Damn funny la! − A Comparative Corpus Study on Intensifiers in Singapore English

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Tämä pro-gradu -tutkielma tutkii vahvistussanojen käyttöä Singaporen englannissa sekä vertailee tuloksia britti- ja amerikanenglannissa havaittuihin käyttötapoihin. Tavoitteena on laajentaa vahvistussanojen tutkimusta englannin kielen uudempiin varieteetteihin. Vahvistussanat ovat adjektiivin edellä esiintyviä adverbeja, kuten *very* tai *so,* jotka vahvistavat adjektiivin merkitystä. Erityisesti tutkielmassa keskitytään tarkastelemaan, mitä muutoksia vahvistussanojen käytössä voidaan havaita noin kymmenessä vuodessa sekä millaisia vaikutuksia kielenkäyttäjien iällä ja sukupuolella on vahvistussanojen valintaan. Lisäksi tarkastellaan, millaisia vaikutteita Singaporen englanti ottaa muista varieteeteista vahvistussanojen käytössä.

Pääasiallisena tutkimusaineistona on käytetty tätä tutkielmaa varten internetin keskustelufoorumeilta koostettua materiaalia, jossa on viitteitä puhujien ikään ja sukupuoleen. Vertailevana aineistona on käytetty kahta valmista Singaporen englantia sisältävää korpusta, joista toinen mahdollistaa vertailun noin 10 vuotta foorumiaineistoa aikaisempaan puhuttuun kieleen, ja toinen vertailun foorumiaineiston kanssa samanaikaiseen, mutta reilusti laajempaan internetpohjaiseen aineistoon.

Tutkielma pohjautuu aiempiin tutkimuksiin vahvistussanojen käytöstä britti- ja amerikanenglannissa sekä sosiolingvistiseen teoriaan eri ikäryhmien ja sukupuolten kielenkäytön eroista. Teorian perusteella voidaan olettaa, että sukupuolella ja iällä on merkitystä vahvistussanojen esiintymiseen, ja että käytetyt muodot voivat vaihdella kieliyhteisössä todella nopeastikin. Lisäksi eri varieteettien vahvistussanojen ei voida olettaa seuraavan samoja kehityspolkuja, vaan erillään olevat kieliyhteisöt voivat kehittää omia tapojaan käyttää niitä. On kuitenkin todennäköistä, että nykypäivänä globalisaatio ja sen tietoverkot kuljettavat vaikutteita varieteettien välillä ennennäkemättömällä nopeudella, vaikuttaen myös vahvistussanojen käyttöön.

Tulokset vahvistavat, että kymmenessä vuodessa perinteinen vahvistussanan *very* käyttö vähenee samalla kun muiden muotojen, kuten *so* ja *really,* käyttö kasvaa. Singaporen englannissa esiintyy myös muotoja, joita ei ole tavattu runsaassa käytössä muissa varieteeteissa, kuten *super* ja *damn*. Nuoret kielenkäyttäjät suosivat eri vahvistussanoja kuin aikuiset, ja miesten ja naisten vahvistussanojen välillä esiintyy myös huomattavia eroja. Singaporen englannin voidaan todeta ottavan enemmän vaikutteita amerikanenglannista samalla kun monet brittienglannille tyypilliset vahvistussanat puuttuvat kokonaan.

Tutkimus todentaa, kuinka internetissä saatavilla olevaa kielellistä materiaalia voidaan hyödyntää tieteellisessä tutkimuksessa, ja osoittaa sen soveltuvuuden siihen. Uudet tutkimukset perustuen mahdollisesti pidemmällä aikavälillä kerättyyn korpusmateriaaliin mahdollistaisivat tässä tutkielmassa nousseiden kehityssuuntien lähemmän tarkastelun ja vahvistamisen. Lisätutkimuksissa voidaan tutkia muita uusia englannin varieteetteja ja vertailla niitä keskenään yhtenäväisyyksien ja poikkeavien kehityssuuntien paljastamiseksi.

Avainsanat: vahvistussanat, korpuslingvistiikka, Singaporen englanti, varieteettierot

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1. Introduction

The use of intensifiers has received much attention from sociolinguists lately as a system where the English language exhibits rapid language change. The study of New Englishes, on the other hand, is another core field of variationist linguistics that has been an area of interesting views and debates in the recent decades. This master's thesis combines these two approaches by examining the use of intensifiers in Singapore English, one of the New Englishes (Platt et al. 1984). More specifically, the focus is on intensifier use in Singaporean discussion forums on the Internet. The topic is worthwhile, because even though there are multiple studies on intensification in the core varieties of British and American English, there are none conducted on the Singapore English intensifier system or that of any of the New Englishes. My thesis therefore extends the scope of intensifier studies into new varieties, building on Tagliamonte's (2008) argument that there exist notable differences in the way different English varieties use intensifiers and how their systems develop.

The major goal of the thesis is to compare Singapore English intensifier use to what has been found to be going on in its postcolonial mother variety, British English, and the variety that today perhaps most strongly influences other varieties globally, American English. Singapore English is an interesting variety from the point of view of any chosen linguistic topic because of the multilingual, post-colonial setting and the unique forms English takes in that environment. By looking at the most frequent intensifiers in Singapore English in three different sets of data, the analysis hopes to reveal whether other English varieties are influencing the intensifier use in Singapore English, or whether it is developing a system of its own.

Building the analysis on core theories in sociolinguistics, another goal of the thesis is to analyse whether extralinguistic variables such as age and gender have an effect on how intensifiers are used. Studies on this matter in the recent decade show a generation gap in the English intensifier system moving from the 20th to the 21st century, which indicates ongoing change (Stenström 2000, Ito and Tagliamonte 2003, Tagliamonte 2008). Extralinguistic as well as linguistic theories and methods are furthermore employed in an attempt to describe the level of delexicalization of different intensifiers,

which may reveal patterns and allow predictions of language change. Finally, patterns of possible deviations from the BrE and AmE usages or new innovations arising in Singapore English are discussed. The main research questions can be summarised as follows.

1) What are the most frequent intensifiers used in Singapore English and have they changed in ten years?
2) Is there variation in the frequency or choice of intensifiers based on age and gender of the speakers?
3) How is delexicalization manifested with certain intensifiers and how do these findings relate to earlier studies? What do the results predict about future changes in the intensifier system?
4) What other English varieties seem to be influencing the Singapore English intensifier use the most or is it developing a system completely of its own?

In an attempt to answer these questions authentic data is examined, collected from an online discussion forum site, SgForums[1], to form the *Singapore Forums Corpus* (SFC). The patterns arising in that data are then compared to the ICE-Singapore corpus containing spoken data collected 10 years prior to the SFC, and the Corpus of Global Web-based English (GloWbE) where the majority of data are collected from the Internet, similarly to the SFC data.

In Chapter 2 of this thesis, the theoretical background relevant for studying intensifiers is discussed. First, the concept of intensifiers is introduced, with discussions on labelling them by different grammarians and on the historical change of intensifiers. Furthermore, Chapter 2 presents mechanisms of change detected in the intensifier system, where delexicalization is a major process. Finally, the main differences that have been found between British and American English intensifier use are presented, in order to later compare them with the results of the present study.

In Chapter 3, the different extralinguistic factors which might bear a significant effect on the patterns found in this study, focusing mainly on age and gender, are presented. In Chapter 4, a brief account of the Singapore English social background and linguistic variation is given. Chapter 5 presents the methodology and linguistic material employed in the analysis, Chapter 6 consists of the analysis of the actual data and Chapter 7 discusses the findings.

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[1] Special thanks to Professor Sebastian Hoffman for his assistance with the collection and processing of the linguistic data from the Singapore Forums website, enabling the use of new, unexplored authentic material on Singapore English.

2.   Intensifiers

In this thesis, the term *intensifier* is used to refer to adverbs that function as modifiers of other words by boosting or maximising their meaning. Even though there are some intensifiers that can modify nouns, particles, prepositions, other adverbs and verbs (Quirk et al. 1985, 448-450; Biber et al. 1999, 546, 548, 554), the focus here is on those items that modify adjectives. Various studies suggest (Rickford et al. 2007; Tagliamonte 2011) that intensifiers occur most frequently, some of them 80 percent of the time, with adjectival heads. Therefore many previous studies have also concentrated on intensifiers modifying adjectives.

Motivation for the extensive study of intensifiers in recent years is based on the tendency for rapid change in the intensifier system (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003). Intensifiers form an open class of words where new items are quite easy to add (Quirk et al. 1985), which enables the intensifier system to "thrive on novelty", as Lorenz (2002, 143) points out. Because intensification is a means for speakers to make their utterances more expressive, it naturally follows that the more novel the form is perceived as, the more expressive its power is (ibid.). Once a degree word saturates a speech community, its uniqueness and expressivity decline, and new variants need to be incorporated into the intensifier system, because the "speakers desire to be original" (Peters 1994, 271).

This chapter discusses the ways in which intensification is treated in grammars and in other earlier theoretical background. This involves discussing the problem of labelling intensifiers and giving an outline of their historical development. In addition, to account for the variation and change in the system, the mechanisms of intensifier delexicalization and recycling of intensifiers are presented. Finally, the major differences in intensifier usage detected between British and American Englishes are discussed.

2.1 Labelling

Grammarians are not unanimous in their classification and naming of the adverbs that intensify other words. In this section, different ways of categorising intensifying adverbs are discussed, which will be of help when justifying the choice of intensifiers for analysis in this thesis. However, it is almost impossible to list all possible items in the open category of intensifiers, as Bolinger (1972, 21) argues. Naming of intensifiers has varied from intensives (Stoffel 1901), boosters (Bolinger 1972), and amplifiers (Quirk et al. 1985) to degree adverbs (Huddleston and Pullum 2002), among others.

Bolinger (1972) notes that intensification is most frequently discussed in connection to adjectives and other adverbs, and similarly, Biber et al. (1999, 544-5) argue that "one of the primary functions of adverbs is to modify adjectives" as degree adverbs. Bolinger (1972, 17) divides degree words into four groups according to the part they occupy on a scale of intensification. Boosters, such as *terribly*, intensify upwards, compromisers, like *rather,* occupy the middle field, diminishers, such as *little*, scale down from the norm and minimizers, for example *bit*, occupy the bottom part on the scale (ibid.). Biber et al. (1999, 554-5) accept both terms intensifier and amplifier to refer to the words that scale upwards from a norm. These can either be used to express a great degree on the scale, like *very* and *so* do, or to express the highest possible point on the scale, which is the case with *totally* or *absolutely*. Together with diminishers or downtoners (ibid., 555), words that scale down from a norm, such as *slightly* and *rather*, intensifiers form a broader category, adverbs of degree, which "describe the extent to which a characteristic holds" (ibid., 554).

On the other hand, for Quirk et al. (1985, 445, 589), intensifier is the wider term for the two subgroups of amplifiers and downtoners. Intensifiers are defined as scaling devices, and it is noted that this involves both scaling the meaning upwards and downwards (ibid., 591). They further divide amplifiers into two categories of maximizers (*absolutely, completely, extremely, entirely, perfectly)* and boosters (*really, very, awful, dead, so, right, well, quite, pretty)* (ibid., 590-1). As is illustrated by

authentic examples in the Singapore Forums Corpus (SFC)[2], maximizers (1) "denote the upper extreme of the scale" (ibid.), whereas boosters (2) "denote a high point on the scale" (ibid.).

(1a.) the result is **totally** different from wat u all say [TP2009*Hwaimeng*386246]
(1b.) my skin has been **extremely** dry for the past few weeks, so have switched from seba med to baby oil for the moment. [PTT2009*cassie*317234]

(2a.) His dark circles also **so** dark, but how come he still **so** charming and i not pretty leh??? [PTT2005*Qoo`~`*140577]
(2b.) Some are **pretty** obvious they are NOT real soldiers, more like models posing for a shoot. [MN2006*sgf*200098]

Furthermore, Quirk et al. (1985, 447) distinguish emphasizers, such as *really* in *She has a really beautiful face* or *all* in *He looked all confused*, as a category distinct from degree adverbs but which, however, can have a similar meaning to intensifiers when occurring with gradable adjectives. Downtoners Quirk et al. (1985, 590) divide into approximators (*almost*), compromisers (*more/less*), diminishers (*partly*) and minimizers (*hardly*). Nevertheless, it is the booster class that is especially open for new items and most often affected by the hyperbolical change in intensifiers (ibid.), which is one of the reasons why the amplifying meaning is at the focus of this thesis.

Of the grammarians discussed here, Huddleston and Pullum (2002) most clearly seek to avoid the term intensifier altogether, although they admit it is sometimes used for the items that can occur with adjectives and adverbs, but not with verbs (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 585 footnote). They do not think it is necessary to separate this group from the general category of adverbs of degree, and furthermore seem to think that it is incorrect to use intensifiers to refer to items which semantically express other than high degree (ibid.). The labelling of degree words is approached only through verb modification, because for Huddleston and Pullum (2002, 535-6) adverbs modifying adjectives are just a subgroup of those modifying verbs. Degree adverbs are arranged in categories from high to low degree (ibid., 721): Maximal (*absolutely, completely, totally*), Multal (*deeply, so*), Moderate

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[2] The information given with an example from the Singapore discussion forums (the SFC) data consist of the abbreviated forum name (TP=Teens Planet, MN=Military Nuts, PTT=PTT Pte Ltd), the year, *the nickname of the speaker* and the number of the text file containing the example, in this order. All examples from the SFC data are from here on given in a similar form.

(*moderately, rather*), Paucal (*a little, slightly*), Minimal (*barely, hardly*), Approximating (*almost, nearly*) and Relative (*enough, sufficiently*). Table 1 sums up the discussion so far and gives further examples of the different categories.

Author(s)	Terminology	Scaling upwards	Scaling downwards
Bolinger 1972	Degree words / intensifiers	Boosters: *terribly*	Compromisers: *rather, fairly* Diminishers: *little* Minimizers: *bit*
Biber *et al.* 1999	Adverb of degree / Degree adverb	Intensifiers / Amplifiers subgroups: 1) *very, so, extremely, too* 2) *totally, absolutely, completely, quite* (sense of 'completely')	Diminishers / Downtoners *slightly, somewhat, rather,* *quite* (sense of 'to some extent')
Quirk *et al.* 1985	Intensifiers	Amplifiers 1) maximizers: *absolutely, altogether, completely, entirely, extremely, fully, perfectly, totally, utterly* 2) boosters: *so, highly, well, enormously, deeply, badly, greatly, highly*	Downtoners *quite, pretty, rather, relatively, fairly* 1) Approximators: *almost* 2) Compromisers: *more* or *less* 3) Diminishers: *partly* 4) Minimizers: *hardly*
Huddleston and Pullum 2002	Degree adverbs / degree modifiers	Maximal: *absolutely, completely, totally, entirely, quite* Multal: *deeply, so, well, strongly* Moderate: *moderately, partly, quite, rather* Paucal: *a bit, a little, little, slightly* Minimal: *barely, hardly, scarcely, at all* Approximating: *almost, nearly, virtually* Relative: *enough, sufficiently, too much*	

Table 1. Labelling of intensifiers in different grammars of English.

As can be seen from Table 1, some items occur in more than one category and can sometimes be used to both amplify and to downtone. Biber et al. (1999, 556) locate the adverb *quite* in both categories, because it can be interpreted to have both the meaning of 'completely', hence an amplifier, and 'to some extent', which is a downtoner. The latter meaning is said to occur usually with gradable adjectives (3) and the former with non-gradable ones (4) (illustrations from Biber et al. 1999, 556).

(3) quite nice ('to some extent')
(4) quite motionless ('completely')
(5) quite confident

However, when *quite* modifies adjectives like *confident,* which can function either as a gradable or a non-gradable adjective (5), it is often impossible to separate the senses (ibid.). Therefore, *quite* will be excluded from the analysis in this thesis, as the purpose here is to concentrate on the amplifying meaning. Biber et al. (1999, 552) note that *just* is similar in the respect that it can either increase (*just dreadful*) or decrease (*just 4.5 points down*) the intensity of the modified item.

Even though *pretty* is in most cases in Table 1 listed as a downtoner, *The Oxford English Dictionary* (s.v. *pretty* adv.) describes the adverb *pretty* as "Qualifying an adjective or adverb: to a considerable extent; *fairly, moderately; rather, quite*. In later use also: *very*" and adds that it more recently has taken into indicating a moderately high degree. Therefore, it is justified to include *pretty* in the analysis section of this thesis.

Different kind of ambiguity arises with *really*, since it can be interpreted as a stance adverb expressing 'in reality' (6a.) or an amplifier (6b.) (Biber et al. 1999, 858), and often even the context does not help in deciding between the senses. In this thesis it is decided that if such cases are encountered, they will be interpreted as amplifiers for the benefit of the analysis. *Really* cannot be excluded from the analysis altogether, as in previous studies it is found to be one of the most central intensifiers in English (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003).

(6a.) It's *really* wonderful.
(6b.) Susie's *really* excited about that backyard.

Biber et al. (1999, 564) note that even though many of the common degree adverbs are interchangeable from context to context, even those that are similar in meaning do have some preferences as regards their adjective collocates. Some intensifiers, on the other hand, are so semantically restricted in their adjective collocations, that they are fossilized (Partington 1993, 179). For example, it is acceptable to have the combination *dead tired/drunk,* but perhaps not **dead exhausted/intoxicated* and *fast asleep* or *wide awake*, as discussed in Quirk et al. (1985, 447 footnote).

In conclusion, what is meant by intensifiers in this thesis is a fusion of the meanings defined by the grammarians. The purpose is to concentrate on those items that scale upwards the meaning of the

adjective modified (Biber et al. 1999; Huddleston and Pullum 2002) and that have either a maximizing or a boosting effect (Quirk et al. 1985). This is also the definition most frequently employed in earlier intensifier studies (e.g. Tagliamonte 2008, Tagliamonte and Roberts 2005) and, as was already mentioned, is the class where most of the change usually takes place.

2.2 Historical trajectory

In order to study the recent changes in the intensifier system, it is important to understand the changes that have characterised the system in the past. The history of the English intensifier system has in the past been subject to fevered change and competition for popularity, as new forms have been needed to replace the older ones weak in their expressive power (Stoffel 1901). Figure 1 shows the timeline from Old English to Modern English and how the popularity of intensifiers has fluctuated through that time period.
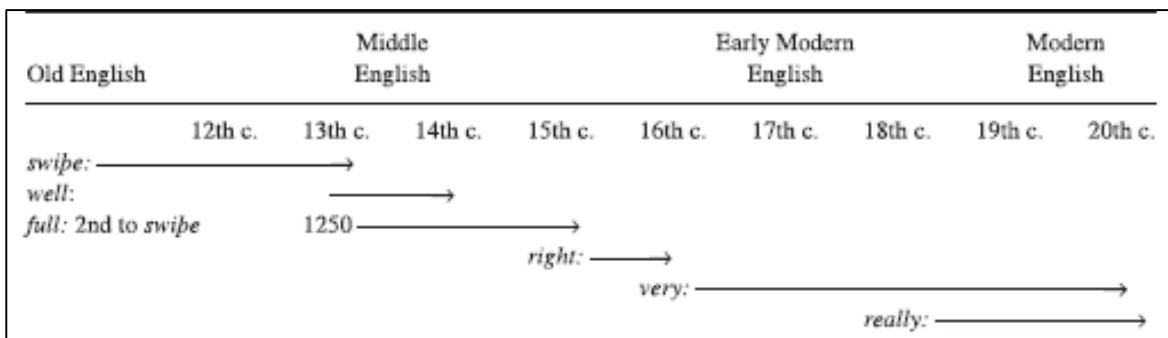
Figure 1. Summary of the shifts in the popularity of intensifiers in English (abstracted from Mustanoja (1960) and presented in Ito and Tagliamonte (2003, 260).

As the figure portrays, various adverbs have been popular intensifiers since Old English through the Middle English Period to Modern English. The word *swiþe,* which originally meant 'strong' and as an intensifier 'extremely, very', was the most popular intensifier of adjectives in the Old English and Early Middle English periods (Mustanoja 1960, 325; Ito and Tagliamonte 2003, 259). It then gave way to other fairly old adverbs *well, full* and *right* during the Middle English period (ibid.). These findings are also supported by Peters (1994, 272) who studied Middle English and Early Modern English letter collections, which show a growth in diversity in the booster class of adverbs during that time unparalleled in any other times of English history. As will be seen later, many words

featured in Figure 1 appear only as minority variants among intensifiers used today (Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010, 253). The intensifier *well* was recorded, however, in use by London teenagers in the 1990s by Stenström (2000), which exemplifies how older forms do not entirely disappear from the intensifier system, but stay in the background and can reappear in later usage if a new expressive item is needed (ibid.).

In the late 16th and early 17th century *very* won in popularity over *right,* according to Peters (1994, 277) and Mustanoja (1960, 326-7), who tracks its origins to the 14th century adjective *verray*, meaning 'true, real'. *Very* continues its dominance through 18th and 19th centuries, but in some 20th century studies forms like *really* and *so* have defeated it in frequency (e.g. Tagliamonte and Roberts, 2005). The popularity of *very*, taken the background of intensifiers as a system characterised by rapid change, has prevailed surprisingly long. The following illustrations (7-9) of the different historical intensifiers are presented in Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005, 283) (original sources parenthesized).

> (7) bute a mayden **swiþe** fayr
> 'maiden very fair'
> [(*The Lay of Havelok the Dane*, c. 1280; ed. W.W. Skeat, 2nd ed., rev. K. Sisam (Oxford: Clarendon, 1915), line 111, (cited in Mustanoja 1960; 325)]

> (8) But ye hym mysid **right** sone
> 'but you him missed very recently'
> [*Cursor Mundi*, c. 1450; ed. Richard Morris et al., 3 vols. (London: Early English Text Society, 1874-92), line 17413 (cited in OED2)]

> (9) He was a **verray** parfit gentil knyght.
> [Geoffrey Chaucer, "General Prologue," *Canterbury Tales*, c. 1386; from *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F.N. Robinson (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), line 72 (cited in Mustanoja 1960, 326)]

Not featured in Figure 1, the intensifier *so* was already used in Old English (Mustanoja 1960, 324), while Tagliamonte (2008, 369) has found the first unambiguous examples of the intensifier use of *so* dating from the mid-1800s English. In addition, *pretty* is the first time quoted as an intensifier in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) in 1565, and Stoffel (1901, 153) observes that its used in "contemporary usage" for the expression of a high degree. Ito and Tagliamonte (2003, 261) note that it is also important to understand the linguistic mechanisms through which the changes described happen. Although these processes are not always easy to track with each change taking place, one of

the most prominent processes associated with the change in the intensifier system is delexicalization (ibid.), which is discussed in the next section.

