

Semantic Prosody and Intensifier Variation in Academic Speech

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1 INTRODUCTION

“That paper is very interesting!” “This music is really cool!” Phrases like these are spoken everyday. Speakers add emphasis to what they are saying for different reasons such as commanding attention, focusing a topic, or making an exaggeration. Speakers use intensifiers to add this emphasis to their utterances. Intensifiers are very common in English and are used to add to or amplify the meaning of an adjective. The common intensifiers *very* and *really* seem to be used interchangeably such as “That coffee is *very* good” or “That coffee is *really* good”. The current study examines the variation of these intensifiers to determine what factors condition the use of these items.¹

Academic English is a register that is studied to determine differences in speech and writing depending on academic disciplines and environments. By using an academic corpus, this study analyzes the effects of language-internal and language-external evaluative factors predicting intensifier variation. Language-internally, intensifiers seem to have an embedded evaluative factor concerning their positive, negative, or neutral semantic values. These semantic values are related to the original adjective that gives rise to the Modern English intensifier. Some intensifiers are more closely related to their initial lexical meaning such as *perfectly* or *awfully*, whereas others, including *really* and *very*, are further delexicalized due to their frequent use as intensifiers. This notion of embedded evaluation is described as semantic prosody (Huntson 2007). Most research on

¹ This paper contains selections from a completed Master’s thesis. The full thesis can be found in the University of Georgia Thesis and Dissertation Archives: <http://www.libs.uga.edu/etd/>

semantic prosody concerns corpus studies of collocation. The current study adds a variationist analysis and interpretation explaining that an adjective's semantic prosody is a factor in determining the preference of intensifier.

Additionally, previous studies have failed to use a reliable and consistent methodology for discerning an item's semantic prosody. Using a solely impressionistic approach, researcher judgments can cause errors labeling whether an adjective is emotional or neutral, positive or negative. With a test based on the lexical properties of the target adjectives, I combine the study of lexical semantics with quantitative variation to create a framework for better methodology.

This paper analyzes the variation between the most common intensifiers, *very* and *really*. This study builds upon previous intensifier variation analyses from Tagliamonte (2002, 2005, 2008) and Ito and Tagliamonte (2003) and offers a more objective method for discerning the pragmatic effect of adjectives on their modifiers. To understand the variation between different instances of intensifiers, I observe several independent variables that shed light on the language-internal (e.g., lexical content of the adjective) and -external (e.g., gender) motivations for intensifier variation. Both language-external and -internal factors are influenced by evaluation. The language-internal factor is a lexically embedded evaluative property such as positive or negative evaluation. The language-external factors also introduce a notion of evaluation based on environment. The formality and subject material of a register, as well as a speaker's social standing, can factor into the variation of intensifier use. Though *very* is more frequently used in this particular corpus of Academic English, namely the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE), the findings show that certain factors favor the use of *really*

over *very* in particular social and linguistic environments. Using the methodology for determining semantic prosody, this study also discusses which type of semantic prosody favors which intensifier. The purpose of this study is first, to identify and analyze adjective modifiers in Academic Speech, focusing on the variation between *really* and *very*, and second, to provide a methodological framework for operationalizing semantic prosody as a predictive factor.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 English Intensifiers

The types of adjective modifiers examined in this study are intensifiers or amplifiers or, as Tagliamonte defines, “those adverbs that maximize or boost meaning” (2003: 258). These are used for emphasis, as in the case of a child asking for, “The *really* big bear, not the *big* bear.” A job application might include a phrase “John is very good at his job,” rather than “John is good at his job.” Pragmatically, the use of an intensifier like *very* produces a scalar implicature. This means that when a speaker uses *very*, as in “very good”, the meaning (i.e. the implicature in pragmatic terms) is “better than just good”.²

Though many intensifiers like *extremely*, *totally*, and *so* are commonly used in Modern English, *very* and *really* remain the most frequent (Ito 2003, Tagliamonte 2008). The current study focuses on the variation between *very* and *really* because (1) the intensifiers seem to have similar functions, and (2) both are commonly used to the extent that neither seem to carry a lexical meaning similar to that of *perfectly* or *completely* but

² In neogricean terms, this would be an instance of what Levinson refers to as an M-implicature, in which a “marked description” induces a “marked interpretation” (1995:97).

rather focus on an amplification of the adjective modified³. For example, both sentences below are syntactically well-formed and seem to carry the same semantic value.

