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Intensifiers and the Construction of Identity in New Mexican English

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INTENSIFIERS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY
IN NEW MEXICAN ENGLISH

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

In traditional sociolinguistic analyses, one or more linguistic variables are examined in terms of their correlation with broad social categories, such as gender or ethnicity. If a correlation is found, it can be argued that the variable is indexical of the speaker’s membership within the relevant social category (Labov 1972, 2001; Mesthrie et al 2000; Tagliamonte 2005, 2008). The use of intensifiers in English is one linguistic variable which has been extensively analyzed in terms of its variation in multiple populations, with noted differences in intensifier use between male and female speakers, older and younger speakers, and speakers in different regions (Ito & Tagliamonte 2003, Tagliamonte 2005, 2008, Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005). These patterns in intensifier use suggest that intensifiers can be used by speakers to index aspects of their social identities. However, the connection between intensifier use and aspects of speaker identity other than these broad social categories has not been adequately explored.

To better understand the way intensifiers are used to index aspects of speaker identity, the study addresses speaker identity by exploring the topic of self through an
analysis of differences in intensifier use when speakers are talking about themselves and their own experiences, versus when speakers are talking about other people or things, or reporting other people’s experiences. The way speakers discuss macrosocial categories such as gender, age, and ethnicity is also analyzed. Additionally, the study focuses on the variety of English spoken in northern New Mexico, which is a linguistically interesting but understudied variety of American English, allowing for both a description of the use of intensifiers in New Mexican English as well as a comparison to other populations of English speakers. The study finds that elements of individual speaker identity, such as speaker stance and a speaker’s personal connection to discourse content, influence intensifier variation as much as the social demographic categories to which speakers belong. This multifaceted exploration of intensifier use expands our understanding of how intensifiers are related to the construction of speaker identity in discourse while also contributing to the study of intensifier variation in different dialects of English.
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the Problem

English, like all other languages, is subject to a great deal of variation between speakers, as well as within the speech of any one speaker. Differences in the way people speak English can be found at all levels of linguistic structure. For decades, linguists have been asking how and why language variation exists among speakers of the same language and within the speech of a single person. Internal analyses of language use tell us a lot about how language works, and how and why language variation exists, but it’s necessary to keep in mind that language is an inherently social thing, and the social context of its use cannot be ignored. Therefore, it is valuable to study language variation from a sociolinguistic perspective.

In traditional sociolinguistic analyses, one or more linguistic variables are examined in terms of their correlation with broad social categories, such as gender, age, or ethnicity. If a correlation is found, this suggests that the linguistic variable in question may be perceived and used by speakers to index membership in a specific social group. Yet, speaker identity is much more complex than these broad social categories. Therefore, it is important to consider the way other aspects of speaker identity, including speaker stance and the speaker’s personal connection to discourse content, affect language variation.

This study explores the way speaker identity influences language variation by analyzing the use of intensifiers in English. It also describes the patterns of intensifier use found in a variety of English spoken in northern New Mexico, which is a linguistically interesting but understudied variety of American English. The study
combines a qualitative discourse analysis of intensifier use and identity construction with a quantitative variationist sociolinguistic paradigm to analyze a sample of spoken data from speakers of various ages, genders, and ethnicities from New Mexico. The study analyzes a corpus of sociolinguistic interviews compiled by the author which will henceforth be referred to as the New Mexico English Corpus, or the NMEC. Variation in intensifier use is analyzed across age groups and genders and ethnicities, with a focus on two specific ethnic groups which are prominent in New Mexico (Hispanics and Anglos).

Additionally, the study focuses on the topic of self in discourse by analyzing differences in intensifier use when speakers are talking about themselves and their own experiences, versus when speakers are talking about other people or things, or reporting other people’s experiences, while also considering syntactic, semantic, and discourse factors which have been shown to influence intensifier use in other populations. The results suggest that a speaker’s personal connection to discourse content, and individual aspects of speaker identity such as speaker stance, are as important to consider as broad social groups when determining how speaker identity influences intensifier variation.

1.2. Organization of thesis

Following this introduction, I detail the theoretical background informing the questions addressed in this study (section 2). I discuss relevant previous research on sociolinguistic variation (section 2.1), including variation across age groups (2.1.1), genders (2.1.2), and ethnicities (2.1.3). This is followed by an in-depth description of identity construction in discourse (2.2), with a focus on identity construction in narratives

1 for a detailed description of the NMEC, see section 6.1; all examples taken from the corpus are cited with the speaker number (NMEC 3 = speaker 3)
(2.2.1). I summarize previous findings regarding intensifiers (2.3), including descriptions of semantic (2.3.1), syntactic (2.3.2), social (2.3.3), and discourse (2.3.4) factors which have been shown to influence intensifier use. Section 3 includes a description of the research methodology employed in this study, including a description of the data sample (3.1), a discussion of sociolinguistic interviewing (the primary method used to collect spoken data in this study) (3.2), a description of coding practices (3.3), and a description of the quantitative methods used in the analysis (3.4). Sections 4 and 5 describe the results, including overall patterning of intensifier use across the population (section 4) as well as specific analyses of intensifier variants in different discourse contexts (section 5). Section 6 describes the results of a multivariate quantitative analysis of the data, followed by a summary of the findings in section 7. Section 8 presents a discussion of the results and section 9 offers recommendations for future research.
2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Sociolinguistic analyses typically seek to correlate patterns in language variation with macrosocial demographic categories. If a certain linguistic variable is found to correlate with a specific social category, it can be argued that that variable may be used by a speaker to establish his or her identity as being part of (or not being part of) that social group (Labov 1972, 2001; Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005, Tagliamonte 2008, and many more). Which linguistic variables are socially indexed in this way, and how and why speakers index different social identities depends on the social and linguistic context of each community. As such, the way speakers use language to represent and navigate these social identities in interactions with other speakers contributes to language variation.

However, this approach oversimplifies the concept of speaker identity because identity is more complex and fluid than the broad categories on which these types of studies are based. Rather than being an inherent property of speakers which can be neatly compartmentalized into clear-cut categories, identity is something which is variable and constructed by speakers in interaction with each other, through social and discourse practices (Bucholtz & Hall 2005, Benwell & Stokoe 2006). Identity is multi-faceted and subject to change, and speakers project a variety of different identities in various contexts (Bucholtz & Hall 2005, Georgakopoulou 2007). The important aspects of identity which are perceived to be relevant, and which are espoused and displayed by speakers differ from speaker to speaker and from discourse context to discourse context. So, if speakers use language to construct or index their identities (and this, in turn, contributes to language variation), it must be taken into consideration that the linguistic patterns
exhibited by a speaker may be different depending on which aspect of identity that individual speaker deems most important or relevant in a specific discourse context (Bucholtz & Hall 2005, Georgakopoulou 2007, Benwell & Stokoe 2006).

One type of discourse which has proven particularly fruitful for research on speaker identity is narrative. Narratives involve a speaker describing sequences of events which the speaker perceives to be important and worth sharing. The speaker presents these events to a listener in a way which reflects how the events transpired, how the speaker is involved with the described events, and how the speaker feels about the topic and theme of the story, all at the same time. Narratives are important tools for evaluating speaker identity because they “reveal aspects of the storytellers’ agentive and epistemic selves” (Schiffrin 1996: 167). When telling narratives, speakers characterize and present their narrative identities a certain way based on the identities of their interlocutors and the nature of the story. Narrative identity involves “the development and presentation of a self as a psychological entity” as well as “as someone located within a social and cultural world” (Schiffrin 1996: 169). In other words, narrators develop their identities as unique individuals, but also position themselves as entities within the social and cultural context of the discourse. In short, storytellers can use linguistic strategies in narratives to construct aspects of identity related to who the narrator is as a unique a person, and as a member of a society, as well as to evaluate and present the speaker’s position relative to the specific social context of the storytelling, and the general content of the discourse (Schiffrin 1996, Georgakopoulou 2007).

For example, gender is an aspect of identity which has been subject to close examination by discourse analysts. It has been suggested that, in English, the use of
hedges (words used to distance the speaker from the rest of the utterance, or lessen its impact, such as “kind of” and “maybe”) is a linguistic strategy which is favored by women (Mesthrie et al 2000). As such, speakers may perceive hedges to be indexical of a feminine identity, and they might be avoided by a person trying to present a masculine identity. This doesn’t mean that only female speakers use hedges, or that there is something inherently feminine about hedging; only that the use of hedges could represent an aspect of feminine identity in this particular culture. Furthermore, it has been argued that the type of language used by men and women is particularly different when speakers are delivering narratives (Benwell & Stokoe 2006, citing Coates 2003). For instance, Coates (2003, cited by Benwell & Stokoe 2006) argues that, in narratives, men “perform ‘dominant masculinity,’ via their choice of topic, focus on action, lack of hedging, competitive style, and use of taboo language” while women “perform ‘ideal femininity’ through the choice of personal topics, displays of sensitivity, and telling stories cooperatively in sequences that orient to the importance of mutual understanding and friendship” (Coates 2003: 110-111, cited by Benwell & Stokoe 2006: 55).

Along with hedges, many different types of linguistic resources have been considered as important tools in identity construction, both in and out of narratives, including a variety of different lexical, syntactic, phonetic, and grammatical variables (Johnstone 2006, Benwell & Stokoe 2006, Brown & Tagliamonte 2012, and many more). Although speakers do seem to use various linguistic features to construct and display their identities, the way these features are used to construct identity is not consistent across discourse contexts (Brown & Tagliamonte 2012). Speakers use different types of
identity construction strategies when telling scary stories with their friends around a campfire than they would describing themselves in a job interview, for instance.

In an attempt to further penetrate the mysteries of identity construction in discourse, the present study looks closely at intensifiers, words like *really* and *very* which serve the linguistic function of intensification (Partington 1993). Intensifier use is productive and constantly fluctuating, with old and new variants falling in and out of use at different rates in different communities (Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005, Xiao and Tao 2007, Tagliamonte 2008). There are many types of intensifiers which occur frequently in English, and their variability across social, semantic, syntactic, and discourse categories has been a fascinating source of research for linguists for decades. Because many intensifiers vary across social constructs such as age and gender, they may be used by speakers to index these social aspects of their identities. However, it is necessary to look more closely at other aspects of speaker identity in order to have a more complete understanding of the relationship between identity and intensification.