2.3 Variation and Change in the Intensifier System

One of the reasons for why intensification is a target of sociolinguistic study is the tendency for fast renewal and the great variety of forms used in expressing it. Several scholars (Bolinger 1972, Peters 1994, Tagliamonte 2011) point out that it is only natural that intensifiers used in a speech community change, because their ability to emphasize meanings and affect recipients rely heavily on their novelty. Partington (1993, 188) also agrees that new and unpredictable intensifier + adjective collocations have a more emphatic meaning than predictable ones. Bolinger's influential observation about the nature of intensifiers sums up many points in this discussion:

> Degree words afford a picture of fevered invention and competition that would be hard to come by elsewhere, for in their nature they are unsettled. They are the chief means of emphasis for speakers for whom all means of emphasis quickly grow stale and need to be replaced. (Bolinger 1972, 18)

By studying the rapidly changing intensifiers, scholars hope to shed light on the tendencies of language change in general. The registers in which intensifier change is most likely detected are informal rather than formal in nature (Lorenz 2002). In this section, mechanisms of change relevant for the intensifier system are presented. This involves accounting for the ways in which intensifiers come to be in the first place as well as explaining how they change, which is supported by the grammaticalization theory. Later, in Chapter 4, the effects of social factors into the ongoing change are discussed.

2.3.1 Open and closed classes of adverbs

Quirk et al. (1985, 590) note that intensification is usually expressed through the use of adverbs, although other parts of speech are also possible origins. They divide adverbs into a closed class constituted by simple and compound adverbs and an open class constituted by the derivation of adverbs from adjectives by using the -ly ending (ibid., 438). The interesting question is, why some

types of adverbs develop into expressions of intensity more easily than others. Lorenz (2002, 144) argues that the open *-ly* class, with words such as *highly, terribly* and *absolutely,* is central to the creation of new intensifiers because most of the innovation occurs there as opposed to the closed class such as *very, quite* and *rather*. Furthermore, Nevalainen (2008, 291) argues for the high productivity of the *-ly* ending in Modern English, because "it is possible to form adverbs from practically all adjectives by means of the *-ly* suffix". However, Biber et al.'s (1999, 540, 564) findings that adverbs formed by the *-ly* suffixation are more frequent in written registers than conversation, and that conversation favours simple and informal intensifiers, seem to somewhat contradict the proposition that the *-ly* class is the most innovative. As is known, innovation generally is more common in informal and spoken registers. In addition, Fries (1940, 205) categorises many simple adverb forms of intensifiers into "vulgar English" while the *-ly* forms are Standard English, and thus more neutral in their meaning. As regards the labelling of intensifiers presented in section 2.1, the booster class is the most open and frequently gains new members (Quirk et al. 1985, 590; Peters 1994, 271).
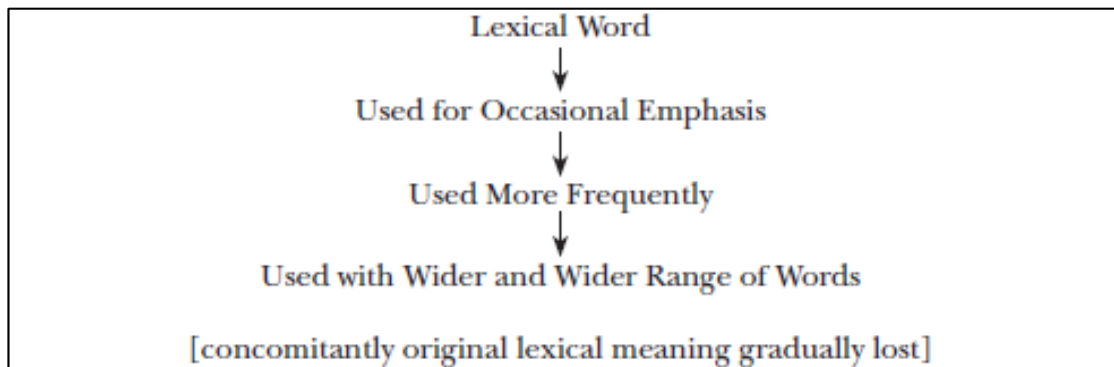
2.3.2 Delexicalization

In addition to the classes described above, *delexicalization*, one of the processes of *grammaticalization*[3], has to be taken into account to understand the linguistic mechanisms of how intensifiers undergo change and new intensifiers come to be (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003, 261). Partington (1993, 183) describes the outcome of delexicalization as "the reduction of the independent lexical content of a word, or group of words, so that it comes to fulfil a particular function but has no meaning apart from this to contribute to the phrase in which it occurs". Reduction of lexical content is a gradual process, as presented in Figure 2, which may require generations of language users to go through. As Partington (ibid, 184) continues, language items in the process of delexicalization can

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[3] Some scholars, for example Hopper and Traugott (2003) and Mendéz-Naya (2008), use the term grammaticalization instead of delexicalization to refer to the process where originally lexical words or constructions take on to serving grammatical functions and developing new ones (Hopper and Traugott (2003). Grammaticalization can be thought of as the larger or the two processes, often including delexicalization as one of its sub-processes. In this thesis the term delexicalization is used as is preferred in many studies on intensification (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003, Tagliamonte and Roberts 2005, Partington 1993, Lorenz 2002 etc.).

typically be found at different points along the scale from full lexical meaning to more or less advanced delexicalization.

Lexical Word
↓
Used for Occasional Emphasis
↓
Used More Frequently
↓
Used with Wider and Wider Range of Words

[concomitantly original lexical meaning gradually lost]

Figure 2. The delexicalization process (Tagliamonte and Roberts 2005, 285)

Figure 2 also shows how the linguistic item going through delexicalization gradually loses its collocational restrictions and increases in frequency (Lorenz 2002, 144). Unarguably, the most fully delexicalized intensifier in use today is *very*, which has now completely lost its historical meaning of 'truly' and collocates widely with all kinds of adjectives (ibid., 145). One example of an intensifiers at the opposite end of the delexicalization cline is *terribly,* which still has some lexical meaning left evident from its frequent occurrences with negative adjective collocates (ibid.). Bolinger (1972, 22) categorizes intensifiers into more grammaticalized, such as *very, so, pretty* and *well* and less grammaticalized, where he interestingly places *really* and many adverbs with the *-ly* ending. Tagliamonte (2008, 338) and Lorenz (2002, 157) have found evidence of *really* being the most likely intensifier to fully delexicalize next.

Being able to determine the delexicalization stage of intensifiers can account for the ongoing changes in the system as well as allow to predict some probable future developments. In other words, the approach analyses the current situation synchronically to account for diachronic changes. Although determining the delexicalization stage is not always a simple task, two means have been employed for that purpose: syntactic function and collocational behaviour. The former involves looking into the syntactic position of an adjective modified by an intensifier. Findings by Mustanoja (1960), Ito and Tagliamonte (2003) and Macaulay (2006), among others, all indicate that the more

frequently the intensifier collocates with predicative adjectives (1) than with attributive adjectives (2), the further advanced it is in delexicalization. Intensifiers co-occurring predominantly with the predicative position are thus far in the delexicalization process and have lost much of their original meaning, whereas those co-occurring notably with the attributive function are new to the system and not yet fully delexicalized.

(1) Predicative position
   a. I checked ur ger ger out liao...she is **super** shortsighted...and hse [sic.] refuse to wear specs coz it ruin her face [TP2005*laurence82*110199]
   b. I like schu's shoes. But nowadays it's getting **so** expensive. [PTT2008*Mimmy*334262]

(2) Attributive position
   a. This is a **very** huge change that will be phased in gradually. [MN2004*dkhoo*82496]
   b. I found this **really** wonderful facial cleanser at Watson's when I was shopping with my sis last week. [PTT2005*starlet**124123]

In a study on York English by Ito and Tagliamonte (2003, 272-3), both *very* and *really* occur more frequently with predicate adjectives throughout the whole corpus, therefore validating the claim that they are well advanced in delexicalization. As expected, *very* is developed further, because it prefers the predicative function markedly more than the attributive, whereas with *really* there is a slightly weaker preference of the predicative function (ibid.). Surprising findings are reported by Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010, 275-6) who studied some fairly new intensifiers *proper, canny,* and *dead* in their Tyneside data in order to see whether they preferred the attributive function. The findings indicate, however, that while with other intensifiers the predicative position is slowly increasing in time, these newer forms occur markedly less in the attributive function than older intensifiers to begin with and seem to prefer the company of a predicative adjective, contrary to the hypothesis (ibid.). The findings are therefore not always simply in support of the theory, the reason why it is interesting to test the same hypotheses in new data and see how the intensifiers studied are distributed syntactically.

Another intralinguistic method for analysing the stage of delexicalization with intensifiers is to measure how widely they collocate with different kinds of adjectives. According to Partington (1993, 183), a correlation exists between the range and number of adjectives the intensifier collocates with

and the delexicalization stage of the intensifier. Therefore, newer intensifiers are expected to have relatively fewer collocates than old ones. For example Ito and Tagliamonte (2003) base this analysis of collocational restrictions on semantic categories of adjectives established by Dixon (1982, 16). Dixon divides adjectives into seven semantic types (given with typical examples) of dimension (*big, long, fat*), physical property (*hard, heavy, hot*), colour (*black*), human propensity (*jealous, happy, clever*), age (*new, young, old*), value (*good, proper, excellent*) and speed (*fast, quick*) with the possible addition of an eighth category, position (*high, low, near*). If an intensifier has collocates in many of those semantic groups, it is fully delexicalized, whereas those intensifiers that collocate in only a few categories have stronger lexical meanings. Dixon (1982, 16 footnote) excludes from his categorization adjectives like *familiar, important, easy* and *difficult* because of the difficulty in labelling them. A full analysis based on Dixon's classification is not attempted in the thesis, since it can be anticipated that not all adjectives found in the data conform to these categories and much material would therefore need to be excluded from analysis.

2.3.3 Renewal and recycling of intensifiers

Besides delexicalization described above, and closely connected to it, intensifier system changes due to two other processes: *renewal* and *recycling*. Renewal, according to Hopper and Traugott (2003, 122), is the process whereby "existing meanings may take on new forms" as opposed to *divergence* where forms take on new meanings, according to the grammaticalization theory. In renewal, the meaning, in this case intensification, stays roughly the same, while multiple forms can be used to express that meaning. As an example they (ibid.) give the forms *awfully, frightfully, fearfully, terribly, incredibly, really, pretty, truly* that have been popular alternatives for *very* at different times. Hopper and Traugott (ibid.) note that renewal is typical for intensifiers because of their emotional function. While speakers aim at the strongest emotional impact possible with their utterance, it is predicted that only a handful of forms will not suffice, but the greater variety of forms to express this meaning an individual masters, the greater the possible impact (ibid.)

Tagliamonte (2011, 334) describes the recycling of intensifiers as a process where old forms that have gone through at least partial delexicalization, but for some reason were left unused in the system, are taken back into active use. Recycling therefore entails some degree of previous advancement in delexicalization. Bolinger (1972, 18) describes recycling as the old popular forms' retreating to "islands bounded by restrictions (in collocation)". This idea is useful in explaining why the grammatical change of intensifiers is not always a continuous process (ibid.) and why older forms keep emerging in contemporary language use in different English varieties in different times. For example *so*, which is found as a new rising trend in many studies, is likely to have appeared first just little after *very* 400 years ago, but has been recycled into new use in AmE and BrE after decades of unpopularity (ibid.).

2.4 Intensifiers in British and American English

Fevered invention is not only typical to the intensifier system of the English language as a whole, but different varieties of English appear to have their own preferences and development trends with intensifiers. Various studies have found significant differences between British and American English intensifier use. As for example Lim (2007, 457) and Mair (2013, 255) note, various varieties of English bear a significant impact globally through media, film industry and politics on other varieties and languages, and most likely affect Singapore English as well on different linguistic levels. Mair (2013) argues for the importance of the two-way effects that this post-national use of Englishes can have but stresses American Standard English as the "hub" with great transnational impact on other varieties (ibid., 261) due to its weight in global political, economic and military issues (ibid., 258). Although Singapore English originates from British English due to the colonial history of Singapore, Schneider (2003, 236) refers to the contemporary discussion about the heightened American English influence on varieties derived from British English. On the other hand, British English is still prominent in global media and teaching institutions (Mair 2013, 258). Therefore, it will be interesting to compare the influences that Singapore English could be seen employing in its intensifier use.

To begin with the comparison of varieties' intensifier use, Biber et al.'s (1999, 561, 564) findings in the extensive *Longman Spoken and Written English Corpus* highlight British English conversation as characterised by intensifiers *absolutely* and *bloody,* while *right, pretty* and *real* are not common. In American English, however, both *really* and its more informal version *real* are commonly found in addition to other popular intensifiers such as *damn, incredibly, so* and *totally* (ibid., 543, 564; Fries 1940, 203).

	Variety	*very*	*really*	*so*
British English	York (1997; Ito and Tagliamonte 2003)	38.3%	30.2%	10.1%
	Tyneside (2000s; Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010)	32.4%	26.7%	9.1%
North American English[4]	*Friends* (1994 – 2002; Tagliamonte and Roberts 2005)	14.2%	24.6%	44.1%
	Toronto (2000s; Tagliamonte 2008)	6.6%	13%	6.1%

Table 2. Popularity of intensifier forms in British and American English in the 1990s and 2000s according to major studies (as percentages of all intensifiers used; variety, year of corpus data and reference to the respective study given).

Overall, intensifier studies on spoken British English are more numerous than those on American English spoken in the US, which may be due to the scarcity of electronic spoken corpora that could be seen representative of the whole variety of AmE. Table 2 compares the most popular items in different varieties in a similar time frame. As can be seen, in BrE *very* dominates in both decades, whereas in AmE *so* and *really* are the most popular forms. The order of popularity is in many cases completely reversed between the varieties. The earliest corpus findings on intensifiers in British English from the 1960s are documented by Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010) who studied the Tyneside dialect on three different decades. In the 1960s *very* accounts for 65 per cent of all the intensifiers found and the second and third frequent *really* and *rather* are found only in small percentages (ibid., 263). In the 1990s *very* drops to only 18 per cent, when an interesting trend and a

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[4] The term North American English is used here, because the study on Toronto English represents Canadian English and clearly cannot be included among the studies on American English spoken in the U.S. Canadian English is, however, in many aspects closer to the American English varieties than BrE, as can also be seen in its use of intensifiers.

case of linguistic recycling appears, as *dead* is at the top with 35 per cent and *really* on the rise with 25.1 per cent (ibid., 267). In the 2000s the situation is once again reversed, as *very* and *really* are nearly even with 32.4 per cent and 26.7 per cent respectively and *so* has reached the top three with 9.1 per cent (ibid., 269).

These findings are also mirrored in Ito and Tagliamonte's (2003) study of intensifiers in *the York English Corpus* collected around 1997 (Tagliamonte, 2011), where *very* is at the top with 38.3 per cent followed closely by *really* with 30.2 per cent and *so* with 10.1 per cent shares. *So* is also gaining popularity in Glasgow teenagers' speech during 1997–2004, according to Macaulay (2006, 271). The findings reveal the speed of change as the oldest and most delexicalized *very* becomes contested by other intensifiers during only a few generations even in York English, which Ito and Tagliamonte call a slightly conservative speech community of a standard northern variety (2003, 262).

Three studies have taken a look into the intensifiers in spoken North American English. Tagliamonte's (2008, 369) study on Toronto English of the early 2000s finds *really* the most popular intensifier with 13 per cent and *very* in 6.6 per cent almost even with *so* in 6.1 per cent. Besides, Rickford et al.'s (2007, 10) analysis of *the Stanford Tape-Recorded Corpus* argue for the heightened presence of *really* in the speech of young Californians with 52.3 per cent. In Tagliamonte and Robert's (2005) study on the spoken media language in the TV-series *Friends* from 1994 – 2002, a trendy use of *so* is recorded with a percentage of 44.1 out of all intensifiers, when *really* reaches 24.6 per cent and *very* only 14.2 per cent. The writers argue that language in the media can be highly innovative and pave the way for similar trends in actual language use, defending media language as a good source for intensification studies (ibid., 296). As Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005, 288) argue, these recent findings in different varieties suggest that the popularity of intensifiers changes on a trajectory of *very > really > so.*

The reasons for the found variation are multiple and cannot be easily explained in every single case. One of the reasons for the variation found in her studies offered by Tagliamonte (2008, 370) is

that York and Toronto Englishes "represent different stages in the cyclic evolution of English intensifiers" with York in an earlier phase where *very* dominates and Toronto as more advanced with a rising *so*. Furthermore, the data coming from a slightly different time periods, the limited set of speakers in the *Friends* data and an attempt of TV-series to favour "a trendy expressive style" can cause differences in findings (ibid., 371). Besides, the extralinguistic factors of age and gender discussed in the next chapter might have a significant effect on how the intensifier system develops in a speech community.

3. Extralinguistic Factors Bearing on Intensification

The ways people use language inside a speech community is very seldom homogeneous, but different social factors intervene to produce variation from speaker to speaker. People's gender, age, religion or social class can, according to Trudgill (2000, 24), function as social barriers creating distance which prevents the diffusion of linguistic features, such as intensifiers, through the speech community much like actual geographical barriers would. On the other hand, certain linguistic features may be used and even exaggerated to signal identity or membership in a group (ibid., 13). It has been argued that by examining these social factors simultaneously with the intralinguistic patterns of delexicalization ways in which linguistic and social factors interact in language change can be found (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003, 262) and hypotheses about future changes made. The correlation of two factors most frequently discussed with intensifier use are speaker age and gender, even though the use of specific items may no doubt also signal in-group membership (Tagliamonte 2011, 321; Peters 1994) or depend on the educational background of speakers (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003, 275). Unfortunately the latter two factors are not attainable through the data used in this thesis, which is why the two previous ones are in the focus.

3.1 Age

According to many studies on intensifiers young people often prefer newer, trendy and incoming forms of intensifiers whereas older people resort to a more traditional set (Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010; Ito and Tagliamonte 2003; Macaulay 2006; Stenström et al. 2002). Younger speakers have also been noted to employ intensifiers more frequently in their speech than adults have, meaning a decrease in frequency among older generations (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003, 257). In general, many scholars agree on the role of the young as innovative and exaggerating speakers and the old as more conservative language users (Paradis 2000, 147). Some trendy intensifiers favoured by young in different varieties are *well, right, bloody* (Stenström et al. 2002, 143), *pure, dead* (Macaulay 2006; Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010) and *all* (Rickford et al. 2007).

These hypotheses are supported by the findings in York English, where *very* was only frequent among the speakers aged 35+ but not among the 17-34 year-olds who favoured *really* (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003, 267). Similarly, Tyneside teenagers were found to be using the trendy intensifier *dead* and slowly increasing their use of *really*, while the older generation still preferred *very* (Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010, 267). While *dead* in Tyneside in the 1990s seems to be a case of age grading, which means that its users discontinued its use when they aged, *really* has had a more lasting effect on the speech community and still favoured among the young of the 2000s (ibid., 271; Chambers 2003). From the point of view of language change, it would seem that innovations leading to change are usually introduced into the system by young people, as for example Lorenz (2002) argues.

3.2 Gender

One of the explanations for why men and women use language in different ways, are the expectations, roles and attitudes that society impacts on different genders (Trudgill 2000, 79). For example, one of such hypotheses of difference is that women use emotional and emphatic language more than men, which is why they would also use more intensifiers (Tagliamonte and Roberts 2005, 289). Labov (1984, 43) and Partington (1993) touch on this in stating that intensifiers are central means of emphasis and therefore used more by women. Stoffel (1901, 101) already established a connection between women and passionate forms such as *so*, stating that "ladies are notoriously fond of hyperbole" and that *so* is "a purely feminine expression". Jespersen (1922, 250) goes further by assigning women an important role in language change because their hyperbolical expression drives the intensifier system forward. Even though it is argued (e.g. Jespersen 1922, 242; Trudgill 2000, 69-70) that women subconsciously tend to use more conservative and closer-to-standard forms than men, Labov (1990, 215) has also shown that whenever there is a situation of linguistic change, women innovate new forms and use more incoming forms than men. Even though Stoffel's and Jespersen's hypotheses are based on casual observations and stereotypes rather than systematic empirical analyses

(Smith 1985, 14), they are one of the earliest accounts on the differences in speaking styles between sexes, and influenced a wide array of studies on intensifiers later on.

More recently, empirical analysis has revealed some aspects of the way women and men use intensifiers. In a study on the TV-series *Friends*, Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005, 289) found that the female characters indeed used the incoming form *so* more than twice as often and *really* markedly more often than the male characters did. They also analysed *so* in the data to see whether it collocates predominantly with adjectives of emotion, and found that the correlation can be seen in the speech of both genders, but more markedly in the female characters' speech. They concluded, therefore, that *so* might be tied to both emotional and female language (ibid.).

Putting the effects of age and gender together, it could be predicted that young women lead the change in the intensifier system by being the first to frequent a new incoming form in their speech. The different studies have not, however, always been unequivocally in support of this claim. In Toronto, the 13-29-year old women seem to have introduced *so* into the system, but interestingly, the young men lead in the use of the intensifier *pretty* (Tagliamonte 2008, 383). In Tyneside English, the 1990s trend *dead* was led by young female speakers, whereas their role in introducing *really*, another incoming form, was not markedly different from that of male adolescents (Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010, 269). The factors affecting intensifier use in York English were also more varied than what the arguments about young female-led change assume. With the incoming intensifier *really*, gender was a significant factor only in the middle age group, whereas among the youngest age group the level of education played a more important role, since both young women and educated men used the form frequently while uneducated young men did not (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003, 275-6).

Both speaker age and gender are common social variants in the studies on intensification, because the patterns discovered are thought to mirror the sequential delexicalization process (e.g. Tagliamonte 2008, 264; Macaulay 2006, 269). Whenever the age groups are differentiated in their selection or intensifiers, a rapid change is probably taking place in the intensifier system, as was the case in York, where the significant point of change was found between the young and middle-aged

generations (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003, 267). This way it is has been possible to single out the age group responsible for the change in the speech community. The most fully delexicalized intensifiers are found to be evenly distributed between genders, such as *very* in Toronto English (Tagliamonte 2008, 383). On the other hand, forms that are in the process of becoming delexicalized are often well diffused across the whole speech community with their popularity fluctuating in time unsystematically, such as is the case with *really* in Toronto (ibid., 388).