- (1) That dog is *really* large.
- (2) That dog is *very* large.

Both sentences express the same scalar meaning of a dog that is bigger than just large or possibly *extra* large.

2.2 Intensifiers and Variation

Ito and Tagliamonte (2003) studied the distribution of intensifiers in a corpus of British English and conducted a multivariate analysis observing the interaction of the factors age, education, syntactic function, and sex. They found that 69% of the intensifiers in their corpus were either *very* or *really*, with the other 31% containing a mixture of other intensifiers including *so*, *absolutely*, *pretty*, and *too*. Their primary reason for this study was to observe the differences over time in use of intensifiers in English and which social groups were using which intensifier more frequently. They also found that women were leading the change to *really* while men are more likely to avoid using *really* as an intensifier (Ito 2003).

Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005) follow the 2003 study with an evaluation of intensifiers in the television show *Friends*. Using a corpus of television transcripts, they observe which intensifiers are spoken more often throughout the different seasons of the show. They report that cast's use of *so* increased throughout the seasons and with an increase in the show's popularity. The female characters led the change, using *so* more often than *really* or *very*. This study also looked at the factor of emotional language. The

³ *Very* and *really* both derive from lexical meanings of *true*, *actual*, or *real* (Tagliamonte 2008) as in “that *very* idea” or “that *really* did happen.” Because *very* is an older word, it has been used longer as an intensifier and has therefore become more grammaticalized than has *really*.

factor of whether an adjective collocate was “emotional” or “neutral” was significant in determining which intensifier was used. An emotional adjective (such as *jealous*, *glad*) favored the use of *so* as an intensifier over the use of *very* and *really* (Tagliamonte 2005).

Tagliamonte (2008) discusses the positive and negative evaluation in terms of its indexing grammaticalization, but draws no conclusions about its effects on intensifier variation. However, she notes that those intensifiers (*e.g. awfully, terribly*) that frequently collocate with negative adjectives are less delexicalized than those that collocate with a wide range of adjectives (*e.g. very*). My research expands this portion of the study and looks specifically at different types of evaluative language including positive, negative and neutral evaluation. This involves using a notion of semantic prosody (discussed below) and whether the modified adjective has a negative, positive, or neutral semantic value.

2.3 Semantic Prosody

The definition and description of semantic prosody is debated among scholars. Sinclair (1987, 1991) first coined the term with a description that “many uses of words and phrases show a tendency to occur in a certain semantic environment.” Louw (2000) builds upon this definition by explaining that semantic prosody coincides with situational context and relies heavily on collocation. He explains that a word’s semantic prosody is different from its connotation, which he considers to be more schematic (Stewart 2010: 14). Huntson (2000) argues that semantic prosody is contextual and must be determined by more than a word’s most frequent collocations.

The scope of semantic prosody used for this paper concerns its relation with evaluation. Morley and Partington (2009) describe this relationship as a speaker’s “desire

to evaluate entities as *good* or *bad*' (Morely 2009: 141). They note that this desire may derive from an organism's innate desire to judge the consequences of an action or decision as beneficial or harmful. While scholars such as Stubbs and Louw stress the importance of collocation in determining semantic prosody, this can also be problematic. Morely and Partington point out that to look solely at collocations can cause lexical items to be labeled with similar semantic prosodies when semantically, and using a speaker's intuition, they should not be. Using the examples of *exacerbate* and *alleviate*, they observe that both terms seem to frequently collocate with negative items (*e.g pain, problems, poverty*). If determining semantic prosody on collocation alone, both *exacerbate* and *alleviate* would be identified as carrying negative semantic prosody. However, the lexical presupposition of *alleviate* tells us that it actually carries a positive evaluation. This supports the idea that a word can carry its own embedded evaluation or lexical presupposition⁴.

While there is considerable debate within the field of the best way to discern semantic prosody, the majority of researchers agree that using one's intuition is unreliable in determining semantic prosody and that we must use techniques in corpus linguistics to determine a word's semantic prosody. There does not seem to be consensus in the literature concerning the best and most reliable methodology to eliminate these judgments in linguistic research. Previous studies (Tagliamonte 2005, Tagliamonte 2008) identify whether an item is emotional or neutral based on the researcher's own intuitions⁵. This impressionistic technique for identifying semantic prosody is not adequate in

⁴ This aspect of meaning of a lexical element is also distinct from its denotation or truth-conditional meaning.