In fact, intensifiers are aparticularly meaningful variable to explore in terms of speaker identity. In addition to their established correlation with social factors, they are reflective of a speaker’s affective and/or epistemic stance towards discourse content (Besnier 1990, Partington 1993, Brown & Tagliamonte 2012). Speaker *affect* is the ‘feeling’ that a speaker brings to an utterance. It incorporates speaker moods, emotions, and attitudes (Ochs & Schieffelin 1989). For example, a person may present an affective stance of sarcasm, disbelief, excitement, desire, disinterest, or despair. A speaker’s *epistemic* stance involves the speaker’s confidence or belief in the truth of what he or she is saying. It can be argued that a person’s affective and epistemic stance on any given
subject is a reflection of that person’s identity. Who a person is, both as an individual human being and as a member of a particular culture or society, is reflected in how a person feels about and talks about different people, things, places, situations, and events, and vice versa, especially if they do so habitually. A speaker’s affective or epistemic stance can be expressed explicitly in the lexical content of an utterance, especially through verbs, adjectives, and adverbs which explicitly encode affect and epistemic stance, such as “I’m happy” or “I wish” or “I hate” or “I believe…” Speaker stance can also be reflected through gestures, facial expressions, and intonation patterns, as well as through the use of certain grammatical and discourse structures (Ochs & Shieffelin 1989). The types of linguistic structures and patterns which are used by speakers to denote stance vary from culture to culture and language to language (Ochs & Schieffelin 1989).

The linguistic process of intensification is, in and of itself, an affective process, because it indicates the speaker’s desire to emphasize an element of the discourse (Partington 1993). The affective and epistemic value of intensifiers is best explained through an example. Consider, for instance, the following sentence, which was uttered by a 60-year-old man who was describing his grandmother. “She was a very small person” (NMEC 12). *Very* here can be argued to have both referential and affective meaning. Referentially, it strengthens the meaning of *small*. That is, it conceptualizes smallness along a scale, with ‘very small’ towards the top of that scale, and ‘not small’ at the bottom. The person being described is not just small, but *very* small. In this sense, the intensification strengthens the referential meaning of *small*. 
The intensification of *small* in this case also gives us insight into the speaker’s affective and epistemic stance towards the subject. The emphasis on the word *small* tells us the speaker thinks this detail is important and worth emphasizing, perhaps because the speaker finds the size of the person to be striking or unusual, or because the smallness of the person is particularly relevant to the discourse context, or both. In this case, the description of the woman’s size is followed by a discussion of the hard, manual labor she used to do, which reflects the speaker’s respect for his grandmother, and his perception and characterization of her as a hard-working, strong woman, in spite of her size.

It has also been argued that the use of intensifiers suggests that “what is being said is sincerely vouched for” (Partington 1993: 178). In this sense, by using an intensifier the speaker is asserting the truthfulness of the statement as well as the speaker’s commitment to that statement. The speaker is assuring the listener that the smallness of the person is unquestionable – this person could not be defined as anything but small. This person is not somewhere in between big and small, but decidedly small. So, when an intensifier is used, the speaker’s emphasis adds affective meaning to the utterance, while the speaker’s commitment to the emphasized detail adds epistemic meaning to the utterance. When combined with inherently affective or epistemic lexical items and structures (such as emotional adjectives or explicit descriptions of personal beliefs), intensifiers are even more strongly reflective of a speaker’s stance. In fact, some researchers call them “stance adverbials” due to their relation to the speaker’s stance on discourse content (Biber & Finegan 2009).

Both the referential content of an utterance and the speaker’s stance are important in discourse. The way people perceive and feel about various aspects of their identities
influences the way they choose to express themselves and thus affects the linguistic structures which are produced. In other words, a person’s affective or epistemic stance could influence the specific words and grammatical patterns the speaker uses.

Furthermore, a speaker’s stance on a topic affects the way listeners perceive both the topic and the speaker (Ochs & Schieffelin 1989, Besnier 1990). The stance-taking nature of intensification makes it particularly interesting to analyze in terms of speaker identity.

Despite the large volume of research on the topics of intensifiers and identity, there are still questions to be answered about how intensifiers, identity, and discourse context interact. To look more closely at the interaction between identity and intensifiers in discourse, the present study combines a general overview of the sociolinguistic patterns of intensifier use in a population with a more in-depth analysis of identity work in and out of narrative contexts. The concept of identity and self-representation of that identity is addressed by considering differences between the way speakers intensify adjectives when talking about themselves, and their own experiences, versus the way they intensify adjectives when talking about other people and other people’s experiences. The following sections will detail more specifically the factors which are considered in the analysis.

2.1 Sociolinguistic variation and identity

Most of the previous section was focused on intensifiers and identity from the perspective of discourse analysis. However, the concept of speaker identity is also interesting when analyzed from a sociolinguistic perspective, which is focused on linguistic variation across broad social groups, rather than the details of discourse. As mentioned in section 1.1, it is common in sociolinguistic analyses to examine language
variation by objectively categorizing speakers into broad, socially relevant identity categories such as gender and class, and using large samples of speech data to determine how patterns in language use correlate with those categories. This method has produced an abundance of studies which suggest that the use of specific linguistic styles and patterns can indicate aspects of speaker identity, particularly those aspects of speaker identity defined by membership in a certain social group. By using a certain word, phrase, or grammatical structure, a speaker can linguistically mark him or herself as part of a specific social group. Social categories which have been found to correlate with language variation include age, gender, and ethnicity.

2.1.1 Age

One of the most important social variables considered in sociolinguistic analyses is age. The relationship between speaker age and language variation is often explored through the lens of an apparent-time analysis. An apparent-time analysis presupposes the idea that speakers develop their linguistic style in their youth, and as adults, their speech mirrors language as it was used when the speaker was growing up. This means that comparing the linguistic patterns of speakers of different ages can give us insight into language trends across time (Labov 1963, Bailey, Wikle, Tillery & Sand 1991, Ito & Tagliamonte 2003, Tagliamonte 2008, and more). In fact, language variation correlated with speaker age is widely considered to be an indicator of language change in progress. Additionally, because certain linguistic patterns vary depending on speaker age, those linguistic patterns may be used by speakers to construct and index aspects of identity related to their age.
2.1.2 Gender

In many variationist studies, speaker gender is analyzed based on two categories which are often associated with the speaker’s biological sex (ie. male and female). Many studies have found differences in language use across these gender categories (Mesthrie et al 2000, Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005, Tagliamonte 2008). For instance, it has been suggested that female speakers tend to use features which are perceived to have high levels of overt prestige, while male speakers are more likely to use vernacular or nonstandard features (Mesthrie et al 2000). It has also been argued that women tend to use new or innovative forms more frequently than men, suggesting that, at least in some cases, women lead linguistic change (Mesthrie et al 2000, Brown & Tagliamonte 2012).

Variationist analyses correlating linguistic factors with speaker gender allow insight into which of those linguistic factors might be used by speakers to index gender identity. For instance, if there is a certain word or phrase which is preferred by women in a community (like the hedges discussed in section 1.2), that word or phrase may be used by a speaker to index one’s status as a female, or to iterate the importance or relevance of one’s femininity in a specific context. However, like all other aspects of identity, speaker gender is fluid, and it is navigated, negotiated, and constructed by speakers in different ways in different social contexts (Mesthrie et al 2000).

2.1.3 Ethnicity

The study of language varieties associated with certain ethnic groups is well-established. Language varieties associated with specific ethnic groups (also called ethnolects) are often believed to derive from language contact situations in immigrant communities, although modern speakers may be generations away from the original immigrants in the community (Eckert 2008). Many different ethnolects have been
described in American English. Among the most widely recognized are African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and Chicano English (CE). Ethnolects can differ from what is considered to be “Standard American English” in many ways, and certain features may become associated with a specific ethnic group (Mesthrie et al 2000). Speakers can then use those features to index membership within an ethnic group. However, it is important to keep in mind that “the linguistic resources that ethnolectal speakers deploy in their day-to-day lives are not all specific to the ethnic category, and those that appear to be specifically ethnic can index far more than ethnicity” (Eckert 2008: 26). In fact, it has been found that identity aspects other than a speaker’s ethnicity, such as the individual speaker’s solidarity with the ethnic community in question, may affect the use of linguistic variables believed to index aspects of identity (Fought 2003).

In fact, linguistic variables have the potential to index a variety of different aspects of social identity simultaneously. Age, gender, and ethnicity are each only a small piece of the speaker’s identity, and none of these are constant in their contextual meaning and importance. Take, for instance, the aspect of speaker identity associated with speaker age. A 25-year old speaker might be perceived as a very young person in a nursing home, a peer amongst friends, or quite old to a preschooler. The difference in age identity in each scenario would be reflected by how the speaker talks to the others as well as how the others treat and talk to the speaker. So, although language variation can clearly be correlated with macrosocial demographic identity categories like age, such broad categorical conceptualizations cannot be said to definitively represent any speaker’s identity. Rather, it is necessary to examine more closely the nuances of language
variation and identity construction to get a more fine-tuned idea about how speakers use language to represent their identities.

2.2. Identity construction in discourse

The previous section detailed types of broad identity categories which have been associated with language variation, and which may be indexed by speakers in discourse, but it is necessary to iterate the fact that speaker identity is very complex. It is not possible to definitively compartmentalize a speaker’s identity as merely ‘male’ or ‘female,’ ‘young’ or ‘old,’ or as a member of a specific ethnicity or social class. A speaker typically belongs to many of these broad social groups at once; each speaker belongs to a certain gender, age group, and ethnicity, simultaneously. Additionally, not all of these categories are relevant to all speakers in all contexts, and there may be other, more fine-grained aspects of identity that are ignored by such broad macrosocial categorizations.

Although we can tease apart and categorize some of the aspects of identity which may be important to speakers at a given time, based on their social or cultural salience, ultimately, speaker identity is not static. Rather, an individual speaker’s identity is defined and constructed through interaction with other speakers within a specific sociocultural environment, an environment which is also subject to change. Any one speaker has an individual identity, which is the inner persona that is unique to each speaker, an interpersonal identity, which is dependent on the speaker’s relationship to the other participants in the discourse, and a collective identity, which involves the speaker’s position in the larger society in which he or she lives (Nadeem 2016). Any and all of these aspects of identity may be constructed and projected in discourse.
Speakers use linguistic resources to construct such an identity when interacting with other speakers, portraying the speaker’s own unique persona, as well as where and how the speaker fits into the larger social spectrum of his or her community, and the immediate discourse context (Brown & Tagliamonte 2012). Identity can be constructed linguistically both through the explicit description of speakers’ own actions, thoughts, and opinions, as well as through the way they represent and position themselves with or against others (Bucholtz & Hall 2005). Additionally, specific linguistic variables can also be used to index aspects of speaker identity. The use of certain discourse structures and genres, such as telling stories or narratives, also allows speakers to explore their identities in different ways. In fact, it has been shown that speakers use linguistic tools and mechanisms differently in narrative contexts than they do in non-narrative contexts (Brown & Tagliamonte 2012).