Yet different types of social factors, which are likely to affect intensifier use in Singapore English, are its unique background as a post-colonial descendant of British English and the contemporary status of English language in the community, which is the subject of the next chapter.

4. Singapore English

Singapore English is one variety among New Englishes, a term established by Platt et al. (1984), which refers to the varieties used in the areas formerly colonised by the UK or the US (ibid.). The postcolonial background has affected all of the varieties uniquely and their development is characterised by multilingualism, language contact situations and recent and innovative change (Mukherjee and Schilk 2012, 190). Therefore, Singapore English should prove a fruitful context for studying intensifiers, which also strive because of constant change, as discussed in 2.3. The development of Singapore English since colonization is presented briefly with the help of Schneider's (2003) dynamic model of dialect development, which centres on the idea that New Englishes are expected to proceed through five universal development stages, each characterized by certain patterns of language use, which, furthermore, are associated with the changes in the social identities of speakers in the community (ibid., 242).

Singapore was under the colonial rule of the British Empire from the early 1920s to the 1960s, so naturally English was, during the time, needed for various purposes. In the foundation phase (Schneider 2003) the 'founder effect' of British English features (Mufwene 2001 in Schneider 2003, 241) on the developing variety was prominent, as no strong national identity of being Singaporean existed. The exonormative stabilization phase to follow soon after in the development, with British English as the stable norm, laid the basis for regarding skills in English as a possibility for social advancement and therefore "a positive attitude towards the use of English" in the Singaporean community (Schneider 2003, 246, 263).

The third phase, nativization, according to Schneider (2003), began with the aspirations for an independent Singapore after the short Japanese occupation during World War 2. By the post war period many indigenous Singaporeans had acquired English as a second language alongside another mother tongue such as Chinese or Malay, spoken at home (ibid.). However, these local forms of English were in contrast with the normative mother variety, causing discussion about the correct language use (Schneider 2003, 248). In 1965 Singapore became an independent republic separate

from both Great Britain and the Federation of Malaya formed in 1957. At the point of departure the city-state decided to keep English as the language of education and business (Bautista and Gonzales 2006, 130). Even though Singapore English is in Kachru's Three Circles model (see Mesthrie and Bhatt 2008, 30) placed as an Outer Circle variety, characterized by having English is as the second language, it is also today acquired by many as the first language (Schneider 2003, 243; Alsagoff 2010, 342). By the 1960s and 70s, with over a hundred years' presence of English, the Singaporean community had advanced to the fourth phase of endonormative stabilization (Schneider 2003) and the emerging local forms of English had become more acceptable as norms in their own rights, instead of just relying on external norms (ibid., 249, 266).

Singaporean language politics has been and still is characterised by a pro-English attitude encouraging Singaporeans to use English for the benefit of global competitiveness in business and academic success (Bautista and Gonzales 2006, 131). This, however, entails various Government campaigns for using Standard English over the Colloquial Singapore English, or *Singlish* (Schneider 2003, 265; Alsagoff 2010, 342; Mesthrie and Bhatt 2008). However, Schneider (2003) and Alsagoff (2010) argue that Singlish is the true lingua franca of the speech community, and all in all closely linked to the feeling of national identity, which means that it is unlikely to be replaced entirely by standard forms in everyday language use.

Singapore Standard English (SSE) does not differ notably from Standard British English. The different sociolects of the colloquial usage, of which the strongest form is Singlish, however, make frequent use of a wide array of features on all levels of structure (phonological, lexical, and syntactic) that differ from the standard usage (Bautista and Gonzales 2006, 132). Many of them are transferred features and the product of contact between the substratum languages, mainly Cantonese and Malay (ibid., 133) and English. Some of the features are, as exemplified below (all except (4) from Mesthrie and Bhatt 2008, 47, 58, 91, original sources parenthesized), (1) indefinite article deletion, (2) loss of past tense morpheme with verbs, (3) subject or object dropping and perhaps the most frequently recognized feature, (4) the use of discourse particles, such as *la* in requests, invitations, promises etc.

(1) I want to buy bag. [Platt et al. 1984; 52-9]
(2) We stay there whole afternoon and we catch one small fish. [Platt et al. 1984; 69]
(3) Ө must buy for him; otherwise he not happy. ('We must buy…') [Wee, 2004; 1062]
(4) Charles and Keith has nice shoes, but without sales cannot buy *la*, expensive man. And their shoes hurtssss. [PTT321102*motoway*2009]

Many utterances in real-life language use switch between SSE and Singlish features, which is a phenomenon found to correlate with the social background of the speaker (Platt and Weber, 1980) but in more recent accounts also with the orientation of the speaker's cultural identity (Alsagoff 2010). All in all, Singapore English is a cline where one end represents frequent use of colloquial features (basilect), and the other is close to standard usage (acrolect).

It is clear that Singapore English has advanced as far as the fourth phase just described in Schneider's dynamic model (2003, 263). Singapore English with its unique features is both the means for expressing national identity and reaching outwards into the world globally, which reflects the Singaporean culture with both European and Asian orientations (ibid., 264). Whether Singapore English has achieved the fifth stage, differentiation, characterized by the emergence of a new language variety and its increasing division into sub-identities of language users based on for example age, gender, ethnicity, social status (ibid., 253), is still under debate. This question is significant also to the subject of this thesis, as the purpose is to find precisely this type of variation in the use of intensifiers.

5. Data and Methods

The present chapter introduces the materials and methods used for obtaining the analysis results. The first section takes a brief look at corpus linguistics as a methodology and discusses benefits and possible shortcomings with this approach. Following this, the normalization of frequencies is presented. The two last sections discuss the characteristics of the three corpora used for the analysis and the breakdown of methods.

5.1 Corpus linguistics

Since the introduction of electronic corpora for linguistic study in the 1960s and the development of further computerised methods, the idea of corpus-based empirical approach has eagerly been adopted by language scholars (Svartvik 1992, 8). Tognini-Bonelli (2001, 2) defines corpus in its most usual form as a collection of authentic texts or samples "assumed to be representative of a given language" as a whole or compiled for a more specific purpose in mind. Lindquist (2009, 1), too, assimilates corpora to the aim of studying language in use, and sees corpus linguistics as a methodology beneficial for scholars with various theoretical orientations. Using corpus methods indeed has the benefit of verifiability over, for example, the less objective casual observations or the linguist's own introspection (Svartvik 1992, 8). As other major advantages, Lindquist (2009, 5) mentions the speed of analysing large amounts of material as well as the reliable calculations of frequencies that computers are able to perform.

When making analyses of language based on corpora, it is essential that one assesses their representativeness, in other words, how far the findings in the corpus can be generalised to the actual language use of the target speech community or a part of it (Biber et al. 1998, 246; Tognini-Bonelli 2001, 57). One of the issues related to representativeness in corpus design is the size of corpus. While it is true that even the largest possible corpora are never able to contain all the linguistic phenomena occurring in language (Svartvik 1992, 10), a corpus of roughly a million words will suffice for the

examination of the most frequent structures in English, while for features occurring less frequently and for many lexical studies, greater amounts of linguistic data would be better.

Ideally the corpus should be balanced in the number of text from different speakers and in the sampling of the different types of language it wishes to represent, so that any feature does not get too high frequency figures just because some speaker or text happens to use it a lot (Lindquist 2009, 40). As the criteria for representativeness vary between types of corpora (ibid.), it is generally agreed that compilers should be as explicit as possible in stating the criteria for selecting texts into a corpus (Tognini-Bonelli 2001, 55). For example, the type or variety of a language and the speech community that are the target of the corpus, as well as the number and length of texts in each sample (ibid.; Biber et al. 1998, 249) should be stated. By explicitly stating the criteria used in compilation, a corpus even with its limitations can still be representative, if not for the whole language, at least for some specific purposes.

5.2 Normalized frequency

As stated, frequencies of different linguistic features are easy to obtain by the use of electronic corpora and corpus tools designed for finding them. However, when comparing frequencies drawn from corpora or samples of different size the raw frequencies alone are not sufficient as such, because they say nothing about how frequent a feature is when the size of the sample is taken into account (Lindquist 2009, 42). By normalizing the frequencies obtained, comparability of quantitative findings can be enhanced (Biber et al. 1998, 263). As explained in Biber et al. (1998, 263) the normalized frequency can be manually calculated by dividing the raw frequencies by the number of words in the sample or text and multiplying this by a word count adjusted according to the sample size, in this thesis by 100,000 words. Normalized frequencies for individual intensifiers will be presented in the analysis section of this thesis next to the raw frequencies.

5.3 Materials studied

    5.3.1 Singapore Forums Corpus

As Lindquist (2009, 11) notes, compiling spoken corpora is often expensive, time-consuming and technically challenging due to data collection by tape recording, for example, for which reason there are fewer spoken than written general corpora. However, Lorenz (2002, 143) argues that language change is most likely to be found in dynamic text-types and spoken informal conversation rather than written language, and as has been discussed, intensifiers, too, are a feature of spoken rather than written language. Due to the lack of existing electronic corpora with enough fairly recent spoken material to study vocabulary items such as intensifiers, and the limited possibilities for collecting such data on Singapore English, Internet discussion forums were selected as the main material to get close to the text-type Lorenz is describing. Claridge (2007, 87) places discussion forums in the field of computer-mediated communication (CMC) and defines them as asynchronic, public places characterised by interactive argumentation, dialogical style and a range of topics from private to public. Both Lindquist (2009, 201-3) and Claridge (2007, 88) agree that although the language of forums is primarily written, depending on the type of the forum, non-standard and informal features are employed. Writers even intend their writing to look like spoken language and edit their posts afterwards only infrequently, which makes forums a hybrid register mixing written and spoken text-types.

    The primary source of data for this thesis, the Singapore Forums Corpus (SFC), contains three Singapore English Internet forums rich with characteristics mentioned in the above paragraph. All three forums exist on the Singapore Forums website and were extracted into a corpus by Professor Sebastian Hoffmann who, by the use of Perl scripts, programming tools suited for corpus compilation and research, carried out the compilation. After the extraction of the data, he also removed block quotes to limit the amount of duplicated and non-conversational material. Then the data was reformatted into a suitable form, more specifically text files, to search with corpus tools. The choice

of forums to use was based on the aim to compare intensifier use between people of different age and gender.

Lüdeling et al. (2007, 15) note that, although the Internet is full of material suitable for linguistic study, a lack of metadata is a common problem, which is also the case with the SFC. Claridge (2007) discusses the problem of attributing nationality and gender metadata to the participants on discussion forums. While the nationality of the majority of participants may be indicated by the name of the website (ibid., 94), in this case SgForums, it is true that the forums are publicly available for anyone who registers on the website. SgForums website does, however, describe itself as 'Singapore's Online Community'.

As for gender, the use of aliases and nicknames common for computerised interaction skew gender information either completely hiding it or making all gender related information dubious, as anyone on the Internet can basically take any identity they choose (ibid., 93). According to Claridge, more reliable information pertaining to gender are self-information given on profiles or the actual content of messages where speakers refer to themselves (ibid., 93).

Forum name	Teens Planet	PTT Pte Ltd	Military Nuts (sample)
Word tokens	326,457	326,479	308,539
Word types	23,578	22,990	24,011
Threads	802	544	228
Posts	13,230	7,620	4,699
Senders*	280	218	186
Time period	2004 – 2009 (–2014)	2004 – 2014	2003 – 2013

Table 3. Composition of the Singapore Forums Corpus [5] (* with 5 or more posts on the forum)

Table 3, modelled after Claridge's example (2007, 91), presents the corpus composition of the *Singapore Forums Corpus* (SFC). With the help of the corpus tools Wordsmith 6.0. and AntConc

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[5] Word tokens and types were obtained in Antconc 3.2.4 by running the Word List query (with tags < > hidden, so they will not affect word count). The data is compiled so that one text file (.txt) contains one thread/topic, and therefore the number of text files belonging to each forum reveal the number of threads. Time periods were obtained by running the searches <200* and <201* in Wordsmith 6.0 (tags allowed in the settings), which also revealed the number of messages posted each year, as each post contains the posting date as a tag in diamond brackets. By using the same search strings, the number of senders could also be counted, by sorting the data for the L1 collocate, which is the placement of the sender's nickname, likewise in diamond brackets. Nicknames that occurred less than 5 times were not included (as they were so numerous) and these numbers obtained.

3.2.4, it was possible to get metadata on the numbers of senders, messages and threads on each forum, as well as the number of words as types and tokens and the date of posts. It should be noted that Table 3 contains all the material posted on the forums or the sample, while some messages may be excluded in the analysis due to duplication of context in quotes or on the basis of unclear contexts.

Metadata pertaining to the age and gender of speakers, as already mentioned, is not so easily obtained from SgForums. It is acknowledged that the categorization of the data into teens', women's and men's samples is only approximate and by no means absolute, as no final certainty to the demographic factors assigned to each forum can be attained. There are some factors on the forums and in the data, however, which can be argued to increase the reliability of the categories employed in the analysis, such as topics, forum definitions and nicknames which will all be discussed below when each individual forum is presented in more detail.

The first forum, Teens Planet (TP) contains roughly 330,000 words from more than 280 senders. Majority of the posts on the forum are dated 2004 – 2009, with rapidly decreasing numbers of posts until 2014, which is indicated in Table 3. The forum is described on the SgForums website as 'A place for teens to share their exciting adventurous life or sad and sorrow life'. As an assurance that majority of speakers are in fact quite young, the most popular topics (in number of posts on each forum, parenthesized) on the forum focus on for example 1) school, 2) ageing and 3) social life, as illustrated:

(1) What secondary school are you from? (259+219), Cool school uniform (163), What is the worst result you get in school? (88), SECONDARY SCHOOL PROM NIGHT (70), sgForums Study Group 2006 (74), Exams over... What to do? (72)
(2) What present did you get on your sweet 16? (69), When I reach 21 (39), ok who are the TEENs in teens? (41)
(3) I wan outings~~ (115), Activities for young teens (38), Lonely valentine (22)

As for nicknames of the speakers on the Teens Planet forum, the few that contain any information about the possible age of the person behind the nickname are laurence82, idiotboi89 and Liang89 who would be between 15 and 27 years of age in the active time frame of the TP forum, 2004 – 2009. For example laurence82's posts on the forum start decreasing drastically after 2006 when the sender

was assumedly 24 years old. No metadata pertaining to the gender of speakers is available, as categorizing each nickname on the forum by an assumed gender is not possible in the current thesis.

The second forum, PTT Pte Ltd, is described as 'A portal for ladies to chat and share views on shopping, beauty tips, skin & body care, food, etc.' and likewise consists of roughly 330,000 words. PTT is an abbreviation of the words Pro Tai Tai, and *tai tai* according to the *Dictionary of Singlish and Singapore English* available online comes from Mandarin and means 'A woman, usu. wealthy, who does not work but spends her time shopping, meeting friends, etc.; a lady of leisure.' The ladies' forum covers a time span of ten years, 2004 – 2014, with a much more even distribution of posts between those years than on the teens' forum. Topics on the forum centre heavily on different products, like 4) make-up and body and 5) clothes as well as 6) forum meetings, which seem to be especially popular among the participants to this forum:

(4) Foundation (liquid, 2-way, pressed/loose powder, BB cream) (305), Body Scrubs & Moisturizers (104), that time of the month (166), Eyebrow trimming (37),
(5) Undergarments Discussion (289), All About Bags & Wallets (179), my toe-ring broke!!! (14)
(6) Proposed Aug '04 KTV Outing (154), Suggestions for Next Gossip Session (118)

Nicknames of some of the most active commentators, such as alfagal, Charlize and Honeybunz clearly have a feminine sound to them.

The third and final forum, Military Nuts, is described as 'A forum to discuss all military related issues', and is originally notably larger than the two previous ones with nearly 8 million words and active posting from 2003 to the present. A random sample of around 308,000 words, however, was thinned of this forum by using a Perl script to keep the data in manageable limits for the empirical analysis and comparison with other forums. Although the sample word count is slightly smaller than on the two other forums, the number of word types is bigger, as seen in Table 3, which suggests that men use a greater variety of words than teens or women. Military Nuts does not in its description define an equally clear membership group as regards age or gender as the two other forums, but is chosen to represent the male language usage, based on assumption that in many communities more men than women would at all be interested in military-related topics. Some of the popular topics

centre around 7) military equipment, 8) locally relevant army news and speculations and 9) Singapore National Service (NS) (note, that the numbers represent posts on the entire forum, not the random sample):

(7) A Singapore aircraft-carrier? (605), Military knives (468), New SAF Digital Camo No.4 (318), RMAF's Sukhois to arrive in May: one year late (360), The 1911-A1 Pistol (152)
(8) Warship in the Straits of Singapore (289), Why does Singapore not declare neutrality? (126), Asia-Pacific on the brink of WAR?! (87)
(9) NS nowadays is like scout camp (134), NS Issue: coming back this wednesday. Need advice asap!!! (127)

Some of the most active nicknames are quite masculine, such as papabear20046, Gordonator, Joshua1975 and LazerLordz.

Reading the forum posts on the three forum, one notices that on PTT and TP forums colloquial expressions (10), sentence structures resembling spoken language (11) and unclear sentences (12) are commonly found. On the other hand, sentences on the MN forum are constantly more fully formed with more complicated structures and word choices (13-14), which suggests that the male participants on this forum are perhaps somewhat older and further educated than the participants in the samples chosen for women and teens. The men's language is constantly showing features with closer to standard language use. Even though the age of PTT forum participants cannot be know, the forum comes across as a place for younger rather than middle-aged or elderly women, based on the observation that their language use, with the mentioned features, resembles more closely the language on the teens' forum than on the men's forum.

(10) huh? .. not i dun want ... all so bz.. how to ? issit i decide the date ? quite true lah [PTT2004*dotsg*91382]
(11) hihi.. long time no post liao..i anything.. ya, i also very the leong u know... unpaid leave.. guess i have to eat treebark... [PTT2004*Qoo`~`*80857]
(12) I out on attachment from poly... Also no holi... 2Mol my face sure very de black! hEe... [TP2004*ahkico*84437]
(13) To be really honest, the 6 months for being posted to a unit now is, opinion-wise, on the borderline of short, at least with 2 1/2 years, he would have had 1 year to get up to speed. [MN2011*Underpaid*424470]
(14) I mean, let's squeeze every drop of usability out of them for the good of the nation, ethics be damned. Such attitudes are extremely common. Stalin is one of the more extreme purveyors of this notion. [MN2008*rooki*306626]

5.3.2 ICE-Singapore corpus

The *ICE-Singapore* is part of *the International Corpus of English* (ICE), which consists of comparable corpora on several varieties of English world-wide, such as Canada, East Africa, Great Britain, Hong Kong, India, Ireland, Jamaica, New Zealand, Nigeria and The Philippines (ice-corpora.net). All corpora on different varieties are compiled according to a similar design: 1 million words consisting of 500 texts of approximately 2,000 words each with a slightly stronger emphasis on spoken rather than written materials, although various types of both are represented (Tognini-Bonelli 2001, 7-8). The compilation process began 1990, so the ICE-SIN data represents the early 1990s language use. Furthermore, the ICE corpora include only speech and writing of individuals over 18 years and thus mainly represent adult language use, as noted on the ICE website (ice-corpora.net).

To be able to examine intensifiers in somewhat similar registers and contexts of language use that were seen on the Singapore Forums Corpus, only certain parts of the ICE-SIN were selected for analysis. As has been noted, the SFC consists of written discussions on informal topics and the language there in many parts reflects usage from informal spoken registers, which may often happen on internet discussion sites. Therefore, the written parts and the scripted spoken monologues were also excluded from the data set used in the ICE-SIN analysis to follow. This left around 500,000 words of unscripted spoken data to be analysed, which is roughly half of the whole ICE Singapore corpus component according to the corpus design in Table 4. By running the Word List search in AntConc, the more specific word count, 567,941, was obtained. The parts that are included in the analysis can be seen in Table 4, which also indicates the number of texts, with roughly 2,000 words in each, in parentheses. The spoken sections under analysis involve 70 texts of monologues and 180 texts of private and public dialogues, which therefore have a stronger emphasis.

SPOKEN (300)	Dialogues (180)	Private (100)	Face-to-face conversations (90) Phonecalls (10)
		Public (80)	Classroom Lessons (20) Broadcast Discussions (20) Broadcast Interviews (10) Parliamentary Debates (10) Legal cross-examinations (10) Business Transactions (10)
	Monologues (120)	Unscripted (70)	Spontaneous commentaries (20) Unscripted Speeches (30) Demonstrations (10) Legal Presentations (10)

Table 4. Spoken components and text types included in the ICE analysis. (http://ice-corpora.net/ICE/design.htm)

Although a full comparability with the Singapore forums corpus cannot be provided, as the two corpora involve different text-types and are compiled using different methods, it is nevertheless interesting to analyse and compare intensifier use in the ICE-SIN spoken section, representing an earlier time period than the SFC, and thus permitting the study of intensifier change in real time (e.g. Lindquist 2009, 167). Furthermore, the aim of the study is not to analyse the conventions of any certain text type, but the ongoing trends in intensifiers in the Singaporean speech community on a more general level.

5.3.3 The GloWbE corpus

The Corpus of Global Web-based English (GloWbE) by Davies (2013) consists of 1.9 billion words of English spoken in 20 different countries. The section on Singapore English covers just under 43 million words from more than 8,339 web sites (Davies and Fuchs 2015, 6) and is therefore many times the size of the SFC, for example. The compilation of the GloWbE was finished in 2013, from which it can be concluded that the material in the corpus dates from around that year. According to Davies and Fuchs (2015, 4) 60 per cent of the materials are taken from informal blogs and the rest 40 per cent from online newspapers, magazines and company websites, which is a division intended to

match the composition of the ICE corpora, which also include 60 per cent of informal spoken language and 40 per cent of more formal text types.

The GloWbE contains material of once again different text-type and register than the SFC or the ICE-SIN. Blogs and news reports both have their own textual conventions and are not as conversational as forums and actual spoken data are. The analysis will reveal what kind of consequences this has on the intensifier findings. Comparison of the SFC findings to the GloWbE corpus, however, can serve a different function than the ICE-SIN because it contains computer-mediated data from the 2000s which is one similarity to the SFC. Its resources can therefore be used to see if the development trends found in SFC are supported in much larger set of data from around the same time.