⁵ This is not explicitly stated in the articles, and there is no discussion of a different methodology for identifying these categories.

quantitative research but it is difficult to find a consistent and reliable methodology for doing so. Using the relationship between semantic prosody and evaluation, we can identify the embedded semantic prosody of an entity by using a test involving lexical presupposition. This is further discussed in the Methodology section. Combining this semantic test with a variationist approach similar to Tagliamonte's, this paper will define a methodology to operationalize semantic prosody through a quantitative analysis, thereby removing subjective researcher judgments.

2.4 Intensifier Environment

Tagliamonte defines the intensifier environment as the intensifier's use as an adjectival head. She bases this definition on a large-scale study by Backlund (1973) who found that a majority of intensifiers fall in that syntactic position. The present study uses the same definition in circumscribing the variable context (see Tagliamonte 2002).

Tokens that were included were instances of *very* and *really* that acted as adjective modifiers. Also, tokens of *real* (for example, *a real interesting study*) were included with the other tokens of *really*. Of these cases, 11% were constructed as *real* (N=1,326).

Really and *real* are treated equally in this study but the alternation between these two constructions warrants further investigation (Paradis 1997).

The examples below show instances of *very* and *really* as intensifiers. The use of *very* or *really* as a modifier of the same adjective has similar meaning.

- (3) I think actually both of these are *really* good points. (LEL066⁶)
- (4) I think that's a *very* good point. (OFC060)

As mentioned above, *very* and *really* are two of the most common intensifiers in English. We tend to use them to add emphasis like “*very* exciting” or exaggeration like

⁶ Indicates transcript number.

“*really* small”. *Very* and *really* can most often be used to modify the same adjectives. For example, a speaker can say “The house is *very* big” or “The house is *really* big” with the phrase generally having the same truth-conditional meaning. In both instances, the speaker refers to the size of the house and adds emphasis to its size. Because of the frequent overlap between *very* and *really* within the context discussed above, I aim to answer two questions in the forthcoming sections. First, what factors (social or linguistic) predict the use of *very* as opposed to *really* within the intensifier environment? And second, how do we establish a methodology to determine the semantic prosody of intensifiers that cannot be determined strictly through a study of collocation?

3 METHODOLOGY

The Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE) was used for this analysis. This 1.8 million-word corpus was developed at the University of Michigan English Language Institute in 2002. It includes transcripts taken from different academic settings including lectures, discussions, office hours, meetings, and other formal and informal academic environments. I extracted a total number of 4,157 tokens of *very* and *really* (or *real*) within the corpus. Extracted items were identified through the MICASE search engine for each lexical item (i.e. *very* or *really*). All instances were first extracted and later exclusions were made depending on their fit according to Tagliamonte’s definition of intensifier. Further detail regarding exclusions is discussed below. After all tokens were extracted, they were coded for semantic prosody, academic setting, academic discipline, and gender. The factor of age has also been found in other studies to be a significant factor in the use of *very* and *really* (Ito 2002) (Tagliamonte 2005). Unfortunately, the MICASE corpus does not include this information in the metadata and

therefore this factor could not be included in the statistical model. Following extraction and exclusion, the data were then subjected to a multivariate analysis using GoldVarb X (Sankoff, Tagliamonte, and Smith 2005).

3.1 Exclusions

In Tagliamonte (2003), tokens that were not affirmative were excluded from the analysis. Her reasoning was that intensifiers in this context did not amplify an adjective's meaning. For example, in sentence (6) below, "it's not really important", the meaning is not heightening the negation as in "it's not important at all", but instead, the meaning could be "somewhat important" or "moderately important".⁷ Tokens such as (5)-(6) were excluded because of the intensifier's lack of amplification with the following adjective.

(5) I have never been *very* good at this. (LEL097)

(6) A lot of reactions need M-G but it's not *really* important. (SGR123)

Tokens were also excluded if the token modified a noun rather than an adjective.

