

## Isolating Intensifiers in Verbal Processes Found in English Literary Discourse

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### ABSTRACT

Isolating intensifiers are regarded as markers of the lexical-grammatical class denoting graduation. This category of language performs up-scaling or down-scaling of isolated and individual item solely so as to convey the level of intensity. The paper aims at exploring how isolating intensifiers upgrade and downgrade verbal processes found in English literary discourse. The study was conducted using qualitative method and basing on 120 samples extracted from the English literary works namely *Wuthering Heights* by Brontë, *The Man of Property* (Galsworthy, 1906), *The moon and Sixpence* by Maugham and *Vanity Fair* by Thackeray. The findings show that the isolating intensifiers can modify a range of various processes such as Material, Mental, Behaviour and Rational processes so as to raise or lower the degree of intensity for the processes. The study also makes some certain contributions to English learning, teaching as well as language study.

**Keywords:** *Isolating Intensifiers, Verbal Processes, Material Processes*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Intensification is a category of language discussed by a variety of linguists. According to Quirk et al. (1972; 1985, pp. 259-261, 439), intensifiers are referred to not only intensifying adverbs but also intensifying adjectives; some noun phrases and a few prepositional phrases which indicate not only an intensification but also a point on the intensity scale which may be high or low. They have a heightening or lowering effect on some unit in the sentence or on the force of the predicate in part or in whole (Quirk et al., 1972); and they can modify a variety of word

classes, not only adjectives and adverbs but also verbs, nouns, indefinite, pronouns, prepositions and indefinite articles. In the authors' view, intensifiers are both inside gradability (Quirk et al, 1985) and outside the gradability as the case of *emphasizers* (Quirk et al, 1972).

Under the theory of Appraisal, intensification by Martin and White (2005) is referred to the axis of graduation showing scalability that of grading based on intensity whose nature is the assessment of degree of intensity and process. Intensification is realized via markers of the lexical-

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grammatical class called *isolating intensifiers* which increase or decrease the level of intensity of a certain individual item. Additionally, intensification is also seen via any single lexical-grammatical item which can convey a meaning of the scaling called *infusing intensifiers*, unlike *isolating intensifiers* which modify certain one of function words. The concept of infusing intensifiers is stated that “there is no separate lexical form conveying the sense of up-scaling or down-scaling”, i.e. any single term itself can convey a meaning of the scaling (Martin & White, 2005, p. 143). It is obvious that Martin and White (2005) bring a new lens of intensifiers from the view of language in evaluation.

By Martin and White (2005), isolating intensification determines the up-scaling or down-scaling of isolated and individually items which solely performs the level of intensity. And ‘the sense of up/down-scaling is fused with a meaning which serves some other semantic function (Martin & White, 2005). They modify a particular type of function words, specifically considered as pre-modifiers of adjectives or adverbs called isolating intensifiers. Isolating intensifiers are seen in four groups:

(i) *Up/Down-scaling of Qualities*

*Isolating intensifiers* determining the scale of qualities are divided into three groups. The first group functions as the pre-modification of adjectives such as *a bit, somewhat, relatively, fairly, rather, very, extremely, utterly*. The second group functions as the pre-modification of adverbs namely *slightly, somewhat, fairly, quite, rather, very*. Obviously, intensifiers such as *very, rather, fairly, somewhat* can be the pre-modification of both adjectives and adverbs. The last are morphemes as suffixes to adjectives in comparatives (hotter, warmer, wetter, colder, cooler) and superlatives (saddest, happiest); and as pre-modifiers to adjectives in comparatives and superlatives (more miserable; most miserable).

(ii) *Up/down-scaling of verbal processes*

According to Chafe (1970), processes in a pure sense are a change of state or condition of nouns as patients of verbs, and processes are distinguished from actions accompanied by

agents. The concept of processes is expanded by Chafe (1970) towards verbs participated in the processes or actions. A verb will determine a process, an action or both a process and an action: as a process, it changes the condition of a noun; as an action, it expresses what someone, its agent, does.

