sample because of the limited time and accessibility. Previously, the information of the 50 most influential people on Twitter was collected proven by their numbers of followers as provided by www.socialblade.com. Only individual accounts used, governmental and brand accounts were excluded.

Further, there were criteria to select the users; 1) included in 50 top Twitter users; 2) active users; 3) they tweeted in English; 4) they were English native speakers. The criteria were established to see how intensifiers are used among natives. It was expected that native speakers would produce more various intensifiers. Méndez-Naya (2008, p. 216) proved through research that the constant change of intensifiers was highly affected by certain social groups. It was also possible that the change is also affected by influential individuals. Influential individuals were also chosen as their data related to residential area or hometown could be easily found on the internet. It would make it easier to decide whether they were native speakers or not.

Their tweets were downloaded using vicinitas.io. The maximum number of tweets that can be downloaded was 3200. However, the data were limited to only tweets posted in 2020. Excluding the previous tweets. After that, only tweets in the 'tweet' column were encoded. The purpose was to gather the latest trend of intensifiers usage in social media.

The tweets used should be written in English. So, the retweets, replies, and non-English tweets were deleted from the list. After that, the tweets were stored in Ms. Excel format. The lexical

items were classified following Quirk's taxonomy as shown in Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3. After being selected, the tweets were stored in TXT format using Notepad. This was a compulsory stage before analyzing the data.

In the data analysis stage, AntConc 3.5.8 2019 was employed. The app helped to categorize the data. The intensifiers as mentioned in Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3 were searched. To see the context, the Concordance feature of the app was used. The feature viewed the position in which searched words were located in the sentence. Next, the number of each intensifier use was listed. From the stage, the frequency in the use of intensifiers was found. The result of the research is presented formally and informally using tables, figures, and description.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

From the total of 23 users selected, 8,975 tweets were analyzed. There were 194,487 word-tokens and 22,877 word-types as shown by the AntConc app. The words shown are including hashtags and links posted along with the tweet. The total number was shown in the Word List section of the AntConc App. From those word-types, 91 intensifiers were found with 1,548 times occurrence. It proved that 1 intensifier was used quite many times. From 91 intensifiers, there were 4 attitudinal disjuncts with 97 times occurrence, 4 style disjuncts with 56 times occurrence, 51 maximizers with 395 times occurrence, 20 boosters with 891 occurrences, 3 compromisers with 38 times occurrences, 2 diminishers with 46 times occurrence, 3 minimizers with 14 times occurrence, and 2 approximators with 2 occurrences. The distribution is described as follows.

Table 4

*The Distribution of Emphasizer*s

Emphasizers		
Type	Number of Items	Number of Occurrences
Attitudinal Disjuncts	4	97
Style Disjuncts	4	56
Total	8	153

Table 5

*The Distribution of Amplifier*s

Amplifiers		
Type	Number of Items	Number of Occurrence
Maximizers	52	480
Boosters	20	891
Total	72	1.371

Table 6

*The Distribution of Downtoner*s

Downtoners

Type	Number of Items	Number of Occurrence
Compromisers	3	38
Diminishers	2	46
Minimizers	3	14
Approximators	2	11
Total	10	109

An analysis of the most frequently used intensifiers

The amplifiers are used 1,371 times, but 891 of them are boosters. When Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005) find out that really, very, and so are the most frequently used intensifiers in the data, it is also found in this research that so is the most frequently used intensifier of all in the data (692 times). The result of this study is also in line with the study conducted by Setayesh and Vaez-Dalili (2018). It is found that boosters are the most frequently used intensifiers (891 times).

The most interesting fact is that the result of this study corresponds to the result showed by Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005). It is interesting since both studies are conducted in a different period. They conduct a study on the use of intensifiers in the television series between 1994 and 2002. Meanwhile, this study analyzes the use of intensifiers in Twitter during 2020. They mentioned that the finding was affected by time origin which was reflecting the typical layering of forms in the language. What makes it different is that the use of really, which was the most frequently used in television series friends, is no longer used frequently on Twitter. This research reveals that from the total of 1,633 occurrences of intensifiers, really is only used 64 times.