(7) ...I know *very little* of what is known about it. (LES121)

(8) No, I think there's *very little*, but that's a good point. (STP011)

These tokens were excluded because *very* modifies an anaphoric noun *little*. Similarly, tokens were excluded if they modified a verb or preposition. In the cases below *really* functions more like 'actually' and does not modify an adjective.

(9) I'm going to *really increase* my effort. (LEL066)

(10) Evolution is *really about* reproductive success. (LEL034)

Finally, tokens were only counted once if the intensifiers were repeated.

(11) Economically, it's a *very very important* crop. (COL075)

⁷ In pragmatic terms, the use of an intensifier produces a scalar implicature such that stating that a book, for instance, is *very interesting* entails that it is also merely *interesting*. In the case of negative contexts, as in (5)-(6), the intensifier has a different effect, namely it produces an inverted scale. For instance, in most cases of scalar implicature, the effect can be cancelled--e.g., *The weather isn't freezing but it is quite cold*. In the absence of a particular intonational contour, analogous examples with intensifiers are infelicitous--e.g., *#I've never been very good at basketball but I am quite good*.

- (12) It turns out there's a *really really good* correlation between elevation and mean annual temperature. (DEF131S2)
 (13) These lemmings are *very very* interesting. (LEL112)⁸

In each instance above, the intensifier was counted once and the repeated intensifier was excluded.

3.2 Factor Groups

The factor groups tested in this analysis were semantic prosody, academic setting, academic discipline, and gender. Semantic prosody was coded as either positive, negative, or neutral based on the semantic prosody of the intensified adjective. In order to determine the semantic prosody of the adjective, I used phrases that could test specific felicity conditions. Certain verbs of judgment have a lexical presupposition that must be satisfied in order for an utterance to be felicitous. For example, the verb *accuse* requires a negative or unfavorable proposition. “Using *accuse* involves attributing some act B to A and presupposing that B is bad...” (McCawley 1975, cited in Green 1996).

- (14) Bill *accused* Sally of stealing the car.
 (15) #Bill *accused* Sally of volunteering in the hospital.

Sentence (14) is felicitous because the proposition [stealing a car] is associated with an idea of doing something that is wrong or bad (i.e. something worthy of an accusation).

Sentence (15) is infelicitous because [volunteering in a hospital] is associated with doing something that is right or good.

This type of behavior is also observed with verbs that have a lexical presupposition of taking a clause that is associated with something positive.

- (16) Mike *praised* Jill for volunteering in the hospital.
 (17) #Mike *praised* Jill for stealing the car.

⁸ All cases (N=22) involving both intensifiers, such as “and that’s *really, very* nice” were also excluded.

Again, the only way sentence (17) would become felicitous was if Mike supported Jill's stealing the car and wanted her to do it in the first place, thereby associating the act with a positive action. These lexical prepositions can relate to semantic prosody because these verbs require certain propositions with a negative or positive value. Therefore, we can assume that if a word or phrase can felicitously combine with a verb like *accuse*, it must carry a negative value or negative semantic prosody. This can be supported with corpus data that shows the positive and negative collocates to these verbal phrases⁹.

The following table shows the top ten adjective collocates of the phrase *accused of being [ADJ]* and the six collocates of *praised for being [ADJ]* from COCA. The majority of the top collocates of the *accuse* construction have a potentially unfavorable quality while the top collocates of the *praise* construction are more favorable. This corpus data provides evidence for the assumption that these verbs prefer a negative or positive proposition in an utterance.

Table 1: Adjective collocates of *accused of being* and *praised for being* in COCA

ACCUSED OF BEING [ADJ]	PRAISED¹⁰ FOR BEING
INVOLVED ¹¹	INTELLIGENT
SOFT	ENCOURAGING
RACIST	DISCREET
GAY	ORIGINAL
UNPATRIOTIC	DIFFERENT
SELFISH	VIRTUOUS
OLD-FASHIONED	
ELITIST	
COMMUNIST	
FOREIGN	

⁹ While I intend to test for semantic prosody, I am not claiming that semantic prosody is a type of lexical presupposition.

¹⁰ Also includes synonyms of *praised*: *celebrated*, *applauded*, *admired*, only 6 tokens available

¹¹ These cases of involved were cases including "involved in abuses" or "involved in a kidnapping", but not "involved in a charity."

