

Intensifiers in Current English

By

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It is necessary to separate intensification as a semantic notion from those elements which signal it. The intensive qualifier is perhaps the most common linguistic signal of intensification in current usage. Because it is a discrete lexical unit, it is easily recognized and may be described in terms of its distribution in positions preceding adjectives and adverbs. This study examines the phenomenon of intensification with specific emphasis on the intensive qualifier as a structural class. Attention is given the historical distribution of specific intensive qualifiers, wherein it is shown that these qualifiers lose lexical meaning as they become widely used and that they pass in and out of fashion. As a class they enjoyed a high degree of popularity during the nineteenth century. Despite their widespread use, however, grammatical

treatment of intensive qualifiers has been largely inadequate. The tendency has been to dismiss them as an ill-defined subgroup of the class of adverbs, and few writers have described them in structural terms. Considerable critical attention has been directed against them as stylistic elements. However, examination of contemporary sources of American English indicates that intensive qualifiers enjoy widespread distribution through many levels of current usage, that a core group of approximately eighty qualifiers are most commonly used, and that among these very, so, too, quite, right, and really occur most frequently. It further becomes evident that intensive qualifiers may be carefully selected to fulfill several functions. Not only do they add emphasis, but also they enhance social, regional, and educational differences in characterization; further, they aid in creating and maintaining tone; finally they clarify and add to meaning.

CHAPTER I  
INTENSIFICATION AND THE INTENSIVE QUALIFIER

Introduction

Although the phenomenon of intensification is important to accurate communication of meaning in English, the grammatical devices for signalling intensification are frequently ignored as an area of study. Forms of intensification are often dismissed as items to be defined summarily in an appendix or a footnote. Yet because intensification is a frequently occurring aspect of communication, it deserves study.

To describe precisely how intensification occurs is sometimes difficult. Further, it is necessary to recognize a distinction between intensification as a semantic category, i.e. intensification as a matter of meaning, and the particular linguistic expressions that convey that meaning. Some of the formal signals of intensification are easy to recognize. Qualifiers, for example, may signal intensification and are easy to label. Other signals, more subtle, are to some extent dependent upon environment and factors extraneous to the lexical symbols which comprise the utterance and are more difficult to analyze--shifted word order or an unusual

intonational pattern, for example. Thus to formulate a clear and concise definition of the intensive is difficult indeed. It is true that grammatical signals available to express intensification may be identified and defined, but the semantic notion of intensification cannot always be captured by a precise definition since intensification is not always signalled by a specific grammatical element.

Since so many devices may signal intensification, these elements must be defined and given attention. Among them are hyperbole and exaggeration, inherently intense words, profanity and obscenity, exclamations, symbolic forms, repetition of words and sounds, multiplication of synonyms, onomatopoeic forms, stretch forms, shifted word order and other grammatical transformations, stress and pitch, redundant prepositions and adverbial particles, intensive personal pronouns, genitive forms with own, and qualifiers.

Some limitations then have to be imposed on any single study of intensification because of the large number and variety of elements which signal it. The intensive qualifier, which will be described later in this chapter, lends itself to close scrutiny because it is a common form of intensification in ordinary speech. Its frequency of occurrence is easily understood when one considers its

historical development. Not only is it widely used today, but it has been widely used for centuries; thus an examination of the historical development of the intensive qualifier as a grammatical class and of selected individual intensive qualifiers logically provides a basis for the study of its use today.

Despite the frequency with which the intensive qualifier has appeared in English speech and writing, its use has historically been condemned as a weak stylistic device. Ironically, evidence to support this condemnation exists side by side with evidence of increased frequency in the use of qualifiers. Thus it is not surprising that further study reveals that attitudes expressed by more-or-less prescriptive grammarians today concerning the use of the intensive qualifier vary greatly from outright condemnation to tacit approval. Some writers ignore the issue entirely.

Given this situation, it is interesting to examine the actual use of intensive qualifiers today to discover how frequently intensive qualifiers occur in contemporary speech and writing and with what specific effects they are employed. It becomes increasingly obvious that despite the fact that intensive qualifiers are often either ignored or condemned, their distribution is widespread indeed, and they have a unique function in communication.

Since an understanding of terms is vital to an understanding of a concept, this chapter will concern itself first with an analysis of intensification itself and the devices which signal it. Because the intensive qualifier is a form of intensification occurring very frequently in contemporary speech and writing, a significant portion of this chapter will be given to a discussion of that word class as a structural element in contemporary English. Chapter II will deal in detail with the historical development of selected specific intensive qualifiers. Chapter III will make an analysis of the treatment of intensive qualifiers in the writings of grammarians. Chapter IV will present an analysis of the distribution and function of intensive qualifiers in contemporary media, and Chapter V will provide a brief summary of findings.

### Intensification

Intensification satisfies a basic human need to emphasize. Because we are often fearful that our listeners may fail to comprehend the full impact of what we are saying, we rely on intensification to underline the meaning of our statements. Further, we are oriented towards multiple degrees of values, i.e. we recognize various levels of qualification in all areas of our lives. We do more than

simply like or dislike things, for example. We intensify by liking things "a lot" or "very well." We intensify in reverse by using what have been called downtoners; thus we like things "a little" or "not at all." We need things "urgently," "very much," "not particularly," or "not at all." Because our needs and desires are complicated, we employ intensifying elements and downtoners to express degrees of value. The primary concern of this study, however, is intensification, not downtoning. Intensification specifies some positive degree of a quality but allows for a great deal of variation. Greater and lesser degrees of intensification are available to express the many levels of value we perceive.

It is now necessary to define those elements that signal intensification. An intensifying element is any linguistic signal that heightens or strengthens the meaning conveyed by a particular utterance. The term "linguistic signal" is employed here to exclude facial expressions, hand gestures, or any other motions which might also signal intensification. Heightened or strengthened meaning may be understood as a response on an Osgood semantic differential scale that departs from the neutral position. In fact, the Osgood semantic differential scale provides a graphic means of recognizing an intensifying element. In attempting to

measure meaning, Charles Osgood<sup>1</sup> sets up a linear scale in relation to some specific concept. He arbitrarily places polar opposite adjectives which can in some way be applied to the concept at each end of this linear scale and designates a specific number of positions along the line between them:

polar term x     $\frac{\quad}{1} \frac{\quad}{2} \frac{\quad}{3} \frac{\quad}{4} \frac{\quad}{5} \frac{\quad}{6} \frac{\quad}{7}$     polar term y

The scale positions are then defined as follows:

- |                                      |                 |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|
| (1) extremely x                      | (7) extremely y |
| (2) quite x                          | (6) quite y     |
| (3) slightly x                       | (5) slightly y  |
| (4) neither x nor y, equally x and y |                 |

He assumes that the terms "extremely," "quite," and "slightly" are "more or less equal degrees of intensity of whatever representational process (x or y) happens to be elicited."<sup>2</sup>

Thus when Osgood is attempting to represent graphically the "semantic differential" of a given expression,

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Osgood, Percy H. Tannenbaum, and George Suci, The Measurement of Meaning, pp. 28-29.

<sup>2</sup>Osgood, et al, p. 29.

he is actually specifying the degree of intensity that the expression inherently possesses. In the very positions which he names on the scales, he is recognizing intensive qualifiers. However, he is recognizing that they have varying degrees of force. For our purposes in defining the intensive element, it would perhaps be precise to say then that any element which would depart from the neutral position on Osgood's scale is in some degree an intensive element.

Therefore every element which will be presented in this paper and discussed as falling into the general category of intensifying elements will stand up to one ultimate criterion: in some way it signals emphasis or additional force; it heightens and strengthens meaning in a way that could be measured by a semantic differential scale. Proceeding from the most simplistic dictionary definition of intensification and intensifying element through the careful grammarians' examples and illustrations related to the body of information they conceive of as grammar and to the historically and culturally broad, imaginative implications given to the term by H.L. Mencken and Leonard Bloomfield, one discovers a wealth of aspects from which the phenomenon of intensification may be considered. The problem is not simply to define the intensive element as some sort of grammatical element, but rather to discover how

intensification is signalled. The linguistic element that signals intensification is most commonly a grammatical class, the intensive qualifier, but intensive signals may take other forms.

Intensive elements are frequently used as vehicles for emotion, emotion which the speaker feels at the moment and emotion which the speaker elicits from his listeners. It is easy to surmise then that the meaning of intensive elements may change slightly as the situations in which they are uttered change. Thus the meaning of intensive elements is unstable because of the connotations derived from the conglomerate of situations in which one has heard them. A study of the phenomenon must therefore attempt to distinguish what is genuinely a part of linguistic competence from those performance factors that are irrelevant to the grammarian's interest.

The most frequently occurring intensive elements are words, and most intensifying words are marked by a loss of original lexical meaning. When a word is used as an intensive qualifier, the attention of the listener is focused on the idea being intensified rather than on the literal sense of the intensifying word. When one says that he is "awfully tired," he is drawing attention to his fatigue rather than to an aura of wonder suggested by awe. Thus the intensifying word ultimately derives much of its

meaning from being bound to that idea which it intensifies. However, if numerous intensifying words are combined in such a way that attention is drawn to them, then focus on the intensifying words shifts emphasis from what is being intensified to the idea of intensification itself with little concern for the lexical meaning of any words involved. To be "terribly, horribly, excruciatingly bored" conveys the idea of the ultimate in ennui. This shift which puts emphasis on emphasis itself accounts for the fact that a superfluity of intensives generally weakens the meaning of an utterance as a whole.

Intensification is nurtured by a natural human tendency to exaggerate. Under the influence of strong feelings or emotions, one searches for words strong enough to communicate his feelings and often settles on words which may be stronger than a literal description of the situation would demand. His listeners recognize the fact that he is simply attempting to be emphatic, and they realize that the forceful words are to be taken in an intensive rather than literal sense. A "screamingly funny person," for example, is not necessarily a person who is shouting. The tendency to exaggerate reinforces the lack of discrimination which marks many intensifying words. In an effort to avoid tame expressions and expressions with limited referents, speakers turn to vague,

general qualifiers with scant concern for their literal meanings, and we hear the familiar wonderfully, marvelously, awfully, terribly, and others of the kind. Such exaggeration seems to be a basic human characteristic. Its prevalence is demonstrated by the fact that this sort of intensive element is among the most common--so common, in fact, that it often escapes our notice, let alone our careful attention.

### Intensive Devices

It has been said earlier that intensification may be signalled in various ways. Among the devices used for this purpose by speakers of English are the following:

- (1) hyperbole or exaggeration
- (2) inherently intense words
- (3) profanity and obscenity
- (4) exclamations
- (5) symbolic forms
- (6) repetition of words and sounds
- (7) multiplication of synonyms
- (8) onomatopoetic forms
- (9) stretch forms
- (10) shifted word order and other grammatical transformations
- (11) stress and pitch

- (12) redundant prepositions and adverbial particles
- (13) intensive personal pronouns
- (14) own
- (15) qualifiers.

Chief among these devices is the use of qualifying words, i.e. words which signal adjectives and adverbs and may be used in conjunction with them. Qualifiers, words like very, quite, and too, are by far the most common intensive qualifiers in contemporary English and will be the focus of this paper. First, however, each of the intensive elements listed will be discussed briefly in the following pages. Those which have some connection with qualifiers or which sometimes function as that part of speech (profanity, for example) will be discussed separately, although they will also be referred to in the discussion of qualifiers. The various ways of signalling intensification are not mutually exclusive. There is in fact some overlapping. For example, "It's hot as hell" is both profanity and exaggeration, while "Hell, it's hot" is both profanity and exclamation. Exclamations, like qualifiers, are a syntactically definable class of words, whereas profanity can be defined only culturally, and exaggeration is defined semantically. Thus there is considerable overlapping among classifications. Although the classification used here is internally inconsistent, it has proved useful in

describing the many diverse ways intensification is expressed in English.

(1) Exaggeration is frequently connected with intensification, and is often used to express an intense degree of a quality. For example, in order to emphasize the fact that a room was particularly stuffy, one might say that the room was so full of smoke that he could not breathe. His listeners would not believe the literal meaning of his statement. Rather, they would have a clear understanding of what he wished to communicate.

Words and phrases of affirmation and negation have been strongly affected by the human tendency to exaggerate, perhaps because we tend to affirm or deny emphatically. In order to intensify our assent, for example, we employ numerous exaggerated or hyperbolic expressions. Expressions such as by all means, certainly, of course, to be sure, surely, and sure serve both to exaggerate and to intensify affirmation. The same sort of thing occurs with negatives, and we find expressions like not at all, by no means, hardly, and not a bit.

The need for intensification is also responsible for the enduring popularity of the double negative. It has never lost its emphatic negative force despite some grammarians' insistence that it logically expresses an affirmative. It has frequently been pointed out that a

person who says that he does not have no money does not actually mean that he has money after all, despite the supposed logic in his statement. It is highly unlikely that the average user of the double negative has any conception that the form has been used without censure in earlier centuries. He uses it simply because it is emphatic, and he is not concerned that it is generally considered sub-standard.<sup>3</sup>

(2) Related to exaggeration is the use of words which are in themselves inherently intense. Even when these words are literally appropriate, their semantic associations are themselves powerful. For example, gigantic, colossal, famished, crushed, annihilated, slaughter, assassinate are all far stronger than words like huge, hungry, destroyed, and kill. These intense words are what speakers grope for in an attempt to make statements that are fresh and effective. They are the tools of any person who wants to convince or persuade an audience or reader to the validity of his point of view.

(3) Still another group of elements used to signal intensification is found in English profanity. It is

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<sup>3</sup>In 1901 James Bradstreet Greenough and George Lyman Kittredge devoted a chapter in Words and Their Ways in English Speech, p. 309 ff., to hyperbole and exaggeration. Much of the material they present is directly concerned with intensification.

generally recognized that American English uses profanity of many forms and that hell and damn along with their derivatives are the items of profanity which probably occur most frequently in American speech. However, it must be noted that while the word hell does not itself function as an intensive qualifier, damn frequently does, either as it stands ("I am damn tired") or in a derivative form ("I am damned tired").<sup>4</sup>

In discussing profanity, it is worthwhile to consider an analysis of hell suggested by H.L. Mencken. He cites fourteen classes of usage of hell, several of which he notes as intensive in nature and which should then illustrate the intensive function of profanity.<sup>5</sup>

It should be noted that although Mencken labels at least five of the classes as intensifying and although many of the classes do express intensity, hell itself is

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<sup>4</sup>When followed by some sounds, like /t/, as in damn(ed) tired, the two forms of the word are, of course, homophonous in most speech patterns.

<sup>5</sup>Following is Mencken's catalog of usages of hell:

1. Hell as the equivalent of negative adverbs or as an intensifier thereof, as in the hell you say and like hell I will.
2. As a super-superlative, as in colder than hell.
3. As an adverb of all work, as in run like hell and hate like hell.
4. As an intensifier of questions, as in what the hell, who the hell, where the hell, etc.
5. As an intensifier of asseverations, as in hell, yes!
6. As an intensifier of qualities, as in to be hell on and hell of a price.
7. As an indicator of intensified

in no case functioning as a qualifier. Rather, it combines with other words to function as an intensifier inasmuch as all profanity functions to intensify an emotion or action or set of circumstances. Its intensifying function is not tied to grammatical structure.

Americans apparently hold contradictory attitudes towards the use of damn and hell. As damn and hell become used more and more frequently and by greater numbers of people, we tend to lose sight of the blasphemous tones originally attached to these words. However, we evidently do not forget these tones altogether because we still preserve numerous euphemisms for hell, damn, God, Christ, and their compounds and forms. A surprising number of these euphemisms can and frequently do function as intensive qualifiers.

There seems to be a growing trend insofar as intensive profanity is concerned to move beyond profanity

experience, as in hell of a time, get the hell, and to play hell with. 8. In a more or less literal sense, as in wouldn't it be hell, go to hell, the hell with, hell on wheels, hell to pay, like a snowball in hell, till hell freezes over, and to beat hell. 9. As a synonym for uproar or turmoil, as in to raise hell, to give him hell, and hell is loose. 10. As a verb, as in to hell around. 11. As an adjective, as in a hellish hurry and hell bent. 12. In combination with other nouns, as in hell's bells, hell and red niggers, hell and high-water, hell and Maria, hell-raiser, hell-diver, hell-bender, and hell-to-breakfast. 14. As a simple expletive, as in Oh, hell. (The American Language, Supplement I, pp. 661-662.)

(the secular use of religious terms) to obscenity (the casual use of socially taboo terms concerning sexual and excretory functions). This may be due in part to a relative loosening of censorship of the press and to a consequent liberalism in prose and in radio, television, and cinema. Whereas Norman Mailer had to make do with fugging in The Naked and the Dead, words such as fucking, mother-fucking, fucking-A, screwing, farting, shitting, and piss-poor are more and more frequently seen in print and heard on stage. Although they are still considered to be in questionable taste as far as polite society is concerned, it is undeniable that they liberally lace the conversation of great numbers of speakers of English. In each case the intensive word serves to provide an earthy, earnest intensification to the idea or phrase it modifies. Most also function as qualifiers of adjectival and adverbial forms.

(4) Exclamations are perhaps the most obvious intensive forms in English. They may take the form of ordinary statements (words and phrases) marked by an exclamation point, or they may be certain special speech forms, such as ah!, oh!, ouch!, hooray!, yippee! "These forms all reflect a violent stimulus, but differ in connotation from an ordinary statement in which the speaker merely says that he is undergoing a strong stimulus."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Leonard Bloomfield, Language, p. 156.

The exclamation point commonly follows this sort of intensive form. It is the mark of punctuation most expressive of intensity and emotion in English utterances. It should be noted that there is an exceptionally high degree of overlapping between exclamations and profanity and obscenity.

(5) It is also possible to include among the class of intensive elements a large number of intense symbolic forms whose sound illustrates their meaning more clearly than does that of ordinary speech forms. A number of these forms which unite intensity and symbolic connotation have been tabulated by Leonard Bloomfield in Language:<sup>7</sup>

- [fl-] 'moving light': flash, flare, flame  
flicker, flimmer.
- [fl-] 'movement in air': fly, flap, flit (flutter).
- [gl-] 'unmoving light': glow, glare, gloat, gloom  
(gleam, gloaming, glimmer), glint.
- [sl-] 'smoothly wet': slime, slush, slop, slobber,  
slip, slide.
- [kr-] 'noisy impact': crash, crack (creak), crunch.
- [skr-] 'grating impact or sound': scratch, scrape,  
scream.
- [sn-] 'breath-noise': sniff (snuff), snore, snort,  
snot.

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<sup>7</sup>P. 245.

- [sn-] 'creep': snake, snail, sneak, snoop.
- [j-] 'up-and-down movement': jump, jounce, jig  
(jog, juggle), jangle (jingle).
- [b-] 'dull impact': bang, bash, bounce, biff,  
bump, bat.
- [-æʃ] 'violent movement': bash, clash, crash, dash,  
flash, gash, mash, gnash, slash, splash.
- [-ɛr] 'big light or noise': glare, blare, flare,  
stare.
- [-awns] 'quick movement': bounce, jounce, pounce,  
trounce.
- [-ɪm] mostly with determinative [-ər], 'small light  
or noise': dim, flimmer, glimmer, simmer,  
shimmer.
- [-ʌmp] 'clumsy': bump, clump, chump, dump, frump,  
hump, lump, rump, stump, slump, thump.
- [-æt] with determinative [-ər], 'particled movement':  
batter, clatter, chatter, spatter, shatter,  
scatter, rattle, prattle.

It must be emphasized that the associations of symbolic forms are not bound to etymological roots and that in many cases the association might appear to be vague. Further, the associations are not mutually exclusive nor do they exclude other connotations. However, it is undeniable that in the minds of most speakers of English certain forms have

taken on an intense symbolic connotation, although it may normally be below the level of conscious awareness, and speakers are neither confused nor distressed by these forms.

The morphemic status of these forms is a problem. Most grammarians would be reluctant to divide a word like crash into two morphemes, cr-, 'noisy impact,' and -ash, 'violent movement,' chiefly because the sound-meaning correlation is not reinforced by grammatical considerations as it is in the case of items like deceive, receive, deception, and reception. What is important here, however, is simply that the existence of the sound symbolism intensifies the meaning of the word in which it occurs. Slam is more emphatic than close forcefully by virtue of the sound symbolism. As in most linguistic matters, one is ultimately reduced to the question of meaning, and meaning is a valid criterion for linguistic analysis insofar as it is consistently recognized by the speakers in a given speech community.

These symbolic forms are often used in situations that call for emphasis; and despite the fact that the association between form and meaning might seem obscure, the repetition of the forms and their frequent association with specific ideas lends strength to their intensive function. The symbolic forms are consciously manipulated by advertisers, poets, writers of children's literature, and

cartoonists. Such writers seize on a form which by association and in a particular environment connotes and intensifies an idea and proceed to play on this association. Thus the effect of wetness is intensified with splish splash, and a child is cautioned not to skrunch (destroy totally) his new toy.

A special type of intensive symbolic form may be considered with this group. If a form is repeated with some sort of phonetic variation, it may evoke further intensified connotations, as in the partial reduplications bim-bam, flim-flam, bouncey-wouncey, snip-snap, zig-zag, riff-raff, hoity-toity, jim-jams, fiddle-faddle, teeny-tiny, ship-shape, hodge-podge, hugger-mugger, honky-tonk.

(6) To this group of repetitive symbolic forms might be added expressions marked by repetition in general. An attempt to strengthen the force of any word in English is frequently marked by simple repetition of the word itself, as in the complete reduplications "He's a big, big man" or "Hurry, hurry." Although any portion of an utterance may be repeated for emphasis, intensification may be heightened on the most obvious level through repetition of individual intensifying qualifiers, as in expressions like "Very, very tired."

Most speakers realize that whereas repetition may be effective on a simple level, the sophisticated listener

will regard such repetition as evidence of the speaker's inadequacy. Thus repetition under those circumstances defeats itself as an intensifying device and comes to have the opposite effect. Writers of advertising copy, however, seize upon repetition for effective intensification, repeating qualities which they wish to emphasize, as in "no stirring, no shaking, no streaking" and "easy to prepare--easy to clean." These writers also tend to utilize repeated superlative forms, as in a "newest, brightest, most advanced" discovery.

The intensifying effect implicit in nursery forms, such as ma-ma, da-da, and pa-pa, and in nonsense forms, such as tra-la-la, hey-diddle-diddle, tarara-boom-de-ay, and fol-de-rol, has generally been recognized. It is based in large degree on repetition of forms.<sup>8</sup>

(7) Along with repetition of words, multiplication of synonyms should be considered. This technique is the repetition of words whose meaning is essentially the same. It is a common advertising device. For example, "Clorox sanitizes and disinfects"; "The rooms are large and spacious." It is apparently effective when one is

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<sup>8</sup>This sort of material is treated in Bloomfield's Language, pp. 156-158. Further, Bloomfield includes the implication of intensity related to endearment in the use of 'pet' names, i.e., Bob, Ned, Dick, Bill, Peggy, Maggie, Fanny, Johnny, Willie, Jimmie, and similarly reduced forms.

attempting to stress an idea in every way possible. The device is a long established one, being common as a technique of Old English poetry and occurring also in the language of scripture.