5.4 Breakdown of methods

The final section before introducing the results of the empirical analysis discusses the concrete steps taken to obtain the findings. As was explained in section 5.1, methods of corpus linguistics were employed. Although the corpus tool used does much of the work by finding the tokens for analysis, some steps had to be taken manually to ensure that the analysed tokens are the correct ones keeping in mind the research questions. Starting with the SFC, after the compilation of the forum data, explained in 5.3, each potential intensifier variant was individually searched for by using the corpus tool Wordsmith 6.0.

very, bery, veri; really, relli, realli, reali; real; so, soo, sooo, soooo; *damn, darn; pretty; super; bloody; dead; extra; jolly; plain; pure; well; wide; fast;* **ly (*e.g. *absolutely, extremely, utterly, totally)*

Table 5. Intensifier variants searched for in the Singapore Forums Corpus.

Table 5 presents the different variants that were searched for and their possible misspellings or phonologically affected typologies, which were found to be numerous and were felt important to be

included in the analysis in addition to the normatively correct forms. The wild card option *ly was used to discover all the derivational adverbs functioning as intensifiers. As the SFC data is not tagged for part of speech, manually weeding out those immediate right-hand collocates of the intensifier which were not adjectives was necessary, as these were numerous after the initial search.

Contexts where the intensifier was directly under the scope of negation, such as (15), were removed because as Tagliamonte (2011, 323) argues, they do not express a higher degree but a moderate or an average quality. On the other hand, contexts similar to (16) given by Tagliamonte (2011) were retained, because the scope of negation is not immediately on the intensifier. Other tokens excluded from the analysis were cases where the context was unclear and an intensifying meaning could not be ascertained (17).

(15) I've always feel that Loreal products are not **very** good [PTT2006*Alluring*203059]
(16) I don't know, what's **so** controversial.
(17) **reali** har [lol] guy cant ride bicycle veri paiseh 1 lah [lol] [TP2006*Chelzea*197311]

In addition, at this point exact duplicate contexts were removed, as they were perceived as quotes from earlier messages. Likewise, sentences with multiple consecutive intensifiers were excluded from the count, as the focus of the analysis is not on this type of intensification.

Many intensifiers were also used with adjectives that are not found in Standard English, but are characteristic of Singapore Colloquial English (SCE). An online dictionary of SCE (see references) was consulted to find the meaning of these words to ensure they are adjectives, and these were included in the analysis. Examples and frequencies of the excluded contexts and SCE adjectives will be provided in relevant places in the analysis chapter.

Following the exclusion of irrelevant tokens, the raw frequencies were normalised by 100,000 words in order to ensure comparability between the three forums and the other corpora. After the quantitative patterns were found, the more contextual analysis was done to look into the attributive and predicative functions of adjective collocates so that propositions about delexicalization could be made and compared. The percentages of occurrence with both the attributive and predicative adjectives were calculated and will be presented in the analysis section.

One of the aims of the analysis is to observe diachronic change, as intensifiers can be expected to experience rapid change in a speech community even in quite short stretches of time. The ICE-Singapore corpus contains material collected roughly 10 years earlier than the SFC and as previously discussed, the unscripted spoken section of the ICE-SIN corpus was selected to compare findings diachronically. By using the POS tagged version of the ICE-SIN, it was possible to run search strings such as [really_* *_JJ] (CLAWS 7 tag set) where the intensifier variant occurs tagged for any part-of-speech, followed by any word tagged for a general adjective (excluding comparatives) in order to exclude other intensifier heads than adjectives from the results.

 Although tagging errors are always possible, the tagging of the corpus was trusted to the extent that no additional searches regarding adjective collocates of intensifiers were made, simply because they would be too time consuming. Because the ICE-SIN includes transcribed speech, the analysis counts on the words being spelled correctly in the transcription, unlike in the SFC where the data analysed were written by the forum participants themselves, resulting in more misspellings. Besides searching for individual variants using the above search string, all *-ly* intensifiers were searched for by using the [*ly_* *_JJ] string. Even the search option of having any word before a general adjective, [*_* *_JJ], was conducted to reveal surprising intensifier variants to adjectives, but the search did not yield notable new discoveries. Exclusions in the ICE-SIN data follow the same principles established above.

Like the ICE-SIN, the GloWbE is tagged for part-of-speech[6] using the CLAWS 7 tag set. This enabled searches such as very.[r*] [jj], where the intensifier carries an adverb tag of any kind and is followed by a general adjective. In the case of some less traditional intensifiers, such as *damn*, which may not always be tagged as an adverb, the option damn [jj] was used instead to ensure more relevant results. The GloWbE corpus interface automatically gives the raw and normalized frequencies by million words for the search string in the selected varieties. To make the results comparable with the

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[6] For a detailed description of the search strings used in both ICE-SIN and GloWbE corpora, see Attachment 1 to this thesis.

two other corpora used in this study, the normalizations were recalculated per 100,000 words. This is not the ideal normalization basis for a corpus of billions of words, but it had to be done for the sake of comparison.

Furthermore, attempting to find all intensifier occurrences in the GloWbE is hindered by the corpus size. The task is more easily attained in a smaller corpus. The analysis in Chapter 6 therefore concentrates on finding relevant occurrences of the same variants already frequent in the two smaller corpora used for analysis. Unfortunately exclusions of unwanted material were not possible in the same scale as with the other two corpora. Mistakes were found where the adjective tag was erroneously used on a different part-of-speech, such as in (18), but going through all of the tokens, for example over 44,000 tokens of *very* alone, was not feasible here.

(18) one night her older brother didn't feel like climbing up his bunkbed to sleep **so** <u>amy</u> slept on the top bunk, Cuong (the brother) slept on the bottom …
[http://asianfanatics.net/forum/topic/270382]

The results of the analysis performed as has just been described are presented next in Chapter 6.

6. Corpus Findings

In this chapter the results of the empirical analysis performed on the three corpora discussed in the previous chapter are presented, focusing on the Singapore Forums Corpus (SFC) as a primary source of data and comparing the most interesting findings occurring there to those in the International Corpus of English Singapore component (ICE-SIN) and in the Corpus of Global Web-based English (GloWbE). First, general frequencies of the most prominent intensifiers in the three corpora are introduced, followed by the findings related to the syntactic patterning of intensifiers in order to detect delexicalization, discussed in section 2.3.2. Finally, the chapter presents the analysis of each of the three forums in the SFC separately and contrasted with each other, which will reveal possible differences in intensifier use related to age and gender of the language users in both the frequency of use and choice of forms. The forums are also analysed from the point of view of the patterns of delexicalization together with the extralinguistic factors.

6.1 General frequencies

This section presents the major frequencies of the most popular intensifiers in the three corpora compared in this study, namely the SFC, ICE-SIN and the GloWbE. The SFC is the primary source of data for the thesis, and is therefore presented first, followed by the ICE-SIN spoken data from around 10 years earlier, and the GloWbE, consisting of slightly newer Internet-based written data.

6.1.1 Singapore Forums Corpus

The analysis begins with the intensifier findings in the Singapore Forums Corpus of altogether 961,475 words, compiled of two entire forums and one forum sample found on the Singapore Forums website, as discussed in section 5.3. This word count is used to calculate the normalized frequencies in Table 6, which gives the raw and normalized frequencies of individual intensifiers in the entire corpus. Table 6 includes only the intensifiers that were popular enough on every forum, which means that each of them occurred more than 10 times on each individual forum. All frequencies have been

normalized by 100,000 words. The total number of applicable intensifier tokens premodifying an adjective is 3,983 with the normalized frequency of 414.3 in the SFC. The method of searching for each intensifier separately in the corpus and then excluding certain tokens that were not applicable for the present analysis was used to obtain these numbers.

The basis for the excluded tokens was laid down in the previous chapter. Here, the most important numbers regarding the exclusions are given. First, 259 intensifiers are under the scope of negation in the SFC overall. Following Tagliamonte (2011), these are not seen as expressing a higher degree of the quality expressed. Negatives are most numerous on the PTT forum (111). The three forums include 72 tokens of unclear contexts, of which interestingly the majority, 49 tokens, are found in the Teens Planet forum. Unclear contexts are often due to the intensifier itself or the word following it being written in unrecognizable characters, which were in many cases, such as (1) below, the result of Chinese characters in the original forum post, resulting in errors the corpus data transcription. Another reason for exclusion as unclear is that the collocate resembles another part-of-speech but nevertheless behaves like an adjective, in which case the intended meaning cannot be ascertained (2).

(1) using eye cream to apply on neck is **so** å¥¢ä¾ˆ [PTT2008FireIce315588]
(2) **very** disorganise lah u allâ€ [TP2004alpha_boy79581]
(3) and what kind of skin you have? cos i have **really really really** oily skin. [PTT2012 AngelOfDarkness310701]

Among the excluded tokens also are 26 identical contexts of which 10 are in Teens Planet and 15 in the Military Nuts forum. Identical contexts are often quotes of an earlier forum post and will therefore be included in the analysis as a single token. Furthermore, 121 instances of multiple consecutive intensifiers, as in (3), are excluded, of which 69 are on the PTT forum.

Naturally, parts of speech other than adjectives collocating with the search words were excluded. The latter case amounted up to around 4,000 tokens altogether because they include all instances of the search word in the corpus. This type of exclusion occurred most often with *so* and *really,* which can both serve other functions beside intensification, such as turn taking, stalling for time and hedging (c.f. Stenström et al. 2002, 148). Other parts of speech besides adjectives can

sometimes be intensified by the same words analysed here, but a closer analysis of these usages is too laborious to overtake in the present study and would not serve a great purpose either, as the main focus is on the intensifiers of adjectives.

Intensifier	N	per 100,000 words
very	1,637	170.3
so	1,225	127.4
really	315	32.8
damn or *darn*	244	25.4
pretty	163	17.0
super	100	10.4
highly	42	4.4
totally	40	4.2
real	38	4.0
extremely	36	3.7
other	143	14.9
total	**3,983**	**414.3**

Table 6. Frequencies of the most popular intensifiers in the SFC (other ≤ 10 on any forum).

(4) why bother having your own spy sats when you can buy **very** sharp satellite photos from the internet taken by some French commercial land-surveying satellite? [MN2004*SlowPoke*88328]

(5) i folded 500+ coloured paper clips into heart shapes and giv him.. and my fingers were **so** numb and painful.. [TP2004*S!ndy*74533]

(6) I afraid I can't confirm coz I'll be **really** beezee [PTT2004*skinnybeanie*80220]

(7) I think those teachers are **damn** outdated , no fashion interest at all . [TP2009*bluedark*348072]

(8) Its no secret that Singapore has a **pretty** friendly relationship with US, with some of the more evident signs [MN2007*fallin*240517]

(9) no offence but i seen some thunder thighs in **super** tight leggings tt the seams are hanging onto their dear lives to hold together [PTT2009*FireIce*374650]

Examples (4-9) above show the top six variants in the SFC occurring in adjective premodifying position. Relatively few intensifiers out of all the different variants searched, more precisely ten, occur more than ten times on all three forums, which can be seen in Table 6. After the exclusion of irrelevant tokens, the most popular item in the SFC clearly is *very*, which intensifies adjectives 170.3 times per 100,000 words. The fact that *very* is the most popular intensifier reveals how prevalent its position is among the most widely used intensifiers and how resistant it is to the constant change and renewal in the intensifier system. The result therefore corresponds to the studies on other English

varieties where *very* is the most frequent intensifier in both American and British English (Fries 1940, 201; Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010, Biber et al. 1999, Ito and Tagliamonte 2003).

Quite interestingly, *so* with the normalized frequency of 127.4 is the second popular intensifier in the SFC with almost as many tokens as *very* and markedly more than the third popular *really*. With *so* rising in popularity so close to *very* in the general count, it is interesting to see whether it gains more popularity in some individual forums over *very,* which shall be seen in section 6.3. The popularity of *so* bears resemblance to Tagliamonte and Roberts' (2005) study on intensifier use in the TV-series *Friends,* which found *so* soaring in popularity in the early 21ˢᵗ century American English, and hypothesized that media language can affect real-life language use. Perhaps, *so* has spread to Singapore English precisely through global media products and the language on the Internet, following Mair's (2013) framework. Similarly, *so* has been found popular in Toronto English in the early 2000s (Tagliamonte 2008). Although the literature regards *so* as the new prominent favourite in American English (Tagliamonte and Roberts 2005) its slow but steady rise has also been recorded in British English especially among the youngest population (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003).

Really is expected to be popular as in previous studies on both BrE and AmE it has been among the most popular items, and has been hypothesized to be the next most likely champion to replace *very* as the long-time favourite form (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003, Stenström et al. 2002, Tagliamonte 2008). It is usually found to saturate whole speech communities and therefore considered already highly delexicalized (Tagliamonte 2008, Lorenz 2002). In the SFC, however, *really* has only one fourth of the popularity of *so* overall which would indicate that Singapore English intensifier system is developing differently from the older varieties, but it remains to be seen if the findings in other corpora and the three forums individually support this presumption.

The fourth popular intensifier in the SFC is *damn* with the 25.3 normalized frequency, which also includes the occurrences of its even more informal variant *darn,* both originating in American English (Fries 1940, 203; OED, s.v. *damn*) although for example Biber et al. (1999, 565) finds *damn* equally popular in BrE and AmE informal conversations. *Damn* has been formed by shortening the

swearword-like adjective of dislike, *damned* (OED), and for many speakers, especially the older population, it may have a ring of informal and taboo language. The fifth popular variant in the SFC is *pretty,* which is likewise more typically encountered in AmE (Biber et al. 1999, 567), here with the normalized frequency of 17.

The sixth intensifier occurring relatively frequently in all three forums is *super* with the normalized frequency of 10.4. *Super* does not feature among the popular items in any of the influential intensifier studies referred to earlier, and its development in the decades to come will therefore be interesting, as it might be a sudden, rising trend in Singapore English. It is merely mentioned by Tagliamonte (2008) as an unpopular form which is part of the intensifier catalogue but not used in Toronto. However, Palacios and Núñez (2012, 789) record 52 occurrences of *super,* which they categorize as a prefix, in 1990s London teenagers' discussions in the COLT corpus. OED (s.v. *super* adj. and int.) describes *super* as colloquial form originating in British English and meaning 'very good or pleasant, excellent'. Therefore, *super* is categorized in the labelling of different kinds of intensifiers, discussed in section 2.1, as a booster with for example *very, really* and *so*, expressing the upper extreme of the intensification scale but not the highest possible point. As Quirk et al. (1985, 590) have noted, the booster class is the most open for new forms when new intensifiers are needed for hyperbole in a speech community.

As stated, the number of different intensifier forms used frequently is not very high, and the frequencies quickly decrease after the two most popular *very* and *so*. For example, it is striking that intensifiers with the *-ly* ending are relatively low in frequency. This might be a result of the informal and spoken nature of the SFC data, as discussed in section 5.3 whereas the *–ly* ending degree adverbs are more suitable for written registers (Biber et al. 1999, 540; Paradis 2000, 151). Neither are some intensifiers typical for British English, such as *bloody* (10) and *absolutely*, both with only 9 occurrences in the entire corpus, nor some trendy intensifiers of recent decades' studies, like *well, right* and *pure* (11), frequent in the present data. These forms, alongside *real, dead* and many *-ly*

ending intensifiers are placed in the 'other' category. It includes all intensifiers that occurred in any of the SFC forums under ten times, and were therefore not among the most popular items.

(10)   … the brit army dismissed the invention because they tot it was a **bloody** unbritish way to fight a war and that men were supposed to die for their country. [MN2003*SingaporeTyrannosaur*36706]

(11)   That shows the quality of people who are homophobic. Just **pure** stupid, uncouth louts who faced with the crumbling of the ideas they hold dear … [TP2006*HENG@*187516]

Later, in section 6.3, where findings on the three forums are presented individually, the order of popularity seen here may be different, which will be a basis for discussions about the choice of intensifiers based on age and gender.

Included in the word counts in Table 6 are intensifiers that modify the so-called "Singlish" adjectives, in other words, items that are not found in Standard English or other English varieties, but clearly are adjectival usages of words borrowed from the mother tongues of Singaporeans, such as Malay and Cantonese and other Chinese varieties. All in all, 226 tokens, 23.5 per 100,000 words, in the SFC had a "Singlish" adjectival head. The meanings for the different adjectives were obtained from the *Dictionary of Singlish and Singapore English*, which can be accessed online. Some examples include:

(12)   but o cos it doesnt work if one is <u>**so** sian</u> tt he doesnt even come here at all... [TP2004*wuming78*81394]

(13)   Lastly, Lancome Amplicils is great!!! This one tried and tested cry till <u>**very** jialat</u> also never smudge!! [PTT2005*Steph84*98057]

(14)   I have seen them at training on tekong back in '86, <u>**really** 'kilat'</u>, whole platoon can move pass you noislessly and you won't realize it till they have passed. [MN2006*baer*203508]

Of the adjectives exemplified in use with different intensifiers here, the dictionary defines *sian* (s.v. *sian*) as 1) 'bored, fed-up, tired' or 2) 'boring, dull, tiring' and *jia lat* (s.v. *jia lat*) as 'difficult, troublesome, severe' whereas *kilat* (s.v. *kilat*) means 'good, impressive, well done'. The most frequent Singlish adjectives occurring with the intensifiers searched were the already mentioned *sian* with 31 occurrences, of which 25 are in the Teens Planet Forum, and *paiseh* ('Bashful, shy; embarrassing, humiliating') with 17 tokens of which 10 are in the PTT Pte Ltd forum.

All in all, the different forms and spelling of Singlish adjectives varies greatly, and some forms occur only once or twice in the data. Items such as these were included in the analysis because they were felt to be an important feature of the Singapore English adjective system as so many different intensifiers collocated with them. More examples on how they co-occur with different intensifiers as well as forum specific frequencies will be presented in the case of the individual forums in section 6.3.

6.1.2 ICE-Singapore

Here, the general frequencies for intensifiers found in the ICE-Singapore corpus are presented and discussed in comparison to the SFC findings in the previous section. As has been mentioned, the data in the ICE are collected in the early- to mid-1990s and therefore represent Singapore English language use some ten years prior to the SFC. Moreover, the corpus consists of the language use of adults, but is not categorized according to demographic factors of age or gender, which unfortunately means its findings cannot be compared to the SFC data regarding these factors. The aim of the ICE-SIN data analysis is, however, to contrast earlier intensifier use to discover patterns of possible diachronic changes taking place in either intensifier frequency or preference of forms. Table 7 presents the raw and normalized frequencies of intensifier tokens found in the 567,941 words that make up the ICE-Singapore unscripted spoken section. Altogether 223 tokens were excluded for their negative contexts. More specific search method and the basis for the exclusions are presented in section 5.3.

Intensifier	N	per 100,000 words
very	1,547	272.4
so	453	79.8
really	96	16.9
pretty	41	7.2
damn, darn	24	4.2
totally	22	3.9
real	18	3.2
completely	17	3.0
extremely	14	2.5
highly	11	1.9
other	61	10.7
Total	**2,304**	**405.7**

Table 7. Frequencies of the most popular intensifiers in the ICE-Singapore unscripted spoken section (N ≥ 10).

Overall, the frequency of all intensifiers together (405.7**)** is a little smaller than in the SFC corpus (414.3**).** As can be seen in Table 7, the five most popular intensifiers are the same as in the SFC, *very*, *so*, *really, pretty* and *damn*, although in a slightly different order. Here *pretty* is more popular than *damn* and therefore the fourth frequent form overall. In fact, *damn* is significantly less popular in the 1990s (4.2 in the ICE) than in the early 2000s (25.4 in the SFC). In the ICE-SIN, *very* is the most popular intensifier by far and is dominating over the second popular *so*. Therefore, another great difference to the intensifier use in the SFC corpus is that here *very* is with 272.4 strikingly ahead of *so* (79.8) in the normalized frequency, whereas 10 years later *so* has caught up and become almost even (127.4) with *very* (170.3), as we saw in 6.1.1. Still, *so* is the form preferred over *really* already in the ICE-SIN. The third popular *really* has only a 16.9 frequency here, however, and in the SFC it is used already with the 32.8 per 100,000 words frequency, which means it also is a rising variant. *Pretty* has likewise soared in frequency since the ICE data 7.2 to the 17 in the SFC.

It is evident by looking at the ICE-SIN findings that in a bit over ten years' time, *very* has had to give way to other forms competing for popularity. While it remains the most used form, its frequency drops from ICE-SIN to SFC, while the other forms' frequencies are on the rise. *Very* being contested like this in one decade informs us of the fluctuation constantly going on in the intensifier

system and of the waning expressive and emotional power of *very*. The following examples illustrate the intensifier use in the ICE-SIN.

(15) Ah she it looks **very** wishy-washy you know so it 's not nice [ICE-SIN:S1A-066#67:1:B]

(16) The art gallery the buildings that you walk through the subway everything look **so** monotonous [ICE-SIN:S1A-090#172:1:B]

(17) It 's **really** strong alcoholic content [ICE-SIN:S1A-056#243:1:C]

Other, significantly less popular intensifier in Table 7 are *totally, real, completely, extremely* and *highly*. Of them only *completely* is not found on Table 6 for the SFC but, all in all, the frequency of these forms has remained quite stable in ten years, ranging from roughly 2-4 in normalized frequencies. The 'other' category here includes forms such as *absolutely* (10 occurrences), *well* (9), *terribly* (8) and *purely* (6). *Super*, which is among the popular items in the SFC with a 10.4 frequency, is not found in the ICE-SIN as an intensifier. This could very well indicate that *super* is an incoming form and a relatively new innovation in Singapore English. It remains to be seen if by studying its delexicalization patterns in connection to age and gender, the group responsible for introducing it can be detected.

It has to be noted that based on the comparison of the two corpora ten years apart in time, Singapore English intensifier system seems to be taking on more forms from the American English variant while the traditionally British forms are rare (*absolutely*) or missing altogether (*bloody*). One of the indicators is that the forms occurring more often in AmE, *so, pretty, damn/darn* and *real* have all become more frequent between the ICE-Singapore and the SFC corpora. *Super*, which originates in British English has, on the other hand, appeared for the first time as an intensifier. It remains to be seen, what kind of intensifier findings can be obtained from yet another contemporary corpus, the Corpus of Global Web-based English.

6.1.3 The Corpus of Global Web-based English (GloWbE)

As discussed in 5.3.3, the Corpus of Global Web-based English (GloWbE) includes altogether 1.9 billion words of English used on the Internet from 20 different counties, for the most part in blog texts (Davies and Fuchs 2015). The size of the Singapore English part is slightly under 43 million words, which makes it many times the size of the two other corpora examined for this thesis. While the GloWbE is sizeable enough for a reliable analysis of lexical variation, it is in its entirety too big for a detailed syntactic analysis of all major intensifier occurrences that will be presented in the case of the SFC in the next chapter, for example. The GloWbE does not provide demographic information of the language users in its Internet materials, where the true identity of language users is always uncertain, as has been discussed in section 5.1. Therefore, GloWbE can only be compared to the SFC in the general frequencies of intensifiers and, as we will see later, samples of it can be used to analyse syntactic matters.