2.2.1 Identity in narrative contexts

Narratives are particularly interesting in terms of identity construction in discourse. Narratives are very common in day-to-day interaction and can be used by speakers to explore a variety of ideas and themes. While there is much debate about what, exactly, constitutes a narrative, in the traditional sense, narratives are stories which are non-shared tellings of specific events which are situated in the past and have a coherent timeline (Norrick 2000, Georgakopoulou 2007, Brown & Tagliamonte 2012). Additionally, narratives have a typical structural pattern, with most narratives consisting of an abstract, a background description or setup for the story, a description of the events of the story told in temporal order, and an evaluation of the events by the speaker (Schiffrin 1996).
The specific discourse context of narrative has been a focus of research regarding language and identity because the telling of stories involves the representation of the speaker’s self within the context of a specific experience, offering a snapshot into the way speakers perceive and portray themselves, constituting something like a “self-portrait” (Schiffrin 1996). Conceptualizations of “race, ethnicity, gender, regional and social identities as well as personal portrayals” can all be can be part of the construction of identity in narratives (Brown & Tagliamonte 2012: 1). It has been established that the types of stories people tell and the way they tell them are influenced by speaker age, gender, ethnicity, social class, and region, as well as the social context of the storytelling situation and the social dynamics between interlocutors (Schiffrin 1996). Identity construction in this context is further complicated by the fact that the telling of a narrative is also influenced by the presence and influence of other participants in the discourse (Ochs 2004, Bucholtz & Hall 2005).

2.3. Intensifiers

The present study analyzes the aspects of identity construction discussed in the previous sections by focusing on the linguistic variable of intensifiers. In the most general sense, intensifiers are words which add emphasis to other words. Intensifiers in English can collocate with many different types of words (Partington 1993, Rickford et al 2007), but the present study is focused specifically on intensifiers which collocate with adjectives. There are many words which are used to intensify adjectives in English. The most frequently used intensifiers are typically considered to be really and very (Labov 1984, Tagliamonte 2005, 2008), but the creation of new intensifiers is common (Partington 1993), and at any given point in time, in any given speech community, there
are many different intensifier forms competing in usage (Tagliamonte 2008). In fact, it has been argued that “it is sufficient to employ an adverb in submodifying position for it to be interpreted as an intensifier” (Partington 1993: 180). For instance, the word crazy is not a traditional intensifier like really or very, but can take on the function of intensification when in submodifying position ([1]).

[1] It was crazy awesome. (NMEC 27)

However, this is not a steadfast rule, as adverbs in submodifying position can also be “downtoners,” which are words like “slightly” and “kinda” which de-emphasize the semantic content of other words (Tagliamonte 2008).

Intensifiers can be broken down into two types: boosters and maximizers. Boosters are words like really and very, which strengthen or increase the degree of the semantic properties of intensified adjectives (see [2]). Maximizers are words like totally and completely which maximize the semantic properties of intensified adjectives, situating them at the top of their semantic scales (see [3]).


“That was very special to me.” (NMEC 10)

[3] “That’s a totally random guess.” (NMEC 5)

“…people that are completely distracted.” (NMEC 28)

While both boosters and maximizers strengthen the semantic value of the words they modify, boosters imply a scalar or gradable form of intensification, while maximizers construe total or maximal intensification of the modified word (Buchstaller & Traugott 2006). It has been argued that intensifiers which are classified as boosters (really, very) rather than maximizers (completely, totally) are more likely to collocate
with scalar or gradable adjectives (*tall, hot*) than with nonscalar or nongradable adjectives (*dead, identical*) (Buchstaller & Traugott 2006). However, both boosters and maximizers can and do collocate with both scalar and nonscalar adjectives (Buchstaller & Traugott 2006). For the purposes of this study, I conflate the two into one category of intensifiers.

### 2.3.1 Intensifiers and semantic constraints

As mentioned in the previous section, a wide variety of adverbs can be employed in submodifying position and be interpreted as intensifiers, with some being more common than others (Partington 1993). Historical analyses of intensifiers have revealed that many intensifiers evolved from lexical items with affective or epistemic semantic content – words which historically referred to the speaker’s subjective feelings and opinions (Partington 1993). For instance, the word *very* once had the specific meaning of ‘truly’ or ‘in truth,’ but is now used purely for intensification. The grammaticalization of intensifiers from words with their own semantic meanings into words which serve the function of intensification has received much attention from researchers interested in the historical trajectory and social importance of intensifiers (Partington 1993, Tagliamonte 2008). Some intensifier variants have been so thoroughly grammaticalized that they function solely as intensifiers (*very*, for instance), while others which are not as far along the path of grammaticalization retain elements of their original semantic meanings (such as *dreadfully*, which often retains a negative semantic connotation) (Partington 1993). Some words can be used both as intensifiers and as meaningful lexical items in their own right, such as *stone*, which can be used for intensification in a phrase like “stone cold,” but can also be used as a content word with lexical meaning, as in “I saw a gray stone.”
In variationist studies, which treat intensifiers as a site of variation and change, it is common to lump all intensifier variants together and analyze them as equivalent forms, without much regard for the semantic distinctions between them, because they all serve the same grammatical purpose of intensification. However, the semantic differences between variants are not irrelevant when it comes to variation in intensifier use. In fact, the semantic properties of intensifiers can influence the types of adjectives intensifier variants can collocate with. Therefore, the semantic properties of intensified adjectives must be considered as internal constraints, and are standardly factored into variationist analyses of intensifier use.

Adjective type is typically classified according to Dixon’s semantic categorization, which suggests there are seven semantic types of adjectives: human propensity (jealous, friendly), physical property (soft, sweet), color (red, green), speed (fast, slow), dimension (big, small), value (good, bad), position (close, far) (Dixon 1977). Intensifiers which have lost all or most of their semantic meaning through grammaticalization are said to collocate with a wider variety of these adjective types than those which retain semantic meanings beyond intensification (Partington 1993). Additionally, intensifiers which retain positive or negative semantic connotations (such as terribly, or dreadfully, which originated from words with negative semantic connotations and still have negative connotations in some contexts) are more likely to collocate with adjectives with the same evaluative connotations. So, terribly would be more likely to collocate with an adjective like depressing rather than happy. This is a general tendency, rather than a rule, and this preference fades as the intensifiers become more grammaticalized (Partington 1993). This can be seen in the case of awfully which
started with a negative connotation, but has spread to be used with more positive adjectives, as in “an awfully good person” (Partington 1993: 183-184).

Intensifier use has also been associated with emotional discourse content (Peters 1994, Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005). This is likely related to the fact that emotional language is affective in nature, and intensifiers reflect a speaker’s affective stance towards discourse content. Emotional language can consist of discourse topics revolving around emotional states or events, a strong emotional involvement of the speaker in the discourse context, or specific words and phrases which specifically encode emotionality, such as happy and sad (compared to non-emotional adjectives like short and tall). Peters (1994) suggests that new intensifiers, in particular, are likely to occur in emotional contexts, and the intensifier so has been found to be used prominently in emotional contexts, especially among female speakers (Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005).

2.3.2 Intensifiers and syntactic constraints

Intensifiers can be used to modify adjectives which occur in both attributive (see [4]) and predicative (see [5]) constructions. Attributive adjectives are “those which occur within a noun phrase” (Englebretson 1997: 411), while predicative adjectives are separated from the modified noun, typically by a linking verb. In conversational speech, intensifiers can also occur in standalone positions3, where they collocate with an adjective but are not part of a verbal clause, as in [6].

[4] She was a very small person. (NMEC 12)

[5] They were super strict. (NMEC 15)


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3 standalone adjectives are a subset of predicative adjectives called “assessment predicates” by Englebretson (1997)
It has been suggested that as intensifier variants become grammaticalized they may prefer to intensify adjectives in predicative constructions. In fact, some intensifiers, such as so, are used almost exclusively in predicative constructions (Tagliamonte 2008). But many intensifiers, including highly grammaticalized ones like very do occur in attributive constructions. Additionally, there are some intensifiers which are very restricted in the adjectives with which they collocate (Brown & Tagliamonte 2012). For instance, brand is almost exclusively used to intensify new (“brand new”), and stone is similarly restricted, collocating with only a few adjectives (“stone cold,” “stone dead”) (Brown & Tagliamonte 2012). Because of these syntactic restrictions, some researchers have preferred to analyze intensifier use specifically in predicative contexts, where all intensifiers can occur (Tagliamonte 2008). However, Buchstaller & Traugott (2006) argue that in order to have a comprehensive understanding of intensifier use, it is necessary to analyze intensifier use in its broadest distribution. Because the bulk of the study is focused on intensification, in general, rather than differences between specific variants, the present study will incorporate all relevant syntactic constructions.

2.3.3 Social variation of intensifiers

Although the features of intensifiers discussed above are worth noting in order to have a clear picture of the linguistic constraints of intensifier use, what is perhaps most interesting for our analysis of intensifier use in terms of its relation to identity is the way it varies socially. Intensifiers encompass a wide range of paradigmatic variants, with multiple variants competing in usage at any point in time, and with usage patterns which shift over time and across populations and social groups. Multiple sociolinguistic analyses of intensifier use in numerous populations have shown that intensifier use is
influenced by social factors, including age (2.3.3.1), gender (2.3.3.2), and regional factors (2.3.3.3). These patterns of intensifier use are different from population to population, suggesting that the social importance of intensifier use is unique to each community.

2.3.3.1 Age
The processes underlying variation in intensifier use can be analyzed through apparent-time analyses (Tagliamonte 2008; see section 2.1.1 for further discussion on the theory behind apparent-time analysis), and strong generational differences in the use of specific intensifier variants have been attested (Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005, Tagliamonte 2008). Looking at intensifier use across the generations allows us to get an idea of how intensifier use is changing over time in a population. Previous analyses of intensifier use suggest that intensifier use, in general, is impressionistically associated with teenagers/young people (Tagliamonte 2008). However, speakers of all ages do use intensifiers. Members of different generations tend to favor different intensifier variants, reinforcing the idea that intensifier use changes over time (Bauer & Bauer 2002, Ito & Tagliamonte 2003, Tagliamonte 2008). For instance, very is often considered the most frequent and widely used intensifier in modern English (Fries 1940, Backlund 1973). However, it has been suggested that very is falling out of fashion, being most commonly used by older speakers, and that really is becoming more popular among younger speakers (Tagliamonte 2008).

2.3.3.2 Gender
Intensifiers have also shown variation across genders. Intensifier use has historically been impressionistically associated with women (Tagliamonte 2008, citing Jespersen 1922, Key 1975), seemingly due to a cultural association between femininity
and emotionality. Although men and women do both use intensifiers, differences in the types of intensifiers used by male and female speakers have been attested in quantitative analyses of intensifier use. It has been suggested that women lead trends in innovative intensifier use (Tagliamonte 2008), and that men and women prefer different intensifiers (Ito & Tagliamonte 2003, Tagliamonte 2008). For example, in her 2008 analysis of Toronto English, Tagliamonte found that young male speakers prefer pretty as an intensifier, and young females prefer so (Tagliamonte 2008). So has also been associated with female speakers in impressionistic studies (Lakoff 1973).