(8) Similar to the repeated symbolic forms are the onomatopoeic intense forms which refer to a sound or to an object which emits a sound that can be imitated. These expressions often have intensive connotations. Examples are chug-chug, choo-choo, ding-dong, pee-wee, bow-wow, cuckoo, tick-tock, and mew-mew. These double syllable forms are reduplications, partial or complete. Pow, bash, crunch, and similar onomatopoeic expressions, however, are not reduplications.

(9) Still another intensifying element in American English is credited by H. L. Mencken to the influence of the Irish on the language of the United States. Mencken asserts that the Irish display an extravagance of speech which makes them almost incapable of saying plain yes or no, and Americans respond to this characteristic. Thus Americans have readily adopted from Irish immigrants expressions such as no-siree, yes-indeedy, and teetotal, frequently used by the Irish.<sup>9</sup> These expressions are called stretch forms, and rely on the reduplication of a sound (teetotal and

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<sup>9</sup>H. L. Mencken, The American Language, 4th ed., pp. 161-162.

indeedy) or on the addition of a final stressed syllable (sirree).

(10) Still another device employed to signal intensification depends on an awareness of word placement within English utterances. Shifted word order thus merits attention. A statement like "Away John ran" is felt to be a more animated form and seems to have the effect of indicating heightened significance of the action over what is conveyed by the more straightforward "John ran away." Since the English language depends heavily on word order for coherence, there is a limited amount of latitude which may be exercised in manipulating the order of elements that compose English utterances. Because the adverb enjoys a degree of mobility of position, manipulation of adverbials, especially front-shifting them, is perhaps the most common form of word order distortion that achieves an effect of heightened intensity. Thus we frequently hear "Up he sat," "Down he fell," "Around he came," and similar expressions involving an adverb of place and a verb of motion.

The choice of direct or indirect discourse frequently bears on intensification. Instead of "I told him to go," one might find a statement made in which the two ideas are reordered into a direct quotation with the quoted material preceding mention of the speaker as in "'Go,' I said." "'Will you save me?' I asked" would then be considered to

be more dramatic and hence more intense than "I asked him if he would save me."

Numerous additional kinds of grammatical transformations draw attention to different elements of constructions. For example, one might utilize identification clauses to emphasize different nouns in an utterance. If Joe hit Mary, and one says, "The one who hit Mary was Joe," then the emphasis is on Joe rather than on any of Mary's other sparring partners. In "The one Joe hit was Mary," the point is made that Mary, rather than any other person, was the victim of Joe's blow. If a speaker provides a delayed explanation in a case like "He hit Mary--Joe did," then the audience is sure to realize that the hitting itself was being emphasized for some reason. If the utterance is "Mary--Joe hit her," then the emphasis shifts again. All of these constructions are commonly employed by speakers of all levels of English usage. They function as a vital technique for emphasizing a particular aspect of an occurrence.

(11) Yet another element signalling intensification is stress, a structural signal peculiar to speech. By stress is meant the relative loudness or force with which a syllable is spoken in comparison to other syllables in the same utterance. There are, however, several devices used in written English, i.e., bold face, capitals, and italics which correlate with unusual stress patterns.

H. A. Gleason, Jr. outlines two functions of stress: "It may assist in delimiting certain units in a sentence, and it may serve to identify the constructions that are so delimited."<sup>10</sup> Thus it is stress in a phrase such as round house which distinguishes a house which is round from a building used to house and switch locomotives.

In addition to delimiting and identifying, stress also functions to indicate intensification. Primary stress in a position which would ordinarily be marked by a lesser degree of stress provides emphasis. For example, in an utterance such as "That is my book," it is possible to place primary stress on any of its components. Placement of primary stress determines the idea to be intensified. If primary stress is placed on that, emphasis is being placed on that particular book as opposed to any books or articles with which it might be confused. If primary stress is placed on is, emphasis is being placed on the affirmation implicit in the statement. Primary stress placed on my emphasizes the ownership of the book. Primary stress placed on book emphasizes the identity of the article as a book rather than anything else. Bloomfield points out that when stress is used to mark emphatic forms, there is usually present an idea of contrast or

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<sup>10</sup>Linguistics and English Grammar, pp. 179-180.

contradiction to what might ordinarily be so.<sup>11</sup>

It has also been suggested that every clause contains some new information signalled by the stress-intonation center of that clause. In effect, the word which receives the primary stress is the word supplying the new or unexpected information to the listener and is in fact intensified.<sup>12</sup>

Further, primary stress is often applied to a word which is an intensive qualifier or an intensive pronoun itself in order to reinforce the intensity. Since intensives weaken and lose their force from frequent use, primary stress provides a temporary stay in the weakening process and revives what may be the dying strength of a word. When ambiguity confuses the function of an intensive, as for example, in the case of a word which might not ordinarily function so, primary stress in connection with juncture is often an indication that the word has or has not an intensifying effect. For example, applying a high degree of stress to the truly in the utterance "He speaks truly good English" helps reinforce the honesty of the "He." If the stress falls on the English, then truly

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11p. 111.

<sup>12</sup>This intensifying function of stress is treated in M.A.K. Halliday, "Notes on Transitivity and Theme in English," Journal of Linguistics, 3, pp. 37-81 and 199-244.

and good fall together, and truly serves simply to intensify good. In an expression such as "He listened so intently," primary stress on the so, followed by a pause, indicates that so means 'in this fashion.' If there is no pause after the stressed so, it becomes a definite intensive qualifier. If intently receives the primary stress, then so functions as a mild intensive qualifier.

The intensifying use of primary stress may also account for the occurrence of the absolute form of a word or phrase when ordinarily a sandhi form would occur.<sup>13</sup> For example, in an attempt to intensify, one might say "These are not good" or "This is really a house" using the absolute forms of not and a. Absolute forms are frequently used in conjunction with intensive qualifiers, as in "That is really a very nice house," where the absolute forms of is and a might logically occur.

Somewhat related to stress is the technique whereby an individual syllable or word is lengthened in order to supply additional emphasis, as in "How's my bi:g boy today?" Often this syllable is itself given unusual

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<sup>13</sup>According to Bloomfield, the form of a word or phrase as it is spoken alone is its absolute form; the forms which appear in included positions are its sandhi-forms. He lists a number of words which commonly have both absolute and sandhi-forms: a, an, the, is, has, am, are, have, had, would, will, them, not, and. Pp. 186-7.

stress at the same time.<sup>14</sup>

(12) Prepositions and adverbial particles afford yet another group of intensive elements, especially when they appear to be redundant or literally superfluous to the verb with which they are used. For example, there is no apparent literal necessity for the particles in continue on, revert back, head up, meet up with, pack up, raise up, repeat again, fill up, save up, hatch out, bleach out, miss out, cool off, dry up, and hurry up. In each case the occurrence of the particle can best be justified by the fact that the particle reinforces and gives emphasis to the meaning of the verb in question. Further, frequent use of the particle-verb combination eventually makes it so familiar that speakers begin to acquire the feeling that the verb alone does not have the strength that the verb-particle combination has and that the verb alone does not mean precisely what the combination means.

In fact, the use of unnecessary particles has become so common that in some instances the particle now signals a difference in the lexical meaning of the utterance. For example, whereas close up may be simply

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<sup>14</sup>For further discussion of gradience see Dwight L. Bolinger, Generality, Gradience, and the All-or-None.

redundant, the up serving only to intensify the close, the expression close down bears the connotation of a longer period of time and does not necessarily signal intensity. The up in shut up may have an intensive function because of the emotion with which this expression is usually fraught, but the down in shut down signals the same sort of meaning as does close down, again without adding intensity. It is further obvious that the particle contributes to the general connotation of the process of diminution or cessation of activity, as does the down in narrow down, quiet down, and calm down, three additional phrases in which the particle is literally superfluous.

As well as being intensive, the particles in sit up, sit down, jump up, and jump down also are used to indicate the position of the actor, i.e. whether he is lying down or standing before he sits, higher or lower than the level to which he will jump. Although the up in stand up may be redundant if the person was standing all the time and can function intensively, the down in stand down (from the witness stand, for example) signals an addition to the meaning of stand. It is obvious that the particles mentioned in this paragraph give directional force to the verb. Direction is also indicated by the particle present in numerous additional expressions like kneel down, bow down, fill up, and raise up, in which the particle does not,

however, suggest a sharp distinction in meaning of the verb.

The with in visit with may be regarded as functioning intensively, but it has come to signal a difference in meaning. For example, while one is visiting the Jones family, he may make it a point to visit with, i.e., have particular conversation with, a particular member of the family. The occurrence of visit with is paralleled by the existence of visit upon which connotes a sense of 'befalling.'

It should be noted further that frequently the addition of a particle to a verb enables a transitive verb to function intransitively. For example, shut is transitive, while shut up can be either transitive or intransitive. Raise is transitive, while raise up may be either transitive or intransitive. Thus it may be concluded that some particles have independent cognitive meanings and change the grammatical class of verbs, while others function simply as intensifying elements.

(13) An important group of elements used to signal intensity are compounds of the personal pronoun with self. The intensifying effect of the self pronouns under certain circumstances, as in "I myself will do it," as opposed to the reflexive use, as in "I hurt myself" is generally recognized. Myself, ourselves, thyselves, yourselves, himself,

herself, itself, ourselves, yourselves, themselves, and oneself appear regularly (or have appeared, as in the case of thymself) in the language. To this list one might add theirself, theirselves, and hissself as dialectal forms.

When these pronouns are used intensively rather than reflexively, the intensive forms stress the identity of that which they modify. Therefore, they are commonly considered to be in apposition with the words or units to which they refer. They may be placed next to their nouns, or they may refer to nouns which are sentence subjects and are separated from them by verbal elements.

Ralph B. Long points out that as appositives the intensive forms are capable of producing effects different from the straightforward intensive effect one would expect. He writes that in the sentence "Christ himself had a traitor among his followers" the Christ himself is like even Christ in force. In a sentence like "I myself am inclined to agree" the myself may be said to add an effect of modesty to the I. He points out several examples of what he terms half appositives:

He's taught Spanish himself.

She made the dress herself.

You're inclined to postpone things yourselves.

George asked Louise to come himself.

George asked Louise to come herself.

Here the pronoun forms obviously intensify the identity of their antecedents.

The half principals [Long's term for the nominal to which an appositive is in apposition] in all these sentences are the subjects of the clauses in which the self forms are adjuncts and half appositives. In George asked Louise to come herself the adjunct herself modifies the predicator come. No half principal for herself is expressed: the implied subject of come, suggested by the first complement (Louise) in the main clause, would serve as half principal if it were expressed. Half-appositive intensives characteristically refer to subjects and are half-appositives to them, and it is not unusual for the subjects to be implied rather than stated--as, for example, in do it yourself.<sup>15</sup>

The half-appositives are at times apparently concessive in function, but the emphasis put upon the concession and modesty in such cases causes the self forms still to fall within the broad area of intensification.

Today the isolated (i.e., non-appositional) self form can combine the function of a personal pronoun and the function of a signal of intensification. Thus when a speaker needs to be emphatic, he chooses the self pronoun form rather than the simple subject or object pronoun form. The isolated intensive form is commonly employed in some sort of subject relationship at the end of a sentence, when a finite verb will be omitted but will be implied, as in "He knew that his opponent was as strong as (he) himself (was)." It can

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<sup>15</sup>The Sentence and Its Parts, pp. 353-354.

also appear at the end of an independent proposition: "The person of whom I wrote was (I) myself." Or it can function as part of a predicate: "You are not (you) yourself today." Occasionally one sees the isolated intensive form as part of a compound subject at the beginning of a sentence or clause, as in "John and myself were there." This form has also been used alone dramatically in an objective position, the most famous example being a telegram sent by U.S. Grant to Secretary of War E. M. Stanton in 1865: "General Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia this afternoon on terms proposed by myself." Perhaps these self forms enjoy popularity today because they obviate the necessity of choosing between nominative and objective case forms.<sup>16</sup>

(14) Closely akin to the pronoun intensive elements are expressions with own--"my own possessions," "his very own words," "their own language." Barbara Strang terms the own's in these constructions post-positional genitive intensifiers and cites "his own house," "the house is his own," and "Shakespeare's own writing desk."<sup>17</sup> Other writers group own with determiners because

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<sup>16</sup>In addition the self forms are sometimes more modest. That is, "proposed by myself" seems modest or self-effacing when contrasted with the starker and simpler "proposed by me." This use, however, is anti-intensifying.

<sup>17</sup>Modern English Structure, p. 112.

it is part of a genitive construction that most often is used in determining function. Own tends to emphasize the permanence of the possessive relationship, an aspect which might not be clear with a genitive alone. The patterning of own with other intensive elements is obviously restricted; i.e. one can say "my very own" but not "my really own" or "my surely own" or "my own very."

(15) The elements that most clearly signal intensification in English fall into a syntactically defined class whose members modify adjectives and adverbs. In traditional grammar these intensives are called adverbs of degree. However, because they are often not adverbial in form and because some members of the syntactic class do not express degree, it has become common to term these words qualifiers. Some words which may function as qualifiers also have other grammatical functions in other utterances. For example, consider "He runs surprisingly fast" and "Surprisingly, he runs fast." Pretty frequently functions as a qualifier ("I did pretty well indeed"), but it is identical in form with pretty, an adjective. The two pretty's share a common historical source but they function within different syntactic classes. This study will treat a word as a qualifier when that word fills the grammatical slot preceding adjectives or adverbs or other qualifiers and when it functions within this slot to modify the word following it.

The focus will, however, be on syntactic qualifiers that are semantically intensifying.

It should be noted that the class of qualifiers does include words other than semantically intensifying words. Downtoners, words which express moderate degrees of qualities, fall into this syntactic class--for instance, less in "less useful." They, too, qualify the degree of a quality though in the opposite direction from intensifiers. On the other hand, an adverb like grammatically in "grammatically useful" fills the qualifier slot but limits the referential range of the adjective rather than giving any information about degree.

The following list is of semantically intensifying qualifiers that are common in contemporary usage. It by no means pretends to be a complete list, but it does cover most of those words included in typical lists of intensive qualifiers and most of those qualifiers frequently heard in American English: absolutely, all, altogether, any awful, awfully, clean, comfortably, completely, conspicuously, damn, damned, decidedly, dreadfully, emphatically, enormously, enough, entirely, even, exactly, exceedingly, extremely, fairly, far, frightfully, genuinely, gloriously, goddamn, hardly, highly, how, incredibly, just, largely, literally, mighty, monstrous, more, most, much, only, own, perfectly, plenty, pretty, pure, purely, quite, rather,

real, really, reasonably, right, scrupulously, severely,  
simply, so, some, somehow, somewhat, still, straight,  
strongly, sure, surely, surprisingly, terribly, thoroughly,  
too, totally, truly, utterly, very, virtually, (a)way,  
well, whole, wholly, wonderfully. The following phrases  
also function as intensive qualifiers: a good deal,  
a little, a little mite, a whole lot, all the more, far  
and away, good and, kind of, more and more, more or less,  
nice and, quite a bit, and so much. Various forms of pro-  
fanity and numerous euphemisms for God and damn expand the  
list still further.<sup>18</sup>

The qualifiers in the foregoing list are qualifiers generally recognized as intensifying. However, the list by no means embraces all of the qualifiers which may function intensively, for the class of intensive qualifiers

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<sup>18</sup>H. L. Mencken provides a generous list of euphemisms for God and damn in The American Language, Supplement I, pp. 664-665. Several of the expressions he offers can fill the qualifier position, e.g., all-fired, blamed, blasted, blowed, confounded, darned, durned, dashed, cursed, danged, deuced, dinged, switched, swiggered, swoggled. Others will fill the position with the addition of a suffix which makes them adjectival in form, e.g., drat(ted), blame(d), blast(ed), darn(ed), cuss(ed), dang(ed), ding(ed), durn(ed), goldarn(ed), goldang(ed), doggone(d), consarn(ed), goldast(ed), goshdarn(ed), goshdurn(ed), dad-blame(d), dad-blast(ed), dad-burn(ed), dad-shame(d), dad-sizzle(d), dad-rat(ted), dad-seize(d), dad-swamp(ed), dad-snatch(d), dad-rot(ted), dad-fetch(ed), dad-gum(med), dad-gast(ed), ding-bust(ed), dag-nab(bed), ding-blast(ed), horn-swoggle(d).

is to a large degree an open class. Speakers of English freely use other qualifiers as intensives in an attempt to be creative. For example, in each of the following expressions, a qualifier functions as an intensifier and supplies additional connotations at the same time through its literal meaning. In effect, the qualifier draws upon its own lexical meaning to make the intensification more striking. Thus one encounters constructions like the following: "a remarkably fine day," "a strikingly different costume," "a frighteningly near explosion," "an incredibly short time," "an overwhelmingly large majority," "a respectfully silent crowd," "a satisfyingly simple answer," "a disturbingly loud remark," and "a firmly closed mind."

The positions which intensive qualifiers occupy in constructions now take on special significance. The intensive qualifier has already been defined largely in terms of its position; i.e. it is a word which fills the grammatical slot preceding adjectives or adverbs or other qualifiers and which functions within this slot to modify the word which follows it. It falls within that group of grammatical elements sometimes called function words which are important in indicating relationships among form classes in English utterances. Intensive qualifiers do not pattern with verbs or nouns as adjectives and adverbs do. Rather, they signal that the word following is an adjective or

adverb and not a noun or verb. Paul Roberts supplies an example of this function: "For example, . . . an orderly room is ambiguous, at least in writing, since we don't know whether orderly is a noun or an adjective. But a very orderly room is unambiguous, for very signals the adjective. Similarly, a rather moving van must mean a van that stirs the emotions; it can't mean a van in motion or a van for moving furniture. 'He was rather potted' must mean he was drunk; it can't mean his remains were placed in an urn."<sup>19</sup>

The fact that qualifiers often resemble the morphological class labeled adverb may contribute to a confusion in distinguishing them. It has been mentioned previously that the two classes have some overlapping of membership and position in utterances. Intensive qualifiers may be homophonous with simple adverbs. For example, the qualifier in "terribly tired" is homophonous with the adverb in "He sang terribly." They may be homophonous with simple adjectives; i.e. the qualifier in "mighty tired" is homophonous with the adjective in "mighty warrior." They may occur singly, as in the examples just cited, or in varying combinations, as in "really terribly tired" or "really mighty nice."

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<sup>19</sup>Understanding English, p. 200.

Intensive qualifiers occur in varying relationships to each other. All fill the position immediately preceding the adjective or adverb, "very tired" for example. Some can also precede another qualifier, so in "so very tired," for example. Some can precede a combination of several qualifiers and the word they modify, "really so very tired," for example. All qualifiers are not interchangeable, however.<sup>20</sup>

Both adjectives and adverbs commonly occur in three forms, which have traditionally been termed the positive, comparative, and superlative degrees. In considering these six forms, one discovers by a process of elimination that the most common intensive qualifiers pattern with these forms according to a regular, rather simple system of distribution. In order to illustrate this system, let us extract from the long list of qualifiers already mentioned those most frequently listed by grammarians and observed in use as common intensive qualifiers: a good deal, a whole lot, any, awful, awfully, damned, even, extremely, fairly, far, far and away, good and, just, mighty, more,

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<sup>20</sup>The problems in attempting to define categories of intensive qualifiers in terms of distribution or collocation are illustrated in a study by Sidney Greenbaum (Verb-Intensifier Collocations in English, Janua Linguarum, Series Minor, No. 86) which is relevant to a study of intensive qualifiers. His concern is restrictions or cooccurrences of "intensifiers" with verbs. By "intensifiers" he means adverbs that may occur before verbs and which heighten

more or less, most, much, only, pretty, quite, quite a bit, rather, real, really, right, simply, so, some, somehow, somewhat, still, terribly, too, very, and (a)way. Since these particular qualifiers appear so commonly, it is reasonable to assume that they constitute a sample adequate and valid for specific study.

The distribution of intensive qualifiers is not determined only by the form of the intensive qualifier itself; i.e., intensive qualifiers homophonous with adjectives do not pattern differently from intensive qualifiers homophonous with adverbs or intensive qualifiers which are phrases. There is no relation between the form of the intensive qualifier and its distribution in English utterances. For example, one hears equally "awful fast," "extremely fast," and "nice and fast."

It becomes obvious then that intensive qualifiers fall into four general categories based on the positions

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the force of the verbs. He chooses for his study certainly, really, badly, (very) much, greatly, entirely, utterly, and completely. As part of his study he differentiates among what he calls degree intensifiers in terms of their patterning. However, he runs into problems early. Although he draws upon numerous tests and informants as a basis for analysis of the distribution of intensifiers, some of the forms he cites as not occurring do in fact occur. In setting up classes of degree intensifiers, he offers such as "\*How totally" and "\*However entirely" as examples of constructions which would not occur. However, in the interests of achieving intensity, such constructions do appear in informal contemporary usage. Thus his study serves further to illustrate the problems of categorizing intensive elements according to collocation and distribution.

they fill in English utterances rather than on their own forms alone. All of them will fill the position immediately preceding some form(s) of the adjective or adverb ("very pretty," "terribly happy"). However, if this position is already filled with a qualifier, not all qualifiers will fill the position immediately preceding this qualifier, i.e., the second qualifier position. Some will, e.g., "really very good," but others will precede only specific qualifier forms, e.g., "very damned good" but not "\*very really nice." When the two positions immediately preceding the adjective or adverb are filled, some (but not all) qualifiers will fill the position immediately preceding them, the third qualifier position, e.g., "really terribly damned nice," but "\*terribly really damned nice." However, the determining factor here is the form of the qualifier in this second position.

Closer observation reveals that there is a pattern to this apparently random distribution within utterances. The distribution depends primarily upon three factors: the form of the qualifier itself, the form of the qualifier which follows the qualifier in question, and the form of the adjective or adverb following the qualifier in question. Is the qualifier itself homophonous with an adjective or adverb? Is the adjective or adverb which follows in the positive, comparative, or superlative degree form? (Apparently in the case of adverbs, degree is more important

than whether the word is an adverb of manner, time, or place.) Is the qualifier a phrase (more or less, quite a bit)?

It has been stated earlier that altogether there are four categories of intensive qualifiers. At this point it should be mentioned that within each category there are qualifiers homophonous with adjectives, qualifiers homophonous with adverbs, and qualifiers which are in themselves phrases but which function as single intensive qualifiers. The categories themselves are determined by the form of the adjective or adverb which the qualifiers will precede. When a qualifier can precede, for example, the positive degree form of an adjective, it can also precede the positive degree form of an adverb ("pretty good," "pretty fast," "pretty soon," "pretty terribly," "pretty near"). It should also be mentioned that more and most come into play in dual roles. In the first place more and most are frequently used instead of -er and -est to form the comparative and superlative degrees of many adjectives and most adverbs. In such constructions they are indeed qualifiers, though the whole phrase is a comparative or superlative form. However, more and most are also used themselves as intensive qualifiers rather than as signals of degree. When they function intensively, they do not pattern with comparative and superlative

degree forms.

