Rasha Mohammad Saeed Mostafa, PhD

Amplification in English: A corpus-based study of the Use of *–ly* amplifiers in academic English

Rasha Mohammad Saeed Mostafa, *PhD*
Modern University for Technology & Information (MTI)

Abstract

English intensifiers have become a major area of interest in corpus linguistics studies. Yet, while attention has been given to exploring intensifiers in spoken English, the present study attempts to contribute to their use in the written register. The study investigates the academic section of the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) to provide evidence on lexico-grammatical collocational patterns of the most frequent –ly amplifiers used as maximizers (fully, completely, and entirely) and those used as boosters (particularly, clearly, and highly). Whereas gradability has traditionally been regarded as the most significant determinant of amplifiers' collocates, the present study focuses on another aspect, i.e. semantic preference. The study highlights the importance of relying on corpus-based evidence to give an accurate account of native-speaker use of amplifiers. It also highlights the importance of integrating computer-based data-driven learning (DDL) in SLA to help ESL learners of academic writing and translators make decisions when using amplifiers.

Keywords: English amplifiers –   collocations   - lexico-grammatical patterns –

semantic preference - academic writing

- **Introduction**

English intensifiers have become a major area of interest for corpus linguistics research for a variety of reasons. Firstly, intensifiers mark the speakers' emotions and perspective on an entity by either amplifying or downtoning the gradable quality they modify. Hence, they are used to achieve subjectivity (Athanasiadou, 2007), and they have an important rhetorical role in both spoken and written language (Recski, 2004). Secondly, intensifiers are flexible, versatile contextually-sensitive linguistic resources that are prone to renewal, and hence they undergo processes of layering, grammaticalization, and delexicalization (Méndez-Naya, 2003; Núñez-Pertejo & Martínez, 2014). Over time, their independent original meanings have been either reduced or completely lost; they have meaning as far as they contribute to the phrase in which they occur. Furthermore, intensifiers can signal in-group membership, and they are often subject to fashion. González-Díaz (2014) points out that numerous studies have attested that when a degree adverb is adopted widely in a particular group, it tends to lose its uniqueness, and soon it is replaced by a new intensifier.

Because they highlight a speaker's point of view and mark his/her membership of a group, intensifiers are important for ESL learners who may overuse them or use them in a non-native manner. English intensifiers can be a challenge for ESL learners, especially when they have near-synonymous meanings (Dao, 2014). To illustrate, a learner of English is faced with a wide range of intensifiers to modify adjectives in terms of degree, such as *very*, *so*, *too*, *really*, *quite*, *rather*, *fairly*, *extremely*, *absolutely*, *entirely*, *completely*, *totally*, *definitely*, *exceedingly*, *enormously*, *awfully*, *greatly*, and *extraordinarily* – these are just a few. Recski (2004) points out that generally, learners' overuse of intensifiers is associated with colloquial spoken style; exaggerated intensity is often considered inappropriate in formal academic texts. Furthermore, research has attested that intensifiers, like all other linguistic resources, have collocational patterns with particular grammatical and semantic characteristics. Teaching these collocations should be a major unit of language learning, similar to other traditional units of language description, i.e., sounds, words, and rules of grammar and discourse (Kennedy, 2003).

The present study attempts to help ESL learners of academic writing make decisions when using intensifiers. It investigates *–ly*-adverb-amplifiers in the academic section of the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA), which contains linguistic resources that are helpful for writing classes. The literature review reveals that more attention has been given to exploring intensifiers in spoken English. Therefore, the present study attempts to contribute to the written register by providing corpus-based evidence on native-like use of amplifying collocational patterns. The analysis will in turn increase the understanding of how English is structured and will give possible new insights into the practice of English language teaching.

- **Literature Review:**

In recent years, there has been a wide range of significant corpus-based studies on intensification, mainly because such a linguistic resource has undergone noticeable change across time. Calle-Martín (2014) points out that these studies can be classified into three categories. The first type of these studies focuses on the sociolinguistic variables of intensifiers, i.e. the distribution across social groups, varieties, etc. The second type of studies is comparative; research in this area investigates the development

of different intensifiers across time. Within the scope of this type I include parallel corpus studies made across languages which contribute to both ESL and translation studies. The third type of intensification studies is diachronic and/or synchronic; they investigate individual items and the origin of their intensifying function.

o **Sociolinguistic studies:**

Núñez-Pertejo and Martínez (2014) conduct a comparative corpus study on the use of intensifiers by adults and teenagers in spoken British English in informal face-to-face conversations and spontaneous speech. They focus on the two maximizers *absolutely* and *totally*, and collect their data from *The Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language* (COLT), *Saarbrücken Corpus of Spoken English* (SCoSE), and *The Diachronic Corpus of Present-Day Spoken English* (DCPSE). The study reveals by statistics that adults use intensifiers twice as often. When teenagers use *absolutely* and *totally*, these two maximizers have a more discourse-oriented function, being emphatic, affirmative response items rather than mere intensifiers. To mark their in-group solidarity and identity, teenagers frequently resort to slang, taboo and swear words (e.g. *bloody*) as intensifiers. Considering collocations, the study reveals that *totally* tends to co-occurs more frequently with adjectives expressing negative semantic prosody whereas *absolutely* is used with emotionally loaded collocates, either with positive or negative semantic prosody. The major significance of this study lies in validating previous research and contributing to the study of teens talk as well as the grammaticalization and delexicalization processes characteristic of the intensifier system.

