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A Really Interesting Story: The Influence of Narrative in Linguistic Change

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Abstract

The intensifier system is well known for its perpetual recycling of fresh innovations; however, neither qualitative nor quantitative analyses have offered a consensus on which social factors are involved in the increased use of one variant at the expense of another, nor do we know much about sites of innovation. In this paper, we delve deep into the intensifier system by considering the distinction between narrative and non-narrative discourse contexts (Labov and Waletsky 1967) and using a "small-within-large" methodology wherein a subset of data from a broad sociolinguistic study is our foundation (Tagliamonte 2008). Our results reveal that narratives have significantly higher intensification rates than non-narratives, which we interpret as a linguistic resource to increase affective meaning when performing the identity work inherent in storytelling (Schiffrin 1996). Further, the statistically significant predictors for intensifier use in narratives are predominantly semantic, involving adjective type and emotional value with no significant social factors. Yet in non-narrative discourse, syntactic factors predominate and both gender and age are statistically significant effects. Partitioning the data by discourse context uncovers additional sociolinguistic bifurcation. Indeed, a more detailed examination of the interaction of speaker age and gender reveals how critical the narrative/non-narrative contrast is in the ebb and flow of changes within this system. While younger speakers of both genders show an increase in *really* in narratives, in non-narratives younger women exhibit a heightened usage compared to older women (4% vs. 21%). The results for *very* are equally suggestive: younger women use less *very* in both registers but there is a sharp decline in non-narratives in particular. This suggests that innovations rise first in narratives for all speakers and then diffuse to non-narratives lead by younger women. Taken together, the findings from this study support earlier observations that greater care should be placed on the discourse embedding linguistic variation and change (see e.g., Cheshire 2005 et seq). We have demonstrated that language change actually begins and ends in stories.

A *Really* Interesting Story: The Influence of Narrative in Linguistic Change

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1 Introduction

The English intensifier system is well established as a dynamic and innovative linguistic site of linguistic change. Various quantitative studies have found evidence of intensifier recycling and innovation, multiple trajectories of innovation, and many social forces at work. However, neither the quantitative nor qualitative work on intensifiers has offered a consistent view of which social factors are involved in these innovations. Specifically, while women are predicted to lead linguistic change (e.g., Labov 1972a *et seq.*), the results are inconclusive with some studies finding women leading in the use of innovative forms (e.g., Tagliamonte 2008) and others finding no difference in rates (e.g., Xiao and Tao 2007). Despite all we know about the system we are still searching for evidence of innovators and sites of innovation.

In this paper, we look at the intensifier system from a unique perspective by taking into account discourse context. This more holistic approach to quantitative studies is a response to calls for more semantic and discourse sensitive methodologies in sociolinguistic research. Cameron compellingly argued that, "[t]he social practice of language-using is not defined simply by the act of speaking (or writing or signing)… What most crucially defines this social practice… is the act of addressing someone, in some context, for some purpose" (1990:186). Most interesting is the body of studies exploring identity work done through narratives and which provides evidence that race, ethnicity, gender, regional and social identities as well as personal portrayals can be part of narrative work (for a brief overview see Schiffrin 1996:170). For example, Schiffrin suggested that, "telling a story provides a self-portrait: a linguistic lens through which to discover peoples' own (somewhat idealized) views of themselves as situated in a social structure" (1996:199). Our approach takes into account both the goals of the narrator, the structure and linguistic elements used in the narrative itself, the context of the narrative, and the complex and fluid nature of identity. This requires looking at the data both quantitatively and qualitatively.

With this methodology, we can explore the use of intensifier variation while being mindful of the effects of many contextual elements. This requires an exploration of the social work intensifiers do, as well as the social work discourse type and context inherently bring to the equation, and the intersection of these elements. To this end, we used another novel methodology in taking a large-scale corpus with established findings on the intensifier system (i.e., Tagliamonte 2008) and focusing on a sample subset, adding new linguistic constraints based on discourse context and the indexical work intensifiers are claimed to do (see Jespersen 1922, Lakoff 1975, McMillan et al. 1977, Macaulay 2006, Precht 2003, 2008). This "small-within-large" method (Tagliamonte 2012:356) allows us to expand the types of constraints investigated in light of the findings of the large-scale study. In essence, we can look qualitatively at the data, with robust quantitative analyses upon which to build our understanding.