*Isolating intensifiers* determining up/down-scaling of verbal processes are identified based on the concept suggested by Halliday (2004) and Martin and White (2005). In the position of Halliday (2004), processes consist, in principle, of three components: (i) a process unfolding through time, (ii) the participants involved in the process, (iii) circumstances associated with the process. Of which, processes are ‘*the most central element in the configuration*’; participants are close to the centre, and are directly involved in the process, bringing about its occurrence or being affected by it in some way while circumstances are more peripheral, and are not directly involved in the process but they augment the centre temporally, spatially and causally (Halliday, 2004).

As can be known, processes are realized by verbal groups, thus intensifiers like *slightly, a bit, somewhat* or *greatly* determining the scale of verbal processes adverbially modify verbal groups such as *This upset me slightly / a bit / somewhat* (Martin & White, 2005).

(iii) *Up/down-scaling of modalities*

According to Martin and White (2005), modality refers to the degree of certainty or uncertainty of what is being said so as to determine the subjectivity of the speaker or the writer. From this point of view, it can be seen that isolating intensifiers denoting the scale of modalities either upwards or downwards are often realized by such grammatical items as *just, somewhat, quite, very* as in *just / somewhat / quite / very possible* or *reasonably / quite / very / extremely often*.

(iv) *Maximisers*

*Isolating intensifiers* as maximisers seen are adverbs indicating the scale of the highest possible intensity such as *utterly, totally, thoroughly, absolutely, completely and perfectly* (Martin and White, 2005, p. 142). As for Quirk et al. (1985), the authors add some items such as *altogether, entirely, extremely,*

*fully, quite, thoroughly* to this type. As a result, isolating intensifiers as maximisers are recognized via such adverbs as *utterly, totally, thoroughly, absolutely, completely, perfectly, altogether, entirely, extremely, fully, quite, wholly, dead, awfully and frightfully*.

Investigating isolating intensifiers in English literary discourse is still an issue left open; especially a consideration into functions of isolating intensifiers as modifiers of verbal processes is a thing of novelty. The paper wishes to find out how the category of language is used to adverbially modify processes found in English literary discourse. Hopefully, it would provide deep understanding of isolating intensifiers by language teachers and learners for language using, literary writing and for the practice of English language.

## II. METHODS

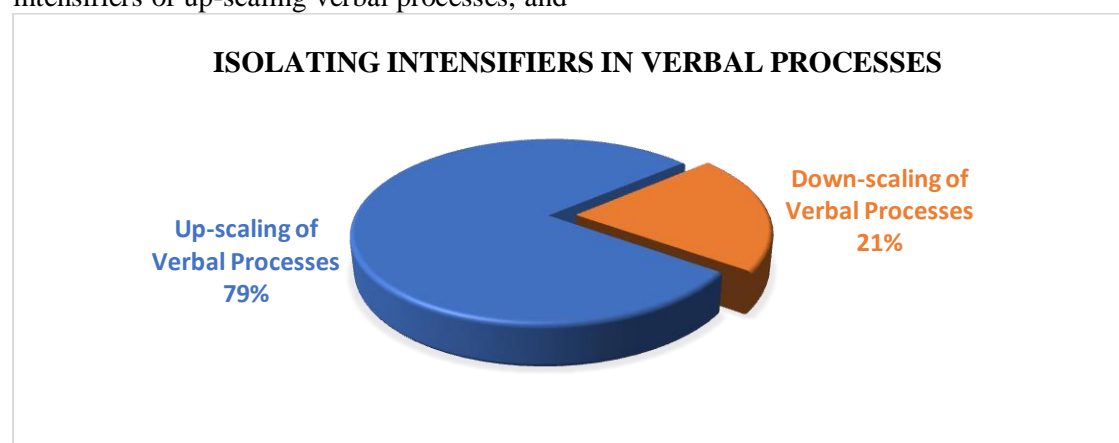
The study was conducted using qualitative method to analyze materials and the data collected; basing on 120 samples extracted from the English literary work namely *Wuthering Heights* by Brontë, *The Man of Property* by Galsworthy, *The moon and Sixpence* by Maugham and *Vanity Fair* by Thackeray. The data were chosen and narrowed based on the concept of isolating intensifiers. The data were analyzed based on the Theoretical Framework of Isolating intensifiers (Martin&White, 2005); Processes in Systemic Functional Grammar by Halliday (2004). First, the data of isolating intensifiers collected were sort out into two groups: (i) the intensifiers of up-scaling verbal processes, and

(ii) the intensifiers of down-scaling verbal processes. Then, a quantitative calculation will be established and a detailed description of the processes will be carried out so as to draw conclusions.

