

## **The importance of dialect, age, gender and social class in the sociolinguistics of intensifier usage in British English**

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Do men and women differ in how frequently they use intensifiers (such as *very*), or are age and social class more important variables? If gender-based differences exist, have they decreased over time, as gender roles have become less rigid? Finally, what is the role of dialectal differences in this change?

Age, gender, social class and dialect are known to influence how often speakers use intensifiers, but previous research has insufficiently investigated the complex interactions that can occur between such variables and/or is restricted to small, tight-knit communities (Cameron 2009, Mills 2006, Murphy 2010). Moreover, a change in attitudes towards the different social roles that women and men are expected to fulfil in society might have contributed to the language of males and females becoming more similar, as suggested by Hancock et al. (2015). In order to address these questions, the present study investigated how age, gender, social class and dialect influence how frequently speakers of British English use intensifiers in private conversations and whether this has changed over the last two decades. Mixed effects regression models were run in R to analyse a total of 41,226 intensifier tokens occurring before adjectives were extracted from the British National Corpus 1994 and 2014, with over 600 speakers, taking into account 134 intensifier variants.

Results show that, in most age groups and social classes, men use intensifiers less frequently than women, and gender differences have diminished to a very limited extent, notably for the middle class. Moreover, intensification rate has increased across the board over time, and across all dialects of English in Britain investigated in the study. This might be due to a shift towards a stereotypically more feminine communicative style as the perception of gender roles has changed, a process by which the middle class might have been particularly affected.