We begin by defining intensifiers and narratives. We then proceed to look at the functions of narratives for listeners as well as speakers, and tie in the use of intensifiers as affective elements in narratives.

1.1 Intensifiers

Intensifiers have been defined as lexical items that maximize, boost, or downtone an adjectival head (see Quirk et al. 1985 and Tagliamonte 2008). If the adjectival head is scalar we can maximize it with an intensifier: *So then they'd sing like some other **totally** beautiful ballad (T, F, 37, N),*[1]

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[1]Bracketed material associated with an example indicates the speaker code, sex, age, and specific corpus in the Toronto English Archive (TEA).

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or boost something: *but he was like our guide, a **really** nice old guy (T, F, 37, N)*. It is also relatively easy to understand how it can weaken or downtone an adjectival head: *It's **kind of** neat to reminisce about it (T, F, 37, N)*. However, some have argued that intensifiers function to emphasize elements, specifically highlighting the speaker's affective stance towards the content (Biber and Finegan 1988, Ochs and Schieffelin 1989, Besnier 1990, Precht 2003, 2008). This is supported by examples where intensification can apply to non-scalar adjectives such as *He's **totally** dead* or *It's **really** circular* (see Kolln 1996:133).[2]

This connection between intensifiers and emotion is found in introspective work such as Jespersen 1922, which claimed women used intensifiers more than men did because of their fondness for hyperbole. McMillan, Clifton, McGrath and Gale 1977 suggested that linguists frowned upon intensifiers because they distract listeners from the representational content of an utterance and instead focus the listener on the emotional content. Note that Lyons 1977 suggested three types of linguistic meaning: referential, social, and expressive/affective. Following from McMillan et al. (1977), intensifiers would then fall under the expressive/affective type of meaning. More recently, Kolln 1996 suggested that "good" writers do not use many intensifiers because they have at their disposal an arsenal of words varying in degree of semantic strength. Intensifiers, she argued, are not as effective as more semantically powerful synonyms. Taken together, these studies suggest that the use of intensifiers is viewed negatively, and is either a consequence of a limited vocabulary or a tendency to highlight affective meaning related to the speaker thereby sacrificing referential content.

1.2 Narratives

Narratives are told and listened to with intentionality. That is, there is motivation to tell stories and motivation to hear them out. Much of the work on narratives focuses on the latter. For example, Labov (1982) explores *reportability*: what makes a story worth listening to. Citing Sacks et al.'s 1974 notion of conversational economy, Labov suggests that in order to atone for taking up so many conversational resources, a narrator must "pay back" or reward the listener by telling an interesting story; it has to be novel, amusing, or thrilling, and its success or failure is culturally determined. The "near-death experience" narratives fundamental to sociolinguistic interviews are clearly thrilling and the speaker, "lost" in the telling, reverts (it is argued) to their vernacular (Labov 1984:29).

What is equally important is why narrators tell stories. What makes someone vie for the conversational resources and the stress of having to deliver a good story? Schiffrin claimed that, "[o]ur transformation of experience into stories, and the way we carry it out, is … a way to show our interlocutors the salience of particular aspects of our identities" (1996 :199). She proposed that both a social identity, (i.e., mother, lover, student) which she calls *identity*, and a personal identity, which she refers to as *self*, are possible to perform in narratives (1996:168). If narratives are a chance to depict and define oneself as either a social being or a unique self, then a speaker's motivation is evident. In story-telling conventions, the speaker has a chance to have an extended conversational floor and to build a self-portrait in relation to actions and other characters. They can show themselves as "the good mother," "the stud," "the hero," or "the victim," or as someone who is interesting, witty, or a badass. The other interesting element of a narrative is that it can be used as a comparative foil for one's present self. That is, it is possible to draw a portrait of one's present self by talking about oneself in the past, especially during one's (misspent) childhood or youth. This is clearly found in "The Milkbox Narrative," a narrative example told by a 53-year-old man and presented below.

(1) The Milkbox Narrative (<, M, 53, N)
   a. My brother was a paper delivery [boy] and occasionally, I would fill in for him when he was at some other engagement.