## III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

As discussed earlier, on the basis of the concept suggested by Chafe (1970), Halliday (2004) and Martin and White (2005), processes are realized via verbs or verbal groups. Regarding term, Chafe (1970) and Halliday (2004) use the same term 'process' but Martin and White (2005) call 'verbal process'. In fact, the term used by Martin and White (2005) so as to put an emphasis on verbs serving as processes in a comparison with 'quality' realized by adjectives and adverbs. In the frame of the paper, we can use both because the term 'process' will be used when a specific process is talked about, and 'verbal process' will be used in the general case.

Through performing the function of setting the level of raising or lowering the intensity, isolating intensifiers are seen as modifiers of verbs or verbal groups serving as processes. The isolating intensifiers with the function of up-scaling of verbal processes found in the data are maximisers occupying quite a large number (95 cases) while the isolating intensifiers with the function of down-scaling of verbal processes obtain a very small number (25 cases) as illustrated in Figure 3.1. The following is a detailed description of isolating intensifiers in the processes.



**Figure 3.1. Distribution of Isolating intensifiers in verbal processes**

### 3.1. Down-scaling of Verbal Processes

By taking the function of lowering the degree of intensity in the processes, such isolating intensifiers as *slightly*, *rather*, *somewhat*, *fairly* and *a bit* found in the data occupy a very low number (25 cases out of 120 cases). Via examining, these intensifiers downgrade verbs or verbal groups, for instance, *it rather dips down*, *his finger and thumb quivered slightly*. An evident thing is that the intensifiers are not popularly used as the function of adverbially modifying verbal processes, however, it is undeniable fact that they can modify a range of various processes – MATERIAL, MENTAL and BEHAVIOUR processes. Of the cases, the majority lie in material processes (13 cases) and mental processes (9 cases) while just a few cases are present in behavior processes listed in Table 3.1. Here, the processes of material focus on the type of TRANSFORMATION recognized via actions or events, and downgraded their degree of intensity thank to *slightly*, *rather*, *somewhat* and *fairly* as in [1]-[5]. Furthermore, the intensifiers are also discovered in the data as modifiers of verbal groups serving as mental processes expressing degree of EMOTION as in [6]-[11].

**Table 3.1. Isolating intensifiers down-scaling of verbal processes**

Intensifier	Occurrences	Process
<i>slightly, rather, somewhat, fairly, a bit</i>	13	material process
	9	mental process
	3	behaviour process
	<b>25</b>	

More interestingly, through considering the following samples, it can be proved that such isolating intensifiers as *slightly*, *fairly*, *rather* can help reduce the intensity of the processes of TRANSFORMATION namely CONTACT as in [1] where the action as the process ‘kick’ is lowered by ‘*slightly*’. In another vein, the processes of MOTION like ‘turn’ and ‘change’ are decreased their intensity by the impact of ‘*slightly*’ as in [2] and [3]; Similarly, the processes of ELABORATING – ‘part’ and ‘curl’ as in [4] and [5] are reduced by ‘*slightly*’. It can be said that in some cases, if the intensifiers are omitted out of the clauses, the values manifested in the processes will be raised to a higher degree of intensity. For instance, *kicking the cat* is forced more strongly than *kicking the cat slightly*; or *turn your head to the left* is a quicker movement than *turn your head slightly to the left*; or *changed slightly the position of a Louis XV table* is a movement and change that is less and slower than *changed the position of a Louis XV table*. See the samples,

1 ... And, **kicking the cat** with the pointed tip of his patent leather boot, he took his huge form away. [1]

[2] *If you will be so good as to **turn your head slightly** to the left, you will see the door.* [4]

