

# **A Semantic Analysis of Intensifiers in Selected Stories**

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**تحليل دلالي للمشددات في قصص مختارة**

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**Abstract:-**

This study analyzes intensifiers from a semantic perspective in three selected stories that are written by Wilde. It aims at identifying the types of intensifiers that are used in these stories, finding out the most frequent intensifiers, and exploring their semantic functions. It hypothesizes that intensifiers are used in these stories to emphasize the elements they modify. The method of the study is a mixed method through which the researcher collects data from the selected stories, investigates intensifiers, their frequency, and provides justification for using this intensifier over others. The data consists of excerpts from the selected stories ( The Happy Prince, The Birth of the Infanta, The Selfish Giant). The findings of the study support its hypotheses.

**Key Words:** semantics, intensifiers, princess, giant, dwarf.

**المخلص:-**

تحلل هذه الدراسة المشددات من الناحية الدلالية في قصص مختارة كتبها وايلد. تهدف الدراسة الى تحديد انواع المشددات التي تم استخدامها في تلك القصص، ومعرفة المشددات الاكثر تكرار واستكشاف وظائفها الدلالية. تفترض الدراسة ان المشددات قد استخدمت في هذه القصص للتأكيد على العنصر الذي تشدد عليه. طريقة البحث هي طريقه مختلطة يتم من خلالها جمع البيانات من القصص المختارة، ايجاد المشددات، تكرارها وتقديم المبررات لاستخدام هذا النوع من المشددات بدلا من غيره. تتكون البيانات من مقتطفات من القصص المختارة ( الامير السعيد، ولاده انفانتا، العملاق الاناني). تدعم نتائج الدراسة فرضيتها.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** علم الدلالة، المشددات، الامير، العملاق، القزم.

## Semantics

Semantics is a technical term for studying meaning in language. It covers many aspects of language and meaning, but there is no general agreement on what exactly should be included or how to describe it. It is a new term, and it is traced to 1948. (Palmer, 1981: 1). It is also used in philosophy and logic, but not with the same range of meaning or emphasis as in linguistics. Philosophical semantics studies the relations between linguistic expressions and the phenomena in the world to which they refer and takes into their consideration the conditions under which such expressions can be spoken to be true or false, as well as the factors that affect the interpretation of language as used. In linguistics, the emphasis is on studying the semantic properties of natural languages (Crystal, 2008: 428-429).

## Intensifier

An intensifier is a term used to refer to a class of adverbs that heighten or lower the meaning of another element in a sentence, for example very, definitely, terribly, hardly, or kind of. It is used either to adjust the intensity of word meaning or to express the speaker's attitude. In communication, intensifiers play an important role; they are a vehicle for persuading, praising, insulting, impressing, and generally impacting the listener's reception of the message. They can modify a variety of word classes (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) and they can serve different semantic functions (Kalebic, 2015:131). Similarly, Decapua (2008: 107) states that intensifiers are adverbs that strengthen the meaning of adjectives and adverbs; they normally precede the adjectives (gradable adjectives that can be used with comparative and superlative forms) and adverbs they are rightening as in: "Jan writes extremely well." in this sentence, the adverb 'extremely' modifies the adjectives 'well'.

## Classification of intensifiers

Intensifiers are classified according to the force of intensification and parameters of variation:

### 1. The force of intensification

Quirk et al. (1985: 589-598) divided intensifiers into amplifiers and downtoners. Amplifiers scale upwards from a supposed norm, whereas downtoners usually scaling downwards from a supposed norm. That is why such scaling requires gradable items to intensify. Amplifiers are divided into two types, which are:

- a. Maximizers are intensifiers that denote the upper extreme of scale; they are: completely, altogether, entirely, fully, perfectly, quite, absolutely, extremely, fully, quite, thoroughly, totally, utterly, in all respects, most.
- b. Boosters are intensifiers that refer to a high point on the scale; they are: heartily, far, bitterly, badly, deeply, highly, enormously, intensely, much, severely, so strongly, terribly, violently, well, a good deal, a lot, a great deal, by far, exclamatory how, . intensely.

On the other hand, downtoners are divided into four types, which are:

- a. Approximators are used to express an approximation to the force of the verb while indicating that the verb concerned expresses more than is relevant, such as almost, nearly, practically, virtually, or as good as all but .
- b. Compromisers have a slight lowering effect and tend to call into question the appropriateness of the verb concerned. They are: kind of, sort of, rather enough, sufficiently, more or less (ibid.).
- c. Diminishers, meaning "to some extent", are divided into:
  - The expression diminishers are intensifiers that express only part of the potential force of item concerned. They are: Mildly (to moderate degree) partly (to limited degree), quite (to moderate degree), partially (to some extent), slightly (to small degree), somewhat (to moderate degree), in part (to some extent), in some respect (to limited degree), a little (to the smallest degree), to some extent (to limited degree), a bit, and least (to small degree).
  - The attitude diminishers, implying that the force of expression is restricted. They include words and phrases such as only, merely, simply, just, and but.