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[2]Buchstaller and Traugott 2006 conceptualize this differently, suggesting maximizers or degree modifiers can be used with adjectives once considered non-scalar, because the shift towards more relativistic ideologies allows such adjectives to be re-conceptualized (348). What was once non-scalar or "bounded" is now understood in terms of being scalar or "unbounded," such as *really unique* and *totally dead*.

b. And some of his customers were **very** interesting to deal with.
c. And I remember this one woman-
d. and this was in the days when you had TV antennas on the roof, the days before cable TV.
e. And you would deliver the paper to their mailbox, which was on the side of the house.
f. We don't have those- milk-box.
g. Pardon-me, it was a milk-box, because the milk guys used to come along and deliver bottles of milk to the side of the house.
h. And there's a little two-door contraption in the wall, so you could open it from inside and open it from outside.
i. And so, we used to put the papers in there, often.
j. Well, as I was walking down her sidewalk to the back of the house to put this in, I guess I wiggled the TV wires.
k. And she came out
l. and yelled at me.
m. And I thought that was **very** unkind of her,
n. so as I walked back to the street, I made sure I gave it a **real** good wiggle.
o. So I shook it
p. and then ran like hell.

This narrative showcases a complex internal structure as outlined in Labov and Waletsky (1967) (see Section 2.1 for details on identifying narratives). Clauses (1a) and (1b) orient the listener as to the time and place of the narrative, as well as the contextual action: delivering papers. In (1c) the orientation continues through the introduction of a specific customer and a specific interaction. The orientation is complicated by the need to give more physical details on which the narrative hinges: the antenna on the roof and the delivery of the newspaper in the milk box on the side of the house in (1d) through (1i). These are necessary because the interviewer is young and will not readily understand these references. Narrative clauses occur in (1j) through (1p) and cannot be re-ordered without changing the meaning of the narrative: the narrator walks beside the house to put the paper in the milk box and (perhaps) inadvertently moves the TV wires, then the women comes out of the house and yells at him. There is a causal order between (1m) and (1n) as his reaction to the woman's yelling impels him to purposefully wiggle the wires as he leaves the property. Again, these clauses cannot be ordered differently without changing the story. The result is summed up in the narrative clauses (1o) and (1p), which also cannot be re-ordered without changing the meaning.

Revisiting the concept of reportability, we note that the actual events are not worthy of so many conversational resources. However, the affective meaning (the narrator's feelings about the woman and the circumstances) is truly powerful. In this case, the narrator juxtaposes his calm and mature assessment of the women as "very unkind" with her unfounded allegations and yelling. The humor arises with the narrator's last act: vindictively shaking the woman's TV wires and then running away from the consequences. This pay-off in humor, makes the narrative worthy of the conversational resources used. In the end, the narrator has followed the Gricean principle of quantity (Levinson 1983) because he delivered a great story, and its reportability is made clear.

What is also important to note is the role of narratives within sociolinguistic interviews. The term "interview" itself may well impel speakers to present self-portraits. Narratives can then be understood as related snapshots of the speaker which culminate in a metanarrative or self-portrait. This is the case for the Milkbox narrator: The Milkbox Narrative occurs early in the interview, setting up the metanarrative of the sociolinguistic interview which concerns the trouble the narrator got into as a child in Toronto, back in the day; a metanarrative positively contributed to by the narrator's wife. For example, immediately following this story, the narrator's wife tells her husband to explain how the neighbors would call his mother as he progressed towards school. This comment results in the narrator commenting on his truancy, his disinterest in school activities, and his interest in things outside of school like his own construction projects, painting the neighbor's dog, and bringing home trash on garbage day. He is self-described as "wild," "a bit of a terror," with a "reputation," and a lot of energy. What makes this particular narrative effective is its economy in relating not only the events, but also a vivid sense of the narrator's character when he was

young, by emphasizing affective meaning. In addition it serves to build the metanarrative of his affective self-portrait.

What is of interest to us is the connection between intensifiers and the speaker's feelings, which we interpret as a kind of self-presentation, which can be local (narrative specific) as well as global (contributes to a metanarrative).

We report here our results from our preliminary study and qualitative analyses using a small subset of the sample in Tagliamonte 2008 in addition to traditional sociolinguistic statistical analyses.

2 Methodology

2.1 Quantitative Methods

The data set used in this paper was drawn from the TEA, which consists of conversations gathered informally between 2003 and 2006, of people born and raised in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. It has over a million words, with speakers stratified by class, gender, and age. Our subset sample totaled twenty-four speakers with two men and two women for each of the following six age groups: 13–17 years, 20–29 years, 30–39 years, 40–49 years, 50–59 years and 60+ years. All speakers had been previously coded for intensifiers and used in the analyses presented in Tagliamonte (2008).