The first category is comprised of qualifiers which precede positive degree forms of adjectives and adverbs ("awful near," "\*awful nearer," "awful good," "\*awful better" "awful best"). In the group of qualifiers studied, the following qualifiers fall within this category: awful, awfully, extremely, fairly, good and, mighty, more, most, pretty, quite, real, right, so, terribly, too, and very. Each qualifier within this category will comfortably precede other qualifiers in combinations, and the qualifiers which they precede may be homophonous with both adjectives and adverbs ("pretty damned tired," "right terribly done in"). Each qualifier within this category can be preceded in turn by other qualifiers, but they seem to be preceded most often only by qualifiers homophonous with adverbs ("simply pretty tired," "\*damned pretty tired").

The second category is composed of qualifiers which precede the comparative degree forms of adjectives and adverbs ("still tireder" "\*still happiest," "much sooner," "\*much soonest"). Among members of this category are a whole lot, any, far, much, and still. The qualifiers within this category will precede other qualifiers in two- or three-qualifier combinations. However, a whole lot, and far, will precede only adjectives and adverbs which exist in some sort of comparative degree form ("a whole lot

closer," "far shorter," "\*far closest"). Still will precede qualifiers homophonous with both adjectives and adverbs ("still nicer," "still more terribly). Still, much and any demand that the adjective or adverb following be in the comparative degree form ("still younger," "\*still youngest" "much nicer," "\*much nicest," "any more difficult," "\*any most difficult,"), but still and much will also pattern with a superlative degree form preceded by the ("much the youngest"). Each of these qualifiers can be preceded by other qualifiers, but the principles determining the types of qualifiers which precede them are unclear.

Members of the third category of qualifiers are qualifiers which will precede both the positive and comparative degree forms of adjectives and adverbs ("rather soon," "rather sooner," "\*rather soonest," "quite suitable," "quite more suitable," "some good," "some better," "somewhat rapid," "somewhat more rapid"). Members of this category include a good deal, quite, quite a bit, rather, some, and somewhat. These qualifiers will precede other qualifiers in combinations, and the qualifiers they precede may be homophonous with both adjectives and adverbs. However, they demand that the word following be in the positive or comparative degree form ("quite terribly torn," "quite a bit too early," "some damned good," "some greater

good," "#quite a bit most important"). Each of these qualifiers is not freely preceded by another qualifier. However, really and still can precede each of these qualifiers, and so perhaps can on occasion ("really somewhat nice," "still a good deal better," "so quite acceptable").

The final category of qualifiers will pattern before all three forms of adjectives and adverbs--positive, comparative, and superlative degrees. (A)way, damned, even, far and away, just, more or less, only, really, somehow, and simply are among the members of this class ("really nicest," "more or less nice," "somehow better"). Members of this category will combine with other qualifiers and will precede qualifiers which are homophonous with both adjectives and adverbs ("simply terribly exciting," "really pretty tired").

These four categories are as far as formal analysis has been carried out here. Beyond this step it may be necessary to deal with meaning, with semantics, if one wishes to break down the categories further, or there may be structural classes that have not been isolated yet. So far, there is no explanation for the fact that the utterance "He is simply terribly fed up" is possible, whereas "He is terribly simply fed up" is incoherent. The difference may depend on the meaning of the individual lexical items, or it may

rest on some more general grammatical distinction that has not been discovered.<sup>21</sup>

It should be obvious, nevertheless, that the apparently random distribution of intensive qualifiers is indeed ordered. More remains to be said later about the distribution of specific qualifiers as they are discussed in later chapters. It does seem reasonable, however, that most qualifiers will fall into one of these four general categories according to the positions they most commonly assume in relation to the words following them.

Despite the numerous obvious distinctions between intensive qualifiers and other adjectives and adverbs, many traditionalists have not acknowledged the need to recognize them as a unique class of modifiers. George O. Curme, for example, says in a book published in 1931 that "the most common way to express the absolute superlative is to place before the positive of the adjective a simple adverb such as very . . . or real (widely used in colloquial American speech)."<sup>22</sup> As late as 1959 Margaret Bryant was writing along the same simplistic lines in explaining that very

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<sup>21</sup>Harry Spitzbardt has in fact classified intensive qualifiers according to meaning in a study, "English Adverbs of Degree and Their Semantic Fields," Philologica Pragensia 8, 349-359. Although he does not deal with their patterning with each other, he sets up sixteen semantic fields into which he places 482 intensifying adverbs.

<sup>22</sup>Syntax, p. 507.

and "similar words" belong in the same class as exceedingly as adverbs of degree, that this is one of the "numerous varied uses" of the adverb.<sup>23</sup> She apparently means by adverb of degree more or less what is meant here by intensive qualifier.

However, the basic problem of classification of elements within language was recognized and stated in 1921 by Edward Sapir, who stressed the fact that although the linguist is not interested in any abstract and universal scheme of the parts of speech--"their number, nature, and necessary confines,"<sup>24</sup> language analysis depends on the scheme within each individual language, on the formal demarcations which it recognizes.<sup>25</sup> He goes on to state that "No language fails to distinguish noun and verb, though in particular cases the nature of the distinction may be an elusive one. It is different with the other parts of speech. Not one of them is imperatively required for the life of the language."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>A Functional English Grammar, p. 190.

<sup>24</sup>Language, p. 119.

<sup>25</sup>Those scholars who are interested in universal schemes of language would certainly disagree with Sapir's premise.

<sup>26</sup>Sapir, p. 119.

It is perhaps the fact that intensive qualifiers are not "imperatively required" on an individual basis that accounts for their vagueness of sense. The presence or absence of a qualifier rarely alters the fundamental meaning of an utterance. Thus a sampling from common desk dictionaries reveals much imprecision in the definitions of intensive qualifiers. Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary defines quite as 'rather,' rather as 'somewhat' or 'in some degree,' really as 'actually' and truly and very as 'to a high degree' and 'exceedingly.' The American College Dictionary defines quite as 'really' and 'truly' and both quite and really as 'actually'; it also defines very as 'extremely' and 'exceedingly,' while quite is 'to a considerable extent or degree,' and rather is 'to a certain extent,' and very is 'in a high degree.' The confusion and duplication evident in this collection of definitions underlines the imprecision with which these qualifiers are defined and reinforces the idea that their primary function is to add emphasis despite whatever etymological meanings they may have had earlier. In fact, The American College Dictionary at one point simply calls very an intensive.

It is obvious to the most naive speaker of English that these words are all exchangeable in patterning. One can say "It is very hot," "It is quite hot," "It is really

hot," "It is rather hot," "It is bloody hot," or "It is damned hot" with equal facility and with the expectation of being easily understood. However, it is also apparent to any speaker of English that these expressions are not entirely synonymous. They are not interchangeable in meaning, and particularly not in the situations in which they are used.

A group of Pennsylvania college women sensed widely differing connotations evoked by each of the expressions mentioned above. They decided that "It is rather hot" and "It is bloody hot" seemed British to them, and they asserted that they would expect the speakers to be British subjects. It is probable that they tended to equate the fact that these expressions were not commonly used in their area and the fact that they did hear these expressions in British films. They joined "It is rather hot" and "It is quite hot," however, as expressions which seemed sophisticated to them when used by American speakers. They said that they would expect these speakers to be well educated. "It is really hot" and "It is very hot" were the expressions most familiar to them, and they felt that these expressions conveyed an impression of average "American." "It is damned hot" was considered by them to be mild profanity, inappropriate under most circumstances, but the strongest of the expressions given.

Asked to rank the intensive qualifiers in order from weakest to strongest, the students decided on the following order: rather, quite, very, really, bloody, damned. The group were then confronted with the simple statement "It is hot," spoken slowly, with primary stress on each word. They were then divided in opinion. Some of them felt that this was the strongest expression of all, while others felt that it was the weakest because no intensive qualifier was included. None of them were conscious of the fact that the unvarying stress was itself unusual and was a form of intensification. Not one of the students, however, felt that all of the expressions were equal either in meaning or in intensity.

Let it be granted that this sort of experiment is greatly simplified and that this group of respondents was fairly naive. However, the reaction illustrates two facts: first, even if intensive qualifiers have lost much of their original meaning and force, the choice of one qualifier over another makes a definite difference in meaning, slight as it may be; second, the elimination of intensive qualifiers entirely and the reliance on unusual stress patterns may be itself a forceful sort of intensification.

As one examines the phenomenon of intensification more closely, it becomes increasingly obvious that intensification is not an element of language which yields

itself to simple definition and easy analysis. As an area of study, its implications are broad; thus one must perforce choose to limit his observations to one aspect of the subject.

It has been indicated earlier that the intensive qualifier is a form of intensification occurring frequently in contemporary speech and writing. Further, the qualifier is the intensive form most easy to recognize and suffering least from ambiguity of interpretation. Yet ironically very little attention has been given this element, and that attention which has been directed toward it has been largely pejorative in nature. Despite this criticism, however, the intensive qualifier continues to occur freely, as it has for centuries. Therefore, this study will concern itself primarily with a discussion of intensive qualifiers, giving attention to their historical development and to their current distribution in the language.

## CHAPTER II

### HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE INTENSIVE QUALIFIER

#### The Weakening Process

It has been stated in Chapter I that although the intensive qualifier is a common form of intensification in contemporary speech and writing, far too little critical attention has been given it. It has not been singled out for study even though its widespread use is by no means limited to present-day English. Furthermore, usage over the centuries has brought about changes in meaning of individual intensive qualifiers. It seems appropriate then that before we proceed to an examination of the distribution of this form in contemporary speech and writing, we devote some attention to the historical development of the intensive qualifiers.

It has been noted in Chapter I that intensive qualifiers commonly weaken in meaning over a period of time as they are more frequently used. The semantic weakening was explained as being a result of the following combination of factors. The more familiar intensive qualifiers become, the less effective they are. Because of the natural human propensity toward exaggeration, speakers constantly search for stronger and more emphatic expressions, while their listeners efficiently separate the literal denotations of

an isolated word from its application within a particular statement. In many cases the meaning of a word in context is considerably less than its etymology would indicate.

Let us now examine this weakening process as it affects intensive qualifiers in general. Having done so, we shall proceed to examine the development of particular intensive qualifiers over a period of time with an eye to a historical overview of the pattern they illustrate.

Many intensive qualifiers begin as adjectives or adverbs referring to absolute or incomparable qualities. Both absolute adjectives and other adjectives which become intensive qualifiers are first used in the full sense of their lexical meanings. For example, awful was originally used in the sense of 'awe inspiring'; a terrible object was one which evoked terror; when Chaucer applied very to a character, his audience recognized the implications of truth attached to the word.

However, frequent use of strong adjectives makes them too familiar to be effective, so a pattern becomes evident in their development, a pattern in which they progressively weaken in meaning as they are reduced to intensive qualifiers. These adjectives come to be used more and more frequently in combination with other powerful adjectives in order to gain force. Consider this

hypothetical example. A writer might describe his monster not merely as an "awful monster" but as an "awful, grotesque monster." It is reasonable to conjecture that the next step in the weakening of the adjective might be the omission, in speech, of the intonation terminal and, in writing, of the comma that represents it, so that awful seems to modify grotesque rather than monster, and one writes about an "awful grotesque monster." In the final step, the adjective loses its adjectival force along with its original connotation and picks up an -ly adverbial ending. It becomes an intensifying adverb, a qualifier whose primary function is simply to intensify the force of adjectival elements which follow it. It loses its unique lexical meaning and takes on the function of intensifying the degree of the quality expressed in the word following. As intensifying qualifiers weaken in force, they no longer fulfill their original purposes, and speakers and writers turn to newer and fresher qualifiers, qualifiers which are more effective because they are less familiar. However, frequent use destroys the novelty of fresh qualifiers, and, as they eventually weaken, they need the support of still other fresh qualifiers which will themselves eventually weaken and be replaced. Thus a pattern emerges wherein words progressively weaken in meaning. Most intensive qualifiers fit the pattern by sharing two common factors:

first, they originally refer to very strong or absolute qualities, and second, they gradually weaken in force and in meaning.

Because it has not been the practice in the past to treat qualifiers as a separate syntactic group, intensive qualifiers have been most often referred to as falling into the class of adverbs. It is helpful at this point to refer to the master list of intensive qualifiers compiled on page thirty-five in Chapter I. Most of them would traditionally have been labeled adverbs of degree; all of them have shared in the process of weakening of meaning.

Let us now consider individually a number of these intensive qualifiers, concerning ourselves primarily with their historical development as they have become associated more and more with intensification and less and less with their etymological meanings.

Individual intensive qualifiers have been selected for examination in this chapter for several specific reasons. First, they are themselves the qualifiers grammarians use most frequently in compiling lists of intensive qualifiers. They appear on virtually every such list and have in fact been extracted from the longer lists of currently used qualifiers supplied in Chapter I. Second, they are, with the exception of one small group, the qualifiers which do in fact appear with a great deal of

frequency in present-day English. Third, they are typical in their historical development, in that each has progressively weakened in force.

They fall into three groups, each of which will be treated separately. The first group consists of qualifiers which are widely used today on all levels of usage. The qualifiers falling into this group are awfully, even, extremely, much, quite, rather, really, simply, so, still, surely, too, and very.

The second group of qualifiers consists of those qualifiers which are widely used today but which are somewhat restricted as to levels of usage. Members of this group are mighty, only, pretty, and right.

The third group of qualifiers is made of those which are rarely used today except in colloquial, dialectal, or certain pat expressions. However, these qualifiers have been widely used in the past and occur frequently in literature of past periods and in the informal speech of certain dialect areas today. Thus any kind of historical overview would be incomplete without them. The qualifiers within this group are considerable, desperate, full, jolly, mortal, and pure.

The lists of the preceding paragraphs are not exhaustive. The discussion here cannot attempt to provide a thorough historical examination of all intensive qualifiers. However, the lists do afford a representative



### Group I

The first group of qualifiers to be examined are qualifiers which are widely distributed in contemporary American usage. More than that, however, they occur consistently on multiple levels of usage and appear in both formal and informal expression. By examining each qualifier in terms of its chronological development, it will be made evident that this group of qualifiers illustrates the overall weakening of lexical meaning characteristic of intensive qualifiers.

Qualifiers which will be considered in this group are the following, and they will be examined in the order in which they are listed: awfully, even, extremely, much, quite, rather, really, simply, so, still, surely, too, and very.

#### Awfully

It is interesting to note that despite the fact that awful (from the Scandinavian a3i and awfully have been used since the Middle English period, awfully was comparatively late in assuming an intensive function. The original meaning of awfully was 'in a manner characterized by awe or dread,' as is illustrated in a 1375 Oxford English Dictionary citation, "lukit he awfully." This meaning has apparently died hard; and awfully continued to be used in this sense into the Modern period. Thus

we have as evidence a 1687 citation, "The lion awfully forbids the prey," and an 1839 entry, "awfully were his features wrought."

By the nineteenth century, however, awfully had largely lost its original connotation of awe and was reduced in meaning to the point where it functioned simply to intensify. In fact, it has been pointed out that awfully was the intensive adverb most in vogue during the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary supplies numerous citations as evidence of the intensive distribution of awfully during this century. In 1830 we find "awfully sad," in 1842 "awfully bad," in 1849, "awfully clever."

In the twentieth century awfully rarely appears in the sense of provoking awe and appears most commonly as a simple intensive qualifier meaning 'very.' Today little distinction is made between the forms awful and awfully when they are used as qualifiers except for the fact that awfully is considered better usage by those who recognize that an adverbial form normally modifies adjectives, other adverbs, and verbs.

Thus it may be seen that the evolution of awful and awfully into intensive qualifiers exemplifies the overall

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Carpenter Fries, American English Grammar, p. 203.

weakening of lexical meaning typical of intensive qualifiers. The qualifier comes into the language functioning as an adjective with specific semantic associations. Because of the force of its meaning, it begins to be used intensively and exists as both adjective and intensive qualifier for a time. Ultimately, it loses its original adjectival force and functions simply as an intensive, until it means little more than 'very.' In succeeding pages it will be shown that the stages in this development of awfully are applicable to other intensive qualifiers as well.

### Even

Another common intensive qualifier is even, from the Old English efne. Its original adverbial meaning was 'exactly,' 'precisely,' or 'just.' However, early in its development it began to assume an intensive function, although it has not always functioned as an intensive qualifier. The Oxford English Dictionary draws the earliest intensive citations of even from the Old English period in "efne swa" constructions. The editors go on to supply thirteenth century examples, one of which is "efne bisse worden," dated 1204; and citations from succeeding centuries indicate that even consistently continued to function intensively.

The fourteenth century supplies "stand even in," dated 1340. The fifteenth century provides the phrase "even into ship," dated 1400. In the sixteenth century we encounter again an intensive use of even which has persisted through the years in "even so," dated 1576. From the seventeenth century we extract a 1611 citation, "even before." The eighteenth century supplies "even on that occasion," dated 1776. In the nineteenth century even began to appear commonly in constructions which are clearly recognized as incorporating intensive qualifiers. Citations such as "even greater" and "even more applicable" illustrate this use. During this time period even was used particularly to emphasize comparative qualities.

This brief group of citations ranging from the Old English period through the nineteenth century clearly show that even has been used intensively since the Old English period. Other forms of the word have existed side by side with its intensive form, but as time has passed, it has come to be more and more widely utilized as an intensive qualifier.

In the modern period even has come to be an extremely versatile intensive word. For example, even can function as an intensive qualifier occurring before adjectives and adverbs ("even prettier" and "even now") and prepositional phrases functioning as adverbs ("even in the morning "). When even is used as a qualifier

preceding adjectives and adverbs, it patterns most usually before the comparative degree forms of these words or before more. However, even will precede certain other forms, such as "even happy."<sup>2</sup>

### Extremely

Extremely (from the French extreme) was used literally in the sixteenth century to indicate something to the uttermost degree, something farthest from center. However, its meaning speedily began to weaken, and it was used as an intensive qualifier during the same century. The Oxford English Dictionary provides several examples of this usage in citations such as "extremely crooked," dated 1540, and "extremely racked," dated 1563.

During succeeding centuries its force weakened still further. In the seventeenth century we find "extremely dangerous," dated 1638, as an example of its intensive force, while a 1776 citation, "extremely favorable," serves to illustrate its distribution in the

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<sup>2</sup> Even also functions to intensify other constructions. It can be used before nouns ("Even Ann Agreed"), verbs ("He even promised"), nouns and their modifiers ("even the poets"), and dependent clauses ("even after they promised"). In these constructions even is not an intensive qualifier in the strict sense of the definition because it does not precede adjectives or adverbs. However, it is here obviously intensive in function, and these intensive constructions are perhaps as common today as constructions where even is clearly an intensive qualifier.

eighteenth century. It became quite common indeed in the nineteenth century, having lost virtually all of its original etymological meaning in expressions such as "extremely strong and cool," dated 1889.

In the twentieth century extremely functions to a large degree as an ordinary intensive qualifier with the force of very.

### Much

The word much (from the late Old English mycel) has been widely used since Middle English times in the sense of 'great.' Early in its development, however, it began to function as an intensive qualifier, and it has continued to function intensively simultaneously with its adjectival and nominal functions. It has been employed both before single-word modifiers and before modifiers composed of phrases.

Much was used intensively as early as the fifteenth century. This is illustrated in Oxford English Dictionary citations "miche bisie," dated 1449, and "much gladly," dated 1490. Since busy is an adjective and gladly is an adverb, the use of much in these two constructions fulfills the definition of the intensive qualifier set up in this paper.

In the sixteenth century much came to be used intensively to precede other than adjectives or adverbs.

The Oxford English Dictionary provides a 1551 entry, "much like uncourteis," as an illustration of this sort of patterning.

Much continued to be used as an intensive qualifier in the seventeenth century. The Oxford English Dictionary provides a 1650 construction "much delightful" as proof. In discussing the use of much during the eighteenth century, the dictionary editors equate it with very, thus proving that by the eighteenth century much was solidly established as an intensive qualifier. "Much unkind," dated 1796, is offered as evidence.<sup>3</sup>

In the nineteenth century much was quite commonly used to function intensively, as is illustrated in an 1838 citation, "much different." Jespersen suggests that in expressions like the following nineteenth century citations, much is a 'strengthened,' i.e. an intensive, meaning nearly. He cites "much the same thing," "kept pretty much to the same," "much such a part," "much such a sort of

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<sup>3</sup>Jespersen suggests that during this century "a good deal," "a great deal," "considerably" and "far" were used as more or less synonymous with much. He supplies citations from Fielding ("far the greater number are of the mixt kind") and from Walpole ("a man a good deal the elder of Francis") to substantiate this usage. Modern English Grammar, Part VII, p. 401.

earthen jar," and "relapsing much into its usual state."<sup>4</sup> This intensive usage of much as close in meaning to nearly is borne out by an 1875 citation in the Oxford English Dictionary, "much the largest river." Stoffel provides yet other citations which support the same principle.<sup>5</sup>

In the twentieth century much is frequently employed as an intensive qualifier in combinations with other qualifiers. For example, one commonly hears phrases like "very much" with participial adjectives like pleased and amused or with too as in "very much too young." One also hears the less formal "pretty much."

The use of much with a single participial modifier is common today in constructions like "much obliged" or "much inclined to agree."

### Quite

Quite, derived from the Old French quite, seems to have begun to function intensively in the Middle English period, when it meant 'completely,' 'wholly,' 'altogether,' 'entirely.' The Oxford English Dictionary supplies

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<sup>4</sup>Modern English Grammar, p. 400 ff.

<sup>5</sup>C. Stoffel, Intensifiers and Downtoners, p. 151 ff. A number of references to this monograph will be found in the pages following. The monograph is heavily annotated, and the first half is directed specifically to intensives. Many of Stoffel's statements are somewhat dated, and this fact will be pointed out when it is applicable.

citations which indicate that in this sense quite dates from the fourteenth century. For example, a 1375 entry, "Blynd I ame quhyt," implies that the speaker is entirely blind.

Citations drawn from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries indicate that this meaning was sustained through these periods. "Quite upright," dated 1597, and "quite dead," dated 1604, serve as typical examples. By the eighteenth century, however, the meaning had expanded to include implications of 'actually,' 'really,' and 'truly,' This usage draws on the implication that the circumstances surrounding the utterance are such that they fully justify the use of the word thus qualified. Phrases such as "quite smart and handsome," and "quite Anglican character" are supplied as examples of the expanded meaning of quite.

Quite continued to be used intensively through the nineteenth century, as the 1861 entry, "quite certain," illustrates. It retained to some extent its associations with completeness.

By the twentieth century, however, it has become increasingly obvious that quite is used far more commonly in the sense of 'very' than in the sense of 'absolutely' or 'completely.' What was in the eighteenth century an expansion of the original meaning of the word has in fact led to a progressive weakening of its meaning.

To some degree quite has lost the sense of completeness, and when we say that something is "quite good," for example, we do not imply that it is perfectly good or that it can not be better. We simply mean that it is very good indeed.

