**Title: Adjective amplification in Asian Englishes – a corpus-based analysis of language-internal and -external factors during different stages of change**

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**Abstract**

This study takes a corpus-based approach to analysing ongoing change in adjective amplifiers (*very*, *really*, *so*, etc.) in Hong Kong (HKE), Indian (IndE), and Philippine English (PhiE) based on data from the International Corpus of English. The current study adds to existing research by providing insights into the adjective amplifier systems of Asian English varieties and it uses the insights gained from this analysis to evaluate if the importance of language-internal and language-external factors during different stages of change. Using Conditional Inference Trees, the study assesses if *really* or *so* are replacing *very* as the dominant adjective amplifier in HKE, IndE, and PhiE – a trend shown to be at work in inner circle varieties of English – and if the same mechanisms found to govern this change in inner circle varieties are also at work in Asian Englishes. The analysis shows that the amplifier systems of HKE and IndE are very stable and amplifier choice in these varieties is determined predominately by intra-linguistics factors (adjective type, syntactic context, semantic category). In contrast, the amplifier system of PhiE shows notable signs of ongoing change which is driven predominately by social factors (age and gender of speakers). The results indicate that during stasis and initial stages of change, language-internal factors determine amplifier choice while social factors become more important once changes have reached mid-range. The paper argues that once certain variants (*really* and *so*) gain social meaning, it is this social meaning (the association with specific social groups) drives and accelerates change as speakers want to associate with social groups that carry covert prestige.

**Keywords**

Adjective Amplification, Intensification, Asian Englishes, Language Variation and Change, Corpus Linguistics, Conditional Inference Trees, Corpus Linguistics

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1. **Introduction**

Adjective amplification represents a widely studied phenomenon that has attracted substantive attention from linguists .

This study takes a corpus-based approach to analysing ongoing change in the use of adjective amplifiers (*very*, *really*, *so*, etc.; see (1) and (2)) in Hong Kong (HKE), Indian (IndE), and Philippine English (PhiE) based on data from the International Corpus of English.

While previous research on changes in amplifier systems has successfully applied multivariate methods and unearthed intricate interdependencies and highly systematic trajectories of change in inner circle varieties of English (e.g., D’Arcy 2015; Tagliamonte & Denis 2014), only few studies (e.g. Fuchs & Gut 2016) have analysed ongoing change in adjective amplification in Asian varieties of English. The current study adds to existing research in focusing on change in adjective amplification in HKE, IndE, and PhiE.

One of the most consistent findings in previous research on changes in adjective amplification in informal spoken discourse has been the replacement of very by really. The present study uses Conditional Inference Trees to assess if this trend holds true for HKE, IndE, and PhiE and if the underlying factors that drive this change in inner circle varieties are also at work in these Asian English varieties.

The analysis shows that the amplifier systems of HKE and IndE are very stable and amplifier choice in these varieties is determined predominately by intra-linguistics factors (adjective type, syntactic context, semantic category). In contrast, the amplifier system of PhiE shows notable signs of ongoing change which is driven predominately by social factors (age and gender of speakers).

The results indicate that during stasis and initial stages of change, language-internal factors determine amplifier choice while social factors become more important once changes have reached mid-range. The paper argues that once certain variants (really and so) gain social meaning, it is this social meaning (the association with specific social groups) drives and accelerates change as speakers want to associate with social groups that carry covert prestige.

This study investigates the effects of language-internal and language-external factors during ongoing change and evaluates if the importance of these factors differs across stages of change. To address this issue, the present study focuses on ongoing change in the adjective amplifier systems of Hong Kong, Indian, and Philippine English based on data from the International Corpus of English. As adjective amplification has been found to be a site of “fevered invention and competition that would be hard to come by elsewhere” (Bolinger 1972: 18), this domain lends itself to fine-grained analyses of change.

While there exists a substantial amount of research on research on the factors that impact language change (Labov 1994, 2001, 2010) and changes in adjective amplification (e.g. D’Arcy 2015, Tagliamonte 2008, Tagliamonte & Denis 2014), issues relating to when which factors are more or less impactful during changes in this domain remain unresolved. A key factor for why such issues were difficult to address is methodological: whereas most analyses of ongoing change use regression modelling to evaluate the impact of different factors during language change, tree-based models (see Tagliamonte & Baayen 2012) they are more appropriate to detect differences in the impact of factors across stages of change. Therefore, the present study uses Conditional Inference Trees to determine which factors are dominating during which phase of change.

One of the most consistent findings in previous research on changes in adjective amplification in informal spoken discourse has been the replacement of very by really (D’Arcy 2015, Tagliamonte 2008). The present study investigates if this trend holds true for Hong Kong, Indian, and Philippine English and if the underlying factors that drive this change vary across different stages of change in these Asian English varieties.

The present analysis shows that *very* is being replaced by *really* in Philippine English which is similar to the findings from research on change in adjective amplification in inner circle varieties. As such, the change that can be observed in Philippine English represents a vigorous to mid-range stage of change while the change is only in its incipient stage in Indian English. In Hong Kong English, the amplifier system represents a pre-change situation where the amplifier system is remarkably stable. The statistical analysis reveals that during stasis and incipient stages of change, amplifier sue is determined by language internal factors while extra-linguistic factors, in particular social factor, drive change once the change is accelerating and has become more vigorous.

In review of the converging results from previous research and the present study of Asian varieties of English, the paper adds credence to the hypothesis that linguistic change represents an “opportunistic process that reinforces social distinctions by associating them with particular linguistic variants” (Labov 2002). Applied to the present case this means that change is initially dominated by intra-linguistic factors and accelerates once the innovative variant is sufficiently associated with a social group that then serves as the extra-linguistic driving force during vigorous and mid-range change.

1. **Previous Research**

The present study investigates if this trend holds true for Hong Kong, Indian, and Philippine English and if the underlying factors that drive this change vary across different stages of change in these Asian English varieties.

1. **Data and Methodology**

Th is section provides information of the corpus data used in the present study, the data processing, and the statistical methods that were applied to the data.

3.1 Corpus Description

The present study uses data from the Indian, Hong Kong, and Philippine components of the *International Corpus of English* (ICE; see XXX).

3.2 Data Processing

The data within each corpus was processed in R (R Core Team 2021). The data were loaded and annotated with metadata (sociodemographic information about the author and information relating to the data itself such as when and where the letter was written). The resulting table was then saved for further processing. For the topic modelling, the letters were split into sentences resulting in a table holding 13,931 sentences which formed the basis for the Latent Dirichlet Allocation which represents the core procedure for the topic modelling.

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1. **Results**

The present study investigates if this trend holds true for Hong Kong, Indian, and Philippine English and if the underlying factors that drive this change vary across different stages of change in these Asian English varieties.

1. **Discussion**

The present study investigates if this trend holds true for Hong Kong, Indian, and Philippine English and if the underlying factors that drive this change vary across different stages of change in these Asian English varieties.

1. **Outlook**

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