

*Intensification in*

# ENGLISH AND SPANISH COMMUNICATION



NYDIA FLORES-FERRÁN

# **Intensification in English and Spanish Communication**



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Nydia Flores-Ferrán

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*To Simon*



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# Introduction

Linguistic intensification refers to ways we escalate and underscore our communication, albeit oral or written. We increase the illocutionary strength to persuade, convince, sway, and change our hearer's or reader's perspective. Researchers have investigated intensification with three subfields of linguistics: Pragmatics, Sociolinguistics, and Semantics. In this book, we center on these two fields, Pragmatics and Sociolinguistics, as critical to understanding, researching, and teaching about linguistic intensification.

Pragmatics intersects with sociolinguistics. It is a sub-field of linguistics that attends to the meaning of expressions in the contexts of sequential interactions. It is concerned with speaker intention, listener uptake, and aspects of face. That is, it attends to the meaning of expressions in context. Sociolinguistics, the broader of the two fields, is concerned with interactions, the contexts in which they occur, including who speakers are, their age, education, dialect, other external concerns, and the purpose of the interactions. In brief, it also attends to language variation and change. We believe that the relationship between speakers is critical to understand the linguistic choices they make to communicate. As noted by Cameron and Schwenker (2013, p. 4), "Because communication entails acts of language use that require, minimally, two people for their achievement, we see how communication is intrinsically social." Thus, when we discuss the pragmatics of intensification in this text, we focus on the ways and reasons speakers and writers tend to escalate or amplify communication. Although studies have investigated intensifying forms through another subfield of linguistics, semantics, this perspective does not have to refer to the speaker in social interaction, whereas pragmatics and sociolinguistics do. Thus, we adopt a socio-pragmatic perspective throughout this book.

This book adopts a theory of persuasion to frame our perspective on intensification, noting that persuasion attempts to influence others and therefore involves conscious intent. As we will illustrate throughout the text, we try to change our hearer's or reader's behavior and thoughts by intensifying. In other words, it intersects with the self-interest and desire of the persuader.

In Spanish, a speaker can say *¡Qué va!* ('No way!') to express absolute negation when *no* would suffice. A speaker may issue this expression as a reaction to a statement produced by an interlocutor. It denies the truth conditions of a previous utterance, and its scope entails a convincing follow-up statement, a reason for having issued the negation *¡Qué va!* Take, for example, this context:

A: El presidente ganará las elecciones.

B: ¡Qué va! Las perderá por sus engaños.

A: The president will lose the elections.

B: No way! He'll lose because of his shenanigans.

B's statement requires a response that points to the reasoning behind the response *¡Qué va!* or 'No way!.' In Spanish and English, the negation carries a strengthening effect. In the subsequent two expressions, we use another device to strengthen the force of a proposition:

Jeff Bezos is really, really rich.

Jeff Bezos es súper rico. Or Jeff Bezos es bien bien rico.

In the proposition 'Jeff Bezos is really, really rich,' we find an escalation when it would suffice to say, 'Jeff Bezos is rich.' or 'Jeff Bezos is really rich.' Likewise, in Spanish, by adding '*súper*,' we are attempting to increase the notion that his wealth is above a norm, an unusual category.

Take, for example, how intensification manifests in these utterances extracted from several oral narratives of personal experience (underlined ones):

*Me gusta.*  
'I like him.'

*Estoy loca por él.*  
'I am crazy about him.'

*Mucha gente vinieron a la protesta.*

*Millones de personas vinieron a la protesta.*

'Lots of people came to the protest.'

'Millions of people came to the protest.'

In other words, the expressions ‘crazy about him’ and ‘millions’ represent hyperbole and exaggeration. On the other hand, the option to say ‘I like him.’ and ‘Lots of people came . . . ’ is what we would consider a norm. We intentionally express these types of utterances to convince and persuade the hearer of the speaker’s opinion.

In this book, we attend to intensification in English and Spanish using a wide lens. We examine it through a socio-pragmatic-affective and cultural lens since the book unveils many linguistic features, strategies, and devices (i.e., henceforth ‘elements’) that have a strengthening effect. It is important to note that context explains whether a linguistic element contributes to intensifying an expression.

As we see it, we use intensification as a means of persuading or convincing our audience. By strengthening, we are adding saliency and amplifying to underscore our claims. We also suggest here that we heighten our communication to be more effective and drive our points. However, what is the purpose? We posit that we attempt to persuade and change attitudes or beliefs. In the earlier example, which notes ‘I am crazy about him.,’ the speaker tries to convince the listener that she not only likes the person, but that she is intensely insane or ‘crazy’ about him. The other example explicitly conveys an exaggeration indicating that an uncountable mass of people came to the protest. The speaker could have suggested that ‘lots of people came.’ By saying that ‘millions came to the protest,’ the utterance carries more strength. We can also say it functions to verify the truth.

We also view intensification as the effect an utterance may have on its addressee or audience. Namely, it attempts to influence the listener or reader by elevating an expression’s content to persuade and convince. In other words, it is a means by which we make our points more effective and transparent and attempt to change or influence our audience’s perspective.

Our position about intensification, in general, departs from the fundamental premise that suggests that we intensify to emphasize. There are no blurred boundaries when it comes to linguistic intensification. At times, we amplify by elevating an expression’s meaning to a maximum degree while at other times, to a more moderate one. We intentionally escalate our communication to any degree above the norm, the norm being neutral.

As illustrated throughout the book, this phenomenon is ubiquitous in our speech, a bit less common in our writing. However, what is essential that we recognize for now is that there are degrees of modulation associated with intensification.

## HOW THE BOOK STARTED

Over the years and after collecting considerable amounts of oral narratives of personal experience and institutional interviews, we uncovered how speakers mitigated their expressions. The observations and research discussed in the book (Flores-Ferrán, 2020) *Linguistic Mitigation in English and Spanish: How Speakers Attenuate Expressions* motivated me to explore linguistic intensification since I uncovered the use of intensifying elements in the data collected. For instance, in Spanish oral narratives of personal experience, the data revealed that speakers tended to strengthen expressions using hyperbole, specific lexical items, prosodic features, and morphological ones. They also employed cultural sayings, repetitions, reformulations, and metaphoric expressions as they recounted their narratives. Here are several examples (underlined in Spanish). Their English translations represent close equivalents but employ different features or elements to convey a similar meaning:

<i>Estoy <u>loca</u> por verlo.</i>	‘I’m <u>dying</u> to see him.’
<i>Camina con el rabo entre las piernas.</i>	‘He’s/she’s sorry.’ (inf. Walks with tail between legs.)
<i>A ese club va solo <u>gentuza</u>.</i>	‘Riffraff only go to that club.’
<i>Un <u>chorro de gente</u> aparecieron en la fiesta.</i>	‘A deluge of people showed up to the party.’
<i>Me cae <u>bien mal</u>.</i>	‘It <u>really rubs</u> me the wrong way.’

In institutional discourse, more specifically in therapeutic interviews, I could also detect expressions of intensification. For instance, I uncovered several strategies: a metaphoric one, a prosodic feature,<sup>1</sup> and a rhetorical one, repetition:

Spanish Intensified	English Intensified	The norm
<i>Me parte el alma.</i>	‘It breaks my soul.’	(It hurts me.)
<i>¿Tú estás loca?, ¡Claro que no:::!! ↑</i>	‘Are you nuts? Of course no:::!!’↑	(You’re wrong.)
<i>No se preocupe, no se preocupe . . .</i>	‘Don’t worry, don’t worry.’	(Don’t worry)

Thus, while documenting mitigating expressions, intensifying elements were detected. The findings led to researching and documenting intensifying aspects in both oral and written data obtained from institutional and

non-institutional discursive settings. So, we may ask whether we are driving our point across to the hearer if we say ‘I want to see him’ instead of ‘I am dying to see him.’ The former merely expresses a desire while the latter represents an affective-related expression, almost desperation. Thus, the latter represents an intensified expression that informs the listener of how firm an intention is.

## THE AIM OF THE BOOK

The book has several goals. The first goal is to make us aware of the phenomenon of linguistic intensification and its various manifestations. To achieve this goal, we discuss several linguistic elements used in communication to express intensity. By ‘elements,’ we refer to linguistic strategies, devices, and features. The linguistic elements were gathered from authentic, spontaneous communication and written discourses. Another goal is exploratory; the book delves into uncovering expressions of intensification; some may be associated with cultural concerns while others are not. The critical point is that intensification is depicted here from authentic spoken and written data.

Further, the book aims to examine intensification in English and Spanish. It does not draw comparisons between the languages, although we unveil linguistic behavior that, in several instances, differs. I find it necessary to discuss intensification in two languages. As a bilingual and a linguist, I vacillate daily between two linguistic and cultural worlds and often interpret and compare how we communicate.

Since the book examines linguistic intensification, it encourages us to situate the findings concerning this phenomenon with language learning. Furthermore, we mention the applied perspective of language instruction since curricula and textbooks are now beginning to scratch the surface with teaching pragmatics to language learners (henceforth ‘learners’). In other words, as a pervasive linguistic phenomenon, intensification has to be fully addressed in language learning and teaching. In particular, the book approaches teaching and learning English and Spanish as a second or foreign language, but the chapter that pursues that discussion can also inform instruction in any language.

The book primarily addresses linguists, researchers, young scholars, and language instructors. It situates the pragmatic phenomenon of intensification as a critical part of language learning and teaching. At the same time, it attends to researching intensification in a meaningful manner. The book also reaches out to linguists, researchers, and language instructors to collaborate and closely unpack this phenomenon. Furthermore, it points out how researchers have detected intensification in oral, written, and digital



communication. Finally, the book's exploratory analysis informs its intended audience to look at ways to expand on and explain this pragmatic and socio-cultural-affective phenomenon. In sum, the main questions this book addresses are the following:

1. From a pragmatic perspective, what is linguistic intensification, and how does it manifest in oral and written communication?
2. Why is linguistic intensification considered a socio-pragmatic *and* affective phenomenon?
3. What features, strategies, devices, lexicon, or elements are employed to intensify communication in English and Spanish?
4. How can we apply what we know of intensification to language learning, teaching, and research?

## HOW THE BOOK IS ORGANIZED

Chapter 1 focuses on the pragmatic category of intensification, and it discusses several tenets of intensification. Moving forward, Chapter 2 centers on empirical research conducted on English and Spanish intensification elements. It discusses the concept of modulation, mitigation, and intensification. The chapter also exemplifies how intensification manifests in the press, oral communication, and other institutional discourses in English and Spanish.

Since intensification is ubiquitous in our communication, Chapter 3 aims to identify several linguistic elements that speakers and writers employ to escalate. It provides a foundation from which we can further investigate intensification from a broader perspective. The chapter describes contexts and illustrates, by way of authentic excerpts, how intensification manifests.

Chapter 4 discusses the fields that have informed intensification in Spanish and English: Sociolinguistics and Pragmatics. It presents perspectives on how to employ a pragmatic and sociolinguistic approach to the study of this phenomenon. The chapter also discusses persuasion theory and how it can explain this phenomenon. It also delves into the steps we can take to inform a socio-pragmatic pilot study. Finally, the chapter also explains methodological concerns that we need to consider when investigating intensification.

We guide readers through an analysis of intensification in Chapter 5. This chapter aims to merge the theoretical with research, keeping in mind that Chapter 6 attends to applied or instructional aspects. Chapter 5 examines intensification in legal discourse, press/media, oral narratives of personal experience, and political speech.

We discuss pedagogical considerations in Chapter 6. The chapter attends to instructional concerns through a proposed draft that we can use to inform

instruction. The chapter underscores the importance of teaching pragmatics explicitly and offers several instructional interventions. It also discusses protocols we can use to investigate acquisition.

Chapter 7 briefly discusses digital communication and the manifestation of intensification. It first explains studies and itemizes elements of intensification in Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC).

We present several guiding principles regarding linguistic intensification and affirm our perspective regarding its realization in oral and written communication in Chapter 8. Finally, we close the book with Chapter 9 by providing concluding remarks.

## NOTE

1. ↑ symbol refers to rising intonation. In instances where we find vowel elongation, this symbol is employed.



## Chapter 1

# What Is Linguistic Intensification?

This chapter aims to describe the pragmatic category of intensification by adopting a socio-pragmatic and cultural-affective perspective. In it, we operationalize linguistic intensification by drawing from the work of several scholars. The chapter also explains the difference between mitigation and intensification to provide a foundation for our explanations. In doing so, we discuss how intensification relates to directness, not vagueness, following Hamilton, Hunter, and Burgoon (1990), who have posited that language intensity increases clarity. Finally, we briefly explain how intensification intersects with hyperbole, and we conclude the chapter by summarizing the main concepts presented.

### OPERATIONALIZING INTENSIFICATION

We intensify, escalate, or amplify our expressions' strength using various linguistic strategies, devices, and markers (e.g., elements). For example, here are only a few clauses that illustrate how we intensify from bottom to top:

↑	That is an absolutely preposterous lie.	<i>Es una mentira absolutamente absurda.</i>
	That is a gargantuan lie.	<i>Es es una mentira gigantesca.</i>
	That is a huge lie.	<i>Es es una mentira enorme.</i>
	That is not true.	<i>Eso no es verdad.</i>
	That is a lie.	<i>Eso es una mentira.</i>
↑	I was very, very much in love.	<i>Estaba muy muy enamorada.</i>
	I was in love.	<i>Estaba enamorada.</i>

The following expressions, which are independent of each other, also represent intensifying expressions even though not in context:

Go for it!	<i>¡Dale!</i>
Move!	<i>¡Ándale!</i>
Bingo!	<i>¡Bingo!</i>
Mother of God!	<i>¡Madre Mia!</i>
Oh, ple:::se!	<i>¡Ay, por favo:::r!</i>

In general, in the first segment, we find that one way we can escalate expressions is by adding more linguistic material to increase the impact of a proposition from ‘I was in love.’ to ‘I was very much in love.’ and ‘That’s a lie.’ to ‘That is an absolutely preposterous lie.’ The second segment, which contains independent, unrelated expressions, illustrates how we intensify by employing lexical items or phrases whose meanings carry more locution (i.e., Go for it!, Move!, *¡Ándale!*, *¡Dale!*). We also amplify by reformulating and repeating. For example, we can use different rhetorical strategies, such as ‘huge lie’ instead of ‘huge, huge lie,’ or ‘absolutely no not true.’ While scholars have suggested that these are ways we provide clarity in communication, we posit that it is also a way in which we attempt to persuade our hearers (or readers).

Linguistic intensification is related to emotions. Labov (1984) maintains that intensity is “the emotional expression of social orientation toward the linguistic proposition: the commitment of the self to the proposition” (pp. 43–44). We also maintain that intensification manifests in diverse emotional ways. For instance, Bradac, Bowers, and Courtright (1980) posit that we can evidence intensity by emotional-expressive language in addition to a straightforward assertion. An excellent example of emotive language is the language of obscenity and opinionated language. Both tend to contain linguistic elements that convey intensity.

Research on linguistic intensification began as early as the 1970s. In general, intensification researchers defined it as modifying our communication to increase, escalate, or boost expressions. Researchers referred to it as a way we tend to convey a degree above the norm. In general, we can intensify our propositions by making them more salient or more expressive, or adding prosodic emphasis to convince and persuade our audience, to underscore our claims, among other functions.

This linguistic phenomenon is common in all languages. In other words, all languages have elements (e.g., grammatical, phonological, syntactic), strategies, and devices that contribute to increasing intensity. We note here that the phenomenon of intensification is a socio-pragmatic one, and a myriad of

factors influence why and how we intensify or escalate expressions. The factors that may play a role can be the context, setting, interlocutor or audience, and discourse category (e.g., an argument, an adult reprimanding a child, or a narrative meant to convince a hearer of a critical event).

This book mostly follows Albelda Marco (2005), who defines intensification as a pragmatic category despite embracing diverse linguistic realities. Furthermore, Albelda Marco maintains that intensification depends on a communication's situational context. In other words, context is critical to the realization and interpretation of intensification. As such, we conceptualize this phenomenon as intersecting with sociolinguistics. Namely, its expression can correlate to a particular social interaction and the speakers' gender, dialect, and age, among others.

Most research related to linguistic intensification has examined lexical intensifiers (e.g., 'so,' 'very,' 'really'). Researchers have investigated lexical items (e.g., adverbials and adjectives) or phrases that escalate meaning. Bolinger (1972) defined *intensifiers* as "any device that scales a quality, whether up or down or somewhere between the two" (p. 17). As noted by Bolinger, degree expressions consist of a word or phrase expressing a quality within a scale. Bolinger (1972, pp. 58–60) suggested that noun-intensifying features may fall only within a noun phrase's (NP's) function, such as:

1. But this is **pure** speculation.
2. She feels a **complete** failure. [his bold]

He also posited that almost any adverb modifying an adjective tends to have an intensifying effect.

Briz Gómez (1996), for Spanish, considers intensification as an escalation of expressions. He maintains that pragmatic intensification occurs when a speaker reinforces what they have stated. In Spanish, for example, we have *muy* ('very'), *bastante grande* ('really' or 'pretty' as in 'pretty big'), and *demasiado* ('too') as in *demasiado grande* ('way too big'). As noted earlier, most scholars agree that intensifying markers situate their meaning in terms of a scale or degree, ascending above what would be considered a norm or a base. Beinhauer (1991) and Vigara (1992) also consider intensification as a highlight or escalation, respectively.

Interestingly, Ghesquière and Davidse (2011) have concerned themselves with forms that contribute to intensifying, which fall outside the use of lexical items. They argue that phrases such as 'a complete mess' and 'a whole bunch of crazy stuff' also function to intensify. These kinds of structures have fallen outside the lens of many who have investigated intensification. For instance, Paradis (2008) has challenged the view that degree is a grammatical phenomenon only characterized by certain word classes, such as adverbs or

adjectives. As we will attest throughout this text, degree can be represented by forms and expressions other than adjectival and adverbial ones. We find Ghesquière et al.'s work is critical to our perspective in the book as we move forward. Namely, expressions such as 'a complete mess' or 'a deluge of work' represent the many other ways we convey intensification.

Paradis (2008) further argues that the notion of degree is pervasive in language and suggests that degree configuration is highly dependent on context and communication. For instance, 'what a car,' 'very British,' 'a very key strategic question,' and 'it is so not true' are examples that go beyond the scope of word classes, lexical items, and morphological markers, among others. In them, we find a combination of syntactic structures and lexical items that contribute to intensification.

Studies also coined intensifiers as 'amplifiers' (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Startvik, 1985), 'boosters' (Holmes, 1984), 'escalating' (Briz Gómez, 1998), among others. For example, Holmes (1984, p. 347) noted that intensifying the illocutionary force means to modify it such that we boost an expression (underlined forms):

You are pretty → Really you are amazingly pretty.

In the example, we find that 'really' and 'amazingly' increase the expression's degree of intensity. However, again, these are adverbial+adjectival forms, and we already know that intensification manifests with more than these categories.

## MITIGATION VERSUS INTENSIFICATION

We cannot approach a study of intensification without including a brief about linguistic mitigation. Mitigation refers to ways in which we attenuate, soften, and downgrade communication. The pendulum swings in the opposite direction when we mitigate or decrease the force of an expression, as seen in Holmes's (1984, p. 347) example:

You are kind of pretty in a way.

Research on linguistic mitigation also emerged during the 1970s from pragmatic research that attended illocution and speech acts. Discussions on mitigation centered on how speakers tended to minimize the force of an expression to save 'face,' a notion set forth by Goffman (1971). At the time, scholars enlisted Politeness Theory (Brown and Levinson, 1987) to frame their research on mitigation. In brief, researchers examined how speakers

downgraded, softened, hedged, attenuated, or weakened the strength of their utterances and expressions (Briz Gómez, 1995a; Caffi, 2007; Flores-Ferrán, 2020; Holmes, 1995; House and Kasper, 1981; Leech, 1983; Márquez-Reiter, 2000, among others). In particular, Flores-Ferrán (2020) argues that mitigation reflects a modulation—a cushioning, padding effect, or a softening of an expression. We should note that there are many factors that prompt speakers to mitigate, not only politeness. Czerwionka (2010, p. v) suggests that we attenuate our expressions in response to social and cognitive stressors. For example, a speaker can make a direct request or a demand, such as in the following example:

Context: A professor has noted that the temperature is not comfortable in the classroom. She can address her students by stating:

‘Open the window.’ or  
‘It’s hot in here.’

The professor has the option of formulating a hint, a request, or a directive. In the latter example, the professor indirectly suggests (e.g., hinting) that someone take action to open a window, whereas, in the first, we find a direct, unmitigated directive. We can further illustrate a mitigated expression if the professor issues the request differently: ‘Do you think it is possible for you to open the window?’ where we find a softening or weakening effect instead of ‘Open the window,’ a directive. From a pragmatic perspective, the professor, who is in a position of power, can formulate an order. Speaker familiarity also can influence how a speaker produces the request (i.e., a mother to a son may say ‘open the window.’). Thus, we also find that many sociolinguistic factors (e.g., setting, power dynamics among speakers, gender, age) may influence how and why we attenuate.

We gather from this brief explanation that mitigation represents an attenuation of an expression, and it entails indirectness and sometimes vagueness.<sup>1</sup> While scholars have investigated mitigation under the umbrella of Politeness Theory, others have studied this phenomenon using a socio-pragmatic-affective and cultural framework. They note that when speakers mitigate, they are not necessarily polite (e.g., Briz Gómez, 2004; Czerwionka, 2012; Caffi, 2007; Delbene, 2004; Flores-Ferrán, 2020; Placencia, 1996). Scholars such as Briz Gómez suggest, among other concerns, that mitigation has affective conditioning since it increases solidarity among interlocutors. So when a speaker decreases the harshness of a message (depending on context), a speaker may be attempting to reach a goal unrelated to politeness, an example we present here:



Context: A supervisor requests that a subordinate immediately join her in developing a new project. The subordinate's response:

'I'd be happy to engage in this project at the beginning of next month, if possible.'

On the surface, the response may represent a refusal of some sort. However, the subordinate has given the supervisor options: to select someone else, accept her postponement conditions, or reach some agreement, such as finding a way to lighten her workload. Said differently, in instances where there is a high imposition request, an addressee may wish to attenuate her response to align with personal/professional goals. Again, the supervisor's hierarchical status may have influenced how the employee issued the response. Thus, the answer may have warranted a socio-pragmatic and cultural lens to analyze the realization of a mitigated expression. One may argue that some politeness is present in this response since the subordinate did not say 'I can't.' However, we need more context to analyze utterances further. For instance, we do not know how long the employee has been working in the position, whether the supervisor was younger or older, whether this was the first request, or whether they have a friendly working relationship.

We may consider intensification expressions affective since they reflect the speaker's attitude and commitment toward a proposition. Speakers and writers may also choose to intensify communication to show their orientation, involvement, or investment in a linguistic proposition's veracity. Moreover, speakers and writers use their linguistic tools to sway, convince, persuade, insist, and stand firmly committed to the contents of their utterance when intensifying.

## INTENSIFICATION AND DIRECTNESS

If in the last example (i.e., 'I'd be happy to engage in this project at the beginning of next month, if possible. '), the subordinate would have responded: 'I'm feeling a bit overwhelmed.', the response would have represented an indirect refusal. So the reply has accomplished two things (i.e., 'I'd be happy . . . ). First, the speaker informs her boss that she does not immediately wish to engage in the new project. Second, the speaker provides the reason she cannot engage in the project without directly refusing. The boss has several options, such as choosing someone else, reassigning the work that her subordinate has, or formulating another plan. Nonetheless, 'I'd be happy to . . . ' represents an attenuated indirect response.

Contrary to mitigated expressions, when we escalate or intensify expressions, we are direct. That is, we escalate to:

- persuade
- convince
- sway

and we, therefore,

- accentuate
- elevate
- heighten
- stress
- emphasize
- amplify
- enlarge
- reinforce
- boost
- insist

We must keep in mind that the utterance's meaning reflects a degree of intensity above the norm. Responses such as 'yes' versus 'of course!' *sí* versus *claro que sí*, represent two examples of intensification. For instance, let us modify the previous context in which a supervisor has asked a subordinate to join her on a new project. If the supervisor has known the subordinate a long time, the assistant could directly respond, such as: 'I've got wa::y too much on my table right now.' This response represents a refusal, an intensified one. It is illustrative of how directness and intensification intersect among familiar interlocutors. In this case, the features or elements that point to intensification are not merely word classes. Instead, it is a combination of the response's syntactic structure and a prosodic feature: 'wa::y too much on my table right now' and the use of time deixis 'right now.' However, in this modified example, we need to consider that the relationship between the two interlocutors is a friendly one among colleagues, a socio-pragmatic observation. If the subordinate had issued the following response, such as 'I'm wa::y too busy to get into something new,' the statement would still have constituted a direct intensified refusal.

Similar to mitigation, intensification represents what we do with language. It does not manifest in specific forms or features. Instead, intensification refers to *how* we use forms, features, strategies, and devices to intensify communication. It relates to how we use all our linguistic resources, including word classes, lexical and non-lexical items (e.g., discourse markers),

verb forms, syntactic structures, and prosodic and morphological features to escalate.

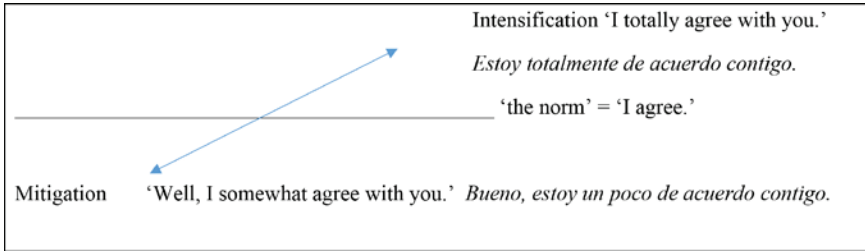
Our approach to examining intensification in this book falls within a broad realm of what a language provides its speakers (or writers). The speakers or writers have this vast realm of features, strategies, and devices to enable the pendulum to move in the opposite direction of mitigation, a challenge for language learners. To learn about and use intensifying features, a learner requires explicit instruction. However, as a pragmatic phenomenon, it does not appear explicitly in texts.

Further, intensification is a socio-pragmatic-affective and cultural phenomenon whose features cannot be examined or explained in isolation. For example, during the early stages of my doctoral studies, a professor of psycholinguistics asked another classmate and me to meet in her office to discuss our team's research project for her course. After making our formal presentation about our potential project, the professor stated:

“You don't know rice and beans about this project.”

While at a glance, the statement on the surface may have been considered pragmatically appropriate (based on her different cultural orientation and the fact that she was our professor and had a higher status), it was *not* socio-pragmatic nor culturally acceptable. It was pragmatically inappropriate. The former classmate and I still remember how we considered the statement a cultural insult (i.e., a dysphemism). In context, and knowing that we were both Hispanic and came from a culture whose leading staple food was rice and beans, we also found it an exaggeration, an insult, and one that was biased, reflecting a cultural stereotype, and thus an intensified expression. The professor could have issued an attenuated utterance: ‘I think you need more information and advice on this matter,’ a suggestion that would have reflected somewhat of a norm. Thus, insults and other related terms (e.g., religious, ethnic) can have an affective-intensifying quality. Recall that the hearer or recipient of the message interprets the expression as an intensified one.

We need to consider structures, lexical items, and linguistic strategies and devices inherent in a language and culture (even language learners need to consider these) to capture how intensification manifests. For example, Fraser (1980) posited that mitigation involved several features and effects from a speech act. A similar perspective we formulate regarding intensification: Intensification affects an utterance or a message. Both represent a modification; mitigation downgrades while intensification escalates. Figure 1 demonstrates this explanation.



**Figure 1.1. Mitigation and Intensification Scale. Source: Created by the author**

Flores-Ferrán (2020, p.14) used this previous example in English and Spanish to illustrate the difference. However, we do not claim that mitigation and intensification can be considered binary or cut-and-dry. It is also essential to note that gradability is a concern that exists in both mitigated and intensified expressions. We understand that there is a point at which terms may be neutral. We might boost or downgrade expressions upward or downward depending on context and norm by employing different strategies, devices, and lexicon, among other features. Therefore, we should consider that the figure does not reflect varying degrees of intensification. We will discuss concerns regarding degrees in the subsequent section of this chapter. To add more clarity to figure 1.1, we present the following context:

Context: Two friends are discussing a political issue. One differs from the other's opinion:

A: I totally agree with you. (intensified: 'totally'= maximizer)

B: Well:: I somewhat agree with you. (mitigated: 'well,' 'somewhat' = minimizers)

In Spanish:

A: *Estoy totalmente de acuerdo contigo.* (intensified lexical item: *totalmente*)

B: *Bueno:: no estoy muy de acuerdo contigo.* (mitigated: *bueno, no muy de acuerdo*).

In both languages, these examples convey similar meanings. The B examples represent how a speaker downgrades a message while attempting to voice opposition. In the A examples, the speaker is direct by increasing

the force, noting that she is entirely in agreement with her interlocutor (i.e., ‘totally’ *totalmente*). Both examples represent ways in which the interlocutor negotiates and formulates opposition or support in a particular context. Fraser (1980, p. 341) provided us with a seminal example representing intensified and mitigated propositions, respectively:

“You’re fired.” instead of “It is my unpleasant task as Vice President to bring you the bad news that we are no longer able to retain you in our employ.”

In the next example, we find increases in intensity gathered from an excerpt in which only the intensified expressions are present:

Context: During a heated political argument, a speaker expresses an opposing position and tells another speaker:

... <i>Mentiroso.</i>	‘Liar.’
... <i>Eso es mentira.</i>	‘That’s a lie.’
... <i>Eso no es verdad.</i>	‘That’s not true.’
... <i>Embuste.</i>	‘That’s a fib.’

In the example, we find *embuste* (‘fib’) at the lower end of the intensity spectrum, while *mentiroso* (‘liar’) represents a high degree of insult. These expressions signal confrontation. In other words, scalarity or degrees of intensity are present as the argument increases from *embuste* to *mentiroso*. What is interesting about these expressions is that the bottom three challenge the veracity of the opposing view, but the top, *mentiroso* (‘liar’), represents an insult to the interlocutor who issued a previous statement. We may add here that what a speaker asserts or conveys can go beyond what a sentence means. For instance, Levinson (2000) has noted that we mean more than we say when we speak.

For a thorough examination of intensification, we need to closely examine speaker-hearer interactions to understand the communication context and the effect of an intensified expression on the hearer. In general, a speaker may be attempting to impress, persuade, convince, insist, or underscore the truth conditions of a proposition while at the same time influence the listener. On the other hand, the listener must interpret the message, the importance of why the speaker is attempting to persuade, convince, and so forth, and respond accordingly (if needed).

The intersectionality between persuasion and intensification becomes evident in the heated argument (i.e., ‘liar,’ *mentiroso*). Miller (1980) reminds us that we intend to reinforce, shape, or influence another(s) response with

persuasive communication. That is, the more a speaker refutes another's argument, the more amplified the denials may become. Generally speaking, we should expect more linguistic material in persuading-related communication that escalates, not brief, concise, short assertions. In subsequent chapters, we will discuss the linguistic behaviors, such as taboo and dysphemistic-related ones, and so forth, as well as phrases and cultural expressions that contain a more potent illocutionary force and yet have less linguistic material.

## INTENSIFICATION IN THE FIELD OF SOCIO-PRAGMATICS

Davis (1991, p. 11) has noted that “pragmatics has as its domain speakers’ communicative intentions, the uses of language that require such intentions, and the strategies that hearers employ to determine what these intentions and acts are so that they can understand what the speaker intends to communicate.” In other words, it examines the micro-interactions. Sociolinguistics has as its domain the linguistic *and* social aspects of language, the macro. It looks at language in society, the patterns that may correlate with speakers’ age, education, gender, and dialect, among other social factors.

Researchers have documented sociolinguistic correlates in the use of intensifiers among different age groups. For instance, teenagers and young people tend to employ intensifiers more than older adults, and women more than men tend to use intensifying forms (e.g., Molina Martos, 2010; Paradis, 2000a; Stenström, 2002; Tagliamonte, 2008).

Grice (1975) noted that we could not guide our interpretations by only the conventional meanings of terms. Instead, we need to consider the context (i.e., social interaction) in which the linguistic forms manifest to comprehend the meaning thoroughly. Thus, we must examine why speakers and writers strengthen the force of their expressions. As explained in a previous example, ‘I have wa:::y too much on my table.’ on the surface represents a string of words, a grammatical string of words that makes sense. However, the context in which a subordinate responds to a supervisor’s request to join her on a new project contextualizes the utterance’s meaning. That is, we can construe it as a complaint, a refusal to take on a new project, or simply, ‘I’m busy.’ Thus, all language produced in communication is context-dependent. Récanati (1991) suggests that what is said is pragmatically determined, not semantically. To be succinct, Culpeper (2011) has also posited that “it is not what you said, it’s how you said it” (p. 57) that is important in communication. Therefore, to examine intensified expressions, we must use a socio-pragmatic-affective and cultural lens to interpret communication fully.