- Minimizers are negative maximizers such as barely, hardly, little, scarcely and non-assertives: in the slight, in the least, at all, a bit (Quirk et al., 1985: 589-598)

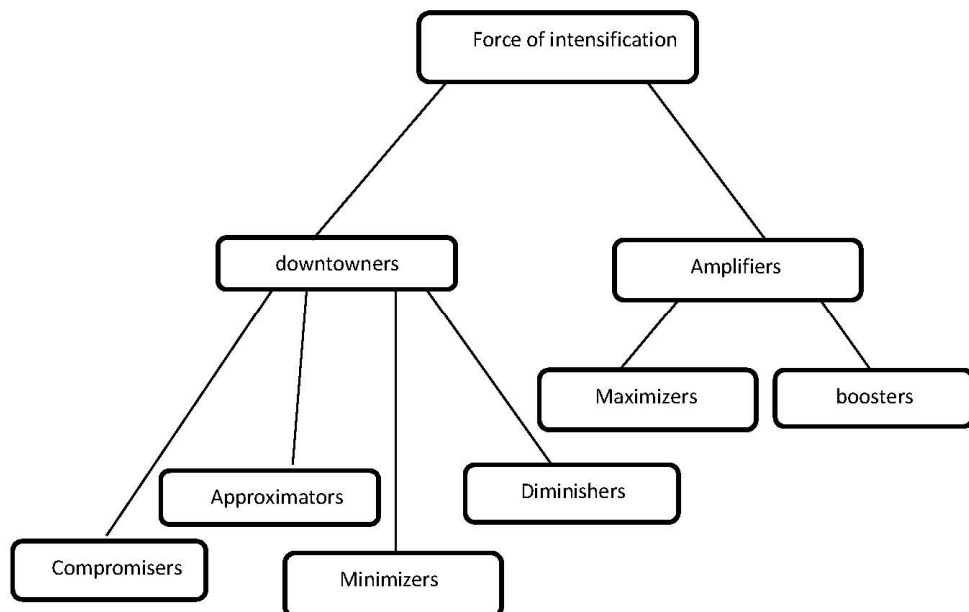


Figure (1) Quirk et al. 's Model of classification of intensifiers

## 2. Parameters of variation

Intensifiers vary with respect to each other along a number of parameters of variation (or contextual preferences) on the morho-syntactic, lexico-semantic, and discourse-pragmatic levels (Cacchiahi, 2009b: 32).

### 2.1 The lexico-semantics of variation

According to Cacchiahi (2009b: 32), intensifiers are classified according to parameters:

#### 1. Degree of intensification

In this parameter, intensifiers are either upwards (e.g. extremely) or downwards (e.g. abit). upgrading intensifiers can be classified into:

- a. Absolutives (completives): these intensifiers acquire degree-fixing intensification, and they are used to adjust limited and extreme predicates, e.g., "absolutely dead".
- b. Intensifiers of the extremely high degree: these intensifiers are used to adjust gradable predicates and get degree-modifying intensification, e.g., "extremely good".
- c. Intensifiers of the high degree: these intensifiers modify gradable predicates and express a high degree of intensification e.g. "very good"(ibid)

## 2. Semantic Prosody

Regarding this parameter, intensifiers can be classified into:

- a. Intensifiers with positive semantic prosody: intensifiers that collocate with positive predicates, e.g., "perfectly new".
- b. Intensifiers with negative semantic prosody: intensifiers that collocate with negative predicates, e.g., "downright evil".
- c. Intensifiers with neutral semantic prosody: intensifiers that collocate with both positive and negative predicates, e.g., "really" or "very" (Cacchiahi, 2009a:233-236).