Table 8 summarizes the findings and presents the most popular intensifier variants in the GloWbE corpus Singapore component. Although frequencies normalized by a million words would have been more suitable and reliable in the case of GloWbE, to make the results comparable with the two other corpora used in this study, the normalizations had to be recalculated per 100,000 words. The 'other' category is not found in this table, since mapping out all the minor intensifier variants is too laborious in a corpus as large as the GloWbE.

Intensifier	N	per 100,000 words
very	44,289	103.1
so	22,785	53.0
really	12,413	28.9
pretty	6,454	15.0
extremely	3,654	8.5
super	2,672	6.2
highly	2,545	5.9
totally	1,704	4.0
absolutely	1,323	3.1
real	981	2.3
damn and *darn*	644	1.5
Total	**99,464**	**231.4**

Table 8. Frequencies of the most popular intensifiers in the Singapore section of the GloWbE corpus

The order of the most popular items resembles both the ICE-SIN and the SFC findings, with *so* in the second place after *very,* and *really* coming third. After that, the order differs from the SFC, where *damn* made a peak at the fourth place, but which in the GloWbE is occupied by *pretty*. *Damn* was seen on the fifth place in the ICE-SIN as well, but here *extremely* gets surprisingly popular. *Super* is the sixth popular form similarly as in the SFC. Some examples of intensifier use in the GloWbE are as follows.

(18) Blunt fringes are **super** trendy at the moment, and suit many people … [GloWbE, abeautifulstory.net, 2012]

(19) I was **totally** stressed and burnt out coping with tight deadlines and looking after my **super** dependent mum and also preparing three whole meals separately [GloWbE, lifelittletales.wordpress.com, 2012]

(20) Anyway, while I was on a holiday trip at Thailand, I was taken on an elephant tour. It was **pretty** fascinating to see how they trained the elephants to perform feats … [GloWbE, www.mlmblogexpert.com]

(21) I know a sure sign of realy loving a drama is when I start looking for bts and any little glimpeses [sic.] and when I want to savor the drama like a **really** delicious food. [GloWbE, joonni.com, 2012]

The total frequency achieved by these intensifier forms in the GloWbE is 231.4, which is significantly lower than in the ICE-SIN and the SFC, where intensifier frequencies were over 400 per 100,000 words. Internet language, which GloWbE consists of, could be expected to be colourful and emphatic, but the intensifier findings do not seem to reflect that. This difference, compared to the other corpora, could be due to the fact that finding all relevant intensifiers in a corpus the size of GloWbE is a task too laborious for the current study, which leaves some popular intensifiers in hiding.

On the other hand, GloWbE contains written text-types in contrast to the spoken section of ICE-SIN and the interactive forum data in the SFC, which bears an effect on the results. In any case, all variants, starting from the most popular *very,* are less frequent here than in the other corpora, throughout the table. None of the top-six variants achieve higher frequencies than were seen on the SFC for these forms, but instead the normalized frequencies are just notably lower. This would point to the direction that that the actual number of intensifiers in GloWbE is relatively smaller indeed, which reflects the written nature of most GloWbE materials. Intensifiers, as known, prefer informal and spoken contexts.

The results in the GloWbE support the finding that *very* is decreasing in frequency in the 2000s Singapore English compared to the 1990s situation. From the 288.2 normalized frequency in the ICE-SIN, *very* drops to 170.3 in the SFC and to 103.1 in the GloWbE. This could be predicted, based on the development paths seen in British and American English intensifier use. Other variants are on the rise, filling in the gaps that the waning popularity of v*ery* is leaving in the system. *So* peaks in popularity in the SFC corpus (127.4) but has notably lower frequencies in both the ICE-SIN (79.8) and the GloWbE (53.0). *Really,* on the other hand, is on a steadier rise, starting from the ICE-SIN 16.9 and climbing to 32.8 in the SFC and remaining in 28.9 in the GloWbE, not experiencing as drastic a drop as *so* there. *Pretty* follows, although slightly behind with overall fewer occurrences than *really,* a similar path with the lowest frequency in the ICE-SIN (7.2) and the highest in the SFC (17.0), maintaining nearly that same frequency in the GloWbE (15.0). Based on this, it could be predicted that *really* and *pretty*, which retain their frequencies more constant in the GloWbE data, are more likely to have a lasting power against *very* than *so*, which drops notably in frequency after peaking in the SFC.

A great advantage of the GloWbE is that it allows comparing frequencies of any word between different English varieties. As regards the intensifier variants discussed, interesting points arise also from this type of comparison. All three popular intensifier variants, *very, so* and *really* are notably less frequent in American and British English than in Singapore English, as seen in Table 9.

	Singapore English	American English	British English
very	103.1	73.8	94.4
so	53.0	42.8	38.3
really	28.9	18.5	20.8
pretty	15.0	15.9	12.1
super	6.2	2.2	1.5

Table 9. The frequencies of the most popular intensifiers in three varieties in the GloWbE (as normalized per 100,000 words).

Pretty is also more popular in Singapore than in British English but between Singapore and American English its frequencies are almost equal. Based on this it can be concluded that Singapore English is using intensifiers overall with greater numbers than older English varieties.

Super, which was not found as an intensifier in the ICE-SIN at all, only occurs later in the GloWbE with 6.2 and in the SFC with 10.4 normalized frequencies. It is possible therefore, that s*uper* has appeared in Singapore English intensifier system for the first time in the late 1990s or early 2000s. *Super* is also significantly more frequent in Singapore English (6.2) than in British or American English in the GloWbE, where its frequencies are 1.5 and 2.2 per 100,000 words, respectively. The rise of *super* in AmE, although undocumented in the GloWbE, is noticed by those interested in language change, and while it is a variant awarded little scientific study, its use has been covered in a recent article in *the New York Times* (2016). The writer, Teddy Wayne, claims, based on findings in the *Contemporary Corpus of English* (Brigham University) and the Google Books Ngram alongside his own observations, that, first of all, *super* is new as an adverb, in use only from the 1946 onwards, and secondly, its use has been growing massively in the early 2010s as compared to the 2000s. This agrees with the fact that in the ICE-SIN the variant is non-existent and indicates that the rise of the popularity of *super* is almost simultaneous in American and Singapore English. Wayne's other point is that *super* is typical for the American mentality and sense of superiority, although linguists have categorized it as British variant, as discussed earlier.

Palacios and Núñez (2012, 289-790) group *super* together with prefixes such as *mega* and *uber*, which are synonyms for it and can become independent words, in which case they function as

intensifiers. These forms have occurred in many products of popular culture as well as the TV series *Friends* where *so* was also numerous (ibid.). In the GloWbE which is well suited for searching rare lexical items such as these prefixes, however, their frequencies are not great. *Uber* occurs only 0.1 per 100,000 words, *mega* 0.2 and *ultra* 0.6, and they are even less popular in the BrE and AmE sections of the GloWbE. Out of these occurrences most likely not all are intensifying usages. Therefore, the use of *super* in Singapore English in these quantities is quite exceptional and deserves to be noted.

Another variant, *damn* and *darn,* seems to be a trend of the SFC corpus (25.4), as it is infrequent in both the ICE-SIN (4.2) and the GloWbE (1.5), but the speculation remains whether it is a phenomenon related to the corpus context or whether it is tied to a certain language use or a certain group of users at the time period in question. The popularity of *–ly* ending adverbs of degree in the GloWbE is also one of the differences compared to the two other corpora. Their greater frequencies (3-8.5 as opposed to 2-4) once again tell about the association of *–ly* adverbs with formal registers (Paradis 2000, 151) and the nature of data in the GloWbE.

Now that the general frequencies in each corpus have been presented, a look into the syntactic patterning and the extralinguistic factors follows, which will hopefully shed more light on the speculated developments in the Singapore intensifier system.

6.2 Syntactic positions

The present chapter discusses findings related to the ways the intensifiers under scrutiny are distributed between attributive and predicative adjective functions across the three corpora. The most notable changes between corpora are compared for discussion. Later, in section 6.3.2, the forums of the SFC are contrasted again with respect to the syntactic positions and the effects of age and gender together.

The analysis is conducted in order to reveal patterns of delexicalization, which is one of the mechanisms of language change. Tagliamonte (2008, 373) hypothesizes that intensifiers that are far

delexicalized usually occur predominantly with predicative adjectives (1-2) rather than attributive ones (3-4) or are in some cases equally divided between functions, whereas intensifiers new to the system should be found more with the attributive function. However, Barnfield and Buchstaller's (2010) diachronic Tyneside study not only revealed that all intensifiers favour the predicative position and are increasingly moving towards even greater predication in time (ibid., 274), but also that intensifiers that were new to the system in the 1990s or 2000s occurred overall less with the attributive function than the older forms did (ibid., 276) which is contrary to some earlier studies (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003; Tagliamonte 2008). Therefore, it is also possible that the newest forms are introduced into the system directly through the predicative function. Such forms even tend to keep increasing their preference of the predicative (Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010).

(1) Primary school, especially during Children and Teachers's Days, we can go **really** wild with the teachers. [TP2006*ndmmxiaomayi*199569]
(2) As usual, I will bring my own reading material, cuz usually the salon's ones are **so** torn, dirty and oily. [PTT2007*Honeybunz*262525]
(3) Otherwise, it's a **pretty** small piece of rock with a single lighthouse on it. [MN2005*fudgester*154317]
(4) there's a **very** eager watier [sic.] who can't stop pouring drinks for you. [PTT2004*X-men*102470]

Figures 3, 4 and 5 present the distributions pertaining to the syntactic position of adjectives modified by intensifiers in the three corpora, starting from the earliest data, the ICE-SIN, continuing to the SFC and to the GloWbE, the newest data set. The percentages of tokens occurring with either function are given in case of each intensifier variant. *So* is excluded from this analysis, because it can only be used in the predicative position, making constructions in the attributive position very infrequent and ungrammatical. Likewise, the –*ly* ending intensifiers are not included either because they are infrequent in both the ICE-SIN and the SFC, thus giving whatever findings might occur there very little credibility.
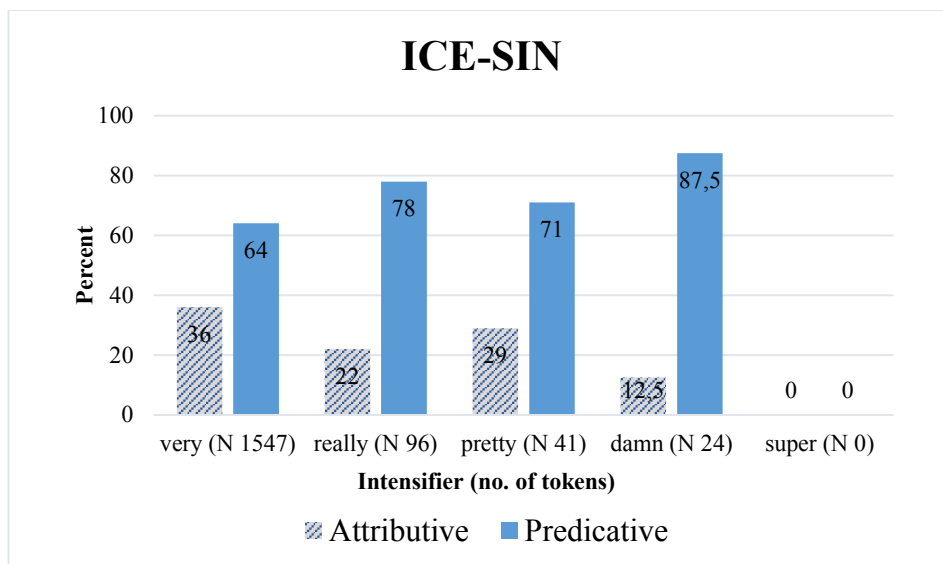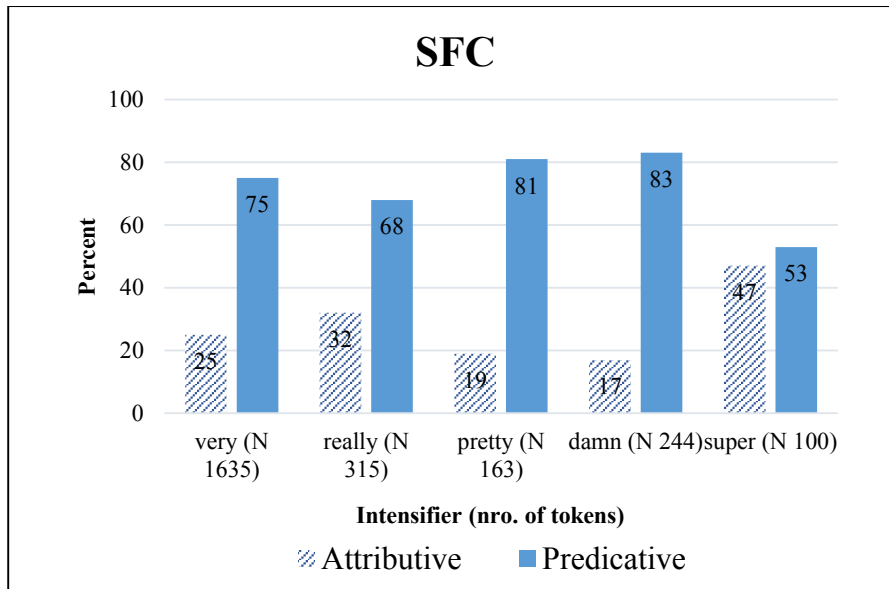
Figure 3. Distribution of intensifiers by syntactic position in the ICE-SIN corpus.

(5) Then the tutor said **very** strong wind uh *laughs* [ICE-SIN:s1a-002#253:1:B]
(6) Of course everybody feel **very** upset about the accident and I … [ICE-SIN:S1B-066#167:1:B]
(7) On the other hand Jane Fonda's workout it's it's **really** fun because uh it's it's a dance workout as well ya [ICE-SIN:S1A-063#204:1:B]
(8) … they were **pretty** curious judging from the expressions [ICE-SIN:S1A-047#233:1:B]
(9) Well he thinks I am **damn** helpless uh [ICE-SIN:S1A-047#96:1:A]

As has been noted earlier, the frequencies of intensifier variants in the ICE SIN corpus drop significantly after the most popular *very*. It is surprising to find *very* occurring quite much, 36 per cent of the time in the attributive position (5), since according to its well recorded full delexicalization (Bolinger 1972, Lorenz 2002, Tagliamonte 2008), the predicative function (6) could stand out more clearly in Figure 3. However, as hypothesized, this kind of pattern is possible for the delexicalized forms as well. *Really, pretty* and *damn* (7-9) all have a higher percentage of predicative occurrences than *very*, which is contrary Ito and Tagliamonte (2003) and Tagliamonte (2008) where the more delexicalized forms are used in the predicative more. On the other hand, Barnfield and Buchstaller's (2010) theory about the newer variants occurring less in the attributive, could apply here. To conclude, *super,* which is relatively popular in the later data sets, does not occur in the ICE-SIN at all and cannot be analysed for syntactic function therefore. Overall 65.3 per cent, 1,115 tokens, out of all occurrences of *very*, *really*, *pretty* and *damn* collocate with predicative adjectives.

Figure 4. Distribution of intensifiers by syntactic position in the entire Singapore Forums Corpus (SFC).

The syntactic patterns in the SFC corpus intensifiers reflect the more usual developments found in the literature (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003, 272) where *very* is strongly favoured in the predicative and the second frequent form *really* is slightly lagging behind *very* in the percentage of the predicative. It is possible that *really* still retains its modal meaning of 'truly' alongside the intensifying meaning, which discourages the variant from spreading as an intensifier to the same frequency as *very* (ibid.). Another notion of interest here is that both *pretty* and *damn* are even more infrequent in the attributive than the two contemporary long-time favourites *very* and *really. Damn* could be an indication that intensifiers newer to the system have entered the speech system through the predicative function (Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010). *Pretty*, however, has been found as an intensifier in English since the 16th century (Fries 1940, 201) and certainly, with enough confidence since the 17th century (OED, s.v. *pretty* adv.). It clearly is a recycling in Singapore English, which was not yet established as a variety of English when *pretty*, for example according to Stoffel (1901), last strived in popularity. Intensifiers recycled into new bloom require past delexicalization to an advanced level (Tagliamonte 2008), and *pretty* is likely to have fulfilled these requirements of a recycling already (ibid.).

Without a doubt the newest intensifier, *super*, on the other hand, is quite evenly distributed between attributive (10) and predicative functions (11), preferring the predicative one just slightly. This preference being so minor, however, indicates rather that *super* is not yet very far in its delexicalization process in the SFC, which agrees with the fact that it is absent in the data 10 years earlier.

(10) I bought their package just because they have outlets all over the place and I **super** busy woman, not all the time I can stick to the same outlet. [PTT2011*Honeybunz*372346]
(11) pple, tts [sic.] my youngest cousin!! … he's **super** cute!!! [TP2005*Joyce*116831]

All in all, Singapore English seems to be moving towards increasing predication as the percentage of predicative adjectives with *very*, *really*, *pretty* and *damn* together is 75.6 per cent in the SFC, whereas in the ICE-SIN the predication remained in 65.3 per cent. This corresponds to earlier findings, where intensifiers are recorded to keep increasing the predicative emphasis through years in use (Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010, 274)

Because of the size of the GloWbE corpus, it was not feasible to analyse every single intensifier token given in Table 8 in section 6.1.3 by their collocation with attributive or predicative adjectives. Instead, a random sample of 500 tokens was obtained for every intensifier variant relevant from the point of view of comparison, namely *very, really, pretty, damn* and *super.* These samples were then analysed by syntactic behaviour. Figure 5 summarizes the findings. In parentheses, the number of tokens may vary, as some tokens have been excluded from the samples of 500, by the same basis of exclusion as laid down before in section 5.4.
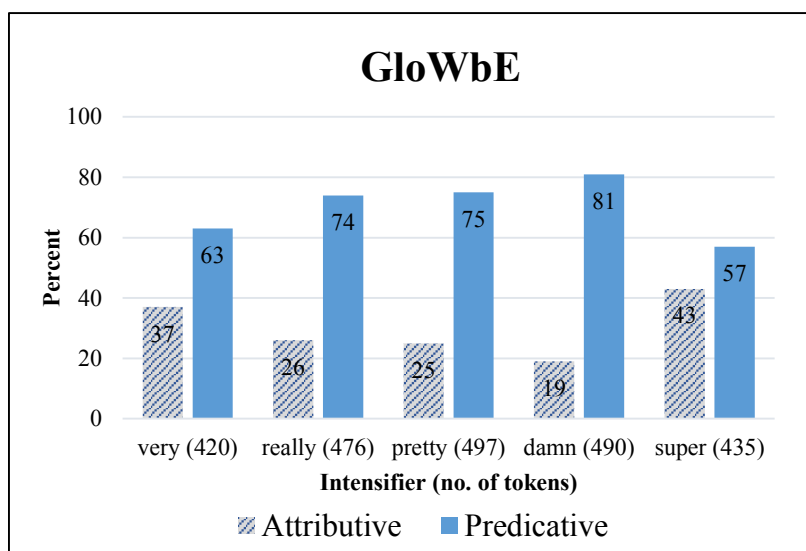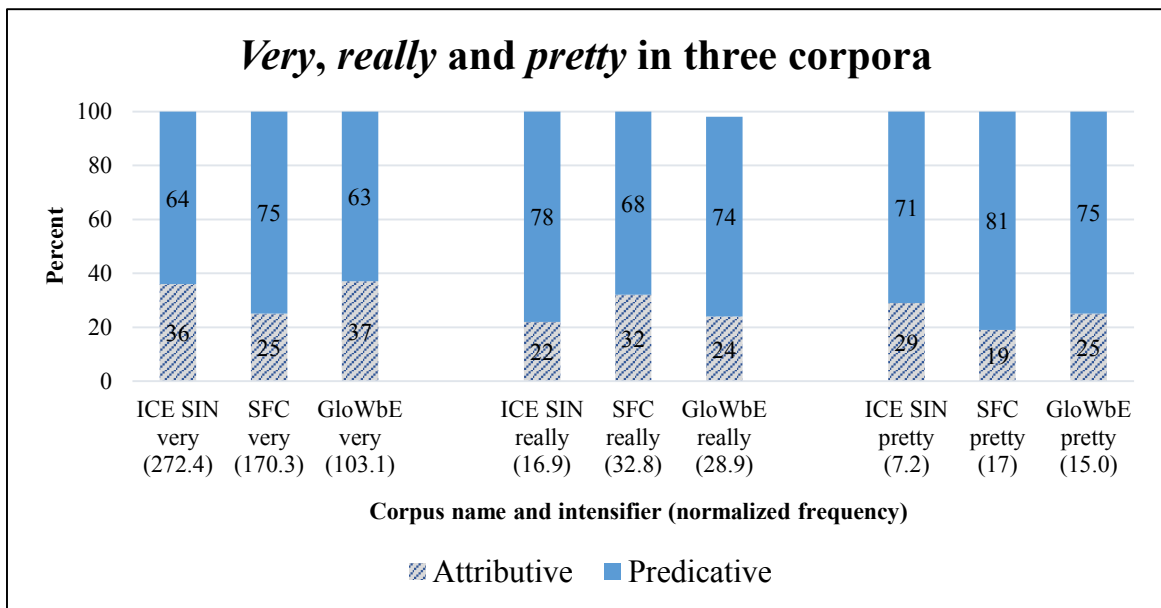
Figure 5. Distribution of intensifiers by syntactic position in the GloWbE corpus.

In GloWbE, *very* is again strangely frequent in the attributive, making the percentage more even between the syntactic positions than could be expected in the case of such delexicalized form like *very*. Similarly to the other corpora, *really, pretty* and *damn* are all strongly favoured in the predicative. *Super* is still almost even in the two syntactic positions, but now slightly more occurring in the predicative than in the SFC, indicating advancement in delexicalization for the development of *super* in the future.

As the three figures indicate, all major intensifier variants in all three corpora prefer the predicative position, although with slightly varying distributions. Increase in the variants' preference of the predicative is also visible. It is not surprising that these intensifiers are overall more commonly used with predicative adjectives, since the majority of forms here have been around in the varieties influencing Singapore English for centuries. Furthermore, it is possible that while the older intensifiers have entered the intensifier system through first being introduced in the attributive and from there gaining ground in the predicative as well, newer forms, such as *damn,* have appeared in the predicative from the first usages onwards, based on their notably low frequencies of the attributive. Indeed, *damn* is throughout the three corpora, out of all forms, found the least in the attributive.