In terms of position, quite has historically been used before noun phrases, as in "quite a nice job" and "quite the young man," as well as before adjectives and adverbs, as in "quite nice." Today, it is more formal than informal. Its development historically is typical of intensive qualifiers; as it has come to be used more as an intensive, it has weakened in a literal, lexical sense. Today it means little more than very.

### Rather

The meaning of rather (from the Old English hraþor) has shifted sharply over the centuries. During the Old English and Middle English periods it was used to denote precedence in time as in "Atte a rather [earlier] and nerre day," 1429. In the seventeenth century, however, it began to be applied to adjectives and adverbs with a more general meaning and was used to express 'to some extent' and 'somewhat,' as an Oxford English Dictionary citation, "rather bitter," dated 1662, illustrates. In this sense rather was used as a limiter or downtoner rather than as an intensive, but as a qualifier nevertheless. In the eighteenth century, rather continued to function as a

qualifier expressing a restrained intensity, as "rather inconvenient," dated 1761, illustrates.

In the twentieth century rather frequently displays a reversal of meaning and is used as an intensive qualifier rather than as a downtoner. "That was rather good" is today a forceful, emphatic statement, although it is perhaps the tone of voice which influences the interpretation of rather as an intensive.

### Really

Really (from the Anglo-Norman real) has been in common usage since the fifteenth century, when it was used to emphasize the speaker's belief in the truth or correctness of a statement. By the seventeenth century its meaning had weakened, and it had been reduced to an intensive qualifier. The Oxford English Dictionary provides a 1610 citation, "really blessed," as an early example of its intensive use.

In the eighteenth century really continued to function as an intensive qualifier ("really frightful," 1772, for example), and was frequently coupled with truly as a sort of doubly strong qualifier. Citations such as "real good," 1718, and "real fine," 1827, suggest that the colloquial real has alternated with really since the eighteenth century. Really functioned as an intensive

qualifier on through the nineteenth century and has become one of the more widely distributed intensive qualifiers in use today. The close association of really and truly has also continued into this century.

### Simply

Simply (from the French simple) was first used in English during the Middle English period, when it expressed an absence of complexity, of compositeness, of intricacy. In the sixteenth century it began to be used intensively because it had come to mean 'without exception,' 'absolutely.' Thus to say that something was "simply good" was to say that it was intrinsically good under all circumstances. However, this forceful meaning of simply quickly began to weaken, and during the sixteenth century one could already apply simply to modifiers without intending to imply the full force of its meaning. One could say that something was "simply good" without meaning literally that it was always good under all conditions, for example. The Oxford English Dictionary supplies the first citation of simply as an intensive qualifier in the phrase "simply the best," dated 1590.

The editors go on to supply citations which illustrate that simply continued to be used as an intensive qualifier through succeeding centuries. For example, they

provide "simply necessary," dated 1621, and "simply undeniable," dated 1856, setting up a progression that runs through the nineteenth century.

In the twentieth century simply is widely used as an intensive qualifier in both formal and informal speech. As an intensive, it merely adds emphasis without the associations of its original etymological meaning.<sup>6</sup>

### So

So is yet another of the most widely used intensive qualifiers today. The Oxford English Dictionary supplies proof that so (from the Old English swa) has been used intensively as well as comparatively from the time of the earliest written records. The editors observe that in affirmative clauses it has commonly been used as an intensive without comparative force from the Old English period through the present day.

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<sup>6</sup>C.S. Lewis devotes some attention to simply in Studies in Words, p. 167 ff. He writes that in essence simply functions like the Greek adverb haplos, which means 'intrinsically,' 'unconditionally,' 'not in relation to special circumstances.' The opposite of haplos can be expressed by some form of reservation, by an expression like "in a way," "in a sense," or "up to a point." He maintains that our older writers used simply in this sense and to use it otherwise is a logical absurdity. He says, for example, that a bone might be good for a dog, but a bone is not good simply. While still in the animal, it was good for him, and it may be good some day for a paleontologist, but it is never good simply. Current use of simply as an intensive qualifier is a manifestation of its 'deterioration' of logical meaning.

The earliest examples of the intensive use of so date from the Old English period. The phrase "swa openlice" is typical. So was used intensively in the thirteenth century, as the citation "swa wraðe," dated 1225, illustrates. In the fourteenth century phrases such as "so myghty," dated 1340, were apparently common.

The fifteenth century supplies a 1412 entry, "flesche so frele," as typical. Moreover, during this century the construction "so--as" was being used in simple affirmative sentences to express intensity. The "so--as" construction continued to be used in the sixteenth century in phrases such as "so soon as the all-cheering sun." Entries such as "so swete," dated 1503, continue to illustrate the intensive use of so.

The seventeenth century supplies the phrase "so dogged," dated 1629, to illustrate the intensive function of so, while the "so--as" construction continued to flourish, as the phrase "so harsh a name as madness" illustrates. Numerous illustrations prove that in the eighteenth century constructions with "as--as" became quite common along with the "so--as" constructions. These constructions seem to have been interchangeable, as examples like "as soon as," "as long as," "as often as," and "as far as" seem to indicate. The simple so intensive continued, however, to be widely used during this period, as the 1741 entry

"so silly," illustrates. The nineteenth century shows the same sort of distribution of so, as Trollope's 1857 phrase "so excellent" demonstrates. Stoffel writes also that it was during the nineteenth century that "so--as" constructions become more fashionable and hence more popular than "as--as" constructions and began to replace them.<sup>7</sup>

The adverb so functions today in the twentieth century as a widely used intensive qualifier. It has been suggested that so has so easily assumed an intensive role because the most traditional use of so as an adverb is to indicate or imply a degree of comparison, or result. Therefore, when one says he is "so glad" or "so tired" about something, his listeners assume that some sort of result is implied, that the speaker is "so glad" or "so tired" that he could do something, or that a comparison is implied and he is "so glad" or "so tired" as someone else is. Indeed this connotation of comparison may well help to account for the wide distribution of so as an intensive qualifier.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>P. 73 ff.

<sup>8</sup>On the other hand, Jespersen represents another approach to the function of so. He writes that in an expression like "I was so glad to help Mr. Fenwick; he interested me so," so functions simply as an intensive used in the positive degree. In other words, he does not see so as an adverb with an implied comparison. Modern English Grammar, Part VII, p. 402.

In the twentieth century the "as--as" constructions, which have been mentioned in connection with the development of so, appear to have replaced "so--as" constructions to express simple comparisons showing the relative equality of things, e.g. "as pretty as a picture." A "so--as" construction seems to be more of a conscious archaism for the sake of intensity, as in the familiar "so long as you both shall live."

The simple intensive qualifier so, however, enjoys widest distribution of occurrence. It indicates the degree of the quality which it modifies. It has been used with intensive force since the Old English period and shows no sign of vanishing from the language at this point.

### Still

Still has come to function intensively only in comparatively recent times. As an adjective stille was used first during the Old English period, when it meant 'noiseless,' and 'without commotion.' By the sixteenth century, however, still had come to suggest 'in a further degree,' 'yet.' The Oxford English Dictionary records this usage occurring in 1593.

It was not used freely to emphasize a comparative quality until the eighteenth century, when it was used intensively in the sense of yet in expressions like "still less reason," "still more strongly," and "more

precisely still." That it continued to be used intensively through the nineteenth century is indicated by an 1832 citation, "still louder."

It is commonly used today as an intensive qualifier emphasizing a progressive sense of 'more and more.' Its distribution is similar to that of rather.

### Surely

Surely (from the Old French sur) has been employed intensively since the fourteenth century, as the citation "surely soth" suggests. Little in its history is particularly distinctive except for a slight shift in meaning. Originally it implied 'safety' and 'security' and had protective connotations, but in the late Middle English period it had also assumed implications of 'certainty.' It continued to be used in both senses, suggesting security and certainty throughout succeeding centuries. During these centuries it functioned intensively but only rarely as an intensive qualifier. For the most part it intensified verbs and nouns, as citations from the Oxford English Dictionary ("surely do," dated 1599, and "was surely his wife," dated 1661) illustrate. The editors refer to surely here as a "mere intensive."

By the nineteenth century the idea of protection had gone, and surely implied 'certainty' of a general sort. It functioned freely as an intensive qualifier preceding

adjectives and adverbs, as in "Surely best is meet," 1850, and "Surely very feeble," 1907.

Today it is current in standard usage as an intensive qualifier with only a weakened sense of certainty, with little force at all, as in "You just saw surely the best movie ever made."

### Too

The qualifier too (from the Old English to) was being used intensively as early as the fourteenth century. An Oxford English Dictionary citation dated 1340, "to moche charite," indicates that too filled the qualifier position at this time. It continued to function as an intensive qualifier through succeeding centuries and during the Renaissance was frequently reduplicated for additional emphasis, as is illustrated in "too, too soft," dated 1582.

Both constructions occurred through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as the following citations indicate: "too, too solid," 1602; "too lovely," 1697; "too many," 1721; and "too, too nice," 1745.

In addition to the single too and the reduplicated too, yet another intensive too construction began to be used commonly in the nineteenth century--"only too." This use is illustrated in "only too pleased," dated 1889.

All three too constructions are widely distributed in the twentieth century. In fact, too is today one of the most commonly used intensive qualifiers in current American English.

### Very

Very (from the Old French verai) is by far the most commonly used intensive qualifier in American English today. The Middle English adjective verray meant 'true,' as is illustrated in the works of Chaucer, whose "verray parfit gentil knight" was true and well-born, and whose "verry angel" was a genuine angel. The process by which a qualifier loses its etymological meaning and becomes primarily an intensive is slow and gradual. However, numerous references may be found in the literature of the fourteenth and succeeding centuries to illustrate the degree to which very came to function intensively.

During Chaucer's lifetime very was already beginning to take on an intensive function while losing some of its lexical meaning. The Oxford English Dictionary has citations which show that very functions intensively with adjectives, adverbs, and past participles (as in "very early" and "very repentant") as early as 1387. The editors go on to show that very continued to be used intensively in the fifteenth century by supplying citations such as "vere hartely," dated 1448, and "verray trewe,"

dated 1470. However, most of the citations of very during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries indicate that very was still being used primarily as an adjective in the sense of "true" or "genuine."

By the sixteenth century very had come to be used frequently as an intensive qualifier, and since that time intensification has been its primary function. In the Oxford English Dictionary one finds a 1567 entry, "very first," illustrating that very was commonly used intensively with superlatives. Other citations along this line are supplied by C. Stoffel, who points out that the following statement appears in Stephen Hawes' Passetyme of Pleasure, written in 1506: "And whan that I had sene everythinge, my spere I charged, and that was very great." He supplies a statement from Sir Thomas More with several uses of very: "All suche priestes too, as can no more than theyr grammer, and verye scantly that; conteyning suche hygh dyfficulties as verye few lerned men can verye well attayne; he . . . can not tell when he should take the tone . . . is not, for translating into englishe, a man verye mete." He cites a statement by Sir Thomas Elyot in 1531: "Wrastlynge is a very good exercise;" and then a statement made in 1549 by Hugh Latimer: "When I was a scholer . . . I hearde verye good reporte of London . . .

verye busie and . . . verie good worckmen."<sup>9</sup>

Thus it is evident that by the end of the sixteenth century very was solidly established as an intensive qualifier. It was still being used to some degree with its original adjectival force, however. Stoffel cites Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice, Act III, Scene 2, Line 225, where there is a reference to "my very friends and countrymen."<sup>10</sup> Here it is obvious that the speaker is referring to his true friends, and it is further obvious that the adjective very and the intensive qualifier very were existing side by side. Shakespeare also uses very in phrases such as "very now" where very is intensive, but the modern reader recognizes that the intensive use of very in this combination has died out in the years intervening.<sup>11</sup>

During the seventeenth century we continue to find very used with its original adjectival force in phrases

<sup>9</sup>Cited in Stoffel, p. 29.

<sup>10</sup>Cited in Stoffel, p. 31.

<sup>11</sup>Stoffel cites this construction from Othello, I, i, 88. However, Stoffel cites other constructions, "very bootless" and "very ready," for example, (p. 33) which he says have vanished from the language but which have not. Perhaps the word "bootless" is no longer in common usage, but very is used with synonyms for bootless in similar constructions today, e.g. "very vain," "very futile."

like "my very son." However, the Oxford English Dictionary also supplies phrases like "very discontented," dated 1641, and the "very next day," dated 1654, to illustrate the point that it was also an intensive qualifier commonly used with "superlative" forms.

In the eighteenth century very becomes even more common as an intensive qualifier. The Oxford English Dictionary records "very best" dated 1717 and "very large," dated 1774 as typical examples of this usage. Very was also used before nouns in its intensive function in a construction such as "He thought proper to put the matter very home . . ." <sup>12</sup> Very was occasionally used alone with some adjective understood, as in the following sentence written by Jonathan Swift: "The fit went off, leaving me sickish, but not very." <sup>13</sup>

Perhaps the most significant development in the intensive use of very to occur in the nineteenth century is the fact that it began to be coupled with own to emphasize ownership. The Oxford English Dictionary notes

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<sup>12</sup>Jespersen supplies this citation from Fielding in a discussion of very. He terms this sort of usage "rather peculiar." Language: Its Nature, Development, and Origin, p. 400 ff.

<sup>13</sup>Jespersen, Language: Its Nature, Development and Origin, p. 400 ff.

this usage as first having occurred during this period and cites an 1863 example, "my very own hand." The superlative veriest also occurred commonly at this time. As evidence Stoffel cites Dickens' phrase "the veriest old well of a shivering best parlour that ever was seen."<sup>14</sup>

In the twentieth century very has come to be the most widely used of intensive qualifiers. It has lost almost all of its original etymological associations and is used in virtually all situations and under all sorts of circumstances.

One frequently encounters very used before a noun today, as in expressions like "That's the very thing," "He's the very person," and "That's the very one." Despite the fact that when very is used before a noun, it is no longer an intensive qualifier because intensive qualifiers by definition pattern before adjectives and adverbs, it is obvious that in these examples very is used to add emphasis. It seems to emphasize the idea of coincidence, of identity.

Very continues to be coupled with own in the twentieth century. This occurs both in casual conversation and in formal writing, as in "Each individual must cast his very own ballot."

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<sup>14</sup>Cited by Stoffel, p. 31.

However, the most common use of very in the twentieth century is as an intensive qualifier which expresses the high degree of a quality. It appears most frequently before adjectives and adverbs, but then only before the positive and superlative degree forms of these words. We tend to use "very much" before adjectives and adverbs in the comparative degree and before past participles, unless the participle has lost its verbal character entirely. Thus much is used with the verbal participle, "very much filled," but not with the adjectival participle. We tend to say "very pleased," "very satisfied," "very contented," and "very frightened." We introduce the much in such expressions to add still another note of emphasis or intensity; and we also insert much when that which is modified is itself a phrase, as in "She is still very much a young girl."<sup>15</sup>

It should be obvious here that the development of very is typical of the historical route taken by most intensive qualifiers. It originally functions as an

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<sup>15</sup>Jespersen sets forth an interesting argument about the development of very as an intensive qualifier. He maintains that very is used today in places where it could replace much in an earlier construction. He offers citations from the fifteenth through nineteenth centuries with phrases including much and where the much would today be replaced with very. Some of his examples are: Caxton --"they were moche fatte;" Milton--"In much uneven scale;" and Ruskin--" . . . ideas which I find for the present much obsolete." Jespersen, Language: Its Nature, Development, and Origin, p. 400 ff.

adjective with specific semantic associations. As it begins to appear intensively, the two forms coexist for a time. Ultimately it is used primarily as an intensive qualifier.

At this point we have examined a selection of intensive qualifiers which are freely used in contemporary speech and writing and which today appear on all levels of usage. Frequent use has caused all of these qualifiers to weaken progressively in terms of their strict lexical meaning. In fact they have weakened so much that the word very could today be substituted for most of them.

### Group II

The second group of qualifiers to be examined in this chapter are those qualifiers which are widely used in contemporary usage but which are restricted in terms of the levels of usage on which they occur today. For the most part they are restricted to informal modes of expression, although in previous centuries they were standard in formal expression.

They will be examined individually in terms of their chronological development, and it will become evident that they too exhibit a progressive weakening of lexical meaning. Qualifiers which will be considered in this group are the

following: mighty, only, pretty, right.

### Mighty

The adjective mighty dates from the Old English period, when mihtig meant 'powerful.' As an adjective it has retained this meaning through succeeding centuries, but at the same time it has functioned as an intensive qualifier. The Oxford English Dictionary notes that mighty, modifying adjectives and adverbs, was used intensively as early as 1300, as the citation "mighty meek" illustrates.

Mighty continued to be used as a simple intensive steadily weakening in meaning. During the nineteenth century, however, a change in its intensive meaning began to be evident, and by 1901 Stoffel had come to feel that mighty was used intensively chiefly in ironical speech. He offers expressions such as "This is all mighty fine, but what are we to do in the meanwhile?" and "He looked mighty wise" to illustrate this point.<sup>16</sup>

More recently mighty has regained its original intensive force, and today we hear expressions like "That's mighty hot coffee" and "It was mighty late." This usage is generally considered to be colloquial, however.

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<sup>16</sup>Stoffel, p. 126.

Only

Only derived from the Old English ānlic, has been in the language since the Old English period. Historically it has suggested 'a single, solitary thing, or fact' and has tended to be a limiter or downtoner rather than an intensive. However, during the nineteenth century only began to be used intensively to throw emphasis on a particular word, phrase, or clause. The earliest such construction provided by the Oxford English Dictionary is "only think how long," dated 1838, and since then we find expressions like "only in an emergency" and "only dimly" in common usage. When only appears before an adjective or adverb ("only dimly") in order to throw emphasis on it, it may properly be considered an intensive qualifier.

Despite the fact that grammatically and logically only should be placed closest to the word it is supposed to modify, its position is fluctuating in common usage, largely for the sake of intensification. The speaker is, in a sense, emphasizing the only as well as the idea which he intends to stress. For example, one hears expressions such as "She is only the prettiest girl in town" and "I'm only tired and dirty," where a stressed only is clearly an intensive qualifier. Ambiguity presents no problems because stress and pauses clarify the structure of the sentences and reinforce the intensifying function of

only.<sup>17</sup>

### Pretty

The word pretty was originally an Old English adjective praetig, meaning 'cunning' or 'crafty.' By the fifteenth century it had come to mean 'clever' and 'skillful' and had, in addition, taken on the meaning 'pleasing' or 'comely.' It is this last meaning which has survived in succeeding centuries. In general pretty has been an epithet expressing admiration and appreciation since this period.

In the sixteenth century pretty began to function as an intensive qualifier. Citations illustrate that when it appeared before another adjective or adverb, it tended to lose its full meaning and become simply a word functioning to show degree. The Oxford English Dictionary records the first evidence of the intensive use of pretty in a 1565 citation, "pretie hardie felaw."<sup>18</sup> That pretty continued to be used as an intensive qualifier through

<sup>17</sup>Contrary to popular belief the separation of only from the word or phrase it is grammatically supposed to modify is not a recent development. The Oxford English Dictionary reports that this has been a common practice since the fifteenth century. It was not conspicuously avoided in writing until the nineteenth century.

<sup>18</sup>Charles Carpenter Fries discusses this intensive use of pretty through the centuries, illustrating it with numerous citations, in American English Grammar, p. 201.

the seventeenth century is illustrated in a 1638 citation, "pretty ancient."

Pretty came to be widely used as an intensive qualifier during the eighteenth century. As a qualifier, it had much the same force as rather. A 1749 citation from the Oxford English Dictionary, "pretty considerable," makes this evident. It is clear that as an intensive, pretty had come to vary greatly from its etymological meaning.

An 1888 citation in the Oxford English Dictionary, "pretty equally balanced," provides proof that pretty continued to function intensively. It had in general become somewhat stronger than rather by this point. Interestingly, Stoffel points out that during this century pretty was rarely employed before adjectives and adverbs expressing negative or unfavorable ideas. He writes that "pretty poor," "pretty ill," "pretty weak," "pretty small," "pretty bad," and the like were unusual. Far more common were expressions like "pretty comfortable," "pretty good," "pretty gracious," "pretty cheap," and "pretty often."<sup>19</sup> These expressions deal with ideas which are either positive or neutral.

In the twentieth century there is little preference today as to the appearance of pretty before positive and

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<sup>19</sup>Stoffel, p. 152.

negative ideas. "Pretty bad" seems to be as common an expression as "pretty good." Pretty has in fact become a strong intensive qualifier which is freely applied to all sorts of qualities.

Pretty is today widely used as an intensive qualifier. In addition, it survives as an adjective referring to that which is esthetically pleasing, having lost entirely its etymological meaning. As an intensive qualifier, however, it has much the same meaning as very.

### Right

Right, in its early form riht, was used as a noun and as a verb during the Old English period. However, the editors of the Oxford English Dictionary point out that it had begun to be used as an adverb by the end of that era; and by the thirteenth century right was functioning as an intensive qualifier, both with adverbs and with adjectives. It retained its earlier associations with 'straight,' 'precisely,' 'exactly,' and 'just' and was a forceful intensive. The phrases "right well" and "right interesting" are typical of the citations given from this period.

By the fifteenth century the intensive force of right had weakened somewhat, and speaking of its intensive function, the editors of Oxford English Dictionary define

right simply as 'very,' citing a 1477 usage, "I should like it right well," as an example. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries right continued to be used quite commonly as an intensive qualifier. Numerous citations substantiate this usage: "right gracious," "right true," "right fair," "right glad," and "right suddenly."

By the nineteenth century right was becoming less common in formal usage and less widely accepted in all but informal speech. In effect it was vanishing as a natural, unaffected intensive qualifier. Today, however, right is fairly common in the informal speech of many people. It is frequently used with the positive degree forms of adjectives and adverbs ("That's a right pretty dress; I like it right well"), and it occasionally appears with other constructions as in "right to the point." It should be noted that only the constructions in which right precedes a phrase are generally considered to be standard and acceptable in formal usage today. The other combinations are in some way limited to particular geographical areas or social strata.

We have now examined a second group of intensive qualifiers, qualifiers which are freely used today but whose use demonstrates some sort of restriction in terms of levels of usage on which they are appropriate. It has been shown that these qualifiers also illustrate the progressive weakening of lexical meaning characteristic

of intensive qualifiers as a syntactic class.

### Group III

The third and final group of intensive qualifiers which will be considered in this chapter are qualifiers which are rarely heard in contemporary American usage except in colloquial or dialectal usage or in a few pat expressions. These are qualifiers, however, which have been freely used in the past. Thus they occupy significant positions in any historical overview of the intensive qualifier.

Furthermore, they serve as evidence of a statement made earlier in our discussion of intensive qualifiers in which it was asserted that intensive qualifiers pass in and out of popularity, that they can become so overused and meaningless that they virtually disappear as intensive qualifiers from the language. These words have all at one time been widely used and today appear intensively only rarely.

Each item will be examined individually according to its chronological development and will be seen to have weakened significantly in terms of its original lexical meaning. The following qualifiers will be examined in this group: considerable, desperate, full, jolly, mortal, and pure.