## 3. The lexico-semantic parameter

Cacchiani (2009b:32) enlarges Lorenz's work (2002:147-152), and he distinguishes the following:

- a- Grammaticalized intensifiers (e.g., very)
- b- Telic intensifiers (e.g., unbelievably)
- c- Comparatives (e.g., extraordinary)
- d- Non-telic intensifiers ( e.g., amazingly)
- e- Semantic –feature-copying intensifiers (e.g., stunningly beautiful)
- f- Taboo intensifiers (e.g., bloody)
- g- Phonaesthetic intensifiers (e.g., howlingly funny)

Lastly, the lexcco-semantic parameter is "the extent of grammaticalization/delexicalization," according to the semantic

bleaching which intensifiers undergo as they develop from other classes. Intensifiers are classified into:

- a. Highly grammaticalized intensifiers which are used with a wide variety of collocates (e.g., very).
- b. Relatively less grammaticalized intensifiers (e.g., fabulously wealthy)
- c. Co-lexicalized intensifiers (precious few)
- d. Lexicalized intensifiers (shockingly underpaid) (Cacchiani, 2009b:32)

## 2.2 The Discourse-Pragmatic Parameters

The Discourse-Pragmatic Parameters are a set of factors that apply to intensifiers as a whole, rather than individual words. These parameters include:

- a. The degree of expressivity and involvement: this parameter overlaps with the lexico-semantic parameters and category intensifiers based on their level of emotional expression and personal involvement. There are three subcategories:
  - Subjective or personal intensifiers
  - Intensifiers for expressing undistinguished emotion
  - Intensifiers for expressing specific emotions (Cacchiani, 2009a: 235).
- b. The parameter of speech act modification: this parameter examines the way in which intensifiers affect the speech act, resulting in three possible outcomes:
  - Reinforcement of the speech act
  - Mitigation of the speech act
  - Aggravation of the speech act (ibid)
- c. Static pragmatic factors : this parameter considers the broader communicative context and divides intensifiers into two subcategories:
  - Text type and genre conventions: this includes politeness strategies and conventions related to specific text types and genres.

- Components of the communicative situation: this parameter considers factors such as style, register, participant roles, relationships, setting topic, purpose, social evaluation, and channel, which can restrict the use of intensifiers.

Finally, all these discourse-pragmatic parameters provide a framework for understanding the way in which intensifiers function in different contexts and the way in which they are used to achieve specific communication goals(ibid).

### Method of analysis

This study employs a mixed method to find and analyze the semantic functions of intensifiers in the short stories "The Happy Prince", "The Birthday of the Infanta", and "The Selfish Giant", which are written by Oscar Wilde. Quirk et al. s' work (1985: 589) is adopted for providing a semantic categorization of intensifiers .

### Data analysis

Three stories are selected as data for this study. After a thorough reading of the stories, the researcher identifies all lines, which include intensifiers that modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs. The identified intensifiers are categorized using Quirk et al. s' work, which distinguishes between amplifiers and downtoners.

### Story 1:

This story of "The Happy Prince" is written by Oscar Wild. It is an allegory since it has an intended message that could be seen as political. It sheds light on the society, which is full of injustice and people, who concentrate on superficial beauty and lack kindness for each other, and life, which is full of luxury. The mayor and councilors' ridiculous behavior is also reflected. In this story, the prince and the swallow try to help people who are suffering.

**Table (1) Frequency of intensifiers in "The Happy Prince"**

Intensifiers	Frequency	Percentage
Amplifiers	18	85.71%
Downtoners	3	14.28%
Total	21	100%

The story consists of 1,909 words; 21 words (about 1.10%) are used for intensification. The finding in Table 1 shows that 85.71% of intensifiers in the text are amplifiers, which used to maximize and



boost the meaning of the elements they modify. While 14.28 % intensifiers are used to minimize the meaning of the element they modify. The rate of amplifiers is higher than downtowners.

**Table (2) Frequency of individual intensifiers in "The Happy Prince"**

Intensifiers	Type	Frequency	Percentage
Very	Booster	11	52.38%
So	Booster	5	28.80%
Only	Minimizer	2	9.52%
Too	Maximizer	2	9.52%
Quite	Compromiser	1	4.76%
Total		21	100%

Twenty-one intensifiers are found in the story "The Happy Prince". The booster 'very' is the most frequent intensifier. Next in frequency are the boosters 'so' and 'too', whereas the rest of intensifiers are rarely found, as in Table 2. The booster "very" is used to conform the extremity of a quality, as in beauty, thinness, strangeness, illness, brightness, coldness, and sadness, e.g.

### **1. "Everyone thought that it was very beautiful."**

The word "very" is used to modify the adjective (beautiful) in this sentence, which expresses a belief or opinion.

### **2. "That is very strange."**

The intensifier "very" emphasizes the adjective (strange) to express something unusual.

### **3. "The face was very beautiful in the moonlight."**

In this sentence, the intensifier "very" is used to emphasize the beauty of the face.

### **4. "Her face was very thin."**

The word "very" in this line intensifies the word 'thin' to indicate an extreme lack of fullness, which expresses poverty.

### **5. "He is very ill."**

The word "very" modifies the adjective 'ill' to refer to intense sickness.