Analyzing why so is still famous although the time is flying, will need a deeper consideration related to the background. The television series friends were an American movie taking place in New York City. "The series was extremely popular" (Tagliamonte & Roberts, 2005, p. 281). It is related to the sample users used in this data. The data were taken from English native speakers, mainly American. It is in line with the result found in friends series since both data sources are English. It can be concluded that so is still popularly used by English speakers especially Americans, no matter how time has changed and the media are also different.

It is proven that a movie or television series is the representation of humans in real life. Whereas Twitter as a social media platform is a miniature of humans' real life. People utter whatever they want in social media as they are speaking into someone in their real life.

Table 7
The Example Use of So

Twitter	Friends
I struggle with what to demand because so damn much needs to change.	I am so sorry.
Haaaa!! Boys and girls are so different.	I am so, so happy for you guys. (Tagliamonte & Roberts, 2005)

It is clearly stated by Quirk et al. (1992, p. 381) that so is classified into boosters. There are also special cases when so is used repetitively as in Table 7. It is in line with Sardabi & Afghari (2015: 206) that divide intensifiers into standard intensifiers, repetitive intensifiers, and persuasive intensifiers.

This study in line with the result showed by Sardabi and Afghari (2015) that boosters are the most frequently used intensifiers. It is quite

difficult to distinguish between boosters and maximizers. One point that can be used to find the difference is that boosters have a comparison version (Quirk et al., 1992, p. 386). Meanwhile, maximizers are used to modify non-gradable words (Sardabi & Afghari, 2015, p. 50). For example, in the sentence, "Climate change will force far harsher changes on our kids" (BO). The word far as an intensifier comes from afar and it means very much.

However, the sample use of this study is still very limited so the relations between gender and intensifier use cannot yet be justified. To correlate the intensifiers and gender theory as studied previously by Sardabi and Afghari (2015), and Genc nd Armagan (2018), more tweets posted by men and women are required.

It is also possible to analyze the variations of intensifiers according to the period by enabling more tweets from previous years. This study analyzes only tweets in 2020. However, what is still debated is about language use in social media. Physically, they are written but in terms of style, sometimes people use verbal styles. If the language in Twitter is conceptualized as a spoken language, then it depicts or represents the language used in daily life.

The use of intensifiers is still monotonous, proved by the case when a lexical item is used many times and the other lexical items are only used once or twice (such as fullest and slightly). It can be assumed that the rarely used intensifiers are still new, or people are not familiar with them. However, since the data were gathered from influential people in the world, the use of intensifiers may spread and then be used by other people daily.

CONCLUSION

The first purpose of this study is to find out what are types of intensifiers found in social media. According to the data, the types of intensifiers found are maximizers, boosters, approximators, compromises, diminishers, and minimizers. All of the intensifier types proposed by Quirk et al. (1992)

are found in the data. Although all types are found, the intensifiers are not fairly distributed. For example, the use of amplifiers is more than 100 times. On the other hand, the use of diminisher and minimizers is not more than 10 times.

The second purpose of this study is to describe whether the use of intensifiers in social media is monotonous or not. It can be seen that the use of intensifiers is quite monotonous but it can also depict the trend since the tweets are limited from tweets posted in 2020.

Third, the findings in this research are similar to the study conducted Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005) that so is the most frequently used intensifiers. The result also corresponds with the study conducted by Sardabi and Afghari, (2015) that boosters are used most frequently.

This study lacks many aspects but it can be used as the basis of conducting further study of English intensifiers. The study of intensifier variations from various periods can be conducted by gathering tweets from various years. This study shows only the result of analyzing tweets in 2020.

Furthermore, this study reveals that the most used intensifiers on Twitter are so. The use of so is quite popular since Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005) also found in their study that the use of so and very was the most frequently used. This fact portrays future opportunities to look deeper into those intensifiers (so) to reveal why they are popular especially on Twitter. This study will need more approaches such as from the perspective of semantics or sociolinguistics.

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