## Considerable

Considerable came into the language from the French considérer in the Middle English period, when it was an adjective meaning 'worthy of being taken into account,' 'worthy of consideration.' In the seventeenth century the meaning shifted somewhat, and the adjective considerable began to be used in reference to anything which was important. During this century the adverb considerably began to function as an intensive qualifier, as an Oxford English Dictionary citation, "considerably less," dated 1670, illustrates.

By the eighteenth century the original meaning of considerable, i.e. in reference to something which should be taken into account, had died, and considerable simply meant 'worthy of regard.' In that century, however, it began to take on additional implications and came to suggest something that was worthy of regard because of its magnitude. Considerably continued to function intensively, as the 1790 citation "considerably remote" indicates. In the nineteenth century considerable began to join considerably and to function as an intensive qualifier in informal American usage. It had picked up the implications of magnitude and as an intensive qualifier suggested a large quantity of the quality modified.

Although considerable and considerably were used with equal frequency during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, considerable is only rarely heard today. It is colloquial or dialectal, while considerably is standard in general usage.

### Desperate

Desperate apparently came into the language from the Latin dēspērātus during the fifteenth century. Its original meaning was 'having lost hope' and it retained this meaning through the sixteenth century. However, in the seventeenth century, it began to take on additional connotations and in colloquial usage began to function as an intensive qualifier whose force was implied by the literal sense of the word. Although desperate was used only colloquially as an intensive during this period, the adverb desperately was being used intensively at the same time and in more formal usage. The Oxford English Dictionary provides examples of the intensive use of both desperate and desperately from this century, "desperate malicious," dated 1636, and "desperately pale," dated 1696, for example.

Both desperate and desperately continued to be used intensively through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as an 1830 entry, "a desperate bad road," and an 1843 entry, "desperately rapid," illustrate. However, desperate is

only rarely used as an intensive qualifier today, despite its previous popularity. It is used colloquially in constructions like "I am desperate tired," while desperately occurs in general usage. In both cases the meaning 'hopelessly' has been replaced by a simple intensive force best paraphrased as 'extremely' or 'excessively.'

### Full

Full is one of the oldest English intensive qualifiers, although it is not frequently used today. Its earliest appearances date from the Old English period, when it existed as an intensive qualifier meaning 'exceedingly.' The Oxford English Dictionary provides expressions such as "full unrote," dated 888, as examples of its usage during this period.

During the Middle English period it was the most frequently employed intensive qualifier. For example, the works of Langland and Chaucer are replete with full's where Modern English works would employ very's. Further citations from the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries show that full continued to function as a popular intensive qualifier: "full brihte," 1200; "ful deer brederen," 1380; and "full wretched," 1450.

It was in the sixteenth century that very began to replace full as the most widely used intensive qualifier. However, full continued to be employed, and by the end of

the century Shakespeare was still using it freely in ' expressions like "full dearly," "full little," "full many a," "full oft," "full so valiant," and "full lovely." That full continued to be used through the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries is illustrated in citations like "full little," dated 1635, "full slowly," dated 1782, and "full well," dated 1875.

Today full is only rarely used as an intensive qualifier. It exists primarily in a few pat expressions such as "full well" and "full many." It is otherwise used as a conscious archaism. The form fully, however, is frequently used as a qualifier in phrases such as "fully aware," "fully ready," and "fully satisfied." Whereas full has almost vanished as an intensive qualifier, fully freely occurs with adjectives and adverbs.

### Jolly

Jolly (from the French jolif) was widely used in the Middle English period as an adjective with joyous and festive connotations. However, over the years it weakened until it became an intensive qualifier with a shift in meaning. It had originally been used both adjectivally and adverbially in an appreciative or admiring sense to qualify other adjectives and adverbs, but the Oxford English Dictionary indicates that in the sixteenth century it came to be used frequently with ironic overtones and

then in the same century weakened to the level of the intensive qualifier very. Among sixteenth-century citations which illustrate the intensive function of jolly are "jolly fortunate" and "jolly quiet." It continued to be used intensively through succeeding centuries.

By the end of the nineteenth century jolly was in such common widespread usage as an intensive qualifier that Stoffel could call it "the characteristic schoolboy intensive" and support this statement with numerous citations, such as "jolly soon" and "jolly decent."<sup>20</sup> Stoffel was obviously thinking about the nineteenth-century British schoolboy, however, because jolly has not been as popular in American usage.

As an intensive qualifier, jolly is seldom heard by American speakers, although they often read it in British literature. It is occasionally used by an American speaker attempting to imitate British usage or attempting to draw especial and unusual attention to what he is saying. The American speaker frequently couples jolly with good and well, although it could easily pattern with positive degree forms of any adjectives and adverbs.

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<sup>20</sup>Stoffel, p. 122.

Mortal

Mortal, borrowed from the French, has been widely used as a simple adjective since the Middle English period. Since it refers to an absolute quality hardly subject to qualification, 'being destined to die', it is easy to see how it could have come to be used intensively. As an intensive qualifier, it would originally have implied an absolute certainty as inevitable as death and would thus have been a forceful modifier indeed.

Apparently mortal has been used as an intensive qualifier throughout most of the modern period, for it is cited in the Oxford English Dictionary as being used so in 1407: "the peril was so mortal strong." It was commonly used to intensify in the nineteenth century, when it freely occurred before nouns as well as other qualifiers. Phrases like "I was a mortal sight younger," "a mortal lazy fellow," and "through a whole mortal season," all nineteenth-century citations, illustrate its intensive function during this period.

Today mortal is occasionally used colloquially as an intensive qualifier, as in "I am mortal tired." In these cases it has entirely lost its earlier fearsome qualities.

## Pure

During the Middle English period pure (from the French pur) i.e. 'not mixed,' 'unalloyed,' another adjective which expressed a quality hardly susceptible of qualification, began to be used. It has been used in succeeding centuries to modify adjectives, adverbs, and noun constructions to suggest 'absolutely,' 'thoroughly,' 'completely,' 'fully,' 'utterly,' and 'entirely.' The adverb form purely has been used in the same sense. The Oxford English Dictionary provides citations like the following to demonstrate the distribution of the two words: "pur gidy and wod," 1297; "pur lytel," 1394; "purely destroyed," 1429; "pure easy," 1491; "pure aged," 1560; "pure good," 1710; "purely ignorant," 1656; "pure swampy," 1810.

By the nineteenth century these words were passing out of use as intensives, and neither pure nor purely is widely heard today except in occasional colloquial usage. One also occasionally hears pure-tee as a stretch form of pure, as in "I am pur-tee exhausted."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>The form pure-tee is itself of uncertain origin. One also hears pure-dee; and either may be a stretch form of pretty.

The discussion of pure terminates our examination of the third group of qualifiers. The qualifiers selected for study within this third group demonstrate in their development the same weakening of lexical meaning evident in intensive qualifiers in general. Furthermore, their individual histories bear out the thesis that intensive qualifiers have periods of waxing and waning popularity. Although these qualifiers no longer occur freely in contemporary usage, they were at one time widely used. The fact that they have passed out of fashion today does not lessen their significance in terms of a historical overview of the intensive qualifier. If anything, it enhances it.

#### Summary of Findings

This examination of three groups of specific intensive qualifiers not only illustrates the weakening of meaning noted earlier but also leads to several further generalizations.

It is obvious that individual qualifiers pass through varying periods of popularity. For example, full was widely used during the Middle English period and has largely vanished in Modern times. A number of qualifiers, among them jolly, mortal, desperate, and considerable, were quite popular during the nineteenth century but have passed out of common usage in more recent years.

Some qualifiers pass out of fashion in formal 'speech and survive in dialects or very informal speech. Mighty and pretty, for example, were both used widely in earlier centuries and have both been relegated to colloquial or informal usage today.

The qualifier very stands as an exception to the fluctuating popularity of individual intensive qualifiers. Not only is it one of the oldest of qualifiers in English, but its popularity has not waned. It has enjoyed consistent distribution on all levels of usage since the early Modern period. It has come to be a perennially acceptable qualifier and has entirely lost its original literal meaning.

The preceding historic overview of the selected group of intensive qualifiers as a syntactic class suggests that it is not until the Modern English period that the intensive qualifier manifests itself as a syntactic class enjoying widespread distribution. Prior to the Modern period, the number of intensive qualifiers in use seems to be comparatively small. We find for example, that few of the intensive qualifiers discussed in this chapter were used in the Old English period. In fact the class is largely restricted to full, so, and even (in "even so" constructions) during this period.

During the Middle English period, full is the intensive qualifier most widely distributed in the language. However, by the latter portion of this period, other adjectives and adverbs are beginning to take on intensive functions and are beginning to function as intensive qualifiers.

The early centuries of the Modern English period see still more words begin to function as intensive qualifiers. But it is during the Renaissance, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, that the intensive qualifier begins to come into its own. In fact, nearly half of the qualifiers examined in this chapter either first come to be used as intensive qualifiers during this period or are solidly established as intensive qualifiers during this period.

Although intensive qualifiers continue to be widely used in the eighteenth century, it is in the nineteenth century that they become quite popular as a class and nineteenth century writers employ them freely in their prose. Hence the nineteenth century marks another high point in their distribution.

In the twentieth century a number of the intensive qualifiers which were widely used in the nineteenth century--jolly, desperate, and mortal, for example--have become much less popular. Yet as a class intensive qualifiers retain their widespread distribution.

Qualifiers are commonly used today on all levels of speech and writing although some are restricted to specific levels of usage. However, the twentieth century has seen a critical attitude develop concerning intensive qualifiers, and many grammarians now caution against their frequent use. Ironically, text-book prohibitions seem to have no influence on the actual frequency with which intensive qualifiers occur. They appear frequently in conversation and informal writing, and are encountered in all communications media.

It is important then to separate the actual use of qualifiers from what is said about them in grammars, handbooks and other commentaries on the language. Therefore, the chapter following will analyze the treatment of intensive qualifiers in just such works.

## CHAPTER III

### GRAMMATICAL TREATMENT OF THE INTENSIVE QUALIFIER

#### Diversity of Approach

That intensive qualifiers have been widely employed in English speech and writing over a long period of time cannot be gainsaid. Ironically, however, as they have been used, they have been at the same time condemned as being stylistically weak. At times the very writers who condemn the use of the intensive qualifier use the form itself to assert that the qualifier is "very poor" technically. Great diversity is evident in the treatment of intensive qualifiers in scholarly writings. A large body of writers make no distinction between intensive qualifiers and adverbs of degree; some acknowledge them and describe them as structural elements in English; others ignore them; and still others condemn them with only minimal analysis.

Since qualifiers are among the most prominent intensive elements used in American English today, and since the history of a number of qualifiers has been shown to extend over several centuries, this chapter will concern itself primarily with the treatment of the intensive qualifier in more-or-less contemporary grammars, handbooks, and commentaries on the language.

The treatment of intensive qualifiers may be approached in two ways. It is necessary to consider first the question of definition, i.e. to determine whether or not the sources define the intensive qualifier and, if so, in what terms the definition is given. Where intensive qualifiers are not defined precisely, it is helpful to determine whether or not the intensive qualifier is acknowledged or described in any way whatsoever. Secondly, it is worthwhile to take into consideration any overtly expressed attitudes toward the use of the intensive qualifier. The organization of this chapter then will be to discuss each of these two concerns in the order in which they are suggested here.

Most of the information used will be derived from grammar books, handbooks, and commentaries on language. These works are formal approaches to the study of language that attempt to codify usage at particular points in time, and one can learn a great deal about the scholarly approaches and attitudes toward a given feature of language by addressing himself to the prohibitions and cautions voiced in such handbooks. Conservative by nature, they are slow to change, and any language feature which they acknowledge either by recommendation or by prohibition is one that must be taken into account in a description of the standard prestige dialect.

The influence of the schoolmarm is still strongly felt in the standards of numerous publications, and it is the language used in such "respectable" and "respected" publications that helps to establish what we consider the "rules" of standard good usage. Language changes in the ordinary speech of both standard and nonstandard dialects, but only those innovations which appear in the "careful," guarded usage of speakers of prestige English become recognized as standard. Change does not become acceptable in the opinion of many speakers until it has permeated the formal language exemplified by the usage of scholarly publications or other examples of what might be called "copyreader's English." Thus a process of judgment is implied which determines the degree to which a word or construction is accepted in the formal speech and writing of educated society.

The chapter will concern itself first with the question of definition of the intensive qualifier and will examine several sources to determine whether or not they deal with the question of definition, and if so, how they approach it. The concern will be whether or not the sources recognize intensive qualifiers as being a distinct class of modifiers, and, if so, how they define them. Definitions mentioned in this chapter will not be included as an attempt to define the intensive qualifier--that was

done in Chapter I. Instead, any definition mentioned will be included solely to indicate the stance of the author of the work from which it was taken. It will be seen that some grammarians define intensive qualifiers by describing them semantically, while others define them by describing them as a structural class. A few combine the semantic and structural approaches. Still others ignore intensive qualifiers as a class. In each case the approach taken is significant in determining what contemporary writers feel is the nature and the function of the intensive qualifier.

#### Definition

The presence or absence of definitions of intensive qualifiers in the sources under consideration is itself significant in a discussion of the treatment of the class. If a given handbook does attempt to define the intensive qualifier, the framework in which this definition is set is a definite signal of attitude and indication of approach on the part of the editors. The absence of any sort of acknowledgement of the intensive qualifier as a structural unit of the English language indicates what will be considered a conservative attitude toward the whole concept of modern linguistics. Frequently it goes hand in hand with a list of injunctions against certain "meaningless"

words which include what we recognize as intensive qualifiers.

If the qualifier is defined in traditional grammatical terms, i.e. semantically and formally, as an adverb of degree, then the editors have significantly limited the qualifying concept because only adverbs of degree are then considered qualifiers. This leaves out phrases such as "good and--" and implies that adjectives functioning as qualifiers are not really "correct." In theory then one should not say "pretty bad" because pretty is an adjective in form, not an adverb of degree. On the other hand, if the qualifier is described as a structural unit, it is more likely that the editors of the handbook are descriptive, rather than prescriptive, in outlook, and some attention is given to the broad implications of the entire concept of intensification.

Thus there are several possible handbook approaches to the treatment of the intensive qualifier insofar as definition is concerned. First, a grammarian may describe it primarily in semantic terms and label it "adverb of degree." Second, he may describe it as a structural unit. Third, he may ignore the intensive qualifier almost entirely, treating it at best as an ill-defined subgroup of the general class of adverbs.

A great number of grammarians define intensive qualifiers in traditional grammatical terms, basing their

definitions largely on meaning. This tendency was quite common during the nineteenth century and continues to be so today. For example, as early as 1855 William C. Fowler discusses adverbs with no special differentiation between intensive adverbs and the main body of verb modifiers. Listing adverbs, he cites: "He reads correctly," "He was exceedingly careful," "He does tolerably well," with no distinction among the types of adverbs employed. However, one of his classifications of adverbs is the adverb of degree, which, he says, answers "How much?" And he lists much, little, too, very, right, infinitely, scarcely, hardly, merely, far, besides, chiefly, only, mostly, quite, dear, stark, partly, almost, altogether, all, clear, enough, so, as, even, how, however, howsoever, ever so, something, and nothing.<sup>1</sup> It is obvious from this list that the adverb of degree is defined semantically rather than structurally, that Fowler means a class defined by shared meaning rather than by grammatical function. Thus nothing and very may be semantically similar in that they are both possible answers to the question "How much?" However, they belong to different syntactic classes in most of their uses. A word like besides, which belongs

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<sup>1</sup>The English Language in Its Elements, p. 366.

to yet another syntactic class, can be included in the group only by stretching the semantic criterion that defines it.

That this semantic approach, which recognizes that among adverbs there are adverbs of degree, was common during the nineteenth century (and even earlier) is clearly seen in an examination of The Grammar of English Grammars, a massive work by Gould Brown which provides a digested catalog of over 350 eighteenth and nineteenth century grammars. Among adverbs are defined adverbs of degree; among adverbs of degree are those which answer the question "How much?" and express "excess or abundance." Brown supplies a long list of those adverbs, many of which commonly function as intensive qualifiers. Among them are very, quite, too, exceedingly, and fully.<sup>2</sup>

It is indeed within the semantic group of adverbs of degree that many of the words we recognize as intensive qualifiers are found. Those writers who have recognized intensive qualifiers as in some way different from the mass of adverbs have in fact grouped them with adverbs of degree. Generations of students have been told that adverbs relate "how, when, where, and to what degree," and intensive qualifiers have simply been grouped among that

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<sup>2</sup>P. 421.

large group of adverbs that answer "To what extent?" However, adverbial units that indicate semantic extent or degree fall into several syntactic classes, as the following sentences illustrate:

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|-----------------------|--|
| He is very tall.      | (modifier of an adjective)                       |
| He reads little.      | (optional modifier of an action verb)            |
| He weighs a lot.      | (obligatory modifier of a stative verb)          |
| He completely forgot. | (Moveable modifier, cf. "He forgot completely.") |

A number of more contemporary grammarians also regard intensive qualifiers as adverbs of degree, rather than as members of a structural group. Ralph B. Long, for example, provides a discussion of words which sometimes function as adjectives and sometimes function as adverbs. He cites real, pretty, and very as adverbs with meanings of degree,<sup>3</sup> but he does not mention their intensive function. His examples include "pretty late," "real new," and "very high," obvious examples of an intensive usage. In his chapter on adverbs, he lumps intensive qualifiers with the adverbs of degree. Among them are "extremely pleasant," "absolutely impossible," "terribly expensive," "desperately in love," "only

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<sup>3</sup>The Sentence and Its Parts, p. 54.

trying to help," "only a child," "only three of us," and "very thoroughly."<sup>4</sup>

The sort of over simplification exemplified in Long's work is illustrated further in Margaret Bryant's A Functional English Grammar, where intensive qualifiers are given little attention. In a discussion of pronouns, intensification is mentioned as one of the functions of the reflexive pronouns.<sup>5</sup> Other intensive elements are not mentioned. However, in a discussion of classes of adverbs, adverbs of degree are included, and "He is very wise" is supplied as an example of this form.<sup>6</sup> Thus Bryant provides another case in point in which the intensive qualifier is simply grouped with adverbs of degree.

Other somewhat traditional grammarians, although not acknowledging intensive qualifiers as such, do make simple statements to the effect that adjectives and adverbs can be preceded by words that intensify their meaning, words like very and right. For example, J. I. McCollum

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<sup>4</sup>Long, p. 271. Long goes on to posit an interesting theory as to the origins of certain intensive qualifiers, although he does not use the term. He says that they result from attempts to avoid very. Thus it may be assumed that this is giving some sort of attention to the possibility of defining in terms of structural patterns.

<sup>5</sup>p. 41.

<sup>6</sup>p. 191.

adopts this position and goes on to say that some adjectives have an absolute quality and cannot logically be compared, unique, round, square, and perfect, for example.<sup>7</sup> Although he approaches a structural position in talking about where such words occur, he falls back on the old clichés that would preclude the existence of an intensive qualifier construction in numerous cases where such constructions are actually found. In a discussion of adverbs he makes no distinctions between intensive qualifiers and adverbs with other functions.

Thus far in our discussion we have dealt with grammarians who have in some way acknowledged the existence of what have been identified as intensive qualifiers. However, most of the grammarians discussed so far have not fully recognized that intensive qualifiers might be defined or described in terms of their own characteristic behavior within structural patterns.

Some grammarians demonstrate some awareness of the distinctive nature of intensive qualifiers and attempt to describe them both in terms of their traditional grammatical classes and in terms of their structural positions.

For example, as early as 1929 H. Poutsma recognizes that some adverbs of degree have an intensive function,

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<sup>7</sup>Essentials of Grammar and Style, pp. 37-39.

and he cites very, very much, highly, greatly, largely, strongly, badly, sadly, and others as examples of this group.<sup>8</sup> More importantly, however, he provides an analysis of those adverbs of degree which denote intensity, showing in this analysis that they modify various classes of elements: adjectives, adjectival word groups, adverbs, adverbial word groups, adnominal nouns, prepositions having adverbial values, and prepositional word groups.<sup>9</sup> Thus he treats these adverbs of degree both semantically and, to a limited degree, structurally.

Along the same lines, a much later work, the Scribner Handbook of English devotes a section in its discussion of the parts of speech to "Intensifiers," defining an intensifier as "a word which may modify an adjective or an adverb, but not a verb; thus it will fill the slot in 'He was \_\_\_ good,' and 'He worked \_\_\_ slowly,' but not in 'He worked \_\_\_.'" Examples of intensifiers are very, rather, pretty, quite, too.<sup>10</sup> What is important here is that these editors choose to discuss intensive qualifiers ("intensifiers") in terms of where they pattern. This

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<sup>8</sup>A Grammar of Late Modern English, Part II, "The Parts of Speech," Section II, "The Verb and the Particles," p. 670.

<sup>9</sup>Pp. 691-692.

<sup>10</sup>Albert H. Marckwardt and Frederic G. Cassidy, p. 207.

part of their approach to the subject is then structural. Later, however, when discussing adverbs, they name one class "adverbs of degree" and go on to say that these adverbs of degree are "intensifiers."<sup>11</sup> In this way they combine their structural approach with the traditional.

L. M. Myers provides a general treatment of adjectives where he discusses adjectives, not adverbs, of degree, and within this group one finds several intensive qualifiers--for example, "pretty old," "very carefully," and "right interesting." Their intensive function, however, is not mentioned. It is simply stated that they are used to modify adjectives, adverbs, and participles, that indeed some of them (pretty, in particular) may tend to weaken the modifiers following.<sup>12</sup> Myers is to some degree concerned with the positions of such adjectives and may therefore also properly be considered as representing a viewpoint which draws on both a traditional and a structural approach to the intensive qualifier.

The work of Harold E. Palmer and F. G. Blandford seems to represent this viewpoint to some degree, but it is obviously leaning in the direction of a position that

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<sup>11</sup>Marckwardt and Cassidy, pp. 234-235.

<sup>12</sup>Guide to American English, pp. 154-155.

is more structural than semantic. Palmer and Blandford point out that the only general statement they are willing to make concerning adverbs is that adverbs are modifiers.<sup>13</sup> However, they construct a catalog of adverbs according to meaning, modification, grammatical function, and position. Within this catalog a correlation is made between meaning (in terms of degree), position (pre-adjective) and grammatical function (the modification of adjectives and adverbs). Among those adverbs illustrating this correlation are many of those which we recognize as intensive qualifiers.<sup>14</sup>

A study currently in progress by Randolph Quirk attempts to deal with intensive qualifiers both in terms of semantics and in terms of structure. Quirk analyzes what he calls "intensifiers" by dividing them into three classes: emphasisers, amplifiers, and downtoners. Amplifiers are further subdivided into maximisers and boosters. All three--emphasisers, maximisers, and boosters--include intensive qualifiers. His distinctions among the three classes are largely semantic and to some degree debatable. However, he proceeds to indicate in some detail the structural and syntactic relationships in which these elements

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<sup>13</sup>A Grammar of Spoken English, 2nd edition, p. 171.