**6. "The Happy Prince looked very sad."**

Using the word "very" to modify the word "sad" denotes a high level of sorrow.

**7. "It is very cold here."**

**8. "It is very cold".**

The writer uses the word "very" to emphasize a degree of external coldness, which contrasts with the speaker's internal warmth.

**9. "That is very unusual."**

In the excerpt, the word "very" is used to refer to something which is not ordinary to find this type of birds in this time.

**10. "But he is very cold and he can't write."**

Wilde uses the word "very" here to emphasize coldness, which prevents the writer in "The Happy Prince" from completing his story.

**11. "The Happy Prince does not look very bright."**

In this sentence, Wilde uses the word "very" to intensify the adjective 'bright'. This line is said by an important man in the city when he was walking with his two friends.

The intensifier "so" is used in more emotional contexts, to boost or heighten feelings of happiness, tiredness, laziness, warmth and hunger.

**12. "His mother is so happy."**

The word "so" is used to refer to extreme gladness.

**13. "These women are so lazy."**

The intensifier "so" is employed to indicate extreme laziness.

**14. "She was so tired."**

Wilde uses the intensifier "so" to indicate extreme tiredness.

**15. "My face does not feel so hot."**

"So" is used to refer to a high extreme of heat.

**16. "we are so hungry."**

In this sentence, the word "so" expresses extreme hunger.

"Too" denotes an excessive degree that surpasses what is considered normal and often carries negative connotations.

**17. "Because he loves him too much."**

"Too" is an intensifier used to express strong adoration.

**18. "You have stayed too long."**

In this sentence, "too" indicates an excessive duration.

The intensifier "only" restricts the element that it modifies. "Only" restricts the quality of being gold and the woman's action as in the following sentences:

**19. "He is only gold on the outside."**

The intensifier "only" limits the scope of specialty.

**20. "He is crying because she can only give him water from the river."**

The intensifier "only" limits the ability of doing things .

The intensifier " quite" softens the meaning of the elements it modifies.

**21. "I feel quite well."**

The compromiser "quite" shows a moderate degree of being well.

**Story 2:**

"The Birth of the Infanta" is one of Wilde's stories. It is about the king's daughter and her birthday. It expresses many ideas, they are: the cruelty of society, ignorance ( lack of passion) and loneliness (isolation). It begins with days through which the birthday of the king's daughter is set in the kingdom. An ugly dwarf is brought to entertain the king's daughter and the royal household. Despite his ugly appearance, the king's daughter is fervidly interested in the dwarf. Throughout the events of the story, Wilde shows a sort of comparison between the richness and privilege of the royal household and the dwarf's adversity.

**Table (3) Frequency of intensifiers in "The Birth of the Infanta"**

Intensifiers	Frequency	Percentage
Amplifiers	17	85%
Downtowners	3	15%
Total	20	100%

Wilde writes a story consists of 1,582 words and includes 19 intensifiers. The intensifiers used in this story are both amplifiers and downtowners.

**Table (4) Frequency of individual intensifiers in "The Birth of the Infanta"**

Intensifiers	Type	Frequency	Percentage
Very	Booster	13	65%
So	Booster	3	15%
Only	minimizer	2	10%
Too	Maximize	1	5%
Quite	Compromiser	1	5%
Total		20	100%

Seventeen of intensifiers used in the story are amplifiers. The most frequent amplifier is 'very' followed by 'so'. Three downtowners are used, in this story, which are 'only' and 'quite'. A high rate of amplifiers is used to strengthen and emphasize the element they modify.

Very is the most popular intensifier. It is used to indicate the high level of quality of the element it modifies. In the following sentences, the word "very" emphasizes the degree of sadness, silliness, unusual nature of proportion, entertainment, pride, amusing, manner of crying, degree of sadness, and extent of ugliness.

## **22. "The king felt very sad."**

In this sentence, the word "very" conforms the severity of the king's sadness.

## **23. "He is very silly."**

The use of the booster "very" intensifies the degree of silliness.

## **24. "He had very short legs and very big head."**

The word "very" is used twice, in this sentence, to intensify dwarf's physical characteristics of shortness and bigness.

**25. "There was one very funny thing about the dwarf."**

"Very" emphasizes the humorous aspect of the dwarf.

**26. "The infant was very amused by him."**

A high level of amusement is expressed in this sentence by using the intensifier "very".

**27. "The little dwarf was very very proud."**

The word "very" is doubled for emphasizing the degree of pride.

**28. "His dancing was very funny."**

In this sentence, "very" emphasizes the high degree of humor.