2.3.3.3 Region

In addition to variation across age groups and genders, patterns in intensifier use vary from region to region. While there is some consistency in the most popular intensifiers (typically really, very, and so) across populations, there are different trends in intensifier frequency. For example, British English speakers from the city of York in northern England were found to intensify 24% of adjectives (Ito & Tagliamonte 2003), while Canadian English speakers from Toronto exhibited a much higher intensification rate of 36.1% (Tagliamonte 2008).

The fact that intensifiers interact with various social categories, both in terms of frequency and with regards to the use of specific intensifiers, suggests that intensifiers have salient social meanings which vary from community to community, and supports the idea that certain patterns in intensifier use may signal membership within a certain social group (Partington 1993; Peters 1994; Tagliamonte 2008). In other words, speakers may use intensifiers to index these social aspects of their identities. Additionally, although some intensifiers retain specific semantic meanings in some contexts, as
described in section 2.3.1, the most commonly used ones have been grammaticalized, and their function is primarily to represent the speaker’s affective stance towards other relevant linguistic content (Brown & Tagliamonte 2012). This combination of inter-and intraspeaker meaning makes intensifiers particularly interesting to analyze when considering the construction of speaker identity in discourse.

2.3.4 Intensifiers in discourse

In addition to the factors influencing intensifier variation described in sections 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3, previous research suggests that the use of intensifiers is different in narrative and non-narrative contexts (Brown & Tagliamonte 2012). Brown & Tagliamonte (2012) found that intensifier use increases in narrative contexts. They suggest that because the success of a narrative depends largely on its tellability (whether it’s a ‘good’ story or not, worthy of the listener’s time), intensifiers serve to increase the excitement or emotional content of narratives, to further engage listeners.

The same study also found that the factors constraining intensifier use were different in different discourse contexts: semantic constraints such as adjective type and emotion are dominant in narrative contexts, while social and syntactic constraints come more into play in non-narrative contexts. Additionally, the authors suggest that innovations in intensifier use arise in narrative contexts, then spread to non-narrative contexts, led by young women (Brown & Tagliamonte 2012). Brown & Tagliamonte link the noted differences in intensifier use in different contexts to the different role identity plays in each context, and suggest that the linguistic resources used by speakers to construct that identity vary from context to context.
2.4. NM English

The speakers who are the focus of this study are English speakers from New Mexico. New Mexico has a complex linguistic history. The state’s linguistic background involves primarily Spanish, English, and several indigenous languages, including Navajo, Tewa, Towa, Tiwa, and Keres, with the indigenous languages being the first present in the region. Spaniards entered the region in the 1500s, and the first permanent Spanish community was established in 1598 north of present day Santa Fe (Bills & Vigil 2008). Aside from a twelve-year period where the Spanish were run out of the area during the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, the Hispanic presence has been continuous and widespread throughout the area that is modern-day New Mexico (Bills & Vigil 2008). The Hispanic population grew throughout the 18th century, becoming the dominant population but remaining relatively isolated, resulting in a unique variety of Spanish spoken by speakers in Northern New Mexico which has been extensively studied and is typically referred to as Traditional New Mexican Spanish (TNMS). Although Anglo-Americans quickly saturated surrounding areas following the Mexican-American war (1846-1848), the Anglo-American English-speaking population remained a minority in New Mexico up until the mid-1900s (Bills & Vigil 2008).

Although English is believed to have been present in New Mexico for at least 150 years, Spanish remained the dominant language until relatively recently compared to other parts of the southwest United States. Spanish was spoken by native New Mexicans as well as immigrants from Mexico who settled in the area, and is the language which is most commonly studied with regards to language use in New Mexico (particularly TNMS). Although Hispanics are still the majority ethnic group in New Mexico (2010
English has been the dominant language in New Mexico for the last several decades, and yet has remained under the radar in linguistic studies. Given its linguistic situation, it stands to reason that the variety of English spoken in New Mexico is a unique dialect of American English which has not yet been adequately described.

In the only published study focused specifically on English use in New Mexico, Hernandez describes the variety as a variety of “Chicano” English (1993). Chicano English can be broadly defined as any variety of English which has been influenced by Spanish, specifically if English is the speaker’s native language. Chicano English does not rely on Spanish-English bilingualism, but is rather considered to be an ethnic variety spoken by Hispanics who are native English speakers (rather than second-language learners) (Fought 2003). In many cases, it is associated with populations of Mexican immigrants to the United States and their descendants, and is considered by some researchers to be a variety exclusive to speakers of Mexican origin (Fought 2003).

These definitions of Chicano English are problematic with regards to the Spanish-influenced variety of English spoken in New Mexico for a few reasons. A classification of Chicano English as a “Mexican-influenced” variety eliminates a variety of English influenced by a type of Spanish like TNMS, which differs significantly from all contemporary Mexican Spanish varieties. Furthermore, it has been argued that what is typically called “Chicano English” is not necessarily confined to speakers who identify as Chicano, or even only to speakers who belong to the ethnic population of Hispanics. Rather, it can be spoken by English speakers from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds, and can be used to index elements of social order aside from ethnicity (Hernandez 1993, Eckert 2008). Other researchers have used the terms “Latino English”
(Wolfram & Schilling 2003) or “Hispanic English” (Wolfram et al 2004) to refer to this type of English. I prefer to use the broader and more inclusive term, “Spanish-influenced English,” as it refers to the influencing language rather than incorporating ethnic associations. However, this term is still problematic, because a speaker with no exposure to or knowledge of Spanish could speak a variety of Spanish-influenced English.

In fact, in her analysis of New Mexican English, Hernandez (1993) found that the features analyzed were not exclusive to any one race, age, or socioeconomic class, but were found in speakers from a variety of backgrounds. Therefore, she proposed the variety be examined more broadly as a variety of Standard American English (Hernandez 1993). In fact, although the English spoken in New Mexico clearly has the potential to have been widely influenced by Spanish, it also has the potential to be quite different from other varieties of Spanish-influenced English due to varying linguistic contexts across populations. Therefore, the variety analyzed in this study will henceforth be referred to simply as New Mexican English (NM English). It is important to note, however, that this label is not intended to suggest that all English speakers in New Mexico speak this variety. In fact, the speakers included in this sample are exclusively from northern New Mexico. Therefore, this sample does not reflect potential regional differences within the state. The study will, however, consider potential differences between speakers of different ethnicities, specifically differences between Hispanic speakers and non-Hispanic speakers.

2.4.1 NM English and ethnicity

Although previous research suggests use of specific intensifiers may index membership in a group (Peters 1994), there is no previous research to suggest that
intensifier use is affected by membership in a specific ethnic group. However, because ethnicity has been found to be correlated with variation of other linguistic variables (Mesthrie et al. 2000), the question of ethnicity will be taken account in the present study, to determine if intensifier use varies across ethnic groups. On one hand, it is possible that there will be no difference in the speech of Hispanics and non-Hispanics. It may be that intensifiers are not used by speakers in this population to index ethnic identities. On the other hand, because Hispanic culture and identity are particularly strong in this community, it may be found that intensifiers are used as a tool to construct and differentiate Hispanic identity in discourse, either through frequency of intensification or through the use of specific intensifier variants. Because ethnicity and intensifiers have been analyzed together, it is unknown whether intensification in general, or the use of specific intensifier variants, in particular, will be associated with one ethnic group or the other. Either way, whether ethnicity is correlated with intensifier use is unknown, and worth examining.

2.4.2 Perception of a unique dialect among speakers

As mentioned previously, the features, stratification, and breadth of the variety of English spoken in New Mexico are unknown. A complete description of the defining features of this variety has never been compiled. However, there is a perception among speakers in New Mexico that the variety spoken in the state is unique. Each speaker in the dataset was asked if people in New Mexico speak differently than other people. Of the 28 speakers interviewed for the present study, 100% of them asserted that people in New Mexico do speak differently than other English speakers. This perception of a
unique variety reaffirms the importance of describing and analyzing New Mexican English.

2.4.3 Intensifier *all* and New Mexican English

One intensifier which has been associated with New Mexican English is adverbial “all.” Although it is often perceived as a new, innovative, or nonstandard intensifier associated with young speakers (Waksler 2001), it has actually been used to intensify adjectives since Old English (Buchstaller & Traugott 2006, Rickford et al 2007). It may be perceived as an innovative form because it is commonly associated with young speakers in the media (Buchstaller & Traugott 2006). It does seem to have become more frequent in recent times, and has received more attention as an intensifier variant (Buchstaller & Traugott 2006, Rickford et al 2007). Interestingly, it is also an intensifier which is commonly associated with New Mexican English in New Mexican culture. The use of intensifier “all” is often described by speakers as a New Mexican feature. For example, when describing the way northern New Mexicans talk, one male speaker laughed, “It’s moch⁴, well, it’s all moch, as they would say” (NMEC 27), placing particular emphasis on the intensifier *all*. In fact, the use of intensifier *all* is so salient in New Mexican culture that multiple popular YouTube videos created to comedically represent the New Mexican dialect directly reference it (i.e. Blackoutdigital 2012).

It is worth noting the significance of this intensifier to this population, but the use of intensifier *all* will not be specifically analyzed in the following analysis. This is because it only occurred 5 times in the collected sample out of 357 total intensifiers, occurring much less frequently than other intensifiers (see example [7a-e]).

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⁴ *moch* is a colloquial term used to describe the way people from Northern New Mexico speak English
[7] a. We’d get **all** dressed-up. (NMEC 14, F, 33)

   b. He was being **all** weird. (NMEC 22, M, 27)

   c. She’d be **all** happy. (NMEC 29, M, 20)

   d. We get **all** excited. (NMEC 29, M, 20)

   e. It’s **all** moch. (NMEC 27, M, 40)

Of the four speakers who used *all* as an intensifier, two are Anglo and two are Hispanic.

One of the possible reasons why this study found no sign of *all* being a preferred intensifier in this population, despite its association with the dialect, is that it is a widely recognized, socially salient variant which is perceived as ‘different’ or ‘nonstandard.’ Although sociolinguistic interviews are designed to elicit natural speech, it may be that the interview format is still too formal for speakers to willingly use what is quite saliently perceived as a nonstandard variant. Additionally, it has been suggested that intensifier *all* collocates most frequently with present participles and prepositional phrases, rather than adjectives (Rickford et al 2007), which may also explain the limited use of *all* in the data.
3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Description of sample

The data analyzed in the present study consists of speech data from a corpus of 28 sociolinguistic interviews which were collected by the author in summer 2016 (see section 3.2 for a discussion on sociolinguistic interview methodology). All the speakers are native speakers of English from New Mexico, meaning that they acquired English as a first language. The speakers profess varying levels of competency with Spanish, with most of the speakers being monolingual English speakers with some knowledge of basic Spanish vocabulary. A few of the speakers claim to have passing conversational Spanish skills, but only one of the speakers considers himself to be a completely fluent, bilingual speaker of Spanish (speaker 3). This speaker learned both English and Spanish as a child. Several of the speakers have studied or been exposed to other languages as well, including Italian, German, and Navajo. While it is interesting to note the speakers’ language backgrounds, there is no reason to believe English intensification processes would be influenced by contact with Spanish, or any other language, for that matter. As such, level of competency with or exposure to Spanish or other languages is not considered as a variable in this study.