<sup>14</sup>pp. 187 ff.

may be involved.<sup>15</sup>

It has been shown at this point that a number of grammarians define the intensive qualifier semantically as an adverb of degree. Others draw on this rather traditional approach but go further and imply some consideration of structure as well. It remains now to consider a group of grammarians who describe intensive qualifiers primarily as a structural class.

Following the seminal work of Charles Carpenter Fries, these grammarians make a part-of-speech distinction between form classes and function words, i.e. those words which signal relationships among other words within utterances. Intensive qualifiers fall into the group of function words. Some grammarians further recognize that many intensive qualifiers can be used together in distinct, specific positions in relation to each other.

Fries clearly and succinctly describes intensive qualifiers structurally, and his description merits attention here. Within the large group of function words, he describes several groups on the basis of the positions they can fill in utterances. Group D words are "all the words that can occur in the position of very before a Class 3 word in the following sentence frame . . . .

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<sup>15</sup>Randolph Quirk, et al., unpublished manuscript.

The concern may not be very good then."<sup>16</sup> Group D words, i.e., intensive qualifiers, signal some degree of the quality for which the Class 3 word stands and can fill the same position for many Class 4 words.<sup>17</sup> Class 3 and Class 4 words are recognized in traditional terms as adjectives and adverbs, respectively. Thus Fries becomes one of the most important of contemporary grammarians to be consulted in a study of qualifiers and is cited here as a prime example of the structural approach. Fries' terminology has been frequently adopted and provides a viable basis for further commentary and exploration.

A number of additional contemporary grammarians ought to be mentioned in connection with Fries, because they share the same structural approach to the intensive qualifier and because there are enough of them that their very number lends them importance.

Paul Roberts, for example, is typical of contemporary writers, and his Understanding English is currently in use among secondary school teachers and college teachers of composition. He recognizes and records intensive qualifiers, under the name "intensifiers," as structural

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<sup>16</sup>The Structure of English, p. 92.

<sup>17</sup>The Structure of English, p. 93.

elements whose meaning is dependent on their patterning with adjectives and adverbs. He states that although intensifiers share most of their positions with certain adverbs, there are significant differences in the patterning of the two classes, and intensifiers do not pattern with verbs as adverbs do.<sup>18</sup> He describes rather than prescribes their use and incorporates a discussion of them within a description of adjective and adverb classes. Thus his emphasis is clearly on structure and descriptivism.

Other grammarians, however, recognize a group of elements which they call qualifiers and which fulfill the intensive function although they are not labeled intensive qualifiers. For example, when one examines the list of expressions supplied by William Schwab, he finds the following constructions which include intensive qualifiers: "rather scandalous," "pretty boisterous," "very strict," "quite good," "less firm," "much later," "most loudly," "even then," "too far," "a bit harder," "rather less intense," "somewhat more intelligent," "really quite softly," "very much later." In discussing qualifiers

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<sup>18</sup> Paul Roberts, Understanding English, p. 166. Another book by Roberts, Modern Grammar, pp. 34-35, does not deal with intensive qualifiers as a class, mentioning very only as part of a "very rule" to signal adjectives. Focusing on the intensive qualifier very as a linguistic signal is, however, a sign of recognition of the qualifier as a structural element.

Schwab acknowledges the structural relationship of intensive qualifiers to other words in explaining that qualifiers help to resolve ambiguity by signalling that the word following is an adjective or adverb rather than a noun.<sup>19</sup> Schwab then cogently describes the nature and function of intensive qualifiers as they are recognized in this paper, and his approach is basically structural.

A significant number of grammarians do not seriously or adequately acknowledge the existence of intensive qualifiers. Sometimes they do refer to "intensifiers," and they will explain, as do Robert Gorrell and Charlton Laird, that intensifiers are "words like very and sometimes words like deeply, which are often called adverbs."<sup>20</sup> Thus intensive qualifiers are inadequately defined; one simply infers that certain words function to intensify. It becomes clear that many handbooks and guides make no particular distinction between intensive qualifiers and the mass of adverbs. They acknowledge words like very, but that is as far as they go. Two good examples of such treatment of intensive qualifiers are supplied by John E. Warriner,<sup>21</sup> and William W. Watt,<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Guide to Modern Grammar and Exposition, pp. 34-35.

<sup>20</sup>The Modern English Handbook, 3rd Edition, p. 549.

<sup>21</sup>Handbook of English.

<sup>22</sup>A Short Guide to English Usage.

whose handbooks do not acknowledge intensive qualifiers.

Knud Schibsbye devotes considerable attention to adverbs and deals with a number of them individually. He refers to a group of intensive adverbs--awfully, exceedingly, far, frightfully, greatly, highly, much, terribly, very, and others--only peripherally in a discussion of much and very. He deals with the patterning of much and very in utterances, but a number of constructions he finds unacceptable or unusual are in fact heard, e.g. "very excited," "very amused by," and "much surprised."<sup>23</sup> Thus he offers no definition of the intensive qualifier and treats it inadequately as a class.

Dwight Bolinger also discusses the intensifying function of particular words and provides very and much as examples of those words. He simply points out this function and does nothing more to explain it.<sup>24</sup>

Interestingly enough, a significant number of transformational grammarians fall into the group of writers who do not deal adequately with the intensive qualifier per se. These writers, of whom D. Terence Langendoen<sup>25</sup> and Roderick

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<sup>23</sup>A Modern English Grammar, p. 166.

<sup>24</sup>Aspects of Language.

<sup>25</sup>Essentials of English Grammar.

A. Jacobs, working with Peter S. Rosenbaum<sup>26</sup> may be considered typical, do not acknowledge intensive qualifiers as structural classes or indeed as any classes at all. Neither work considers adverb constructions to any significant degree, although Jacobs and Rosenbaum deal at one point with adverbs of manner. Both works employ intensive qualifiers in illustrations occasionally to signal adjectives and adverbs, but they go no further, and in these illustrations their concern is with adjectives and adverbs. It is significant, however, that when they draw upon intensive qualifiers, they do so in terms of function within structures rather than in terms of meaning.

Some transformationalists do at least acknowledge that there exist adverbs of degree, even if they do not proceed to discuss them. For example, a study by Robert Stockwell, Paul Schachter, and Barbara Hall Partee states that the writers make no attempt to handle such adverbs in the Phrase Structure rules they describe. The examples provided as adverbs of degree are what we acknowledge to be intensive qualifiers.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>English Transformational Grammar.

<sup>27</sup>Integration of Transformational Theories on English Syntax, UCLA Syntax Project, p. 30.

The preceding discussion has illustrated the general imprecision with which the intensive qualifier has been defined in more or less contemporary treatments of the language. However, definition alone is but one aspect of the treatment of this class of elements. A number of sources go well beyond the question of definition and description of the nature and function of intensive qualifiers. These writers supply overtly expressed opinion about the acceptability of the intensive qualifier in speech and writing, often making statements about their "correct" use.

#### Attitude

In the following discussion, two distinct approaches to the intensive qualifier will be seen. A great body of opinion maintains that the intensive qualifier is a poor device stylistically; thus we will see a great number of prohibitions and warnings about its use. However, another body of opinion does not censure the intensive qualifier at all. Instead it is regarded as a valid and effective device in both written and spoken English.

This portion of the chapter will then be organized as follows. First, it will examine eighteenth and nineteenth century treatments of intensive qualifiers, pointing out that during this period as a rule the use of intensive qualifiers was roundly censured and that women were largely

held to blame for the popularity of such qualifiers. The chapter will next direct its attention to more contemporary treatment of intensive qualifiers and the attitudes expressed overtly through various commentaries on the language.

Historically linguistic prescriptivists have relied heavily on the illogicality involved in comparing absolute qualities and have therefore tended to think that since intensive qualifiers are frequently applied to absolute qualities, qualities which cannot logically be qualified, most intensive qualifiers are linguistically and logically not possible.

This critical attitude which assumes, on logical grounds, that intensive qualifiers are poor usage is evident in writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, two of whom are cited in the following pages to illustrate this attitude.

A letter by William Cobbett, a late eighteenth-century politician, demonstrates this position. Cobbett writes:

'Very right' and 'very wrong' are very common expressions, but they are both incorrect. Some expressions may be more common than others, but that which is not right is wrong, and that which is not wrong is right. There are here no intermediate degrees. We should laugh to hear a man say, 'you are a little right; I am a good deal wrong; that person is honest in a trifling degree; that act was too just.' But, our ears are accustomed to the adverbs of exaggeration. Some writers deal in these to a degree

that tries the ear and offends the understanding. With them, everything is excessively or immensely or vastly or surprisingly or wonderfully or abundantly or the like. The notion of such writers is, that these words give strength to what they are saying. This is a great error; strength must be found in the thought, or it will never be found in the words. Big-sounding words, without thoughts corresponding, are effort without effect.<sup>28</sup>

Thus Cobbett supplies an example of the application of logic to language in an attempt to prescribe usage.

That Cobbett's position is not unique is shown in 1881 by G. Washington Moon, an Englishman who agreed with the school of thought maintaining that some qualities cannot be compared at all--that their definitions imply totality or completeness which either exists in itself or does not. He lashed out against expressions like "so universal" and "so totally." He felt that there was a trend toward the misuse of superlatives like totally, supremely, absolutely, and universally, whose meaning precludes their being qualified by so, more, or most. He asserted that so and such were greatly in favor "with demonstrative young ladies; with them every beautiful object is either 'such a beauty' or 'so beautiful.'" He

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<sup>28</sup>Cited in Susie I. Tucker, English Examined, pp. 144-145. This letter was included within an 1818 Grammar of the English Language in a Series of Letters and was chosen here because of its representative nature.

maintained that excessive use of intensives was a mannerism which should be avoided. He wrote, for example, that in its proper place so "is a very precious little word; and nowhere is it more precious than in the expression 'God so loved the world.'"<sup>29</sup> In general, however, he felt that so in an expression like "so totally" destroyed the force of the word which it was meant to strengthen.<sup>30</sup> Moon is probably right about so's being precious but for the wrong reason if he thinks it is a matter of the intrinsic nature of the word. A mannerism is determined by the circumstances, not the logic, of its use.

The remarks of Moon and Cobbett suggest that intensive qualifiers were held in critical disfavor during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. One school of thought further postulated that women were in large part responsible for the widespread use of intensive qualifiers. This school of thought has endured to some extent to the present.

If we examine several specific allegations that blame women for the plethora of intensive qualifiers, we find four specific explanations offered. First, it is

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<sup>29</sup>Bad English Exposed, 7th edition, p. 135. Attention is called here to Moon's use of very. Obviously "very precious" illustrates the judicious use of an intensive construction.

<sup>30</sup>Moon was a member of the Council of the Royal Society of Literature. His discussion of intensive constructions forms part of a series of critical essays on inconsistencies and errors he had noted in the works of Lindley Murray and other grammarians.

asserted that women are incapable of being original. Second, it is alleged that women, more than men, tend to be influenced by what is fashionable in speech. Third, women are accused of failing to finish their sentences because they do not think carefully about what they are going to say. And finally, it is postulated that women substitute inoffensive intensive qualifiers for the profanity which social pressure denies them. These explanations will become clearer as we examine some of the sources which offer them.

On May 6, 1756, an article appeared in The World entitled "Feminine Vocabulary," in which the following statement was made:

Such is the pomp of utterance of our present women of fashion; which, though it may tend to spoil many a pretty mouth, can never recommend an indifferent one. And hence it is that there is so great a scarcity of originals, and that the ear is such a daily sufferer from an identity of phrase, whether it be vastly, horridly, abominably, immensely, or excessively, which, with three or four more calculated for the same swiss-like service, make up the whole scale or gamut of modern female conversation.<sup>31</sup>

Thus women were being held responsible for the presence in the language of a feature which was censured.

Otto Jespersen asserts that adjectives such as pretty and nice have been used more by women than by men.

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<sup>31</sup>Cited in Tucker, p. 96.

He cites a 1754 statement by Lord Chesterfield that vast and vastly had become fashionable with women and everything was "vastly obliged," "vastly offended," "vastly glad," "vastly sorry." A large object was even "vastly great," "a snuffbox vastly little." Something else was "vastly pretty" because it was "vastly little." He feels that women have not contented themselves merely with adding new words to the language; they persist in giving new applications to and extending the meanings of old words.<sup>32</sup> And Jespersen does not entirely approve of what he believes women to be doing.

Jespersen feels that it was the affection of women for hyperbole in general that led them in the first place to institute fashion with regard to adverbs of intensity-- adverbs which they often used without regard at all for the etymological meaning of the word. A thing was awfully pretty or terribly nice. To women quite meant 'very' in the sense of being quite charming or quite angry. A woman would make a statement like "It was just sweet of him."<sup>33</sup>

An 1896 article in Punch cited the frequent feminine use of so--in phrases like "so charming," "so lovely,"

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<sup>32</sup>Language: Its Nature, Development, and Origin, p. 249.

<sup>33</sup>Language: Its Nature, Development, and Origin, p. 249.

"Thank you so much," "Your bonnet is so lovely." Jespersen's explanation for this "characteristically feminine" usage is that, more than men, women break off in conversation without finishing sentences. They start talking without having carefully thought what they are going to say. Actually a statement like "I'm so glad you have come" requires a complement--"that I must kiss you, that I must treat you to something extra," and so on. But when one is speaking hastily, it is often difficult to find the exact words one needs, and the result is something like "I am so glad I cannot express it"--and women do not express the inexpressible. However, as often happens in language, the frequent repetition of such constructions inevitably results in the fact that such constructions acquire some force and become a part of ordinary speech.<sup>34</sup>

Although the idea of placing the blame on women for excessive use of intensive qualifiers may elicit a smile, there is some validity to the argument. Historically middle class American women have not enjoyed the same freedom to swear which their male companions have enjoyed and which women in other cultures have exercised. Thus it has been necessary for them to find euphemistic, socially acceptable expressions of emphasis. It is a

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<sup>34</sup>Language: Its Nature, Development, and Origin, p. 250.

reasonable supposition that intensive qualifiers may have helped to fill the void in the feminine vocabulary which swearing could not fill in polite society.

Whether women will continue to use conventional intensive qualifiers because they do not use as much profanity as men do is debatable. An article in Newsweek magazine maintains that scatological language is becoming more and more frequent in feminine circles. It reports that "The new blue talk seems to radiate from the college campus . . . . At Wisconsin's Stout State University . . . eavesdroppers into the girls' dorms . . . found that coeds swear as often as the boys. The word 'damn' . . . was among the twenty most often used words in ordinary speech."<sup>35</sup> If what this article indicates is true, and the conclusion seems to be so, whatever doubts one may have about the statistics cited, there exists the possibility that intensive qualifiers in ordinary informal speech will be drawn more and more from the heretofore "forbidden" words. At any rate, as women become more and more at ease with their swearing, less and less will they be subject to blame for spreading the popularity of "inane" intensive qualifiers. And it is certainly true that today's liberated woman is not concerned with the supposed impropriety of swearing, that she would feel no need to impose

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<sup>35</sup>Newsweek, 16 December 1968, p. 104.

any artificial restraints on her own language.

At this point it has been shown that the intensive qualifier was to a great extent condemned during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and that women have largely been held to blame. It is in order now to consider more contemporary treatment of the intensive qualifier, to examine grammars and handbooks that describe good usage in order to determine and assess contemporary attitudes toward the intensive qualifier.

Most critical opinion is directed against the use of the intensive qualifier. Those works which set themselves up as arbiters of style almost unanimously recommend against it. What is worth noting, however, is the great variety of reasons given for avoiding its use.

By far the most common is the assertion that intensive qualifiers have been so overworked that they have become virtually colorless and meaningless. One handbook maintains that very has lost so much force that it is often best either to delete it or to replace it with a stronger intensive qualifier. Qualifiers such as terrible, awful, and terrific are called "counter words" and are said to be overused. Such a work implies an attitude toward the qualifier that is somewhat disapproving.<sup>36</sup> Another handbook puts forth a simple warning against the overuse of

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<sup>36</sup>Watt, p. 100 et passim.

intensive qualifiers because of our general tendency to exaggerate, saying that frequent exaggeration has caused words like extremely, terribly, awfully, very, and quite to weaken significantly.<sup>37</sup> Gorrell and Laird also believe that intensive qualifiers must be carefully selected, that they are the mark of careless composition, and that they are frequently overworked.<sup>38</sup>

Occasionally writers adopt the extreme position that common intensive qualifiers like very, quite, rather, pretty, and little can be completely eliminated in most prose. For example, a grammarian such as Sheridan Baker will acknowledge the propensity toward using them by admitting that many have had to be cut from his own texts.<sup>39</sup> In short, such a writer recognizes that intensive qualifiers are frequently used but disapproves of them on stylistic grounds.

It should be mentioned that the tendency to disapprove of intensive qualifiers on the grounds that they are overworked is not a phenomenon of this decade. In fact, during most of the first half of the twentieth century lavishly descriptive prose was coming under censure.

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<sup>37</sup>Myers, pp. 361-362.

<sup>38</sup>p. 380.

<sup>39</sup>The Practical Stylist, p. 103.

Young authors had been having their adjectives heavily blue-penciled, but adverbs were escaping virtually unscathed.<sup>40</sup> Only adverbs used intensively were coming under criticism as being stylistically poor and weak in meaning, and by 1937 H. L. Mencken was discussing intensive qualifiers and pointing to common ones (such as awfully) as examples of the "novelties of slang" which had been overworked until they lost all definite meaning. By 1940 the blue pencil had begun to hit intensive qualifiers hard, and it was felt that in general intensive qualifiers had lost so much meaning that they had come to produce an impression that was the opposite of that desired; and thus their use was considered questionable.<sup>41</sup> Today as well as asserting that intensive qualifiers have weakened in meaning, contemporary grammarians also suggest that common intensive qualifiers are simply boring for the reader.<sup>42</sup>

One encounters occasionally a sort of conservatism by which the oldest and most common intensive forms are preferred to new forms. A case in point is in the writing

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<sup>40</sup>Janet Aiken, Commonsense Grammar, p. 127.

<sup>41</sup>Janet Aiken and Margaret Bryant, Psychology of English, p. 126 ff.

<sup>42</sup>Porter G. Perrin, An Index to English, 4th Edition, p. 225, provides an example of this suggestion.

of C. S. Lewis, who consistently adopts a decisive position regardless of the subject under discussion. Clearly a prescriptivist, Lewis asserts that he has an idea of what is good and bad language and that he intends to send his reader away with a new sense of responsibility to the language. He devotes some space to verbicide, the murder of a word, and in this discussion he calls inflation verbicide in its most common form. One of the examples that he gives is the substitution of awfully for very.<sup>43</sup> Clearly the implication here is an attitude toward innovation in intensive qualifiers which is basically conservative.

Intensive qualifiers are also opposed in the name of precise diction. Such opposition is found especially in the kind of work that attempts to provide the undergraduate with a guide to expository writing. The idea seems to be that although intensive qualifiers are common enough in daily conversation, they weaken the written phrase. Examples like "very strict," "quite a bit," "rather evident," and "most exciting" are censured.<sup>44</sup> This attitude towards intensive qualifiers is fairly typical of contemporary thought, where intensive qualifiers are recognized as stylistic devices which are weak

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<sup>43</sup>Studies in Words, pp. 6-7.

<sup>44</sup>This position is taken by Schwab, pp. 313-314.

if overused.

It is also pointed out by at least one grammarian<sup>45</sup> that avoiding the excessive use of intensive qualifiers will help to keep writing from becoming dated. Since intensive qualifiers are constantly weakening and losing their emphasis, they are constantly passing in and out of fashion, as can be seen in the history of full, jolly, and others. This sort of objection, however, seems valid only if a writer is conscious of writing for the twenty-second century.

The constant use of intensive qualifiers is further considered to be the mark of the amateur writer. Young writers are constantly being cautioned to understate, to render rather than to describe, to remember that a phrase like "a very good woman" is weaker in effect than "a good woman."<sup>46</sup>

Still another disapproving attitude toward the intensive qualifier is based in the idea that although the intensive qualifiers lend emphasis, they may tend to be

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<sup>45</sup>Margaret Bryant, Modern English and Its Heritage, p. 271.

<sup>46</sup>Janet Aiken and Margaret Bryant provide a thorough discussion of this sort of technique in Psychology of English, pp. 126 ff. They cite the following example as typical of an inexpert writer: "Ann dropped into a chair; she had had such a hard day, and she was so tired." They point out that a better effect would have been achieved with "She had had a hard day, and she was tired."

emotional. This would tend to obscure the ultimate effect and would in fact hinder one's understanding of the statement. From this point of view, one can condemn the intensive qualifier in the interest of simplicity and clarity. In this vein, one writer, mildly disapproving of intensive qualifiers, goes on to blame such phrases as "greatly amused," "thoroughly bored," "deeply concerned," "extremely disgusted," "quite encouraged," "decidedly interested," "genuinely pleased," and "quite surprised" as being emotional substitutes for very. He would obviously prefer to have the simple very function as the intensive qualifier in each of those phrases.<sup>47</sup>

Porter Perrin amusingly and cogently summarizes the widespread disapproval of the use of intensive qualifiers in a discussion of the word very. Here the writer points out that very is so much used that its intensive force is slight, and a

writer should make sure that it really adds to the meaning of his phrase. The Emporia Gazette once described its war upon very this way: 'If you feel you must write very, write damn.' So when the urge for emphasis is on him, the reporter writes 'It was a damn fine victory. I am damn tired but damn well--and damn excited.' Then because it is the Emporia (Kansas) Gazette, the copy desk deletes the profanity, and the quotation reads: 'I am tired but well--and

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<sup>47</sup>Long, p. 59.

excited.' That's how the Gazette attains its restrained, simple, and forceful style. Very simple.<sup>48</sup>

Here the qualifier is condemned apparently on stylistic basis; and, as it has been indicated, this represents a school of thought widespread in contemporary language study.

It is at this point valuable to examine the reasons given in the foregoing discussion for the stylistic weakness of intensive qualifiers. To a large extent intensive qualifiers have been criticized for the very features that place them in their class. They are criticized for having weakened in meaning, for being overworked, for failing to add significantly to the meaning of an expression. Yet these are the very criteria that define the class of intensive qualifiers.

Intensive qualifiers are indeed words that have weakened in meaning. They have in fact been overworked until they are "meaningless" insofar as their original lexical meanings are concerned. Their function is to intensify rather than to convey lexical meaning themselves. They are somewhat emotional; speakers and writers use them for just this emotional quality. After all, exaggeration

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<sup>48</sup>p. 451.

(and, to some degree, emotion) plays a significant part in the development of the intensive qualifier. It would appear then that criticism on the basis of the qualities indicated here is criticism which reflects a somewhat limited understanding of the nature and function of the class of intensive qualifiers.

The second major approach to the intensive qualifier is an approach based on descriptive analysis rather than prescriptivism. A smaller but significant group of scholars include the intensive qualifier as a structural element in their descriptions of the English language. Rather than condemn the construction per se, they tend to point out differences in the construction depending upon the level of usage. They do not find the qualifier itself stylistically or grammatically right or wrong. It is just there.