[3] *He **changed slightly** the position of a Louis XV. table which was one of his treasures.* [4]

[4] ..., her lips **slightly parted**, ... [1]

[5] *The long light hair **curled slightly** on the temples.* [3]

Additionally, such intensifiers as *somewhat*, *slightly*, *fairly* and *rather* are operated as graders of MENTAL processes construing EMOTION as described in samples [6]-[11]. These intensifiers downgrade the degree valued in the processes, i.e. they value a lower degree of intensity in the processes than the core meaning of remainders embodied in the processes. To be more exact, the isolating intensifiers namely *somewhat*, *slightly*, *fairly*, *rather* will reduce the degree of intensity of processes expressed by *cowed*, *tickled*, *captivated*, *disconcerting*, *prided*, and *puzzled* compared with their core meaning of remainders namely *cow*, *tickle*, *captivate*, *disconcert*, *pride* and *puzzle*. The semantic meanings are displayed in sequences in Figure 3.2. as follows.

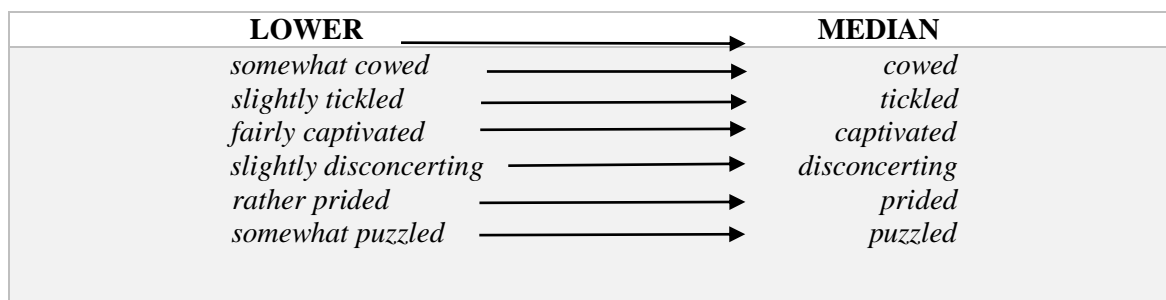


Figure 3.2. Lowering intensity of processes

- [6] Heathcliff had moved to the window, and hung his head, **somewhat cowed** by her violent rating apparently. [3]
- [7] I had been **slightly tickled** at the gentleness which Mrs. Strickland put into her mention of her husband's name. [4]
- [8] Miss Crawley was **fairly captivated** by the sweet blushing face of the young lady. [2]
- [9] And this news was **slightly disconcerting** to me personally, ... [4]
- [10] He **rather prided** himself indeed on a liberal attitude towards women, ... [1]
- [11] Oh! Here we are the same as anywhere else, when you get to know us,' observed Mrs. Dean, **somewhat puzzled** at my speech. [3]

Moreover, such isolating intensifiers as *slightly, somewhat, fairly* discovered in the data modify verbal groups as BEHAVIOUR processes (see examples [12]-[14]). Like isolating intensifiers modifying material and mental processes, these intensifiers decrease the intensity of the processes to a lower degree compared with the core meanings of remainders embodied in the processes. It can be further explained that the 'physiological processes manifesting states of consciousness' as termed by Halliday (2004) realized via some expressions like *quivered, sobbed, relaxed* in the samples have their intensity reduced due to such intensifiers as *slightly, fairly, somewhat*.

- [12] Mrs. Heathcliff's lip **quivered slightly**, and she returned to her seat in the window. [3]
- [13] He ran up to her – caught her in his arms – gasped out some inarticulate words of thanks and **fairly sobbed** on her shoulder. [2]
- [14] The long, lugubrious folds in his cheeks **relaxed somewhat** after seeing him, [1]

### 3.2. Up-scaling of Processes

Most isolating intensifiers as maximisers operate the function of increasing degree of intensity of verbal processes except for *awfully, enormously, extraordinarily, dreadfully, excessively*. The intensifiers occur in a very large number reaching 79% (95 cases out of 120 cases). Of 95 cases, *quite* is most used (20 cases), followed by *completely* (14 cases) while some other intensifiers rarely occur such as *totally* (1 case), *extremely* (2 cases), *terribly* (2 cases), *highly* (3 cases), *fully* (3 cases), *most* (3 cases). The intensifiers are used to raise the intensity of verbal processes to the highest degree, for example, (*quite*) *win, cure; (completely) removed, beaten in the race; dropped entirely; burn entirely; altogether disappeared; thoroughly cured; do perfectly, perfectly melt*. At the same time, they modify a series of processes namely Material processes, Mental processes, Rational processes and Behaviour processes.