Next, in order to distinguish between different kinds of delexicalization development paths, the older forms', *very, really* and *pretty*, development is compared in Figure 6 through the time period covered by the three corpora, followed by a similar analysis of the two newer variants, *damn* and *super* in Figure 7. Because different data sets are now compared, the numbers parenthesized present the normalized frequencies for each intensifier. Discussion and comparison to earlier theory about these intensifiers is included.

Figure 6. Comparison of the older intensifiers by syntactic distribution in three corpora. (Corpus name, intensifier variant and normalized frequency given.)

As presented in Figure 1 in section 2.2, *very* has occurred in English since the 16th century and *really* from the 18th century onwards (Peters 1994). *Pretty* does not occur in the figure, but OED quotes occurrences equally old for *pretty* as well, as will soon be discussed. Even though all three intensifiers are relatively stable in distribution throughout the different data sets, there are some slight changes in percentages, which form varying patterns of delexicalization. To begin the comparison, *really* (12) occurs most frequently in the predicative at the point where it is used the least frequently, in the oldest data from the ICE-SIN. In other words, increasing in frequency, it increases in the attributive. This is contrary to for example Tagliamonte's (2008) findings in Toronto, where *really*

occurred with greater emphasis in the predicative at the point of its highest frequency. However, the first occurrence of *really* in OED (s.v. *really* adv. and adj.) is in the predicative in 1722 and in the attributive later, in 1824. It has to be noted that the adjectival meaning of 'truly, positively' for *really* might still have been strong even in those examples.

In the literature, *really* rises to popularity in the 1990s Tyneside English (Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010, 267), whereas earlier in the 1960s it was still unpopular. Labov (1984, 44) mentions really as "one of the most frequent markers of intensity in colloquial conversation" in American English, which indicates it spread originally from AmE to BrE. It is likely that *really* has not been around in Singapore English as long as in British English, since its first occurrences in OED are relatively new and from the time when English was only beginning to be used in Singapore. Therefore, in the foundation phase of SgE *really* has most likely been absent from BrE as an intensifier, which may result in its lower frequencies still today. Could it be that because of the likely later introduction to Singapore English, *really* is behaving syntactically like a newer form of Barnfield and Buchstaller's (2010) prediction, and slowly growing its usage in the attributive while getting more popular through time?

(12)　This thing threw me up and made me **really** nervous [ICE-SIN:S1A-019#128:1:A]
(13)　the part about the thinning and dropping off of the actual lashes sounds **pretty** freaky to me already [PTT2008*fairlady_xoxo*321454]
(14)　I am a **very** comedic person. [GloWbE, mathialee.wordpress.com, 2009]

Following a different pattern than *really, pretty* (13) occurs most in the predicative at the point where it is also the most frequent, which is in the SFC. During over ten years' time from the ICE SIN to the SFC, its use decreases in the attributive while it is becoming more and more popular in overall use. This indicates a slow and steady rise in the whole speech community and lasting popularity. OED (s.v. *pretty* adv.) quotes the first usage with an attributive adjective for *pretty* in 1577 and the first predicative in 1677 already in the American context. *Pretty* has not been found as the intensifier number one in any of the earlier studies, but in 2000s Toronto English it is fourth popular and advanced in delexicalization in the whole speech community (Tagliamonte 2008). The differing development path indicates that *pretty* is an overall older form than *really* and has perhaps lingered

longer in the Singapore English intensifier system than *really*. A deeper diachronic analysis would be needed to reveal if *pretty* was especially popular in British English at the time of Singapore colonization and the following decades, in order to explain its possible early introduction to SgE. Another hypothesis is that American English has been influencing Singapore English use from relatively early on, introducing its popular form such as *pretty* to the community.

Very (14) surprisingly has more occurrences in the attributive than the other variants, even though it is concluded as the most delexicalized variant. Its patterning is quite stable, fluctuating only for the favour of the predicative in the SFC corpus. As Tagliamonte (2008) stated, old variants that are found equally distributed and fluctuating unpredictably are far in their delexicalization, which surely is true of *very*. The sway in the SFC could also be explained by a greater number of predicative adjectives overall in that corpus compared to the other two. However, this remains purely hypothetical unless all adjective phrases in the corpus were tested. Generally speaking, attributive adjective phrases are more common in written registers, most strongly represented here by the GloWbE, because of their tendency to condense a lot of information (Biber et al. 1999, 506).

Next, the two clearly newer intensifiers *damn* and *super* are compared in the three corpora as regards their distribution in syntactic position in Figure 7.
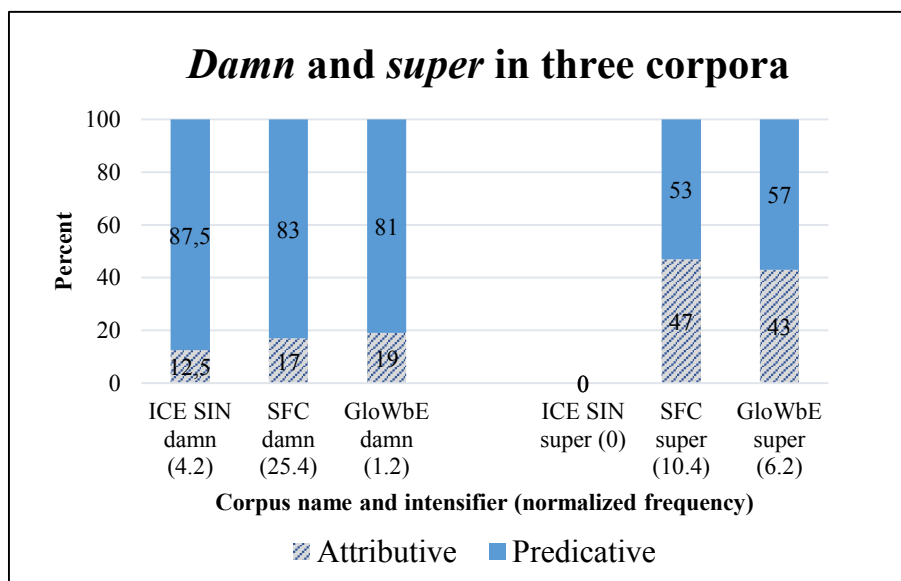
Figure 7. Comparison of the newer intensifiers by syntactic distribution in three corpora.

Damn (15) is in these sets of data the form least frequently met in the attributive. *Damn* seems to be a trend in the SFC corpus, because it is much less popular ten years earlier in the ICE-SIN as well as in the GloWbE, which has only slightly newer data than the SFC. Even though the frequency drops after the SFC, the percentage of use in the attributive continues the slow but constant rise. *Damn* is a new form, found in OED (s.v. *damn* adj. and adv.) for the first time in the predicative in 1882 and in attributive only as late as in 1945, and is likely to follow Barnfield and Buchstaller's (2010) idea on the delexicalization of new intensifiers, predominant in the predicative from their introduction to the system onwards. Instead of continuing to grow in the predicative, *damn* is slowly gaining more ground in the attributive, but is probably perceived as an intensifier of informal spoken registers, largely incompatible with some of the GloWbE text-types.

    (15) this is a **damn** practical society where everyone despises n hates a leech (GloWbE, leechietheleech.blogspot.com, 2012)
    (16) The cake was **super** moist (I might actually label it as juicy) and rich -- I was in chocolate heaven. (GloWbE, chubbyhubby.net/recipes)

Finally, another newer variant, *super* (16)*,* patterns differently than *damn* in the two syntactic positions as it is almost evenly distributed between attributive and predicative adjectives but slowly indicating a future preference for the predicative. It does not fall as quickly as *damn* in the GloWbE data either. OED entry for *super* (s.v. *super* adj. and int.) does not mention or quote the intensifying adverb usage of the word at all, but only gives the adjectival and interjectional usages, of which the latter is more similar to intensifiers. Having been used mostly as an adjective in British English from the 1769 onwards, the attributive function is natural for it from the outset. Furthermore, its usage as a prefix is a link to nouns, which are central parts-of-speech in the attributive usage. Perhaps the spreading of *super* into the predicative function is a recent innovation, supported by the fact that it does not occur in the ICE-SIN in either function, and by its still frequent occurrences in the attributive in this data.

Tagliamonte (2008, 389), among others, has raised concern about whether the syntactic analysis of intensifiers is a good indicator of delexicalization, especially in the case of old and thoroughly delexicalized forms. Findings, where the syntactic patterns are unpredictably fluctuating, point away

from an ongoing delexicalization process (ibid.) As Ito and Tagliamonte (2003, 274) note, extralinguistic factors are often cited as a more important factor contributing to intensifier use than internal factors are. In order to find support for and better understand the delexicalization and development of intensifiers in Singapore English, the extralinguistic factors of age and gender are considered in the Singapore Forums Corpus and paired together with the syntactic analysis in the latter section.

6.3 Variation by age and gender

As was established in Chapter 3 of this thesis, the extralinguistic factors of age and gender have a potential impact on how intensifiers are used in a speech community. Younger and older speakers often prefer different intensifier variants and also use intensifiers overall in different frequencies (Stenström et al. 2002, Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010, Ito and Tagliamonte 2003). The young are often considered as the group where intensifier use is the most frequent (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003), although it is sometimes proposed that they might prefer other means of intensification (Stenström 1999). Younger populations are also found taking on trendy innovative forms in their speech (e.g. Stenström et al. 2002). In addition, Chapter 3 discussed the heightened use of intensifier among women as well as the hyperbole and heightened expression of emotion often associated with both female language use and intensifiers (Tagliamonte and Roberts 2005).

From the point of view of the development of intensifier systems and delexicalization, especially the young female language users often are the ones introducing novel intensifiers into a speech community and making frequent use of incoming forms, this way pushing the intensifier system and language change forward (Labov 1990, Lorenz 2002). Furthermore, because of the possibility of fast renewal and recycling processes in intensifiers "it may be possible to tap into the recycling process by plotting the frequency of individual intensifiers in apparent time" according to Tagliamonte (2008, 371). These are the hypotheses that are under scrutiny in the present chapter.

The analysis in this section is only able to include the Singapore Forums Corpus (the SFC) because it is the only set of data where any metadata indicating the age and gender of the speakers are found. The basis for why the PTT is seen as a ladies' forum, Teens Planet as a young people's forum and Military Nuts as men's forum is given in section 5.3. It is problematic for the analysis that all of the three forums can be characterized only according to either age or gender, but none of them according to both factors. Nevertheless, as discussed in 5.3, the PTT comes across as a forum of young adult female speakers and Military Nuts as a place for more mature male speakers based on the nature of the topics and language use on both forums, while nothing can be said about gender on the Teens Planet. The present section will first look into the general frequency comparison of intensifiers in the three parts of the SFC and then move on to the syntactic comparison in order to see if that sheds new light on the delexicalization findings obtained in the previous section.

6.3.1 General frequencies

The frequencies of intensifiers on the individual forums of the SFC, presented in this section, are compared to the frequencies in the SFC overall (section 6.1.1) and to earlier studies about the language use of different age and gender groups in English speaking communities. The frequencies are given for each forum in both raw frequencies and as normalized by 100,000 words. Only the frequencies of intensifiers occurring more than 10 times on the forum are mentioned in tables 10, 11 and 12.

6.3.1.1 Teens Planet Forum

The Teens Planet (TP) forum word count is 326,457 words and the gender of the forum is mixed. The frequencies of individual intensifiers on the teens' forum are given in Table 10. All in all, 1,589 tokens of adjective intensifiers were found, which is almost 40 per cent of the intensifiers in the entire SFC. The normalized frequency of all intensifiers together is 486.7, which is greater than in the SFC overall, 414.3. This already indicates that young people in Singapore are especially inclined to using

colourful language, such as intensifiers, and may therefore be expected to contribute to the change in the intensifier system with a significant impact.

Intensifier	N	per 100,000
so	664	203.4
very	559	171.2
damn and *darn*	122	37.4
really	92	28.2
pretty	36	11.0
super	35	10.7
real	18	5.5
totally	15	4.6
other	48	14.7
total	**1,589**	**486.7**

Table 10. Intensifier frequencies on the Teens Planet forum (N ≥ 10)

(1) I listen to any radio station as long as its not local....too much singapore this singapore that...am **so** sick of it already [TP2006*Coquitlam*200529]
(2) pls, u r **sooo** young, but i know love has no age limit, c'mon, have more courage n tell her [TP2004*101wish*92884]
(3) Your school **very** strict. I've never heard of rules on bags before [TP2004*chocoB*89281]
(4) thanx to all hu haf supported Teens Planet!! [wink] sureeee.. we were **darn** active in June [TP2004*Joyce*84302]
(5) those who take public transport, please state whether the bus is **damn** cold or **damn** hot or just too slow.. Thanks! [TP2005*smrt_950*119369]
(6) To be honest when one thinks of the british as stiff upped lipped people, u actually realise they're **really** cool about stuff that might seem 'controversial'. [TP2006* HENG@*187516]

Whereas in the whole SFC *very* was by far the most frequent intensifier, this is not the case on the Teens Planet forum. The teens prefer *so* (1-2) over *very* (3) with the normalized frequency of 203.4 against 171.2. The teens' use of *so* covers over half of the tokens of the intensifier variant in the corpus, where the overall frequency of *so* is significantly lower, only 127.4. *So* has had a steady rise in BrE. It occurred in the speech of Glasgow teenagers in 1997-2004 with 30 per 100,000 words (Macaulay 2006) as well as in the COLT corpus on London teenagers in the 90s with 140 per 100,000 words (Palacios and Núñez 2012). *So* has been hypothesized to become a big time favourite in AmE (Tagliamonte and Roberts 2005), where it is considered generally more popular than in BrE. The popularity in other varieties indicates that *so* has come to Singapore English as an intensifier recycling due to mostly American English influence. Tagliamonte (2008, 369) quotes two unambiguous

examples of *so* as an intensifier, the earliest she has detected, dating from the mid-1800s. It could therefore be claimed that *so* was not yet available in the intensifier pool when English became used in Singapore in the early 1800s, much like was discussed with *really* in the previous section. It might be that Singaporeans have taken on using *so* only in the turn of the 21ˢᵗ century due to the trendy usages in other varieties. This change, it seems, is led by young people.

Finding *very* as the second most popular form among young people is quite surprising, as it is considered an intensifier characteristic of conservative language use and frequent especially in the use of older generations in BrE varieties (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003, Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010). On the other hand, from the way *very* saturates the English language intensifier system it can be predicted to be found frequent even among teens. It is also possible that teens in Singapore feel a stronger need to adhere to the standard forms than elsewhere, due to the active pro- Standard English language politics of the country (Mesthrie and Bhatt 2008, Alsagoff 2010, 342).

So and *very* are markedly more popular among the teens than are other intensifier variants. The third and fourth popular *damn/darn* (4-5) and *really* (6) drop in normalized frequency to 37.4 and 28.2, respectively. It is interesting to notice that *really* is not specifically popular among the teens. Its overall frequency in the SFC is 32.8 but on the TP only 28.2. Its infrequency is in strong contrast to its popularity among the young in the 1990s' York and Tyneside Englishes (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003; Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010) and its appearance among the most frequent intensifiers in the 1993 COLT corpus (Palacios and Núñez 2012). The Singaporean teens of the 21ˢᵗ century seem to differ from the teens in Britain in the late 20ᵗʰ century in their preference of *really* and furthermore seem to have moved on into supporting *so* as the popular trendy variant, which already implies a later stage of development in the cycle of intensifier change (Tagliamonte and Roberts 2005).

Damn and its variant *darn,* on the other hand, is a trendy intensifier on this forum among the teens, as it is found as the third most popular intensifier. It also gets a higher frequency among the teens, 37.4, than overall in the corpus, which is 25.4. Palacios and Núñez (2012, 792) found that the

tendency to use taboo or swear words as intensifiers is more frequent among teenagers than in adult language use, which could explain this trend.

After the four most popular items are, in a similar manner to the entire corpus's distribution in Table 6, *pretty* (11.0) and *super* (10.7)*, which, however, are not frequent enough to show a special preference among the teens. *Totally* is the only intensifier with the *-ly* ending that has been included in the table. The other *-ly* variants occur ten or less than ten times and are therefore in the category 'other', which overall reaches the normalized frequency of 14.7. The most frequent variants in this category are *extremely* with 8 tokens, *dead* with 7 each and *greatly* with 6 tokens.

Based on these findings it could be hypothesized that the teens have introduced *so* into the Singapore intensifier system because of the notably higher frequency of the form in their use. However, verifying this claim any further would require earlier as well as newer data with demographic factors similar to the SFC data. Since the analysis by syntactic position cannot be conducted in the case of *so* either, the finding remains only tentative. Based on intensifier findings in previous studies (Lorenz 2002, Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010) however, whenever there is a generation gap in the use of an intensifier, meaning that the young and the older populations have different favourite variants, there is a change in progress towards the variant favoured by the young. In addition, the frequency of *so* and *damn,* too, among the teens might be an indication that American English is heavily influencing Singaporean intensifier use, and that global media products, where the heightened use of *so*, for example, has been detected (Tagliamonte and Roberts 2005), influence young people's language use the strongest. On the other hand, the teens have preserved the traditional British *very* quite well which could indicate that the Singaporean teens of the 21st century adhere to Standard English norms more strongly than elsewhere.

Altogether 117 Singlish adjectives were found used with intensifiers by the teens, which is 7.4 per cent of all intensifiers detected on the TP forum. 59 are found with the intensifier *so* (7) and 42 with *very* (8). The heightened use of these non-standard forms with *so* might indicate the likewise non-standard status of the intensifier *so* in Singapore English.

(7) **so** <u>siann</u> de lehh. teens planet nvr had a proper outing before~~ i wan outing!! [TP2004*S!ndy*90321]

(8) haha, of course la. moderator must be **<u>very</u> <u>guai</u>** one wad [TP2006*er_liang89*197045]

The examples show two of the most popular Singlish adjectives on the TP. *Sian* meaning '1. Bored, fed-up, tired 2. Boring, dull, tiring' (*Dictionary of Singlish and Singapore English*, s.v. *sian*), is used with an intensifier 25 times on the TP forum, and *guai/kuai lan* meaning 'bad, evil, thuggish' (s.v. *kuai lan*), is used with an intensifier 7 times on the TP forum. Both adjectives' meanings reflect quite well the topics and issues that teenagers might be dealing with in their lives.

6.3.1.2 PTT Pte Ltd Forum

The PTT Pte Ltd forum, characterized as the women's forum, contains overall 326,479 words and a total of 1,613 applicable tokens of intensifiers of adjectives. The overall frequency of intensifiers on the women's forum is, therefore, relatively high, with over 40 per cent of the intensifiers in the SFC as a whole and even slightly more than on the Teens Planet forum. The female language users on the forum are more likely to be younger adults rather than older, based on the topics, as established in section 5.3. Findings arising in the female Singaporean speech community should be noteworthy, since female language users are overall regarded as important contributors in leading change from one intensifier to other (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003, 277) and enthusiastic users of intensifiers, as has been discussed. Stenström et al. (2002, 142) found out that in London young females use intensifiers generally more than young males and Tagliamonte (2008, 388) noted that women and men might lead in the use of different intensifier variants. All frequencies in Table 10, which presents the most frequent items for the ladies, are again normalized by 100,000 words.

Intensifier	N	per 100,000
very	765	234,3
so	402	123.1
really	165	50.5
damn and *darn*	92	28.2
pretty	70	21.4
super	49	15.0
real	13	4.0
other	57	17.5
total	**1,613**	**494.1**

Table 11. Intensifier frequencies on the PTT Pte Ltd forum.

(9)   … but I think Singaporean girls are **very** beautiful and don't need to try and look like someone else [PTT2005*skid*3701047]

(10)   then after i reply then they say check email for the redemption details **so** troublesome and **so** unfrenly (sic.) to environment waste paper shd jus use sms [PTT2008*FireIce*301419]

(11)   BTW, Sasa also sells the brand: Pupa Pupa has **really** cute packaging of their cosmetics. Worth collecting. [PTT2008*viciouskitty74*327198]

(12)   sometimes my eyeliner smudge or shed, woah!!! **damn** ugly smokey wannabe failure [PTT2009*FireIce*315588]

(13)   **super** random buy, but i think my hair likes it! ha. [PTT2010*udontknowme*312155]

By looking at Table 6, it can be said that the PTT Pte Ltd forum is more conventional as regards its most popular intensifiers than the teens' forum, as the most popular item is *very* (9) with a normalized frequency of 234.3, which is significantly higher than in the SFC put together (170.3). The forum follows the order of popular forms in the SFC overall with the intensifier *so* (10) as the second most frequent item by the normalized frequency of 123.1, instead of *really,* which is the third popular with a notably lower frequency of 50.5. *So* is nevertheless popular with the female language users even though it is notably behind the teenagers' frequency of 203.4. Labov (1990) discovered that in language change in general women tend to use more incoming forms than men, which could explain the frequent use of *so*, originally introduced by the young to the system. The rising *so* in Toronto English was found in Tagliamonte (2008, 383) to be led by 13- to 29-year-old women, which fits the finding obtained here in Singapore English.

In addition, *really* (11) is with 50.5 more popular on the ladies' forum compared to the two other forums and the entire corpus, with the overall frequency of 32.5. *Really* makes a similar peak

in Tagliamonte's (2008, 372) Toronto study among the 20- to 29-year-old young adults. In British English both Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010) and Ito and Tagliamonte (2003) found gender as the contrastive factor in the use of *really* in the young adults' age group. For the linguists, this indicates an ongoing change in the intensifier system from *very* to *really* (ibid).

The four most frequent items are the same as were seen on the TP forum, with *damn* (12) in the fourth place. It is, however, less frequent here than on the TP forum, with 28,2 normalized frequency against the 37.4 of the teens, which indicates that the female speakers are only slowly adopting the variant after its probable introduction by the teenagers. Similarly to the TP forum, the last three intensifiers with over ten occurrences are *pretty, super* and *real. Pretty* and *super* (13) are somewhat more popular among the adult women speakers than with the teens, with the normalized frequencies of 21.4 and 15 against the 11 and 10.7 seen on the TP forum. In the 'other' category the most frequent forms *totally* and *highly* have 10 occurrences each and *extremely* has 8.