## INTENSIFICATION AND HYPERBOLE IN COMMUNICATION

Hyperbole and exaggeration in communication are common characteristics of intensification. Nevertheless, before delving into a discussion on hyperbole and exaggeration, I would like to underscore that intensified expressions also manifest with rhetorical devices such as repetition and reformulations. Also, we can evidence intensification with one or several consecutive forms.

In a study conducted by Méndez-Naya (2017), we find co-occurrences of intensified forms in a corpus-based analysis of Old, Middle, and Early Modern English. In other words, this linguistic behavior is not new. She maintains that the co-occurrence and iteration of intensifiers are associated with increasing expressivity. She also suggests that speakers intensify because they are compensating for semantic-pragmatic attrition. Méndez-Naya (2017, p. 251) exemplifies the use of intensifiers (underlined):

“This has been a very difficult—a very extremely difficult lesson for me.”  
(COCA, 1991, NEWS)

“Very soon after going out with him, a mutual friend of ours told me, ‘Anna you have to be very really careful. Tommy is going to chop you up into little pieces.’” (COCA, 2015, SPOK)

As we see it, emphasis can only provide a partial account of why we intensify if we consider it as a means by which we make statements prominent. We know that other reasons may account for amplifying or escalating communication. For example, degrees of intensification differ (van der Wouden and Follen, 2017), which may not intersect with a speaker’s desire to signal prominence. The varying degrees also suggest that we escalate according to various contextual needs, not merely making a statement prominent. Van der Wouden et al. have noted that we can increase the intensity when describing intensification with English adjectives and adverbials (e.g., ‘high’ to ‘very high’ and ‘suffers’ to ‘strongly suffers’). A similar syntactic structure exists in Spanish, *alto* and *muy alto* (‘tall’ and ‘very tall’) and *sufre muchísimo* (‘enormously suffers’ or ‘suffers a lot’). Thus, intensification presupposes the possibility of gradability.

Moreover, gradability increases according to contextual needs. That is, we may intensify expressions to convince, sway, persuade, insist, and so forth, or even further, exaggerate (e.g., ‘the place was packed with people’ or ‘there were millions and millions of people’), but all to change or influence the hearer or reader. For instance, with ‘the place was packed,’ we find

a metaphoric expression that refers to an expansion in number or quantity. Using ‘millions and millions of people’ and ‘millions and millions of ants,’ a speaker may be augmenting a number they cannot distinguish or be merely exaggerating. Neither account, therefore, points to emphasis if we consider it as a reason for intensifying. Instead, they show how we can increase quantity to reflect an almost hyperbolic condition. We also increase clarity and commit to the effectiveness of the statement. We should note here that these expressions are not exemplary of how we may increase illocutionary force. Instead, they are ways to try to persuade our audience to believe or make our statements more credible.

Further, van der Wouden et al. (2017) posit that intensification always involves the speaker’s judgment. We also claim that intensification consists of a writer’s judgment, as we will see throughout this text. That is, it is the speaker’s or writer’s assessment that considers a “property being present to a degree which deviates from the average” (van der Wouden et al., 2017, p. 82).

We should also note that languages differ in how intensifying forms are realized (Mahmood, 2015). Also, differences exist concerning how intensification manifests among different English and Spanish varieties (e.g., Kanwit, Elias, and Clay, 2018).

Briz Gómez (1998, p. 116) has provided examples that we note may not have English equivalents for Spanish. Instead, they represent approximate translations:

<i>Ha sido superdivertido.</i>	‘It has been super fun.’
<i>Había un mogollón de gente.</i>	‘There was a mess of people.’
<i>Me moría de la risa.</i>	‘I would die laughing.’

These examples provided by Briz Gómez (1998) reflect slight differences in their English translations. For instance, we cannot semantically translate the whole meaning of the term *mogollón* in a ‘load,’ ‘tons,’ or ‘mess’ in English; it has a sense of a load implied, but it also conveys a mess. Thus, connotations and cultural expressions of intensity may differ among languages and dialects of a language. For instance, Kanwit, Elias, and Clay (2018) have noted that Spanish exhibits variation between the uses of intensifiers such as *muy* ‘very’ and *bien* ‘very’ across several dialects (e.g., *muy grande*, *bien grande*). Namely, they are not used in similar frequencies nor do they have similar connotations. Thus, we find differences within and among languages concerning how intensification manifests.

We also need to consider that, over time, lexical items can shift. For instance, Partington (1993) explains that frequently used adverbial



intensifiers (e.g., ‘very,’ ‘utterly’) have been grammaticalized. That is, they have grammaticalized from modal to an intensifier. Said differently, we can create intensifiers at any time. For instance, the adjective ‘pretty’ as in ‘pretty big’ suggests that the meaning of ‘pretty’ does not reflect aesthetic; it operates as an intensifier in providing an opinion about *x*. Thus, we assert that intensifiers are sensitive to semantic change and recycling (e.g., Bolinger, 1972; Ito and Tagliamonte, 2003; Méndez-Naya, 2008). That is, a word form’s meaning can expand or reduce over time.

With this in mind, we follow Partington (1993 pp. 178–79) and suggest that intensification is “a direct indication of a speaker’s desire to use and exploit the expression of hyperbole.” Partington maintains that a speaker tells the hearer that what is said is genuine, honest, and trustworthy by intensifying. In other words, the speaker has an invested interest in the statement. He also maintains that intensification in communication represents a vehicle for “praising, persuading, insulting, and relies on the listener’s reception of the message” (p. 178). Thus, if it is a vehicle to persuade, impress, and so forth, intensification would seem to, at times, overlap with exaggeration and hyperbole. However, exaggeration and hyperbole may not make a statement incredible. Instead, it may serve as an overstatement to underscore and convince the hearer.

Norrick, following Preminger (1974, p. 359), suggests that hyperbole is “a figure or trope of bold exaggeration” (2004, p. 1728). He points out that we should not take these expressions literally. For instance, we have phrases or sayings that often represent hyperbole (e.g., ‘I worked all day and night,’ ‘I haven’t seen him in a million years.’). Furthermore, we have noted earlier that intensification may function to convince hearers. Given that case, we may intensify expressions to make statements believable, make strong assertions, convince and get points across, make arguments compelling, and make and support claims.

## CHAPTER 1 SUMMARY

We know that intensification is a complex phenomenon and that it manifests with a wide range of linguistic elements, syntactic structures, rhetorical devices, and others. In this chapter, we have attempted to introduce a broad account of what we see as intensification. We need to keep in mind several points. First, intensification relates to escalating, boosting, or amplifying an expression above a norm. Second, it is not a recent phenomenon of study. Research on this matter began as early as the 1970s. During earlier research, studies mainly attended to the use of adverbial and adjectival intensifiers. Third, intensification intersects with directness, and researchers

have associated it with emphasis, exaggeration, and hyperbole. Fourth, in general, intensification can fuel informal and formal conversations and writing. Also, it is pervasive in our speech and writing. A fifth concern related to intensification is preponderance. It may entail consecutive, redundant, and co-occurring forms that may contribute to escalating. Another consideration about intensification is that languages and dialects of a language may differ in the linguistic elements to express intensity. Therefore, we cannot point to a rule, formula, or specific structure representative of intensification. Instead, we know it is pervasive in our communication, and it manifests in many different ways.

A seventh concern we discussed relates to the scope of intensification. Intensification does not manifest solely with specific word classes. Instead, various syntactic structures, phonological features, and rhetorical devices can intensify an expression. The point made here is that it is ubiquitous, common to all languages, and its realization may differ according to dialects. More importantly, socio-cultural factors contribute to shaping the ways we communicate using intensifying elements. Finally, two other concerns summarize this section: One, intensification is not static or fixed. Instead, terms, phrases, and expressions are created, revitalized, or become grammaticalized over time. Two, another of the more critical aspects of this phenomenon is that its interpretation is context-dependent.

## NOTE

1. For a comprehensive discussion on linguistic mitigation, see Caffi (2007) for mitigation in Italian, and Flores-Ferrán (2020) for English and Spanish, Briz Gómez (1998), among others.



## Chapter 2

# Empirical Research on Intensification in English and Spanish

This chapter's primary goal is to provide orientation regarding intensification research, how scholars have viewed it. The chapter begins with a brief discussion on modulation since we do not consider intensification a cut-and-dry phenomenon. Then, it discusses several empirical studies conducted in English and Spanish, which have contributed to our understanding of how intensification manifests. The chapter also discusses evident lacunae we need to address. Finally, we illustrate how intensification manifests in various discourses and set the foundation for chapter 3, which provides a detailed analysis using natural, spontaneous speech and text.

### ON MODULATION

We already discussed that intensified linguistic behavior is not binary since degrees of intensification exist in expressions. For instance, Holmes (1984: 345–46) presented these examples to illustrate the mitigating force of a speech act (her italics, 346):

“You are a fool.”

“You are *a bit* of a fool *you know*.”

The latter example illustrates how we can mitigate or soften the expression. The first is direct but does not necessarily represent an intensified expression. By saying, for example, ‘You are a total fool,’ we would be escalating to the maximum. Akin to what Holmes (1984) has posited, we find that intensification strengthens or escalates communication. However, it also exhibits

varying degrees of that strengthening, referred to as modulation or adjustment. In other words, there is a wide variety of tools, strategies, devices, and linguistic features that we can use to increase the intensity of our communication from a minimum to a maximum degree. This variation perhaps makes it a challenge for research, teaching, and learning. For instance, the expression ‘You are a fool.’ conveys less intensity than ‘You are a damn fool’ or ‘You are a total fool.’ Nevertheless, both these latter expressions represent ways we can intensify meaning. Perhaps the term ‘damn’ conveys more intensity in some dialects because it is considered a dysphemism or taboo term.

Interestingly, we find that a speaker’s attitude affects the modality of these expressions. For instance, Sbisà (2001) has noted variations in degrees of strength in expressed attitudes and states. The speaker, by saying ‘You are a damn fool,’ is sure about her opinion. However, there is slight uncertainty in the expression in ‘You are a bit of a fool, you know.’ This latter example also reflects the affective meaning and attitude of the speaker.

We present examples of intensity modulation next. The expressions increase in strength from examples one to five. Said differently, the second example represents an increase in modulation, and the fourth and fifth examples would be representative of maximum force and certainty:

1. You are a bit of a fool.
2. You are a fool.
3. You are quite a fool.
4. You are a damn fool!
5. You are a total fool!

At a glance, we may suggest here ‘damn fool’ may represent a more heightened escalation than ‘total fool.’ Still, only the context and culture can determine whether ‘total’ overrides ‘damn.’ ‘Damn’ may increase the expression’s force simply because it is a taboo term in particular dialects, as mentioned previously. Naturally, these five examples do not take prosody into account. Suppose prosodic features are used, such as ‘You are qui:::te a fool.’ In that case, it may increase the strength of the utterance since the co-occurrence of the prosodic and the lexical choice may further amplify.

In Spanish, the same modulating effect appears in the following four examples. Number four conveys a maximum or heightened meaning, and number one, slightly mitigated:

- |  |                             |
|--|-----------------------------|
| 1. <i>Eres un poco desagradable.</i>               | (You are a bit unpleasant.) |
| 2. <i>Eres desagradable.</i>                       | (You are unpleasant.)       |
| 3. <i>¡Hombre! ¡Qué desagradable eres!</i>         | (Man! You are unpleasant!)  |
| 4. <i>Nadie puede negar que eres desagradable.</i> | (No one can deny . . . )    |

Meyer-Hermann (1988, p. 280) provides this figure, which I have modified to reflect an increase in intensity using the previous examples:

**Table 2.1**

<u>Attenuation zone</u>	0	<u>Intensification zone</u>
Eres un poco desagradable.	Eres desagradable.	¡Hombre! Qué desagradable eres! Nadie puede negar que eres desagradable.
(example 1)	(example 2)	(examples 3, 4)

Created by author. Modified from Meyer-Hermann, 1988, p. 280.

Naturally, when coupled with exclamations and other prosodic features, utterances begin to reflect an increase in intensification (Hidalgo Navarro, 2011). However, in writing, we may rely on different strategies to intensify, and they may not be similar to those that manifest in oral speech. For example, a written expression may depend on punctuation (e.g., exclamation point), while oral speech may rely on intonation and stress. Castroviejo (2006) has noted that exclamations represent a high degree of intensification. For instance, we may find the use of various quantifiers (e.g., ‘every,’ ‘all’) and morphological features (e.g., the superlative, *brav-est*, *alto-ísimo*) in writing, not prosodic features. Likewise, we may probably attest to repetitions and reformulations in oral, but not in written discourse. However, we may also evidence metaphoric expressions, paraphrasing, and so forth in verbal and written discourse. Thus, we need to consider how the various intensifying elements function to escalate in each discourse category. We should not wholly discard prosodic features in written communication, as we will attest to the use of prosody in the chapter on Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), where we evidence written prosodic features in CMC.

We also have to consider repetition and reduplication (i.e., words formed by the repetition of sounds or doubling (e.g., ‘that’s a no-no,’ ‘teeny tiny,’ ‘*un poco*,’ ‘*un poquitín*’ (a little), ‘*un chin*,’ ‘*un chincito*’ (a tiny bit)). For instance, Wierzbicka’s (1991) account of repetition and reduplication suggests these forms affect the illocutionary status. They show the degree of the speaker’s commitment to an utterance and thereby intersect with intensification.

## EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON INTENSIFICATION IN ENGLISH

Numerous studies on intensification, degree modification, and intensifiers in English would be difficult to review. The earliest documented research on degree modifiers, for example, dates back to the work of Stoffel (1901) and Borst (1902), both of which provide inventories of intensifying adverbs in

modern and early English. Much later, we find the seminal work of Bolinger (1972). Nonetheless, this section will highlight empirical and descriptive accounts of intensifiers and intensification. In addition, the segment will contribute to the intensification analyses we provide in the next chapter.

We first begin with Labov (1984), since this book is informed by a socio-pragmatic framework when analyzing intensification. Labov (1984, p. 43) has noted that emotion is often “expressed through peripheral, gradient systems . . . any imaginable emotional state can be stated as a proposition: ‘I am moderately angry with you,’ or ‘I am entirely committed to this line of action.’” Namely, there are scalar qualities to how we increase or describe emotions. To be more specific, Labov (1984, pp. 43–4) considers intensity as “the emotional expression of social orientation toward the linguistic proposition: the commitment of the self to the proposition.” This statement underscores the perspective that an examination of intensification in written or oral speech is a socio-pragmatic category *and* an affective one. To that end, we have many intensifying linguistic elements we can deploy to escalate (e.g., ‘Sure, it is!’ ‘I’m so::: glad she arrived,’ ‘The price is vastly higher.’). Following Wierzbicka (1991), I suggest that we refer to intensification as an affective-emotional phenomenon but not *always* emotional unless a context calls upon the emotional. For instance, when we repeat, such as in *se desapareció rápido rápido* (‘it disappeared quickly, quickly’), we are not tapping into emotion. Instead, we are perhaps referring to escalating speed. In *me siento mal mal* (‘I feel bad, bad’ or ‘really really bad’) in a context in which a client is speaking to her doctor, we can consider the utterance an intensified-affective one.

Many scholars have investigated intensification in English (e.g., Athanasiadou, 2007; Bolinger, 1972; Labov, 1984; Paradis, 1997, 2008; Pomerantz, 1986; Partington, 1993; Tagliamonte, 2008; among others). Scholars such as Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik (1985, pp. 445–46) maintain that intensifying modifiers such as adverbials are a subset of linguistic devices. Earlier on, scholars coined these terms as ‘amplifiers’ as they ‘scaled upwards from an assumed norm.’ We can generally divide these forms into ‘maximizers,’ which reflect a scale’s upper extreme. There are also ‘boosters’ that tend to denote a higher degree than *x*. Regardless of this distinction, we consider maximizers *and* boosters as denoting intensification. Speakers and writers may use these expressions with multiple goals (e.g., to sway, influence), and the forms can function to convince, persuade, or legitimize claims (Pomerantz, 1986).

This book also addresses how and why we intensify. To be clear, we refer to intensifiers as specific lexical items, such as ‘very,’ *muy* or *bien* in Spanish. On the other hand, we define intensifying expressions as those that go beyond a lexical item, such as *¡Qué rico!* (‘Wonderful!’ or ‘Very tasty!’). The literature has also referred to intensifying lexical items as ‘degree modifiers,’

‘degree words,’ ‘reinforcers,’ and so forth. However, this book discusses lexical modifiers and expressions, not only single modifying items, as we assert that intensification is not limited to degree words. Instead, it can be expressed with various linguistic elements, such as one lexical item or many, prosodic feature(s), rhetorical devices such as repetition, and many more. Further, a critical part of understanding the manifestation of intensification is context. Thus, if we examine a single term, we may omit the bulk of the expressions that convey intensification.

Scholars who have investigated intensification in English have, by and large, considered this phenomenon as a pragmatic category. Accordingly, they have relied on context since it substantiates its communicative value. Namely, scholars have examined the strategies and devices we use to intensify and why they may prompt their use through a socio-pragmatic lens. For instance, the following expressions are context-dependent and convey varying degrees of intensification:

Context: When handed an unfavorable report, a boss produced this statement to a subordinate:

‘It is pretty bad.’ (adjectival) (as opposed to ‘It is bad.’)

Context: A couple during a divorce deposition/hearing described it thus:

‘It was so, so tiring.’ (repetition) (as opposed to ‘It was tiring.’)

Context: At a party, when someone told a story about a hilarious incident, a listener stated:

‘I almost died laughing.’ (hyperbole) (as opposed to ‘I laughed a lot.’)

Context: A wife issued a request to her husband to clean the garage, and he responded:

‘You’re killing me!’ (hyperbole) (as opposed to ‘You’re asking me to do so much.’)

Another perspective discussed in research regarding linguistic intensification is that of its relationship to subjectivity. For example, Athanasiadou (2007) posited that intensification points to an expression that entails subjectivity. However, the study relied on an examination of only adverbs related to intensification. The author noted that adverbs and adjectives primarily mark gradability. In essence, Athanasiadou (2007, p. 557) maintains that intensifying expressions “involve the speaker’s assessment and evaluation offered to the addressee. They are characterized by the position their intensified entities occupy on a scale . . . by the ordering of alternatives offered to the addressee.”

Previously, we mentioned Paradis’s (2008) work in that she challenged the view that degree is a grammatical phenomenon only characterized by



certain types of word classes, such as adverbs or adjectives. Three of the four previous examples illustrate ways in which intensification manifests beyond adverbs and adjectives.

To start, however, Paradis has investigated intensification for over a decade (e.g., 1997, 2000 [a, b, c], 2001, 2008). Paradis (1997) examined the use of degree modifiers in a London-Lund Corpus of British English. The study noted that there were differences in the uses of degree modifiers between oral and written discourse. For example, she found that ‘awfully,’ ‘bit,’ and ‘jolly,’ among others tend to occur exclusively in oral data, while ‘most,’ ‘almost,’ ‘highly,’ and so forth, we find more frequently in written text. This earlier study created a typology of the grading functions of degree modifiers. It identified modifiers that coupled semantically with totality and others with approximators. For instance, Paradis categorized maximizers (e.g., ‘absolutely’) and approximators (e.g., ‘almost’). Within the category of scalar modifiers, she delineated boosters (e.g., ‘extremely’), moderators (e.g., ‘fairly’), and diminishers (e.g., ‘slightly’).

Paradis (2000b; 2008) also suggests that degree modifiers have gone through a semantic change. Akin to Nuñez Pertejo (2017), researchers have documented these forms’ lexical-semantic change across languages. Expressions such as ‘wicked,’ ‘awesome,’ and others have gone through semantic bleaching while others have expanded their meanings. In line with Paradis’s work, we should note that degree words and expressions are dynamic for English and Spanish. Over time, they can take a new meaning, such as ‘pretty’ in ‘pretty big,’ which represents a process of grammaticalization. In Old English, ‘pretty’ semantically pointed to something cunning or tricky.

Nuñez Pertejo (2013, 2017) reported the diachronic changes and the historical development of ‘terrific.’ It is a polysemous form. She showed how this form had evolved from its original use, a negative connotation associated with ‘frightful’ to a more neutral sense having to do with size. Today, the form conveys a positive association meaning ‘amazing.’

Paradis’s work also challenges the view that degree is a grammatical phenomenon characteristic of only certain word classes. Instead, she contends that degree is ubiquitous in language and is associated with most meanings. Paradis (2008) drafted a typological model, representing an essential contribution to our research on intensification. She has argued that by using intensifiers, speakers and addressees construct meaning at the time of use. Namely, context guides the emissary’s thoughts while the hearer interprets meaning. To be succinct, Paradis (2008, p. 217) reveals that degree is a configurational meaning structure “that combines with knowledge structures pertaining to things, events, and states.” In other words, the degree is shaped by “mappings between lexical items and their meanings,” such as in the use of the

expression ‘very British,’ ‘what a car,’ ‘it is not so true.’ This perspective suggests that meanings are not inherent in the items themselves. Instead, the meanings of the expressions are shaped by speaker intention, listener uptake, and context. For instance, ‘very British’ tells us that the speaker knows what ‘British’ means in this cultural context, perhaps not the listener.

We noted earlier that several researchers had used a sociolinguistic approach to investigate English intensifiers. For instance, Ito and Tagliamonte (2003) investigated the use of ‘well weird,’ ‘right dodgy,’ ‘very strange,’ and ‘really cool’ in a corpus from a socially and generationally stratified community. From this study, we learn that intensifiers such as ‘very’ and ‘really,’ among others, have changed over time. The scholars report a rise in the frequency of use of these forms and their distribution across generations. The study also documented a higher incidence in the use of ‘really’ among younger speakers. Therefore, we find that forms become grammaticalized, and the expansion in use can spread among the oldest and middle-aged speakers first and then the more youthful generation later.

Scholars have relied on Ito and Tagliamonte (2003) to inform many of their sociolinguistic studies. Ito et al. is a cross-generational and socially stratified investigation of a single speech community in York, England. It consisted of an examination of the uses of adjectival heads related to intensification. The results of this study revealed that intensifiers are in constant change in frequency use and lexical preference. Further, the study confirmed that women lead change over men from one intensifier to another and that the middle-aged generation is responsible for this change. While this may be the case, the scholars report that younger educated males favor ‘really’ more than women. The study also confirmed that intensifiers are an excellent linguistic category to view grammatical layering in synchronic data. It reports that many of the forms examined were part of Old English and still exist today. In other words, the scholars suggest that old intensifiers do not diminish in use over time. They also documented a generation gap in ‘very’; it is favored by speakers over thirty-five while ‘really’ was found more characteristic of the younger generation.

Merx (2018) also investigated the use of adjectival intensifiers and other intensifiers. The study examined intensifiers as ‘very,’ ‘really,’ ‘pretty,’ ‘quite,’ and ‘so.’ It examined data from a Victoria Canadian English corpus (i.e., the Diachronic Corpus of Victoria English). The study also employed a sociolinguistic framework following Ito and Tagliamonte (2003) and Tagliamonte (2008). The study revealed that the most frequently used intensifier was ‘very.’ Older adults favored the form, a finding similar to what was documented by Tagliamonte in North American English. Also akin to Tagliamonte’s and Ito and Tagliamonte’s work, Merx attested to increases in the use of ‘pretty’ and ‘so.’

Bauer and Bauer (2002) also investigated aspects of intensification. The study centered on boosters (e.g., ‘really’) and maximizers (e.g., ‘totally’). Bauer et al. considered these forms as intensifiers or amplifiers. While the authors claim that the study had flaws in its data collection, it yielded valuable results contributing to future research. They explain the use of adjectival boosters (e.g., ‘the test was easy as’ where there is an implied predicative position). The study documented the boosters ‘so,’ ‘very,’ and ‘really,’ widespread among many young New Zealanders attending multiple schools. Regardless, the so+adj (e.g., ‘so cool’) construction was quantitatively more frequently used than any other. The study also attested to a generational divide; older adults employed ‘really’ with much more frequency. The finding also points to generational changes in intensification expressions but recommends further analysis.

In a large corpora study,<sup>1</sup> Tao (2007) also investigated lexical intensifiers. In particular, the research centered on the use of ‘absolutely’ in spoken American English as an independent modifier, the freestanding form, synonymous with ‘right’ or ‘correct.’ The study characterized the change in the use of the form as part of emergent grammar. Tao posited that ‘absolutely’ had grammaticalized to a turn initiator used as an agreement response. For instance, the study uncovered a 35 percent use of the independent ‘absolutely.’ This finding was surprising since the authors note it frequently appears as a syntactic head (e.g., ‘absolutely marvelous’), not a freestanding one. Also, for example, the study indicated that ‘absolutely’ could co-occur with negative and affirmative terms, such as is the case for ‘perfectly’ and ‘entirely,’ as in ‘absolutely delighted’ or ‘absolutely intolerable.’

Interestingly, Tao’s study also documented how ‘absolutely’ appears as a response in both dependent and freestanding syntactic positions, as in ‘absolutely right’ and ‘absolutely’ and competes at times with ‘yes,’ as in ‘absolutely yes,’ a form of tautology or redundancy. This study, although conducted in English, also is illustrative of how forms change in Spanish. For instance, in Spanish, *correcto* has also been grammaticalized to an agreement form (i.e., *sí* ‘yes’), not only a lexical item that defines a status or object as right or wrong. We can state a similar case for the form *cierto* (‘true’) in Spanish. It has become synonymous with ‘yes.’ Naturally, these observations largely depend on the Spanish dialect under examination and contexts in which these forms emerge.

Before continuing, a brief explanation is in order. First, we need to reiterate that this book does not aim to compare intensification in Spanish and English. However, we should mention why most studies of English intensifiers have attended to lexical items. English does not count on inflectional markers to express intensification as Spanish does; they are less common in English. For instance, English does have analytic adjectivals and adverbials that intensify,

such as ‘huge’ and ‘really’ (Tagliamonte, 2008). Other languages, such as Spanish, tend to have a wide range of analytic *gran* as *gran idiota* (‘big idiot’) and synthetic ones, such as *grand-ísimo* (‘huge’). The realization of synthetic intensifiers in teenage English oral speech is not frequent simply because English does not count on a vast repertoire of synthetic markers. However, one-word intensifiers are frequent (Stenström, 2005). Therefore, it is common to hear ‘I made a huge mistake.’ in English, and we find few instances of affixation, such as ‘mega-mistake.’

For now, we can say that English intensification studies have mainly focused on phrasal expressions and lexical items. We find few studies that have attended to affixation. For example, Ghesquière and Davidse (2011, p. 252) investigated phrasal noun-intensifying adjectives, including intensification scales. They focused on prenominal adjectival phrases that have gradable properties:

Highly entertaining  
 A complete mess  
 A whole bunch of crazy stuff  
 A particular threat

Their work was akin to Bolinger’s study (1972, pp. 58–60) (his bold):

But it was **pure** speculation.  
 She feels a **complete** failure.  
 And fatigue is a **particular** problem for women.  
 What may be considered riches by one man may seem a **mere** pittance to another.

Coupled prenominal phrasal forms, such as ‘an excellent report,’ convey gradability. Also, stand-alone or single lexical items such as adjectives (i.e., excellent, as in ‘He is excellent.’) do not always function to boost. For instance, ‘a complete’ as in ‘a complete order’ does not express intensification or an escalation. Instead, it points to a fulfilled order. On the contrary, there is an amplification or escalation to a person’s condition in ‘She is a complete failure.’ Together ‘complete failure’ escalates the state to an absolute degree, the highest. To be clear, if a store clerk says, ‘This is a complete order.’ it would not represent an escalation of intensity. However, if a store clerk indicates, “Your order is a complete mess,” then we have a context in which the phrase conveys increases in gradability to the maximum degree. Therefore, we need to consider these as phrases (e.g., ‘a complete mess’) together. These coupled terms represent an escalated expression. However, as separate lexical items, the forms cannot convey intensification. The semantic aspect of the noun and adjective

and context play a critical role in interpreting a phrase as intensifying. That is, in their syntactic association and meaning, they both strengthen.

A diachronic investigation of intensification has been the focus of several studies. For instance, Partington's (1993) seminal work focuses on language change and intensification. He posits that intensification is "a direct indication of a speaker's desire to use and exploit the expression of hyperbole" (p. 178). In particular, the study explores the meaning and function of intensification diachronically and synchronically. The many points discussed in the study are the collocation behavior of lexical items such as 'awfully,' 'absolutely,' 'bitterly' (following Bolinger, 1972; Quirk et al., 1985). Partington (1993) suggests that these forms can modify verbs in 'value highly' and submodify adjectives and adverbs (e.g., 'absolutely crazy,' 'perfectly well').

Further, Partington notes that intensifiers are subject to restrictions; several can collocate with few items such as 'stone' (e.g., 'stone-cold'). Others such as 'very' and 'quite' have extensive collocation ranges. Another point made similar to that posited by Paradis (2008) is that intensifiers form an open set since we can create new ones at any time. Partington's study also explains novel intensifier use as 'horribly articulate' and 'excruciatingly gaudy.' In doing so, he further substantiates the fact that intensifiers represent an open set. These studies also reiterate the point I previously made that the adverbial/adjectival phrases are codependent on their nouns when interpreting their intensifying meaning.

Partington views intensifiers' functions as a vehicle to impress, praise, persuade, insult, and influence a listener's perception of a message in the communication process. To substantiate his perspective, we have extracted examples gathered from Mahmood (2015, p. 25) that exemplify how intensifiers may function (his underlines):

Context: A manager to a worker:

Yes, your mistakes are completely unbearable.

(Function: to insult)

Context: A selling agent of housing to a customer:

The house is extremely beautiful.

(Function: to persuade)

Context: A teacher to a student:

You are awfully intelligent.

(Function: to praise)

Mahmood also stresses that the interpretations of propositions such as these previously presented are subject to socio-cultural divergences.

Interestingly, tautology also plays a role in the expression of intensification. For example, a study by González-Díaz (2018) examined tautological expressions of intensification. This particular study centered on constructions such as ‘tiny little’ (e.g., ‘tiny little bird’) and ‘big huge’ (e.g., ‘big huge pay raise’) in present-day English. The quantitative analysis uncovered that these expressions had widespread use. González-Díaz stressed that intensificatory repetition is not new since it represents a linguistic behavior typical of English speakers (e.g., ‘a long, long time ago,’ ‘a very old, old story’). The corpus investigation revealed that size-adjectival clusters had a wider semantic and functional distribution than researchers had initially reported. Namely, they do not only associate with physical functions but also expand to non-physical and metaphorical uses. Thus, the clusters seem to have reinforcement and intensifying functions (e.g., ‘great big huge building’).

A semantic perspective has also informed studies of intensifiers (e.g., Beltrama and Bochnak, 2015; Morzycki, 2012). For example, Morzycki (2012) provided a semantic account of degree modifiers such as ‘flat-out,’ ‘downright,’ and ‘straight-up,’ which the scholar notes represent a distinct natural class. Morzycki (2012, p. 567) suggests dividing these forms into two categories: forms that encode extremeness and others encoded based on contextual factors. The findings from the analyses contribute to a theory of adjectival extremeness. As an example, Morzycki explains that we can understand:

‘Your shoes are downright \_\_\_\_\_!’  
gigantic  
gorgeous  
fantastic

But Morzycki (2012) maintains that we are unlikely to say:

‘Your shoes are downright \_\_\_\_\_!’  
big(?)  
pretty(?)  
okay(?)

With this in mind, Morzycki (2012) posits that quantification is restricted. Also, she explains that we can categorize modifiers as signaling that a degree falls outside a contextual range. We gather from this study that certain features are inherent in extreme quantitative adjectives but not in degree modifiers. While the analysis is solely semantic and did not shed light on dialect differences, we may question how, for example, ‘absolutely dead’ is more

acceptable than ‘downright dead.’ The expression of extreme adjectives has contextual restrictions, but we may find the limits associated with a language’s dialect or cultural differences.

Intensification also manifests in various English discourses, not only in oral communication. For example, in media print, we find strategies used to intensify communication. We present two examples gathered from an English language press here:

Context: The two excerpts were obtained from the *New York Times*, May 1, 2020, as they provide the latest updates on the coronavirus news (<https://www.nytimes.com/news-event/coronavirus>):

“With rent due today, #CancelRent becomes rallying cry for some tenants.”  
 “Stocks slump after tech companies take a hit.”

We evidence how the writers amplified to influence and persuade readers. The phrase ‘a rallying cry’ contains two intensifying elements: ‘rallying’ and ‘cry.’ The author could have used ‘shout.’ However, ‘rallying’ and ‘cry’ carry more illocutionary force. We also have ‘slump’ and ‘hit,’ which connote a severe drop in value in the second headline. ‘Hit’ also represents a violent fall. Thus, the writer is characterizing these actions as brutal. The illocutionary force regarding tenants’ cries could not have carried the same strength if the writer had employed a phrase such as ‘tenants are complaining’ or ‘the cancel rent movement is increasing among tenants.’

To summarize, research on English intensification has relied on linguistics’s pragmatic, sociolinguistic, and semantic subfields. We also explained that diachronic and synchronic studies in English addressed intensifier grammaticalization or delexicalization. They have relied on corpus gathered from Old to Modern English. We also find that several studies have investigated intensification in spontaneous oral speech and written discourses (e.g., written material of various categories such as newspapers, literature, and letters). That said, most English intensification studies have investigated this phenomenon by exclusively attending to a closed class of lexical items. We have noted that English does not have an expansive inventory of affixes that mark intensity. Instead, it tends to rely on analytic adjectival and adverbial structures to express intensification. Nonetheless, we may still be in the early stages of research in that English phrasal and cultural expressions need to be further investigated, not only lexical items.