Table 3.2. Isolating intensifiers up-scaling of verbal processes

Intensifier	Occurrences	Process
<i>quite, completely, greatly, entirely, altogether, thoroughly, exceedingly, utterly, perfectly,</i>	49	material process
	38	mental process



<i>absolutely, highly, fully, most, extremely, terribly, totally</i>	5	behaviour process
	3	rational process
	<b>95</b>	

It can be added that these maximisers chiefly modify processes of transformation as MATERIAL PROCESSES (49 cases) and verbal processes as MENTAL ones (38 cases) while just some modify behaviour processes (5 cases) and rational processes (3 cases) as described in Table 3.2. It is an evident thing that by means of such grammatical adverbs, the processes of transformation are upgraded their intensity, i.e. the intensity of the action or event is raised to the highest point. What is more, as can be seen, such maximisers play a vital role in conveying the highest degree of processes denoted by verbs of emotion like *disgusted, shocked* and *perturbed*; desideration – *expect* and *refused*; cognition – *believe* as depicted in [15]-[21]. Moreover, these maximisers also have a great effect on a few verbs of psychological behavior such as *deceived, encourage, respect, crying* and some insensitive and possessive verbs such as *remaining, owed* as mentioned in Table 3.3.

- [15] *And why did she hate him? Even now he could not **altogether** believe it. [1]*
- [16] *who never could **thoroughly** believe the young lady's protestations that she had never exchanged a single word with Mr. Crisp, [2]*
- [17] *He had **fully** expected him there to give evidence; [1]*
- [18] *They **entirely** refused to have it in bed with them.*
- [19] *Dobbin begged Chopper to report progress to him at the hotel where he was stopping, and walked off moodily west-wards, **greatly** perturbed as to the past and the future.*
- [20] *Catherine, love! Catherine!' interposed Linton, **greatly** shocked at the double fault of falsehood and violence which his idol had committed.*
- [21] *I say, I wish you to come with me into the house!' I cried, thinking him deaf, yet **highly** disgusted at his rudeness.*

Noticeably, the isolating intensifiers as maximisers can be both pre-modifiers of verbs as in [22], [23] and [24] and post-modifiers of

HEAD-verb as in [25], [26] and [27]. When serving as pre-modifiers, there are two tendencies: (i) maximisers are categorized as *grammatical item* defined as a closed class that has no referential meaning (Martin & White, 2005), however, the maximisers strengthen or weaken the meaning embodied in the processes; (ii) they fall down so-called *lexical item* that creates 'delexicalisation' (ibid.). This may be explained that as grammatical item, maximisers convey their full semantic meaning but as lexical item, they no longer load the full semantic meaning. As Sinclair (1994, as cited in Martin & White, 2005, p.143) states,

The meaning of words chosen together is different from their independent meanings. They are at least partly delexicalized. This is the necessary correlate of co-selection. If you know that selections are not independent, and that one selection depends on another, then there must be a result and effect on the meaning which in each individual choice is a delexicalization of one kind or another. It will not have its independent meaning in full if it is only part of a choice involving one or more words. [Sinclair 1994, p. 23]

For example:

- [22] *Attempting once to scold her in public, Rebecca hit upon the before-mentioned plan of answering her in French, which **quite** routed the old woman. [2]*
- [23] *I recollected the association of Heathcliff's with Catherine's name in the book, which had **completely** slipped from my memory, till thus awakened.*
- [24] *Presently Francie said: "Do you know, I think Uncle Jolyon is **terribly** changed this last year. [1]*
- [25] *But Miss Crawley's usual terrors regarding death **increased** greatly when such dismal propositions were made to her.*