**29. "He laid there crying very quietly."**

The intensifier "very" modifies the word 'quietly' to describe the way in which the dwarf cries.

**30. "that is very sad."**

A high degree of sadness is expressed by using the word "very" before the adjective 'sad'.

The word "so" is a booster which is used to emphasize brightness, happiness and loudness.

**31. "The sun is shining so brightly."**

The uncommonly level of brightness is expressed by using "so" to intensify the word "bright".

**32. "A princess must not laugh so loudly."**

"so" is used to emphasize the volume of loudness.

**33. "Everyone is so happy."**

A higher degree of happiness is expressed by using the intensifier "so".

The minimizer "Only" restricts the scope of the element it modifies.

**34. "She only laughed at his ugliness."**

The action of laughing is restricted to specific physical characteristic which is ugliness.

**35. " I will only play with people who have no hearts."**

The act of playing is limited to certain type of people is made by using the intensifier "only".

The compromiser "quite" is used to provide moderate intensification. It suggests, an important but not extreme level of happiness.

**36. " He seemed quite happy."**

Wilde uses the word "quite" to indicate a moderate degree of happiness.

**Story 3:**

"The selfish Giant" is one of Wilde's stories. The idea of this story is the danger of selfishness, which prevents from experiencing all the goodness in life. It is about the giant who prevents children from playing in his garden. The story begins in giant's garden, which is full of flowers, fruits, and birds. When the giants comes back from his travel to meet his friend and he sees the children playing in his garden. The children run away when they see the giant. One day, children find a way to the garden; they bring back the spring. After watching this, the giant decides to tear down the wall and welcome children in his garden, and the garden prospers again.

**Table (5) Frequency of intensifiers in "The selfish giant"**

Intensifiers	Frequency	percentage
Amplifiers	12	75%
Downtowners	4	25%
Total	16	100%

This story includes 1,169 words; 16 of them are intensifiers. The intensifiers are both amplifiers and downtowners. The rate of the amplifiers is higher than downtowners.

**Table (6) Frequency of individual intensifiers in "The selfish giant"**

Intensifiers	Type	Frequency	Percentage
Very	Booster	9	56.25%
So	Booster	3	18.75%
Only	Minimizer	4	25%
Total		16	100%

Sixteen intensifiers are used in "The selfish giant" . Twelve of them are amplifiers, which are very and so. The downtowner "only" is used four times.

The most common intensifier "very" amplifies adjectives and adverbs to show a high level of the quality described, e.g.

**37. "He shouted in a very loud voice."**

The word "very" refers to extremely high degree of voice.

**38. "He was a very selfish giant."**

The intensifier "very" is used to show a high level of selfishness.

**39. "It was the first song in the garden for a very long time."**

In this line, the word "very" is employed to indicate an extensive duration.

**40. "so he went down, opened the door very quietly."**

The use of the intensifier "very" shows a low level of noise.

**41. " A small boy was standing in the far corner of the garden."**

The booster "very" is used to refer to an extreme degree of smallness.

**42. " I have been very selfish."**

The word "very" is employed to indicate a high level of selfishness.

**43. "The giant felt very sad."**

The use of "very" emphasizes the depth of sadness

**44. " The giant was very kind to the other children."**

The booster "very" is used to emphasize a high degree of kindness.

**45. "The giant became very old and weak."**

The intensifier "very" is used to show an extreme degree of losing strength.

"so" is used to refer to a high degree of described quality e.g.

**46. " I can't understand why the spring is so late."**

The use of "so" explains an extreme degree of delay.

**47. " we were so happy there."**

"So" is employed to refer to high level of happiness.

**48. " we are so happy here."**

The use of the booster "So " emphasizes a high level of happiness.

"only" restricts the quality of the described elements , e.g.

**49. " we only met him today."**

In this sentence, "only" is used to limit the duration.

**50. "The spring was only sleeping."**

"Only" limits the state of the spring to sleeping in this sentence, it refers to merely dormant.

**51. " The followers were only resting."**

The minimizer "only" limits the action of the flowers .

**Conclusion:**

Some conclusions are arrived at:

1. Wilde uses intensifiers in his stories to emphasize the depth of emotion experienced by characters and create empathy.
2. He uses amplifiers more than downtoners.
3. The boosters (like very and so) are employed to enrich his description and make his scenes more explicit .
4. The maximizer "too" and the repetitive intensifier "very" are used to emphasize certain images, such as "The sun is too hot."
5. The minimizer "only" is utilized to restrict or minimize the scope of the action to a single aspect.
6. The compromiser "quite" is employed to create moderate intensity in the adjective or adverb.



7. These intensifiers are used by Wilde to have a good understanding of events.

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