Because of potential regional variation across the state, the corpus focuses on speakers from northern New Mexico, with the southernmost speaker being from Belen, NM, a small town just south of the state’s largest city, Albuquerque. This distinction between North and South is based primarily on the author’s perception as a native New Mexican regarding potential regional differences in language use across the state. The sample consists of a combination of speakers who are well-known by the
author/interviewer, as well as speakers who did not personally know the interviewer but were referred to the study by other participants. This method of population sampling, in which the sampling net is widened by having speakers referred to the study by other speakers, is commonly used in sociolinguistics, and is called “judgment sampling” or “snowball sampling.” The sample consists of 15 male and 13 female speakers, ranging in age from 18 to 89 years old. There are 17 Hispanic and 11 non-Hispanic speakers in the sample. Age, gender, and ethnicity were all self-reported by participants. A comprehensive table of the speakers and their associated demographics can be found in Appendix A.

3.2 Sociolinguistic interviews

The main method of data collection in this study, rather than being a traditional interview or a formal task, is that of sociolinguistic interviewing. Sociolinguistic interviews are an established and well-defined method of language documentation in the field of variationist sociolinguistics that has been used by researchers across the US and in other countries for several decades (for details on this method and its history see Labov 1984, Tagliamonte 2006). Sociolinguistic interviews are modeled on the structure of naturally occurring conversation. The researcher and the interviewee have an informal and intentionally open-ended conversation that is maximally guided by topics that the interviewee initiates, ideally with minimal prompting from the interviewer (Labov 1984). For this study, the interviews each lasted 45 minutes to an hour. The conversation was focused primarily on the topic of New Mexico, with prompts designed to get speakers talking about various aspects of life in New Mexico, including childhood experiences, cultural practices, and attitudes about the state. The aim of sociolinguistic interviewing is
to document casual, everyday speech, in order to allow for descriptive analyses of language in use. In using this method, the current study will document the form of informal English used in New Mexico today, and allow for a comparison between this variety of English and other regional varieties, including those spoken in other parts of North America.

3.3 Coding

3.3.1 Extraction of tokens

All interviews were audio recorded, and the audio was analyzed using Praat, an acoustic analysis software widely used in linguistic research (Boersma & Weenink 2013). A minimum of 10 minutes of each interview was excerpted and coded for all instances of adjectives and intensifiers. After ten minutes of speech was analyzed, additional speech was coded until there were at least 10 tokens of intensifiers from each speaker to analyze. The first five minutes of each interview was excluded from the analysis, to allow the speaker time to relax and enter a more casual, conversational speech style. Due to variability in intensification rates, the number of adjectives used by each speaker was different, ranging from 25 to 100 adjectives per speaker, with an overall average of 55 adjectives per speaker.

In accordance with practices established by previous studies (Ito & Tagliamonte 2003, Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005, Tagliamonte 2008), all adjectives which had the potential to be intensified were included in the analysis. Following procedures originally delineated by Ito & Tagliamonte (2003), adjectives which occurred in constructions which did not allow for intensification were excluded. Adjectives cannot be intensified in comparative constructions [8], and the meaning they bring to superlative [9] and
negative [10] constructions is semantically different than the intensification in which this study is interested. For instance, in [9], *very* doesn’t strengthen the semantic meaning of *big*; rather, it functions more as a downtoner in this context. As such, adjectives in comparative, superlative, and negative constructions were omitted from the analysis.

[8] “Well they’re more safer there…”


Both boosters and maximizers were coded as intensifiers (see 2.3 for a complete discussion of intensifiers). Each adjective and intensifier had to be analyzed on a case-by-case basis. Many intensifier variants can be used in non-intensification contexts. *That, too, so,* and *all* are all examples of words which can intensify, but can also have functions other than intensification. So, each adjective token had to be verified as an intensifiable adjective, and each intensifier had to be verified as fulfilling the function of intensification. All instances of adjectives with the potential to be intensified and all instances of intensifiers were extracted and coded.

### 3.3.2 Social factors

Each token was coded for the gender of its speaker (*male* or *female*). Gender was self-reported. Speaker **age** was coded as a continuous variable based on each speaker’s birth year (**birth year**). Tokens were also coded based on the speaker’s self-reported ethnicity (**Hispanic** and **non-Hispanic**). Other sociolinguistic categories which have been found to be relevant in terms of language variation include social class and level of education. Because my speakers were not well-balanced in these categories (for
instance, nearly all of the speakers can be considered middle-class), I do not discuss them in this analysis.

**3.3.3 Semantic factors**

Each token was also coded for three semantic categories, based on the semantic qualities of each adjective. *Semantic type* of the adjective was coded with three categories: **physical** (*soft, wet*), **human propensity** (*friendly, mean*), and **value** (*good, bad*). These categories are consolidated categories which were used in Brown & Tagliamonte’s 2012 study on intensifier use, adapted from Dixon’s semantic categorization of adjectives (Dixon 1977). In this categorization, adjectives referring to dimension, speed, position, and color were coded as **physical**, rather than having their own categories. *Polarity* is the semantic connotation or affective evaluation of the adjective. *Polarity* was coded with three categories: **positive** (*good, happy*), **negative** (*bad, sad*), and **neutral** (*yellow, round*). *Emotionality* of the adjective was coded with two categories based on whether the adjective had emotional semantic meaning: **emotional** (*sad, shocked*) and **non-emotional** (*short, clean*).

**3.3.4 Syntactic factors**

Each token was also coded based on the type of construction in which it occurred. There are three categories for syntactic *construction*: **attributive** (see [11a]), **predicative** (see example [11b]), and **standalone** (see example [11c]).

[11] a. It was a **very** small town. (NMEC 5)

    b. I was **very** free. (NMEC 3)

    c. I had good teachers. **Very** wise. (NMEC 3)
3.3.5 Discourse factors

Each token was coded for the discourse context in which it occurred, with two discourse context categories (narrative and non-narrative). There are many different conceptualizations of what constitutes a narrative. For the purpose of this study, narrative context of each token was determined based on the criteria delineated by Brown & Tagliamonte’s 2012 study. To qualify as a narrative under these criteria, three things are required:

1. “a temporal juncture had to be present (overtly or covertly)” (Brown & Tagliamonte 2012: 4)

   **Example:** ‘I went outside and then stepped on a bee.’

2. “the clauses connected to the temporal juncture could not be interchanged without changing the story’s meaning” (Brown & Tagliamonte 2012: 4)

   **Example:** the meaning changes between ‘I went outside and then stepped on a bee’ vs. ‘I stepped on a bee then went outside.’

3. “the narrative had to be about a specific incident, not a conflation of several incidents” (Brown & Tagliamonte 2012: 4)

   **Example:** ‘One time I went outside and stepped on a bee and it hurt’ is a narrative but ‘I used to go outside and step on bees all the time’ is not.

Any context which did not fit this description, including generalized descriptions of past events and observations, was coded as non-narrative.

---

5 the examples in section 3.3.3 were invented by the author, to facilitate understanding of the described criteria
3.3.6 Identity factors

As discussed previously, identity can be constructed in discourse both when speakers speak specifically about themselves and their opinions and experiences, as well as when they position themselves when discussing other people, and experiences and opinions other than their own (Bucholtz & Hall 2005). Speakers also explicitly discuss the identity categories which are often used in traditional sociolinguistic analyses, such as age and ethnicity. To explore these elements of identity construction, tokens were coded with 3 different identity categories.

3.3.6.1 Self-reference

The first identity category focuses on the noun being modified by the adjective: all adjectives were coded for whether they directly described the speaker (self, example [12a], below) or something or someone else (other, example [12b] below). References to the speaker and other people (as in us or we) and references to parts of the speaker (as in “my arm” or “my mind”) were also categorized as self.

[12] a. I was very curious. (NMEC3)

I got sick. (NMEC2)

b. …a valuable thing (NMEC4)

the weather’s very agreeable (NMEC4)

3.3.6.2 Topic

The second identity category refers more broadly to the topic of the discourse. In narrative contexts, if a speaker was delivering a narrative about something he or she experienced personally, the token was coded as speaker (referring to speaker’s experiences). If the speaker was delivering a narrative about somebody else’s experiences, the token was coded as nonspeaker (referring to other people’s
experiences). See example [13] below for types of narratives coded in the data. All adjectives in [13a] were coded as speaker, as part of a narrative about the speaker’s own experiences, while all adjectives in [13b] were coded as nonspeaker, as part of a narrative about somebody else’s experiences. Intensifiers in the narrative examples are bolded, and adjectives are italicized.

[13] a. “um tried to swim with great whites but puked off the side of the boat so much that I couldn’t even get into the cage… it was a really rough day… yeah I get motion sickness anyway but then the waves were really bad like people who were – they always say you know “oh get in the water you’ll feel better” but people who were in the cage were like “no, it’s no better in the cage” ((laughing)) it was pretty rough, we did see some great whites though, I could see them on top, I chummed the water, for the people in the cage.” (NMEC 14)

b. “I had a friend, it was actually my ex’s best friend, um, lived in Japan for like two years with his wife, they were um, architecture interns. And he actually, she was the architecture intern, he followed her there and taught English to businessmen. Which was basically they just wanted to have conversations with somebody who spoke English so they could practice, but they made really good money doing it. ((laugh)) and then she decided she didn’t like architecture, and so she recommended him for the internship, and so they switched, and he started doing the internship and she did um, taught English.” (NMEC 14)

In the non-narrative context, observations or explanations which didn’t qualify as narratives but are reflections of the speaker’s self were coded as speaker. These types of tokens included adjectives in which the speaker was the direct referent, as in the self-
reference category described in 3.3.6.1. Additionally, adjectives which were in observations speakers were making about themselves or their own experiences, such as generalized descriptions of experiences which did not qualify as narratives, or constructions which directly related the adjective to the speaker’s self were coded as **speaker** [14a]. Observations about other people and things were coded as **nonspeaker** [14b].