The following section on Spanish intensification may inform future work on English intensification. It exemplifies the wide range of linguistic elements we use to intensify communication.

## EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON INTENSIFICATION IN SPANISH

Scholarship on intensification in Spanish has been abundant (e.g., Albelda Marco, 2005, 2007, 2014; Albelda Marco and Álvarez Muro, 2010; Beinhauer, 1991; Briz Gómez, 1998, 1996; Enghels and Roels, 2017; Fuentes Rodríguez, 2006; Guerrero Salazar, 2017; Herrero Moreno, 1991; among others). It would be impossible to address all of the studies conducted in Spanish regarding intensification. Suffice it to say that most of the literature reveals that intensification is a pragmatic strategy associated with colloquial Spanish. It is referred to as an affective expression, highlighting a sort, a heightening, among other terms. According to Briz Gómez (1998), intensification reflects a speaker's eagerness to influence their hearer persuasively. Briz Gómez suggests that intensification is associated with how a speaker conveys an attitude toward an action, object, person, or entity.

Most researchers investigating intensification in Spanish consider it a pragmatic category. They suggest that intensification implicates reinforcing what has been expressed in a statement to make it more credible. Albelda Marcos (2005) and Fuentes Rodríguez (2006) posit that intensification manifests with various grammatical categories (e.g., verbs, adverbs, adjectives, discourse markers). Further, we find that intensification is associated with multiple discursive-pragmatic phenomena (e.g., modality). Intensification also manifests using different aspects of linguistics (e.g., phonological, morphological, syntactic). Studies have also maintained that intensification entails modality, reinforcement, persuasion, and threat. For instance, Briz Gómez (1998, p. 109) has noted that in our conversations:

*“se trata de ser claro, de dar fuerza argumentativa a lo dicho o al acto de decir, de reforzar el estado de cosas que se presenta como real y verdadero y, si la argumentación lo requiere, de ser vehemente.”*

(We attempt to be clear, to provide argumentative strength to what has been said, or in the act of speaking, to reinforce the state of things that are presented as real or genuine, and, if the argument requires it, to be vehement.) [my translation]

Thus, as we know it, intensification has a communicative function. Within a social interaction, speaker intention and listener uptake together shape its meaning. Albelda Marco and Álvarez Muro (2010) have also posited that intensification modifies illocutionary force. They also suggest that intensification has social-communicative repercussions. Albelda Marco et al. (2010, p. 84) provides this example:



*Hicimos de todo, de todo, de todo, no teníamos quien nos viera, o sea, nos quisimos, nos amamos, nos adoramos.*

(We did everything, everything, everything, we didn't have anyone watching; in other words, we wanted each other, we loved each other, and we adored each other.) [my translation]

In the previous excerpt, we find intensifying rhetorical strategies through repetition (i.e., *todo, de todo, de todo*) and reformulations (i.e., *nos quisimos, nos amamos, nos adoramos*). In it, we find expressed pronominals, morphological, and syntactic repetition contributing to increased strength.

We gathered the following excerpts from oral narratives of personal experience that were collected throughout my research:

Context: In an oral narrative of personal experience, a speaker discussed his fatigue<sup>2</sup>:

(M#30)

*Llegué a mi casa a las dos de la tarde con un cansancio existencial terrible, o sea, tan terrible, que yo cuando estoy así, tan cansado, yo agarro, apago todo, apago el teléfono, tranco las ventanas y me meto en la cama debajo de las sabanas.*

(I arrived home at two in the afternoon with a terrible existential tiredness, in other words, so awful, that when I get this way, so tired, I take to shut down everything, shut down the phone, shut the windows, and I get into bed under the sheets.)

In the narrative, we see how a speaker employs rhetorical strategies and devices to increase the message's illocutionary force to his hearer. In the excerpt produced, we find the intensification expressed in *un cansancio existencial terrible, tan terrible*, and *tan cansado*, which points to how the speaker made his propositions more credible. It consists of repetition and reformulation (e.g., *tan* 'so' and *cansancio* 'tiredness' and *cansado* 'tired'), strategies used to assure the hearer that the information was relevant to the narrative. It guaranteed that the hearer captured the seriousness of his fatigue. Furthermore, we find several semantic verbs of motion: *tranco* ('shut'), *agrarro* ('grab'), *meto* (defined approximately to 'get into,' 'shove into'). These verbs of motion also contribute to increasing locution. For example, the narrator could have expressed, 'close the windows' instead of 'shut,' 'take' instead of 'grab.'

In another narrative of personal experience, a woman recounts a moment in which she saw a whale off the coast of Puerto Rico:

Context: In an oral narrative of personal experience, a speaker recounts and acts out an event that took place while on a boat off the shores of Puerto Rico with her family:

(#34JN)

*En el momento que estoy mirando hacia el horizonte, salió una ballena y brinca. Y yo aja. Y yo, "Oh!" Y le digo a mi sobrinas y mi sobrino, "Acabo de ver una ballena!" Y ellos "embuste!" y yo, "Te lo juro, te lo juro, acabo de ver una ballena!"*

(At the moment that I was looking at the horizon, a whale came out and jumped. And I, "oh!" and I tell my nieces and nephew, "I just saw a whale!" and they "fibber," and I, "I swear, I swear, I just saw a whale.")

The narrative is of particular interest since the narrator acts out the protagonists' voices in the story. For instance, Cameron (1998) has reported that the quotation strategy employed by the narrator is associated with topics related to fear, humor, or in this case, surprise. This observation further escalates and underscores the emotional aspect of the phenomenon of intensification. In it, we find expressions of intensification, such as the speech act of swearing (i.e., 'I swear') and the rhetorical strategy of repetition to make her claim credible and reinforce that she did indeed see a whale. In other words, the intensification elements produced made her statement believable, and therefore, persuaded her nieces and nephew to believe she had seen a whale. In addition, we should note that her utterances required intensification as the speaker attempted to persuade her audience to accept her statement since earlier, they had claimed that she (the speaker) was fibbing.

We gather from these excerpts then that the theoretical underpinnings of persuasion can inform studies of intensification. In other words, the excerpts demonstrate how speakers persuade hearers or readers to believe in the occurrences recounted in the narratives. In the passages, we found that increases in illocutionary force made utterances more relevant, credible, and convincing to the hearer(s).

We now return to the perspective that intensification is a socio-pragmatic affective linguistic category. Other sociolinguistic studies have investigated intensification in Spanish. For example, we find Carrera de la Red (2013), Enghels and Roels (2017), Molina Martos (2010), and Montecino (2004). Molina Martos (2010) conceives intensification as a pragmatic category

conditioned by social factors and subject to constant transformation. Molina Martos notes that while preponderance, emphasis, exaggeration, and hyperbole fuel everyday colloquial conversation, this linguistic behavior is gradually permeating the linguistic behavior among Madrid's educated women. Specifically, young women employed jargon, dysphemisms, and other linguistic devices in their everyday speech as strategies to intensify their communication. In other words, their sociolect has leveled and has eliminated the asymmetries previously found in upper- and lower-educated speech. The study documented, among other devices, the use of external modifications such as *muy* ('very'), *mucho* ('a lot/lots'), and colloquial expressions such as *montón* ('a lot'). Molina Martos also uncovered that dysphemetic or taboo terms operate as intensifiers in the utterances such as *Estuvimos tres días jodidas* ('We were screwed for three days.'). Among the various devices employed by young women, the study reported the use of:

- Internal modifications, synthetic affixation (e.g., *rarisimo*, 'rarest')
- External intensifying elements, lexical adverbial and adjectival (e.g., *tanta+noun* as in *tanta gente*, 'so many people')
- The use of quantifiers to express hyperbole (e.g., *no me llama en cuatro mil días* ('[you/he/she] haven't been called in four thousand days')
- Syntactic devices (e.g., articles+noun), as in *un fracasado*, 'a failure,' 'a loser'
- Exclamations such as *¡Hombre, no es agradable!* ('Man, that's not pleasant!')

One of the most comprehensive examinations of intensification is that of Albelda Marco (2005). Albelda Marco (2005) and Briz Gómez (1997, 1998) are perhaps the most recognized scholars in the literature investigating attenuation and intensification in European Spanish. Albelda Marco's work discusses this phenomenon's meaning by depicting the use of quantifiers, superlatives, modality, references to scales, and linguistic strategies and devices that contribute to intensifying: lexical, morphological, syntactic, prosodic, and so on. Further, this body of work presents data on how intensification intersects with the social aspects of communication.

Enghels and Roels's (2017) work is of particular interest. They examined the use of *mazo(a)* and *mazo(de)* (definition approximates 'super,' 'a lot,' 'much') and other lexical intensifiers among Madrid teenagers. The form refers to an increase in size and an agreement marker. The scholars used a semantic-pragmatic and sociolinguistic lens to investigate the use of intensifiers. They noted that *de mazo*, which originates from a hammer, had grammaticalized to current usage. Enghels et al. also maintain that extralinguistic

factors (e.g., gender) influence the use of this form, and it appears evenly distributed among all social classes.

As mentioned earlier, Spanish has a wide range of synthetic features and analytic forms that can escalate. For example, depending on a dialect, we may refer to a house as *casa* but a big house as *cas-ona*. We may also express *una enorme casa* or *una gran casa*, ‘an enormous house,’ *casa grandísima*, ‘large house,’ or *una casa super-grande*, ‘super big house.’ Therefore, speakers can employ various prefixes, suffixes, and lexical items (e.g., adjectival phrases) to intensify.

As mentioned previously, we cannot determine intensification by the use of a word or phrase. Instead, we need to take two concerns into account.

**Table 2.2**

<i>Proposition/Utterance</i>	<i>Evaluating?</i>	<i>Type of Intensifier</i>	<i>Mode of Intensifying</i>	<i>Communicative Sub-effects</i>
<i>Yo estaba toda tirá.</i> (I looked sloppy.)	Yes	Expression	Maximum	To exaggerate, add credibility
<i>Te lo juro de vergüenza, cerré la puerta.</i> (I swear, from shame, I closed the door.)	Yes	Modality	Commitment to the truth	To make statement credible
<i>Lo comprendo perfectamente.</i> (I understand perfectly.)	Yes	Expression	Absolute value	To make statement credible
<i>¡Qué va!</i>	Yes	Expression	Absolute negative value	Imposition of ‘I,’ the speaker

Based on Albelda Marco (2005, pp. 306–307)

First, the context and how linguistic elements make it such that the hearer can capture the intensifying effect. Second, that the features, phrases, and expressions contain values that point to escalation, increasing gradation, or illocutionary force. Namely, they convey a message beyond the norm. Albelda Marco (2005, pp. 306–307) itemizes intensifiers and their functions, and in what follows, I present only an excerpt of the typology<sup>4</sup>:

Interestingly, *¡Qué va!* denotes a negative value similar to ‘no way!’, ‘what the heck?’ or ‘no,’ ‘nonsense,’ ‘unbelievable.’ Albelda Marco explains that this utterance, like many others, behaves somewhat as common set phrases that function to intensify (Ruiz Gurillo, 2000; Corpas Pastor, 1997). Although rare in speech and writing, we can also escalate the use of the lexical item

*abrazo* ('hug') to *abra-zote* ('big hug') in closing written and oral speech without context per se.

Briz Gómez (1998) maintains that intensification, as a pragmatic category, relates to argumentative strength. His categorization, while more comprehensive than others, also takes context into account. The following represents a synthesized description of several categories of intensification elements in Briz Gómez (1998, pp. 116–27).<sup>5</sup>

**Phrases/expressions:**

*De verdad* ('honestly,' 'really')

*¡Lárgate o verás!* ('Get out, 'or you'll see!')

*Por supuesto que sí* ('of course,' 'yes')

*Me ha pegado un susto de muerte.* ('X scared to death')

*Eres un huevo torpe.* ('You're a silly egg.')

**Function:**

to reinforce

to threaten

to reinforce, insist

to escalate reaction

to increase criticism

**Internal modifications by affixation:**

*Requete-bién* ('super-great')

*Cuerp-azo* ('super body')

**Function:**

prefixed to increase

intensity/quality

suffixed to increase

size/quality

**Syntactic article+nominal, art+ adj/adv:**

*Con la gente que venía* ('with the company he keeps')

*Lo que estudiaba el tío* ('how that guy studied')

*Es un burrón, un pulpo, una gallina* ('X is ignorant,' 'octopus,' 'hen')

**Function:**

to increase

force criticism

to escalate criticism

to increase critique

**Exclamatory propositions:**

*¡Qué listo eres!* (neg. 'How sharp you are!')

*¡Lo que nos reíamos!* ('How we laughed!')

**Function:**

to augment critique

to increase emotion

description

**Idiomatic Phrases:**

*Me importa un bledo.* ('I don't give a damn/hoot.')

*Me importa un pepino.* ('I don't give a damn/hoot.')

**Function:**

to underscore opinion

to underscore opinion

From a pragmatic perspective, Briz Gómez suggests it is evident that intensifiers tend to reinforce or manipulate an attitude. Following Briz Gómez

(1998, pp. 126–27), we note that intensifiers also represent values or units that convey agreement or disagreement, as in:

Mother to son: *Recuerda que tienes que estudiar.*

(Remember, you have to study.)

Son to mother: *Que sí::: mamá:::*

(Why yes::: mother:::) [my translation]

Intensification can manifest with other non-lexical features such as prosodic ones. In the previous example, *Que sí, mamá* is representative of an attitude and was expressed with the use of elongated vowels *Que sí::: mamá:::*, exhibiting a degree of frustration.

Hidalgo Navarro's (2011) work reminds us of the importance of prosody and colloquial Spanish intensification. In addition, he discusses acoustic or suprasegmental features that also invoke humor. For example, his work uncovered vowel extensions, intonational curves, and so forth that heightened the force of expressions. Further, of the many devices and strategies speakers use to intensify, this study attended to amplitude (e.g., whispering) as a strategy speakers use to boost.

The study contributed several significant findings. First, the study explains many prosodic linguistic behaviors that contribute to intensifying humor, not just one. Second, it points to how prosodic features, directly and indirectly, contribute to conveying intensification. Third, the study also describes how imitation of voices (e.g., feminine voice as a jeer) can operate to intensify.

In brief, when we investigate intensification, we need to consider prosody and suprasegmental features. Also, we need to examine voice changes closely. Finally, we also suggest nonverbal behavior (i.e., kinesic and facial gestures that co-occur with expressions).

## INTENSIFICATION IN NON-INSTITUTIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL DISCOURSES

Intensification also manifests in various discourses, not only everyday and formal conversations. From a sociolinguistic and pragmatic perspective, this observation is critical for researchers and language instructors. Therefore, we need to consider the various manifestations of intensification in language instruction and language research. For example, in instances that contain dissent, refuting, arguing, oppositions, and so on, one would expect the expression of intensifying elements with more frequency. Thus, regardless of the discursive setting, and knowing how pervasive intensification is in our communication, we cannot disregard its presence and importance in institutional

settings (e.g., court, family disputes) and non-institutional (e.g., familiar conversations) settings. We substantiate this observation by way of Herrero Moreno's (2002, p. 222) work. For instance, we find intensification expressed in utterance marked with number two gathered from a family dispute, a non-institutional discourse informal conversation:

- 1: *¿Vas ir a casa de Maite a estudiar?*  
 2: *¡A ti qué leches te importa!*

- (1: You are going to Maite's house to study?  
 2: What business is it of yours!) [my translation]

In the utterance marked number one that follows, we find intensification related to a familiar conversation, also a non-institutional interaction:

- 1: *Jo, estoy helada. Hace un frío de mil pares de narices.*  
 2: *Pues hará frío, pero a mi no me lo parece.*

- (1: Crap, I am freezing. It is as cold as a thousand pairs of noses.  
 2: Well, it is cold, but to me, it doesn't seem like it.)  
 [my translation]

In both of these previous excerpts, which represent everyday interactions, we find different categories of intensification. In the first excerpt, the use of *¡A ti qué leches te importa!* represents an increased outburst, a negative expression related to a dispute. The expression *Jo, estoy helada. Hace un frío de mil pares de narices* is not related to a dispute. Instead, it escalates how cold it is with forms such as *jo, helada*, and *mil pares de narices*, a hyperbolic expression. Therefore, although these two excerpts represent similar familiar interactions, the micro-interactions are different, and so are the intensifying terms.

In the following excerpt obtained from Flores-Ferrán (2020), we find an example of an institutional-based interaction, one in which the client discusses her depression with her therapist. The therapist had inquired how she was before her depression and her current state of mind:

Context: A client discusses her behavior before her depression began. This interaction took place in a therapy session:

*Sí sí siempre, siempre me estaba riendo, canto canciones de la iglesia, pero este tiempo que estuve dos meses así, bien mal, era llorando, agresiva . . .*

(Yes, yes, always, always [I] was laughing, singing church hymns, but these times, that I was like that [with depression], really bad, was crying, aggressive . . .) [my translation]

The following excerpt has a similar context, an interaction between a therapist and client:

Context: In a therapy session, a client discusses her anxiety about being summoned to a court:

*Porque a mi no me ha llegado ninguna carta de la corte. Ningún juez me ha citado a mi, nada, nada, nada.*

(Because I haven't received not one letter from the court. Not one judge has cited me, nothing, nothing, nothing.) [my translation]

In the previous two excerpts representing formal interactions, the expressions of intensification appear as the rhetorical strategy of repetition *sí sí siempre, siempre, nada, nada, nada*. There also is an adverbial/adjectival phrase *bien mal*. The second excerpt contains multiple negatives: *no me ha llegado, ningún juez, nada nada nada*. These excerpts illustrate how persuasive language emerges in our linguistic behavior and an institutional setting. Naturally, we cannot only attribute these intensification strategies to institutional discourses. What is important is that we have uncovered similar and different intensification elements in arguments, narratives, familiar and unfamiliar interactions, and institutional and non-institutional settings.

Herrero Moreno's (2002) study did not center on intensification. However, it merits mentioning since it discusses emotive-based utterances. Furthermore, the study describes several features, strategies, and devices that are associated with intensification. For instance, the study depicts increased prosodic features and other linguistic elements that convey assertiveness, positions, dissent, and rejections. In other words, intensification manifests as a way to legitimize claims and positions. Pomerantz (1986) suggests that speakers wish to convince, defend, justify, accuse, complain, and so forth in these types of adversarial interactions. We propose here that these types of interactions are a good breeding ground to capture intensification.

Before we discuss intensification in institutional discourse, we need to define what we refer to as 'institutional discourse' throughout the text. Institutional discourses are interactions that occur within a specific institutional setting. They refer to instances in which one person representing an institution encounters another for its services (Agar, 1985). We may say that these discourses are professionally related ones. Examples of such discourses are a customer interacting with a service agent, a patient with a doctor, a teacher with a student, a clinician with a client, a lawyer advising a client, and a court judge interacting with a lawyer in court. The interactions are quite different from friends interacting at a party or a social gathering or family members interacting around dinnertime, where multiple discussions and



varied topics are prevalent. Institutional discourses generally center on a topic or a specific goal. For instance, a client may complain to a customer service agent about a broken item they purchased. A doctor may also interact about a patient's diagnosis, and a student may discuss their grade with a teacher. Also, a lawyer may argue a case in front of a court or judge. Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (2005, p. 13) maintain that institutional talk represents "spontaneous, authentic language use by speakers who are speaking as themselves, in genuine situations, with socio-affective consequences."

We note that there has been an abundance of research conducted on intensification in everyday speech. However, there is a shortage of empirical research on intensification in institutional speech or writing. We find that there are more studies on *mitigation* in institutional discourses than studies conducted on intensification. For Spanish and English, we note that several scholars have investigated intensification in court/parliamentary proceedings, therapeutic discourse, literary discourse, and an instructional setting (e.g., Albelda Marco, 2005; Flores-Ferrán, 2020; Fuentes Rodríguez, 2011; Kanwit, Elias, and Clay, 2018; Márquez Guerrero, 2015; García Zapata, 2014). For example, we note that García Zapata's work centers on intensification in Medellín, Colombian literature. It represents one of the few to address intensification in a literary text.

When I began investigating how speakers may mitigate or attenuate expressions, I reviewed many studies that gathered data from several institutional discourses, including instructional settings, medical and hospital interactions, courts, and legal proceedings, among many others.<sup>6</sup> However, concerning intensification, to date, I have not encountered as many. Most studies have focused on independent linguistic features and phrases in English. For example, several studies have focused on adjectival terms or the use of lexical items such as 'really.' Others, for Spanish, have attended to syntactic or morphological features gathered from corpus studies. However, very few have examined intensification in Spanish and English expressions in natural, spontaneous speech and institutional, discursive settings. Therefore, we elaborate on few studies that have contributed to shaping the intensification analysis in this book.

For Spanish, Márquez Guerrero examined the alternations between attenuating and intensifying expressions in political discourse. The study revealed how speakers tend to intensify expressions in political-argumentative discursive settings. Specifically, the study illustrated how a politician should have strengthened expressions to discuss his achievements rather than using mitigating devices to describe his accomplishments.

In another study (Flores-Ferrán, 2020), I encountered intensification elements, features, strategies, and devices in therapeutic interactions. The

excerpts in the study exemplify how Spanish speakers employed intensification to persuade, reject, insist, and discuss aspects of treatment. Oral narratives of personal experience were also illustrative of the multiple strategies speakers used to increase the illocutionary force of expressions. For instance, speakers employed redundant lexical items, repetition in phrases, increased use of subject pronoun *yo* (I), and cultural references to escalate communication.

Intensification has also been examined in the context of Spanish written documents, such as newspaper articles, headlines, literature, and in corpora (e.g., de Jesús Rondón Guerrero, Soto Peña, and Álvarez Muro, 2009; Granda, 2012; Guerrero Salazar, 2017; Lavric, 2016; Mancera Rueda, 2009). For instance, Guerrero Salazar (2017, pp. 189–90) discussed intensification strategies employed in front-page headline sports pages. She documented the following expressions in the study:

*Los más odiados* (Sport, 12-XI-12)  
(The most hated)

*Grande entre los grandes* (Marca, 27-XI-13)  
(The biggest of the biggest)

*El mejor del mundo* (Marca, 1-IX-12)  
(The best in the world). [my translations]

In journalistic discourse, it is common to find intensification as a means of persuading and influencing readers. Another study conducted by Mancera Rueda (2009) substantiates this perspective. The study revealed how in newspaper opinion columns, authors vehemently transmit their opinions and sentiments and reaffirm judgments and attempt to attract, convince, persuade, and change the readership's reasoning about an issue. In essence, Mancera Rueda posits that opinion columnists provide a *manipulación del decir* (manipulation of what is said). Furthermore, they employ multiple intensification strategies and devices such as lexical, stylistic, and other intensifiers. For example, the study uncovered the use of the personalized *tú* (you), which functioned to increase intensity rather than the use of a null subject, the default linguistic behavior expected<sup>7</sup> in that particular dialect.

We also have found intensification in comic strips. The following list represents an abbreviated and modified version based on Renkema's (1999) work, which investigated intensification in that particular genre:

**Lexical intensifiers:**

Basic lexical intensifiers: *Muy* ('very'), *mucho* ('a lot'), *superbueno* ('super good')

Quantifiers: *Casi todos* ('almost all')

Qualifiers: *Honestamente* ('honestly')

Precision markers: *Exactamente* ('exactly')

**Semantic intensifiers:**

Verbs: *Estrellarse* ('smash,' as in smash into)

Nominals: *Engaño* ('hoax,' 'cheat,' 'deceit'), *embuste* ('a fib')

**Stylistic intensifiers:**

Repetition: *Hacia calor, calor, calor* ('It was hot, hot, hot')

Exaggeration: *Esperó siglos* ('she/he waited centuries')

Comparison: *Era más papista que el Papa* ('He was more religious than the Pope')

For the most part, we also find that researchers have relied on corpus-based data to examine intensification. For instance, Briz Gómez et al. (2002) gathered data from a corpus to investigate intensification in written and oral colloquial conversations. He explored the uses of lexical and stylistic forms, such as emphatics, hyperboles, totalizers (e.g., *todos*, 'all'), and negative determiners *ningún* (none).

We gather from these and other studies that there is a vast repertoire of strategies, devices, or linguistic elements for Spanish, including syntactic, semantic, morphological, prosodic, and others, to communicate intensification. In addition, researchers have investigated phrasal expressions, lexicon, and cultural sayings. We also find that researchers have taken different paths to investigate this phenomenon. While several have focused their investigation on the use of lexical items in utterances, others have examined intensification in various discourses (e.g., written, oral, colloquial, newspapers, literary). As Palacios Martínez and Núñez Pertejo (2012) point out, intensification manifests in both written and verbal communication for several reasons. It adds expressivity, strengthens a message, or reinforces the speaker's and writer's attitude of what they are saying. We also add to this perspective the importance of the affective factor in the expression of intensification.

We should also recognize that social factors mediate how intensification manifests. Concerning studies conducted in Spanish intensification, and as mentioned previously, we find that age, dialect, and cultural differences have

been documented in the expression of this phenomenon, again, social correlates. We have also noted that researchers have approached the study of intensification in Spanish literature, newspapers, and other sources such as personal experience and digital corpora narratives. Furthermore, researchers have discussed lexicalization. Similar to English, and over time, meanings of lexical items have changed to new functions. Namely, in several studies, we have attested to changes in lexical items such as dysphemetic or taboo terms that increase a message's illocutionary force. The studies reported these changes to be socially stratified by age and gender groups.

In written text, literary in nature, we find García Zapata's (2014) work that examined intensifiers and dysphemisms in Colombian literature. The study revealed taboo items or dysphemisms denote intense expressivity (high degree) in propositions. These forms can function to attack its characters' positive or negative images, express emotions, and increase solidarity and camaraderie among protagonists. Further, the study revealed that intensifying forms such as dysphemisms were characteristic of male characters in literature.

To summarize, research centered on Spanish intensification has used a broad brush to collect and analyze data and describe this phenomenon from a socio-pragmatic, cultural, and affective perspective. Descriptive research has also informed the investigations conducted by researchers. Besides, several researchers have approached their examination of intensification by contrasting its realization with that of attenuation. Research on intensification in Spanish has, by and large, confirmed that this phenomenon entails modality, and it serves to reinforce, persuade, and influence its audience.

Prosody seems to have been a concern that researchers tend to overlook in studies related to intensification. So let us briefly return to prosody and its relationship to the expression of intensification. Hidalgo Navarro (2011) has noted there are diverse linguistic processes that may contribute to intensification. Here are only a few:

- Intonation (rising, falling, and flat)
- Intonation (questions)
- Tone (lower or higher than usual)
- Tone (exaggerated, falsetto)
- Lower voice
- Speed
- Syllable elongation
- Giggles
- Pauses

These linguistic behaviors coupled with a thorough examination of a specific institutional or non-institutional discourse may enable us to investigate the realization of intensification with a fine-toothed comb. In other words, a study that does not include an examination of prosody may constitute a partial investigation. For instance, and as mentioned earlier, Márquez Guerrero (2015) examined parliamentary proceedings. The study revealed how speakers tended to intensify expressions in political-argumentative discourse prosodically. In Flores Ferrán (2020), we also discussed instances in which a client attempts to persuade her therapist about her negative perception of the medications using prosodic features. In the excerpts presented in this text, we also reported using repetitions, reformulations, multiple negations, and repeated uses of the overt first-person pronoun 'I,' among other strategies and devices to intensify. Perhaps these behaviors co-occur with prosodic features. For instance, when clients exhibited resistance to medication, we uncovered how they emphasized, highlighted, repeated, and used multiple devices to persuade and convince their therapist that the drugs were ineffective. Clients also employed changes in pitch, stress, and tones, and many other features.

For future research endeavors, Lavric (2016) recommends examining the use of intensifiers in written discourse to draw comparisons to conversations and oral narratives. Her study also suggests that we closely look at prosodic features that intersect with intensification.

In an instructional discursive setting, we find a study on intensification. For instance, Kanwit, Elias, and Clay (2018) examined intensifiers among Spanish learners. The study gathered the preferences of learners to use several lexical items to intensify. However, we know relatively little about the acquisition of intensification and its relationship to prosody in learning environments.

In sum, intensification is ubiquitous in institutional and non-institutional discursive settings in both English in Spanish. Most studies conducted in English have investigated the phenomenon of intensification by examining the use of discrete lexical items. For Spanish, a more comprehensive outlook has encompassed intensification studies. At this juncture, we should strive to investigate intensification in various discursive settings and attend to its manifestation beyond discrete lexical forms.

## **ABOUT DATA COLLECTION: A BRIEF THOUGHT**

We find there are essential concerns that we need to address when we initially investigate intensification:

1. What type of institutional discourse seems appropriate for collecting a full breadth of intensification elements?
2. Are oral narratives or arguments best suited for collecting, analyzing, and depicting sufficient instances of intensification?
3. Can corpus studies yield a complete depiction of intensification in a language?
4. What categories of discourse can we rely on to capture prosodic features related to intensification?

There are various ways to collect data or instances of intensification. We can obtain data from spontaneous speech interviews, newspapers, magazines, oral interactions in service encounters, oral narratives, corpora, and many more. That said, we need to identify an appropriate discursive social interaction that lends itself to the production of intensifying linguistic elements. For instance, not all narratives may render sufficient intensifying elements unless we gather multiple stories. However, in following Labov and Waletzky (1967), we should note that we may uncover intensification elements in the complication sections. When we mention ‘gather tokens,’ I refer to instances in which we use a quantitative lens to address the patterns of intensifying elements in one’s research. Naturally, if we intend to use a qualitative approach to examine the use of intensification, for example, then as Schegloff (1993, p. 107) has posited, “one is a number” and that one instance, therefore, is essentially evidence of a speaker’s or writer’s linguistic behavior. Consequently, we should not shy away from sorting the use of intensification elements in any discourse category, albeit institutional or non-institutional. We should aim to render a thorough account of this phenomenon or focus on only one aspect to address researchers and language learning environments.

We should also note that a historical text may not yield sufficient intensification data. Nevertheless, interactions in courts, family discussions, and interactions among service encounters may lend themselves to a comprehensive examination of intensification. Alternatively, we can gather data from headlines, news briefs, and other sources.

## CHAPTER 2 SUMMARY

This chapter delved into several topics. First, we discussed modulation and how intensification may not be considered a cut-and-dry phenomenon. Then, as most literature has suggested, we pointed to ways to consider intensification within ranges, a gradient or scalar perspective.

We also discussed studies conducted on intensification in English and Spanish. The chapter also discussed grammaticalization concerning lexical

items. Next, we reviewed and exemplified intensification with data collected by researchers to point out several intensifying linguistic behaviors. Finally, we ended the chapter with a brief synopsis on intensification and its realization in institutional and non-institutional discursive settings and several thoughts about gathering data for a study.

The chapter also exemplified intensification in various discursive contexts: institutional and non-institutional talk and press/media. Thus, we suggest a cross-discursive analysis to examine the manifestation of intensification in diverse discursive environments. Further, the chapter presented several excerpts of charts intending to categorize behaviors, all of which will inform the following chapters.

We underscored the importance of examining prosody during the discussion since we may omit key elements that intensify regardless of the discourse.

Concerning future research: We should consider expanding our English intensification research to reflect several aspects researchers have uncovered in Spanish.

## NOTES

1. Cambridge University Press/Cornell University Corpora, University of California Spoken Corpora, Corpus of Spoken Professional American English and the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English.

2. All excerpts of narratives of personal experience were obtained by the author during the period of 1998–2001. All excerpts from therapeutic discourses were obtained by author during 2008–2010.

3. Approximate translations: ‘a lot of people,’ ‘he hasn’t called in four thousand days,’ ‘he’s a failure,’ and ‘Man, that’s not pleasant!’

4. It is not possible to represent all the strategies, devices, and examples that can mark intensification in a statement without presenting context. Therefore, in chapter 3, where I present analyses, I will fully describe features and elements that point to intensification. For full descriptions of typologies, readers are advised to examine Albelda Marco (2005) and Mancera Rueda (2009), among many others.

5. Translations or exact equivalents are not always possible for several.

6. For a detailed account, the reader is advised to review Flores-Ferrán (2020).

7. Spanish is a null subject language. Therefore, subject pronouns do not have to be expressed since the verbs’ morphology indicates person and number. In English, we express subjects as in ‘I am hungry.’ In Spanish speakers and writers have a choice to express the subject pronoun, such as in *Tengo hambre* or *Yo tengo hambre*. Both are considered grammatical. For a comprehensive study of this grammatical/syntactic feature and its alternations, the reader is advised to review Cameron (1992) and Flores-Ferrán (2002). An important distinction regarding Spanish dialects: European

Spanish (Spain) tends to exhibit higher uses of null subjects. Therefore, in the case of a columnist's choice to add or express the subject pronoun *tú*, the author may be employing the expression of the subject as a pragmatic strategy to intensify.