Writers like Fries, for example, point out the possibilities inherent in the use of this element and do not pass judgment on it. They are generally aware that the trend of much modern writing is toward a more colloquial and less formal tone. Not only in advertising, but also in serious books, magazine articles, newspaper reportage, the tendency seems to be that writing reflects the patterns of the spoken language. Thus we find that these writers accept the intensive qualifier as a vital

part of this informal tone. Although some qualifiers are pointed out as slang, they are not censured.<sup>49</sup>

It is apparent that the prose of these writers reflects their overtly stated philosophy. For example, in five pages of Roberts' Understanding English we find the following expressions: "rather vague," "most generally," "more or less serious," "a pretty exclusive group," "too hard," "simply dried up metaphors," "pretty routine affair," "only reasonable," and "very easy."<sup>50</sup> The tone of this entire book is informal if scholarly; thus Roberts' own use of intensive qualifiers is in keeping with his appraisal of them. Other writers, transformationalists, who, as we have seen earlier in this chapter, do not acknowledge intensive qualifiers or deal with them specifically, use them as freely in their own prose. Descriptivists such as Randolph Quirk deal with intensive qualifiers as both a structural and a semantic class but impose no prohibitions on their use.

Descriptive writers will occasionally prescribe to a very limited extent. They do point out that certain

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<sup>49</sup>Paul Roberts cites pretty in "hit the books pretty hard" and awfully in "an awfully cute kid" as colloquial, but he supports the idea that writing is becoming more colloquial. Understanding English, p. 351.

<sup>50</sup>Pp. 350-54.

intensive qualifiers are appropriate in specific situations and inappropriate in others. A typical discussion illustrating these statements points out that a number of intensive qualifier constructions are frequently used without arousing critical condemnation. Among examples are "He is pretty old, but he works very carefully," "They were all very tired, and pretty tiring too," and "It was bitter cold, although the stove was red hot." Pointed out as questionable (or sure to be questioned) are "mighty fine," "real good," and "right interesting."<sup>51</sup>

Although it has been shown that much of the great body of literature dealing with language study tends to censure the intensive qualifier as a poor stylistic device, it has also been shown that there is a growing segment of opinion which offers description rather than criticism. It is apparent now that some statements may be made about the treatment of intensive qualifiers supplied in the various handbooks and commentaries on English grammar and usage examined within this chapter.

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<sup>51</sup>Myers, p. 155.

Summary Statements

In summary, few of the sources actually isolate intensive qualifiers as such. The tendency is to say something about certain adverbs of degree which "intensify" and to drop the subject there. If the authors do concern themselves with intensification at all, many of them discuss intensive pronouns and cite occasions on which these pronouns are acceptable. Nevertheless it should be possible at this point to derive basic principles from the commentaries discussed. Writers seem to fall into two camps concerning their treatment of intensive qualifiers. On the one hand are those who recognize intensive qualifiers and define them as structural units in terms of their function in English utterances and who do not decry their common use. On the other hand are those who do not treat them separately as a class, who lump them in the aggregate of English adverbs, at best setting them off as adverbs of degree, and who tend to condemn them as stylistically poor. Much of their criticism is based on the very characteristics which set intensive qualifiers off as a class.

At any rate, these sources have provided valuable information because they are recognized as prescribing and/or describing that which is stylistically and

technically good in contemporary English usage. Thus the treatment they have given the intensive qualifier reflects contemporary attitudes on the subject. The approaches themselves become increasingly interesting in the light of the fact that regardless of one's attitude, intensive qualifiers are used commonly and frequently. Their frequency must frustrate their censors.

It remains now in the following chapter to determine just where, to what extent, and with what effect intensive qualifiers are used. Thus we will examine the actual distribution of intensive qualifiers in several contemporary media.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISTRIBUTION AND FUNCTION OF THE INTENSIVE QUALIFIER

#### Sources for Analysis

Thus far this study has concerned itself with two things. First, it has attempted to explore to some degree the phenomenon of intensification. Then it has focused on the intensive qualifier as a specific device for intensification and has analyzed both the historical development of some intensive qualifiers and attitudes directed toward the class of words over a period of time. It will now examine the distribution and use of the intensive qualifier in contemporary communication. Two facts become more and more obvious: first, the intensive qualifier is a widely employed structural device; and second, its use is a stylistic technique. Despite the fact that it is frequently severely criticized, it shows no sign of vanishing from the language.

It is evident that intensive qualifiers are common both in the speech and in the writing of contemporary Americans. It is further evident that the use and distribution of the qualifier is not random; the presence or absence of qualifiers often signals a specific effect; and a careful craftsman may use intensive qualifiers to artistic effect in literature. What must be ascertained,

however, is the general principles which underlie the distribution of the intensive qualifier.

To this end it is fruitful to consider several different examples of contemporary prose in order to identify the qualifiers used therein, to discern whether or not those qualifiers produce any specific effects, and to identify any pattern or system in their distribution. It is felt that an adequate representative sampling of contemporary American English usage can be found in the following:

- (1) a selection of short stories taken from a contemporary anthology, Modern Short Stories, edited by Arthur Mizener.<sup>1</sup> The stories chosen from this anthology are "The Waiting" by James Agee from Agee's A Death in the Family; "Delta Autumn," "The Fire and the Hearth," and "The Raid" by William Faulkner; "Old Red" by Caroline Gordon; "The Gambler, the Nun, and the Radio," by Ernest Hemingway; "The Artificial Nigger" by Flannery O'Connor; "The Grave" by Katherine Anne Porter; "A Losing Game" by J. F. Powers; "Defender of the Faith" by Phillip Roth; "A Sense of Shelter" by John Updike; "When the Light Gets Green" by Robert Penn Warren; and "A Worn Path" by Eudora Welty. Each author in this collection of short

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<sup>1</sup>Arthur Mizener, ed., Modern Short Stories, rev. ed.

fiction is a recognized contemporary literary artist of some merit. The stories themselves are written in diverse styles; the subject matter varies; and the characters represent divergent social, economic, and regional backgrounds. Thus it is hoped that this selection will provide insight into the contemporary literary use of intensive qualifiers.

- (2) Selected popular news magazines, Time, Life, and Newsweek in particular.<sup>2</sup> News magazines will be employed because they are topical, extremely popular throughout the United States, and widely read by a middle-class American audience. They are frequently quoted by middle-class America, and in turn frequently quote middle-class America within their pages. In addition they are held up as a standard for popular journalism. They then should provide yet another aspect of intensive qualifier distribution.
- (3) The conversation heard in a randomly selected television interview program.<sup>3</sup> The television

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<sup>2</sup>Life, 21 March 1969; Newsweek, 10 February 1970; Time, 21 March 1969.

<sup>3</sup>"The Tonight Show," National Broadcasting Company, 10 January 1970.

"talk" show was chosen to provide what would perhaps be the most contemporary source of intensive qualifiers. Its format makes it an ideal object of study. It usually features several guests who come from widely differing backgrounds--politically, socially, and economically. Television itself is probably the broadest of contemporary media in that it reaches great numbers of the American population. Further, it undoubtedly promotes the leveling of language distinctions in the United States, and this factor can make it only a richer source for this study.

- (4) A typical display of traditional greeting cards. Intensive qualifiers are often connected with emotions, and the primary function of a greeting card is to excite an emotional reaction. In addition the greeting card is probably the most popular form of literary exchange among middle-class Americans. Thousands are exchanged annually, and they are purchased in large part for the sake of the message. Since the messages frequently include intensive qualifiers, the greeting card is a valuable source of information.

(5) A current edition of children's tales.<sup>4</sup> The primary value of an edition of children's stories is that it serves as a palatable and enjoyable method of education and entertainment. These stories teach in large part by dint of repetition of vocabulary and basic sentences. In effect the English language is reduced to its fundamental elements. That the intensive qualifier is repeated frequently is indicative of its basic importance as a simple and fundamental method of emphasis.

The sources utilized in this chapter show that certain techniques are employed by writers and speakers when they use intensive qualifiers. The analysis of these techniques will focus on each of the five genres (short stories, news magazines, television program, greeting cards, children's stories) in turn.

### Short Stories

Despite the many admonitions that intensive qualifiers are "poor" stylistically, writers of recognized artistic ability do freely use qualifiers. Some writers

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<sup>4</sup>Edna Johnson, Evelyn R. Sickels, Frances Clarke Sayers, Anthology of Children's Literature.

use them more than others, but qualifiers are not completely absent from the works of any of the writers studied.

The prose fiction examined comprises a total of approximately 97,300 words. Of these, 305 words are intensive qualifiers. Thus the frequency of occurrence of intensive qualifiers in the prose fiction may be expressed as .003 intensive qualifiers per word.<sup>5</sup> The distribution of intensive qualifiers in the individual authors studied is as follows:

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<sup>5</sup>Decimals will be rounded off to the nearest thousandth in the interest of clarity.

Table I

<u>Author</u>	<u>Total Number of Words</u>	<u>Intensive Qualifiers</u>	<u>Frequency of Occurrence of Intensive Qualifiers</u>
Agee	8,815	57	.006
Faulkner	35,341	35	.001
Gordon	7,883	17	.002
Hemingway	7,310	77	.011
O'Connor	9,030	35	.004
Porter	2,580	21	.008
Powers	3,870	4	.001
Roth	10,670	22	.002
Updike	5,160	19	.004
Warren	3,153	10	.003
Welty	3,511	8	.002

Forty-eight different intensive qualifiers occur in the prose. They are: absolutely, all, altogether, awful, awfully, clean, completely, damn, dreadfully, enough, entirely, even, exactly, exceedingly, frightfully, goddam, hardly, how, incredibly, just, largely, mighty, more, most, much, only, own, perfectly, plenty, pretty, quite, rather, really, right, simply, so, some, still, straight, terribly, thoroughly, too, utterly, very, virtually, well, and whole. The following phrases are also used as intensive qualifiers:

all the more, a little, a little mite, more and more, and so much. In addition the authors use devices such as double negatives and italicized print to function intensively in conjunction with intensive qualifiers.

In all of the samples of both narration and conversation examined, the qualifier very was by far the most common, occurring approximately twenty-five percent of the time. So and too occurred commonly, although not as frequently as very. Other qualifiers noted as occurring with some frequency are rather, awful, terribly, pretty, really, quite, completely, mighty, most, entirely, absolutely, thoroughly, right, enormously, and substantially.

On the whole, literature of recognized merit reflects little creativity or ingenuity in the choice of intensive qualifiers. John Updike's "A Sense of Shelter" may be considered as a case in point. The qualifiers in this short story are limited almost entirely to the prosaic more, really, so, very, quite, rather, and too. One finds, for example, "more distinct," "really interesting," "so awful," "very silly," "quite stern," "rather blankly," and "too hot." "A Losing Game" by J. F. Powers has only four qualifiers, and they are rather, awful, well, and very. In "When the Light Gets Green" Robert Penn Warren uses very, pretty, too, and so. Philip Roth uses very, enough, awfully, exceedingly, so, and too in "Defender of the Faith." Hemingway relies heavily on very, so, and too.

Flannery O'Connor too depends upon the conventional very, too, and entirely. It is quickly apparent that all of the intensive qualifiers mentioned here would appear in any typical list of qualifiers frequently used in American English.

Katherine Anne Porter's "The Grave" relies on this same group of ordinary qualifiers used so unobtrusively that they do not draw the reader's conscious attention. She uses so, completely, really, rather and very freely in this six-page story. However, when she speaks of the little girl's being "quietly and terribly agitated," the juxtaposition of this particular pair of qualifiers effectively suggests an unusual ambiguity which intrigues the reader's interest.

Several general statements may be made about the use of intensive qualifiers in literature. For example, they predominate in informal conversation and narration rather than in formal narration or formal speeches. Then too, a number of writers use intensive qualifiers carefully as an aid in delineating character. Qualifiers also frequently contribute to an ironic tone, and writers may achieve irony through their effective manipulation. In fact, careful distribution of qualifiers may help in creating tone in general in a situation. Qualifiers are further used to clarify the meaning of specific situations where the

precise choice of qualifier indicates exact meaning.' Each of the generalizations mentioned in this paragraph will now be illustrated in some detail in terms of the prose which was analyzed.

The writers under study tend to make two kinds of distinctions between the narrative portions of their texts and the dialog. First, intensive qualifiers tend to be used more frequently in dialog than in narrative. Second, the choice of qualifiers differs from dialog to narrative.

In stories which preserve a quantitative balance between narrative and dialog far more qualifiers appear in the dialog than appear in the narrative. Furthermore the qualifiers that appear in the narrative show less variety and are themselves less unusual and more formal, more conventional and traditional, than those which appear in dialog. For example, Updike uses phrases like "more distinct," "only one class," "too many times," "very interesting," "quite stern," "very small," "rather blankly," and "so clean," in narrative. In dialog he uses some of the same qualifiers ("so awful," "very silly," "very sweet," "too hot," "too skinny," "so pretty"), but he introduces a phrase like "just aching" in dialog, and this phrase would be stylistically incongruous in the narrative portion. Hemingway's "The Gambler, the Nun, and the Radio" illustrates the monotony in choice of qualifiers and the relative

frequency of qualifiers in dialog. He relies heavily on very ("very reliable," "very sick," "very tired," "very pleased," "very thick"). Among other qualifiers he uses are so ("so uncomplaining," "so much noise"), much ("much simpler," "much better"), and too ("too excited," "too many").

Katherine Ann Porter's "The Grave" has as many qualifiers in narrative as in dialog, but this story has very little dialog in it, and there is very little difference in the qualifiers in each section. James Agee uses qualifiers freely in both narrative and dialog, but he follows the general tendency and uses more in dialog than in the narrative. Those used in narrative are slightly more formal than those used in dialog. For example, one finds "pretty soon," "straight out," and "right along" in dialog and "virtually unbearable," "thoroughly well," "quite volubly," and "very sincerely" in narrative. However, like other authors, he uses very more than any other qualifier, and he uses it in both narrative and dialog.

There does not seem to be a marked difference in the type of qualifier used in dialog and that used in narrative when the narration is in the first person or when a portion of the story takes the form of an interior monolog. The Hemingway story illustrates this principle because it is first-person narration, and the narrator's thoughts are formulated in the same style as are his speeches. William Faulkner's omniscient or first-person narrators make little

distinction in choice of qualifiers between conversations they record and descriptions they narrate. As a matter of fact Faulkner uses few qualifiers.

Robert Penn Warren's "When the Light Gets Green" is narrated by an adult and deals with his childhood. Thus, since it is seen through the eyes of a child who is both supplying narrative and relating dialog, no distinction is made between narrative and dialog in terms of vocabulary in general and consequently in terms of intensive qualifiers. In narrative Grandfather rides "very slow," and the weather is "mighty still;" in dialog very is the dominant qualifier.

Philip Roth's first-person narrative mingles qualifiers in dialog and narrative and displays little variety in the qualifiers chosen. In fact, he employs only very, awfully, so, and too, and he uses very seventy-five percent of the time.

In addition to using qualifiers more in informal conversation than in formal narration, contemporary writers use intensive qualifiers subtly as a technique of delineating character. Relying more on the particular qualifiers which individual characters use than on the frequency of occurrence that qualifiers exhibit in the speech of these characters, a careful writer is able to achieve striking differences among characters. He relies on intensive qualifiers as an additional means of placing his characters against the

appropriate educational and regional background. When a critic discusses the literature of a writer, the qualifiers used by each character (or, alternately, the lack of them) cannot be overlooked. Thus particular qualifiers often signal a character's social or class position. The fact that particular qualifiers may signal dialect differences among characters is obvious. In short, careful selection of qualifiers is used to enhance distinctions--social, educational, regional--among characters.

For example, one of the characters in the Hemingway story is a less-than-intelligent, rather inane nun. The reader's vision of her simple naïveté is enhanced by the fact that the one qualifier she uses over and over again is very. Her conversation is monotonous, and the monotony is emphasized by her repetition of very. The Powers story uses very few intensives, but they are carefully chosen. In reference to the clergymen the narrator uses "rather episcopal," "well suited," and "very few." But when the uneducated janitor speaks, he says "awful busy." Thus it is obvious that the author has in the first cases fitted the qualifiers to the dignity of the subjects under discussion and in the second case used the informal awful in connection with the less dignified janitor. The Warren story is narrated by a child and relates a childhood incident. The story is written in what is a very simple style, and

the child is apparently quite young. Thus the qualifiers used here are themselves simple--very, pretty, too, and so--and are appropriate both to the subject matter and to the characters involved.

Closely related to their function of defining and distinguishing character is the ability of the intensive qualifier to suggest social status. This is perhaps done most obviously when the writer deals with some sort of regional dialect in his story. Commonly, the more pronounced the dialect, the simpler, more naive the character. When the writer wishes to create the effect of dealing with genuine natives of a region, he finds the use of regional dialect an asset.

James Agee, William Faulkner, Caroline Gordon, Flannery O'Connor, Katherine Ann Porter, and Eudora Welty deal with southerners, and in each story the regional dialect of the characters is an obvious feature. Common to each story is the widespread distribution of familiar qualifiers. Very occurs far more often than any other qualifier; too, entirely, simply, and completely frequently appear. However, on occasion each writer demonstrates that intensive qualifiers can be used colorfully to reinforce dialect and social status. The characters in "Old Red" are unsophisticated country people; in precise reference Caroline Gordon suggests their character with phrases like "so bone ignorant" and

double negative intensive constructions, as in "don't hardly know." Faulkner drops an occasional intensive qualifier "damn" into dialog to add to the same effect. In "A Worn Path" Phoenix Jackson speaks of the "whole enduring time." Flannery O'Connor's character has a "mighty sorry time"; the intensive "ain't--either" construction appears in the same story. These colorful qualifiers and constructions appear in the dialog rather than in the narrative portions of the stories, with the exception of "Old Red," which is a first person narrative in which no distinctions are made between narrative and dialog.

Yet another function of the intensive qualifier in addition to delineating character is the creation and maintenance of tone in a piece of fiction. Selection of new or unusual qualifiers creates an atmosphere of freshness or novelty, while selection of conservative, staid qualifiers may result in a serious tone. In addition, qualifiers may be applied to specific qualities to aid in creating patterns of imagery in both speech and prose. For example, numerous qualifiers applied to modifiers related to speed may heighten the effect of motion; numerous qualifiers applied to modifiers related to color may heighten the impression made by the colors. Colloquial qualifiers enhance an informal tone.

For example, as tone shifts in "Defender of the Faith," the shift is signaled by differing qualifiers.

Throughout most of the story the tone is quiet and restrained, and the most widely distributed intensive qualifier is very, as in "very slight," "very simply," "very strong," "very close," etc. However, during the angry confrontation one night between the sergeant and the enlisted man one finds "Stay the hell away," and the next morning a G.I. refers to "Chinese goddam eggroll."<sup>6</sup> Simplicity and restraint mark the tone of "A Worn Path." The intensive qualifiers which maintain the dignity of the story and of Phoenix Jackson are very in "very old," so in "so high," all in "all gone," and straight in "straight up." This tone is further maintained by the use of few intensive qualifiers in general in the story. In the Faulkner stories a colloquial, informal tone is maintained with phrases such as "a little mite stronger," "a little smarter," and "right yonder."

Frequently intensive qualifiers appear in the speech of a person or a character who is relaxed and at ease in his surroundings, and thus they may add to the leisurely tone of the situation. Why the intensive qualifier should

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<sup>6</sup>Although "the hell" does not seem to be an intensive qualifier in form, in this case it apparently functions as a qualifier intensifying away. The phrase "Chinese goddam eggroll" seems to illustrate a sort of structural reversal in which greater emphasis is gained by placing the goddam after Chinese similar to a stretch form. In this case within the phrase as it stands, however, goddam is not truly a qualifier, although it does add emphasis.

occur so readily in situations with which the speaker is familiar is difficult to explain. Perhaps the explanation is as simple as the fact that unfamiliar circumstances which render one ill at ease are not conducive to informal conversation. At any rate, ordinary situations encourage ordinary intensive qualifiers, while ordinary intensive qualifiers may then enhance the casualness of an ordinary situation.

If, however, a writer chooses to use an ordinary qualifier under horrible circumstances, he may manage to enhance the horror of the affair with his off-hand manner, or he may create an effect that is simply humorous. For example, "A Sense of Shelter" concludes with the observation that it is "very hot . . . the smell . . . was like the mingled sweetness and corruption . . . in the cemetery." Added to this "dreadful vision" are images of "piles of raw flesh and wilting flowers." Here the intensive qualifier very, a low-profile word, helps bring into sharp relief the strong, almost repugnant, image created.

Qualifiers may well be used to lend a tone of security or authority or conviction to an otherwise bland or doubtful situation. The effective placement of a forceful qualifier may strengthen a weak assertion of fact, and numerous qualifiers are used to this end. However, a plethora of qualifiers in the same situation may have just the opposite effect and further weaken the situation. Therefore, when qualifiers are used for reinforcement, they are used with discretion.

In "The Waiting," for example, Mary attempts to reassure herself that her husband is not seriously injured, and she wonders if he can get "thoroughly well," if they will bring him "straight home." She seems to be attempting to construct an aura of security for herself, and the intensive qualifiers in her speech bear this out.

The very fact that a word may function as a qualifier indicates that it is not confined to the limited range of semantic connotations attached to its literal meaning. To the contrary, qualifiers may tend to become rather colorless. Therefore, they can ironically drip malice or throw into comic relief an ostensibly serious situation. Because on the one hand their frequent use renders them colorless and on the other hand most qualifiers originate as vivid, forceful words, they may effectively draw on both areas of meaning. Thus one encounters intensive qualifiers which help to create irony. For example, when the young girl is upset by the bloody body of the dead rabbit in "The Grave," she is not merely agitated but is "terribly agitated." Thus the word terribly brings home to the reader both the horror of the situation and the irony of the choice of a widely used, hence relative weak, intensive qualifier to depict it.

Irony may also be created through a proliferation of intensive qualifiers. For example, the inane nun in Hemingway's "The Gambler, the Nun, and the Radio" speaks of

a critically ill patient as being "so uncomplaining" when his condition is "very bad" and the odor of his peritonitis "really terrific." She overstates in general, and the multiplicity of intensive qualifiers in her conversation are applied equally to the critically ill patient and to a baseball game, the suspense of which is "simply dreadful," "too much." Thus the frequent use of intensive qualifiers in her speech and her lack of discrimination in their choice contribute to the irony perceived by the reader.

Yet another way in which writers of fiction use intensive qualifiers is to clarify meaning in a given situation. That this is an effective technique is illustrated when on occasion the author invites his reader to become aware of the conscious manipulation of qualifiers. In the Agee story such a point is reached when one of the characters ponders aloud the presence or absence of an intensive qualifier in an effort to establish an exact degree of meaning. Awaiting news of an injured relative, the woman reflects "'A serious accident,' he said. Not a 'very' serious one. Just 'serious.' Though, goodness knows, that's serious enough."<sup>7</sup> This character is attempting to discern what her informant meant by saying that the accident was "serious" when he did not

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<sup>7</sup>James Agee, "The Waiting," in Mizener, p. 415.

say that it was "very serious." She actually goes on to take some sort of comfort from the fact that the intensive qualifier very was not used.<sup>8</sup>

Before beginning the discussion of the material gleaned from an analysis of news magazines, one important statement must be made. One does not draw the same sort of conclusions about the intensive qualifiers which one draws from fiction simply because the prose forms are different and have different purposes. The manipulation of the intensive qualifier in news magazines, on television, in greeting cards, and in children's tales lacks the artistic merit of that found in literary prose. However, specific effects are evident in all media.