Martínez and Núñez-Pertejo (2012) investigate intensification in youth language. They analyze data from different corpora: *The Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language* (COLT), *Saarbrücken Corpus of Spoken English* (SCoSE), and *Diachronic Corpus of Present-Day Spoken English* (DCPSE) together with data from teen magazines and Websites. The results of this study reveal that teens frequently use *really* and *so* as intensifiers. In addition, they widely use taboo words (e.g., *bloody, fucking*) as intensifying expressions. Negatives are also frequently intensified and exclamations are a common reinforcing resource. Finally, youth tend to use prefixes *(e.g. super-, mega-)* with expressions denoting positive qualities (e.g. *cook, massive*) to strengthen the force of the utterances.

In their sociolinguistic corpus-based study, Yaguchi et al. (2010) explore the sociolinguistic functions of three commonly-used adjective-modifying intensifiers in spoken American English, namely, *very*, *real*, and *really*. They examine the distribution of the three intensifiers in the

expository and exploratory talks of the *Corpus of Spoken Professional American English* (CSPAE) across genders in formal settings. The significance of the study lies in its finding that intensification is not a mere word choice but rather a concealed device to express the speakers' attitude and position as social beings. Furthermore, the study's finding that female speakers' tend to use the intensifier in the predicative rather than the attributive position is interpreted as an act of positive politeness and "thereby, characterize professional women's public speech style" (p. 594).

Xiao and Tao (2007) investigate the distribution of thirty (30) amplifiers in the *British National Corpus* (BNC) according to variables such as gender, age, social class and educational background. The study has five major findings. Firstly, amplifiers are used twice as frequently in speech as in writing. Secondly, men tend to use maximizers whereas women prefer to use boosters for intensification. Thirdly, *very*, *quite* and *really* are the most frequent amplifiers in both spoken and written communication. Fourthly, speakers with a higher level of education use amplifiers more frequently. Finally, diachronically, the use of amplifiers declined during the period 1960s - 1990s.

Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005) investigate the use of intensifiers in the popular American television series *Friends* between the years 1994 and 2002. The major significance of this study lies in providing an opportunity to study linguistic innovation in real time and to use media-based data as a surrogate to real-world data in sociolinguistic research. Based on the analysis of over 9,000 tokens, the study concludes that *very* gave way to *really*, and this may have given way to *so*. Furthermore, a major finding of this study is that females tend to use *so* more frequently than males.

o **Comparative studies:**

Martínez and Núñez-Pertejo (2014) investigate teens' talk in English and Spanish using data from COLT and *Corpus Oral del Lenguaje Adolescente* (COLA). Their results reveal that there are common tendencies in intensifying strategies used by English and Spanish teens, such as the use of taboo and swearing words. Yet, some differences have also been attested. For example, equivalent *–ly* adverbs are less frequent in Spanish. Furthermore, expletives in English carry religious connotations, but they are associated with sexuality in Spanish.

Baños (2013) conducts a significant study based on the findings of Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005). The starting point of this study is that

the use of intensification in sitcom discourse mirrors its use in realistic colloquial conversations in English and in Spanish. The study explores how intensifiers in *Friends* have been dubbed into Spanish. Using a parallel corpus consisting of original and dubbed episodes (English-Spanish), Baños evaluates the accuracy of translating features of intensification into Spanish. Results reveal that the adverbial intensifiers are translated into Spanish using adverbs that are typical of written formal communication rather than colloquial conversation. Furthermore, in order to provide a domesticated dubbed product, several emphatic linguistic features typical of spontaneous colloquial conversation in Spanish are used to translate intensifiers, such as intensified lexemes and idiomatic lexical bundles.

o   **Diachronic and/or synchronic studies:**

Several corpus studies scrutinize the historical development of intensifiers in different varieties of English. These studies examine the range of collocational patterns, different syntactic functions and various meanings associated with these functions over the years. Calle-Martín (2014) investigates the history of *wonder.* Blanco-Suárez (2014) focuses on *dead* as an intensifying adverb. Núñez-Pertejo (2013) examines *absolutely* in late modern and contemporary written British and American English. Zhang (2013) tracks the development of the semantic prosody of four adverbial boosters: *terribly, awfully, horribly* and *dreadfully* by comparing their frequency in collocating with pleasant and unpleasant words over the years. Martínez (2009) explores the syntactic and semantic changes that *quite* has undergone over the years. Sowa (2009) surveys the post-modifying intensifier *as* in New Zealand and Australian English. Ito and Tagliamonte (2003) study the 'recycling' of the two intensifiers *very* and *really.* Nevalainen and Rissanen (2002) focus on the diachronic semantic change that has led to the two downtoners *pretty* and *fairly*.