For the present study, I utilized the lexical presuppositions associated with these verbs to form phrases that would expose the pragmatic behavior of adjectives. In order to code for semantic prosody while working to avoid researcher judgment, I used the following sentences to test the felicity when a target adjective was substituted.

TEST 1: If phrase is felicitous, adjective has negative value and is coded for negative semantic prosody.

He was accused of/blamed for being _____.

TEST 2: If phrase is felicitous, adjective had positive value and is coded for positive prosody.

He was praised/applauded for being _____.

For example, testing the adjective *bad*, which we would expect to carry a negative value can be seen below.

(18)	TEST 1	He was accused of being <i>bad</i> .
	TEST 2	#He was praised for being <i>bad</i> .

Bad passes TEST 1 because the phrase is felicitous but it fails TEST 2. Therefore *bad* was coded for negative semantic prosody. This can also be supported by corpus data. In the Google Books American English Corpus (155 billion words) we find 76 instances of the phrase *accused of being BAD* and zero instances of the phrase *praised for being BAD*. Similarly, a word, such as *good*, that we might assume to have positive semantic prosody, has 47 instances of *praised for being GOOD* and zero instances of *accused of being GOOD*.

(19)	TEST 1	#He was accused of being <i>good</i> .
	TEST 2	He was praised for being <i>good</i> .

Here we see that *good* fails TEST 1 but is felicitous in TEST 2, supporting the corpus data. An adjective like *good* was coded for positive semantic prosody.

Finally, if an adjective fails both tests, it was coded for neutral prosody. For example, the word *red* was coded for neutral prosody because of the following test result.

(20)	TEST 1	#He was accused of being <i>red</i> .
	TEST 2	#He was praised for being <i>red</i> .

Clearly, both utterances are infelicitous when *red* is inserted in the adjective position. Because *red* fails TEST 1 and TEST 2, it is coded as neutral semantic prosody. Other examples of adjectives coded for semantic prosody are shown below. Each token was subjected to the tests described above.

Positive Semantic Prosody

- (21) It was a *very good* class. (OFC149)
- (22) I think this is *really cool* because... (LES080)
- (23) ...some *really amazing* product. (LES078)

Negative Semantic Prosody

- (24) Don't smoke, it's *really bad*. (STP141)
- (25) I'll be *really upset* if we ignore it. (LAB026)
- (26) ...you know this is something *very terrible* and... (LES140)

Neutral Semantic Prosody

- (27) ...she gave a *very detailed* explanation (OFC048)
- (28) That's a *very long* time to form a relationship... (LEL150)
- (29) It's a *really big* pain in the neck. (TOU030)

The second factor group, academic setting, is based on the type of interaction. The types of settings were split into three groups: large group interaction (discussions, labs, study groups), small group interaction (advising, interviews, meetings, office hours, tours, service), and lecture (colloquia, dissertation, lectures, seminars, student presentation). The purpose of this factor group was to find if a lecture-style register with limited participation predicts different intensifier use from a register of more participation and involvement. Swales and Burke (2005) completed a study on Academic English in

which they found *very* to occur more often in written language than *really*. They concluded that this was likely due to the fact that the more formal language preferred *very*. This factor group tests whether the formality of lectures or seminars may also predict *very* over *really* with the smaller, more informal registers favoring *really*.

The third factor group was academic discipline, split into engineering/physical science, biological/health science, humanities, social science/education, and other¹². These factors may predict if certain styles of language and linguistic content affect the use of one intensifier variant over another. This stems from the discussion in the previous section concerning Louw (2010) and Huntson's (2007) claims that the semantic prosody of a word can change or become less distinct depending on the contextual environment.

Finally, the fourth factor group is gender. This is a common social variable in many sociolinguistic studies including those on intensifier variation. Tagliamonte and Ito (2003) conclude that female speakers use *really* more than *very*, while male speakers are more likely to use *very*. Age could not be included in my factor groups based on the incomplete coding of age in MICASE. However, age has been found as a significant predictor of intensifier use in previous studies (Ito 2003, Tagliamonte 2005).