#### News Magazines

Several conclusions may be reached about the use and distribution of intensive qualifiers in the articles, editorials and reviews found in contemporary news magazines--Time, Life, and Newsweek. One might expect of this more formal, ostensibly objective format, that intensive qualifiers do not appear frequently. However, this is not so.

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<sup>8</sup>Agee further emphasizes the role of intensive qualifiers by frequently italicizing them or including them within single quotation marks, indicating that the words are quoted, in reality or in imagination.

They actually appear more frequently in these periodicals than in the prose fiction analyzed. There does not appear to be a significant difference in the use and distribution of these qualifiers from one magazine to the other.

A total of 19,785 words in news magazines were examined. The prose consisted of news articles and reviews. Within this prose 121 of the words employed were intensive qualifiers. Thus the percentage of intensive qualifiers occurring in the prose is .006 qualifiers per word. In news articles, however, the percentage is roughly .005 intensive qualifiers per word, while the percentage of intensive qualifiers occurring in reviews is .022 intensive qualifiers per word. The following qualifiers appear in these periodicals: absolutely, altogether, comfortably, conspicuously, decidedly, dreadfully, emphatically, enormously, entirely, even, exceedingly, extremely, fairly, genuinely, highly, just, largely, literally, mighty, more, most, much, only, perfectly, pretty, purely, quite, rather, really, reasonably, severely, so, still, straight, strongly, substantially, surprisingly, terribly, thoroughly, too, totally, very, virtually, and wholly. The following phrases function as intensive qualifiers: a little and kind of.

More intensive qualifiers occur in quoted dialog than in narration, and all of these magazines incorporate a significant amount of quoted dialog within their articles. When one issue happens to feature a great deal of dialog,

the frequency of occurrence of intensive qualifiers increases.

In general throughout the magazines the qualifiers used with the greatest degree of frequency are conservative and unimaginative. The editors rely heavily on most ("a most steadfast antiwar spokesman," "most serious," "most ambitious,"), entirely ("entirely different"), and very ("very few," "very good"). Interestingly enough, however, editors do not depend entirely on very. Most is also popular. Perhaps it seems to lend more dignity and importance than very.

News magazines make effective use of a variety of intensive qualifiers which are unimaginative in themselves. However, the fact that the editors do not rely entirely on one intensive qualifier creates the impression of diversity and freshness. The phrases in which these qualifiers are incorporated gain meaning when the reader begins to consider the historical semantic associations of the qualifier. Unimaginative they may be in themselves, but they are also carefully chosen and gain meaning in context. Consider, for example, the scope of "substantially below," "largely boarded up," "genuinely misled," "enormously fertile," and "emphatically condemned."

Television Interview Program

Yet another aspect of the distribution of intensive qualifiers is apparent through the study of conversation on a contemporary television interview program, Johnny Carson's "The Tonight Show." This conversation provides valuable information about the language patterns in "T.V. standard" English, and this is the English standard which middle America is coming to recognize more and more as acceptable "good" English.

In one and one-half hours of conversation it is reasonable to estimate that approximately 5,400 words were considered. Among these, 52 words were intensive qualifiers. This suggests a percentage distribution of .010 intensive qualifiers per word. The following intensive qualifiers were employed on the program: absolutely, awful, extremely, fairly, just, kind of, lot, much, perfectly, real, really, right, scrupulously, so, somehow, terribly, too, very, and whole.

The phenomenon of intensification is evident throughout such programs. This is probably due in great part to the purposes of the programs--to entertain and to sell products in a consciously easy-going and informal setting. At the same time the performers seem to be preoccupied with convincing the audience of the importance of all that is going on as well as the importance of the people appearing on the program. Thus the audience is exposed to "very

sensational stars" and "really unusual performances." Many qualifiers appear in the exchanges of compliments which are a stock feature of each evening's program.

Five primary devices of intensification are evident: repetition, own-pronouns, emphatic verb forms, stressed pronunciation of words; and intensive qualifiers. Words, phrases, and ideas are constantly repeated. Repetition is an obvious technique in commercials, but it also occurs consistently throughout the dialogs. The names of the guests are repeated; when they are introduced, it is with a cluster of adjectives all saying substantially the same thing. In addition to repetition, a number of own-pronoun constructions appear during the course of conversation. A guest talks about "my own achievement," "his own talent," and "our own efforts." All of the participants on the programs seem to want to express "their own ideas." In expressing their ideas, they also use emphatic verb forms, such as "people do help" and "actors do work."

By far the most obvious intensive element, however, is the intensive qualifier. As the list indicates the individual qualifiers employed are conventional and few in number in comparison with other media. As has proven to be consistent in other media, very is used most often. However, really, and real are used almost as frequently.

The primary effect achieved by the intensive qualifiers in such a television program is the delineation

and maintenance of mood or tone. A significant distinction between the kinds of intensive qualifiers used becomes apparent as the mood or tone of the interviews shifts. For example, during an interview with a semi-educated comedian, both host and guest used informal qualifiers in keeping with the informal language they were using. One said his tie was "kinda sharp," that another individual was "pretty loud mouthed." Later, during an interview with an obviously educated and intelligent political commentator, both general vocabulary and intensive qualifiers became more formal. For example, one heard "extremely foolish," "very relevant," "scrupulously honest," "fairly consummate," "somewhat guilty," and "very much interested." It happens that "kind of" was used during this more serious discussion, and "kind of" is considered to be an informal construction. However, when it was used during this second period, both words were pronounced. The contrast between "kind of" and "kinda" was noticeable.

Thus it can be seen again, as it was in literature, that intensive qualifiers play a significant role in reflecting the mood or spirit of dialog.

Greeting Cards

Another medium in which intensive qualifiers made a significant appearance is greeting cards, the ordinary cards, exchanged by thousands of people annually. In greeting cards a message must be short, to the point, and personal, and it should evoke a desired response in the recipient of the card. Intensive qualifiers function here in two major ways. They add to the sentiment of the message, and they lengthen the verse, adding to the metrical structure. When they reinforce the sentimental tone of a message, it is obvious that they also fit into the metrical scheme. However, within other messages they add less to tone than they do to meter.

Following are several sentimental verses in which the intensive qualifier(s) add to the cloying sentimentality.

Along with loving wishes  
 for your nicest day  
   so far,  
 Comes a special thought,  
 Granddaughter,  
 Of how very dear you are. (Rust Craft)

If thoughts were flowers  
 What a bouquet  
 Would brighten up your room today  
 For so many thoughts and wishes, too,  
 Keep going your way  
 The whole day through. (No name)

Another Christmas season  
 Is another chance to say  
How many happy things  
 you're wished  
 In just the warmest way. (Gibson)

Because of all the things we've done  
 The happiness we've known  
 Because of plans and dreams that we  
 Can call our very own,  
 This greeting brings a loving wish  
 That comes to tell you, too,  
 Its wonderful, Honey, to share  
 This special day with you. (Hallmark)

A very Merry Christmas and a  
 Happy New Year, too,  
 Now, there's a pair of wishes  
 That are anything but new,  
 But actually they're most sincere  
 And go a long, long way  
 Toward saying how much happiness  
 You're wished from day to day. (Gibson)

In the following verses the primary function of the intensive qualifier seems to be to enhance or lengthen the meter. In these selections less sentiment dominates the message, and there is less need for the qualifier to re-inforce a sentimental tone.

One new baby's mighty nice,  
 But, Gee  
 You folks have two  
 That's something very special. (Gibson)

Here's a little something  
 With the  
 Best of wishes, too,  
 For someone who is very nice  
 In other words, for you. (Hallmark)

From these samples it can be seen that the intensive qualifiers used in greeting card verse are unimaginative and repetitive. Very is used far more than any other intensive qualifier, and the qualifiers are used for their intensive function or as metrical rather than filler for any semantic associations.

In all a total of 150 cards were examined, their messages including some 3,450 words. Of those forty-two were intensive qualifiers, creating a distribution of approximately .012 intensive qualifiers per word. This is the highest percentage of intensive qualifiers appearing in any of the media examined. At the same time, this sample reveals the least variety in the selection of intensive qualifiers employed, for the intensive qualifiers number only the following: awfully, how, just, mighty, most, quite, really, so, terribly, too, and very.

The different occasions for which the cards are intended seem to call for little difference in the use of qualifiers, other than the fact that in the few sympathy cards examined, the qualifiers used tend to be somewhat formal. Very, quite, so, too, and most appear most commonly, whereas mighty and awfully do not appear at all. There is no apparent difference in the qualifiers used in cards for children and cards for adults. There is, however, a noticeable difference in the incidence of

qualifiers in studio cards. Intensive qualifiers occur approximately half as frequently in studio cards as in other greeting cards because those studio cards with brief, terse messages use few qualifiers of any sort, although studio cards with longer messages employ qualifiers in much the same manner as other greeting cards.

Yet however meaningless and unimaginative intensive qualifiers are in greeting card messages, they still manage to inflate the ego, soothe the heartbreaks, and remember the special days in the lives of the recipients.

### Children's Stories

The final source of intensive qualifiers, children's tales, was selected because it provides a body of literature couched in simple, elementary terms; and it was felt that some acknowledgement of the role intensive qualifiers play in English on its basic levels would be valuable. Examination of a standard, familiar collection of fairy tales reveals that there are several factors which apparently condition the use of intensive qualifiers in this sort of story. First, these stories are directed toward children. Thus the vocabulary employed will be limited to a child's understanding. Second, these stories are meant to be read aloud. Thus they will be repetitive and simple in diction. Third, the subject matter of the stories is super-

natural or fantastic. The tone of the stories is set by the willing suspension of disbelief, and any techniques which add to the aura of fantasy will heighten their success.

There is little variety in the particular intensive qualifiers that occur most frequently in fairy tales. So, very, quite, too, more, most, and really appear more often than other intensive qualifiers, and so, very, and quite are the most popular of this group. These very simple qualifiers are justified by the audience, means of transmission, and subject matter.

They are words which enter the child's vocabulary early in his life; they are a part of simple, clear diction; and when used as intensive qualifiers they heighten the nature of that quality they modify to such an extent that, given the appropriate setting, the quality can take on the aura of the fantastic. For example, Hansel and Gretel become "very hungry" when lost in the forest. The shoemaker's elves are "very clever." Innumerable enchanted princesses are "very beautiful." Witches are "quite evil," appearing when it is "quite dark." Jack's beanstalk is "so big" and the giant "so haughty." The ugly duckling weeps "so piteously" before he turns into a swan whom the children admire because he is "so young, so handsome." This heightening of the extreme qualities of a situation is vital to a fairy tale.

Within these tales at least 17,200 words were examined. Of these ninety-two were intensive qualifiers. Thus there was a frequency of occurrence of .005 intensive qualifiers per word, which, as we have seen, is a frequency of occurrence higher than that in other prose fiction. The specific intensive qualifiers employed are: frightfully, gloriously, greatly, indeed, just, monstrous, most, much, quite, rather, right, so, still, terribly, thoroughly, too, very, and wonderfully.

It is interesting to note, then, that the intensive qualifier moves with adept ease into the fantastic world of the fairy tale. It appears both in dialog and in narrative passages and adds significantly to the totality of the effect of the tale.

### Conclusions

The sources in this study examined have demonstrated a progression from more to less sophistication as this discussion has moved from fiction to periodicals to television to greeting cards to fairy tales. This progression was necessary in order to broaden the scope of the analysis and to add to the validity of the conclusions reached.

In all samples of the five genres (short story, news magazine, television talk show, greeting card verse, and fairy tale) a total of 143,158 words were examined. Of

these, 612 were intensive qualifiers. This yields an overall distribution of .004 intensive qualifiers per word.

The following chart summarizes graphically the comparative frequency of occurrence of intensive qualifiers in the sources examined:

Table II

<u>Source</u>	<u>Total number of words</u>	<u>Intensive qualifiers</u>	<u>Frequency of occurrence of intensive qualifiers</u>
prose fiction	97,323	305	.003
news magazines	19,785	121	.006
television interview program	5,400	52	.010
greeting cards	3,450	42	.012
children's tales	17,200	92	.005

Seventy-five different individual intensive qualifiers were encountered in the sources studied. It may be helpful in summary simply to have them listed here:

absolutely, all, altogether, awful, awfully, clean,  
comfortably, completely, conspicuously, damn, damned,  
decidedly, dreadfully, emphatically, enormously, enough,  
entirely, even, exactly, exceedingly, extremely, fairly, far,  
frightfully, genuinely, gloriously, goddam, hardly, highly,  
how, incredibly, just, largely, literally, mighty, monstrous,  
more, most, much, only, own, perfectly, plenty, pretty,

purely, quite, rather, real, really, reasonably, right, scrupulously, severely, simply, so, some, somehow, still, straight, strongly, substantially, sure, surely, surprisingly, terribly, thoroughly, too, totally, utterly, very, virtually, well, whole, wholly, and wonderfully. In addition, the following phrases were seen to appear functioning as intensive qualifiers: a good deal, a little, a little mite, all the more, far and away, kind of, more and more, more or less, quite a bit, and so much.

In actual practice, however, speakers of English rely on a relatively small number of specific intensive qualifiers to produce intensification. The following small group of intensive qualifiers are the only ones which occurred ten or more times in the sources examined. They are used far more frequently than any of the remaining qualifiers.

Table III

<u>Qualifier</u>	<u>Number of uses</u>
very	150
so	82
too	45
quite	21
right	20
really	18
much	11
rather	10

It can thus be seen that very, so, and too occur with far more frequency than any of the remaining qualifiers.

It can be seen by now that several things are generally true about the use of intensive qualifiers in contemporary media. First, their use is widespread. In no source examined was the use of intensive qualifiers even rare, much less nonexistent.

Second, their use is apparently often conscious, and this conscious application of intensive qualifiers is not limited to literature. That people are aware of the significance of the intensive qualifier was illustrated when Senator Robert F. Kennedy was shot. His press secretary engaged in a lengthy discussion with reporters concerning the Senator's condition. The problem was to determine whether the Senator's condition was to be labeled serious or very serious. Such an exchange illustrates the importance of the qualifier as a vehicle for conveying and clarifying meaning, and it illustrates the fact that the people involved had a definite aware of the significance of the intensive qualifier.

Third, that the intensive qualifier is employed as a literary device hardly needs reiterating. Some discussion has been given its effectiveness in maintaining tone, delineating character, signalling social status, and creating irony.

Certain general principles have emerged concerning the use of the intensive qualifier in nonliterary media. For example, the qualifier functions first and foremost for emphasis, but it is a basic element for conveying emotions, moods, or the spirit of a dialog. It is often critically important in clarifying meaning precisely.

The variety of intensive qualifiers used in any given situation is a significant indication of the character of the persons involved. Generally speaking, the more sophisticated a speaker, the fewer intensive qualifiers will appear in his speech and the greater the variety among the intensive qualifiers which do appear. The less sophisticated speaker tends to lace his conversation with qualifiers, and his range of qualifiers is limited. Apparently the intensive qualifier is a structural device mastered early in life, but as a vocabulary item it serves as a direct indication of the intelligence, education, and sophistication of the speaker.

CHAPTER V  
CONCLUSION

At this point several conclusions may be drawn from this study of the intensive qualifier. It has been indicated that the area of intensification offers a wealth of material for analysis because intensification manifests itself in virtually all forms of oral and written expression and permeates all levels of usage. Yet scholars have given intensification too little study in light of its importance in English communication.

The intensive qualifier is but one of several signals of intensification; yet it is perhaps the most commonly employed mode of intensification. Further, it is not difficult to isolate. It is a discrete lexical unit, a word. It occupies a recognizable position in English utterances; that is, it precedes adjectives, adverbs, and other qualifiers. Then too its function, intensification, is clear. It has been employed in English speech and writing for centuries and shows no signs of vanishing today.

That the intensive qualifier enjoys wide distribution today has been illustrated by an examination of a varied group of sources of contemporary American English. Counting the intensive qualifiers in random samples of the language demonstrates that the average

frequency of occurrence of intensive qualifiers is .004 intensive qualifiers per word. Intensive qualifiers appear in virtually all forms of English expression and levels of usage. They appear in both spoken and written English, in both formal and informal expression. One might logically expect that varying levels of usage and diction appropriate to different modes of expression would provide a large number of intensive qualifiers in common usage. But this is not so. Within these diverse areas of distribution we find the same basic core of approximately eighty intensive qualifiers appearing over and over again. They apparently transcend stylistic limitations and freely cross the boundaries imposed by levels of usage. However, hundreds of intensive qualifiers do exist in the language because speakers freely create new intensive qualifiers as the need arises, although in actual practice some eighty intensive qualifiers form the nucleus of the qualifier group. Closer examination reveals that six of the list of eighty qualifiers appear far more frequently than the remainder. These six, listed in order of frequency of occurrence, are very, so, too, quite, right, and really. Very is by far the most commonly employed qualifier. It appears approximately twice as frequently as so, three times as frequently as too, and seven times as frequently as each of the remaining three.

Careful selection of specific intensive qualifiers has been shown to be an effective rhetorical technique in all of the sources examined. Writers and speakers employ them to aid in the creation of particular effects. First and foremost, they use the intensive qualifier to intensify, to add emphasis to the qualifier it modifies. However, beyond this direct function, the choice of a specific qualifier can do more than simply add emphasis; it can significantly affect the manner in which the qualifier adds emphasis and the quality of that emphasis itself. Two factors must be considered here: the number of qualifiers employed in an utterance and the specific qualifiers chosen. For example, the presence of several qualifiers will produce an effect totally different from that produced by the absence of all qualifiers. Compare, for example, a statement such as "He was really extremely disturbed" to "He was disturbed." The choice of a formal qualifier, very for example, over one less formal, damned, for example, suggests a significant difference in tone and diction.

Intensive qualifiers are used in literature to delineate characters, to enhance social, educational, and regional distinctions among characters, to suggest and maintain tone, and to clarify meaning. They predominate in informal rather than in formal prose. They appear more in dialog than in narrative portions of fiction.

In news magazines they occur more in reviews and editorials than in straightforward reportage. It seems that when the narrator is apparent to the reader, when he emerges as a person, the frequency of qualifiers increases. Thus they help to maintain the personal quality of the review or editorial. Speakers employ intensive qualifiers to create and maintain tone in conversation. Qualifiers function in greeting cards to enhance sentiment and to maintain metrical patterns. In fairy tales they manage to aid in the creation of an aura of fantasy largely because they add to sheer exaggeration.

Thus it is apparent that too many distinctions can be made concerning the effects produced by the choice of specific intensive qualifiers in specific situations to dismiss them as insignificant units of English communication. They merit serious study.

Any attention given the historical development of the intensive qualifier suggests three conclusions. First, the intensive qualifier has historically been a common element in English communication; second, intensive qualifiers weaken in meaning with the passage of time and with frequency of use; and third, new qualifiers are constantly being created. Intensive qualifiers lose literal lexical meaning as they are more and more frequently employed. Most words come to be used as intensive qualifiers in the

first place because they suggest some absolute or extreme quality. The speaker searches his own vocabulary for some forceful word to give emphasis to whatever he is attempting to express. But since his primary concern is emphasis rather than the lexical meaning of the qualifier he chooses, the lexical meaning becomes less and less important, and frequent use finally determines that the qualifier ultimately lose major semantic associations other than intensity.

As specific qualifiers come to be used more and more, they tend to lose their original force and weaken in intensity. Therefore, speakers constantly create new ones in an effort to recapture a fresh intense effect, and new intensive qualifiers are continually entering the language. Ironically, however, although new intensive qualifiers are constantly being created, they do not permanently displace those few intensive qualifiers which seem to be indispensable in contemporary usage. Despite the wide range of intensive qualifiers currently in use, speakers of English tend to rely ultimately on the same rather limited list of the most common qualifiers, and very, so, and too remain the most popular.

Although the employment of intensive qualifiers is pervasive educationally, socially, and historically, few grammarians have adequately treated them as a structural class. Many writers have failed to define them precisely,

often regarding them at best as members of an ill-defined subgroup of adverbs. Some structuralists, however, have recognized that intensive qualifiers form a distinct class and treat them as such. On the other hand, many transformationalists are among those who fail to isolate them adequately.

Treating the intensive qualifier as a stylistic device, grammarians have commonly held them in little esteem. Whenever they have felt called upon to make some statement about the use of qualifiers, the tendency on the part of these writers has been to censure them, to point out that they are stylistically weak, to suggest that they be omitted. Intensive qualifiers have frequently been called "empty words" because of their loss of lexical meaning and as such are censured. This sort of reasoning recognizes the primary function of the intensive qualifier, i.e. to intensify, but it ignores the fact that although these words are perhaps "empty" in isolation, when they are actually used in phrases, they bring to mind the entire range of intensification. The individual intensive qualifier has meaning in relation to other intensive qualifiers and in relation to the quality it modifies. Therefore it has meaning in an unspoken but real framework, and speakers of English understand this framework. A particular intensive qualifier is chosen out of all other qualifiers for

the connotations it suggests as well as for the force it exerts. If intensive qualifiers were in fact "empty" words, there would be no reason for choosing one over another. But this is obviously not true, for when a speaker says, for example, that one thing is "extremely good," he means something different from a statement that something is "very good" or "damned good." These three qualifiers do not suggest identical meaning. They all function to intensify, but different effects are produced by the selection of one rather than the others. They suggest different levels of diction and different situations in which they would be appropriate. Hence they are not "empty," and thus condemnation of intensive qualifiers most probably stems largely from stylistic preference rather than from semantic hollowness.

Today the general attitude of those who write books on grammar and rhetoric is changing. The intensive qualifier is commonly being recognized and defined as a significant structural unit within English utterances. It is defined largely in terms of its patterning before adjectives and adverbs and in terms of its intensive function. As a stylistic device it is less frequently censured. Just as levels of usage are commonly recognized as appropriate to different situations, so specific qualifiers are being appropriate to different situations. Careful selection

and choice of qualifiers is urged in order best to create the effect desired within an utterance.

Thus the contemporary emphasis is on choosing the right qualifier rather than on categorically avoiding them. Implicit in this approach is a recognition of the complexity of meaning associated with the qualifier and an acknowledgement that the intensive qualifier is a significant structural unit of English communication.

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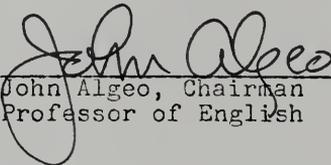
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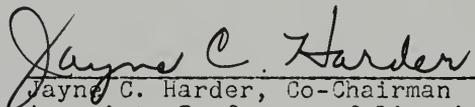
## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

  
John Algeo, Chairman  
Professor of English

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Associate Professor of Linguistics

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