Intensifiers that maximized or boosted the meaning of adjectival heads (e.g., *really*, *super*, *uber*, *very*, *so*, and *pretty*) were coded. Following the principle of accountability (Labov 1972a), all contexts in which an adjectival head could felicitously be intensified were included in the analysis. Superlatives, comparatives, and adjectives within the scope of negation were excluded and intensifiers that downtoned adjectival heads (e.g., *quite*, *fairly*, *sort of*, *kind of*) were coded as non-intensified instances following Tagliamonte (2008).

Six linguistic factors were coded. Syntactic Type had two levels: predicative (*He's **really** tall*) and attributive (*He's a **really** tall guy*). Semantic Type had three levels: human propensity (*proud*), value (*awesome*), and physical (*tall*). This factor was recoded into a new factor group, Emotionality, with two levels: emotional (*jealous*) vs. non-emotional (*skinny*). Polarity was also coded for with three levels: positive (*happy*), negative (*horrible*), and neutral (*tall*). These follow the coding in Tagliamonte (2008).

Two linguistic factors are new in this study. First is Semantic Strength with four levels: weak (*it was a **good** car* (?, M, 78, N)), strong (*Oh it was **great*** (c, F, 52, N))*, extra strong (*Oh, that was **incredible*** (7, M, 35, I)), and indeterminate. For this last type of adjective, a synonym that had the same positive, negative, or neutral connotation could not be found. For example, *proud* was coded as indeterminate because synonyms such as *arrogant* or *egotistical* have negative connotations, while *proud* is not necessarily negative. In effect, we found that while some adjectives could be readily ranked in terms of the semantic power of their synonyms, such as *good* > *great* > *incredible*, others could only be boosted by using comparative or superlative structures. As such structures are not intensifiable, they were omitted from the analysis.

The second new factor group is Discourse Context with two levels: narrative and non-narrative. Narrative context were determined following Labov and Waletsky (1967) and Labov (1972b). First, a temporal juncture had to be present (overtly or covertly), such as *And she came out and [then] yelled at me and I thought that was very unkind of her* (<, M, 53, N). Second, the clauses connected to the temporal juncture could not be interchanged without changing the story's meaning. For example, *And I thought that was very unkind of her and she came out and yelled at me* does not have the same causal meaning as the original phrasing so these are narrative clauses. The final criterion was that the narrative had to be about a specific incident, not a conflation of several incidents (Labov 1972b:361). Once these criteria were noted the entire narrative was delineated and all intensified/intensifiable tokens were coded as narrative. All other intensified/intensifiable tokens were coded as non-narrative.

2.2 Qualitative Methods

Interviews were analyzed using both the audio files and transcriptions. Notes were made outlining narrative structures as well as false narratives. Detailed notes documented the interview themes or

types (e.g., "the historian/authority," "the reluctant participant") and general effects of interruptions and/or support from the interviewer and attending family/friends.

3 Results

Not surprisingly, distributional analysis indicates that the TEA subset analyzed here and the overall TEA corpus rate are parallel: 34% (591/1727) vs. 36% (6334/9905).

More tellingly, within the TEA subset speakers intensified 10% more in narratives than in non-narratives as shown in Table 1. A chi-square test found this difference to be significant: χ^2 (1, N=1727) = 12.44, $p < .001$, Cramér's V = .09.

Narrative		N=340		Non-Narrative		N=1387	
Intensified		Not Intensified		Intensified		Not Intensified	
%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
42	144	58	196	32	447	68	940

Table 1: Distribution of intensification in TEA (subset) by discourse context: Total N = 1727.

A fixed effects linear regression (using *Goldvarb X*) found discourse context to be a significant factor group with narratives favoring intensification (factor weight .59, 144/340) and non-narratives marginally not favoring it (factor weight .48, 447/1387). Given this result and the chi-squared result, the data was partitioned by discourse context and analyzed separately to evaluate the constraint across narrative vs. non-narrative discourse.[3]

