

## **A corpus-based analysis of interpersonal functions of intensifiers in L1 and L2 writing: ENGAGEMENT and GRADUATION analysis**

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Intensifiers play a critical role in conveying the writers' stances and managing the engagement of readers. Although previous studies have addressed the different uses of intensifiers (e.g., Lorenz, 1999; Hinkel, 2003, 2005) and metadiscourse features in writing (Zhao & Wu, 2024), they lack a comprehensive functional analysis of intensifiers and have rarely explored writers' stances and interpersonal communication with readers in-depth. To address this gap, this research provides a more comprehensive analysis of intensifiers used by English L1 speakers and L2 learners of English at the A2 and B2 levels, exploring how they select intensifiers to communicate with readers in their writing. These three research questions guide this study.

- (1) How do L2 writers at the A2 and B2 levels use intensifiers regarding the frequency of amplifiers and downtoners compared to L1 writers?
- (2) How do L1 and L2 writers at the A2 and B2 levels select intensifiers to communicate with readers, and what do these choices reveal about their interpersonal positioning in their writing?
- (3) How do L1 and L2 writers at the A2 and B2 levels select intensifiers to scale gradual meanings of force and focus, and what do these choices reveal about their rhetorical competence in writing?

The data were drawn from the Written Essays of ICNALE. I employed argumentative essays written by Korean L2 writers at the A2 and B2 levels and English L1 writers. Using the annotation software TagAnt 2.0.5 (Anthony, 2021) for POS tagging, and AntConc 3.5.9 (Anthony, 2014), a concordance software, I searched all adverbs by using the regular expression (regex) '\_RB,' and identified 8419 adverbs in total. After filtering out lexical adverbs manually, a total of 1816 intensifiers were retrieved. I examined each to distinguish and categorize their function based on Quirk et al. (1985) and Biber et al. (1999) (RQ1). The intensifiers were further coded using the GRADUATION and ENGAGEMENT systems in APPRAISAL theory (Martin & White, 2005) to analyze the use of intensifiers in their communication with readers and the construction of their authorial voices (RQ2) and rhetorical effects in their writing (RQ3).

Findings reveal that L1 writers used more amplifiers than L2 writers at the B2 level and employed more downtoners than L2 writers, regardless of proficiency. Moreover, L1 writers had more balanced uses than L2 writers within the GRADUATION system by effectively using both force and focus. L2 learners at the A2 level primarily relied on quality intensification, while L2 writers at the B2 level mainly utilized process intensification. The results suggest that L2 writers may lack

awareness of their readers or alternative perspectives and rhetorical competence. ESL and EFL instruction should emphasize the interpersonal and rhetorical functions of intensifiers, moving beyond simplified explicit instruction of degree adverbs. I also suggest classroom activities that provide L2 learners with a better understanding of the nuanced roles of intensifiers in constructing reader-writer relationships and authorial voice within authentic materials, offering pedagogical implications for teaching the interpersonal aspects of writing.

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