[14] a. “That was very important to me.” (NMEC10)
   “My allergies are really bad.” (NMEC1)  
   b. “She was a really interesting lady.” (NMEC19)  
   “It’s really pretty.” (NMEC6)

### 3.3.6.3 Social categories

As discussed previously, macrosocial demographic categories such as gender and age are often associated with language variation. Researchers have found that language variation is influenced by differences in gender, age, ethnicity, class, and other types of social variables. I take a closer look at the way speakers interact with these categories in actual discourse by focusing on the way users use adjectives and intensifiers specifically when talking about these social categories. Adjectives which refer to these types of broad social categories were coded. A binary distinction was made between **social** (see [15a]) and **non-social** adjectives (see [15b]). **Social** adjectives referred to aspects of class (*rich, poor*), age (*young, old*), ethnicity (*Hispanic, Asian*), or level of education (*educated, uneducated*). There were not any adjectives referring specifically to gender (speakers did not use the adjectives *male* or *female*, for instance), so that social category is not explored in this respect.
a. “He grew up very poor.” (NMEC 13)

“He’s from a very Hispanic background.” (NMEC 18)

b. “I was very curious.” (NMEC 3)

“She was really shocked.” (NMEC 4)

The social adjectives described here can be categorized according to Dixon’s semantic classifications (see section 3.3.3). For instance, some can be classified as human propensity adjectives (*Hispanic, educated*), while others can be classified as physical adjectives (*young, old*). However, although they do not all fall into the same semantic category based on Dixon’s categorization, they do have something in common: they refer directly to social aspects of a speaker’s identity. Including a focus on this subcategory of adjectives allows insight into whether adjectives which encode social aspects of identity are treated differently than other types of adjectives. Just as we might expect speakers to use identity constructing resources such as intensifiers differently when speaking about themselves versus speaking about other people, we might also expect speakers to construct their identities differently when explicitly talking about specific categories related to identity, such as age or ethnicity.

3.4. Quantitative methodology

General trends in the data are explored through descriptive statistics. In addition, a multivariate analysis using Rbrul (Johnson 2009), a sociolinguistic platform based on R software (R 2017), was conducted to determine the significance and interaction of multiple different types of linguistic variables.
4. RESULTS

4.1 Overall intensifier use in population

The collection of data resulted in 1554 tokens of adjectives, with 357 of those adjectives intensified. So, 23% of all adjectives which could be intensified, were intensified (see Table 1). This overall intensification rate is similar to previous findings of intensification rates of around 22% in American English (Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005).

Table 1. Overall intensification frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># adjectives</th>
<th>1544</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># intensified</td>
<td>357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% intensified</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.1 Patterning of specific intensifiers

To intensify the 357 intensified adjectives, speakers used 18 different intensifiers. Of those 18 intensifiers, only five of them occurred more than 10 times in the sample. The rates of usage for specific intensifiers can be seen in Table 2. In keeping with trends seen in other populations, really is the most popular intensifier in this population, accounting for 34% of the intensifiers in the sample, followed closely by very, which accounted for 31% of the intensifiers. Trailing behind are pretty (14%), so (9%), and super (4%). Given the strong preference for really and very, I will focus on these two intensifiers in particular in this analysis. See Appendix B for a comprehensive list of all the intensifiers found in the data.
### Table 2. Intensifier variants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANK</th>
<th>INTENSIFIER</th>
<th># occurrences</th>
<th>% of 357 intensifiers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Really</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Very</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pretty</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>So</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Super</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 4.2 Intensifier use and semantic constraints

##### 4.2.1 Adjective type and intensifier frequency

Value adjectives were the most common type of adjectives found in the sample. Both human propensity and value adjectives are intensified more often than physical adjectives (see Table 3).
Table 3. Adjective type and intensifier frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Human Propensity</th>
<th>Physical</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of tokens</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>738</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># intensified</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% intensified</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.2 Emotional adjectives and intensifier frequency

Adjectives with *emotional* semantic content (*happy, shocked*) were rare in the data, accounting for only 5% of the adjectives. However, there is a strong tendency for emotional adjectives to be intensified compared to non-emotional adjectives (*tall, fast*), with 41% of all emotional adjectives being intensified (Table 4).

Table 4. Emotional adjectives and intensifier frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Emotional</th>
<th>Non-emotional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of tokens</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># intensified</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% intensified</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.3 Polarity and intensifier frequency

There is also a striking pattern in terms of adjective *polarity*. As can be seen in Table 5, adjectives with neutral connotations are the most common, but adjectives with positive and negative connotations are more likely to be intensified. Neutral adjectives exhibit relatively low rates of intensification compared to population averages.
Table 5. Polarity and intensifier frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of tokens</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># intensified</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% intensified</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 Intensifier use and syntactic constraints

There was a relatively equal distribution between predicative and attributive adjectives, with just a handful of standalone adjectives. However, there is a distinct difference in the intensification rates between the syntactic contexts (see Table 6). Although they account for a mere 3% of the data, standalone adjectives (words uttered by themselves, without being part of a verbal clause), exhibit the highest rates of intensification. Adjectives in predicative constructions also exhibit high rates of intensification, while adjectives in attributive constructions are intensified very rarely. This corresponds with previous research suggesting intensifiers prefer predicative contexts (see 2.3.2).

Table 6. Syntactic context and intensifier frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Predicative</th>
<th>Attributive</th>
<th>Standalone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># adjectives</td>
<td>773</td>
<td>731</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># intensified</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% intensified</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.4 Intensifier use and social constraints

Table 7 shows that females exhibit slightly higher rates of intensification than males in this population. There was no noticeable difference in terms of frequency of intensifier use and age. Table 8 shows a negligible difference between ethnicities, with intensification being slightly preferred by Hispanic speakers.

Table 7. Gender and intensifier frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># adjectives</td>
<td>890</td>
<td>654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># intensified</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% intensified</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8. Ethnicity and intensifier frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Non-Hispanic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># adjectives</td>
<td>887</td>
<td>657</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># intensified</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% intensified</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.5. Intensifier use and identity

The previously discussed social, semantic, and syntactic constraints have all been explored in previous studies. The present study introduces three new identity categories to consider in terms of adjective intensification: whom or what is described by the adjective (self vs other), topic (speaker vs nonspeaker), and intensification of adjectives describing ‘social’ categories such as gender or age (social vs nonsocial).
4.5.1 Intensifier use and self-reference

Table 9 shows the difference in intensification rates when the speaker was referring to him/herself versus when the speaker was referring to someone else. The difference is marginal, with a slight preference for intensifying adjectives referring to the speaker’s self.

Table 9. Self-reference and intensifier frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Referring to: self</th>
<th>Referring to: other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># adjectives</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>1375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># intensified</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% intensified</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.5.2 Intensifier use and topic

Table 10 shows the intensification rates when the topic of the discourse was the speaker’s self, versus when the speaker was talking about other people or things. The rates are equal at 23%, showing no difference in intensification rates between topics.

Table 10. Topic and intensifier frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Topic: speaker</th>
<th>Topic: nonspeaker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># adjectives</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>1008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># intensified</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% intensified</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.5.3 Intensifier use and social adjectives

There are marked differences in the intensification rates when the adjective refers specifically to a social category such as age, ethnicity, or class. Speakers are much less
likely to intensify adjectives which encode a specific social identity category than other types of adjectives (see Table 11).

**Table 11. Social adjectives and intensifier frequency**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Non</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># adjectives</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>1290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># intensified</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% intensified</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**4.6 Intensifier use in narratives**

As can be seen in Table 12, the sample analyzed seems to follow the trend found by Brown & Tagliamonte (2012) in that there is a slight increase in intensifier use in narrative contexts. However, this difference in minimal.

**Table 12. Narratives and intensifier frequency**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Non-Narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># adjectives</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>1336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># intensified</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% intensified</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**4.6.1 Narrative and social categories**

While narrative by itself doesn’t seem to predict intensification rates, there are a number of apparent interaction effects. The social categories of gender and ethnicity and discourse-level identity categories pattern differently when considered in the context of narrative vs non-narrative. As can be seen in Table 13, females, in particular, seem to increase their intensification rates in narratives, while the intensification rates for males
do not differ between discourse contexts. This amounts to an interaction effect driven by women’s increased use of intensifiers in narratives.

**Table 13. Narrative context and gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Non-narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># adjectives</td>
<td>male: 126</td>
<td>female: 82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>male: 764</td>
<td>female: 572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># intensified</td>
<td>male: 26</td>
<td>female: 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>male: 164</td>
<td>female: 142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% intensified</td>
<td>male: 21%</td>
<td>female: 30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>male: 21%</td>
<td>female: 25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14 shows the differences in intensification rates across ethnicities and discourse contexts. There appears to be a general tendency towards Hispanic speakers showing increased intensification in non-narrative contexts, while non-Hispanic speakers show increased intensification in narrative contexts, and vice versa.

**Table 14. Narrative context and ethnicity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Non-narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># adjectives</td>
<td>Hispanic: 114</td>
<td>Non: 94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic: 773</td>
<td>Non: 563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># intensified</td>
<td>Hispanic: 24</td>
<td>Non: 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic: 191</td>
<td>Non: 115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% intensified</td>
<td>Hispanic: 21%</td>
<td>Non: 29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic: 25%</td>
<td>Non: 20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**4.6.2 Narrative and semantic and syntactic categories**

The raw data show no tendencies toward interactions between narrative context and semantic type, polarity, emotionality, or syntactic construction.
4.6.3 Narrative and identity categories

What is perhaps most interesting in terms of the present study is the relation between identity categories and discourse context. Because narratives are particularly important in identity construction, the way these categories interact with storytelling provides valuable insight into the way intensifiers and narratives are used to construct identity.

4.6.3.1 Self-reference

Recall that the self-reference category differentiates between adjectives which describe the speaker directly, and adjectives which describe other entities. In non-narrative contexts, there’s only a marginal difference between when speakers use adjectives referring specifically to themselves compared to when they refer to others. However, in the narrative context, speakers show a tendency to intensify less when they refer directly to themselves compared to when they refer to other people (Table 15).

Table 15. Narrative context and self-reference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Non-narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># adjectives</td>
<td>self: 19</td>
<td>other: 189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># intensified</td>
<td>self: 3</td>
<td>other: 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% intensified</td>
<td>self: 16%</td>
<td>other: 25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.6.3.2 Topic

Intensification rates across discourse contexts in the topic category were quite different, as can be seen in Table 16. When telling narratives, speakers preferred to tell narratives about their own experiences, in general, as can be seen by the higher token rates for narratives about the speaker’s self, versus narratives about others. However, it is
interesting to note that there is a distinct difference in the intensification rates between the two types of narratives. When speakers tell narratives about themselves, they are more likely to intensify adjectives than when they tell other people’s stories. In fact, intensification rates when telling other people’s stories were particularly low, compared to the population averages. Interestingly, in non-narrative contexts the difference in intensification rates when speakers are talking about themselves and others is minor.

Table 16. Narrative context and topic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Non-narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># adjectives</td>
<td>speaker: 162</td>
<td>other: 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>speaker: 374</td>
<td>other: 962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># intensified</td>
<td>speaker: 44</td>
<td>other: 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>speaker: 81</td>
<td>other: 225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% intensified</td>
<td>speaker: 27%</td>
<td>other: 15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>speaker: 22%</td>
<td>other: 23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.6.3.3 Social adjectives

As discussed in section 4.5.3, adjectives referring to social categories are significantly less likely to be intensified than other types of adjectives. As can be seen in Table 17, this resistance to intensifying social adjectives is particularly strong in narrative contexts, with only 3% of social adjectives being intensified in narratives, while the social adjectives are slightly more likely to be intensified in non-narrative contexts.

