Gender Difference In Intensifier Usage

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Abstract

In this study we examine the difference in use of intensifiers between men and women. Language is an important and powerful tool to express yourself. Intensifiers play a big role in expressing your feelings. Investigating these differences in language between men and women plays an important part in understanding how language and gender evolves. In this study we focus on intensifiers. We explore whether in 2024 women still use more intensifiers than men and if there is a slight convergence in intensifier usage. We expect that women still use more intensifiers but that there is a convergence in the number of intensifiers used by men and women.

1 Introduction

Do women really still use way more intensifiers than men, or has this totally changed? Language is an important part of every culture, and a powerful tool to express yourself. Investigating the differences in language between men and women is crucial to understanding how language and gender roles evolve. In this study we focus on the usage of intensifiers, and we explore if in 2024 there still is a difference in the way men and women use them.

1.1 A Brief Overview Of Intensifiers

Intensifiers are adverbs or adverbial phrases that serve to strengthen or weaken the meaning of a particular part of the sentence (Declerck, 1991). Some commonly used intensifiers include absolutely, completely, extremely, highly, rather, really, so, too, totally, very and at all.

Examples:

"I like him very much."

"I badly need a hot bath."

"I really don't know."

"A great many people think the Prime Minister is the richest man in the country. (or: a good many people)"

"I was very much surprised by that news."

Declerck (1991)

1.2 Rationale For The Study

Since the last study of gender differences in intensifier usage in 2017, our society and languages have kept evolving. Gender roles and gender are constantly changing. While previous studies have laid out important groundwork on this topic, the ever-changing nature of language needs a fresh look into the difference in intensifier usage between men and women in 2024. By revisiting this subject in 2024, we aim to capture the constant change of language, and provide a more current understanding of the way gender influences intensifier usage.

Our specific research question is: How has the usage of intensifiers between men and women changed?

For this study, the independent variable is gender, and the dependent variable is the frequency of intensifiers used.

- We hypothesize that there will still be an observable difference in the way men and women use intensifiers, and women still use more intensifiers than men.

- We hypothesize that the difference between the number of intensifiers used by men and women will grow closer together over time.

2 Related Work

Previous studies have already investigated the gender differences in intensifier usage. While both studies look into the same specific study of gender and intensifier usage, they use different methods and approaches.

The first article by Hessner and Gawlitzek (2017) examines the stereotype that women are emotional and tend to exaggerate and men in contrast are seen as tough and blunt. Hessner and Gawlitzek (2017) investigates this by using the Spoken British National Corpus 2014 to conduct their research. They examine thirty-nine intensifiers and differentiate between amplifiers and downtoners. For both men and women, they rank the ten most used intensifiers, and they calculate the frequency of the use of intensifiers. Their research shows there is a difference in the type of intensifiers men and women use as well as a difference in frequency of the intensifiers used. They found that women across all age groups tend to use more intensifiers than men. There are limitations to this study. They did not take into account that certain topics could make men or women more enthusiastic, and they would use more intensifiers. They suggest that future research involve exploring different topics.
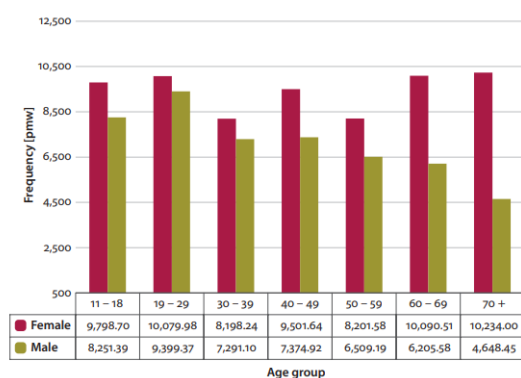

Figure 1: This graph shows the overall distribution of amplifiers by age and gender.