The above findings mean that women are in lead in the use of many an intensifier variant. The mentions made about women's preference for hyperbolic expressions such as intensifiers, are not complete nonsense, it seems. Both *very* and *really* are characteristics of young adult Singaporean female intensifier use in the 21st century, since their use greatly exceeds the corpus averages. This is interesting, as *very* is expected based on its delexicalization profile to be evenly divided between genders and not associated with either gender in a specific way (Tagliamonte 2008, 383), although the opposite seems to be the case here. In order to confirm whether *really* has at some point been popular for younger people as well and only from there adopted into popularity by adult females, would once again require data from an earlier time period with extralinguistic markers.

Women speakers even use the newest intensifier *super* the most and take a lead to the other groups with the steadily rising *pretty* as well. However, *so,* which is the most frequent form for the SFC teenagers, is a rising trend that the adult women are still in process of adopting in their use. The connection between the female preference of *so* and emotional adjectives is established in Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005), but will not be tested further here. *Damn* is another trendy intensifier

that women seem to be adopting after teenagers' initial preference of it. Of the teenage-led trends, it is likely that *damn* is newer than *so*, but elaborating this claim further will require a look into its syntactic behavior, which will follow with each relevant variant after the frequency analysis of the third forum, Military Nuts.

92 tokens of intensifiers occurring with Singlish adjectives were found on the PTT Pte Ltd forum, which is 5.7 per cent of the intensifiers included in the analysis of this forum. Women therefore seem to make less use of the intensifier + Singlish adjective combination than teens. As can be expected based on the popular intensifiers on the forum, 43 such adjectives co-occur with *very*, and 37 with *so.*

(14) becos i always feel tht makeup remove process is **very** mah fan, always scared canot remove throughly. [PTT2008*winnie^_^*315588]
(15) Errrr **so** paiseh meeting on weekdays abit su sa for me leh [PTT2004*realitybites*106502]

Both adjectives illustrated occur 10 times on the PTT forum and are therefore the most frequent ones there. *Mafan* (14) means 'pained or annoyed, troublesome, bothersome' (*Urbandictionary* s.v. *mafan*) and *paiseh* (15) is 'bashful, shy, embarrassing, humiliating' (*Dictionary of Singlish and Singapore English* s.v. *paiseh*). Singlish adjectives occur in a wide spectrum of forms with English intensifiers, which is one indicator of the advanced development and spread of the intensifier system.

6.3.1.3 Military Nuts Forum

The Military Nuts forum in the SFC involves, as has been discussed in 5.3, military related forum discussions by predominantly male adult speakers from Singapore. It comes across as a forum where the speakers are slightly older than on the PTT Pte Ltd and certainly on the Teens Planet forum, as revealed for example by the language use, discussed in section 5.3.

The 781 relevant intensifier tokens in the Military Nuts sample of 308,539 words make up only roughly 20 per cent of all intensifiers in the SFC corpus. In comparison to the normalized frequencies of all applicable intensifier tokens in the different forums, the 252.8 of the MN forum is much behind the 486.7 of TP and the 494.1 of PTT forums. Therefore, it could be claimed that men are less fond

of using hyperbolic expressions such as intensifiers in their informal language use than women and teens are.

Intensifier	N	per 100,000
very	313	101.4
so	159	51.5
really	58	18.8
pretty	57	18.5
damn and *darn*	30	9.7
highly	28	9.1
fully	22	7.1
extremely	20	6.5
super	16	5.2
totally	15	4.9
heavily	12	3.9
=, < 10	51	16.5
total	**781**	**253.1**

Table 12. Intensifier frequencies on the Military Nuts forum. (N ≥ 10)

Table 12 shows the distribution of intensifier variants in the MN forum sample by frequency. The 781 relevant occurrences of intensifiers are distributed between surprisingly many intensifier variants. Although the frequency of use is low among men, they resort to more intensifier forms than women or teens do. As was seen in 5.3, the word-type count in the MN sample is also higher than in other forums, although its word count is smaller, which indicates that men vary their word choices more. Altogether 11 intensifiers occur 10 or more times on the forum whereas only 7 are popular enough to appear in the table on the PTT forum and 8 on the Teens Planet forum. This is a development recognized in the literature, in the case of London teenagers in the COLT corpus (Stenström 1999, 75; Stenström et al. 2002, 139), where young females kept using *really* while young males constantly changed the intensifier variant and seemed to master a larger variety of forms. According to Hopper and Traugott (2003) a connection exists between the variety of forms in use and the strength of the expressive impact of intensifier use.

Men also seem less attached to any specific form than women or young people are. As we have seen, teens preferred *so* and *damn* more than the average on the three forums and the ladies were

found to give emphasis to *really* and *very*. Based on this, men seek to enhance their impact by using more forms rather than taking on any of the trendy incoming intensifier forms. Perhaps men also have less need to show their adherence to a certain social group by the use of intensification. They might have other means of showing their belonging than intensifiers. Based on these findings, men avoid coming across as hyperbolic and do not wish to be recognized from the use of any specific intensifier variant.

(16) Those are **very** long range 288km rockets which can hit KL from Singapore. [MN2011*weasel11962*424470]
(17) No wonder Taiwanese Navy **so** rich. [MN2005*Manager433*160447]
(18) You are **really** naive. If Iraq collapses and becomes a rogue nation … [MN2005*SMAPLionHeart*138537]
(19) Arapahoe I'm not sure who you are referring to, but I'm **pretty** sure no one mentioned an American hegemony? [MN2008*edwin3060*309758]

The four most popular forms among men are also in a slightly different order than on the two previous forums. The most popular form again is *very* (16), which has double the normalized frequency, 101.4, compared to the next most popular intensifier *so* (17), with only 51.5. Again, *so* is more popular than *really*. The third and fourth popular variants *really* (18) and *pretty* (19) reach in their normalized frequencies only little below 19 both. *Really* is significantly less frequent among men (18.8) than among female (50.5), which is clearly differentiating the two groups, and corresponds to Ito and Tagliamonte's (2003) finding that gender is a contrastive factor in the use of *really* among adults.

Pretty is for the first time seen among the four most frequent intensifier forms, and its popularity among men is greater (18.5) than among teens (11). It is the only variant, besides the –*ly* ending intensifiers, in which men are not in the last place in usage frequency. *Pretty* has been found popular among men before, by Tagliamonte (2008, 383) in Toronto, where young men were leading in the use of *pretty,* while young women led with *so.* In the SFC, *pretty* can be seen as a variant used mainly by adults, in contrast to for example *very*, which was also popular among the teens. It is argued (ibid.) that this preference by men is surprising, but that it might be due to the men hoping to avoid the female trendy intensifiers which drives them to using *pretty*, a form free of any social associations.

However, it has to be noted that the female users are still leading in the use of pretty (21.4), although men are not that far behind. *Damn*, which occurred as an incoming trend on the other two forums, gets a small normalized frequency of 9 on the men's forum. Stenström et al. (2002, 139) argue that men are more likely to include strong intensifiers and taboo words, which *damn* clearly fits alongside the BrE *bloody* and the straightforward swear word *fucking,* in their speech. This behaviour is not found in the SFC corpus with men.

(20) He got there by virtue of being **highly** skilled in martial arts.
[MN2005*HENG@*113095]

(21) So, I am **fully** supportive of "excess to requirement" elite soldiers being redeployed to less demanding vocation. [MN2007*aikchongtan*298533]

What is yet another difference compared to the other forums on the MN forum is that there are more variants with the *–ly* ending (20-21) occurring over ten times and none of them the most probable *completely*. Even though the normalized frequencies of these variants are not great, varying from 4 to 9, they are still more frequent than on the two other forums. Men are not leading in the use of any non *–ly* ending intensifier variant. This confirms that the language use on the men's forum is perhaps more conservative and more distanced from informal spoken discourse witnessed on the other two forums. This perhaps also explains the lack of taboo words.

The more standard nature of the men's forum language is also supported by the fact that unclear sentences, as discussed in the methods section, and Singlish adjectives are less frequently found on the MN forum than on the two other forums. Only 17 tokens of Singlish adjectives with intensifiers were found, which is 2.2 per cent of the intensifiers on the MN forum overall, and therefore greatly less in percentage than on the teens' and women's forums. The most exploited adjective is *garang* (22) meaning 'Bold, daring, fearless.' (A Dictionary of Singlish s.v. *garang*). It's found in 4 tokens, whereas on the two other forums it did not occur at all.

(22) As per normal, our **very** garang OC was there to lead the route march to our 1st campsite. [MN2005*Gordonator*122116]

The difference in the usage of intensifiers with Singlish non-standard adjectives is once again indication of the different type of language use by men as compared to women and teens. Intensifiers

do not seem to have saturated the men's language use equally fully, since use with all kinds of adjectives is not as common.
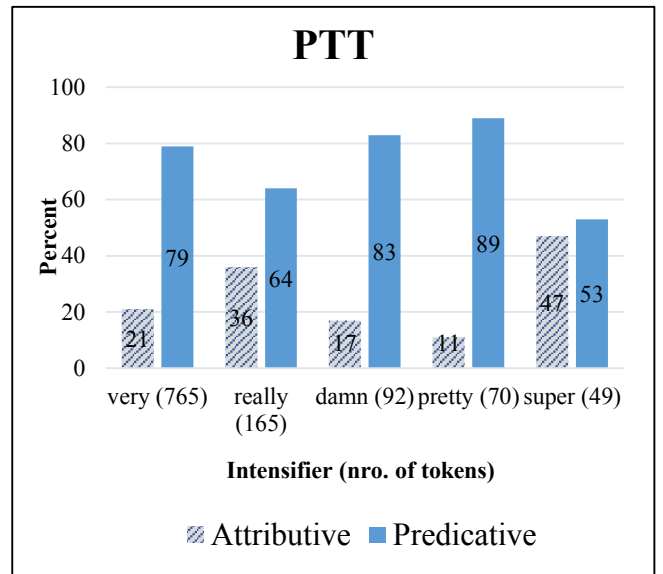
6.3.2 Syntactic positions

Section 6.2 compared the three corpora used in this thesis as regards the syntactic positions of intensifiers in order to discover patterns of delexicalization. In the present section, the three forums of the SFC are compared to see how the intralinguistic factor influences different social groups at one point in time (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003, 274). It might be possible to gain a deeper understanding of the working of age, gender and delexicalization in language change together (ibid., 262). However, the analysis of delexicalization through syntax would benefit from a diachronic perspective, if any older or newer data categorized by extralinguistic factors were available for comparison. It needs to be remembered that the comparisons and predictions we are able to make in this thesis, by using the SFC data as explained, are only based on synchronic data and the patterns arising there.

Figures 8, 9 and 10 summarize the distribution between the two syntactic positions of the most popular intensifier forms, namely *very, really, pretty, damn* and *super,* across all the three SFC forums individually. This will reveal whether the syntactic positions preferred differ according to the age or gender grouping established in the corpus design. The older and the newer intensifier forms are compared in more detail below. Comparisons to the findings discussed in section 6.2 for the whole SFC and the reference corpora are made. To ensure that the results between forums can be compared, the percentages for the intensifiers' co-occurrence with the two adjective functions are given. The intensifier *so,* although it is the second popular form, is not analysed according to its syntactic behaviour, as it usually occurs only with the predicative function, the attributive function, such as *so nice hair, being considered as ungrammatical.
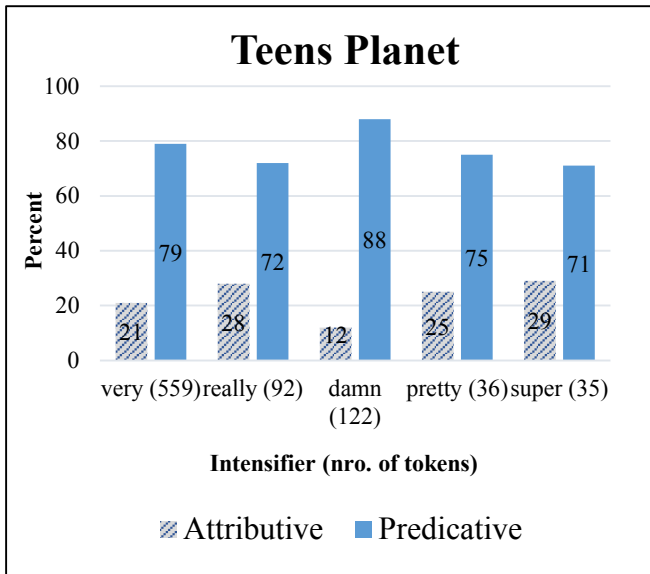
**Figure 8.** Distribution of intensifiers across syntactic positions on the Teens Planet forum.

Figure 9. Distribution of intensifiers across syntactic positions on the PTT Pte Ltd forum.
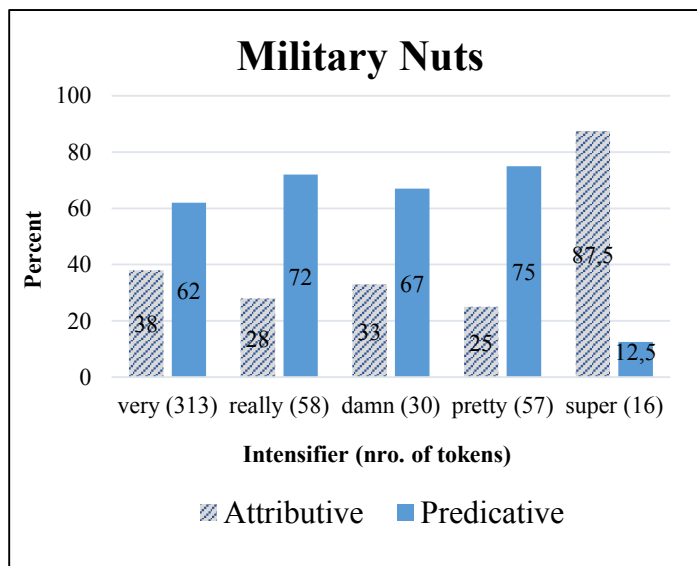
Figure 10. Distribution of intensifiers across syntactic positions on the Military Nuts forum.

As can be seen from Figures 8, 9 and 10, on all three forums, the forms *very, really, damn* and *pretty* are all more frequent in the predicative position in every forum. This would suggest that these forms have been in use already for a relatively long time in the Singaporean speech community, and that the forms have disseminated widely in the system because they can be used in a variety of functions. The initial analysis would be to say that all these forms are highly delexicalized.

Super, on the other hand, is strongly favoured in the predicative by teens, but among adult women it is equally distributed between the two functions, and on the adult men's forum the attributive is more frequent. This kind of pattern exhibits a strong proof of *super* being a fairly recent innovation in Singapore English, occurring the most delexicalized in the language use of the youngest speakers. It also suggests an ongoing delexicalization in the case of *super*, which is not so clear for any other form. Figures 11 and 12 present the differences in intensifier patterning between forums in a form which makes comparing the older and the newer forms' development easier.
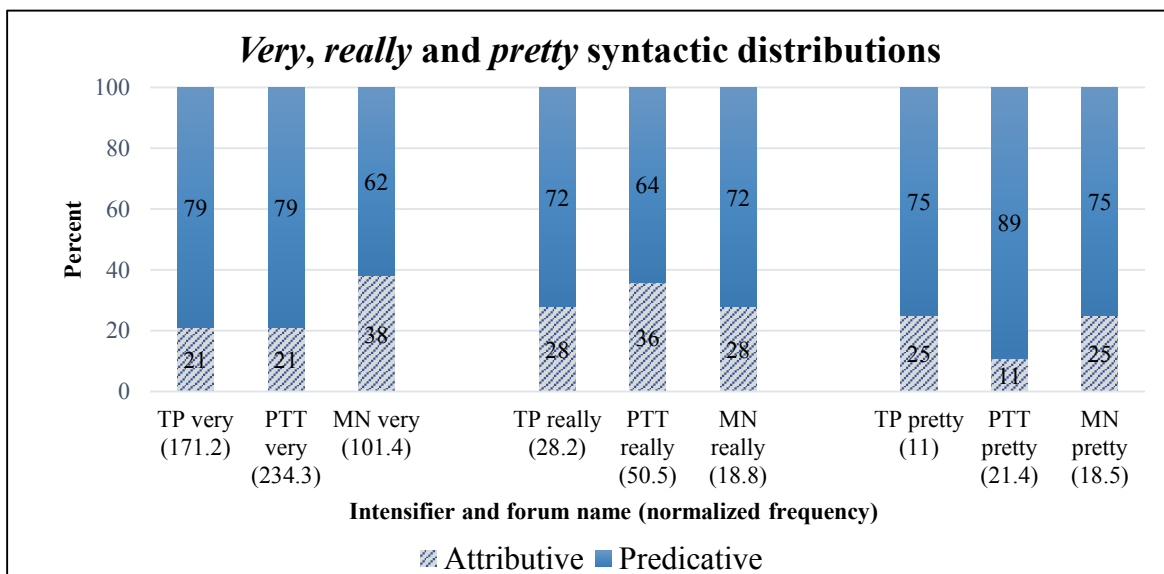
Figure 11. Older intensifiers', *very, really* and *pretty*, syntactic distributions by forum (forum name shortening and normalized frequency given: TP = teens, PTT = female, MN = male)

Figure 11 compares the three intensifier forms which, according to the historical trajectory of intensifiers presented in section 2.2, are older forms, first detected in use in the 16th – 18th centuries. As we can see, *very* is more frequently, 79 per cent of the time, used in the predicative by both teens and the adult women than by the adult men, who use ve*ry* more evenly with both adjective positions. Therefore, a greater popularity results in a greater emphasis on the predicative for *very,* as is expected. Curiously, the greatest frequency on the PTT does not result in any greater predicative emphasis compared to the TP forum. On the other hand, among male speakers, where *very* is used less frequently in relation to the other two forum groups, the attributive adjective position finds more

room. Men on the forums make overall less use of intensifiers, and although ve*ry* is the most popular form for them, it has not saturated their language use as fully as that of women and teens. It seems that *very* is more advanced in delexicalization among younger people and females, contrary to, for example, Tagliamonte's (2008, 373) findings with *very* more advanced for the 30+ age group. *Very* was also seen more equal between the functions in both the ICE-SIN corpus 10 years earlier and the GloWbE, both including mainly adult language use. It could be that men and adult population in general are for some reason resisting the spread of *very* in the predicative in Singapore English, which affects the development of the variant throughout the three corpora.

The slightly newer form, *really,* however, exhibits a different pattern. It similarly occurs predominantly with the predicative on all three forums but it is more equally distributed in the use of women, where it also is the most frequent of the three forums. This confirms the pattern seen with *really* in section 6.2, where the three corpora were compared. There, *really* was seen distributed syntactically more evenly on the SFC forums, where it was also the most frequent whereas the predicative was emphasized in the lower frequencies in other corpora. It was hypothesized that this could be seen as the pattern found in Barnfield and Buchstaller's (2010) study, whereby newer forms enter the system preferring the predicative and then start gaining ground with the attributive, too. If this is the case, it would seem that it is the female speakers who have first taken on using *really* in the predicative, because the form has been in their use long enough to have extended notably in the attributive, too. The considerably lower frequencies among the teens and the male speakers mean, at the same time, that the variant has not yet had possibilities to extend into the attributive.

This point of view would involve viewing *really* as a newer intensifier form, although, as seen in section 2.2 and in OED, it has been around in English since the 18th century. The literature (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003; Tagliamonte 2008) treats highly delexicalized forms that occur with sudden popularity in the speech community as intensifier recycling. Observed among others by Bolinger (1972), old forms do not entirely fall out of use but may be taken back into active use if perceived

expressive enough. The result in the SFC would indicate that recycled forms may travel along the development paths observed among entirely new forms, moving along increasing attribution.

It is possible that, after the rise of *really* into popularity in BrE and AmE in the late 20th century, the form has been led into Singapore English by young women, already used in the predicative, which is the predominant example available at the time in the influencing varieties. This means that the recycling has reached SgE slightly later than the core varieties. The spread of *really* is, furthermore, likely to be hindered by the success of *so*, as the intensifiers in the system affect each other's popularity. Once again this could be a result of the global media and worldwide information channels typical for the times, bringing influences in a new way to the Singapore English variety. It would be interesting to look into this in earlier data with extralinguistic markers. In ICE-SIN 1990s data *really* is already the third popular intensifier, although it is not as frequent as in the 2000s SFC. As said, it is more strongly favoured in predicative back then. If *really* is to follow the development seen in BrE and AmE varieties, it may continue its frequency rise and syntactic division, and be in the future seen in Singapore English in similar numbers as *very* and *so* in the SFC data.

Pretty is often mentioned as a form that is steadily advanced in delexicalization in the whole speech community because it is so strong in the predicative throughout the data (Tagliamonte 2008). *Pretty* is met in English as an intensifier earlier than *really* (Figure 1) and could have been introduced to Singapore English early on, based on its syntactic distribution resembling the traditional attributive to predicative pattern seen with older forms. In the SFC *pretty* is most markedly, 89 per cent of the time, used in the predicative among women speakers, where it is also most numerous overall. Male speakers, who use *pretty* more than in average in the whole SFC, are behind the women in both frequency of use and the percentage of occurrence in the predicative (75 per cent). It seems that the variant is slowly spreading from the female to the male language use, whereas the teens are interested in other kinds of trends. *Pretty* is among the popular forms already in the ICE-SIN and it survives in GloWbE, as does also *really*, where it occurs almost as frequently as in the SFC. *Pretty* is part of adult language use which guarantees its survival in the more formal and written GloWbE data. The

different patterns of *pretty* and *really* suggest that *pretty* has been around in Singapore since the early steps of English use onwards, whereas *really* has been fully realised as an intensifier only after it started becoming a popular recycling in the mother varieties.