The results in Table 2 suggest that narrative and non-narrative contexts have different constraint systems. Compare the relative strength of the semantic constraints in narratives compared to non-narratives as measured by the range values within each model. There is a marked contrast between the strongest constraint in narratives (i.e., Semantic Type: 35 vs. 28, and 22 for the other two significant factors) and in non-narratives where it is comparatively weak (12 vs. 25, 22, 20 and 6 for the other significant factors). In addition, while Emotionality is significant in narratives, with non-emotional adjectives favoring intensification, this factor is not significant in non-narratives. Conversely, Semantic Strength is significant in non-narratives with weak and indeterminate adjectives favoring intensification, but it is not significant in narratives. The strongest constraint for non-narratives is Syntactic Type, which is also significant in narratives. However, it ranked after both semantic constraints, demonstrating that semantic factors outweigh syntactic factors in narratives.[4] Finally, we note the absence of social factors in narratives: Neither gender nor age is significant in narratives, yet both are significant in non-narratives.[5]

We suggest that these differences expose an underlying contrast in how intensifiers are deployed in narrative vs. non-narrative discourse. The heavier weighting of semantic constraints suggests that intensifiers in narratives are connected to more expressive, affective, and emotive functions, while in non-narratives they are constrained by syntactic constructs as well as by social group membership. The lack of significant social factors in narratives may indicate that our speakers are not straight-jacketed by their societal roles in story-telling, but are working on a representative metanarrative of self throughout the interview. Or it may be that intensifier frequency is not a part of identity work in narratives, and that other means, perhaps the use of specifically indexed intensifiers, do social identity work in this context.

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[3]Polarity was not significant for either discourse context or for the data when discourse context was collapsed, therefore this factor has been removed from subsequent analysis.

[4]The relatively modest total N for narrative discourse may be the explanation for the lack of significance of some factors. As we augment the data set we will endeavor to provide further statistical validation of the findings.

[5]Partitioning the data so as to analyze 60+ speakers vs. all others returned a significant result. This suggests a change in narrative style that is also found in quotative *be like* studies (see Blyth et al. 1990 and Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2007).

	Narratives			Non-Narratives		
Input	.41			.30		
Total N	340			1389		
Factor Group	**FW**	**%**	**N**	**FW**	**%**	**N**
Adj Semantic Type						
Human Propensity	.66	56	110	.58	46	235
Value	.47	41	171	.49	30	927
Physical	.31	20	59	.46	26	227
Range	*35*			*12*		
Adj Emotionality						
Non-Emotional	.53	43	35	[.51]	32	1297
Emotional	.25	34	305	[.43]	35	92
Range	*28*					
Adj Syntactic Type						
Predicative	.57	50	240	.59	40	912
Attributive	.35	24	100	.34	18	477
Range	*22*			*25*		
Age						
20-29	[.53]	41	44	.55	35	159
40-49	[.54]	44	43	.55	37	143
50-59	[.51]	44	25	.53	32	146
Teens	[.55]	48	123	.51	35	548
30-39	[.56]	48	52	.50	32	250
60+	[.28]	23	53	.33	15	143
Range				*22*		
Adj Strength						
Indeterminate	[.56]	39	31	.57	38	489
Weak	[.51]	40	102	.53	33	526
Strong	[.46]	36	121	.39	24	256
Extra Strong	[.37]	41	86	.37	25	118
Range				*20*		
Gender						
Women	[.49]	42	188	.53	33	726
Men	[.52]	43	152	.47	28	663
Range				*6*		

Table 2: Multivariate analysis of intensification in narratives vs. non-narratives (TEA subset).

A comparison of intensification rates by discourse context indicates that the top four lexical intensifiers, *really*, *very*, *pretty*, and *so* are the same for both discourse contexts although the ranking is slightly different. Most notably, *very* was ranked 2nd in non-narratives in terms of frequency of use, but was last (fifth) in narratives. In Figure 1, intensifiers denoted with an asterisk, *really*, *pretty*, and *so* were found to be significantly different across discourse contexts using chi-squared tests of independence.[6]

Figure 1 highlights the status of the significantly different variants: they are all incoming or waxing intensifiers according to Tagliamonte 2008. She suggested that *really* was the most popular intensifier in the system (369), and that *so* was preferred by adolescent women, while *pretty* was preferred by adolescent men (372).

If we look at the data by social group (Age/Gender) and across discourse context as shown in Figure 2, another facet of our story emerges.