Table 17. Narrative context and social adjectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Non-narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># adjectives</td>
<td>social: 29</td>
<td>non: 179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>social: 225</td>
<td>non: 1111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># intensified</td>
<td>social: 1</td>
<td>non: 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>social: 33</td>
<td>non: 273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% intensified</td>
<td>social: 3%</td>
<td>non: 28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>social: 15%</td>
<td>non: 24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. USE OF VARIANTS *REALLY* AND *VERY*

Given the strong preference for *really* and *very* in this population, I consider the way these two specific variants are used across the constraints described previously. Because not all intensifier variants can occur in attributive constructions, I exclude all attributive adjectives from this portion of the analysis, resulting in a total of 288 intensified adjectives.

5.1. *Really*, *very*, and semantic constraints

5.1.1. Semantic type and specific variants

*Really* and *very* can both be used with all types of adjectives. However, whether or not a speaker uses *really* or *very* is influenced by the semantic type of the modified adjective. As can be seen in Figure 1, *very* is most likely to be used with human propensity adjectives, and least likely to be used with physical adjectives, while *really* is used most often with value adjectives, and least often with human propensity adjectives.
5.1.2 Emotionality and specific variants

Emotional value of the adjective also affects which intensifier is used. As can be seen in Figure 2, *really* and *very* are used relatively equally with adjectives which do not encode emotions. However, *really* is much more likely than *very* to be used with adjectives with do encode emotions.

**Figure 2. Really, very, and emotional adjectives**
5.1.3 Polarity and specific variants

Specific intensifier variants are also correlated with the polarity (affective evaluation) of the intensified adjective. As can be seen in Figure 3, adjectives with neutral polarity, or those which incorporate neither positive nor negative affective value, favor intensification by very. Adjectives with positive polarity tend to be intensified with really, while really and very are used relatively equally with adjectives with negative polarity.

Figure 3. Really, very, and polarity

5.2 Really, very, and syntactic constraints

As can be seen in Figure 4, really is used slightly more than very in predicative contexts. On the other hand, very is the preferred intensifier in standalone contexts.
5.3 Really, very, and social constraints

5.3.1 Age and specific variants

In terms of age, really is preferred to very by younger speakers. Very, on the other hand, is favored by older speakers. This is especially apparent if we look at the use of very by speakers 50 years old or older, compared to younger speakers (Figure 5).
5.3.2 Gender and specific variants

As can be seen in Figure 6, use of *really* and *very* is not dramatically different between genders. Males use *really* slightly more than females. What is most striking is the females’ tendency to use other, less common intensifiers compared to male speakers.

Figure 6. *Really, very, and gender*

5.3.3 Ethnicity and specific variants

As can be seen in Figure 7, Hispanic and non-Hispanic speakers exhibit similar patterns in their use of *really* and *very*. Non-Hispanics show a tendency to use other, less common intensifiers compared to Hispanic speakers.
5.4 *Really, very, and identity categories*

5.4.1 *Self-reference and specific variants*

We see some variation in the specific intensifiers used when the noun being modified by the adjective is the speaker’s self, compared to when the noun is someone or something else. We can see that when speakers use adjectives describing themselves, *very* is preferred to *really*, while when speakers use adjectives describing other people and things, there is a slight preference for *really* (Figure 8). However, while *very* is common when the noun being modified by the adjective is the speaker’s self, it is nearly as common when the noun is somebody or something else. On the other hand, *really* shows decreased use when speakers are referring to themselves. In fact, speakers are most likely to use intensifiers other than *really* or *very* to intensify adjectives which describe the speaker’s self.
5.4.2 Topic and specific variants

As we can see in Figure 9, when speakers are talking about themselves and their own experiences, *very* is used more often than *really*. When speakers are talking about things other than themselves, *really* is preferred to *very*.

Figure 9. *Really, very, and topic*
5.4.3 Social adjectives and specific variants

Looking at the use of specific intensifiers and social adjectives, Figure 10 shows that very is preferred when intensifying social adjectives, while there is a slight preference for really with other types of adjectives.

Figure 10. Really, very, and social adjectives

5.5 Narratives and specific intensifier usage

An analysis of specific intensifier use across discourse contexts shows that in non-narrative contexts, really and very are used equally. In narrative contexts, however, very is used much less often, accounting for only 13% of the intensified adjectives (Figure 11).
6. QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

In order to determine if any of the trends described in section 4 and 5 were statistically significant, I conducted a multivariate analysis using Rbrul (Johnson 2009), a program run on the statistics software R. In my analysis, I first looked at trends in overall frequency of intensification. The dependent variable was a binary, categorical variable based on whether or not an adjective was intensified, and all the coded factors described previously were included as independent variables. An analysis of VIF scores confirmed that the variables were not collinear. In addition to the syntactic, semantic, social, and identity independent variables, pairwise interactions between narrative and all other independent variables were included in the model. Speaker and adjective were included as random effects.
6.1 Significant effects: Intensifier frequency

When all the above described factors are included in a multivariate analysis, three of the main effects are significant: **syntactic context** (Table 18), **adjective polarity** (Table 19), and **social adjectives** (Table 20).

**Table 18. Syntactic context**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTOR</th>
<th>LOGODDS</th>
<th>TOKENS</th>
<th>YES/YES+NO</th>
<th>CENTERED FACTOR WEIGHT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standalone</td>
<td>0.932</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0.375</td>
<td>0.718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicative</td>
<td>0.355</td>
<td>773</td>
<td>0.353</td>
<td>0.588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attributive</td>
<td>-1.288</td>
<td>731</td>
<td>0.094</td>
<td>0.216</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Table 19. Adjective polarity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTOR</th>
<th>LOGODDS</th>
<th>TOKENS</th>
<th>YES/YES+NO</th>
<th>CENTERED FACTOR WEIGHT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>0.313</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>.342</td>
<td>.578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>0.138</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>.332</td>
<td>.534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>-0.451</td>
<td>941</td>
<td>.163</td>
<td>.389</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 20. Social adjectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTOR</th>
<th>LOGODDS</th>
<th>TOKENS</th>
<th>YES/YES+NO</th>
<th>CENTERED FACTOR WEIGHT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.407</td>
<td>1290</td>
<td>.250</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>-0.407</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>.134</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Age, gender, ethnicity, emotion, semantic type, narrative, topic, and self-reference were not significant effects in this sample. None of the pairwise interactions between narrative and the other independent variables were significant.

6.2 Significant effects: Really and very

In order to determine the significance of the effects explored in terms of the use of really and very, specifically, I conducted two separate multivariate analyses. First, I zeroed in on intensified adjectives, with a total token count of 288. In the first analysis, the dependent variable was the binary categorical variable of really vs. all other intensifiers, while in the second analysis, the dependent variable was the binary categorical variable of very vs. all other intensifiers. All of the previously described constraints were included as independent variables. Due to the limited data, no interaction effects were included for really and very. Once again, speaker and adjective were included as random effects.

Really showed no significant effects of any of the constraints analyzed. Use of very, however, was significantly affected by narrative context (Table 21), semantic type (Table 22), emotional adjectives (Table 23), and speaker age (Table 24).
Table 21. *Very* and narrative context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTOR</th>
<th>LOGODDS</th>
<th>TOKENS</th>
<th>YES/YES+NO</th>
<th>CENTERED FACTOR WEIGHT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non</td>
<td>0.851</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>0.312</td>
<td>0.701</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>-0.851</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0.132</td>
<td>0.299</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 22. *Very* and semantic type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTOR</th>
<th>LOGODDS</th>
<th>TOKENS</th>
<th>YES/YES+NO</th>
<th>CENTERED FACTOR WEIGHT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human propensity</td>
<td>1.464</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>0.405</td>
<td>0.812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>-0.049</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>0.272</td>
<td>0.488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>-1.415</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>0.172</td>
<td>0.195</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 23. *Very* and emotional adjectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTOR</th>
<th>LOGODDS</th>
<th>TOKENS</th>
<th>YES/YES+NO</th>
<th>CENTERED FACTOR WEIGHT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non</td>
<td>1.191</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>0.302</td>
<td>0.767</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion</td>
<td>-1.191</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0.167</td>
<td>0.233</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 24. *Very* and speaker age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTINUOUS</th>
<th>LOGODDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+1</td>
<td>-0.054</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. SUMMARY

To summarize, tendencies in the use of intensifiers suggest that the semantic qualities of adjectives do affect whether those adjectives will be intensified. Human propensity and value adjectives tend to be intensified more often than physical adjectives, emotional adjectives tend to be intensified more than non-emotional adjectives, and adjectives with positive or negative polarity are more likely to be intensified than adjectives with neutral polarity. Of these, only polarity has a significant effect, with neutral adjectives being significantly less likely to be intensified than positive or negative ones, and with positive adjectives being the most likely to be intensified.

My findings on the syntactic patterning of intensifiers correspond with previous studies suggestions’ that intensifiers prefer predicative constructions (see section 2.3.2). I do find interesting results with the underexplored standalone construction, which is not specifically analyzed in similar sociolinguistic analyses of intensifier use. It is worth noting that the difference in intensification rates across syntactic constructions is statistically significant.

Aside from a slight preference for intensification among females, I find no significant connections between rates of intensification and social categories in terms of main effects. Differences among speakers of different ages and differences between ethnic groups are marginal. Additionally, the categories of self-reference and topic don’t show conclusive results on their own, but I do find that adjectives which describe social categories resist intensification, in general. This finding is significant. It is particularly

---

6 presumably the standalone context is conflated with the predicative context in most studies, as it qualifies as a subtype of predicative construction (see section 2.3.2)
noticeable in narrative contexts, as speakers show less intensification of social adjectives when they are telling stories than they do in non-narrative contexts.

In fact, although the social and identity categories are inconclusive by themselves, the way they interact with narrative context is notable. In terms of gender, I find that females show increased intensification in narrative contexts while males do not. Regarding ethnicity, I find that non-Hispanic speakers show increased use in narrative contexts while Hispanic speakers actually show a decrease in intensification in narrative contexts.