•   **Intensifiers: Taxonomy and Functions**

Like adverbs of degree, intensifiers modify adjectives, adverbs, and clauses. In a broad sense, intensifiers refer to all words that express a degree that is higher or lower than the assumed norm (Quirk et al., 1985, pp. 589-91). They are located on an intensity scale (Figure 1). Using Quirk et al's taxonomy, Núñez-Pertejo and Martínez (2014) refer to two types of intensifiers. The first type is 'amplifiers'; they scale an entity upwards, expressing a positive degree. Amplifiers fall into two

categories. The first category is 'maximizers' (e.g. *absolutely*, *totally*); the second is 'boosters' (e.g. *very*, *really*). On the one hand, maximizers are concerned with the extremes; they express the superlative degree of the modified item. Boosters denote a high degree of a quality without reaching the extreme. The second type of intensifiers is 'downtoners' they scale the entity downwards from an assumed norm, hence, expressing a negative degree. Downtoners fall into four categories: approximators (e.g. *almost*), compromisers (e.g. *more or less*), diminishers (e.g. *partly*) and minimizers (e.g. *hardly*).
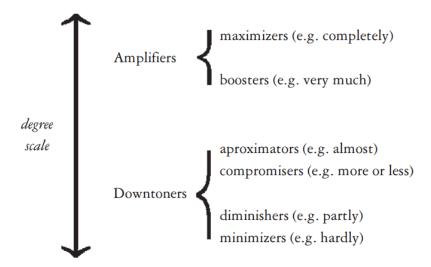

Figure 1. Subtypes of intensifiers, adapted from (Quirk et al., 1985, pp. 589-90)

Lorenz (2002) provides a semantic classification of intensifiers according to their sources. Intensifiers fall into five categories. Firstly, 'scalars' scale a quality without providing additional propositional content (e.g. *very*). Secondly, 'feature copying' intensifiers copy a substantial part of the modified-item's denotation (e.g. *obviously clear*). Thirdly, 'evaluative' intensifiers express a speaker's evaluation of the modified item (e.g. *ridiculously low*). Fourthly, 'comparative' modifiers express a distinct feature of the item in relation to other items (e.g. *eminently*). Finally, 'modal' intensifiers state the degree to which the quality holds true (e.g. *truly*). In a former study, Lorenz (1999) argues that, like all modifiers, intensifiers are used to assert the importance or relevance of the qualities they modify and to elaborate on their core meaning. It is this collocational association between the intensifier and the modified term that form idiomatic usages.

Considering the above semantic classification, Lorenz (2002) provides noteworthy findings about the grammaticalization process that intensifiers undergo. The study reveals that because evaluatives are qualitative adverbs that carry a great emotive force, they are the most powerful resource of innovation. Evaluatives imply a speaker's search for novelty in assessing a referent. They range from expressions that refer to extremes, in size (e.g. *enormously*), depth (e.g. *deeply*), or strength (e.g. *heartily*), to expressions that are linked with the ideas of astonishment (e.g. *surprisingly*), negative emotions (e.g. *terribly*) or taboo words (e.g *bloody*). It is no surprise, then, that evaluatives are considered polysemous. Notably, Lorenz's finding validates Quirk et al's (1985) account of booster amplifiers. Boosters form an open class, i.e. "new expressions are frequently created to replace older ones whose impact follows the trend of hyperbole in rapidly growing ineffectual" (p.590). I conclude that as long as speakers vary in the extent to which they give hyperbolic perception of an item, there will always be new boosters introduced.

- **Research Questions:**

The current study focuses on the use of *–ly* amplifiers in COCA academic sub-corpus. It adopts a window of one-word range to investigate collocational patterns of amplifiers. The purpose of the analysis is to answer the following research questions:

a. What is the predominate meaning and the pragmatic function of the highest frequent amplifiers: *fully*, *completely*, *entirely*, *particularly*, *clearly*, and *highly*?

b. What are the patterns of collocations, semantic prosody and semantic preference associated with these amplifiers?

c. What are the lexico-grammatical patterns governing the use of these amplifiers?

d. Based on the findings, what pedagogical decisions regarding the teaching of amplifiers should be made when introducing them to academic writing students?

- **Analysis and discussion**

The starting point to check *–ly* amplifiers in the academic sub-corpus of COCA is guided by: (i) the list Quirk et al. (1985) provide for the two semantic categories 'maximizers' and 'boosters'; and (ii) the list of highest frequent amplifiers in BNC included in Kennedy's corpus study (2003). Table 1 lists the frequency of the most recurrent amplifiers in COCA academic sub-corpus arranged in a descending order.