## *Chapter 3*

# Identifying Intensifying Linguistic Behavior

This chapter's primary aim is to exemplify and explain several linguistic features, strategies, and devices (henceforth 'linguistic elements') employed to intensify oral and written communication in English and Spanish. Specifically, it addresses intensification in oral narratives of personal experience, press/media, political statements, and institutional discourses gathered from various sources.

First, we discuss how intensification manifests in several personal experience narratives. As is the case of all the subsections of this chapter, this section contains excerpts in Spanish and English that describe the context, identifies the linguistic elements used to intensify, and demonstrates how these contribute to escalating. An interpretation follows every passage. Second, the chapter delves into exemplifying the use of intensifiers in institutional, discursive settings. The section is followed by how intensification manifests in the press/media. Lastly, the chapter presents excerpts of other discrete linguistic elements contributing to escalating communication in both languages that have not appeared in the passages.

### INTENSIFICATION IN ORAL NARRATIVE OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

We begin by explaining what constitutes an oral narrative of personal experience. The data generated for the oral narratives in this chapter followed the work of Labov (1972, 1984) and Labov and Waletzky (1967). Instead of using the classic term of a sociolinguistic 'interview,' which often gets confused with a traditional Q&A interview, data were gathered by asking speakers to recount an experience that significantly impacted their lives. In several instances, speakers spoke for up to thirty to forty-five minutes recounting

one long story. Other speakers produced short vignettes and connected one account to another. In essence, the narratives constituted monologues without interruptions. Every participant in the study created a story from an identical prompt.

We notice in the excerpts that speakers discuss conflicts, personal issues, or adversarial incidents that contain various intensification elements. In other descriptive passages, we find minimal uses of intensifiers. In some other narratives, speakers merely recount a professional or personal travel experience. Labov and Fanshel (1977) have noted that a speaker is concerned with coherence, the sequence of events, the defenses, and the protagonists' status within their stories when telling narratives. We should note here that only excerpts are presented, not fully developed long narratives. Also, for passages produced in Spanish, we provide a translation.<sup>1</sup>

#### Excerpt 1: An oral narrative of personal experience

Context: When asked to recount a story in Spanish, the speaker (S) realized that she was slightly uncomfortable with her pronunciation.

Intensifying element(s): *¡Ay bendito!*, *¡Qué problema!*, *Es un problema, sí*

Strategies: repetition, reformulation

Function(s): to reinforce, insist, persuade

S: *¡Ay bendito!*, *¡Qué problema!* *Es un problema sí, porque yo no me siento cómoda así narrando en español. ¿Y si no pronuncio las palabras bien?*

(Oh gosh! What a problem! It is a problem, yes, because I am not comfortable narrating in Spanish. What if I don't pronounce the words right?)

As an intensifying phrase, the expression *¡Ay bendito!* is of particular interest since it is characteristic of the Puerto Rican Spanish dialect, a culturally-bound intensifying set phrase. This specific utterance in the recording represented a complaint and a surprise. In other words, it expressed emotions. Further, the use of *¡Qué problema!* *Es un problema sí* illustrates how the speaker escalated her discomfort and underscored it by repeating, reformulating, and adding *sí*. In brief, the speaker attempted to persuade me to allow her to tell her story in English.

#### Excerpt 2: An oral narrative of personal experience

Context: A speaker recounts an incident that occurred during her teen years. Her mother discovered a love letter in her room and inquired about it. The speaker personifies the mother's voice.

Intensifying element(s): *¡Oye! ¿Qué es esto? ¡Ay por favor, naa:::da!*

Strategies: prosodic elevation, vowel elongation

Function(s): to express intense displeasure, to persuade the mom to drop the subject

S: *Y mi mamá dice: ¡Oye!, ¿Qué es esto? y yo le contesto: ¡Ay por favor, naa:::da!*

(And my mom says: ‘Listen! What is this?’ and I respond, ‘Oh, please, no:::thing!’)

The narrator imitated her mother's voice and tone when she produced the intensified expression of *¡Oye! ¿Qué es esto?* She issued the question as an exclamation; it exhibited heightened prosodic stress and disagreeable tones. The daughter, the narrator, also created an escalated response, and it contained prosodic features: *¡Ay por favor, naa:::da!*

One may ask whether the option to express these utterances without escalating would be plausible. In this case, the mother's reaction could have been a mere inquiry, such as ‘I found this letter; can you explain it?’, slightly mitigated. The daughter's response could have been, ‘It's nothing.’ Therefore, we suggest that the prosodic elevation and vowel elongation escalated to shut down the mother's inquiry. The intensifying linguistic elements point to the severity of the alarm in both mother's and daughter's utterances (even though the narrator was enacting them). In this excerpt, the narrator attempted to drive her point across and persuade me to believe that her mother's behavior was unacceptable.

### Excerpt 3: Institutional/oral narrative of personal experience

Context: During a study abroad program, a graduate student described her observations about teaching practices in a school.

Intensifying element(s): ‘really,’ ‘great’

Strategies: lexical intensifiers (adverbial/adjectival)

Function(s): to emphasize and persuade the hearer

“But what I really found interesting was the drawing workshop; each group was working on a drawing of some historical date in country. I thought that was a great way to combine history and art, in a way that students are choosing to learn about history while enjoying something that they like to do.” [sic]

In excerpt 3, the narrator pointed to an observation she found necessary to discuss, one that left an impact during her school visit. In it, we find that both unbound lexical items ‘really’ and ‘great,’ adverbial/adjectival items boost the explanations she provided. We should note that the expression of these items was optional. Namely, she could have stated ‘what I found interesting’ and ‘was a way.’ Adding ‘really’ and ‘great,’ the speaker amplified the descriptions of the class observations, underscoring her claims about the good teaching practices she was surprised to find.

Interestingly, this narrative did not exhibit conflict or adversarial concerns, yet the speaker employed these intensifiers. Thus, we may find fewer intensifiers in this category of descriptive recounting. Nonetheless, the intensifiers functioned to underscore the narrator’s perspective.

Excerpt 4: Institutional/oral narrative of personal experience

Context: During another study abroad experience, a student compared his first experience in Peru with Argentina’s experience.

Intensifying element(s): ‘really incredible,’ ‘obviously,’ ‘totally,’ ‘really a completely,’ ‘incredible,’ ‘totally,’ ‘mostly,’ ‘so much less,’ ‘very,’ ‘go a long way’

Strategies: external modification

Function(s): to insist, reinforce

“It’s really incredible the difference here from living in Cuzco, Peru. I mean, obviously they’re totally different countries, but this is really a completely different experience being in the middle of a first-world, thriving South American city, surrounded mostly by people as white or whiter than me who don’t speak English. I feel so much less out of place, and yet there’s also a sense that I’m not as interesting to people I’ve bumped into or made comments to in the café or whatever. Except the woman who’s hosting me in her home. She’s very courteous and hospitable, which will go a long way toward helping me feel comfortable here.” [sic]

In the previous excerpt, which also asked the narrator to recount an experience of significant impact, we find multiple external modifications that intensify the speaker’s expressions. We find that the elements function to convince the hearer, underscore the differences between how he felt in the two countries, and reinforce his identity as a Caucasian-looking foreigner.

The narrator employed various external modifications, such as adverbial maximizers (‘totally,’ ‘completely’) and other phrases ‘so much less’ to intensify. More importantly, the terms ‘go a long way’ and ‘so much less’ indicate

how he amplified differences or underscored the comparisons. Again, here in this descriptive account, we find an absence of controversy and conflict, perhaps conditioning the use of only lexical intensifiers.

Excerpt 5: An oral narrative of personal experience

Context: A speaker recounted a childhood incident when a stranger harassed her and how her father reacted to the event.

Intensifying element(s): external adjectival NP, quantifier ‘*una*’

Strategies: rhetorical strategies, hyperbole, metaphoric, repetition

Function(s): to convince, reinforce, insist

“¡Y mi papá me ha cogido y me ha dado esa tremenda pela! Pero que, bueno que, que por poquito, que que, me, me me me, tú sabe, me mata. Pero una cosa bárbara. Nunca se me olvida ese incidente. Nunca se me olvida ese incidente. Y este yyyy después yo no entendía, tú sabes, yo no entendía, porque me habían dado una pela cuando no había sido mi culpa lo que había pasado.”

(And my father grabbed me, and he gave me a tremendous beating! But that, well that, that he almost that that . . . you know, killed me. But a brutal thing. I’ll never forget that incident. Never forget that incident. And (*este* ‘um’) a:::nd later I didn’t understand, you know, I didn’t understand, why [they] had given me a beating when it hadn’t been my fault.)

In excerpt 5, we find that the narrator employed several linguistic elements to persuade the hearer of how the incident impacted her life. First, we detect the semantic verb of motion *me ha cogido* (‘grabbed’) and the use of *tremenda pela* (‘tremendous beating’), not just a beating. The term *pela*, however, is not equivalent to beating. Semantically, it references something similar to peeling, a violent beating. Both *cogido* and *pela* represent semantic verbs of motion, denoting a violent force. Second, we also note how she used *por poquito me mata* (‘almost killed me’), representing hyperbole because her father would not have killed her.

Nonetheless, as a child, the fear of her father prompted the tension and the uncomfortable reaction. The use of the diminutive *-ito* points to how close she thought he was to kill her. The use of the diminutive in this linguistic environment does not represent a mitigated expression. Instead, it contributes to escalating the action to approximate a killing. It operates as an approximator since it explains how close the act was to a killing. We also note several uses of *me* (a reflexive pronoun that refers to herself) and the repetitions of *nunca se me olvida ese incidente*, which point to how the incident was ingrained in and impacted her life, becoming almost traumatic. The use of the

term ‘barbaric’ also implies how she intensified her description of the incident. Could the speaker not have amplified or escalated the narrative? In this case, the narrator is not only recounting but describing an emotional incident in which her linguistic options were limited if she wished to convey the value of this harmful and emotionally challenging experience. In addition to these observations, we attest here how the affective intersects with intensification. This particular excerpt contained conflict and represented an adversarial episode that prompted multiple and diverse intensification expressions.

### INTENSIFICATION IN INSTITUTIONAL, DISCURSIVE SETTING

Earlier, we explained the nature of institutional discourses. In brief, we posited that these discourses refer to instances in which one person representing an institution encounters another who wishes to use its services. We also mentioned that these interactions are different from friend and family interactions in that institutional discourses are usually centered around a theme or specific purpose.

Several excerpts presented in this segment provide a context and point to the intensifying features and functions. Like the excerpts presented in the oral narratives of personal experience, the passages are in English and Spanish (with corresponding translations). In addition, data was gathered from previous research (e.g., Flores-Ferrán, 2010).

Excerpt 6: Institutional discourse: Therapy session with a client

Context: A therapist is assisting a client who suffers from depression. The client identifies her problem.

Intensifying element(s): a saying/expression; proverb

Strategies: hyperbole

Function(s): to make her condition credible; to persuade the therapist that the medication is not working

Therapist: *Y entonces, puedo entender un poquito más de lo que me está explicando. Entonces al sentirse de esta manera, como es difícil motivarse para, para hacer las cosas necesarias . . .*

Client: *Mjm . . . creo que sí. No sé. Parece que el mundo me va a venir encima. No tengo solución a las cosas . . .*

(Therapist: And then, I can understand a little better what you are explaining. So, when feeling this way, it is difficult to motivate yourself to do the necessary things . . .

Client: Aha. I think it is. I don't know. It is as if the world is falling on me. I don't have solutions for things . . . )

The hyperbolic expression '*que el mundo me va a venir encima*' increased the feeling of helplessness on the client's part. In other words, it represents an escalated utterance that she employed to inform the therapist of her current condition. In addition, she used this expression to make her feelings of depression more credible.

Excerpt 7: Institutional discourse: Therapist session discussing medication

Context: A client described how she felt without medications.

Intensifying element(s): *no no no; muy + difícil*

Strategies: external modification, negation; repetition

Function(s): to make her statement more credible to continue with medication

Client: *Creo que cuando no me tomo no, no, no coordino bien, cuando yo no me tomo ese medicamento. Se me hace muy difícil concentrarme en lo que estoy haciendo. Estoy allí en la casa, o a veces me dan ganas de irme y estar sola. . . . Así me siento.*

(I think that when I don't take [medication], I don't don't don't coordinate right, when I don't take the medication. It becomes difficult to concentrate on what I am doing. I am at home, or sometimes I want to leave and be alone. . . . That's how I feel.)

In the previous excerpt, we find several intensification indicators. For example, we note multiple repetitions of '*no*,' and these repetitions co-occurred with '*muy difícil*' (adverbial/adjectival phrase). Together, they increased the adverse conditions the client was experiencing without her medication. In addition, these expressions functioned to convince the therapist to renew her prescriptions.



Excerpt 8: Institutional narrative: A minister reacts to being fired for misconduct by his bishop.

Context: A church minister, while providing a service, was summoned to appear in front of the bishop.

Intensifying element(s): repeated first-person pronoun *yo* ‘I’; semantics of verb *rompí*, maximizer/quantifier *todo* ‘all’

Strategies: external modification; repetition, centric *yo*

Function(s): to maximize the intensity of the argument, insist

Minister: *Porque yo siempre se lo había dicho, mira, yo soy . . . tal vez tú no entiendas la expresión, pero yo soy un yo soy un, yo soy individuo que soy unido a la calle. Yo soy un títere de la calle. No me cruce la línea a mi. Y al tipo empujarme, yo le metí un puño en la misma oficina. Y le rompí la nariz y los dientes y todo, y el otro salió corriendo. Y entonces la secretaria estaba mirando pero se dió cuenta que fue que él me empujó. Yo me defendí.*

(Because I have always said, look, I am . . . maybe you don’t understand this expression, but I am I am I am an individual who is bonded to the street. I am a street thug. Don’t cross my line. And when the guy (bishop’s associate) pushed me, I punched him in the office. [I] broke his nose and teeth and everything, and the other aide ran away. And then the secretary was looking, and she noticed that it was the other one that pushed me. I defended myself.)

What is interesting in excerpt 8 is the repeated use of the first-person pronoun in Spanish, *yo*. As a null subject language, we should note that Spanish does not require speakers or writers to express subjects. More specifically, speakers can omit a subject pronoun since the verb’s morphology identifies the person and number. When the minister expressed his anger, we can observe how he employed the overt subject pronoun several times. This linguistic behavior intensified the degree to which he was involved in the argument as he juxtaposed it to his assailant’s behavior. In other words, he was imposing his identity, self, voice, and perspective in the matter to convince me to believe his side of the story.

Further, we find that he explained how he completely broke the bishop assistant’s nose and teeth. The semantic aspect of the motion verb *rompí* (‘broke’) illustrates the violence or force engaged in the action. While we know he could have issued the term ‘punched,’ as in *le di un puño*, he escalated his message’s force using the motion verb *rompí*. Therefore, he projected more strength and power with his intentional choice of the lexicon.

To add to his characterization, when the speaker described himself as a person engaged in his community, he used *títere*. This form may refer to a puppet

in several Spanish varieties. Still, here it is used to refer to a thug, a hoodlum. Namely, he was raised in the streets. Thus, he portrayed himself, although a minister, as a thug, also intensifying his image. This quasi-hyperbolic expression points to ways in which he personified himself. Finally, the entire passage contained conflict and tension, a context that engaged emotional strife, substantiating a previous observation of how the affective intersects with intensification.

## INTENSIFICATION IN MEDIA

As noted earlier, speakers and writers may intensify expressions to make them more salient and expressive to convince their listeners or readership. In addition, there are other reasons to boost: to persuade an audience and underscore claims. In this section, we exemplify strengthening linguistic devices and strategies in the press/media.

Excerpt 9: Institutional narrative: Mental health professionals discuss teenagers' and parental behavior

Context: Radio talk show: Conversation with professionals about the mental health of teens, including teenagers' voices.

Intensifying element(s): verb intensifiers, adjectival NPs, swearing, quantifiers, repetition

Strategies: external modifications

Function(s): to impose perspectives, to make points credible

(Source: Tonight, FRONTLINE takes you "Inside the Teenage Brain," Program #2011, original airdate and script, January 31, 2002. Written, produced, and directed by Sarah Spinks. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/teenbrain/etc/script.html>)

Dr. Jay Giedd, National Institute of Mental Health:—five, four, three, two, one—Dr. Charles Nelson, University of Minnesota: I think the problem parents have is that once their kid becomes a teenager, for a brief period of time, it's as though they've been invaded by another body.

Dr. Charles Nelson: They need to learn how to relate to being a kid. I think they forgot.

Dr. Jay Giedd: We know that there's a lot of dynamic activity. In many ways, it's the most tumultuous time of brain development since coming out of the womb.

Brittany: I swear to God, I'm never talking to any of your friends again! I'll never talk to you again! I swear to God.

Brandon: No. You don't have to—did I say anything? Did I say no you couldn't sit here?

Charles: Those cells and connections that are used will survive and flourish. Those cells and connections that are not used will wither and die.

Dr. Mary Carskadon, Brown University: With all of the things that teenagers have available to them, their sleep has been shoved into an ever-narrowing window.

Nikki: Living a teenage life today is completely different from before. I know it's very stressful on adults, but they're going to have to realize that it's today's world. That's how it is. [*sic*]

Interestingly, the speakers in the radio talk show characterized teenagers and discussed their perspectives on teen development. On the one hand, the professionals indicated the parents had to learn new ways of understanding teens as another body had invaded them (teens). The form 'invaded' as a motion verb conveys a violent or damaging effect. On the other, the speakers depicted teens as being oppositional and argumentative. In general, the speakers used hyperbole to describe teens' actions, and the teen's clip exhibited the intensified speech act of swearing. For instance, we found lexical items and phrases issued by the health professional, such as 'tumultuous' and 'ever-narrowing window' to describe teenagers' mental conditions. Conversely, the teen's voice contained not only swearing but also oppositional behavior and repetition. Namely, the producers juxtaposed the parents' and teens' statements using different rhetorical discursive strategies and devices to intensify.

How can these linguistic behaviors be stated in such a way that they are not intensifying? For example, the doctor could have expressed that they were 'changing' instead of saying that teens had their bodies 'invaded by another body.' Instead of using the term 'tumultuous,' the other doctor could have issued phrases such as 'a difficult stage' or 'a challenging period,' more attenuated expressions. Instead of employing the term 'shoved,' a semantic verb of motion denoting force, the speaker could have stated that the teens lacked sleep or were sleep-deprived.

Other adjectives point to escalation or intensification. For example, in the excerpt, 'completely different' could have been expressed as 'different.' Still, the use of 'completely' may point to how the change is viewed, categorically, by using this maximizer.

## Excerpt 10: Media/institutional narrative

Context: Radio show host describes her reaction to a video she saw.  
 Intensifying element(s): ‘so,’ adverbial, ‘heartbroken again,’ quantifier  
 Strategies: internal and external modifications, hyperbole, repetition  
 Function(s): to influence an audience  
 (Source: NPR, June 1, 2020, *Fresh Air*, original script)

“This is FRESH AIR. I’m Terry Gross. Like so many Americans and people around the world, I was horrified watching the video of the police officer—now charged with manslaughter and third-degree murder—who had his knee on George Floyd’s neck for over eight minutes, keeping the weight on Floyd’s neck even after he died. My heart was broken. It was broken again over the weekend as I watched peaceful protests against the death of Floyd and other black men and women who died at the hands of police become violent confrontations in cities around America, including Philadelphia, where I live, and Brooklyn, where I grew up.”

In excerpt 10, we find that the show’s host employed ‘so’ in ‘so many Americans and people around the world’ to infer that she was not the only one going through this horrific emotion. By expanding her condition to many Americans and worldwide, she escalated her situation and attributed it to a larger population. Further, we find the use of ‘over eight minutes.’ While she could have issued a term such as ‘several,’ she employed ‘over’ to amplify the time and situate the problem of how prolonged the choking was. We also find that she described her feelings: Her heart was broken and broken yet again. She did not use the term ‘disappointed’ since, by stating that the altercation broke her heart, she characterized the pain and agony she felt and escalated it with hyperbole. Thus, what we find here is a heightened emotional state. She intentionally intensified the expressions to transmit or disclose the feelings to her audience. This observation again points to the fact that intensification is a socio-pragmatic concern and an affective one.

A summary is in order. The previous excerpts demonstrated linguistic behaviors related to intensification. The behaviors remind us of the vast ways to intensify other than adjectival or adverbial phrases. We can easily overlook these behaviors when researching or teaching about intensification. In them, in several instances, we find absolutes or extremes. For example, we uncovered the use of semantic verb classes that point to physical or violent intensity (i.e., ‘shoved’). We also substantiated the use of stylistic intensifiers. In particular, the narrative gathered from the minister’s altercation demonstrated the repeated use of the pronoun expression ‘I,’ *yo*. The description

also illustrated how the minister intensified his self-characterization as a thug or hoodlum, although he was a minister. By strengthening or escalating, he underscored his convictions. Lastly, the excerpts' data served to elucidate that intensification is a socio-pragmatic *and* affective concern.

In essence, the linguistic elements used to intensify or the ones we have pointed out were only a few. Nevertheless, we have attested that intensification has, at times, an affective component. In contrast, in other instances, it functions as a means of staking claims, persuading, or imposing 'self,' making statements more credible and persuading an audience.

Concerning the radio program excerpts, one may ask whether the hosts needed to escalate their statements. One can argue that since the audience was not physically present, the hosts might have needed to compensate by adding more intensifying linguistic elements. On the other hand, since the interaction was not face-to-face, did it require the presenters to intentionally employ linguistic elements to persuade or convince their audience? Further research would be needed to attend to this observation. Overall, it seems plausible that persuasiveness depends on the talk category issued during a radio show or a podcast. That is, intensification, in general, may well be characteristic of radio talk but not of all shows. For example, we uncovered how the hosts underscored their arguments to make them more convincing to their respective audiences in these excerpts. In other shows (e.g., discussions related to health), perhaps this linguistic behavior is not the case. However, this observation needs further investigation.

## MORE INTENSIFYING FEATURES

Many linguistic elements can contribute to intensifying an expression. As mentioned earlier, there are internal (e.g., bound-synthetic and unbound-analytic, morphemes) and external (e.g., phrases) modifications in English and Spanish. The work of Mancera Rueda (2009) discusses prevalent linguistic procedures of intensification. Also, Albelda Marco (2005) also represents a comprehensive approach to examining this phenomenon in Spanish. For work conducted on intensification in English, the seminal work of Paradis (1997; 2000a, b, c, 2001), among others, also merits mentioning. Several have discussed scalarity and degrees, while others have investigated the use of lexical items, not scalarity. Paradis (2008) provides a paradigm of modifiers of degree, totality modifiers, and scalar ones, an aspect the excerpts in this book may not have exemplified. For degree modifiers such as adjectives, Paradis (2008) notes 'absolute,' 'complete,' 'perfect,' 'total,' 'utter,' and 'awful,' among many others, function as intensifiers. Also listed in her account are degree modifiers with nominals (phrases) such as 'extreme pleasure,' 'a perfect idiot,' 'total

crap,’ and so forth. We pointed out several similar to these in the previous analysis of the excerpts.

This chapter’s segment provides a modest account of other linguistic elements used to express intensification that we did not attest to in the previous excerpts. As a socio-pragmatic phenomenon, intensification is found to be quite pervasive in everyday speech and writing. This section discusses several features gathered over ten years from natural, spontaneous speech (oral narratives, institutional interactions, and conversations). In these following excerpts, we also uncover the co-occurrence of intensification elements.

#### Excerpt 11: Lexical or unbound modifiers (English)

Context: In response to the rioting taking place and the reporting of it, the former president of the United States issued this tweet:

“Really sick to watch the Fake and totally Slanted News (?) coming out of MSDNC and CNN. It bears NO relationship to the Truth or Facts. They are merely offshoots of the DNC, much like the . . .” (Source: President Donald Trump tweets June 2, 2020) [sic]

Following Paradis (2008), we find the maximizers ‘totally’ and ‘really’ were employed to escalate the notion that the news was not reporting accurate information. ‘Totally’ is considered categorical, a maximizer, while ‘really’ operates as a booster. Both these forms were employed strategically to devalue what was being reported by news outlets.

#### Excerpt 12: Unbounded, lexical and phrasal modifiers (Spanish)

Context: In an oral narrative of personal experience, a speaker recounts how shocked he was when he first saw snow and had to go to work in it.

*Aquí, cuando yo vine aquí, aquí caían unas tormentas de nieve tremendas. Casi no se podía ni ni caminar.*

(Here, when I first arrived, here tremendous snowstorms would fall. One could not not even walk.)

In this detailed storm description, the speaker issued the adjective *tremendas* to make his statement more credible. The proposition was also supported by adding the approximator *casi* (‘even’) to describe how intolerable the weather

conditions were: Walking was difficult. The use of *ni* also functions to escalate, as in *ni tan si quiera* ('not even').

Excerpt 13: Bound and unbound modifiers (Spanish)

Context: In an oral narrative of personal experience, a speaker recounts how others in his social circle felt about him.

*Yo, como era buenísimo, todo el mundo decía que querían un hijo como yo.*

(I, since I was really good, the entire world (i.e., everyone) would say that they wanted a son like me.)

The speaker employed the bound morpheme (superlative *-ísimo*) as he described himself as the best, a son that others would have liked to have had. Further, we find the quantifiable *todo el mundo* ('the entire world,' 'everyone') points to the maximum escalation degree.

Excerpt 14: Bound modifier and unbound lexical item (English)

Context: In boxing, Mohammed Ali poetically expressed superlatives and totality in utterances in which he self-described. We should also note the use of 'even.' It amplifies the proposition even further:

"I am the greatest; I said that even before I knew I was."

Excerpt 15: Bound and unbound morphemes, lexical item and repetition, prosodic feature (Spanish)

Context: A narrator portrays her boyfriend negatively as a womanizer.

*Y él:::, él:::, era un mujeriego y yo, tan inocente.*

(And he:::, he:::, was a womanizer and I, so innocent.)

In excerpts 14 and 15, we find maximizers. For example, the bound morpheme *-est* (superlative) in English represents a totality modifier. In Spanish, the bound morpheme *-iego*, similar to that of English *-izer*, escalates the boyfriend's character in a negative light. Further, in the utterance, we find an unbound morpheme, *tan* ('so'), reflecting the opposite characterization of

herself, an innocent victim. In addition, the speaker emphasized the use of ‘he’ by elongating the consonant in *el:::*. Thus, the bound and unbound morphemes and prosodic features co-occurring in these two excerpts show how speakers intentionally amplify their descriptions. Finally, in the last passage, the repeated use of *él:::* *él:::* serves to escalate similar to ‘that guy,’ a deictic expression that alerts the hearer that a negative connotation or statement was forthcoming, similar to *aqué!* (‘that guy’).

#### Excerpt 16: Semantic verb types

Context: A narrator recounted an incident when he was assaulted and escaped from robbers.

*Me fugué y en la fuga, yo salí afuera, y llamé un carro de policía. Y les dije que me acaban de asaltar.*

(I escaped/split, and in the escape, I went out and called the police. I told them that I was just assaulted.)

In excerpt 16, several instances in which the verb’s semantic category conveys an intensifying effect. For example, we find *fugué*, which depicts an escape, not just a mere run. In addition, the speaker transformed the noun *fuga* to the prepositional phrase *en la fuga*, which also infers a type of getaway. We should also note that the narrator also produced the term *asaltar*, when a person is robbed violently at gunpoint. He did not use the term *robar* or *robaron* (‘they robbed me’). Therefore, the intentional selection of lexical items points to how the speaker made his story more dramatic and credible.

#### Excerpt 17: Syntactic alerts

Context: A speaker complains about how her memory has deteriorated as she has grown older.

*¡Contra! . . . Me he puesto peor después de vieja.*

(Shoot . . . I’ve gotten worse after getting older!)

The term *contra* does not represent a swear or taboo term; it approximates one. Regardless, in its initial syntactic position, it alerts the hearer about something negative forthcoming. It denotes an increased negative value.

#### Excerpt 18: Rhetorical Strategy: Repetition



Context: A narrator describes how during his youth, he smoked cigarettes but never used drugs.

*A veces me fumaba tres cajas de cigarrillos en un en en cuando estaba en un vacilón. Pero, gracias a Dios, nunca nunca he fumado, cosa de marijuana, nunca usaba eso, nunca usaba droga ni nada de esas cosas.*

(Sometimes I would smoke three packs of cigarettes in a in in when I was goofing around. But, thank God, never never I have smoked, things like marijuana, never used that, never used drugs nor nothing like those things.)

To persuade or make his statement more credible, the speaker in excerpt 18 repeatedly issued the term *nunca* ('never') to claim that he did not use drugs nor smoke marijuana. He also specified *ni nada* ('nor nothing'), a phrase that conveys totality. Nevertheless, again, here we also find the co-occurrence of lexical items that negate.

These latter excerpts (11–18) present linguistic features, strategies, and devices authentic to oral communication yet not attested in the earlier data presented. Moreover, the elements described function to reaffirm and underscore claims. In other words, the linguistic elements contribute to influencing and persuading hearers.

While we have attested linguistic elements in oral and written discourse, it merits mentioning how sign language intensifies. For instance, Fuks (2016) has investigated intensifiers in Israeli Sign Language (ISL). Although signers use existing intensifier adverbs already in ISL, the study uncovered that they also increase the intensity by adding modifications to these expressions. These modifications may manifest as movement lengthening, movement substitute, delayed realization, and repeat form production. Fuks reported that the changes represent parallels to what we know as vowel lengthening, reformulation, and repetition in signing. In particular, the gestures co-occurred with mouth gestures and audible vocal intensifiers together with intensified forms. Thus, there is a synergetic synchronization between the intensifying elements that stay relatively constant and others complementing an expression.<sup>2</sup>

### CHAPTER 3 SUMMARY

We have illustrated several linguistic elements (e.g., features, devices, and strategies) contributing to intensifying expressions in several discursive categories. We have described them in naturally occurring speech—oral narratives of personal experience, various discursive settings, media-related documents, and on-air radio speech. Since the chapter's goal was to exemplify

how intensification manifested, we also provided an account of other intensifying elements that did not appear in the excerpts. Among the many concerns discussed, we attested and explained:

- Culturally-bound expressions
- Repetitions
- Reformulations
- Vowel elongation
- Prosodic elevation
- Hyperbole
- Metaphors
- Exaggeration
- Swearing
- Numeric/quantitative maximizers
- Approximators
- Bound (synthetic) and unbound (analytic) morphemes
- Syntactic alerts
- Semantic motion verbs
- Co-occurring elements

We presented the data related to intensification in this chapter in their respective contexts. Up to this point, the data revealed two differences between English and Spanish, although the book's purpose was not to compare intensification behavior in both languages. First, the Spanish excerpts exhibited intensifying cultural phrases. Second, we found a combination of adverbial and adjectival constructions and bound (i.e., synthetic) morphemes for Spanish. Generally speaking, English seems to exhibit limited uses of affixation to intensify. Instead, it relies on analytic markers such as adjectival and adverbials. In both languages, we note that prosodic features operate to strengthen.

The chapter did not represent a comparative study about how intensification manifests in various discourses such as press, radio talk shows, political discourse, oral narratives of personal experience, and institutional discourses. We suggest that we inquire whether intensification elements emerge similarly in various discursive settings for future research. We also need to identify a general distribution of the features, devices, and strategies in oral instead of written communication. For instance, we need to uncover whether syntactic alerts, swearing, hyperbole, exaggeration, and metaphoric expressions are more prevalent in oral than written communication. At this juncture, we can only hypothesize that intensification in verbal communication differs vastly from written. However, this observation is only speculative, needing further investigation.

**NOTES**

1. Approximations of translations are provided when literal ones are not possible. In particular, if an expression is culturally bound, we do not provide a literal translation.
2. For further details, see Fuks's (2016) study, which presents a comprehensive explanation and pictorial examples.

## Chapter 4

# Intensification

## *Theory of Persuasion and Socio-Pragmatics*

This chapter discusses the theoretical underpinnings of persuasion and how it can account for intensification. We also explain how sociolinguistics and pragmatics contribute to a comprehensive study of linguistic intensification. Finally, we discuss the value of approaching an investigation of linguistic intensification through a socio-pragmatic perspective. The chapter does not discuss whether a pragmatic *or* a sociolinguistic approach is a better approach. We already know that both complement each other. The contents are mainly concerned with the paths we take to investigate the linguistic mechanisms used to intensify in any language, even though the book may center on English and Spanish.

As noted earlier in the book, Persuasion Theory in communication following Miller (1980) can provide the underpinnings for understanding intensification. Excerpts presented throughout the text are illustrative of how and why we intensify communication. For example, Miller (1980) defined persuasion in communication as any message intended to shape, reinforce, or change others' responses, as we have evidenced so far in the text.

We briefly address why a Theory of Persuasion is fundamental to understanding intensification. The theory can explain intensification, make predictions, and support the evidence discussed in the book. In the past few chapters and the forthcoming one, we have presented authentic excerpts that illustrate how intensifying linguistic elements consistently are produced to influence and shape people's interactions. We have also underscored how the intensifying data point to persuasion. For instance, Reardon (1981) maintains that persuasion is how people help each other shape their versions of reality. It, therefore, involves changes in assumptions, beliefs, and behavior. More specifically, Reardon (1981, p. 19) suggests that persuasion is necessary based

“on the fact that all of us differ in our goals and how we achieve them.” To this end, we have presented linguistic behavior that supports this position.