As far as self-reference, in non-narrative contexts, intensification rates are similar when speakers used adjectives referring to themselves and when they use adjectives referring to other people and things. In narratives, on the other hand, speakers are more likely to intensify adjectives when they refer to other people and things, and show decreased intensification when referring directly to themselves. Regarding the topic category, in non-narrative context there is not a notable difference in intensification rates when speakers talk about themselves and others. However, when speakers narrate stories about themselves, they show increased intensification. When they tell other people’s stories, they use less intensification. These interaction effects were not found to be significant in the multivariate analysis, but that may be due to the small sample size, with only one or two tokens in some of the interaction categories (for instance, only 3 adjectives directly referring to the speaker’s self were intensified in the narrative context). The fact that these trends have been observed suggests they might be worth exploring with a larger dataset.
Really and very are the most commonly used intensifiers in this population, and they are competing in usage across semantic, syntactic, social, and discourse categories. While the use of really and very fluctuates in use across the different categories, what is most notable is the fact that really is not significantly constrained by any of the semantic, syntactic, social, or discourse constraints discussed here. Very, on the other hand, is significantly more likely to be used with non-emotional adjectives and adjectives with neutral polarity (those which do not have a positive or negative affective evaluation) than with emotional adjectives or adjectives with positive or negative polarity. It is also significantly less likely to be used in narratives than non-narrative contexts. Very is also subject to an age constraint, such that older speakers are significantly more likely to use very than younger speakers.
8. CONCLUSIONS

My findings support the idea that variation in intensifier use is influenced by aspects of identity beyond the macrosocial categories which have been analyzed in previous studies. Specifically, speaker stance and each speaker’s personal connection to discourse content also influence patterns of intensification. The intensification patterns across the semantic constraints, overall, can be argued to be directly indicative of the relationship between speaker stance and intensification. Adjective type and polarity are typically analyzed in terms of specific variants, rather than intensifier frequency. Recall that intensifiers with positive or negative connotations tend to collocate with adjectives of the same polarity, and intensifiers which have lost their original meanings and become grammaticalized can collocate with a wide variety of adjective types. However, it is notable that adjectives which already express a specific stance (adjectives with specific affective polarities) are significantly more likely to be intensified, in general, than those which do not. Additionally, human propensity adjectives are interesting in that they explicitly describe aspects of human identity, which can include descriptive aspects of a person’s personality (friendly or shy), or a person’s stance (excited or interested), and value adjectives are closely related to speaker stance (whether a speaker describes something as good or bad, for example). That both of these types of adjectives show a tendency to be intensified more than physical adjectives supports the idea that intensification is related to speaker stance and identity construction. Adjectives which encode emotions also show a tendency to be intensified, further solidifying the link between intensification and speaker feelings.

The findings regarding syntactic context are also telling. We already know from previous studies that intensification is more common in predicative contexts and less
common in attributive contexts. However, given the relation between intensification and speaker stance, the significant intensification rates for the standalone context suggest that this particular construction is strongly associated with speaker stance. This is especially evident in the way the standalone context is used: standalone adjectives typically occur as a response to something asserted by the interviewer [16], or as a reiteration of something the speaker is discussing [17].

[16] INT: Yeah, they’re smart aren’t they?  
SPEAKER: Very. (NMEC 8)

[17] I had good teachers. Very wise. (NMEC 3)

The identity categories explored in this study offer new ways to examine speaker identity and variation in intensifier use. The focus on social adjectives offers valuable insight into the way speakers talk about the macrosocial groups into which they are typically categorized. It is interesting that adjectives which explicitly describe social categories resist intensification. A more fine-tuned look at the different social categories contained within the broader ‘social’ category shows that the intensifier rates are highly variable between different social categories (Table 25). When using adjectives referring to class (rich, poor, well-educated, ghetto), intensification is likely, with a 31% intensification rate. On the other hand, when talking about region (New Mexican, southwestern, etc), there was a 0% intensification rate. Intensification was also rare when talking about ethnicity, with only 5% of ethnicity-related adjectives (Hispanic, white, etc) being intensified, while adjectives referring to age (young, old, etc) were similar to the overall averages in this population.
Table 25. Social adjectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># adjectives</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1290</td>
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<tr>
<td># intensified</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% intensified</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interestingly, many of the class and ethnicity adjectives could be categorized into the same adjective type, human propensity, and the age and region adjectives could qualify as physical adjectives, under Dixon’s (1977) classification. Yet, they are intensified differently. This could be because the concepts of ethnicity or region are less likely to be construed along a scale (recall that intensifiers ‘boost’ adjectives up their semantic scales or conceptualize adjectives at the ‘top’ of their semantic scales). That is, speakers may see aspects of identity relating to ethnicity or region as less fluid than other aspects of identity. This is supported by the fact that social adjectives which allow for more social movement, or which can be more easily construed as scalar (ie: class adjectives like rich or poor) exhibit more intensification than those which are more rigid in their meaning (ie: regional adjectives like New Mexican).

In addition to looking at the way speakers treat words which encode identity categories, I also explore the way speakers talk about themselves and others. While the categories of self-reference and topic are inconclusive alone, interactions across discourse contexts correspond with previous findings which suggest that the way speakers use intensifiers is different in narrative and non-narrative contexts. Intensification rates in narratives were influenced by the category of self-reference, or when speakers use
adjectives to describe themselves. Speakers show a tendency to use fewer intensifiers when they are referring directly to themselves in narratives, while they are more likely to use intensifiers when referring directly to themselves in non-narrative contexts.

This provides a very interesting contrast to the topic category, which addresses general discourse topic (differentiating between when speakers are talking about themselves and about others.) When speakers narrate stories about themselves, they show increased intensification. When they tell other people’s stories, they use less intensification. In non-narrative contexts, no such effect exists. It has already been established that increased intensification in narratives serves to increase listener engagement (Brown & Tagliamonte 2012), but it also makes sense that speakers would be more likely to add emphasis to adjectives when they are telling their own stories, because they are more intimately familiar with their own identities and experiences than with others, and thus are able to take a firmer stance. As such, it can be argued that, in addition to narrative context, a speaker’s personal connection to discourse content influences intensifier use. The fact that the difference between topics seems to apply more to narrative contexts, but not non-narrative contexts is reflective of the unique type of identity work which is performed by speakers when telling narratives.

Additionally, young speakers, females, and non-Hispanic speakers all show a tendency toward increased use of intensification in narrative contexts, supporting the idea that strategies for constructing identity in narratives are different for members of different age groups, genders, and ethnicities. In fact, while non-Hispanic speakers show increased intensification in narratives, Hispanic speakers decrease in intensifier usage when telling stories. This suggests that Hispanic speakers use intensification differently
than non-Hispanic speakers, especially in narrative contexts. While storytelling seems to encourage intensification for non-Hispanic speakers, it does not have the same effect for Hispanic speakers. This may be indicative of a cultural difference between ethnic groups in the way identity is constructed in narratives. It may be that intensification is not as valuable a tool for identity construction in narratives for Hispanic speakers as it is for their non-Hispanic counterparts.

Finally, the results suggest that specific intensifiers can be intimately tied to different aspects of identity construction. *Really* and *very* are the most commonly used intensifiers in this population, and they are competing in usage across semantic, syntactic, social, and discourse categories. *Very* seems to have a weaker association with speaker identity than *really* for a few different reasons. First, we can see that *very* disfavors affective language, in general, because it is associated with non-emotional adjectives and adjectives with neutral polarity (those which do not entail a positive or negative affective evaluation). The fact that speakers are less likely to use *very* with emotional adjectives and adjectives which entail specific polarities suggests that *very* is perhaps less associated with speaker’s feelings than other types of intensifiers. *Very* also has a tendency to occur in non-narrative, rather than narrative contexts. On the other hand, *really* is widely used with all types of adjectives and is also the most commonly used intensifier in narrative contexts. As such, it seems that when speakers are using language to reflect aspects of their identities in discourse, either through specific stance words (adjectives with specific polarities or emotion words) or through identity construction tools like narratives, they are more likely to use *really*, or other, less common intensifiers, while *very* is delegated to less affective, non-emotional language.
Really and very are often considered to be highly grammaticalized and interchangeable, with their variation being largely attributed to social differences among speakers. Although both really and very can be used with a wide variety of adjectives and among speakers of all ages and genders, the way they are used in discourse is, in fact, different. The fact that really is not constrained by the factors analyzed here supports the idea that really is highly grammaticalized. However, very is falling out of fashion and favored more by older speakers, which suggests it may be being replaced with other, newer and/or more exciting intensifiers (such as really). In fact, it has been suggested that innovative uses of intensifiers have more emphatic value than traditional ones. As such, a statement like, “It was extraordinarily strange” suggests stronger intensification than a mere “It was very strange” (Partington 1993, Tagliamonte 2008). In terms of the present study, really seems to hold a strong affective value for speakers in a way that very does not. So, it may be that very has gone stale with overuse, which may explain why it is relegated to contexts and adjectives which are detached from speaker emotion.

Finally, this study describes patterns of intensifier use in NM English, constituting one of the first explorations into this unique dialect. It also allows for comparison of intensifier use in this population to other populations. For instance, findings regarding very and age correspond with previous findings that suggest very may be falling out of use, suggesting that this pattern is not unique to a specific community, but is common in English, in general. On the other hand, intensifier variation is often considered to be largely social in nature, but the lack of significant social constraints other than age in this population reiterates both the differences in the social significance of intensifier use across populations as well the complexity of the many factors influencing intensifier use.
in any one population. Most importantly, it offers a new perspective as far as how to analyze intensifier variation. By combining a qualitative discourse analysis with a quantitative variationist paradigm, we can zero in on some of the fine-grained, subtle nuances of speaker identity which influence intensification in English. In fact, this approach is valuable not just in terms of intensification, but when considering language variation in general.

8.1 Recommendations for future research

This study suggests that the construction and indexing of speaker identity influences the use of intensifiers in English discourse. Analyzing the patterns of use across adjective types and identity categories allows insight into aspects of identity construction which may be affecting intensifier variation. However, the study does use a small sample, so it would be valuable to compare these findings with a larger sample. Additionally, it would be worthwhile to compare these findings with other populations of English speakers, to determine how the patterns described here are manifested in other communities.

Analysis of speaker identity and intensifier use would also benefit from a more fine-grained analysis of discourse contexts and topics. Although the narrative context is interesting and valuable due to its use as an identity construction strategy, the non-narrative context is overly broad, and given the evidence that discourse context is relevant in this regard, it would be worthwhile to untangle the differences between contexts within the non-narrative context. Similarly, the category of topic at this point is overly broad, with only two categories (speaker or nonspeaker). It would be worthwhile
to expand the topic category and explore the way different types of topics (ie. sports, food, speakers’ childhoods) influence intensification.
APPENDICES

APPENDIX A. Speaker demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPEAKER</th>
<th>BIRTH YEAR</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>ETHNICITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1926</td>
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<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Non-Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1981</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>11</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
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<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
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<td>1982</td>
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<td>Non-Hispanic</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>1988</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>1954</td>
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<td>1963</td>
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<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>1988</td>
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<td>Non-Hispanic</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Non-Hispanic</td>
</tr>
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<td>21</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Non-Hispanic</td>
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<td>Non-Hispanic</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>1949</td>
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<td>Non-Hispanic</td>
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<td>24</td>
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<td>1938</td>
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<td>Hispanic</td>
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<td>1968</td>
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<td>Non-Hispanic</td>
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<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>1996</td>
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<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Speaker 9 omitted from analysis due to recording issues*
## APPENDIX B. Intensifiers in data

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<thead>
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<th># OF TOKENS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>all</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brand</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>completely</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crazy</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
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REFERENCES


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