The more recent innovations in the English intensifier system are *damn*, an AmE associated, taboo-like word occurring as a trend in the SFC, and *super,* used in colloquial BrE originally in exclamations and as a prefix (OED) and occurring, according to some observers (*the New York Times* 2016), in AmE with surprising frequencies. Neither of the words have been studied extensively as an intensifier, and therefore, they can be described as possible innovations which, by occurring with these frequencies, distinguish Singapore English intensifier use from other varieties.
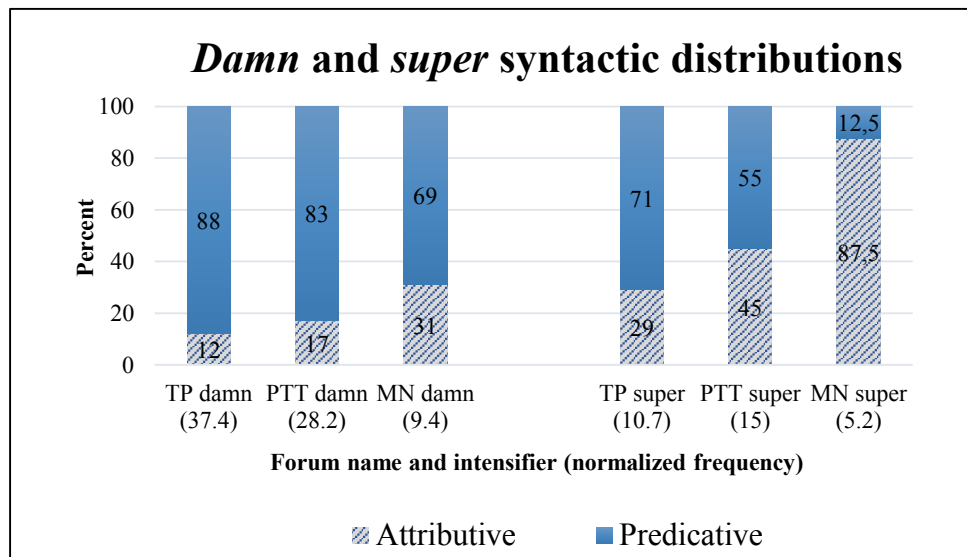
Figure 12. Newer intensifiers', *damn* and *super*, distribution between syntactic positions (forum name shortening and normalized frequency given).

As can be seen from Figure 12, both forms advance in the 2000s' Singapore English in patterns that are typical for the general spread of intensifiers in a speech community. *Damn* is more frequently used with predicative adjectives the higher its frequency in the language use of a certain group of people is. Discussed in the previous section, *damn* is most markedly, besides *so,* the teenagers' preferred intensifier as in their use its frequency, 37.4, exceeds the average normalized usage frequency 25.3 of the SFC. Besides the general question of frequency, *damn* occurs only 12 per cent

of the time with attributive adjectives among the teens, making it highly likely that they are responsible for making *damn* the SFC trend, while the form is also more advanced in delexicalization for them than for the other groups.

Damn was, however, already around in Singapore English in the 1990s ICE data, where it occurred as the fifth popular form, although with a modest frequency. It is known that the ICE-SIN involves the language use of adults, which would indicate the popularity among the teenagers in the SFC a trendy recycling of a form that has existed quietly in the background for some time. Furthermore, *damn* seems like an instance of age-grading (Chambers 2003), meaning that the trendy form is popular only for one age group, usually the young, but dropped as that group of speaker ages. This is supported by the small but existing frequency in the ICE-SIN and the drastic drop in frequency seen in the GloWbE. It would, however, require further data to see if young people in different times find *damn* an attractive intensifier choice.

Interestingly, the diachronic aspect into *damn* in 6.2, where it was compared in three corpora, pointed to *damn* as an example of a clearly newer from, which, according to Barnfield and Buchstaller's (2010) theory, would have entered Singapore English in the predicative and has since been indicating a further stepwise spread into the attributive. In contrast to this, in Figure 12 the group responsible of the spread to attributive are the male users, although the form is not specifically popular for them. The diachronic and synchronic findings as regards the syntax of *damn* are contradictory, and any simple explanation to its delexicalization trajectory in SgE cannot be given.

Super, on the other hand, is almost equally distributed between the functions in the women's use, where it also is the most frequent. The predicative stands out the most among teens, who are using the form slightly less. *Super* seems to be overall less delexicalized than *damn,* because the percentages of the attributive function are generally higher. What should be noted is that the men make very little use of *super* and, consequently, it is used in the predicative only in two instances, which is 12.5 per cent of its total occurrence on the men's forum. It seems that the teens might have introduced *super* into Singapore English, judging from how advanced *super* is in predicative function

in their use. Nevertheless, the change and spread of *super* is currently led by the frequent use among women. Men's speech, the intensifier *super,* has not yet managed to permeate in any way. But as the syntactic division of the form point to *super* being in the process of active delexicalization, it might, in a few years' time be found in men's speech with greater predicative frequencies than here. *Super* does not occur in ICE-SIN 10 years before the SFC, which strengthens the interpretation that teens have introduced it sometime between the ICE and the SFC data sets, later decreasing its use to make room for *damn*. When compared to the second reference corpus GloWbE, the use of *super* does not make a total plunge there which was seen with *damn. Super* is perhaps able to hold on to some of its popularity in GloWbE because of the adult women who are leading its spread. Another interesting point is that *super* occurs less in both BrE and AmE according to the GloWbE data, so testing its delexicalization there might also yield some enlightening results.

The co-operation of language internal factors such as syntax and the external categories of speaker age and gender certainly offer interesting and multifaceted points of view into intensifier development and change. Differing patterns emerge, as we have seen, and the results are often difficult to interpret, even in light of earlier theories. It still remains questionable whether simply the higher occurrence with predicative adjectives is enough to mark an intensifier as delexicalized and whether newer and older intensifier forms can be said to develop in markedly different syntactic patterns. It seems that recycled forms, such as *really*, can also advance through the trajectory of newer forms, introduced by Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010).

7. Discussion on Findings

The corpus analysis revealed interesting patterns pertaining to how intensifiers in Singapore English are spreading in time, which already in themselves offer material for predictions on possible future changes in the intensifier system. Six variants, namely *very, so, pretty, really, damn* and *super* were analysed more closely in three sets of data. The frequency counts of *very* in the three corpora show that its frequency is decreasing notably in Singapore English moving from the 20th century to the early 21st. Although it succeeds in maintaining its place as the number one intensifier variant in each corpus, its normalized frequency drops from 288.2 to 170.3 to 103.1. As Rickford et al. (2007, 128) note, even though the power of *very* to emphasize and intensify words is dwindling, its placement in the core of intensifier use of the English speaking communities is prominent. It also seems that in SgE other variants constantly need to struggle for expressivity and advancement in delexicalization in order to saturate any speech community as fully as *very*.

Some earlier studies (e.g. Tagliamonte 2008) record findings where another form has succeeded in replacing *very* as the most popular intensifier, although how lasting the power of such change is, remains yet undiscovered. Based on the findings in the corpus analysis, in Singapore English the form closest in popularity to *very* and its most likely contestant is *so*, which is the second popular variant in each three corpora. *So* has been adopted with enthusiasm by the Singaporean speech community probably already well before the reported popularity in the 1990s ICE data. Its normalized frequency develops to its culmination point in the early 2000s' SFC, plummeting surprisingly fast in the GloWbE corpus of later 2000s. The findings in apparent time according to age reveal that *so* is the number one variant for teenagers. It appears that young language users are causing the peak in the SFC corpus, where their usage greatly exceeds the corpus average. The use of *so* is associated with emotional language use and the language of trendy media products (Tagliamonte and Roberts 2005). It could be hypothesized that global media is one factor in the rise of *so* and perhaps other variant as well, following Mair's (2013) observations of the ways of language spread. The plummeting intensifier frequencies in GloWbE is partially explained by the written nature of its data. It is highly

popular that *so* has come to SgE to stay, at least for a while, but perhaps not with equally high frequencies as met in the SFC and the teens' forum.

Two intensifier variants exemplifying a steadier rise in Singapore English are *really* and *pretty*. *Really* is the third popular form in every corpora studied but it also is constantly less frequent than *so*. Its decrease is not so drastic in the GloWbE corpus, which indicates that *really* might well be the next big favourite in Singapore English, similarly as Ito and Tagliamonte (2003), among others, have predicted about the development of *really* in other varieties. *Really* is clearly a women's form, used on their forum above the SFC average, markedly more than other groups, which further supports a steady ongoing change into its direction (Labov 1990). *Pretty* is steadily increasing, likewise, rising from a small frequency into a moderate one in the ten years' time. It is a very old form and behaves most predictably as regards its frequency and delexicalization patterns. *Pretty* is popular for both adult women and adult men, but not for the teenagers in the SFC. Its pattern indicates that it saturates the whole speech community but its unpopularity among young people implies it is not likely to rise into a sudden peak, a recycled innovation, anytime soon.

Damn and *super* are best characterized as new trends or intensifier innovations in Singapore English. *Super* does not occur in the 1990s ICE-SIN as an intensifier but appears in the Singapore Forums and the GloWbE as the sixth popular intensifier with 10.4 and 6.2 normalized frequencies. It has a greater probability of surviving longer in the system by being used by adult women than the slightly earlier newcomer *damn,* which already falls heavily after the SFC. *Damn* has taboo origins and is the fifth popular in the ICE-SIN and already fourth in the SFC. *Damn* is a teenager-led change, as for them it is in the top three intensifiers. The plummeting frequency in the GloWbE can be explained with the difference in registers of corpus data, but the striking frequency leap also indicates the phenomenon of age-grading in the case of *damn*. The young speakers are using it in informal forum contexts, but at the same time adults are not using it in GloWbE. Unfortunately, having only one set of data with young speakers, prevents making wider conclusions about their intensifier use.

The syntactic distribution of *damn* in the SFC suggests it has already existed in the system for a while, but opted into use by the teens for its expressive force, which agrees with Ito and Tagliamonte's (2003) finding that innovations do not appear from out of thin air, but are more likely to be recyclings of forms encountered more or less delexicalized in the system before. It is likely that *super* has entered Singapore English later than *damn* and therefore may also last longer. What signals the novelty of *super* further is its syntactic distribution, as among men, where *super* is rare, it is preferred in the attributive, increasing in the predicative where it is more frequently used. This pattern detected with *super* is the only one in the current set of data pointing to an ongoing delexicalization. Unfortunately, categorizing adjectival heads according to their semantic classes established by Dixon (1982) was not possible in the scope of the present study. The method is used in some intensifier studies (Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010, Ito and Tagliamonte 2003) as another intralinguistic factor mirroring delexicalization. Items further delexicalized tend to occur with a wider spectrum of adjective categories, and analysing this could have provided more credibility to the predictions about delexicalization in unclear cases. However, the established categories felt too narrow for the variety of adjectives in the data, which would have meant excluding relevant tokens based on the incompatibility of the categories.

The same intensifier forms, *very, really* and *so* have been found popular in earlier intensifier studies, too. The discussion forum material from Singapore converted into a corpus proves to be as colourful and informal as true spoken language, where the following characteristic of intensifiers, which make them such a great target for sociolinguistic study (e.g. Tagliamonte 2008, 362), can be observed. First, the forms are surely versatile (ibid.), as relatively many variants are used to express the meaning of intensity and which behave differently in different contexts. Second, intensifiers in this study have proved to be capable of rapid change (ibid.), as evidenced by the peaking popularity of *damn* and the appearance of *super* in as short a time as ten years. The same forms are also crucial in this Singapore data for a third characteristic, the coinage of new expressions to add to the expressive effect of the intensifier system (ibid.). As Quirk (1985, 590) notes, the booster class is the most open

for new forms when the hyperbole drives forward new forms to replace those experienced as dull and lacking expressivity. Following Tagliamonte (2008, 362), it is clear that there are also coexisting forms in Singapore English that are proof of older and newer layers of intensifiers and the ongoing change.

It is at this point well grounded to consider the different intra- and extralinguistic factors and their relevance for the perceived change in the Singapore intensifier system. Possible contributors are the extralinguistic factors of age and gender and the intralinguistic processes of delexicalization or influence of the British and American varieties. Tagliamonte (2008, 391) argues that "how long an intensifier lasts most likely has as much to do with its sociolinguistic status as with its success along the delexicalization path". Of course the change in intensifiers is a result of the interplay of all these factors together, but do some of them stand out more than others? Starting with the intralinguistic results, it seems to matter in some cases if the intensifier variable has extended in syntactic function better than other variants. Forms like *pretty* and *very* are popular among all groups of people at different times and are constantly preferred in the predicative, indicating advanced delexicalization. These forms which have been in the system for longer have the tendency of occurring more in the predicative at the point where they are the most frequent. A newer form such as *super*, on the other hand, occurs evenly distributed between syntactic positions during the time of its introduction to the system, which implies less advanced delexicalization. However, the apparent time findings with age and syntax together reveal that *super* is delexicalized differently in the use of different groups of speakers, indicating ongoing advancing delexicalization, not detected elsewhere in this data.

The syntactic findings are occasionally puzzling and the patterns found unsystematic and therefore hard to explain. For example, the results show *really* constantly finding more room in the attributive at the points of its highest frequency. A look into older and newer corpus data with similar demographic factors as the SFC has would be needed in order to make better sense of these findings. The delexicalization results obtained from the GloWbE corpus are only tentative as well, since the 500 word samples used for analysis represent only a small fraction of the size of the Singapore

component included in the corpus. It should be noted that GloWbE also involves material from mostly written registers, where the attributive position may be emphasized to begin with (Biber et al. 1999, 506). As regards the other analysed corpora, the spoken unscripted components of the ICE-SIN were used and the SFC was argued to involve written language which in its informal features and topics comes close to a dialogical spoken register.

The perceived effects of age and gender, of course, also depend on how readily the suggested categorizations of the forums included in the SFC into teenagers', women's and men's language use can be accepted. Furthermore, the full analysis by these groups of speakers is hindered by the fact that gender is hidden on the Teens Planet forum and age cannot be ascertained on the PTT Pte Ltd and Military Nuts forums. The findings in the corpus data, on the other hand, fulfil the expectations about the language use of such groups. Women and young people use intensification overall and the intensifier variants studied in this thesis more frequently than men do.

Women are leading in the use of the variants *very, really, super* and *pretty,* and the forms strongly associated with teenage language use are *so* and *damn.* It is therefore evident that adult women and teens are responsible of introducing and affecting the spread of different forms into SgE, which might tell something about how lasting the effects will be. The forms led by the young seem to achieve great frequencies suddenly but also plummet faster, while the women's forms are steady climbers and may last longer. Men do not have a specific intensifier favourite besides *very*, although they mark the variant *pretty* as a clear instance of adult language use by overtaking teens in the usage frequency. Men in the Singapore forums use a larger variety of forms than other social groups do, which was hypothesized to indicate that they wish to avoid using the trendy forms associated by teens or women, or that they have other means of intensification than explored in this thesis. According to the Singapore Census of Population 2000 (in Schneider 2003, 264) "clearly English is the language of and for the young generation" as a larger proportion of children use it at home than youths or adults do. This might also lead to the English intensifiers occurring more naturally and in greater numbers in the speech of younger rather than older people.

Another proposition that Schneider (2003, 265) makes about the colloquial form of SgE, Singlish, proving to be "a dialect facilitating emotional expressiveness and play, a language of one's heart, an identity carrier" fits the nature of intensifiers well. As illustrated in the case of each SFC forum, intensifiers occurred with notable frequencies with different Singlish adjectives, most numerous among teens and most often with *so.* From this it can be inferred that also *so* is linked with both the identities that Singaporeans wish to convey by the use of Singlish as well as the informal associations given to the sociolect, which might explain its popularity.

Although it is argued that development trends in intensifiers observed in any English variety cannot be generalized into another variety (Barnfield and Buchstaller 2010), influence of other varieties on the relatively new Singapore English certainly is possible in intensifiers as well as other linguistic features. It would seem based on the current findings that Singapore English is taking after American English in its choice of popular intensifier variants. Forms such as *damn* and *darn*, analysed as one variant, and *so, really* as well as *pretty,* are either originally American or have appeared as an American favourite in recent decades (OED; Tagliamonte and Roberts 2005; Tagliamonte 2008; Rickford et al. 2007). *Super*, which is of British English origin, but used increasingly in American speech, is another trend to add to this list. It is possible that this tendency is mirroring the predominance of American media and political influence of the modern world, which bears on language spread, too (Mair, 2013).

Compared to the developments detected in British and American Englishes, Singapore English can be argued to be well advanced in the general cyclic development of intensifier system. Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005) hypothesize that English intensifier system advances on a trajectory from *very* through *really* to *so*. The overall popularity of *so* supports this view, and what is more, points to Singapore English rather advancing on a trajectory from *very > so > really*. Therefore, the possible rise of *really* in the decades to come remains an interesting future development and a possible starting point for further study. On the other hand, the sustained popularity of *very,* even among the youngest speakers, speaks for a strong adherence to traditions in the Singaporean community, which

agrees with the language policies of the country and the cultural background. It is almost like the Singapore English intensifier system is still in some way in the process of forming itself, glimpsed in the surprisingly great percentages of older forms in the attributive and, as in the case of *really*, in the unsystematical and unpredictable delexicalization patterns.

8. Conclusion

This thesis has looked into intensifier use in Singapore English and more specifically the effects of age and gender of speakers on the choice and frequency of intensifiers in materials drawn from Singaporean Internet discussion forums. In addition, the analysis has explored patterns arising from the intralinguistic factor of delexicalization. The study has allowed a glimpse into the variety and fluctuation typical for intensifiers, and has pointed to some major points of change in the Singapore English intensifier system. In roughly ten years' time the traditional intensifier *very* loses much of its popularity to other variants, although surviving as the top variant, at least for adult speakers. At the same time the variants *so, really, pretty* and *damn* increase in frequency to compete with *very*. A completely new intensifier *super* occurs, barely documented in any of the earlier intensifier studies. An innovative intensifier trend, the use of *damn* in the SFC data, is also one of the most striking findings.

The factors affecting intensifier use most strongly seem to be extralinguistic, but in the current set of data it is difficult to conclude whether age or gender is the determinative force behind the choice of form. However, clear patterns based on both factors emerge. Teens are recognized for using the intensifier *so* and *damn* markedly more than other groups, while young adult women lead in the use of many forms, most notably *really, very* and *super*. Teens and young women also use intensifier overall more than male speakers. More mature men, on the other hand, are not marked by the use of any specific form, but master a greater variety of forms than women or teens do, and seek to enhance their intensifier expressiveness that way. It is possible that men are avoiding the hyperbolic expressions preferred by teenagers and women. The only intensifier men use more than teens is *pretty,* which marks this form as another separator between generations.

Based on the frequency findings and *so* indicating a clear generation gap in its use, it was claimed that young speakers are likely to have introduced *so* into Singapore English and also lead its spread forwards. *So* also seems to have a status of an informal form, judging from its frequent occurrence among Singlish intensifiers. Female speakers are helping in the spread of the incoming

form *so* by using it frequently, which corresponds to the roles attributed to women in language change situations traditionally. Whereas *so* is increasing its use among adults, *damn* seems to be a case of age-grading, as it is found popular only among the SFC teens but its use is discontinued in the speech of adults of the same time as well as in the GloWbE data. Validating this claim would require Singapore spoken data from the decades to come.

Another change in progress, judging by the frequencies, is *really*. It is most frequently used by young women in the current set of data, which has been in other studies considered as an indication of an ongoing change towards the direction of the form. Unfortunately, data with younger male speakers are not included, to compare these findings there.

An analysis to detect delexicalization was carried out based on the syntactic positions of adjectives modified by intensifiers. The findings, however, continue to challenge the hypothesis that this intralinguistic factor unequivocally mirrors the delexicalization processes changing the intensifier system. It occurs that overall predication has indeed been increasing in time among intensifiers in Singapore English, which indicates advancement in delexicalization. However, the usually most delexicalized *very* is found with unpredictably large numbers in the attributive, and a closer exploration reveals that adult speakers are resisting its further spread into the predicative. The language internal findings are also quite incoherent for the forms *really* and *damn*. The syntactic patterns with *really* in connection to specific SFC forums suggest that it is a recycling of an older form, but nevertheless progressing in Singapore English like a new form, which may start in the language system through the predicative and advance with increasing attribution.

The form where the intralinguistic method points to an active ongoing delexicalization is *super*, which increases in predicative in ten years and, in addition, is strongly divided in the syntactic patterning between the different forum groups based on age and gender. The two groups of speakers are contributing into making *super* a popular form in different ways, as women lead in the frequency of use while the form is most clearly delexicalized among the teens. This kind of pattern is not as clear for any other form, which supports the interpretation of *super* as a new innovation, and not a

recycling, which describes the other popular forms better. As a conclusion, it seems more likely that *really*, *pretty* and *super* will be able to retain their competitive spot against *very* in the future better than the trendy *damn* or *so* which both decrease hugely in frequency in adult language use in corpora outside the SFC. In order to compare the patterns and validate these claims, future study would need actual spontaneous spoken recorded Singapore English data with demographic factors of the speakers carefully recorded.

In comparison to what has been found out about intensifier use in British and American English in the turn of the 21st century, Singapore English stands out by introducing the new popular variants *damn* and *super*. Although these forms have been in minor use in the core varieties before, their rise indicates that Singapore English is likely to create its own trends in intensifier use instead of just following other varieties. Therefore, studying intensifiers in different varieties of English is worthwhile, and may reveal new and innovative patterns. The lack of recent corpus data on especially the New Englishes has for long hindered many studies, but as this thesis has shown, material on the Internet, especially on discussion forums, may reflect tendencies of spoken language and therefore provide cumulative data for studying various linguistic features and language change. Extracting data from the Internet is more efficient and easier than in the past, and could in future studies be used for collecting longitudinal data in longer stretches of time. Perhaps further studies are also able to find Internet data with more clearly defined speaker demographics, to avoid the uncertainty of categories encountered here.

In the 21st century, Singapore English intensifiers are found more markedly to take influence from the globally influential variety American English rather than its postcolonial mother variety British English. Of the popular forms, *so, damn/darn* and *really*, although detected in BrE, are either originated or found more popular in American English in recent decades. Likewise, the intensifier usage of *super* has been claimed to be soaring in America according to some observers. However, outside the scope of this study are the influences that the mother tongues spoken in Singapore might

be bringing into the English intensifier system, too. The investigation of these influences offering

interesting possibilities for analysing language contact and change are left for future studies.

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Attachment 1

Search strings used for finding intensifiers in the ICE-SIN in Wordsmith 6

really_* *_JJ (produced 109 entries, of which 13 excluded as negative)

ver*_* *_JJ (produced 1,637 entries of which 90 excluded as negative or irrelevant)

so_* *_JJ (produced 508 entries of which 55 excluded as negative)

damn (produced 29 entries of which 5 entries excluded, tags not used because all relevant entries found without)

pretty (produced 41 entries, tags not used because all relevant entries found without)

*ly_* *_JJ (used to find any intensifier with the –*ly* ending occurring with any general adjective)

*_RG *_JJ (used to discover all degree adverb + adjective combinations)

Search strings used for finding intensifiers in the GloWbE

very.[rg] [jj]

so.[rg] [jj]

really.[r*] [jj]

pretty.[rg] [jj] (does not change with the .r* tag)
super [jj] (relevant entries not found with the .rg tag)
damn [jj] (relevant entries not found with the .rg tag)

highly [jj]
totally [jj]
absolutely [jj]
extremely [jj]