Further, Reardon stresses “that when one person’s goal achievement is blocked by the goal-seeking behaviors of another, persuasion is used to convince the offender to redefine his or her goal or alter the means to it” (p. 19). To this end, we have illustrated this behavior in most excerpts. For example, we showed how a client attempted to persuade her therapist to renew her medication. In addition, we have explained how talk show hosts employed intensifying elements to characterize teen behavior. Further, in the next chapter (chapter 5), we will attest to more instances of intensification used as a persuasive strategy. For example, we will see how attorneys argue in court by intensifying their propositions to make their statements more credible and persuade judges and other attorneys. We will also point to intensification in political speeches as a means of swaying audiences. To this end, Persuasion Theory can provide the explanatory power needed to embrace the manifestation of intensification as we describe it in this book.

We align our views with Reardon (1981) for several reasons. First, Reardon suggests that persuasion involves conscious intent, which we have detected throughout the excerpts. Second, two conditions need to be met by interactants for persuasion to be required: an individual’s behavior is considered inconsistent, inappropriate, or ineffective by another, or there is a perceived threat to one’s goals. To be specific, these conditions are consistent with many of the excerpts presented throughout this text. For instance, in the oral narratives of personal experience, we attested how a minister recounted a colleague’s vicious verbal attack (excerpt 8). The minister’s intensified language firmly showed how he wanted to achieve his goals and ensure his actions were justified and proper. In another narrative (excerpt 3), we uncovered how a father beat his daughter when he found out that a stranger was following her. Embedded in the story was the speaker’s belief that she had not done anything wrong. Also, in the next chapter, excerpt 23 illustrates intensification in a narrative produced by a mother who lost her daughter during the World Trade Center attacks. The mother consciously used intensifying elements to convince listeners of the pain her daughter’s death had caused. Therefore, these and other excerpts substantiate the reasoning and importance of Persuasion Theory concerning intensification.

We mentioned earlier that we need to consider the communicative intention to understand linguistic intensification. We have also posited that the communicative strategies that speakers and writers employ have to be discussed within their respective contexts, not out of context. We believe that sociolinguistics and pragmatics can provide a comprehensive outlook to investigate intensification. We cannot rely on a stand-alone lexical item or phrase out of context to understand the presence of linguistic intensification.

With this in mind, we suggest two approaches to studying linguistic intensification, although we have mentioned that scholars have also employed a semantic approach (e.g., Morzycki, 2012). First, we can use a pragmatic approach that situates our understanding of the intensification mechanisms that speakers and writers use within respective contexts. By context, we refer to the types of discourse (e.g., institutional or non-institutional). We also refer to the micro-interactions (e.g., between friends, lawyers with clients). Further, we need to focus on the interaction itself: the situation, what was communicated before, among other aspects. In other words, we can examine data using a micro-approach following Hymes (1972).

On the other hand, we can dissect intensification by using another path, a sociolinguistic one. If we employ a sociolinguistic approach, we aim to uncover the patterns that may emerge when speakers or writers intensify communication. A sociolinguistic approach seeks to respond to the social and linguistic, a macro perspective. That is, we strive to unveil whether the use of an intensifier(s) or intensifying elements, for instance, is conditioned by social factors, such as age, gender, education, dialect, and others. We also seek to find linguistic correlations, such as the preference for a group of speakers to use an intensifier element(s) among several linguistic categories. In other words, with a sociolinguistic perspective, we are looking for social *and* linguistic correlates. For example, we have already discussed studies that have reported how speakers of a certain age, gender, and education level may favor the use of several intensifying linguistic elements. However, to uncover whether correlations exist, we need to review transcripts, code data, and conduct a quantitative analysis to determine the linguistic and social factors that may condition the use of an intensifying element(s).

From a methodological perspective, it is essential to determine how we wish to design a study. This decision depends on whether our research questions are more conducive to a qualitative micro or quantitative macro approach. We may also consider a mixed-method one depending on the research questions.

For any pilot study, one has to begin by first sorting research questions. First, to examine an intensifying linguistic element(s), we need to look at them in their respective context. Thus, we concentrate on identifying the manifestation of the feature(s) or element(s) in all its realizations and plausible environments. Second, once we have determined that the element(s) is pervasively or uniquely employed, we can choose between a sociolinguistic-quantitative approach or a descriptive-qualitative account. This initial inquiry can rely on examining a corpus, narratives, interviews, the press or media, and so forth.

A sociolinguistic framework will assist in thoroughly investigating whether a linguistic element(s) is widely distributed among a specific group

of speakers, for example. In that case, we need to collect examples, code data, and later conduct a quantitative analysis.

On the other hand, if we are only concerned about providing a descriptive account of an intensifying linguistic element, we do not need to consider quantity. Instead, we should be concerned with gathering ‘authentic’ instances. We can generate data from naturally occurring speech, a corpus containing natural, spontaneous speech, interviews, and specific institutional discourses, among others. In other words, the expression of intensification should not be artificial or fabricated.

The following section will discuss the benefits of using a pragmatic perspective. We later follow this discussion with one centered on using a sociolinguistic approach. In doing so, the chapter also stresses the need to employ a mixed-method approach.

## A PRAGMATIC PERSPECTIVE

We consider three major theoretical frameworks in pragmatics: Speech Act Theory (SAT), Grice’s Maxims, and Politeness Theory. Since we formulate theories to explain, predict, and understand a phenomenon, we need to briefly explain how they can embrace intensification as we view it in this book.

SAT focuses on the illocutionary force of an expression within the context of a speech act (e.g., apology, promise). While it can relate partly to examining illocutionary strength or escalation, it limits an examination’s scope to an act. Many expressions fall outside the realm of speech acts, as we have noted and will observe in many excerpts presented in the text.

We can also suggest Grice’s (1975) Cooperative Principles. The Maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner may explain and make predictions about intensification. However, these may fall short in their explanatory power to account for intensification. For instance, we expect speakers to be genuine and truthful when communicating. However, when we use hyperbole, for example, we are violating a maxim.

Politeness Theory may contribute to understanding the phenomenon of intensification. However, it is also limited in its capacity to make predictions regarding intensification. The theory’s foundation is one related to face-saving behavior, an altruistic one. Conversely, intensification relies on being direct, overt, and transparent, perhaps even persistent. It is concerned with getting the point across, reinforcing, underscoring, and reiterating, among other behaviors. At times, we tend to insist by repeating, reformulating, and adding prosodic features, among other linguistic aspects, to persuade and sway our listeners or readers to give in to our position. Thus, we find that intensification is more self-serving rather than altruistic.

In brief, these theories provide a limited framework to capture the manifestation of intensification. Once again, linguistic intensification refers to how we escalate and amplify. However, many linguistic elements fall outside the parameters of these theories. If we examine Briz Gómez's (1998) upcoming examples in this chapter, we can see how expressions like these fall outside the explanatory capacity of the previously mentioned theories.

We start with a short note: The subfields of linguistics, semantics, and pragmatics investigate meaning. However, "semantics is the branch of linguistics that investigates linguistic meaning, the interpretation of expression in a language system" (Chierchia and McConnell-Ginet, 1990, p. 1). We have already discussed studies that have attended to intensifiers using a semantic perspective (e.g., Morzycki, 2012; Méndez Naya, 2008). Pragmatics, however, adds another layer to semantic or meaning since it draws from social or broader interactions. In other words, semantics feeds into pragmatics. For instance, Leech (2014, p. 304) posits "that the semantics of an utterance has to be incorporated into the understanding of its pragmatics." That is, we cannot just interpret meaning in isolation.

Further, the main difference between the two fields is that an utterance under pragmatic examination focuses on a communicative environment. However, in semantics, a sentence, word, or utterance is the locus of investigation, not necessarily the communicative environment.

Earlier in the book, we discussed semantic change and grammaticalization of lexical items. However, this book attends to intensifying elements within a communicative event. We want to reiterate that semantic-related investigations are valid paths if we attend to grammaticalization or changes over time. We can say the same about a sociolinguistic perspective; it too can describe changes over time. If we also wish to conduct comparative studies on intensification, the field of semantics can provide a research direction. Nevertheless, if we want to achieve a thorough account of intensification, we must rely on a socio-pragmatic foundation.

Previously, we also discussed several robust studies that have dominated the landscape of research on intensification. Therefore, we do not elaborate on them here again. In brief, we have found that researchers have preferred to investigate the appearance of particular intensifying elements and their pragmatic functions (e.g., lexical items, superlative morphology, polysemic forms). The studies have provided a descriptive account, and several have also uncovered speakers' preferences (by employing qualitative and quantitative approaches). Other studies have investigated intensifying elements cross-linguistically. Researchers have also pursued a path that explores degree modifiers, scalarity, and expressions of extremeness. In general, we do find many empirical studies that have used a mixed-method approach.



Researchers who investigate intensification in Spanish have mainly viewed intensification through a pragmatic lens. Consequently, they have used a broad brush to investigate this phenomenon. For instance, studies have examined quantifiers, superlatives, modality, emphasis, and affective and cultural concerns related to intensification. In addition, studies have relied on examining lexical items, modality, syntactic structures, semantics, synthetic and analytic intensifying markers, and prosodic features, among others. Also, researchers have focused on particular phraseology that functions to escalate in Spanish. While this book cannot delve into all the studies, it is essential to note that a wealth of research treats intensification using a pragmatic-descriptive perspective.

Gathering from the studies described in the previous chapters, we can point out that data for many Spanish intensification studies have relied on corpora. Corpus studies are valuable since we may uncover multiple intensifying lexical items in large corpora. A corpus-based analysis may yield sufficient data for a qualitative and quantitative approach. We should note that, at times, we may not find repeated uses of a form in naturally occurring spontaneous speech. This concern may be suggestive of why researchers examine the use of multiple lexical items.

That said, we find a study conducted by Paradis and Bergmark (2003), who investigated the use of ‘really really’ in teen talk. The hypothesis posited by Paradis et al. was that teens were more likely to employ ‘really’ with much more frequency than adult speakers. The scholars used the COLT (The Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language) based on face-to-face conversations. The analyses attested to multiple uses of ‘really.’ It documented how ‘really’ is conditioned by a speaker’s desire to qualify an expression epistemically. The study used a mixed-method approach. It quantified the use of ‘really’ and categorized the tokens in which ‘really’ was used as a degree reinforcer, emphasize, and a truth-attester. The scholars reported that the most common use of ‘really’ is that of a degree-reinforcer, and it was used less as a truth-attester.

We must remind ourselves that intensification does not emerge in only one lexical item or syntactic structure. We also have to remember that no exact syntactic and stylistic concern categorically represents intensifying linguistic behavior. In other words, it is how linguistic elements are employed that makes for an intensifying effect. Therefore, we need to be cautious when extracting data; we need consistency. Furthermore, we examine speaker intentions and the strategies and devices speakers or writers may employ to convey those intentions. That is the domain of pragmatics: a speaker’s communicative intentions (which I extend to a writer’s purpose also).

When analyzing any corpus or written document, we need to consider that intensification is highly challenging to investigate as a pragmatic concern.

Albelda Marco (2005) addresses intensification by examining modality, morphology, lexicon, syntactic structures, semantic problems, and phonic elements. Also, her work centers on several categories of intensification: quantification, a range of gradations, expressivity, emphasis, and highlighting, among many other aspects, which represent gateways to different paths of study.

Briz Gómez (1998) also discusses what we need to consider when investigating intensification using a pragmatic lens. He points out that rhetorical devices and other linguistic aspects are critical to a study of intensification. Namely, we should consider redundancy, reformulation, deixis, intonation, and paralinguistic features when we examine intensification. Briz Gómez maintains that as part of colloquial Spanish, we find that intensification refers to an affective expression, a linguistic emphasis, a kind of elevation, elements that make a linguistic expression stand out. This observation is also applicable to English.

Briz Gómez (1998) provides these examples, which are illustrative of the variety of expressions that can serve to intensify (pp. 112–25):

<i>Lo que estubiaba el tío.</i>	(How studious that guy was.)
<i>Ese restaurante <u>es nada de caro</u> y hace <u>unas</u> comidas.</i>	(That restaurant is <u>not even</u> expensive and makes some [good] food.)
<i>Me ha pegado <u>un susto de muerte</u>.</i>	(He/she <u>scared me to death</u> .)
<i>Es un <u>pe-sa-do</u>.</i>	(similar to ‘He is <u>an-<i>noy-ing</i></u> .’)
<i>No ha dicho <u>ni pio</u>.</i>	(He/she hasn’t said <u>even a word</u> .)

These examples underscore that, as a pragmatic phenomenon, we need to investigate intensification within the linguistic and socio-cultural context. Further, these examples may not have similar representations in other languages.

In sum, to capture a comprehensive, pragmatic manifestation of intensification, we may need to look at many linguistic aspects or focus on one. For example, we may attend to:

- affixation (pre-post-) or synthetic or analytic markers,
- lexical items (e.g., nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs),
- phraseology such as the ones previously illustrated,
- syntactic resources (e.g., the positions of intensifying elements in an expression),
- rhetorical aspects (e.g., repetitions, tautology, and reformulations),
- quantitative-related structures (e.g., numeric and non-numeric, such as *un montón* [‘a bunch’], metaphoric expressions),

- exaggeration (e.g., ‘I haven’t seen you in a million years’),
- hyperbole (e.g., ‘I feel like the world is on my shoulders’), and
- prosodic aspects such as vowel elongation, intonation, exclamation, tone, and stress.

Next, we move to discuss a pilot study of intensification following a socio-linguistic model.

## A SOCIOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

As stated earlier, scholars have attended to intensification mainly using a pragmatics and sociolinguistics lens. Earlier, we discussed how several scholars had used a sociolinguistic approach to investigate lexical intensification. They had focused on lexical items diachronically in Old to Modern English and Spanish. Other research centered on lexical intensification has mirrored a traditional sociolinguistic framework. The studies have mainly focused on how social factors correlated with the use of several intensifiers. We also have discussed that both fields could complement each other.

Suppose we design a traditional sociolinguistic study to investigate the manifestation of intensification. In that case, we need to consider creating a design that addresses which social *and* linguistic factors correlate with intensification elements. To that end, we also need to determine the type of data we wish to analyze, albeit a pre-existing corpus, sociolinguistic interviews, oral narratives of personal experience, or an institutional discourse category (e.g., discourse issued in a court or medical context). Regardless of the choice of data we wish to analyze, we also need to be concerned with expressions or items (i.e., tokens) that can render quantitative results that respond to the research questions. In other words, we aim for robustness. For instance, if we only have minimum amounts of tokens to analyze, it may well be that the distribution and representation of these tokens (i.e., items under investigation) may not yield a significant statistical correlation. In that case, we may wish to construct a qualitative analysis to address the smaller represented tokens and address the more substantial number of tokens with a quantitative analysis.

Many sociolinguistic studies on intensification have centered on analyzing lexical item(s) or morphological ones. For instance, Palacios Martínez and Nuñez Pertejo (2012) attend to the use of ‘really.’ I briefly review it here since it enables us to draw comparisons to Paradis and Bergmark’s (2003) study that I explained earlier. Also, their research model shows how a sociolinguistic investigation can focus on one or several linguistic aspects. Palacios Martínez et al. also focuses on the expression of other devices such as ‘mega,’

'uber,' 'super,' 'cool,' and 'massive.' The data analyzed were sourced from the COLT (The Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language) and DCPSE (Diachronic Corpus of Present-Day Spoken English). The study also gathered data from several other websites, including magazines, to collect intensifiers' authentic uses. This study is particularly interesting because it analyzed the distribution of several related intensifiers in at least five corpora.

Furthermore, Palacios Martínez et al. conducted a statistical analysis to capture the use of the previously mentioned forms. Using a quantitative model that provided statistical significance, the study revealed patterns in the speakers' intensifier use. For instance, adults tended to use the intensifying items more than teenagers, and marked differences appeared in 'absolutely,' 'very,' and 'really.' The study concluded that 'really' was more frequently expressed among teens as an intensifier and that 'very' and 'so' were characteristic of adult language.

Ito and Tagliamonte (2003) also conducted a sociolinguistic study on intensifiers. In particular, they investigated the use of *Well* weird, *right* dodgy, *very* strange, and *really* cool. One of the findings revealed that intensifier use is under constant change. The most frequently used intensifiers were 'very' and 'really' among the younger generation. Again, this study centered on particular lexical items.

Thus, in using a sociolinguistic framework, we can uncover patterns and detect changes over time. However, because specific intensifiers' manifestation requires an adequate representation of tokens to obtain statistical significance, it is incumbent on the researcher to gather and code sufficient tokens. Nevertheless, this observation should not be considered a limitation. We can use a sociolinguistic framework to uncover different uses of intensifying elements. We need the study to reveal if any patterns exist and, in particular, or if we can detect diachronic change (Tagliamonte, 2008). One way of addressing the lower frequencies of tokens that a statistical model may yield as non-significant is to revisit their appearance using a qualitative lens. In other words, again, we suggest using a mixed-method approach. Alternatively, another way to address the low frequencies of tokens is to engage more corpora or different authentic speech or writing categories.

We know that pragmatics and sociolinguistics are fields that researchers have used to investigate intensification. However, we must keep in mind that we need to consider informing our research with a model that has the potential to be replicated, to be expanded, and to advance the field. We want to underscore that there are benefits in using several approaches to investigate intensification. In doing so, we can offer more depth and perspective and add validation to our research by combining methods.

When we challenge the number of tokens collected for a study, we often recall Schegloff (1993). Schegloff once asked: “What counts as an occurrence of whatever it is we think we are counting?” to which he underscored “one is also a number” (p. 101). Thus, a single case of intensification represents essential evidence of a speaker’s and writer’s linguistic behavior. I also feel that qualitative and quantitative approaches can help triangulate data and provide a more robust depiction of this phenomenon.

## METHODOLOGICAL CONCERNS

Vigara (1992) has defined intensification as a complex phenomenon. She posits that by intensifying, a speaker highlights or underscores either a proposition or parts of it. Also, the speaker expresses their attitude toward the proposition to his interlocutor. In other words, the speaker wishes to make the utterance or communication more expressive, and in doing so, tends to underscore it or give it prominence by using certain linguistic elements that place the value of X above the norm.

As mentioned earlier, intensification is pervasive in communication, and research conducted on this phenomenon has used qualitative or quantitative and mixed-method approaches to examine features. Let us reiterate that any quantitative or qualitative investigation involving mixed methods should seek to advance the field. Each approach conceptualizes knowledge differently and aims to achieve harmony between theory, research, and practice. I have often advocated a mixed-method approach since it supports or increases credibility (Creswell, 2003; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). For example, I have first started with a qualitative approach to understanding intensification in its environments. Later, I have delved into quantitative analysis and, at times, vice versa. I started immediately coding linguistic and social factors and conducting a quantitative analysis, and later, I moved to a qualitative one. Creswell (2007, p. 40) maintains that qualitative research “keeps good company with the most rigorous quantitative research.”

I have also followed Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989), who point out five main reasons to use mixed methods: corroboration, complementarity, development, initiation, and expansion.

In first examining an element(s) qualitatively, I have gathered authentic, spontaneous speech from oral narratives of personal experience or oral interviews conducted in an institutional setting. The initial findings obtained from a preliminary qualitative analysis have always yielded material or data to further investigate or contribute to another study’s development. To do so, I have then selected the intensification elements I want to code. For example, once I have identified an element(s) or a phrasal expression, I have then moved

to code for social and linguistic factors that may assist in unveiling patterns. I have developed hypotheses based on other research, including my own, to design research questions: Is the element(s) under observation conditioned by a linguistic environment such as the syntactic position or a previous mention? For example, where do syntactic alerts appear (e.g., *contra*, ‘gosh’)? Do women or men tend to use X more? Does the speakers’ economic standing correlate with using the intensification element(s) under investigation? Finally, following other scholarship, I inquire whether the element(s) under observation correlates to speakers’ age, dialect, or gender. I create these questions based on previous research findings or my general intuitions about a given dialect.

Complementarity also informs my studies. For example, the qualitative provides for a fine-grain micro-approach, and the quantitative has contributed to revealing patterns and further validating hypotheses. Thus, once I have completed the qualitative or quantitative initial analysis, I move down one path to respond to or reformulate or revise the research questions.

*Implementation:* What sequence of approaches would I wish to use for the overall research design? I have usually begun with a qualitative investigation, and then I have transitioned to a quantitative analysis. In several instances, I have delved into a quantitative analysis first. When I have identified the linguistic elements that are not statistically significant, I later address them using a qualitative analysis. The reasoning behind this process is that rarely in quantitative analyses is a feature used 100 percent by X group of speakers. If there is one metaphor I may use here: I squeeze that data like a sponge and attempt to get as much use of it as possible.

*Priority:* Which methods are most important for data analysis? Using a qualitative lens, I have found that I approach examining an element(s) more heuristically. Conversely, for a quantitative, one must also attend to the patterns that the statistical model did not find significant since they represent evidence of speakers’ linguistic behavior. I am a firm believer that these data also can contribute to our research thoughts. That said, and for the portion of the non-statistically relevant data, I then develop a different set of research questions.

*Integration:* At what point of the research process do I decide to amalgamate or blend the data concerning the approaches? After completing an exhaustive qualitative analysis, I initiate a pilot quantitative analysis to include the linguistic and social factors that inform my hypotheses.

On the other hand, if I first begin conducting a qualitative analysis, I still view the entire spectrum of data as essential but address it with different eyes. For instance, if I have found that intensification expressions such as *¡Ay bendito, Claro que no!, Claro* (‘oh gosh,’ ‘of course not!’ ‘of course,’ ‘sure’) is prevalent in the data collected but not statistically significant, then I proceed

to examine their use differently. I study how the expressions were produced and turn to concerns related to their discursive environment.

*Theoretical perspective:* I first identify a theoretical perspective that can frame or provide a foundation for the study. Then I ask whether I have addressed the theoretical framework(s). Assume that I have selected Persuasion Theory as a suitable framework for a study of intensification. I have to ensure that I have fully captured the intensifying expressions that I wish to examine, such as *¡Ay bendito!* and *Claro*. Further, I have also to ensure that Persuasion Theory can explain the elements under examination.

Alternatively, if I use a traditional sociolinguistic perspective, I must ensure that I can provide a macro account. It explains the tendencies based on the social and linguistic factors that I have integrated into the study design. For example, I may consider the age, gender, and dialect of speakers as external factors. As linguistic factors, I may code for the discourse category (e.g., family/colloquial, institutional), the form's syntactic position (e.g., initial or end of a proposition), or alternations (*bendito* versus *ay bendito*). I may also consider coding prosodic features, such as vowel elongation, stress, tone, and other aspects that may co-occur with these expressions. Such expressions are synthetic or analytical intensification markers.

Every project can also begin with a pilot study. Methodologically speaking, it may make sense to invest time in a preliminary analysis that may inform the next step or a more comprehensive investigation. For example, suppose we are looking to address many linguistic and social factors. In that case, we can narrow them down to those found initially statistically significant (by other researchers) and then remove others that a qualitative analysis can address.

## SUGGESTED GENERAL STEPS FOR A SOCIOLINGUISTIC PILOT STUDY

First, we discuss several small steps to inform or shape a pilot study in this section. To do so, we suggest creating two to three research questions that you would like to explore in this initial phase. Ensure that the problem you are investigating is well-informed, and that the literature also informs the research questions. Namely, empirical research similar to what you are exploring can inform this pilot. However, I would examine the linguistic elements using a different population (e.g., diverse age group or dialect of English or Spanish) so that the pilot can advance and inform the field. The pilot study requires that you gather data from speakers and record their narratives or that you gather data from pre-existing corpora. Before doing so, ask the following questions:

1. Do you think the intensification element(s) are conditioned by speakers' ages, gender, and dialect, among others?
2. In what discursive setting and context is the linguistic element(s) produced?
3. Are there prosodic feature(s) that can be attributed to intensifying in the audio transcript?
4. Are there particular stylistic and rhetorical aspects that intersect with intensification? If so, what are they?
5. Is there a new intensification element or behavior we need to consider and incorporate in this study design?

The following section provides a guide on how to begin an analysis. We underscore that these steps represent general ones and that we need to consider the type of study we are conducting before following *only* these steps. In other words, more concerns may require revisions to these steps.

Step 1: Gather transcripts from spontaneous speech or corpora containing natural speech from at least five to ten speakers.

Step 2: Review the transcripts and determine the linguistic element(s) you are interested in coding.

Step 3: Identify and extract the element(s) under investigation.

Step 4: Create social factor groups: (e.g., age, gender, dialect, or any other social factor based on previous studies).

Step 5: Create linguistic factor groups: (e.g., syntactic position, type of lexical item or phrase, type of intensifying marker, analytic or synthetic, adjectival/adverbial in NP, quantifier, semantic verb type, degree [maximum or less]).

Step 6: Create stylistic/rhetorical factor groups: (e.g., repetition, reformulation, hyperbole, tautology).

For instance, after formulating the research questions, we have to create the linguistic, social, stylistic, and rhetorical factors that may manifest in conjunction with the linguistic element(s) under investigation. First, however, we need to code if and only if we recognize that the element(s) environment or context are indicative of intensification. Here are just several examples:

1. Semantic verb type related to motion (e.g., slammed, smacked, crushed)
2. Verbs related to a speech act: (e.g., promise, swear)
3. For Spanish, overt use of a subject pronoun (e.g., *yo*) related to intensification
4. For English and Spanish, prosodic (e.g., vowel elongation, stress)
5. Category of intensifying element in English and Spanish (e.g., analytic or synthetic marker)



**Examples of stylistic/rhetorical factors:**

1. Repetition (e.g., *házlo, házlo ahora*, ‘do it, do it now’)
2. Reformulation (e.g., *empieza, házlo ahora*, ‘start now,’ ‘do it now’)
3. Hyperbole (e.g., *me muero de hambre*, ‘I’m dying of hunger,’ ‘I’m starving’)
4. Metaphoric (e.g., *chorro de problemas*, ‘deluge of problems’)

**Cultural factors:**

Expression (e.g., *¿Muerto quieres misa?, claro*, ‘Why, of course!’ or ‘Obviously!’)

**Lexical/phrases items:**

1. Lexical item (e.g., *Él es una pesadilla*, ‘he’s a nightmare’)
2. Taboo/dysphemic terms or sayings (e.g., *no seas tan pesado*, ‘don’t be so annoying’)

We want our initial analysis (i.e., the pilot study) to yield results that can confirm the study’s hypotheses or respond to the formulated research questions. Therefore, it is essential not to add too many sub-factors under each category created at first. For example, suppose you only have twelve transcripts in this initial pilot phase. In that case, it may be more productive to include only several factor groups (e.g., four linguistic and two or three social factor groups). Then, later, you can add more subgroups. We base this recommendation on the likelihood of obtaining statistical significance by creating a few factor groups instead of too many as an initial step.

For practice, and another way of creating a pilot study, is to shadow a previous investigation. However, you should revise the social and linguistic factors to adhere more to the conditions and linguistic environment in which the study takes place. The findings can yield similar or different results, and from that point, you can move forward.

The following section will provide a general guide for conducting an initial pilot study based on a pragmatic qualitative approach.

### **SUGGESTED GENERAL STEPS FOR A PILOT STUDY FROM A PRAGMATIC PERSPECTIVE**

If we address a study of the pragmatics of intensification, there are several concerns we need to address. First, create two to three research questions

informed by the research you have reviewed. In doing so, have a goal in mind. For instance, you may inquire about:

- The categories of intensification elements and expressions used
- The context or interaction in which intensification elements manifest
- The type of discourse (e.g., argumentative-conflict related, story narrative, interview)

In this case, we employ a heuristic method, a discovery method to uncover the aspect(s) related to intensification, a process always guided by your research questions.

Gather data or corpus and review it several times to determine whether the oral narratives, interviews, or an institutional, discursive setting may lend itself to uncovering the intensifying elements you seek to examine. Here are several suggested steps that may need revision according to the project's goals.

Step 1: Examine transcripts from spontaneous speech, corpora, or another source(s).

Step 2: Highlight the linguistic element(s) you are interested in coding (e.g., via software or manually) based on your primary goal/research questions to later determine how intensification manifests.

Step 3: Create a list of your initial findings or use a software program that can highlight, extract, and allow you to incorporate comments regarding the features you have uncovered.

Step 4: Ensure that your thoughts include: what the element(s) is, the linguistic environment in which it appears, the type of discourse, the type of speakers or writers.

Step 5: Document instances of intensification expressions that respond to the research questions (e.g., morphological, lexical, and phrases related to hyperbole, exaggeration, repetition, among others).

Step 6: Categorize these observations after extracting them. Since in this preliminary examination you may not be concerned about, let us say, the gender or age of the speakers, you may wish to extract instances of intensification and the environments in which they emerge: What are the strategies, devices, linguistic features, or elements that speakers or writers use to intensify?

Step 7: Create a consistent and systematic way of identifying, describing, and interpreting the linguistic elements and contexts you have uncovered to provide a descriptive account.

Step 8: Explain how the theory has guided your study and how it responds to the findings.

Before closing this chapter, we would like to venture a little and add another pilot study idea. Suppose we were attempting to analyze a polysemic lexical item such as *claro* ('of course') or *correcto* ('of course,' 'correct'). In that case, we can use a sociolinguistic or a pragmatic approach to examine the use of these particular lexical items. We should draft research questions that are appropriate given their polysemic identity. A caveat: We may not find multiple expressions of these forms in one transcript or a narrative since they appear more in conversational material. Therefore, we need to examine more material (e.g., spontaneous speech, corpora, newspaper, magazine, public documents, social interactions, among others) to enable the pilot study to inform us of these forms' diverse uses.<sup>1</sup> Once we have gathered data and authentic instances of these forms, we decide whether to follow a sociolinguistic or pragmatic path.

The heuristic method you may have employed in this process will guide thoughts along with the readings. Initially, it is advisable to use a qualitative pragmatic perspective to inform the study of these particular forms. The reasoning behind this thought is that few instances may appear in the data. For example, I may not find *claro* in oral narratives of personal experience. It may emerge more frequently in social interactions, oral interviews, and Q&A-types of interactions. Following a thorough analysis of this form, then we can move forward.

In the next chapter, we will discuss how to identify intensification in more detail. The analysis employs a qualitative approach.

## CHAPTER 4 SUMMARY

This chapter centered on briefly discussing Persuasion Theory and the intersectionality between intensification. We also explained how we approach creating a pilot study on intensification. The chapter discussed how to engage thoughts regarding pragmatics and sociolinguistics to inform a preliminary study. We first addressed how to investigate intensification using a pragmatic and then a sociolinguistic approach. The chapter also attended to issues concerned with using a mixed-method (i.e., a socio-pragmatic) approach since both methods can support each other. We briefly mentioned several studies that have employed a semantic approach and one several researchers have undertaken. The critical message the chapter underscores is that empirical research on intensification can use quantitative and qualitative lenses. We can first begin with a qualitative analysis and then move to a quantitative one or vice versa. Alternatively, we can conduct a pilot study using one approach. The decision on the path we use to approach a task of intensification largely

depends on the research questions we formulate, always keeping in mind that we need to advance the field.

The chapter also urges us to look at the paths other researchers have followed before we engage in designing a pilot study. Our empirical research should inform *and* advance the field even if we base our pilot on a previous study. An analysis can expand or replicate but employ different speakers, factors, dialects, and age groups, among others. Thus, when developing a pilot study, we should build on prior research and create an investigation that informs others. In this sense, the chapter presented a general discussion on how to shape a sociolinguistic-oriented pilot study. We also briefly discussed using a pragmatic approach since the next chapter will detail how we can analyze intensification. Finally, the chapter also discussed methodological challenges and proposed general steps or suggested guidelines informing a pilot study.

## NOTE

1. See Maldonado, 'Claro: de objeto perceptible a refuerzo pragmático,' a study that examines the polysemic use of this form. R. Maldonado (2010), *Claro: de objeto perceptible a refuerzo pragmático*. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301766566\\_Claro\\_de\\_objeto\\_perceptible\\_a\\_refuerzo\\_pragmatico](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301766566_Claro_de_objeto_perceptible_a_refuerzo_pragmatico).



## Chapter 5

# How to Analyze Intensifying Elements

### *Features, Devices, Strategies*

In chapter 4, we discussed how the fields of sociolinguistics and pragmatics had informed intensification research. This chapter now delves into an examination of texts, oral and written. The chapter's primary goal is to exemplify how intensification manifests in institutional and non-institutional discourses, and it provides a guide that can inform research and language teaching practices. We gathered the data for this chapter from various sources, including public legal/court documents and personal experience narratives, among others.

In this next section, we attest to intensification expressions, an inventory of diverse linguistic behaviors. We first begin by analyzing legal discourse; then, we move to oral narratives and political speeches.

### LEGAL DISCOURSE

Excerpt 19: Institutional discourse: A legal hearing in the Supreme Court regarding the use of engineered crops

Context: Supreme Court Legal discussion

Intensifying element(s): adjectival/adverbial intensifiers

Function(s): intensifiers used to escalate the benefits of engineered crops<sup>1</sup>

“Biotech crops have produced enormous benefits for the nation's farmers and consumers. The district court, in this case, issued a broad-based injunction against the planning of a highly beneficial, genetically engineered alfalfa crop.”