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[6]Results for *really* χ^2 (1, N=1727) = 4.5, $p < .05$, Cramér's V = .03, for *pretty* χ^2 (1, N=1727) = 4.64, $p < .05$, Cramér's V = .05, and for *so* χ^2 (1, N=1727) = 4.89, $p < .05$, Cramér's V = .05.
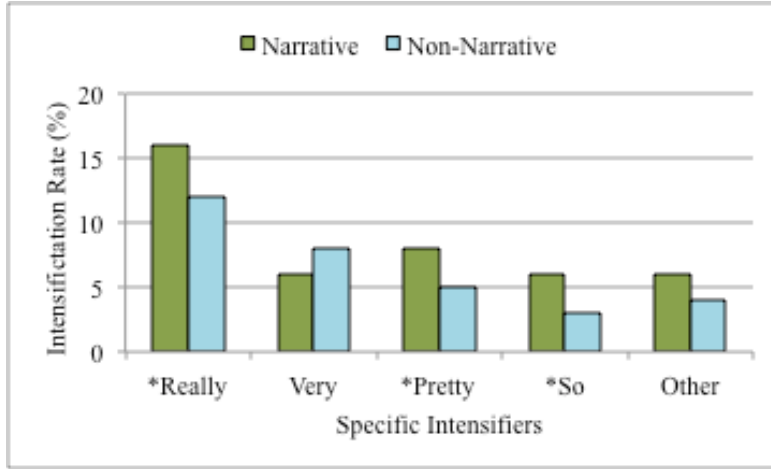
Figure 1: Comparison of specific intensifier rates by discourse context (*denotes significant difference by discourse context).
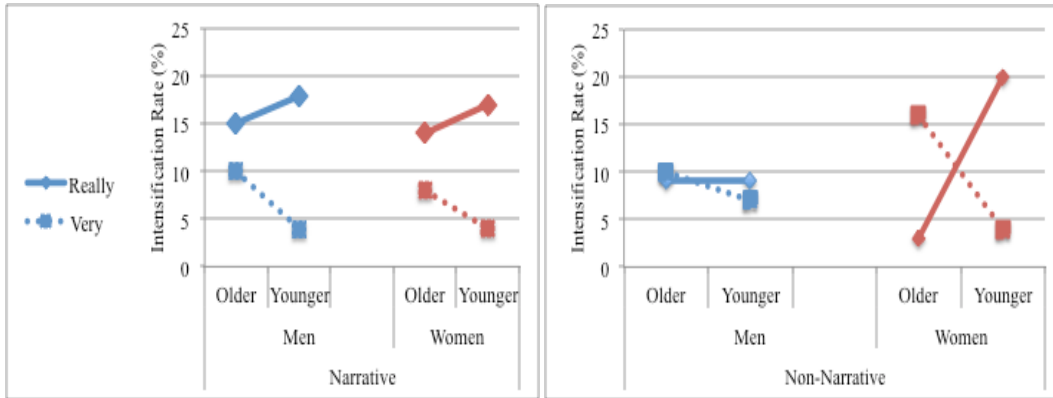

Figure 2a & b: Comparison of rates of *really* and *very* by age/gender and by discourse context.

The solid lines, indicating rates of *really*, and the dotted lines, indicating rates of *very*, show divergent trajectories in narratives (Figure 2a) with increased rates of *really* and decreased rates of *very* by younger speakers. Although the rate of increase from older to younger speaker is modest, men and women are doing the same thing and we see no indication of a specific innovator group. Note however, the already high rate of *really* for older speakers in narratives. That is, *really* is the preferred intensifier in narratives for all speakers, but it becomes increasingly popular with younger speakers in narratives. Tagliamonte (2008) cites *really* as a waxing variant, and this is exactly what we see in this subset of data: *really* was a priori used more frequently in narratives by all speakers, but there is a surge in its popularity for younger men and women in narratives.

The results for the non-narrative data (Figure 2b) show a remarkably different story. The younger women exhibit a noticeable increase in the use of *really* and a concomitant decrease in the use of *very*. Note the dramatic 'X' pattern on the far right side of Figure 2b. Younger men, on the other hand, do not show any increase in the use of *really* in non-narratives and only a slight decrease in *very*. Overall, these additional insights bolster our interpretation of the statistical models in Table 2.

We therefore interpret the consistently higher rates of *really* (and lower rates of *very*) in narratives compared to non-narratives as an indication that intensifier innovation begins in narratives and is spread by younger female speakers to non-narrative. Younger men have not begun to inno-

vate in their use of *really* in non-narrative in the data at this point in time.[7] In sum, what Figure 2 exposes is a possible trajectory of intensifier recycling that begins in narrative discourse by both genders, but is picked up by younger women in the less specialized non-narrative context.