3.3 Summary of Predictions

The linguistic-internal factor of semantic prosody will show whether an adjective with negative, positive, or neutral prosody favors *very* or *really*. Based on Tagliamonte's (2005, 2008) findings, I predict that an adjective with neutral semantic prosody will favor *very* as an intensifier. Because *very* developed earlier than *really*, it is likely that its delexicalization is more advanced and can therefore occur with a greater number and

¹² *Other* disciplines include disciplines that do not fit into the four major divisions, for example a career planning workshop or freshmen orientation tour.

wider variety of adjectives. This would also support Tagliamonte's (2005) findings that more “emotional” language favored collocation with *really*. Because of the proximity to its lexical meaning of *real* and the positive association to true or real entities, I also predict that adjectives with positive semantic prosody will favor *really*.

It is difficult to predict the outcome of the language-external factors of academic setting and academic discipline because little work on intensifier variation has been done within the register of Academic English. However, based on Swales (2003) finding that *very* is more frequent in written Academic English than spoken, I predict that the academic settings involving a more formal setting (i.e. lectures and colloquia) will favor *very* over *really*. My prediction concerning academic discipline is that those disciplines within the fields of natural science and engineering will favor *very*. This is based on the idea that topics in these fields tend to be less open to subjective. Finally, gender should follow the patterns of previous studies including Ito (2003) and Tagliamonte (2008). These studies find that females favor *really* and males favor *very*. Because of the prevalence of this finding, the current study should likely share these results.

4 RESULTS

There were a total of 4,157 (1,326 *really*, 2,831 *very*) tokens of intensifiers *very* and *really* extracted from MICASE. Table 1 shows results from a multivariate analysis in GoldvarbX. *Very* occurs with a total of 742 unique adjectives. *Really* occurs with a total of 408 unique adjectives. In total, there are 946 unique adjectives modified by *really* and/or *very* in this data.

Table 2: Multivariate Analysis of *very* and *really* in MICASE

VERY/REALLY (Input value = <i>very</i>)	Probability	% <i>Very</i>	N (<i>Very</i>)	% Data
Academic Setting				
Lecture	.578	75.5	2284	72.8
Small Group Interaction	.335	51.2	337	15.8
Large Group Interaction	.257	44.3	210	11.4
Range ¹³	32			
Semantic Prosody				
Neutral	.558	74.1	2019	65.6
Positive	.413	58.7	667	27.4
Negative	.314	49.2	145	7.1
Range	24			
Academic Discipline				
Engineering/Physical Science	.574	74.3	512	16.6
Biological/Health Science	.545	73.9	709	23.1
Humanities	.511	72.1	711	23.7
Other	.440	56.6	275	11.7
Social Science and Education	.427	60.2	624	24.9
Range	15			
Gender				
Male	.553	73.4	1218	39.9
Female	.464	64.6	1613	60.1
Range	9			
Log likelihood = -2369.883 p<.001				

As shown in Table 2, *very* is used more frequently as an intensifier than *really* in the corpus (68.1% *very*, N=2,831). All factor groups were selected as significant predictors of intensifier use, with academic setting and semantic prosody showing the highest ranges. This constraint ranking shows that academic setting is the strongest predictor of variation, followed by semantic prosody, academic discipline, and gender.

Within the first factor group, academic setting, lecture-based settings favor *very* and small and large group interactions disfavor *very*. This supports Swales and Burke's (2003) finding that a more formal, lecture-based or written setting would favor the use of

¹³ Range is a measurement of strength or magnitude of effect, indicating which constraints are stronger factors of variation. It is calculated by subtracting the lowest factor weight from the highest factor weight. The highest range represents the strongest constraint and the lowest range represents the weakest constraint (Tagliamonte 2006).

very. Lectures are often prewritten or given as a prepared presentation. This may also explain why a lecture-based setting favors *very*. The informal meetings and less structured discussions favor the use of *really*. This shows that variation of *very* and *really* is heavily influenced by the level of interaction among participants.

The second factor group, semantic prosody, shows adjectives with neutral semantic prosody slightly favor *very* (.558), and adjectives with positive and negative semantic prosody highly disfavor *very* (.413 and .314, respectively). This supports my prediction that adjectives with neutral semantic prosody prefer to collocate with *very* over *really* and that adjectives with positive or negative semantic prosody prefer to collocate with *really* over *very*. This also supports Tagliamonte (2005)'s finding that *really* was favored by 'emotional' language and *very* was favored by 'neutral' language. This adds support that *very* may carry a neutral semantic prosody and *really* carries an emotive semantic prosody.