In the argument and this brief excerpt, we find ‘enormous benefits’ and ‘highly beneficial’ as adjectival/adverbial phrases that function to amplify expressions. They strengthen the reason for favoring the development of genetically engineered crops and attempt to persuade justices to support the venture. Thus, the attorneys intentionally produced intensifying linguistic elements to position their argument positively and underscore their claims.

Excerpt 20: Institutional discourse: A response from a Justice regarding the efforts it takes to analyze data

Context: Supreme Court Legal Former Justice Alito responds to a statement issued by an attorney representing Monsanto.

Intensifying element(s): semantic verb of motion: ‘plow,’ metaphor, adverbial intensifier

Function(s): to exaggerate the effect of the work needed to arrive at a decision<sup>2</sup>

“If we agree with your argument that the Ninth Circuit applied the wrong preliminary injunction standard and remand for them to apply the right preliminary injunction standard, the case may be moot by the time they do that. And the alternative is for us to plow into the extremely fact-bound question whether applying what you contend to be the correct preliminary injunction standard of relief would be warranted on this record.”

The verb ‘plow into’ is of interest. In this context, it is considered an intensifier since it escalates the actions to the point of extreme physical exertion. Interestingly, the debate was about engineered seeds. Thus, to use this particular verb in this linguistic environment points to how the Justice magnified the work that had to be done and depicted the task metaphorically (i.e., ‘plow’). ‘Plow into’ also refers to a hostile activity, a massive endeavor to go through materials the court may not want to undertake. The Justice, in this case, wanted to persuade attorneys that this endeavor was not productive.

Further, ‘plow into,’ a semantic verb of motion related to farming, represents digging, furrowing, or breaking land, meaning, the justices would have to engage in a lot more work to unravel the debate. This semantic observation also appears in the expression of ‘extremely fact-bound question.’ Justice Alito was not pleased with the amount of work entailed in settling the discussion. He amplified his displeasure by using a maximizer to influence other justices to disapprove of the venture.

Excerpt 21: Institutional discourse: A high court suspends the legal practice of an attorney

Context: Supreme Court of Puerto Rico decision suspending a legal practice

Intensifying element(s): rhetorical device: tautology, adjectival/adverbial intensifiers

Function(s): intensification to affirm the court's decision<sup>3</sup>

*“Ante los constantes incumplimientos con las órdenes de este Tribunal y con los requerimientos del Programa de Educación Jurídica Continua (PEJC), decretamos la suspensión inmediata e indefinida del Lcdo. Name<sup>e</sup> de la práctica de abogacía y la notaría.”*

(Due to the constant non-compliance of this Tribunal's orders and based on the requirements of the Judicial Continuing Education Program, we order the immediate and indefinite suspension of attorney XXX's law practice and notary.) [my translation]

In Excerpt 21, we find that the court expressed *constante incumplimientos* (ongoing or continuous non-compliance issues) to indict an attorney who had not complied with a court order. That is, the term *constante* points to multiple breaches of the orders issued by the high court, not just one or a few. Thus, we consider this term intensifying since it denotes repeated violations. It can also be considered a quantifier of a sort. The judge could have expressed the utterance without the intensifier. However, it would not have contributed to the categorical or definite decision. Secondly, the decision issued also conveys a categorical immediate and indefinite suspension (without exception). The expression *suspensión inmediata e indefinida* functioned to amplify and escalate the suspension's importance and timeline. In other words, the decision was final. Lastly, the tone of the decision, using the terms *inmediata e indefinida* increased the strength of the decision, making it irreversible. These lexical items represent a form of tautology, a rhetorical device that contributes to intensifying communication.

Excerpt 22: Institutional discourse: An argument between lawyers in a high court

Context: In the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico, a legal team alleges an attorney was disrespectful and unethical during the fact-finding phase of a case. (Lcdo.=attorney)



Intensifying element(s): amplified negation, repetition, speech act: threat;  
 phrasal response to a threat, interjection, hyperbole  
 Function(s): to contribute to the escalation of the argument<sup>5</sup>

*Lcdo. A: Licenciado, ¿pero por qué usted le sacó la lengua a la licenciada?*

*Lcdo. G: Por molestarla, de broma . . .*

*Lcdo. A: Pero eso es una falta de respeto, licenciado . . .*

*Lcdo. G: ¿Cuántas veces usted me ha faltado el respeto a mí?*

*Lcdo. A: Yo nunca le he faltado el respeto a usted, licenciado . . .*

*Lcdo. G: Já . . .*

*Lcdo. A: Nunca.*

*Lcdo. G: Vuelve a faltármelo pa' que tú veas.*

*Lcdo. A: ¿Qué usted va a hacer, Licenciado?*

*Lcdo. G: Arrancarte la cabeza si tú me vuelves a faltar el respeto.*

(Attorney A: Attorney, why did you stick your tongue out to the attorney (female)?

Attorney G: To bother her, a joke . . .

Attorney A: But that is disrespectful, attorney . . .

Attorney G: How many times have you disrespected me?

Attorney A: I have never shown disrespect to you, attorney . . .

Attorney G: Ha . . .

Attorney A: Never.

Attorney G: Do it again, and you'll see.

Attorney A: What are you going to do, attorney?

Attorney G: Tear your head off if you disrespect me again.) [my translation]

Excerpt 22, which also represents a court hearing, contains various linguistic elements that intensify communication. First, we find repetition in the use of *nunca* ('never') that underscores an absolute and unconditional denial. Second, there is a prosodic feature, an interjection *já* ('ha'), suggesting that

the attorney issuing the non-lexical item seriously disagrees. Third, a threat followed these utterances, *Vuelve a faltármelo pa'que tú veas*, which indicated that he would do something to him if the attorney disrespected him again. Finally, the physical threat of tearing off the attorney's head if he disrespected him again was illustrative of how intensification manifested in the court setting. The expression of tearing the head off represented hyperbole. The description of physical force itself in the threat also functioned to amplify the anger that the attorney was projecting.

We learn from these first four legal excerpts that intensification manifests in various ways. We found specific lexical items, rhetorical strategies, semantic verbs of action, and adjectival/adverbial phrases in addition to prosodic features. These linguistic elements functioned to increase the illocutionary force of their expressions. Interestingly, also expressed in this legal context were physical threats and hyperbole.

To summarize, we should note that arguments take on a dialogical form. That is, speakers issue claims and counterclaims, and challenges, which are characteristic of these institutional interactions. Thus, intensification manifests in the choice of terms, lexical items, prosodic features, and so forth, and how speakers choose to strengthen their arguments. In English, the intensification elements revealed were mainly lexical items and semantic motion verbs. In contrast, the Spanish intensification elements were diverse: hyperbolic, speech acts of threats, interjections, and exclamations, not characteristic of the English language court discourse. Further, we point out that we find the affective or emotional converging with intensification in the court argument in Spanish.

In the next section, we examine intensifying elements in oral narratives of personal experience. We begin with English oral narratives and then proceed to analyze Spanish oral ones. Again, data was gathered for the Spanish stories from previous research projects. In addition, I collected the English narrations from public oral stories recorded by a relative and an observer of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centers, found in the 9/11 Memorial & Museum.

## ORAL NARRATIVES OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

The narratives (excerpts 23 and 24) that follow were extracted from a public site, the 9/11 Memorial Museum, public transcripts. The museum's interviews were on public display as part of the museum's tour. Excerpts 25 and 26 were obtained directly from speakers. They were oral narratives in which we asked participants to recount an event in their lives that had left a significant impact.

Excerpt 23: Recorded public oral narratives, transcripts obtained from the 9/11 Museum

Context: A mother (a non-native English speaker) narrates the loss of her daughter during the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center.

Intensifying element(s): adverbials, quantifiers; ‘so,’ ‘very,’ ‘really,’ ‘always’

Function(s): to add force, emotional emphasis, truth-attesting value<sup>6</sup>

“The last time I saw my daughter was the night before September 11. It was my birthday, and she ask me if I will like to go spend my birthday at the (Windows of the World) and I said, ‘Yes, I’d like that.’ So we all went there, the whole family and during the night, we stopped by the windows, and I said, ‘Wow, they’re beautiful place. I feel like I’m up in heaven, it’s so pretty.’ And she said to me, ‘Mom, I got you on the top of the world.’ The next morning, when I saw the plane just hit the North Tower, and that’s where she was. I said, ‘I know Marisa is very strong. She’s very soft heart, and she always help other people.’ I says, ‘Probably she is helping somebody, probably she got down.’ I could not think that she was not around anymore. About a year later, a policeman called me, and he said, ‘Your daughter’s name was XXXX?’ I says, ‘Yes.’ I say, ‘Why, have you found something?’ He says, ‘We, we found her pocketbook.’ He told me to go pick it up, and that’s when it really felt that she was not here anymore when I found the pocketbook.” [sic]

Excerpt 23 is characterized by several lexical intensifiers of ‘so,’ ‘very,’ and ‘really.’ Like the findings obtained by Tagliamonte (2008) and Paradis et al. (2003), we find that ‘very’ and ‘really’ were used to intensify. In particular, ‘so’ in ‘so pretty’ appeared to stress the adverbial/adjectival phrase while ‘really’ seemed related to a truth-attesting value. On the other hand, ‘very’ functioned as an intensifier slightly related to quantity (i.e., extremely, enormously, hugely, extraordinarily). We should note that the first use of ‘so’ functioned as a conjunction, not an intensifier, so I did not underline or code it. We also find the emotional aspect, in other words, the affective, is noted here as intersecting with intensification.

Excerpt 24: Recorded public oral narratives, transcripts obtained from the 9/11 Museum

Context: 9/11 rescue worker narrates their first impression after the explosion.

Intensifying element(s): adverbials/adjectivals, ‘really,’ adjectival heads, superlative, rhetorical: repetition

Function(s): increase magnitude, expressiveness, and subjectivity<sup>7</sup>

“You could see Manhattan and then not see Manhattan, and all of a sudden I looked up and there was just this explosion of confetti in the air. And I thought that was the strangest sight I had ever seen because, you know, confetti—certainly if there was a parade or something that you would have known of, but there was nothing I knew of. I thought, ‘That’s bizarre.’ It was a tremendous amount of paper. And I couldn’t see anything else because, at this point, I had inched behind a loft building again, and of course, the radio came on and interrupted and said that there had been reports of a plane going into the Trade Center. And as we inched along again, I could see then three floors of first in the Trade Center. And I thought to myself, ‘That’s really bad.’ Because it’s a self-contained building and fire—it should be fire on one floor, not fire on many floors. If you have fire on many floors, that’s a serious, serious, serious problem.” [sic]

In excerpt 24, several linguistic devices function to intensify the descriptions produced by the rescue worker. For instance, we find an ‘explosion of confetti,’ ‘tremendous amounts of paper,’ ‘really bad,’ and so forth. Further, the narrator recounted how she acknowledged that something terrible had occurred when she repeated ‘serious’ several times. ‘Serious’ was considered an intensifier, as in ‘this is a serious mistake.’ Intensification always involves the speaker’s judgment, and we gather from this narrative that the speaker was attempting to characterize the gravity of the situation. Therefore, by repeating ‘serious,’ using other intensifying adjectives/adverbials and other rhetorical devices, she tried to persuade listeners of what she had witnessed. The narrator had the choice of expressing ‘confetti,’ ‘lots of paper,’ ‘bad,’ and ‘a serious problem.’ Still, she engaged her listeners by adding the intensifying elements as she portrayed the situation’s gravity. Again, here we note that emotions and the affective converge with the expression of intensification.

Similar to what we evidenced in the radio talk show discourses (excerpts 9 and 10), we might ask whether the absence of a physical audience might have influenced hosts to amplify their assertions. We need to consider that this transcript, and the previous one, was audio-produced for the museum’s touring audiences. Therefore, it did not represent a face-to-face interaction. Perhaps this factor may have conditioned the need to increase the use of intensifying elements. This observation poses questions about how intensification manifests in face-to-face interactions instead of media-related discourse where the physical presence of the hearers is absent.

The following section analyzes intensification in Spanish oral narratives of personal experience. We follow a consistent analysis that first provides

a context, the intensifying features, and discusses functions. All translations follow the Spanish oral narratives.

Excerpt 25: Oral narrative: A narrator discusses her first visit to Rome

Context: A narrator recounts a visit to Rome, Italy.

Intensifying element(s): adverbials gradability, prosodic, superlative, rhetorical: hyperbole, repetition

Function(s): to amplify descriptors, convey enthusiasm, persuade the hearer

*Mi viaje a Italia en 1996 fue muy bello. Yo no creía cuando estaba ahí ¡No creía que yo estaba ahí! O sea, yo pensaba que toda todo era un sueño. La ciudad de Roma es bellísima. Y lo lo las estatuas que uno ve . . . es pero, magnífico. Hay algo de esa ciudad que cuando tú la ves las cosas que están ahí te mueve pero adentro del corazón. Es algo increíble. Un sensación pero bien bonita. También, ah, fui al Vaticano, y eso era también una experiencia pero bella, bella, bella.*

(My trip to Italy in 1996 was very beautiful. I didn't believe it when I was there. (I) didn't believe that I was there! In other words, I thought that everything was a dream. The city of Rome was the most beautiful. And the statues that one sees . . . it is magnificent. There is something in that city that when you see things that are there, it moves (you) inside your heart. It is incredible. A sensation but very pretty. Also, ah, I went to the Vatican, and that was another experience but beautiful, beautiful, beautiful.) [My translation]

The narrator of excerpt 25 employed various linguistic elements to underscore and persuade the hearer to believe in her emotional and unique experience. We note here that the use of *muy* and the superlative *-ísimo* was optional. In other words, she could have produced an utterance such as *mi viaje a Italia fue bello* ('my trip to Italy was beautiful'), and it would have conveyed a similar meaning. Thus, by escalating the utterance with *muy*, the narrator was informing how much Italy impressed her. Further, the exclamatory utterance *¡No creía que yo estaba ahí!* ('[I] didn't believe I was there!'), represented a reformulation of the previous statement. Again, the first utterance without the exclamation would have sufficed to convey an approximate meaning. The narrator also produced intensifying adverbials, such as *increíble*.

Interestingly, how the experience moved her heart, the hyperbole contributed to amplifying the narrative and persuading the hearer of her great and very personal experience. One may ask whether the narrator impressed the images of Italy on the hearer (in this case, me) or whether she was engaging

herself in the narrative. Regardless, she amplified the images and her emotional state to influence how I viewed her experience.

In sum, we find that the narrator was subjective and had invested emotional interest in the experience. Athanasiadou (2007) has noted that adverbs intensify the adjectives they modify, and they add a passionate and a subjective dimension to communication. Partington (1993) has also stressed that hyperbole functions as a vehicle for impressing, praising, and persuading a hearer. Thus, we find lexical devices and strategies to intensify and reflect the narrator's emotional enthusiasm in the previous excerpt. Without the rhetorical devices and strategies (i.e., repetition, reformulation), the speaker would have been merely fulfilling the task of narrating a visit to Italy.

Excerpt 26: A speaker narrates the impact her mother had on her community

Context: A narrator recounts the death of her mother.

Intensifying element(s): adverbial/adjectivals gradability, quantifiers, rhetorical: repetition

Function(s): to maximize the characterization of her mother

*La segunda experiencia en mi vida, um . . . que me dejó un tremendo impacto en mi corazón, profundo . . . fue um . . . la muerte de mi mamá. Mi mamá era una mujer de . . . un carácter . . . que . . . ella . . . le daba a toda la gente, ella . . . siempre estaba pendiente a si . . . si alguien tenía hambre, ella le daba comida a cualquier vecino . . . el vecindario entero, todo el mundo la conocía, le decían Mamá, este . . . un corazón . . . increíble. Um . . . nació en . . . nochebuena, este . . . tuvo una vida bien difícil en Puerto Rico nacida y criada en Puerto Rico . . . um . . . vino aquí en los uh . . . uh Estados Unidos cuando tenía dieciocho, o diecinueve años, con mi hermano mayor . . . este . . . peleó . . . y peleó, peleó, peleó y triunfó . . . este . . . buscando trabajo . . . se hizo de su negocio . . . tenía un restaurante, y um . . . conoció a mi Papá . . .*

(The second experience in my life, um . . . that left a tremendous impact in my heart, deep . . . was um . . . my mother's death. My mother was a woman of character . . . that . . . she . . . would give to all people, she . . . always was looking after if . . . if someone was hungry, she would give them food to any neighbor, to the entire neighborhood, everybody knew her, they would call her Mamá, um . . . a heart . . . incredible. Um . . . (she) was born Christmas Eve, um . . . (she) had a very difficult life in Puerto Rico, born and raised in Puerto Rico . . . um . . . (she) came to the um . . . um United States when she was eighteen, or nineteen years old, with my oldest brother, she um . . . would struggle . . . and struggle . . . struggle, struggle and succeeded . . . um . . . looking for work . . . (she) made her business . . . (she) had a restaurant, and um . . . (she) met my father . . .) [sic]

Excerpt 26 is illustrative of how intensification again manifests and comes together with emotion. The speaker employed several linguistic elements to intensify. She produced maximizers and quantifiers such as *todo el mundo* ('everybody,' 'the entire world'). She also used adjectival maximizers *tremendo impacto* ('tremendous impact') and rhetorical devices such as repetition. Examining the text further, we can observe that she also characterized her mother again using maximizers. In addition, she increased subjectivity to enable the hearer (me) to capture how special her mother was to her and her community. The rhetorical device of repetition was also evident in this narrative (i.e., '*peleó*'), as the speaker characterized her mother as a fighter.

## POLITICAL DISCOURSES

Excerpts 27, 28, 29, and 30 are taken from former Presidents Obama's and Trump's speeches. At the time of writing this book, Trump was still president. The excerpts represent public speeches to the press, in rallies, and at other gatherings.

Excerpt 27: Political discourse: President Obama

Context: President Obama's State of the Union speech

Intensifying element(s): determiner 'no' as absolute, maximum quantifiers, verbs of motion

Function(s): to amplify the singularity of the United States as a nation, to highlight positive forthcoming changes<sup>9</sup>

" . . . We do these things because they help promote our long-term security. And we do them because we believe in the inherent dignity and equality of every human being, regardless of race or religion, creed, or sexual orientation. And next week the world will see one expression of that commitment when Team USA marches the red, white, and blue into the Olympic stadium and brings home the gold. (Cheers, applause.)

My fellow Americans, no other country in the world does what we do. On every issue, the world turns to us, not simply because of the size of our economy or our military might, but because of the ideals we stand for and the burdens we bear to advance them.

No one knows this better than those who serve in uniform. As this time of war draws to a close, a new generation of heroes returns to civilian life. We'll keep slashing that backlog so our veterans receive the benefits they've earned and our wounded warriors receive the health care—including the mental health

care—that they need. (Applause.) We’ll keep working to help all our veterans translate their skills and leadership into jobs here at home, and we will all continue to join forces to honor and support our remarkable military families . . . ”

In Obama’s excerpt (#27), we find several intensifying elements. First, he asserted ‘no other country in the world’ to signal the United States’ uniqueness. The use of ‘no other’ in the statement represents a quasi-quantifying phrase, an absolute or maximizing phrase. He could have merely stated that the United States is the leader of the world. Second, he used the statement ‘on every issue.’ This entire statement represents a reformulation of the previous expression that pointed to the United States’ leadership in the world. We can consider the term ‘every’ a maximizer. Obama used the quantifier to underscore the country’s singularity. Third, he described the uniqueness of the military with a definite ‘no one knows,’ again an absolute.

He also highlighted the essence of the veterans who served the country to its maximum potential. Besides, he employed ‘slashing that backlog’ to reduce veterans’ long waits to receive benefits. In doing so, he used a semantic verb of motion. The verb represents a violent or aggressive action, an immediate action. He could have employed other verbs, such as ‘reducing’ or ‘cutting down,’ to describe the wait for veterans. Finally, he used the maximizer ‘all’ in several instances. In sum, he employed various intensifying expressions to persuade his audience of how he prioritized the veterans’ health service conditions.

#### Excerpt 28: Political discourse: President Trump

Context: President Trump’s 2019 State of the Union speech

Intensifying element(s): hyperbole/metaphor, semantic verbs of motion

Function(s): to increase or escalate physical force<sup>10</sup>

“ . . . This year, America will recognize two important anniversaries that show us the majesty of America’s mission and the power of American pride.

In June, we mark seventy-five years since the start of what General Dwight D. Eisenhower called the “Great Crusade”—the Allied liberation of Europe in World War II. (Applause.) On D-Day, June 6th, 1944, 15,000 young American men jumped from the sky, and 60,000 more stormed in from the sea, to save our civilization from tyranny. Here with us tonight are three of those incredible heroes: Private First Class Joseph Reilly, Staff Sergeant Irving Locker, and Sergeant Herman Zeitchik. (Applause.) Please. Gentlemen, we salute you.



In 2019, we also celebrate fifty years since brave young pilots flew a quarter of a million miles through space to plant the American flag on the face of the moon. Half a century later, we are joined by one of the *Apollo 11* astronauts who planted that flag: Buzz Aldrin. (Applause.) Thank you, Buzz. This year, American astronauts will go back to space on American rockets. (Applause.)” [sic]

In Trump’s speech, we also find several intensifying elements. While both Obama’s and Trump’s speeches praise the military, Trump also emphasizes the service provided by American astronauts. First, he characterized the liberation mission of Europe as ‘majesty’ (perhaps meant ‘majestic’), an intensifying lexical item. Second, he used the term ‘stormed’ to depict how troops arrived on land. Both the terms ‘majesty’ and ‘stormed’ represent hyperbole. In the case of ‘majesty,’ he could have indicated that ‘the missions show us the power of American pride,’ omitting ‘majesty.’ Also, he could have stated that American men ‘jumped’ from the sky since they were jumping from planes. Trump also issued a metaphoric intensifier when indicating that the soldiers ‘stormed the sea.’ He produced a semantic verb of action/movement, a violent one, that could have been represented by verbs such as ‘jumped to the sea,’ ‘landed by the sea,’ and so forth. The term ‘stormed,’ therefore, serves to amplify the action. Finally, the use of ‘planted’ in ‘planted the flag’ also represents a semantic verb of motion, a burying of the flag. He could have expressed ‘placed the flag.’ In sum, Trump also employed various intensifying elements to sway his audience and make his statements more credible.

Excerpt 29: Political discourse: President Trump at a rally

Context: President Trump gives a rally speech in Tulsa, Oklahoma in June 2020, with protesters outside the area of his presentation.

Intensifying element(s): quantifiers, adjectival/adverbials, rhetorical device: repetition

Function(s): to persuade, convince, impress audience<sup>11</sup>

“Don’t go, don’t come, don’t do anything. Today, it was like—I’ve never seen anything like it. I’ve never seen anything like it. You are warriors. Thank you. We had some very bad people outside. We had some very bad people outside. They were doing bad things. But I really do. I appreciate it. We have just a tremendous group of people in Oklahoma and I hear—I hear from your two great Senators, your new governor that we’re doing very well in Oklahoma.” [sic]

In excerpt 29, we can observe multiple strategies and devices that function to intensify: repetitions, quantifiers, and several instances of ‘very bad

people’ to refer to protesters. Repetition was evident when Trump referred to the protesters against him in the rally; he used ‘very bad people’ twice. When he saluted the audience, he employed the adjective ‘tremendous,’ referring to a group of people (i.e., good people). In other words, ‘tremendous’ contrasted the audience positively with the protesters (i.e., anti-Trump) negatively. Further, when he spoke about how well his campaign was doing, he also issued the term ‘very well’ (sic). Finally, to make his statement more credible and convince his audience about the ‘very bad people,’ he used ‘really,’ to increase credibility to the account. In other words, the more he repeated a statement, the more it may have increased credibility and persuaded the audience in his beliefs.

Excerpt 30: Political discourse: President Obama’s speech to press

Context: President Obama gives a speech to the Associated Press during a luncheon in 2008.

Intensifying element(s): maximizer, metaphor, semantic verb of motion ‘shut’

Function(s): to promise<sup>12</sup>

“But I will never walk away from the larger point that I was trying to make. For the last several decades, people in small towns and cities, and rural areas all across this country have seen globalization change the rules of the game on them. When I began my career as an organizer on the South Side of Chicago, I saw what happens when the local steel mill shuts its doors and moves overseas. You don’t just lose the jobs in the mill, you start losing jobs and businesses throughout the community. The streets are emptier. The schools suffer.”

In excerpt 30, we observe that Obama rarely used devices and strategies to intensify. For example, the ‘will never’ in ‘I will never walk away’ (absolute negation) represents a promise, a speech act that points to the seriousness of his commitment. He could have produced the statement in another way: ‘I will always be there for the veterans.’ Interestingly, the excerpt does not contain repetitions and reformulations. Further, he humanized the schools by indicating that they ‘suffer,’ and the streets he characterized as ‘emptier,’ forms that point to escalating and personifying these entities. He also employed a more forceful expression of a semantic verb of motion, ‘shut,’ to refer to steel mill closures.

To summarize, we selected two State of the Union speeches produced by two presidents, one by Obama and Trump. The reasoning behind choosing two State of the Union speeches is that they are usually similarly crafted.

They begin by saluting the audience and praising individuals who served the nation, and then they start explaining particulars of the plan for the year and the past year.

The excerpts from Obama's speech to the Associated Press and Trump's rally speech show marked differences. While both are informal speeches, Obama's speech contained only several intensifying elements compared to Trump's rally speech. Naturally, stylistically, any two presidents can differ in how they address their audiences. Nevertheless, concerning intensification, we gather differences among the presidents' speeches. Trump's speeches contained repetitions, reformulations, hyperbole, and adjectival/adverbial intensifiers, among several other elements. On the other hand, Obama relied on maximizers and comparatives.

Fairlough and Fairlough (2012) discuss persuasion in political discourse. They have posited that there are loaded terms used to persuade in this type of discourse. The forms usually have a positive or negative emotional connotation and are used legitimately to defend a particular standpoint when an opposing view exists. Thus, loaded lexicon like the ones exemplified in Trump's excerpts "are used deceptively, as if no other possible viewpoint is possible, as if they were neutral, fact-stating propositions beyond conceivable doubt" (p. 93). In Obama's discourse, we do not find loaded terms that suggest opposing views or perspectives. Instead, we uncovered the use of a variety of terms, no repetitions, and reformulations.

## CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY

In this chapter, we analyzed excerpts from institutional and non-institutional discourses and political speeches. Based on the analyses conducted, we comment on how intensification manifested. In several instances, we found that semantically, the choice of motion verbs increased the intensifying effect. Several verbs also were metaphorically employed to escalate the depth of an action. We also detected hyperbole to increase the illocutionary force of an expression and impress the hearer(s). Several excerpts also were illustrative of the rhetorical strategies speakers used to amplify their expressions, such as repetition and reformulation.

Further, we were able to detect the use of prosodic features that functioned to intensify. Together, the lexical items, prosodic features, superlatives, adjectival/adverbial phrases, and motion verbs served to increase an expression above what would be considered a norm. Here, we also pointed out how intensification involved the speakers' judgment, attitude, and emotion.

We may ask whether the speakers required intensified linguistic elements in these contexts. Would we have lost the effects of intensification? The

response is ‘yes.’ If we call a building ‘a building’ when it is a *tall* building or a skyscraper, we would not be conveying the reality or the truth conditions. Similarly, when a speaker states that something left a tremendous impact versus an impact in their life, we comprehend their reality, the scope, and the depth of their perspective. The speaker is escalating the message’s contents using forms they intentionally wish to have their hearer appropriately interpret.

This chapter’s political discourse also draws attention to how two presidents expressed intensification in different ways in their communication to make promises, to commit, to persuade, to divide, and to convince the audience.

Several excerpts discussed in the chapter also illustrated how intensification intersects with subjectivity and emotions. As such, we reiterate that intensification is a pragma-linguistic phenomenon *and* an affective one since it involves the speaker’s judgment.

Further, the narratives packed emotional content. When a speaker considers something significant and knows that the meaning she needs to convey is above the norm, the speaker intentionally escalates. It is up to the speaker to construct utterances that are meaningful to that effect. In other words, to persuade, the speaker may choose intensified lexicon or phrases and use hyperbole and maximizers, primarily if they aim to impress, sway, insist, or influence.

## NOTES

1. Source: Legal proceedings, Supreme Court of the United States, Oral argument No. 09–475, 4/27/2010, *Monsanto et al., v. Geertson Seed Farms et al.*
2. Source: Legal proceedings, Supreme Court of the United States, Oral argument No. 09–475, 4/27/2010, *Monsanto et al., v. Geertson Seed Farms et al.*
3. Source: <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/virtual-civil-trials/puertorico.php>.
4. Name refers to the last name of the attorney.
5. Source: <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/virtual-civil-trials/puertorico.php>.
6. Source: 9/11 Memorial & Museum public original audio transcript, <https://www.911memorial.org/learn/resources/oral-histories>.
7. Source: <https://www.911memorial.org/learn/resources/oral-histories>.
8. Spanish is a null subject language. When a verb is expressed without a subject, the translation appears with the subject pronoun in brackets [xx].
9. Source: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/full-text-of-obamas-2014-state-of-the-union-address/2014/01/28/e0c93358-887f-11e3-a5bd-844629433ba3\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/full-text-of-obamas-2014-state-of-the-union-address/2014/01/28/e0c93358-887f-11e3-a5bd-844629433ba3_story.html).
10. Source: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-state-union-address-2/>.

11. Source: <https://factba.se/transcript/donald-trump-speech-kag-rally-tulsa-oklahoma-june-20-2020>.
12. Source: <http://obamaspeeches.com/E06-Barack-Obama-AP-Annual-Luncheon-Washington-DC-April-14-2008-religion-guns-pennsylvania.htm>.

## *Chapter 6*

# **Pedagogical Implications**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the previous chapters, we analyzed text and oral data generated from various institutional and non-institutional contexts. The goals of the segments were to provide a generalized perspective of the wide variety of linguistic elements used to escalate or amplify communication. In doing so, we noted the conventional and non-conventional linguistic behaviors employed to intensify.

This chapter centers on teaching and researching intensification to English and Spanish learners (henceforth ‘learners’). The chapter provides a general discussion on teaching pragmatics and aims to reach language instructors and researchers. Language instructors may wish to select linguistic elements according to learners’ proficiencies and develop a taxonomy prioritizing the linguistic elements according to their proficiency. On the other hand, researchers may test the taxonomy or choose one or several features to begin planning a pilot study based on the previous chapters’ contents and tenets or focus on the effectiveness of a drafted taxonomy. We have already noted there is an absence of instructional material regarding intensification. Thus, instructors and researchers as a team can benefit from investigating the acquisition of linguistic intensification.

We can apply this chapter’s contents to language instruction in Spanish and English second or foreign language learning contexts. We first discuss issues related to the acquisition of pragmatics, followed by concerns related to explicit instruction informed by Félix-Brasdefer (2019), Ishihara and Cohen (2010), and Taguchi (2019). They thoroughly discuss the teaching of pragmatics. Therefore, we focus our attention on the aspects related to intensification. To inform this chapter, we also draw from Albelda Marco (2002, 2005), Arce Castillo (1999), Briz Gómez (1998), Fuentes Rodríguez (2006),

García (1993), Herrero Moreno (1991), Labov (1984), Paradis (2000c), and Portero Muñoz (1997), among others.

## ABOUT THE ACQUISITION OF PRAGMATICS AND INTENSIFICATION

Tateyama (2019) posits that the learning of pragmatics entails the understanding of “form-function-context-mapping of target pragmatic features” (p. 400). These connections are not always obvious and straightforward to acquire when learning a language. We know that pragmatic competence entails a wide range of knowledge, including the macro and micro routines. These routines include interpreting and performing in the target language, understanding discourse elements such as turn-taking, using proper forms of address, and comprehending prosody in oral communication, among many other aspects. Researchers have noted the importance of explicit instruction in teaching about the pragmatics of a language. That is, implicitly, learners on their own cannot pick up the linguistic nuances and routines. This perspective also includes acquiring how to express intensification.

Naturally, to a certain extent, the pragmatics of a language can be acquired through observation in the case of adults, especially if their first language resembles or maps on to the target one. For example, when a French-speaking learner of Spanish faces the formal and informal address forms in Spanish, *tú* (informal ‘you’) and *usted* (formal ‘you’), it is conceivable that the learner may acquire the forms since a similar distinction exists in French. In other words, when observing interactions among native speakers, the learner may capture the appropriate uses of these forms since a similar grammatical distinction appears in French (i.e., *tu*, *vous*). However, an English speaker learning Spanish has only one representation for these two forms, ‘you.’ Thus, the acquisition and pragmatics surrounding using these forms of address may present a challenge. However, because lessons on these forms appear in language-learning textbooks, we could say that they may reinforce learners’ observations.