Obviously, there is a predominance of more boosters (72,756 occurrences, 53%) than maximizers (34,912 occurrences, 47%). This predominance validates the findings of the studies made by Recski (2004) on MICASE and Kennedy (2003) on BNC. Furthermore, I consider such a predominance to be a feature of academic writing which, in its adherence to objectivity and accuracy, still does not tend to exaggerate or talk about extremes but rather about evaluations. The current study focuses on the highest frequent three of each category, i.e., *fully*, *completely*, and *entirely* from the maximizers list, and *particularly*, *clearly*, and *highly* from the boosters list. I recommend future research to study the least frequent amplifiers, for that will give insights into distinctive usages amongst the terms.

Table 1: Frequency of amplifiers in academic sub-corpus of COCA

Maximizers		Boosters	
Context	**FREQ**	**Context**	**FREQ**
fully	9,384	*particularly*	20,906
completely	6,205	*clearly*	15,667
entirely	5,685	*highly*	14,665
extremely	5,588	*strongly*	7,264
totally	2,338	*greatly*	4,208
perfectly	1,727	*deeply*	3,803
absolutely	1,685	*heavily*	3,508
thoroughly	1,555	*severely*	1,754
utterly	745	*badly*	981
TOTAL	**34,912**	**TOTAL**	**72,756**

Maximizers

Table 2 lists the frequency of the most recurrent collocates of the maximizers *fully*, *completely*, and *entirely* in COCA academic sub-corpus. I used the search term *maximizer [j*]* to check the post-modified adjectives, and *maximizer [v*]* to check the post-modified verbs.

As Table 2 reveals, there are a number of findings resulting from comparing the different collocational patterns of the three maximizers:

i. *Fully* tends to occur predominately as a modifier of verbs than adjectives, whereas *completely* and *entirely* modify more adjectives

than verbs. *Fully* has exclusively positive associations, tending to collocate with positive-semantic prosody items (*aware, human, developed, functional, operational, integrated, certified, consistent, conscious, automated, understand, realized, implemented, informed, appreciate, formed).* These terms generally belong to a favorable semantic inventory of *development* and *expansion.*

ii. *Completely* tends to be co-occur with a semantic class of verbs giving unfavorable implications, usually associated with abolition (*lost, ignored, eliminated, destroyed, removed, changed*). However, when it collocates with adjectives, *completely* does not seem to imply negative associations; the adjective collocates are mainly positive (*new, free, independent, true, successful*).

Table 2: Frequency of highest ten collocates of the three maximizers

fully [j*]	FRQ	fully [v*]	FRQ	completely [j*]	FRQ	completely [v*]	FRQ	entirely [j*]	FRQ	entirely [v*]	FRQ
aware	195	understand	232	different	289	lost	52	different	302	ignored	18
human	67	understood	168	new	111	ignored	41	new	286	lost	15
developed	65	developed	145	free	49	covered	35	possible	75	separate	15
functional	47	realized	131	independent	48	eliminated	35	clear	70	clear	13
operational	43	integrated	99	dependent	38	destroyed	33	consistent	65	eliminated	13
integrated	42	implemented	84	absent	26	removed	30	appropriate	47	disappeared	12
certified	36	informed	70	unknown	23	understand	28	dependent	40	lacking	12
consistent	36	appreciate	63	voluntary	20	eliminate	27	absent	31	based	9
conscious	33	appreciated	57	true	19	understood	26	successful	26	forgotten	9
automated	31	formed	52	successful	18	changed	23	free	22	abandoned	8
TOTAL:	595	TOTAL:	1101	TOTAL:	641	TOTAL:	330	TOTAL:	964	TOTAL:	124
	35%		66%		66%		34%		88%		12%

iii. Like *completely*, e*ntirely* tends to be co-occur with a semantic class of verbs giving unfavorable implications, usually associated with abolition (*ignored, lost, separate, eliminated, disappeared, lacking, forgotten*). However, when it collocates with adjectives, *entirely* does not seem to imply negative associations; the adjective collocates are mainly positive (*new, possible, clear, consistent, appropriate, successful, free*)

iv. *Completely* and *entirely* share collocates; that interprets their interchangeability.

v. Findings on the semantic prosody of the three maximizers in COCA academic sub-corpus validate Kennedy's study (2003) on BNC.

The following is an account of the different syntactic patterns governing the use of the three maximizers. Generally, there are two possible positions for the intensifiers: middle and final.

- **Middle position**

Middle position is favored for maximizers. When maximizers are in middle position they express very high degree, as contrasted to their occurrence in final position which denotes the extreme. For example: *He completely denied it* has a different effect from *He denied it completely*. In the first case, *completely* is close to that of the booster *strongly* or emphasizer *really*. In the second case, *completely* expresses absolute upper extreme. The following concordance lines attest for the middle position of the three maximizers as pre-modifiers for adjectives and verbs:

vi. She is clear, after being **fully informed** that it is what she really wants.

vii. but the small sample size limited our ability to **fully elucidate** independent contributors

viii. To operate without buffers, arrivals must be **completely predictable** and smooth

ix. it may be premature to **completely discount** the possibility of any effects

x. But is that **<u>entirely</u>** **<u>right</u>** if the patient's best interests lie with tighter control?

xi. the existing research evidence is almost **<u>entirely</u>** **<u>derived</u>** from cross-sectional studies.