Additionally, this strengthens the notion that *very* may be more advanced than *really* in the delexicalization process. As discussed above, most intensifiers that still carry a semantic extension similar to their original lexical meaning, or the meaning of the lexical entity from which the intensifier derived, seem to frequently collocate with adjectives with a negative or positive semantic prosody. For example, *awfully* frequently occurs with negative adjectives and *perfectly* with positive adjectives. The fact that *very* is disfavored by positive and negative adjectives shows that its semantic function as an intensifier is also neutral. Intensifiers that remain closer to their lexical meanings add a higher intensification¹⁴ than those that are further delexicalized (Partington 1993). This

¹⁴ I use *higher intensification* to mean a greater emphasis by the speaker in order to amplify the adjective to a greater level. For example, a *really big dog* might be bigger than a *very big dog*.

could explain why *really* is favored by more emotional adjectives. The use of *really* adds a greater intensification than *very* based on its more recent development and lesser advancement in delexicalization.

The finding that *really* is favored by both adjectives with negative and positive semantic prosody is surprising. It seems more plausible that the connection of *really* to the meaning of *real* or *true* would support a finding of only positive adjectives highly favoring *really*. A *true* entity is usually regarded as more positive than a *false* entity. However, the idea that *really* may function as a modifier that intensifies a speaker's emotion might reinforce a speaker's desire to make a negative entity more extreme or emphatic. If a speaker desires to express an extreme negative idea, he may prefer an intensifier that adds greater emphasis and amplification to what is expressed.

The third factor, academic discipline, shows that biological/health science and engineering/physical science favor *very*, humanities slightly favors *very* and social science/education and other disciplines disfavor *very*. This shows that the register is important in predicting intensifier use.

The final factor, gender, shows male speakers slightly favoring *very* and female speakers slightly disfavoring *very*. Though this has the lowest range, it is nonetheless a significant predictor of intensifier variation. This finding supports Tagliamonte (2005) and Ito (2003) that female speakers favor the use of *really* and male speakers favor the use of *very*. This could be affected by the possibility that emotional language is associated more often with female speakers than with male speakers. If this is the case, the previously discussed result that emotional language favors *really* may influence the greater use of *really* among female speakers.

In summary, the most influential factor on variation between *very* and *really* is academic setting. This suggests that the language-external factor of environment and possibly of formality is important in determining which intensifier is used. The semantic prosody of a modified adjective is also a significant predictor of variation. This is likely due to the widespread use of *very* and advancement in delexicalization that allows *very* to be favored by neutral adjectives. Academic discipline is less influential than semantic prosody but is still a significant factor with biological/health sciences, physical sciences and engineering, and humanities favoring *very* and social sciences, education, and other disciplines favoring *really*. Finally, gender is the least influential factor with female speakers slightly favoring *really* and male speakers slightly favoring *very*.

5 DISCUSSION

This paper combines two linguistic concepts that have received increased attention within the field of variationist sociolinguistics. Intensifier variation and semantic prosody both relate to collocation and speaker evaluation. Previous variationist studies have accounted for certain intensifier distributions within corpora. This study focuses on a register of Academic English and adds the component of semantic prosody.

Semantic prosody is a term whose meaning is greatly debated among scholars. Whether it is solely determined by collocation or identified through evaluation of the speaker, there is no reliable and consistent method to approach it for which researchers agree to best. Studies like Louw (2003), Stubbs (2005), and Partington (2004) identify words that have a clear semantic prosody such as *utterly* or *cause*, based on collocational studies in large corpora. This paper seeks to find a methodology that allows us to identify

a semantic prosody for words like *very* and *really*, which do not have an apparent semantic prosody with which they are associated.

5.1 *Very/really in Academic English*

Though *very* and *really* seem to function in similar ways, modifying similar adjectives, this analysis has shown that certain factors can help to determine which intensifier a speaker will use. First, examining the language-external factors, we see that the type of environment and formality of situation factors into which intensifier is used. *Very* is favored by more formal, lecture-style environments that have limited interaction and *really* is favored by informal group discussion that have a higher rate of interaction. This supports Swales (2003) finding that *very* is used more in formal writing than in less formal speech.