Nonetheless, acquiring these forms of address may not be as clear to learners, especially children or novice learners. In other words, it may be difficult to distinguish whether we use the formal pronoun when addressing a relative we have not seen for a while or whether we use the informal or formal ‘you’ when speaking to a grandmother or when we have been introduced to a new friend. Moreover, the micro-interactional behaviors are not transparent. For instance, how long and what kind of input do native speakers receive to fully comprehend the pragmatics of formal to informal address forms after meeting a new person? Are the uses of these forms conditioned by the age

of the addressees? Is the variable use of these pronouns conditioned to social status? Furthermore, we need to consider that several Spanish dialects differ in the ways they employ these forms. For instance, in Bogotano Colombian Spanish, we may use the formal ‘you’ when addressing a friend and a grandmother, yet in Puerto Rican Spanish, speakers do not address grandparents with the formal *usted*.

A similar condition could be stated for teaching and learning intensifying linguistic features and expressions. For instance, in most cases, English learners have textbook lessons that teach how to issue comparisons (i.e., big+er, big+est). However, the morphological ending is mainly presented in a context when the learner’s instruction relates to comparisons (e.g., ‘He is the biggest of the three guys.’). However, textbooks do not always present an equivalent or similar form that conveys a maximum degree (e.g., ‘He’s totally cute.’ instead of ‘He’s the cutest.’). Moreover, the semantic aspect is different in ‘total’ and ‘adjective+est.’ It not only refers to appearance; it refers to an unconditional and an absolute when we use ‘total.’

We can suggest the same regarding rhetorical strategies: We need to explicitly teach learners how and when to use repetition and reformulation as intensifying strategies (e.g., ‘He’s a really, really big liar.’ or ‘He’s a total complete liar.’). For Spanish, a similar concern is apparent in texts. That is, they may explain *El es un mentiroso* but not *Es un gran mentiroso o embustero*. *Embustero* differs in intensity.

Thus, we need to create opportunities to teach, acquire, and practice intensifying elements and expressions in the learning environment. We would like to stress again that there is a body of literature that discusses the acquisition and teaching of pragmatics (e.g., Félix-Brasdefer, 2004, 2007, 2008 [a, b, c], 2019; Félix-Brasdefer and Cohen, 2012; Félix-Brasdefer and Hasler-Barker, 2015; Halenko and Jones, 2011; Ishihara and Cohen, 2010; Taguchi, 2019). It would be impossible to discuss the literature here. Suffice it to say that there is an absence of research related to teaching and learning how to express intensification. Félix-Brasdefer’s (2008 a, b) work on the teaching of mitigation can inform us. Still, we need to extract material from it to conduct and measure the acquisition of intensification through explicit instruction.

Uninstructed pragmatic acquisition, such as one obtained from experience in a study abroad program or working in a community where the target language is the lingua franca, may increase pragmatic awareness. Small increases are usually detected in learners when exposed to these experiences (e.g., Félix-Brasdefer, 2004). So while we can ascertain that learners who participate in community-based or study abroad programs do not reach native-like pragmatic proficiency, they still progress. Therefore, here are only several questions we may need to explore:



1. How can we expose learners to natural, spontaneous language use related to linguistic intensification, and
2. How can explicit instruction mediate the acquisition of linguistic intensification?

To respond to the first question, and because classroom language instruction is limited in time, we suggest using live media with sound and visuals (e.g., YouTube, a documentary about wildlife, a show related to everyday life). Since digital resources can be replayed (even at home), they can immerse learners in several aspects related to intensification. In addition, by replaying, learners receive multiple input avenues, and instructors have numerous opportunities to point to relevant concerns of intensification.

However, it is crucial that instructors attend to only a few intensifying elements at a time since too many features unrelated to intensification may appear in a video clip or a digital source. Perhaps organizing and pre-selecting a few linguistic intensification elements would be preferable for learners, and only presenting one short clip at a time may be advisable. We should select material that delivers the most simple to the more complex elements. For example, if we show snippets or clips of a show every day or every other day in the classroom, the language instructor can pre-select features and explain them beforehand. If novice learners first begin with simple lexical items (e.g., the use of ‘really’ and ‘so’ or in Spanish, *verdaderamente*, and *tan*), they can identify them in the clip, practice them in class, and then repeat them at home. For younger learners, a children’s program may support learning, and for adult learners, a *telenovela* (a soap opera), a documentary, and various other visual or digital tools. If, on the other hand, we are dealing with intermediate learners, it may well be that we can introduce them to phrases such as ‘of course!’ (*claro que sí* or *claro*) beforehand and have them identify the forms as they watch the clip.

TV commercials and online ads may expose learners to instances of authentic intensification. They tend to be short, exaggerate, repeat, reformulate, and compare and contrast. They also attempt to hone in on a specific product. We can have learners imitate, or shadow, TV commercials’ discourses and online ads providing they are age-appropriate.

We should note that live media and socially-based online or digital-based language learning activities create interactions that can reach learners of diverse proficiencies. A caveat: We also need to consider the target dialect of Spanish or English that the learner needs to be exposed to since we do not want learners to acquire and use intensification elements that may not be appropriate to their social environment. There are many instructional sites online; however, we need to vet them since many do not attend practices related to pragmatics.

The second question relates to how explicit instruction can address intensification. A response to this question has to rely on instructors' expertise and their ability to craft lessons that combine direct instruction and immediate practice. For instance, task-based learning can contribute to increasing pragmatic competence (e.g., González-Lloret, 2019). However, concerning the acquisition of intensification elements, research, unfortunately, has been limited. Further, task modality differences have to weigh whether written or oral tasks are more suitable for exposing learners to intensification linguistic behaviors. For instance, Fukuya and Martínez-Flor (2008) compared modality effectiveness between telephone messages and written discourse (i.e., emails). We learn from the study that we can employ various discourse modalities to measure input effectiveness. In brief, we recommend using a multi-modal approach to reach learners to ensure that we tackle the acquisition of intensifying elements from different angles.

### **SHAPING OUR THOUGHTS: TEACHING AND RESEARCHING INTENSIFICATION**

In this section, and before presenting a schema or draft, we first discuss the difficulties we face regarding teaching and learning about intensification, the challenges researchers may also wish to address. Later, the section discusses issues concerning instruction. We stress throughout this discussion that the acquisition of intensification is deeply rooted in explicit instruction. However, we briefly have suggested that learners exposed to community-based language learning or study abroad programs may acquire nuanced aspects of intensification. Later, we present a draft targeted to mid- to advanced learners (although it can benefit beginners if we adjust it). The proposed draft represents only a guide since it has not been empirically tested. The material in it reflects data from oral narratives. An instructor or researcher can supplement or revise the contents with respective age and culturally appropriate examples.

Research has not thoroughly investigated the instructional effects of task-based learning and intensification, as noted before. Intervention-related research has primarily focused on the acquisition of pragmatics, not particularly on intensification. To the best of my knowledge and writing this current text, Lorenz (1999) and Paradis (2000c) discuss the teaching of intensifying adjectives in linguistic behavior among learners. Surprisingly, a thorough search on teaching about intensification yielded research on 'intensifying teaching.' However, it did not generate material about teaching intensification to non-native speakers of English or Spanish.

Research on teenage talk, such as Palacios Martínez and Nuñez Pertejo (2012), can inform instruction, but it does not deal with instruction per

se. Similar to other studies, it deals with how intensification manifests in English-speaking adults as opposed to teenagers. The study merits mentioning since we can extrapolate from it to shape language instruction for teen learners.

There is, however, a plethora of studies related to task-based language learning and teaching in L2 pragmatics (e.g., Alcón-Soler, 2008; Félix-Brasdefer, 2019; González-Lloret, 2019; Taguchi, 2011, 2015). One of the critical concerns of the second language (L2) or foreign language (FL) instruction is that it is limited in the range of activities that instructors can formulate in a classroom environment. As a result, language instructors have to create social contexts that resemble or simulate interactions related to real-life ones.

Regarding teaching this socio-pragmatic and affective phenomenon, we must keep in mind that we want learners to exhibit pragmatic knowledge and competence. That is, we want them to know the conventions of language use and be aware of the linguistic resources they have available to them according to their current L2 or FL environment. We also want them to be able to use the target language in a contextually appropriate manner. In other words, we want our learners to exhibit socio-pragmatic *and* linguistic competence. To this end, we make several recommendations that may require a partnership between instructors and researchers, although instructors can launch them independently.

## 1. Recommendation for a pilot study

Goal: To understand the relationship between proficiency and the acquisition of simple to more complex intensification elements

According to proficiency level, investigate expressions of intensification and create a hierarchical map that illustrates learners' behaviors.

Since learners do not come to us as empty language vessels, we need to ensure that they are aware of their first language's socio-pragmatic behaviors, their L1. Said differently, learners bring to the table the linguistic behaviors of the L1 and the culture associated with it. Depending on their age and L2 proficiency, they may rely on their L1 to construct intensified expressions. A second important aspect is that learners gather pragmatic knowledge from their first culture, which *may not* resemble or map onto the target language.

## 2. Recommendation for a pilot study

Goal: To identify and classify intensification elements according to similarities in L1

Investigate the intensifying linguistic elements that are similar to the learners' L1 and L2. Then determine the aspects that are presumably acquired first.

It is essential to remember that intensification is rarely explicitly discussed in language learning and teaching curricula and books. Language lessons on the English superlative are an excellent example of this disparity (e.g., 'the most' or '+est' as in biggest). While we have lessons related to this grammatical feature, matters related to escalating other than using the superlative are uncommon (e.g., syntactic, prosodic, repetition, lexical). For instance, we should expose learners of English to the uses of 'totally,' 'really,' as in 'really great' as opposed to 'the greatest.' Likewise, in Spanish, the superlative is represented by different forms than those of English. In Spanish, for instance, we have the gender-based morphological ending *-ismo(a)* similar to the 'most' or *-est* in English. The challenge may manifest in learners' ability to distinguish gender in nouns while also adding morphological features (e.g., *mano grandísima, mesa grandísima*, 'big hand,' 'big table,' as opposed to *edificio altísimo, bellísima flor*). Learners of Spanish also need to be exposed to alternative lexical and syntactic structures that escalate. For example, they should be exposed to ones such as *un edificio súper alto, un edificio bien alto* ('a super tall building,' 'a very tall building'), *flor bellísima, bellísima flor* ('beautiful flower.'). Thus, additional attention is needed to design instruction related to conveying maximum degrees Spanish.

Many other strategies, devices, expressions, and features, among others, need to be dealt with explicitly. For instance, we have found that learners tend to circumlocute or avoid using several critical elements to mitigate when speaking (Flores-Ferrán and Lovejoy, 2015). Thus, we can assume this same linguistic behavior is also plausible regarding using intensifying elements.

### 3. Recommendation

Goal: To create a representation of L2 intensifying elements informed by linguistic elements, not by proficiency

Create a pilot study that captures stages of intensifier acquisition. It can first examine the expressions of lexical intensifiers such as adjectives or adverbs. Later, it can then investigate the expression of rhetorical strategies (e.g., repetition, reformulation) or more complex linguistic elements. After, address the use of prosody. Alternatively, we can create a reverse model. We can begin first with prosodic features plus non-verbal gestures and later capture other linguistic intensifying elements.

Unlike writing, which we plan and edit, oral communication is instantaneous. Learners face many challenges when producing expressions that may require

them to escalate, increase illocution, or highlight or amplify an expression. If they rely on their L1, they may inappropriately transfer the L1's linguistic devices and strategies to their target language, something we would like them to avoid.

#### 4. Recommendation

Goal: To probe acquisitional patterns of intensification elements based on L1 similarities

Using a psycholinguistic approach, design a pilot study that investigates the acquisition of only several similar intensifying features. Measure learners' reaction time and match it with how they detect intensification elements in L1 and L2. This protocol relies on tools to time learners' reactions or responses.

I have often underscored that the kernel of learners' challenges is here: When learners are shaping their thoughts as they speak, they are also simultaneously constructing utterances that they deem are grammatical, pragmatic, *and* can best represent what they mean to say. Their thought process is complex since learners also need to consider whether they need to escalate their statements. Moreover, they need to process these thoughts with how the expressions fulfill the appropriate social context given the type of interlocutor(s) and discursive context. These processing activities represent a heavy cognitive load when a learner is speaking. When writing, the challenge may not be as steep since they may edit, re-write, revise, and so forth. Nonetheless, the process remains difficult since many learners rely on translators when writing (albeit digital or dictionary-based), which often does not provide a meaningful interpretation since the translations do not consider contextual cues.

#### 5. Recommendation

Goal: To understand if intensification is acquired and expressed similarly in oral and written discourse

Design a timed task to measure reaction time as learners detect intensification elements in written and oral discourses. We can measure this task by learner proficiency. We can also design a multi-modal approach to determine whether proficiency levels have different reaction times when listening to or reading text containing intensifying elements.

There is yet another challenge that learners face. We know that intensification manifests with various linguistic elements (e.g., morphology, lexical items). Therefore, many Spanish and English expressions have to be explicitly treated in instructional settings to enable learners to understand the appropriate context to use them. For instance, when is it appropriate to use *Ándale*, *Dáale*, *Madre Mía* ('Go ahead,' 'Get going,' 'My gosh,' or 'My my'—not literal)? We can consider a similar position when teaching about English intensification. So we must plan the best way to provide authentic input (Kanwit, Terán, Pisabarro Sarrió, 2017).

## 6. Recommendation

Goal: To measure awareness of linguistic phrases that intensify and understand intermediate and advanced learners' awareness

Investigate how learners notice, recognize, and use cultural expressions to intensify in specific settings or scenarios in the target language. The protocol can present different scenarios, so they match the most suitable phrase.

Learners may not be aware of the rhetorical tools they have available in their L2. That is, we may need to introduce how these strategies can function to intensify communication. These are essential strategies that can contribute to their L2 approximating the speech of native speakers.

## 7. Recommendation

Goal: To measure appropriate uses of repetitions and reformulations

Expose learners to appropriate repetition strategies so they can identify when it is appropriate to repeat. We can perform this task orally (by acting) so learners can identify which utterances are pragmatically acceptable. This task may be suitable for oral skits or short interactions.

We know that a great deal of effort has gone into empirical work on learners' instruction, learning, and assessments related to pragmatics. Studies conducted by Culpeper, Mackey, and Taguchi (2018), Ishihara and Cohen (2010), and Taguchi (2019), for instance, serve as foundations for our language research and instruction of pragmatics. In addition, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) have suggested that:

“For applied linguists, especially those concerned with communicative language learning and teaching, cross-cultural research in pragmatics is essential in coping with the applied aspect of the issue of universality: To what extent is it possible to specify the particular pragmatic rules of use of a given language, rules which second language learners will have to acquire to attain successful communication in the target language?” (p. 196)

In sum, and from research and instructional perspectives, we first should consider these few comprehensive questions of the many that arise about how we envision initial research projects and their relationship to language acquisition and instruction:

1. What role does the L1 of learners play in the learning of L2 pragmatic behavior related to intensification?
2. Which linguistic aspects related to intensification are acquired first or during early learning stages?
3. What kinds of social interactions are best suited for the acquisition of intensification so that we can measure progress?
4. Can we investigate the acquisition of intensification among beginners, intermediate, and advanced learners, their thresholds according to the degree of difficulty?
5. How can we measure progress; what modalities are suited for capturing the attainment of intensification?

Tatsuki (2019) has noted that teachers seem to be responsible for creating and developing materials that supplement language instruction. To add to this statement, and on a separate subject, we need to consider language education programs: They need to address the teaching of pragmatics.

In the following section, we provide a draft (a proposal) that may help organize the priorities regarding intensification teaching.

### **A DRAFT FOR TEACHING LINGUISTIC INTENSIFICATION**

Since we briefly discussed teaching, learning, and research issues concerning the pragmatics of intensification, we now move to provide a generalized foundation for organizing language instruction and inform research. The draft does not provide a comprehensive list of all the linguistic elements that function to intensify, for it would be impossible to do so. It does not intend to suggest that we teach and learn *all* linguistic elements in a classroom setting.

Also, we need to incorporate intensifying aspects gradually. We need to concentrate on aspects that are compatible with proficiency levels first. Further, we should progressively introduce linguistic elements and slowly navigate through them to ensure acquisition.

The proposed draft does not fully address gradability. It is a concern language instruction needs to consider. Namely, we need to consider how a learner acquires the notions related to the range and degrees of intensified elements and the contexts in which they can use them. The proposal's primary goal is to outline strategies, devices, and other elements and contrast them with non-intensifying counterparts.

We mostly follow Mancera Rueda (2009) and Albelda Marco (2005) in creating this draft. The draft contents appear in Flores-Ferrán (2020; 2018; 2017; 2010). While initially, we may find that the current draft is more applicable for intermediate and advance learners, that is not the case. Its goal is to create awareness and open a conversation among instructors and researchers to develop a similar one for *all* learners.

The draft first addresses adjectives and adverbial intensifiers since researchers have documented their use among native speakers. However, it does not fully explain or demonstrate increased levels from lower to higher gradations among the items presented in every entry. Portero Muñoz (1997) posits that we can divide intensifiers into two categories. Some increase a grade similar to comparatives; others, maximizers express the highest degree possible on a scale. We should consider these observations when designing lessons and instructional materials or researching the effects of task-based instruction or any instruction model.

The basic principle behind the draft is to present the non-intensified expression or item to learners then contrast the term(s) or phrase(s) with an intensified one. In other words, we should expose learners to both. This way, they can capture a sense of escalation and persuasiveness that an expression may entail within a context. We also recommend organizing the linguistic elements according to learners' proficiencies to reduce the challenges of understanding the definitions and simultaneously understanding the appropriate contexts. Finally, we need to consider both the pragmatic and grammatical rules and ensure that learners receive input commensurate to their proficiency and age.

Researchers can also inform their thoughts about how they wish to investigate the acquisition of several elements explained in the draft. For instance, a pilot project can investigate stylistic intensifier use among advanced learners compared to native speakers. As an alternative, a pilot study can examine the use of quantifiers among different proficiency levels.

Before presenting the draft, we have included examples from my research. Thus, we should revise the draft to make it suitable for the diverse learner age



groups and proficiencies. In other words, many examples may not be ideal for children but rather for teens and adults.

We also need to recall that there are marked differences between the morphological features we use to intensify. For example, suffixes and prefixes are more productive in Spanish than in English when it comes to intensification.

### 6.1 Chart: Adjectival/Adverbial Intensifiers

<i>Non-intensified</i>	<i>Intensification elements</i>	<i>Escalated in context ↑</i>	<i>Function</i>
<i>Este café es o está bueno.</i> 'The coffee is good.'	<i>Muy, súper+adj</i> <i>adj+-ismo</i> 'very good,' 'really good,' 'super good'	<i>Este café está súper bueno o buenísimo.</i> 'The coffee is super good.' 'the best'	To increase to a high value or quality, to insist, to convince
<i>Este café es o está bueno.</i> 'The coffee is good.'	<i>Increíblemente, absolutamente, extraordinariamente, demasiado</i> 'incredibly good,' 'absolutely great,' 'extraordinarily,' 'really good'	<i>Este café es o está increíblemente rico.</i> 'This coffee is incredibly good.'	To increase value to maximum or increase appreciation
<i>La novela es buena.</i> 'The novel is good.'	<i>Realmente</i> 'really'	<i>La novela es realmente buena.</i> 'The novel is really good.'	To increase validity of what was said, to insist, persuade
<i>Estoy agradecida.</i> 'I am grateful.'	<i>Enormemente</i> 'enormously'	<i>Estoy enormemente agradecida.</i> 'I am enormously grateful.'	To increase size, volume, depth
<i>Sí</i> 'Yes.'	<i>Exactamente</i> 'exactly,' 'sure'	A: <i>Va a llover.</i> B: <i>Exactamente.</i> A: 'It is going to rain.' B: 'Exactly.'	To verify or increase agreement, to confirm with certainty
<i>Sí</i> 'Yes.'	<i>Perfectamente</i> 'perfectly'	<i>El ensayo fue perfectamente escrito.</i> 'The essay was perfectly written.'	To express maximum degree
<i>Grande</i> 'large,' 'big'	<i>+esco (a)</i> 'huge,' 'gigantic'	<i>Ese árbol es gigantesco.</i> 'That tree is gigantic.'	To amplify size

<i>Bella(o), linda(o)</i>	'beautiful,' 'pretty'	<i>Tu casa es bella.</i> <i>Tu casa es preciosa.</i> <i>Tu casa es espectacular.</i>	To amplify aesthetically pleasing descriptor
'beautiful,' 'pretty'	+osa, +oso, +ar ---	'Your house is beautiful.' 'Your house is precious' 'Your house is spectacular.'	
<i>Horrible</i>	+ciudad, desastre	<i>Ese accidente fue horrible.</i>	To amplify
'ugly,' 'horrible'	'+city,' 'disastrous'	<i>Ese accidente fue una atrocidad.</i> 'That accident was horrible.' 'That accident was an atrocitiy.'	negative value

Albelda Marco (2005) has noted that other adjectival forms, such as *bárbaro* 'barbaric,' *fatal* 'fatal,' *divino* 'divine,' *horroroso* 'horrible,' and so forth, also function to intensify depending on their contexts. Further, Ruiz Gurillo (1999) documented adjectival and adverbial intensifiers we form with *de* in Spanish. English equivalents do not exist for many of these. For example, *de chuparse los dedos* (used in contexts where dinner or food is tasty, one could say, 'The dinner was finger-licking.'). The expression *de mala muerte* (for contexts in which a person, a film, a job, or task is awful), *de película* (used in contexts when something or someone looks good—no English equivalent). There are also expressions, such as *La muerte en bicicleta* (literal: 'death on a bike'), used in contexts where a problem, person, or condition is grandiose, as in *Ese jefe es la muerte en bicicleta*, 'That boss is awful.'

## 6.2 Chart: Varied Quantifiers (Count and Non-Count)

<i>Non-intensified</i>	<i>Intensification elements</i>	<i>Escalated in context</i> ↑	<i>Function</i>
<i>[nosotros]</i> <i>Tenemos</i> <i>problemas.</i>	<i>Todos, cada uno</i> 'Everyone,' 'each of us'	<i>Todo el mundo tiene problemas.</i> <i>Todos tenemos problemas.</i>	To attribute the same quality to everyone
'We' (all-inclusive)	'the world'	<i>Cada uno tiene problemas.</i> <i>Todo el mundo . . .</i> 'Everyone has problems.' 'Each of us has problems.'	To exaggerate To increase scope of inclusion
<i>Mucho+</i> 'more'	<i>mucho más</i> 'much+ more'	<i>Él tiene mucho más dulce que su hermano.</i> 'He has much more candy than his brother.'	To compare and escalate the value of one over another

<i>mucho</i> 'many,' 'a lot,' or 'lots'	<i>montón,</i> <i>monstruo(a)</i> 'a bunch of,' 'a huge amount of'	<i>Ella tiene un montón de</i> <i>prendas.</i> 'She has a huge amount of jewelry.'	To increase the value of mas- sive noun-count nouns (e.g., time, money, work)
<i>No es</i> 'is not'	<i>nada de</i> 'not even'	<i>Este café no está nada de</i> <i>caliente.</i> 'The coffee is not even hot.'	To increase nega- tive notion, to contradict

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### 6.3 Chart: Precision Markers

<i>Non-intensified</i>	<i>Intensification elements</i>	<i>Escalated in context</i> ↑	<i>Function</i>
<i>Así es</i> 'that's the way it is'	<i>Exactamente, precisamente, efectivamente, correcto, claro</i> 'exactly,' 'precisely'	<i>Eso fue lo que dije exactamente.</i> 'That's exactly what I said.'	To underscore or highlight what was said, to reiterate with maximum certainty
<i>Cierto</i> 'yes,' 'true'	<i>Eso mismo, así mismo es, correcto, cierto</i> 'exactly'	A: <i>X es un idiota.</i> B: <i>¿Qué dijiste?</i> A: <i>Eso mismo. Dije que es un idiota.</i> <i>Así mismo es.</i> A: 'X is an idiot.' B: 'What did you say?' A: 'Exactly that.'	To avoid repeating what was said, to verify, to confirm with maximum certainty
<i>Correcto, sin duda</i> 'correct,' 'right'	<i>A la verdad, de verdad, verdad que sí, indudablemente, realmente</i> 'truly,' 'undoubtedly,' 'really'	<i>El gerente es verdaderamente generoso.</i> 'The manager is truly generous.'	To emphasize, underscore, affirm, to confirm with maximum certainty
<i>No</i> 'no'	<i>Nunca, jamás</i> 'never,' 'ever'	<i>Jamás iré a ver ese doctor, nunca.</i> 'I will never see that doctor again, ever.'	To affirm and confirm with maximum certainty

### 6.4 Chart: Morphemic Intensifiers

<i>Non-intensified</i>	<i>Intensification elements</i>	<i>Escalated in context</i> ↑	<i>Function</i>
<i>Buen+noun.</i> 'good + noun'	<i>+achón</i> ---	<i>Es un buenachón.</i> 'He is a great guy.'	To escalate the quality of x (x=person)
<i>Comió pan</i> 'ate+bread'	<i>+azo</i> ---	<i>Se bajó un bocazo de pan.</i> 'He downed a mouthful of bread.'	To enhance or escalate the size of a portion
<i>Dinero</i> 'money'	<i>+al</i> ---	<i>Tenía un dineral invertido en casas.</i> 'He had a load of money invested in houses.'	To escalate the size or portion of x

## 6.5 Chart: Affirmative/Confirmative

<i>Non-intensified</i>	<i>Intensification elements</i>	<i>Escalated in context</i> ↑	<i>Function</i>
<i>verdad</i> 'true'	<i>Doy mi palabra de honor, doy mi palabra, he dicho, te lo juro, lo aseguro.</i> 'I give you my word,' 'I said,' 'I swear,' 'I assure you'	<i>¡Te juro que no es mentira!</i> 'I swear, it is not a lie.' or 'I swear it is the truth.'	To swear, confirm, corroborate, to convince, persuade
<i>claro</i> 'of course'	<i>Naturalmente, por supuesto</i> 'naturally,' 'of course'	<i>Claro que sí, que voy. Pues cla:::ro</i> 'Of course, I'm going.'	To reaffirm or confirm

## 6.6 Chart: Affective-Related Expressions

<i>Non-intensified</i>	<i>Intensification elements</i>	<i>Escalated in context</i> ↑	<i>Function</i>
<i>Pasar bien</i> 'have a good time'	Syntactic modification Exclamation, prosodic	<i>¡Lo bien que lo pasamos en la fiesta!</i> 'What a time we had at the party!'	To stress, emphasize, highlight positive activity
<i>Estoy ansiosa.</i> 'I'm anxious.'	<i>Metaphoric: Trepar paredes</i> 'Climbing walls'	<i>Está que trepa paredes esperando la decisión.</i> 'She's climbing the walls waiting for a decision.'	To elevate a human condition, to exaggerate

## STYLISTIC INTENSIFYING STRATEGIES

While we may not have equivalent expressions in both languages, it is essential to note that rhetorical strategies also persuade by escalating and amplifying. In addition to this observation, we add that the following expressions are culturally contextualized and inherently escalated. That is, they may not have an equivalent non-intensified alternative:

## 6.7 Chart: Stylistic Intensifying Strategies

<i>Non-intensified</i>	<i>Intensification elements</i>	<i>Escalated in context</i> ↑	<i>Function</i>
<i>El auto no es bueno.</i> 'It's no good.'	Repetition Reformulation	<i>Él auto no es nada nada nadita de bueno.</i> 'It's absolutely no good.'	To emphasize, persuade
<i>El es bueno.</i> 'He is good.'		<i>El es tan y tan bueno.</i> 'He's so so good.'	
<i>Hace tiempo no nos vemos.</i> 'We haven't seen each other in a while.'	Hyperbole	<i>Parece siglos que no nos vemos.</i> 'It seems like centuries since we've last seen each other.'	To escalate a length of time
--	Tautology	<i>Vive tu vida.</i> 'Live your life.'	To reiterate
--	Pleonasm	<i>Baja abajo. Sube arriba.</i> <i>Come tu comida.</i> 'Climb upstairs.' 'Eat your food.'	To increase degree of action
--	Metaphor	<i>Acaba, que el tiempo es oro.</i> 'Hurry, time is important.'	To increase activity or speed, hurry up
<i>Ese carro no es bueno.</i> 'The car is bad.'	Reformulations	<i>Ese carro es bien malo, no sirve.</i> 'The car is no good. The car is really bad, doesn't work.'	To emphasize, further explain

## INSTRUCTIONAL INTERVENTIONS

As I previously noted, teaching about intensification poses many challenges since there is a lack of instructional material related to it in instructional textbooks and curricula. Instead, the instructors are generally responsible for including aspects of intensification and pragmatics in their instructional activities. Further, language testing mandates issued by states tend to scratch the surface when it comes to teaching and evaluating the acquisition of the socio-pragmatics and cultural affective aspects. Their focus has remained mainly on grammar and communicative competence, slightly touching upon

culture—but not necessarily addressing pragmatics. As such, there are several interventions that we can implement to expose learners. However, we note that we cannot teach all elements:

1. Create awareness-raising exercises first, such as think-aloud for intensification recognition.
2. Provide modeling with skits, including the use of prosodic features that intensify.
3. Design role-plays to gradually incorporate the simple to the more complex elements of intensification.
4. Demonstrate film clips and have students identify intensifying elements.
5. Develop or identify authentic digital tasks so learners can practice at home.
6. Create a variety of scenarios and dialogues so learners can complete them with their intensified responses.
7. Design lexicon around gradability using lexical intensification items, then present more complex expressions. Have learners distinguish which forms are more escalated.
8. Select exercises that include oral or written discourse completion tasks to complete an utterance according to the scenario.
9. Select or create original recordings that contain intensified language, and have learners repeat, select, or emulate them in class and at home.
10. Create mock telephone conversations that include intensified elements.
11. Create contrasting exercises in which learners identify mitigated versus intensified utterances.
12. Use skits, scenarios, and role-plays resembling real-life interactions that require speakers or interlocutors to intensify their communication.
13. Review newspapers, magazines, and other printed matter so that learners can underline elements that point to intensification.
14. Include exercises that combine learners with native speakers to have learners emulate natives' communicative behavior.
15. Use cultural resources from the L1 to contrast L2 pragmatic intensification.
16. Assess the acquisition or use of intensification by employing observation versus written tests.
17. Select and digitally record TV commercial clips and have learners identify intensifying elements or expressions.
18. Use online instructional sites: Search multiple ESL or Spanish sites using 'intensifiers' and 'qualifiers' for classroom instruction.

19. Create exercises for at-home practice, such as short skits or activities that prompt the use of intensification elements, and help learners draw connections from their homes to the classroom.
20. Have learners search for intensification by themselves (e.g., on TV, online) to assess their awareness.

We also need to pay close attention to prosody and the role it plays when teaching intensification. Researchers have noted that pragmatic meaning and prosody are highly context-dependent (e.g., Briz Gómez, 1998; Hidalgo Navarro, 2011; Romero-Trillo and Newell, 2012). Learners must be exposed to as many prosodic alternations as possible and practice using intensification in a meaningful manner, not artificially. They can use scenarios, videos, YouTube, and many other sources to identify and emulate prosodic features used by native speakers. Further, we must note here that concerning prosodic features, we are not only referring to exclamations. We need to incorporate suprasegmentals, intonation, pauses, stress, even silence and discourse markers, and other linguistic behaviors that may emerge in natural conversations. For instance, how do we prosodically intensify an apology? We can present one model, one that contains the escalated expressions with the simplified versions a–d:

- |  |                            |
|--|----------------------------|
| a. <i>Perdón.</i>                      | ‘I’m sorry.’               |
| b. <i>Lo siento mucho.</i>             | ‘I’m very sorry.’          |
| c. <i>¡Ay, cuánto lo siento!</i>       | ‘Oh! I’m very sorry.’      |
| d. <i>¡Ay, lo siento muchí:::simo!</i> | ‘Oh, I’m so very so:::ry.’ |

While the previous paradigm may represent a more simplified activity, we can construct a more listener-engaged intensifying apology:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| a. <i>Lo siento.</i>                                  | ‘I’m sorry.’                                    |
| b. <i>Lo siento. ¿Estás bien?</i>                     | ‘I’m sorry. Are you okay?’                      |
| c. <i>Lo siento. ¿La lastimé? De veras lo siento.</i> | ‘I’m sorry. Did I hurt you? Really, I’m sorry.’ |

Depending on the context, a learner may choose all of the above or just one. For instance, if we provide a scenario such as:

“If a young man bumps into an elderly person, what option(s) does he choose to apologize?” Or,

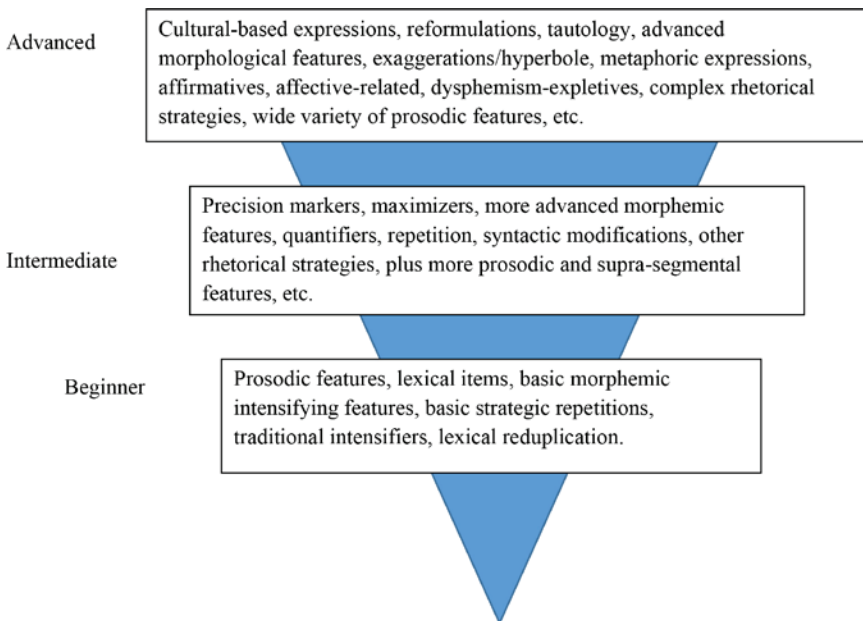


“If a young woman did not show up for an engagement with her best friend, what is the most suitable alternative(s) she should choose when she speaks with her for the first time?”