4 Discussion

We have found that rates of intensification in narrative vs. non-narrative discourse are significantly different. Given the literature that links affective meaning with intensification, it seems fair to speculate that high rates of intensification add what we call "affective weight" whereby the frequent use of intensifiers highlights the emotive content of a narrative, specifically emphasizing the character or self-portrayal of the narrator, as well as the narrator's responsiveness to his/her environment. This expressively weighty content is beneficial in at least two ways: first, it builds listener rapport which grants one access to conversational resources thereby allowing one to do identity work, and second, it stresses emotive elements that are fundamental to creating portraits either of the self. In non-narrative contexts, self-portrayal is not the main focus nor is it the ideal stage on which to perform such identity or self-aggrandizement because the speaker does not have the undivided attention that a storyteller is so often granted by convention. Labov's concept of reportability suggests how the listener profits by giving up conversational resources. Schiffrin's notions of *identity* and *self* indicate how the speaker profits from taking up so much conversational resources. In the TEA interviews, one particularly tenacious interviewee battles his interviewer, who continually interrupts his narrative with irrelevant comments. This piqued our interest: why did he show such perseverance? Vitally, the narrator must have some sort of pay off and it is our assessment that he or she benefits by producing a flattering and/or interesting self-portrayal, which serves to engage the listeners and in so doing may enhance social standing.

Our second finding focuses on linguistic change in terms of specific variants (e.g., *really* vs. *very*) and suggests that intensifier innovation begins in narrative discourse, which is subsequently taken up by younger speakers and is spread by younger women to non-narratives. Interestingly, in narratives both genders engage in the incoming or currently in vogue form, in this case *really*. Like Tagliamonte (2008:367–8) and Barnfeld and Buchstaller (2010:281), popular intensifiers (e.g., *really*) oust older ones (e.g., *very*), as illustrated in Figure 2. However, the additional insight that has come to light here is that in storytelling both men and women pattern together. We suggest it is the added motivation of doing affective self-portrayal vs. social identity work that tips the balance towards equilibrium across the genders.

Related to this finding are our claims about innovation and innovators. We suggest that innovation in a changing linguistic system has two paths: initial usage in specialty context, in this case storytelling, followed by spread into the vernacular (i.e., general non-narrative discourse). The high frequency rate of *really* in narratives for the older generation suggests that narratives are the site of initial innovation (Stage 1). The dramatic shift in intensification rates for younger women compared to older women for *really* and *very* in non-narratives supports the fact that it is younger women who lead in introducing innovations to other discourse contexts (Stage 2). However younger men lag far behind in their use of *really* in non-narratives. Presumably at the next phase of development there will be no difference across narrative vs. non-narrative as young men catch up; however, this remains a question for further research. In other words, it appears that as an innovation encroaches on an extant system, the stylistic repertoire of an individual has a differential response and so exposes the incremental stages of linguistic change. If our results are any indication discourse context and style play an important role in this process.

Finally, our findings support the use of the small-within-large methodology (Tagliamonte 2012:396), whereby a subset of a large corpus is re-analyzed in a more holistic way, to include additional discourse contexts and with attention to other qualitative analyses of the surrounding discourse. This inclusion requires that we look at the semantic and discourse functions of the linguistic elements under study, and the intersection of these multiple elements. Thus, we advocate the vital role qualitative information plays in informing quantitative methodology as well as in

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[7]Other variants compete in popularity with *really* making the system more complex than Figure 2 captures. Therefore, whether or not young men will eventually use *really* at the same frequency in non-narratives as young women is speculative.

interpreting quantitative results. Allowing these insights to inform our analysis of intensifiers enabled us to understand the metanarrative, and therefore, the specific uses of intensifiers within storytelling, as exemplified by the Milkbox Narrative.

In future work, we will increase our sample base and explore new discourse and context related coding possibilities, for example narrative structure and nuances within the broad non-narrative context. Qualitative methods will be used more extensively, with greater focus on coding for metanarratives, and identifying contextual elements such as interviewee-interviewer power dynamics, interview expectations, and the tone of the utterance (e.g., sarcastic, ironic, etc.). Using richer quantitative and qualitative methods will expand our understanding of the intensifier system and through it, linguistic variation and change more generally.

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