I also found that academic discipline is a significant factor within the natural sciences and engineering fields favoring the use of *very* more than the social science and humanities disciplines at a university. It is important to note that these results may be influenced by the status of speakers and formality of the environment. There may be more people of higher status, such as professors, in certain academic disciplines or certain academic environments than others. For instance, if an academic discipline has more formal settings or if there are more speakers with higher status, based on the findings described above, it would be likely that these disciplines also have more instances of *very*.

These results show that breaking down registers is important in establishing a description of intensifier use or any language use more generally. As Louw (2010) discusses, if one style of language is preferred in a larger set of data, it may differ in

when separated into a more specific register. For example, looking at one variant in a corpus of Academic English may differ from looking at that same variant in a corpus of Natural Science and Engineering disciplines alone. Louw also explains that studying speech in a more specified register can assist for pedagogical purposes to “help students comprehend and produce these registers appropriately” whether they are native or non-native English speakers. For example studying a corpus of business school language can “give students insights into how business people use language” (Louw 2010: 759). Thus, not all corpus linguistic research needs to use an extra large corpus. It can be just as valuable to break down corpora into smaller components and analyze the differing results. This can give insight into how language works in a specific environment such as Academic English. A large corpus may be preferable to describe overall language trends but those findings could inaccurately describe language trends in a more specific environment. Academic speech is a specific form of language that should be described for its own patterns and characteristics. These findings can later be compared to findings in larger corpora in order to compare general trends to more environment-specific trends.

The final social factor of gender was also significant. This finding has been well documented in the field by researchers like Tagliamonte, showing that *really* is favored by female speakers and *very* is favored by male. This could be due to a language change in progress of the historically older *very* slowly losing ground to *really*. Historically, it is common for language change to be led by female speakers and this could be an example of one intensifier eventually replacing another.

5.2 Intensifiers and Semantic Prosody

The overall goal of this paper is to provide a better methodology for operationalizing semantic prosody for quantitative analysis. To do so, I have combined a semantic definition of lexical presupposition with a variationist analysis using data from a 1.8 million-word corpus. Using the verbs that have a particular lexical presupposition, I was able to establish a consistent process for determining an adjective's semantic prosody. After determining the prosody of the adjectives, I could use that as a factor in a multivariate analysis to find which types of semantic prosody favored which intensifier. For example, finding that neutral semantic prosody favors *very* and positive and negative semantic prosody favors *really*.

Based on the fact the adjectives with neutral semantic prosody favor collocation with *very*, we can extend that *very* also has some sort of neutral semantic prosody with which it can be associated. It is still difficult to directly state that *very* has neutral semantic prosody, but we know that it has a strong association with adjectives that do. We also know that *really* associates with some sort of emotional prosody. This is a step forward in the identification of semantic prosody using quantitative methods with those words that favor a certain collocation determined from the statistical analysis.

6 CONCLUSION

This study combines intensifiers and semantic prosody within the register of Academic Speech. The most common intensifiers, *very* and *really* function in similar matters within our grammar and certain linguistic and extralinguistic factors are significant predictors of which intensifier will be used. Academic environment, semantic prosody, academic discipline, and gender were significant factors of the variation

between *very* and *really*. *Very* was favored by lecture-type environments, hard sciences, males, and adjectives with neutral semantic prosody. This also includes evidence predicting a possible language change in progress with the increasing use of *really*.

This analysis also supports the study of smaller corpora in a study of variation, arguing that a smaller register is more accurate in determining language trends and patterns relating to a specific environment. Register has a definite impact on language use and the use of a smaller, more specific corpus can better account for the register effects on language use. Though we must be aware that the findings within a smaller register may not be able to accurately extend to language in a larger context, we can still find interesting linguistic phenomena that are common to certain environments. Academic Speech is a register that can be broken down into many different parts and each part may show substantial differences in linguistic patterns.

This study has proposed a methodology for the study of semantic prosody, particularly with respect to its application to linguistic variation. The combination of semantic tests with a quantitative analysis has lessened researcher bias in labeling semantic prosody. This could be extended with another study that tests these methods by asking participants to identify the semantic prosody of adjectives or by asking if the sentences are felicitous when the adjective is included. It would also be interesting to use a study like this in a different register of speech such as an analysis speech in a medical or law environment to find if the conclusions are the same. Additionally, a closer look at age might confirm the language change in progress of an increasing use of *really*. If younger speakers are using *really* more than older speakers, this claim would be supported.

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