It has been observed that regarding middle position of maximizers a post-verb position is very frequent with different forms of verb *to be*. There are 2,823 occurrences of *fully* following the verb, 2,277 occurrences of *completely*, and 1,778 occurrences of *entirely*. Table 3 below summaries top ten occurrences as a result of a search term [v*] *maximizer*:

Table 3: Frequency of *maximizers* in post-verb position

[v*] *fully*	FREQ	[v*] *completely*	FREQ	[v*] *entirely*	FREQ
be fully	654	is completely	395	is entirely	446
is fully	393	be completely	339	be entirely	220
are fully	322	was completely	303	was entirely	172
been fully	220	are completely	243	are entirely	161
was fully	185	were completely	182	been entirely	80
were fully	140	been completely	121	were entirely	72
become fully	83	had completely	53	based entirely	34
participate fully	70	has completely	45	depends entirely	28
can fully	60	have completely	44	composed entirely	27
being fully	57	being completely	34	left entirely	21

- **Final position**

Maximizers are not frequent in final positions. The data from the academic sub-corpus of COCA are extracted using the following search terms (*maximizer .*) , (*maximizer ,*) , and (*maximizer ;*). Table 4 summarizes the frequency of the three possible clause endings: 2.9% of the overall occurrences of *fully*, 6.8% of *completely,* and 7.5% of *entirely* are end positions.

Table 4: Frequency of the three maximizers in end position

Clause ending	*fully*	*completely*	*entirely*
.	132	252	246
,	131	161	173
;	6	7	9
Total	**269**	**420**	**428**
Of Overall FREQ	**9384**	**6205**	**5685**
Percentage	**2.9 %**	**6.8 %**	**7.5 %**

Checking the concordance lines reveals that when maximizers are in end position, they denote absolute upper extreme of the scale. This is contrasted with their occurrence in middle position that denotes very high degree upwards the scale. Here are examples:

xii. the symptoms receded over the next few months, and the patient recovered **fully .**

xiii. I can capture the entire content of such beliefs **fully ,** only that his claims seem well respected.

xiv. organize their ideas coherently; (3) develop their ideas **fully ;** and (4) use concise language a

xv. nuclear warheads will be phased out **completely .**

xvi. I know my world **completely ,** as the gods know ours,

xvii. was executed **completely ;** consequently, teacher interest was high.

xviii. Terrorists willing to commit suicide are another proposition **entirely .**

xix. To stop the gears **entirely ,** the oxygen supply was cut off.

xx. The answer is that they can not **entirely ;** fundamental beliefs will influence decision-making

With regard to the final position of maximizers, it is observed that usually when the sentence is negative, final position is normal. Here are examples:

I.   If they do **not** have sufficient time to develop **fully ,** they hibernate as older caterpillars or pupae through a second winter.

II. They wanted a place to belong where they were **not** only accepted **fully ,** but also made a vital contribution.

III. Not all the pods had been sampled **completely ;**

IV. unexpected flashes: it has not vanished **completely .**

V.   However, they did not become artifacts, at least not **entirely .**

VI. This cannot be ruled out **entirely .**

a. Boosters

Table 5 below lists the frequency of the most recurrent collocates of the boosters *particularly*, *clearly*, and *highly*, respectively, in COCA academic sub-corpus. I used the search term *booster [j*]* to check the post-modified adjectives, and *booster [v*]* to check the post-modified verbs.

According to Table 5, here are the findings resulting from comparing the different collocational patterns of the three boosters:

Table 5: Frequency of highest ten collocates of the three boosters *particularly*, *clearly*, and *highly*

particularly [j*]	FRQ	particularly [v*]	FRQ	clearly [j*]	FRQ	clearly [v*]	FRQ	highly [j*]	FRQ	highly [v*]	FRQ
important	696	given	64	visible	99	defined	410	qualified	348	correlated	331
true	304	striking	53	evident	86	stated	144	significant	308	valued	243
useful	248	suited	37	important	39	shows	128	visible	232	qualified	179
relevant	193	challenging	35	articulated	36	demonstrated	120	unlikely	216	regarded	147
vulnerable	181	pronounced	23	identifiable	36	identified	119	skilled	211	trained	123
interesting	178	regarding	23	different	29	understood	112	effective	201	motivated	111
difficult	172	related	22	superior	27	indicate	109	successful	188	charged	105
interested	159	appealing	21	heterosexual	21	established	102	competitive	167	educated	93
strong	148	affected	20	aware	19	has	96	variable	148	developed	89

effective	116	*associated*	19	*distinct*	19	*indicates*	91	*sensitive*	131	*identified*	87
TOTAL:	**2395**	**TOTAL:**	**317**	**TOTAL:**	**411**	**TOTAL:**	**1431**	**TOTAL:**	**2150**	**TOTAL:**	**1508**
	13%		**12%**		**22%**		**78%**		**59%**		**41%**

xxi. *Particularly* tends to occur predominately as a modifier of adjectives than verbs, whereas *clearly* predominately modify more verbs than adjectives. *Highly* shows almost similar tendency to occur with adjectives and verbs.