The second article by Fuchs (2017) starts of by shedding light on limitations of previous studies. The article takes into account how sociodemographic variables such as age, gender, and social class influence the usage of intensifiers in spoken British English. They utilize the Spoken British National Corpus datasets from 1994 and 2014. They found significant changes in frequency of intensifiers used in both men and women between 1994 and 2014. They think this could be due to the spread of a positively polite linguistic style in British society They found that women still use more intensifiers than men, and that this trend has persisted over time. They also found that male and female middle-class speakers have become more similar in their use of intensifiers, unlike people from upper and working class. They suggest that future research studies if other linguistic variables have undergone similar change.
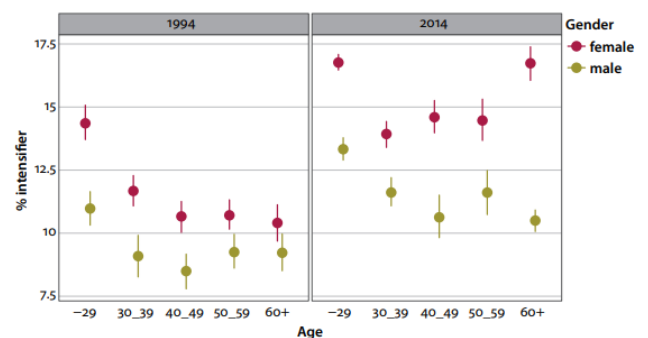

Figure 1. Percentage of adjectives preceded by an intensifier by gender, age and time (error bars indicate one standard error; all figures plotted with *ggplot2*, Wickham 2009)

Figure 2: This graph shows the overall distribution of amplifiers by age and gender.

3 Data

To collect data for this study we held conversations with participants. We recruited participants across different ages, economic groups, and location. The participants were all native British English speakers. There was also an even amount of male and female participants to ensure equal representation.

After reading the limitations in Hessner and Gawlitzek (2017) we decided on a list of diverse topics that would appeal to both men and women to ensure we get an unbiased answer.

The topics for the conversations will be:

- Future goals and dreams
- Daily routine
- Family

Pre-processing We made audio recordings of the conversations and transcribed these. The transcriptions were then analysed for intensifiers. For our study, the independent variable will be gender, men and women. The dependent variable will be frequency off intensifiers used in the conversations. We have created a list of frequent intensifiers such as "really", "very", and "absolutely". This list will serve as reference for identifying intensifiers.

We have created a code that will tokenize all the transcriptions and count the number of intensifiers used and number of words spoken by each participant. It will then calculate the frequency of intensifiers for each gender. For each gender, it will divide the number of intensifiers by the total number of words. This will then be multiplied by a hundred to get the percentage. The results will then be presented in a table like table1.

Gender	Percentage of Intensifier
Female	x
Male	x

Table 1: Table that we will be using to present our results

4 Predicted Results

Based on previous studies we expect women to still use more intensifiers than men. We also expect the difference to become less big. Similar to (Fuchs, 2017) we expect that over time men and women will grow closer together in the number of intensifiers used. We expect that women will have a frequency of 15 percent intensifiers used. For men we think it will be about 10 percent. Table 2 shows an example of the expected results for our study.

Table 2

Age	Percentage of Intensifier
Female	15
Male	10

Table 2: Example of expected results

Discussion If the results are as we predicted, it could provide insights on how gender roles and language use is evolving. It could show us how over time, male and female language becomes more similar to each other.

However, there are limitations to our study. Even though we aimed at a diverse group of participants, it is impossible to represent a broader group. Future research with larger and more diverse samples could make findings more valid.

It would be interesting for future studies to continue investigating the use of intensifiers between genders. This way trends in language could be captured over time. Additionally, the gender binary used in our study, focusing on men and women, does not capture the spectrum of gender identity. It would be interesting for future research to adopt a more inclusive approach by considering more than two genders.

5 Conclusion

In this study we aimed to find out if there was still a difference in the frequency of intensifiers between men and women. Based on previous studies, we expect that women still tend to use more intensifiers than men. We also expect there to be a slight convergence in the number of intensifiers used by men and women, like in (Fuchs, 2017). We predict women to have a frequency of intensifiers of 15 percent and men to have a frequency of 10 percent.

If our predictions are true, they could provide insights in to the evolution of gender specific language.

However, it is important to address limitations of our study. The small scale of our study, and the challenge of representing a diverse population may impact our results. Future work with larger and more diverse samples to enhance validity of the research. It would also be interesting for future work to stray away from the gender binary and see how language varies outside the binary of men and women.

By examining the use of intensifiers between men and women we hope to offer insights in to the changing nature of language and gender roles in 2024.

References

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