Although this exercise may be appropriate for a printed/reading activity, instructors can use their voices or employ others’ voices and provide the options through audio or use both audio and visual prompts. Role plays also represent unique and enjoyable learning activities for language learners of all levels of proficiency.

### A SUGGESTED HIERARCHY FOR TEACHING INTENSIFICATION IN ENGLISH AND SPANISH

The following schema illustrates a triangle where, at the base, we introduce fewer categories of intensification among novice or beginner learners. In the middle section, we add more categories, and at the advanced level, we find the more abstract or complex intensifying elements in the top segment. The intensifying elements’ distribution largely depends on how they may map



**Figure 6.1. Suggested Schema for the Distribution of Intensification. Source: Created by the author**

onto the learners' L1. Naturally, the schema should be adjusted or revised according to dialect, cultural orientations, age, and learners' proficiencies.

At the early stages of acquisition and the bottom of the pyramid, we can expose beginners to lexical items such as 'so,' 'very,' 'really,' 'too,' and so forth. For Spanish learners, we can begin with *tan, muy, verdaderamente, realmente, bien*. We should present simple syntactic structures as 'I am so tired.' (*Estoy muy cansado(a)*). We can also add other linguistic behaviors, such as repetition 'I am very very tired.' (*Estoy muy muy cansado(a)*). We can expose beginners to adjectivals and adverbial phrases, including morphological features that require the least amount of complexity, such as superlatives in English and Spanish: 'big-biggest' (*grande-grandísimo(a)*). We may also add rhetorical devices such as reduplication in 'red red' (*rojo rojísimo*).

We can present prosodic features such as 'so::: tired' (*bie:::n cansado*). Beginners can also be exposed to simple semantic verbs of motion in both languages at the early stages of acquisition. We can introduce prosodic features such as vowel elongation and prosodic elevation.

We recommend introducing a new lexicon and new structures at intermediate stages of acquisition—for example, precision markers as 'exactly' (*exactamente*). In particular, we should introduce lexical items that are cognates to facilitate the acquisition. We can also present more advanced morphemic features such as 'a load of money' (*un dineral*). In addition, introduce prosodic and suprasegmental features and syntactic ones that are more complex, 'a hu:::ge load of money' (*pero mucho mu:::cho dinero*). Intermediate learners can also navigate maximizers 'totally,' 'completely' (*totalmente, completamente*). In addition, they can benefit from learning how to employ approximators such as 'almost' (*casi*). These expressions should be presented in contexts such as *casi me muero*, and 'almost' as in 'I almost died.' Intermediate learners can also benefit from learning the use of unbound morphemes and syntactic alerts, 'Oh, boy . . . ' and *Contra* (no exact equivalent in English).

We can also expose more fluent or advanced learners to reformulations such as 'He's got a huge load of money,' 'He's loaded.' (*Tiene un dineral, Está lleno de plata*). Introducing more advanced morphological features at this stage is also recommended. For example, we can present *azo* as *cuerp-azo* ('great body') or *ón* as in *bofetón* ('huge smack') to advanced Spanish learners. These features do not have English equivalents. Affirmatives such as 'of course,' 'surely' (*claro, verdaderamente, seguramente*) can be presented. Advanced learners can also learn culturally-based expressions in English and Spanish and hyperbole: 'I haven't seen you in a million years' (*No te he visto en un millón de años*) and 'Gosh, you're sharp!' (*¡Qué listo eres!*).

While expletives and dysphemic terms may be plausible to learn at an advanced level, we need to be cautious since these terms are culturally rooted.

We need to ensure that learners use them appropriately. They should also have a wide range of lexicon to reformulate or repeat, such as ‘no never’ (*nunca, jamás*). We can also expose advanced learners to hyperbole, metaphors, exaggeration, and swearing, always keeping in mind that these expressions may be culturally grounded and may prove challenging to acquire. A caveat: We should not expose learners of certain ages to a particular lexicon (e.g., swearing). We already have English and Spanish intensifiers that escalate and amplify communication without resorting to dysphemisms.

## CHAPTER 6 SUMMARY

This chapter centered on concerns related to the teaching, learning, and research of intensification among language learners. It explained the difficulties that learners face in acquiring the nuances of intensification. The chapter couched the problem based on the absence of instructional materials that address intensification. We also briefly dealt with the importance of explicit instruction and the teaching of pragmatics since intensification represents a pragmatic category that requires instructional attention.

The chapter also discussed the importance of exposing learners to micro- and macro-routines. For example, while we have suggested that study abroad and community-based language instruction may benefit learning about pragmatics, we still are faced with how best to research and teach the acquisition of intensification in a classroom environment. We also addressed several questions we need to explore and suggested pilot projects we may wish to undertake. These projects can bridge the current gap in our research and teaching practices. To that end, we presented several protocols.

We discussed several suggestions about how to expose learners to the pragmatics of intensification. Moreover, we proposed a draft or schemata containing examples of non-intensified and intensified expressions that reminded us of this phenomenon’s complexities. The chapter also underscored that research associated with the acquisition of intensification is needed. To that effect, it proposed a schema that distributes intensification elements according to proficiency levels. However, the schema needs to be adjusted to meet learners’ needs both linguistically and culturally.

## *Chapter 7*

# **Intensification in Computer-Mediated Communication**

Languages are dynamic, and with the advent of the internet, we should have expected many linguistic changes. Back when David Crystal (2006) wrote about ‘Netspeak,’ he referred to the language emerging on the internet as a language category with unique features attributable to only online communication. Since then, our online perspectives and practices have dramatically changed. Namely, in the twenty-first century, Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) manifests in a diversity of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, emails, instant messaging or texting, blogs, Instagram, and YouTube, to mention a few. These platforms or digital spaces have influenced how we express ourselves based on their purposes, constraints, and policies. In addition, mobile phones have expanded how we use language to communicate via text instead of calling. We may assume that linguistic changes occur slowly, but online communication linguistic changes have transpired quite rapidly.

Circumstances surrounding online communication may suggest that size, space, or other factors can influence this form of communication on a screen. Further, digital communication may employ paralinguistic devices and visual effects such as emoticons (i.e., emojis) and other non-verbal expressions. For instance, Dresner and Herring (2020) posit that emojis are indicators of emotion that serve an expressive function. Beyond these observations, we also have expressions such as acronyms, abbreviations, shortened spellings, and so on that may be popular among users of specific age groups (e.g., youth versus adults). Therefore, one may ask whether the phenomenon of intensification manifests similarly online as it does in oral or written discourses (e.g., oral narratives, conversations, legal documents, letters, books, stories, newspapers).

In brief, we know and have evidenced a variety of registers in CMC. Further, communication in these platforms can be dialogic and monologic, synchronous or asynchronous, and so forth, increasing the variety of linguistic forms that may emerge.

This chapter briefly delves into the manifestation of intensification in CMC. Much earlier, we had hypothesized that intensification would not be as pervasive online as in oral communication. The reasoning behind this hypothesis was brevity or economy. CMC requires typing and editing, and perhaps when we engage in online communication, we want to be brief, precise, and swift. Also, intensification would involve more linguistic material (e.g., repetition, reformulation, paralinguistic features, adverbial insertions). However, that may not be the case today. Youth and adults seem to prefer to communicate via texts.

Further, in business, emails and texting are legitimate ways of communicating. However, these communicative paths are rapidly changing. With this in mind, at this juncture, perhaps CMC resembles actual speech.

## EVIDENCE OF INTENSIFICATION IN CMC

Several studies have investigated expressions of intensification in CMC (e.g., Baron, 1998, 2003; Bulgin, Elford, Harding, Henley, Power, and Walters, 2008; Dresner and Herring, 2020; Gonzales, 2010; Tagliamonte, 2016; Tagliamonte and Denis, 2008; van Herk, 2009). Unfortunately, the research regarding intensification in CMC has focused on the expression of only several lexical items. This limited examination of lexical items makes it difficult to pinpoint how intensification manifests using the broad lens we depict in this book. Nonetheless, robust studies have reported that CMC language resembles that of oral communication. For instance, Barron (2009) has noted that instant messaging (IM) conversations appear more akin to face-to-face interactions than conventional writing. This perspective then suggests that concerning intensification, its expression should resemble that of oral communication.

We now draw a connection between the realization of intensification and online communication. We recall what we discussed earlier in the book about the affective or emotional aspect of intensification. Baron's (1998) seminal narrative on the linguistics of emails posits that email (as is the case of intensification) can have an emotional nature. Paralinguistic cues such as emojis and smileys seem to create an emotional effect (Dresner and Herring, 2020). The perspective set forth by Baron reminds us that intensification, therefore, can be pervasive in emails shadowing much of our speech. Other studies have also uncovered that intensification in online personal ads frequently contains

intensification elements (Gonzales, 2010). Findings from Gonzales's work point to how the forms and expressions employed in these types of ads tend to boost and amplify the semantic intensity of an object or an identity the writer wishes to describe.

To further substantiate the manifestation of intensification in CMC, we also find other research. For example, Tagliamonte (2016) uncovered various registers employed online (e.g., email, instant messages, phone texting, SMS, written). The study investigated the use of several intensifiers, among other linguistic aspects. Tagliamonte revealed several significant findings. First, teens navigate fluidly among complex online registers. Second, in online communication, intensifier use (e.g., 'really,' 'very,' 'pretty,' and 'so') was pervasive. Third, Tagliamonte found higher uses of intensifiers in email, IMs, and SMS than in written orthographic data. Fourth, 'so' exhibited the highest frequency of use than the other intensifiers under examination, perhaps for its brevity. Finally, and on a separate topic, Tagliamonte maintains that teens' grammar is not negatively affected by the use of online interactions as suggested by the media, teachers, and parents. Thus, this observation may be suggestive of the fact that their CMC is similar to oral communication.

In another study, Tagliamonte and Denis (2008) analyzed instant messaging (IM) by teens. Their research focus was to characterize language use in IM contexts, not to examine the intensification. Nevertheless, the study results attested to the use of hybrid registers among teens in IM interactions. That is, the authors concluded that IM is "firmly rooted in the model of extant language, reflecting the same structured heterogeneity (variation) and the same dynamic, ongoing processes of linguistic change" (p. 25). We gather then that it is plausible that the intensification in the IM environment among teens resembles that of their oral communication. To illustrate intensification online, an excerpt from the study follows. It demonstrates how two interlocutors discuss renting recording equipment:

[001] Ye guy were gonna do lotta different shit for sure  
[001] The songs are gonna totally range  
[999] For sure  
[001] so you come out tonight  
[999] i have to see, but I WILL try, i wanna . . .  
[001] is sooooo cheap (p. 25)

In the short excerpt, we find expressions related to intensification: 'lotta,' 'totally,' prosodic emphasis with 'WILL,' and vowel elongation with 'so.'

The earlier hypothesis I had, which suggested that intensification was not as ubiquitous in CMC because of economy, time, space, and other factors, has

not been substantiated. The studies, Baron (2003) and Tagliamonte and Denis (2008), in particular, do not support my hypothesis.

Bulgin, Elford, Harding, Henley, Power, Walters (2008) also investigated intensification and social patterning in CMC. The study attended to the use of intensifiers online among Newfoundlanders. In particular, they gathered data from a corpus of over 3000 intensifying adjectives extracted from public internet forums. The study results revealed, among other findings, that ‘so’ is the most common variant among urban females while ‘really’ is more prevalent in male communication. Examples set forth by Bulgin et al. (p. 110) are:

1. First year boys are so cute . . .
2. He is so punk rock.
3. Good thing we look so fabulous.
4. I love caramel log bars . . . they are soooooo good.

Noticeable in the previous clauses (1–4) is a prosodic feature, an elongated vowel to intensify (4). With caution, the authors maintain that “women use more emotional forms,” as noted in the literature documented by other researchers. In other words, they seem to suggest that certain intensifiers are “distinctly female” (p. 110). More specifically, females in the study used ‘so’ to boost the meanings of adjectives. The study also uncovered that males outside of St. John and the suburbs showed a preference to use ‘very.’ Thus, the authors proposed that ‘so’ has gathered a more widespread use competing with ‘very’ and ‘really.’

To summarize, most sociolinguistic research on intensification/intensifiers online has focused on lexical items. We noted earlier that one of the reasons studies have focused on lexical items is that English, unlike Spanish, does not count on a similar morphological system to intensify. Instead, English mainly relies on adverbs (‘really big’) and adjectives (‘huge problem’) or lexical items apart from these (‘pain’ as in ‘he’s a pain’) to escalate. Nonetheless, it is plausible to posit that the expression of intensification shadows that of oral communication at this juncture. Also, intensification does not seem to be constrained by online interactions or digital modalities. Instead, different patterns in intensification may result from social variables such as age and gender.

## CHAPTER 7 SUMMARY

The chapter stressed that CMC does not seem to affect how intensification manifests. Limited studies on CMC underscore this assertion. While the popular perspective of the media and other sources has suggested that CMC negatively affects language in the broad sense, most empirical research has

pointed in the opposite direction. Online communications represent registers like any other oral register. Thus, the language developed on the internet, particularly sites where we have found formal discourse such as academic, business, or medical work, may exhibit more formal registers. Conversely, we may discover informal registers in sites or communicative interactions dealing with teen talk or friendly or familiar chatting.

The chapter has noted an absence of empirical evidence in CMC that points to a new generation of intensification expressions. Instead, the status quo is quite similar to that of oral communication. Further, while we may claim that our communication is constrained relative to the type of online communication or platform we may use (e.g., IM versus emails), that is not the case. Time, limitations on characters permitted, space on the screen, and other factors have not created fewer opportunities for intensifying our communication. Instead, we have moved to employ visual effects, abbreviations, and shortened spellings, and we seem to express intensifiers similarly to our speech. We cited several studies in the chapter to substantiate this perspective, attesting to the use of intensifiers online.

The chapter also asserts that emojis and other non-verbal strategies on CMC are indicators of how users display emotions. Thus, they can function to escalate and mitigate the illocutionary force of communication. Since this is the case, it is plausible to suggest that emojis can serve a dual function: displaying emotion and intensifying communication.

We need to address research, however, on the expressions of intensification beyond lexical items. For instance, we have not uncovered whether rhetorical strategies that intensify oral communication, such as reformulations and repetitions, are common in CMC. I hypothesize they are not since they require more linguistic material and do not reflect brevity. Furthermore, we need to investigate whether other prosodic features related to intensification can manifest in CMC. Also, are the following prevalent in CMC: swearing, syntactic alerts, cultural expressions, and exaggerations/hyperbole, as discussed in the previous chapters? If so, how pervasive are they, and are they conditioned by social factors such as age, gender, and education?





## *Chapter 8*

# Ten Guiding Principles of Linguistic Intensification

This chapter delineates several guiding principles concerning linguistic intensification in English and Spanish. The purpose of the chapter is to highlight the most prevailing characteristics of intensification discussed in the book and inspire us to reflect on others that may appear in different categories of material not cited in this text. Therefore, we first begin by specifying a principle and briefly explaining the reasoning behind each in no specific order.

### **PRINCIPLE 1: INTENSIFICATION IS A SOCIO-PRAGMATIC-AFFECTIVE PHENOMENON**

We discussed linguistic intensification primarily as a pragmatic category with a socio-pragmatic and cultural-affective foundation in the book. It has an emotional component as it reflects a commitment of the speaker's or writer's self within a given proposition. We have noted that intensification functions to:

- persuade
- convince
- sway

and we, therefore,

- accentuate
- elevate
- heighten
- stress
- escalate

- emphasize
- amplify
- enlarge
- reinforce
- boost
- insist

We know that intensification is context-dependent. Namely, the context of the communication and the speaker/hearer interaction is essential. We also gather from studies that social or external factors affect the expression of intensification.

Our perspective underscores that the function of ‘emphasis’ cannot fully account for why intensification manifests. The speaker’s or writer’s commitment and judgment affect intensification regardless of the language used to communicate. Further, the speaker or writer determines the degree above the norm or escalation level needed to intensify communication.

### **PRINCIPLE 2: INTENSIFICATION MANIFESTS WITH VARYING DEGREES**

One critical aspect of intensification is that of modulation. We maintain that intensification is not a cut-and-dry phenomenon. There are degrees of intensification, and we modulate the degrees depending on our intentions. Further, we express intensification in different ways. For instance, speakers can elevate intensity by employing prosodic features and rhetorical strategies, whereas writers may use lexical items. There are no restrictions concerning what a speaker or writer employs to intensify. In brief, inherent in intensification is gradability or scalarity. Specifically, obscenities, dysphemisms, taboo terms, and opinionated language are often characteristic of maximized degrees of intensity.

### **PRINCIPLE 3: INTENSIFICATION IS CHARACTERISTIC OF ALL LANGUAGES, ALTHOUGH ITS REALIZATION MAY DIFFER**

Throughout the book, we shared studies investigating intensifiers or intensifying expressions in English and Spanish. Scholars who have examined intensification in English and Spanish agree that it is a pragmatic category. To enable us to affirm this perspective, we exemplified many instances in which intensification functioned to increase value or quality, underscore what was

said, verify or increase agreement, maximize and amplify reasoning, sway, and insist, among many other functions. However, this is what we do with any language.

We also noted that intensification functions were similar in both languages. Nevertheless, we cautiously suggest that intensification may have different manifestations in languages and dialects of a language. In other words, strengthening devices may differ. For instance, Spanish and many other languages are null-subject languages, and as such, we can omit subjects in speaking and writing. Unlike English, Spanish verb morphology informs person and number. So when a subject pronoun *yo* ('I') is overtly and repeatedly expressed, it may point to an intensifying effect but not always.<sup>1</sup> Conversely, since English requires an almost categorical expression of subjects, we cannot claim that a subject's presence may function to intensify. Instead, English can convey intensification by using other strategies, devices, or linguistic features to compensate for this difference, such as adding prosodic features to the subjects.

#### **PRINCIPLE 4: INTENSIFIERS SEMANTICALLY AND DIACHRONICALLY CAN EXHIBIT CHANGE**

Most studies conducted in English and Spanish intensification have examined the use of discrete lexical items or expressions, and they suggest that, over time, intensifying lexical items have changed. They maintain that lexical items are not static since, semantically, they can change over time. Their collocation may also vary over time. Studies also have pointed out a rise in frequency and a shift in meaning among several forms used to intensify. Further, several studies have also pointed to grammaticalization and expansion in use among speaker generations.

#### **PRINCIPLE 5: WE CANNOT IDENTIFY INTENSIFICATION BY USING A SPECIFIC WORD, EXPRESSION, OR PHRASE**

We have stressed that intensification does not refer to a specific term, expression, or phrase. Namely, there are multiple ways that speakers and writers intensify. Nonetheless, we know that specific lexical items or morphological ones function to amplify or escalate communication. Further, intensification can manifest with other non-lexical features such as prosodic ones (even whispering and voice imitations, or CMC, emoticons).

There are also culturally-related expressions that can contribute to escalating. To substantiate this claim, we have documented how speakers attempted to convince, defend, justify, accuse, complain, among other behaviors, many of which we illustrated not only using a word form. As a result, we uncovered numerous intensifying elements: adjectival and adverbial intensifiers, quantifiers, precision markers, morphemic-related features, confirmative-related forms, affective-related expressions, the use of exaggeration, and hyperbole, tautology, metaphors, and reformulations.

### **PRINCIPLE 6: LINGUISTIC INTENSIFICATION IS UBIQUITOUS**

There has been an abundance of research conducted on intensification in colloquial speech. We discussed how intensification manifests in various discourses: institutional and non-institutional, academic and informal speech, in courts, in medical-related practice, media, legal, CMC, political addresses, among other discourses. In other words, intensification is not restricted to a specific discursive environment and is quite pervasive in communication.

### **PRINCIPLE 7: PRAGMATICS AND SOCIOLINGUISTICS CAN COMPREHENSIVELY CAPTURE INTENSIFIED LINGUISTIC BEHAVIOR, WHILE A THEORY OF PERSUASION CAN SERVE AS AN UNDERPINNING.**

We described the value of approaching an investigation of linguistic intensification by way of a socio-pragmatic perspective. We substantiated this perspective by pointing out the numerous studies that have attended to intensification. Further, Persuasion Theory's underpinnings provide sufficient explanatory power to embrace the phenomenon of intensification. A theory must explain facts and make predictions, and the data presented thus far suggest that by intensifying, we attempt to change our listener's or reader's perspective.

### **PRINCIPLE 8: LEARNERS OF A SECOND OR FOREIGN LANGUAGE CAN ACQUIRE ASPECTS OF INTENSIFICATION.**

We have stressed the challenges that language learners face concerning the acquisition of intensification in general. Further, we have emphasized that

the acquisition of pragmatics remains underspecified in instruction and instructional materials. That said, we have noted that although learners can develop pragmatic competency with study abroad and community-based language exposure, learners require explicit instruction since these types of experiences cannot fully support learning the pragmatics of intensification. In particular, we discussed the micro and macro-routines and provided a hierarchical draft that we can probe in learning environments. We also introduced a draft and discussed teaching interventions, all of which would benefit instructional settings.

### **PRINCIPLE 9: INTENSIFICATION MANIFESTS IN COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION (CMC).**

Digitally, we employ intensifying elements similar to those that manifest in oral communication. In other words, adults, young and old, tend to intensify expressions using similar behavior to that of speech. We also know that intensification is prevalent in online communication. That said, there is a need to unveil whether rhetorical devices are as ubiquitous in CMC as they are in oral speech, an area that requires more research.

### **PRINCIPLE 10: SOCIO OR EXTERNAL CONCERNS MEDIATE INTENSIFICATION.**

At times, the manifestation of intensification may be socially stratified, but not always. In other words, speaker groups may prefer certain intensifying elements. Social or external factors such as age and gender differences are the most predominant factors that suggest the intensification may be stratified. Also, cultural norms and dialect differences may condition how linguistic intensification may manifest.

### **NOTE**

1. Spanish dialects tend to differ in the use of overt subjects. While some may have been documented with low instances of overt subjects, others have been reported as having higher rates of subject pronoun expression.



## Chapter 9

# Concluding Remarks

This book had several goals. The first goal was to create an awareness of linguistic intensification. To achieve this goal, we presented authentic oral and written excerpts that exhibited the use of intensifiers and intensifying elements (e.g., devices, strategies, features, expressions). We also discussed how ubiquitous this phenomenon is in our communication. To that end, we explored expressions of intensification in various discourses, oral and written, institutional and non-institutional, and in everyday conversations in English and Spanish. Finally, while the book's purpose was not to draw comparisons between the languages, we touch upon structural differences in the expression of intensification among them.

The book also presented findings from studies and data generated from research to examine ways to apply them to teaching. However, as a linguistic phenomenon, we cautiously assume that intensification is not part of the language teaching curriculum since I had to create supplementary materials to that effect in the many methodology courses I have taught. Moreover, language-learning textbooks are just beginning to address the teaching of pragmatics; therefore, texts, curriculum, and instructional materials may have not yet started to scratch the surface with aspects of linguistic intensification.

In the book, we have analyzed and discussed the realization of intensification using a wide lens. Throughout the text, we have stressed the perspective that intensification is a socio-pragmatic and affective phenomenon. It refers to ways in which we escalate, reinforce, and amplify our communication with the purpose of convincing, persuading, and swaying, among many other reasons. These concluding remarks discuss several additional concerns related to persuasion, degrees of intensification, prosody, online communication, and conflict talk.

We evidenced throughout the text how intensification operates as a socio-pragmatic *and* affective phenomenon. Nevertheless, perhaps we may not have elaborated sufficiently on the affective aspect of intensification. First, let us go back to what we discussed earlier regarding linguistic



mitigation or attenuation and intensification. Linguistic mitigation or attenuation has been associated with emotional conditioning since it softens our communication and increases solidarity and harmony among interlocutors (e.g., Briz Gómez, 1998; Czerwionka, 2012; Flores-Ferrán, 2020). In other words, when we mitigate an utterance, we preserve face and increase unanimity. So, we may ask whether intensification has a similar effect or an adverse one against solidarity building. While we agree that intensification also has an affective component, its purpose is to seek agreement, gain consensus, and change perspectives.

Consensus is not necessarily a mutual effect, whereas solidarity is. By intensifying, we attempt to persuade or move and change our interlocutor or audience in a different direction, ours. Said differently, we try to influence our interlocutors' or readers' opinions from one position to another, not necessarily to create solidarity, but rather to create a consensus, a slightly different purpose. Reardon (1981) suggests that persuasion is not what a person does to another, but it represents something we do *with* another. We construe this phenomenon as a magnet, attempting to join different perspectives. Miller (1980) noted that persuasion in communication refers to "any message that is intended to shape, reinforce, or change the responses of another or others" (p. 11). When we intensify, we are attempting to change our readership or interlocutor's attitude or opinion. We are not aiming to preserve face or gain acceptability, as is the case of solidarity building. Hamilton, Hunter, and Burgoon (1990) stress that linguistic intensity increases attitude change, enhancing persuasiveness. So while we may surmise that there is solidarity-building affective conditioning with intensification, we argue that it is not for bonding. Instead, it is another purpose: obtaining agreement. Thus, it is more self-serving and less altruistic.

Second, concerning intensification in English and Spanish, the excerpts presented in this book reflected authentic linguistic behavior. What has grabbed my particular attention is the courts' discourse, which maximized intensification in Spanish. The English court discourse did not reflect high degrees or maximum intensification. Furthermore, in the Spanish therapy-related speech, we also noted how these discourses reflected linguistic and cultural nuances that were not particular to English discourse. For Spanish, Briz (1998) has posited that to increase the intensity, we employ linguistic strategies such as hyperboles, which often manifest with graphic and dynamic humor, somewhat attested in the court excerpt. The intensification strategies are also quite often expressed as totalizers or maximizers. Therefore, when we participate in a conversation, we manipulate what we say using various intensifying elements. In other words, we should expect diverse linguistic behaviors regarding how speakers or writers escalate communication. This perspective requires further investigation since we gather

this observation from only two different languages represented in this book. Perhaps what fuels the linguistic differences found in this book's excerpts can be culturally bound observations *and* linguistic ones. In brief, we need to conduct a systematic comparison: both at the level of the language system and at the level of language use, which attends to cultural differences.

Third, we noted the vital role of prosody in intensification. Here we find more profound questions that this book does not sufficiently address. For instance, few studies have addressed the prosodic features that may be pervasive concerning the expression of intensification. Further, even fewer studies have delineated how we should address teaching implications and prosodic features. Hidalgo Navarro (2011) has noted that no complete messages exist without prosodic elements (or suprasegmental ones). He also has maintained that extra-linguistic elements need to be addressed when analyzing the manifestation of intensification. These can relate to gestures and paralinguistic ones. Acuña Ferreira's (2011) work also reminds us of the importance of the intersection between prosodic resources and intensification. Specifically, her work outlined how verbal displays of emotions intersect with intensification.

Besides, we cannot omit another aspect: silence. Kallen (2011) argues that silence is not just the absence of noise. Instead, it is meaningful in communication and can represent ways in which we intensify our communication. In sum, several concerns suggest we need to consider further research in prosody, silence, suprasegmentals, and extra-linguistic features.

A fourth concern that requires further consideration is discourse category and intensifying elements since this also has implications for learners and researchers. For instance, Xiao and Hongyn (2007) have reported that amplifiers are more common in speech than writing and favored by individuals with higher education levels. This finding seems to contradict what we discussed previously. We explained in a previous chapter that intensification manifests in CMC similar to oral speech. Since researchers have suggested that this is the case, we need to explore further why intensification elements would be less common in writing since CMC does represent a form of writing. We need to unpack this observation since 'writing' is a generalized term. We do not know whether the written discourse is formal, informal, institutional, non-institutional, or conflict-related. We suggest that researchers dissect the discourses in which intensification is realized and not consider them as monolithic, an observation I expand upon next.

During earlier stages of research, I found that conflict-talk, talk that contained adversarial interactions or discussed problems and oppositions, often increased the presence of mitigated expressions since interlocutors often softened the harshness of a message. Thus, these conflict-related discourses represented spaces where mitigated expressions were common. I now suggest that conflict-related talk may also prompt or mediate the use of intensification

elements since speakers attempt to sway, persuade, and influence their audiences' opinions or perspectives. Following Grimshaw (1990), for instance, we may find that conflict-related talk may contain apologies, gossip, and insults, and these types of discourses are suggestive of the presence of intensified elements. Further, several scholars have noted the effects of intensification in arguments. For example, Maltese (2014) has pointed out that intensification increases the strength or potency of arguments. Labov and Fanshel (1977) have also suggested that challenges, defenses, and retreats are characteristic of conflict-related interactions. Thus, these types of interactions may condition the use of intensifiers and intensifying linguistic elements. In brief, we should disaggregate the categories of discourse to determine the presence of intensification. A more in-depth examination may yield different findings.

We have treated the terms 'intensifier' and 'intensification,' not as separate entities throughout the book. Linguistic intensification includes elements that intensify or intensifiers. The reasoning behind this approach is that our speech and writing do not segregate them. In other words, when we communicate, we do not intentionally choose an intensifying morphological feature over a lexical item, phrase, or cultural expression. Instead, we employ intensification elements spontaneously and randomly when we communicate. For instance, when writing personal letters, perhaps we do not limit expressions of intensification. However, in academic writing, we may restrict the use of rhetorical devices (e.g., repetition). That is, we intensify communication using multiple strategies. Therefore, in the text, we do not segregate the concepts of intensifier and intensification. Instead, we consider an intensifier as a subcategory of intensification.

We have explored how we increase locution, underscore statements, stress, and persuade audiences, among other functions using intensification elements. The majority of research on Spanish and English intensification has focused on adverbial/adjectival intensifiers. First, however, we explained that English and Spanish exhibit differences in their markers to intensify. For example, Spanish has synthetic features and analytic ones to express intensification (e.g., prefixes and suffixes). For example, we find analytic ones (e.g., '*muy grande*,' '*bien grande*') and synthetic ones ('*grandísimo*'). English has a limited set of synthetic markers (e.g., 'big-est,' 'super-big'). However, English also has intensifying phrasal expressions ('Go for it!') similar to those explained in Spanish (*¡Dále!*). We need to continue to attend to intensification using a broader lens and build a taxonomy. We can follow Paradis's work (2008) and consider the wider lens I have employed throughout the text informed by Albelda Marco's (2005) work. Again, we have conceived of intensification as characteristic of the way we communicate using our linguistic arsenal. In other words, we escalate or intensify communication not only using lexical items.

For our next steps, we should investigate ways to effectively teach language learners about intensification, successful interventions, and patterns related to the acquisition stages, among many other aspects of pragmatics.

We also need to consider aspects of dialect differences concerning intensification. Since Spanish or English are not monolithic languages and marked dialect differences exist among them, we should strive to uncover the differences in the intensification strategies relative to a specific English or Spanish dialect. Perhaps in doing so, we can make language learning dialect and culturally more specific, and we can also grasp the differences among the dialects we choose to examine.

This book superficially discusses taboo terms, dysphemism, and curse words as intensification elements. However, we find it essential to explore how these expressions may contribute to intensification from an empirical perspective. When we think of our social relations and intensification, we may ask whether these forms are socially stratified and dialect-based. That is, we need to uncover whether taboo terms represent intensification in only informal friendly or familiar discourses. We also need to determine whether these forms correlate to persuasion or manifest for other purposes, not only for persuading. In other words, we should closely examine the taboo terms that can be associated with persuasive talk rather than the terms used for group bonding in social circles (e.g., social networks). Finally, since these forms are unlikely to be pervasive in the press, media, and formal written texts, we may need to examine them in oral communication and different social networks.

Throughout the book, a message consistently appears: We need to do more to uncover how we intensify our communication. We may categorize linguistic behaviors in English following Albelda's (2005) work to draw comparisons later. We also should investigate intensification in different English and Spanish dialects.

The book did not comprehensively cover all the intensifying structures and features or elements in English and Spanish that researchers have uncovered. Therefore, as a start, I only explained what I found in the data and excerpts presented. We know that there is much more we can do regarding linguistic intensification.

In closing, whatever the assessment of the contents of this book regarding the phenomenon of intensification, let this book be a sketch of the directions we need to take.



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