xxii. *Particularly, clearly,* and *highly* have positive associations, tending to collocate with positive-semantic prosody items that denote achievement especially in terms of intellect and skill (*important, useful, relevant, strong, evident, identifiable, superior, designed, demonstrated, understood, established, qualified, significant, skilled, effective, successful, competitive, correlated, valued, trained, motivated, educated, developed).* These terms generally belong to a favorable semantic inventory.

xxiii. *Clearly* tends to be associated with visual perception (*evident*, *visible*). This falls within Lorenz's category of 'feature copying', whereby the booster copies features from its collocate. This further verifies Paradis's assumption that a successful match between a term and its collocate is achieved when the gradable feature in the adjective harmonizes with the grading function of the degree modifier in terms of scalarity (1997, p. 158).

The following is an account of the different syntactic patterns governing the use of the three boosters. As is the case with maximizers, boosters occur in two possible positions: middle and final. The three boosters are predominately used as pre-modifiers for adjectives and verbs, but they are very infrequent in end position.

- **Middle position**

Middle position is favored for boosters. The following concordance lines attest for the middle position of the three boosters as pre-modifiers for adjectives and verbs:

xxiv. Fasting imposes a reduction of calorie intake, which is **particularly** **significant** if the hours of darkness are few

xxv. Also, young children **particularly** **enjoy** books that stimulate their imaginative powers

xxvi. Two patients (7%) had a **clearly** **visible**, ongoing pathologic process underlying findings

xxvii. The lower data set **clearly** **results** from the PowerBoost phase and the upper data Goodput

xxviii. whether a rich description of the scene, or only **highly** **symbolic** information, should be provided

xxix. and we **highly** **recommend** his article to anyone interested in this subject.

However, there is a predominance of the passive structure used with the *particularly* and *highly*, so the occurrence of the verb after the booster is in participle form. This justifies the high frequency of the *particularly* and *highly* after different forms of verb *to be*. Below are examples of concordance lines:

xxx. Web 2.0 technologies are **particularly** **suited** to storytelling through almost unlimited combinations of text, audio, and video.

xxxi. Timing is **particularly** **affected** if you lecture in the chat room symrochures mode.

xxxii. And yet, for someone who should have been so **highly** **regarded**, he sadly received little recognition

xxxiii. These services are also apparently **highly** **valued** by the bank's customers

- **Final position**

The three boosters are not frequent in final positions. The data are extracted using the following search terms (*booster .*) , (*booster ,*) , and (*booster ;*). The count excluded cases where *clearly* functions as a clause-marker (which is 1,288 occurrences). Table 6 summarizes the frequency of the three possible sentence endings: 1.4% of the overall occurrences of *particularly*, 7.3% of *clearly,* and 0.4% of *highly* are end positions.

Table 6: Frequency of the three boosters in end position

Clause ending	particular ly	clearly	highly
.	14	187	25
,	285	952	36
;	2	12	1
Total	**301**	**1151**	**62**
Of Overall FREQ	**20906**	**15667**	**14665**
Percentage	**1.4 %**	**7.3 %**	**0.4 %**

Interestingly, the end position for boosters is not mainly to add emphasis, but rather to denote the literal meaning of the booster. For example, in the concordance lines below *particularly* means *in particular, highly* means *favorably*, and *clearly* means *visibly* or *in a clear manner*

VII.   concepts related to measuring student success in higher education generally and at community colleges **particularly .**

VIII. the sport specific characteristic of " fitting in with the team " was rated **highly .**

IX.   and the gestures arise from the struggle to communicate them **clearly .**

---

b. General Findings:

Gradability has traditionally been regarded as the most important of aspects that determine amplifiers' collocates. However, the data investigated in the current study reveal another grammatical-semantic factor, i.e. the semantic preference (whether the meaning of the adjective or verb has negative or positive associations).

Whereas Biber et al. (1999) regard amplifiers to be generally interchangeable, close examination of the results of this current study suggest that this is not the case for the amplifiers under study. Indeed, the collocational patternsis evidence for non-interchangeability. For example, it is true that *completely* and *entirely* may be interchangeable; they have similar semantic preference collocating with adjectives having a

positive/neutral semantic prosody and verbs with negative connotations. However, this is not the case with *fully* – the most frequent maximizer in the academic sub-corpus. *Fully* prefers to occur with adjectives and verbs with positive semantic prosody. Hence, interchangeability may result in non-native like collocation.

The current study verifies Kennedy's results that some amplifiers do not seem to fit comfortably with particular adjectives and are unlikely to be acceptable by native English speakers (2003, p.474). The study experiments on shuffling amplifiers and collocates to check if there is corpus evidence of the new combinations (Table 7). In most cases, the new combination is either remarkably less frequent or not possible at all. This is not the case for *particularly* which I classify in Lorenz's terms as a 'scalar'. It scales a quality without providing additional propositional content; this justifies its interchangeability.