[26] *He thought she was thinking deeply of his troubles, and pitied himself terribly. [1]*

[27] *Rawdon Crawley, from the Prince of Wales's friend, whom his Majesty George IV forgot so completely [2]*

**Table 3.3. Examples of Intensifiers up-scaling of Processes**

<i>Items</i>	<i>Occurrences</i>	<i>Examples of Processes</i>
<i>quite</i>	20	* <i>Material</i> - (quite) win, cure, restore, do, ignore, overcome; quite approved of her as a sister-in-law, quite masters me, quite made up * <i>Mental</i> - (quite) know, understand, agree; remembered him quite well, quite confounded me
<i>completely</i>	14	* <i>Material</i> - yielded completely, completely averted, so completely removed, completely beaten in the race, completely banished, completely slipped, victimised him completely * <i>Mental</i> - forget so completely, make up someone's mind completely, * <i>Behavior</i> - deceived completely
<i>greatly</i>	8	* <i>Material</i> - increase greatly, changed greatly * <i>Mental</i> - suffer greatly, greatly agitate, greatly perturb, greatly shocked at * <i>Behaviour</i> - (greatly) encourage, respect
<i>entirely</i>	8	* <i>Material</i> - yielded herself entirely to her sister's orders, move out of this country entirely, dropped entirely, saw it burn entirely * <i>Mental</i> - (entirely) refused, disapproved * <i>Rational</i> - entirely contained * <i>Behaviour</i> - unbosom himself entirely
<i>altogether</i>	6	* <i>Material</i> - altogether disappeared, kill her altogether, gone out altogether * <i>Mental</i> - altogether believe, refused altogether * <i>Rational</i> - remained altogether
<i>thoroughly</i>	6	* <i>Material</i> - (thoroughly) gain, cured, wetted, gauged * <i>Mental</i> - (thoroughly) believe, comprehend
<i>exceedingly</i>	5	* <i>Mental</i> - disliked her elder nephew exceedingly, wished to go exceedingly, depressed me exceedingly, liked exceedingly to act the little mistress
<i>utterly</i>	5	* <i>Material</i> - fade utterly * <i>Mental</i> - rebel against sth utterly, utterly perplexed me * <i>Rational</i> - entirely owing to the situation
<i>perfectly</i>	5	* <i>Material</i> - do perfectly; (perfectly) melt, recovered * <i>Mental</i> - knew the fact perfectly, understood his secret perfectly
<i>absolutely</i>	5	* <i>Material</i> - ruled absolutely * <i>Mental</i> - (absolutely) forbid, seize; absolutely REQUIRE to know
<i>highly</i>	3	* <i>Material</i> - applauded my resolution highly * <i>Mental</i> - (highly) admired, disgusted
<i>fully</i>	3	* <i>Mental</i> - (fully) expect, believed, agreed
<i>most</i>	2	* <i>Material</i> - bit his nails most completely * <i>Mental</i> - spoke most highly
<i>extremely</i>	2	* <i>Mental</i> - hurt me extremely, wanted to have them extremely
<i>terribly</i>	2	* <i>Material</i> - terribly change * <i>Behaviour</i> - crying terribly
<i>totally</i>	1	* <i>Mental</i> - totally forget
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	

#### IV. CONCLUSION

To sum up, isolating intensifiers as modifiers of verbal processes can be divided into two groups. The first is maximisers occupying a very large number and used to upgrade the processes of Material processes, Mental processes, Rational processes and Behaviour processes. The second are the intensifiers *slightly, rather, somewhat, fairly* and *a bit* used to downgrade the processes of Material processes, Mental processes and Behaviour processes. As a result, the intensifiers up-scaling and down-scaling of material processes reach the largest number (62 cases), followed by mental processes (47 cases) while behaviour processes and rational processes are not popular as for such semantic meaning of intensifiers. It is hoped that these initial findings can be of some help to learners of English as well as for who study language have a new look at isolating intensifiers in the verbal processes, at the same time the paper is hoped to shed some new light into the study of language theory.

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