Table 7: Frequency of new collocational structures

Collocation	FREQ
fully different	0
fully new	0
completely aware	5
completely human	4
clearly important	39
clearly true	6
clearly given	3
clearly striking	0
clearly true	6
clearly useful	1
particularly visible	11
particularly evident	104
particularly qualified	1
particularly significant	103
highly important	68
highly true	0

Quirk et al. (1985, p. 597) point out that boosters accept comparisons and modifications, whereas maximizers vary in this respect. Investigating the corpus, the current study does not *fully* attest for this account. Table 8 lists the frequency of exposing the six amplifiers under-study to the test of comparison by making a combination of the amplifier

and the three comparison terms *more, less,* and *most*. The finding of this experiment reveals that while two maximizers (*fully* and *completely*) and two boosters (*highly* and *strongly*) accept comparison, one maximizer (*entirely*) and one booster (*greatly*) do not. Interestingly, while *completely* and *entirely* may be interchangeable, as attested above, they do not have the same comparative behavior. Indeed, this finding of the study gives new insights in ESL. Since it may be difficult to account for these fine collocational distinctions in a textbook, learners should be guided to use the corpus for evidence, by getting exposed to native-produced language.

Table 8: Frequency of comparison-amplifier structures

Maximizers		Boosters	
Context	**FREQ**	**Context**	**FREQ**
more fully	719	*more highly*	303
less fully	2	*less highly*	15
most fully	86	*most highly*	198
more completely	86	*more strongly*	432
less completely	10	*less strongly*	33
most completely	12	*most strongly*	176
more entirely	2	*more greatly*	8
less entirely	2	*less greatly*	0
most entirely	0	*most greatly*	3

II. Conclusion: Implications For Language Teaching

The present study highlights the importance of relying on corpus-based evidence to give an accurate account of authentic native speaker use of the most frequent –*ly* amplifiers in English academic discourse: *fully, completely, entirely, particularly, clearly,* and *highly*. Neglecting the collocational patterns, semantic preferences, and lexico-grammatical patterns of amplifiers as attested in the corpus means that several of the fine distinctions between different amplifiers will be confused and hence result in non-native non-fluent language production.

Based on the findings of the present study, an Arabic ESL learner/translator is faced with three choices to transfer the maximizers 'تماماً' and 'كلياً' into English, i.e. *fully, completely* and *entirely*. So

basically, there are three possible translations for the sentence " أغفل الفكرة تماماً " in which the maximizer modifies a verb carrying negative semantic prosody:

X. He *fully* ignored the idea.

XI.   He *completely* ignored the idea.

XII.   He *entirely* ignored the idea.

However, *fully* (the most frequent maximizer in COCA) predominately occurs with favorable/positive verbs. Hence, the more authentic native-like choice is either *completely* or *entirely*; both maximizers collocate with a semantic class of verbs giving unfavorable implications (e.g. ignoring). Furthermore, in a *maximizer+adjective* structure as in the sentence "تقدم بفكرة جديدة تماماً", considering the most-frequent collocate is the determining factor for an authentic transfer of meaning. Three possible English translations are:

XIII.   He proposed a *fully* new idea.

XIV.   He proposed a *completely* new idea.

XV.   He proposed an *entirely* new idea.

Again, *fully* does not sound authentic because, even though *fully* predominately collocates with adjectives denoting development and expansion, the notion of *novelty* (i.e. new) does not apply as revealed in the results of its frequency in the corpus (Table 2).

I agree with Kennedy (2003) that a learner's linguistic competence significantly depends on an enormous stock of memories of previously encountered words and groups of words. Therefore, it is necessary that learners get exposed to language frequently through the practice of reading. Indeed, with such an exposure to language, idiomatic combinations resulting from frequent collocates, e.g. *particularly given*, *completely different* and *clearly evident*, can be retrieved from the memory and reproduced effectively in real practice.

So, if it is the learner's responsibility to get engaged in reading, it is L2 curriculum's responsibility to derive data from corpora to help language learners understand and use the target language effectively. Findings of the current study validate Kennedy's view that language itself is a curriculum that should be used alongside the traditional teaching resources. Corpus analysis, such as the one conducted in the current study, should give powerful insights to integrate computer-based data-driven learning (DDL) in SLA. Aligning with the study made by Oghigian and Chujo (2010) and that made by Dao (2014), the current study recommends the development of DDL exercises through which ESL learners manage to induce generalizations about language by

investigating concordance lines and identifying recurring grammatical features and word derivations. DDL exercises for beginner learners may be designed depending mainly on observing the key word in context (KWIC). These are mainly paper-based controlled exercises that undergo editing to suit the beginner proficiency level. However, for intermediate and upper-intermediate learners, it is suggested that exercises be designed to get them read and understand concordance lines in a similar way this present study investigates COCA.

III.   Recommendations for future research

I *highly* recommend that future research use parallel copra to investigate the use of intensifiers in English and Arabic. There is an interesting potential area of research in the lexico-grammatical patterns of English *–ly* amplifiers when transferred into Arabic. Another area that needs attention is to compile an ESL Learners' Corpus and use it to investigate how Arabic ESL learners use of intensifiers. These two areas of research will benefit not only SLA but also translation across English and Arabic.

References

Athanasiadou, A. (2007). On the subjectivity of intensifiers. *Language Sciences*, 29, 554–565.

Baños, R. (2013). 'That is so cool': Investigating the translation of adverbial intensifiers in English-Spanish dubbing through a parallel corpus of sitcoms. *Perspectives*, 21 (4), 526-542.

Biber, D., Johansson, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S., & Finegan, E. (1999). *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*. London: Longman

Blanco-Suárez, Z. (2014). Oh he is olde dogge at expounding deade sure at a Catechisme: Some considerations on the history of the intensifying adverb *dead* in English. *Acta Linguistica Hafniensia*, 46 (1), 117-136.

Calle-Martín, J. (2014). On the history of the intensifier *wonder* in English. *Australian Journal of Linguistics*, 34 (3), 399-419.

Dao, T. N. (2014). Using corpora to teach English amplifiers in ESL/EFL classrooms. *Hawaii Pacific University TESOL Working Paper Series*, 12, 32-57.

González-Díaz, V. (2014). 'I *quite* detest the man': Degree adverbs, female language and Jane Austen. *Language and Literature,* 23 (4), 310–330.

Ito, R. & Tagliamonte, S. (2003). *Well weird, right dodgy, very strange, really cool*: Layering and recycling in English intensifiers. *Language in Society*, 32 (2), 257-279.

Kennedy, G. (2003). Amplifier collocations in the British National Corpus: Implications for English language teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 37 (3), 467-487.

Lorenz, G. (1999). *Adjective Intensification-Learners Versus Native Speakers: A Corpus Study of Argumentative Writing*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Lorenz, G. (2002). Really worthwhile or not really significant? A corpus-based approach to the delexicalization and grammaticalization of

intensifiers in Modern English. In I. Wischer & G. Diewald (Eds.), *New Reflections on Grammaticalization* (pp. 143–161). Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Martínez, I. (2009). ''*Quite frankly, I'm not quite sure that it is quite the right colour*.'': A corpus-based study of the syntax and semantics of *quite* in present-day English. *English Studies,* 90 (2), 180–213.

Martínez, I. & Núñez-Pertejo, P. (2012). *He's absolutely massive. It's a super day. Madonna, she is a wicked singer.* Youth language and intensification: A corpus-based study. *Text & Talk*, 32 (6), 773 – 796.

Martínez, I. & Núñez-Pertejo, P. (2014). Strategies used by English and Spanish teenagers to intensify language: A contrastive corpus-based study. *Spanish in Context,* 11 (2), 175–201.

Méndez-Naya, B. (2003). On intensifiers and grammaticalization: The case of *swiþe*. *English Studies*, 84 (4), 372-391.

Nevalainen, T. & Rissanen, M. (2002). *Fairly pretty* or *pretty fair*? On the development and grammaticalization of English downtoners. *Language Sciences*, 24, 359–380.

Núñez-Pertejo, P. (2013). From degree adverb to response token: *Absolutely* in late modern and contemporary British and American English. *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen,* 114, 245-273.

Núñez-Pertejo, P. & Martínez, I. (2014). *That's absolutely crap*, *totally rubbish*: The use of the intensifiers *absolutely* and *totally* in the spoken language of British adults and teenagers. *Functions of Language*, 21(2), 210–237.

Oghigian, K. & Chujo, K. (2010). An effective way to use corpus exercises to learn grammar basics in English. *Language Education in Asia*, 1 (1), 200-214.

Paradis,C . (1997). *Degree Modifiers of Adjectives in Spoken British English*. Lund, Sweden: Lund University Press.

Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S. Leech, G. & Svartvik, J. (Eds.). (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. London: Longman.

Recski, L. (2004). *"...It's Really Ultimately Very Cruel..."*: Contrasting English intensifier collocations across EFL writing and academic spoken discourse. *DELTA,* 20 (2), 211 – 234.

Sowa, J. (2009). '*Sweet as!*': The intensifer *as* in New Zealand and Australian English. *English Today*, 25, 58-61.

Tagliamonte, S. & Roberts, C. (2005). *So weird; so cool; so innovative*: The use of intensifiers in the television series *Friends*. *American Speech*, 80 (3), 280-300.

Xiao, R. & Tao, H. (2007). A corpus-based sociolinguistic study of amplifiers in British English. *Sociolinguistic Studies,* 1 (2), 241–273.

Yaguchi, M., Iyeiri, Y. & Baba, Y. (2010). Speech style and gender distinctions in the use of *very* and *real*/*really*: An analysis of the corpus of spoken professional American English. *Journal of Pragmatics,* 42, 585–597.

Zhang, R. (2013). A Corpus-based study of semantic prosody change: The case of the adverbial intensifier. *Concentric: Studies in Linguistics*, 39 (2), 61-82.

Amplification in English: A corpus−based study of the Use of –ly amplifiers in academic English