

# The Use of Preverbal So and Totally in Youth Language

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Krznarić, Paula

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Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku

Filozofski fakultet Osijek

Dvopredmetni prijediplomski studij Informatologija i Engleski jezik i književnost

Paula Krznarić

**Predglagolska uporaba intenzifikatora *so* i *totally* u jeziku mladih**

Završni rad

Mentorica: izv. prof. dr. sc. Dubravka Vidaković Erdeljić

Sumentorica: doc. dr. sc. Ana Werkmann Horvat

U Osijeku, 2024.

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In Osijek, 2024

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U Osijeku, 28.8.2024.

*Paula Krznarić, 0122240481*

Ime i prezime studenta, JMBAG

## Sažetak

Ovaj rad proučava predglagolsku uporabu intenzifikatora *so* i *totally* u jeziku mladih analizom korpusa koji se sastoji od 16 *YouTube* videa snimljenih od strane izvornih govornika engleskog jezika starosti između 16 i 23 godine. Svrha rada je proučiti nove lingvističke trendove u prirodnom govoru mladih koji su do sada promatrani većinom u govoru odraslih i neprirodnom jeziku serija koji ne mora biti točna prezentacija lingvističkih trendova u prirodnom govoru. Istraživanje je pokazalo da se *so* pojavljuje 589 puta. Većinom je bio korišten kao intenzifikator ili veznik, ali njegova predglagolska uporaba je minimalna (0,34%). Nadalje, *totally* je pronađen 13 puta i samo kao intenzifikator. Zanimljivo je što se *totally* koristi u predglagolskoj uporabi više od *so*, čak 61,54% od ukupnog broja pojavljivanja. Ovaj zaključak upućuje na to da je *so* češći intenzifikator od *totally* u jeziku mladih, ali da je njegova predglagolska uporaba rijetka. S druge strane, *totally* nije dominantan intenzifikator u jeziku mladih u ovom korpusu, ali u rijetkim slučajevima u kojima se pojavljuje, korišten je u predglagolskoj uporabi. Ovo pokazuje da je potrebno opširnije istraživanje kako bi se rezultati generalizirali i donio zaključak o trendovima.

Ključne riječi: intenzifikatori, *so*, *totally*, korpusna analiza, predglagolska uporaba

## **Abstract**

This paper studies the preverbal use of intensifiers *so* and *totally* in youth language by analysing a corpus of 16 YouTube videos made by native English speakers aged 16 to 23. It was done to research new linguistic trends among youth in natural language, which in previous research was mostly done on adults and in scripted media, which may not accurately reflect natural speech patterns. The research shows that *so* appears 589 times. It was mostly used as intensifier or conjunction, but its preverbal use was very minimal (0,34%). Secondly, *totally* was only found 13 times and only as an intensifier. Interestingly, *totally* was used preverbally more than *so* which takes up 61,54% of instances. These findings suggest that *so* is a common intensifier among youth in this corpus, but its preverbal use as an intensifier is very rare. On the other hand, *totally* is not a dominant intensifier among youth in this corpus, but in the rare instances when it appeared it was used as a preverbal intensifier quite frequently. This shows that more exhaustive research on these needs to be done to generalize results and conclude an existence of trends.

Keywords: intensifiers, *so*, *totally*, youth, corpus analysis, preverbal use



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## 1. Introduction

“Intensifiers are adverbs or adverbial phrases that strengthen the meaning of other expressions and show emphasis. Words that we commonly use as intensifiers include *absolutely, completely, extremely, highly, rather, really, so, too, totally, utterly, very* and *at all*” (Cambridge Dictionary n.d. s.v. intensifiers). Méndez-Naya (2008: 213) defines intensifiers as linguistic elements which convey the degree or the exact value of the quality expressed by the item they modify. Thirdly, Tagliamonte and Roberts (2008: 280) define intensifiers as adverbs that boost or maximize meaning. While intensifiers include many examples, this paper focuses on the use of *so* and *totally*. Intensifier *so* is only fairly recently used for modifying a verb with an emphatic meaning, since 1994 (Oxford English Dictionary n.d. s.v. So (adv. & conj.), additional sense), which is one of the reasons for choosing it for this research. *So* and *totally* belong to a group of amplifiers. Amplifiers scale upwards and are divided into maximisers and boosters. *Totally* belongs to maximisers which denote the upper extreme of the scale, while *so* belongs to boosters which denote a high point on the scale (Quirk et al. 1972:381). According to Ito and Tagliamonte (2003: 266) *so* is the third most used intensifier, used in 10.1% cases, and *totally* is not so popular, only used in 1.4% cases in their study of 48 individuals from York English Corpus. This paper will not focus on comparing the frequency of use of *so* and *totally* to other intensifiers but will show the difference in frequency of the preverbal use between the two. Tagliamonte (2008: 372) also found that intensifier *so* was most frequently used among 13- to 29-year-olds. Bordet (2015) suggests that *totally* tends to be used mostly by younger speakers or speakers who want to appear younger while older speakers prefer other intensifiers such as *very*. The author even guesses that *so* might become unpopular and replaced by *totally* if its use continues to expand. This paper aims to further analyse the use of *so* and *totally* in youth language by analysing a corpus of YouTube videos. The OED (n.d. s.v. So (adv. & conj.), additional sense) classifies preverbal use of intensifier *so* as slang and nonstandard. That is why YouTube videos should be a good source for a corpus because the language spoken in that media is natural and those videos are usually filmed in a comfortable space for speakers where they would not use formal language. Despite the frequent use of *so* and *totally* in youth language, there seems to be little research done on natural language in everyday conversation. Most existing studies have analysed these intensifiers within scripted media, such as television shows which do not capture the natural language in its full form. Secondly, there seems to be little research done on the use of intensifiers among the specific group of youth which is typically aged 16 to 23. By analysing the corpus made from YouTube videos this paper provides further understanding on

how these words are used among today's youth aged 16 to 23. Specifically, the research studies the use of *so* and *totally* as intensifiers, emphasizees, discourse markers, conjunctions, pronouns, and adverbial phrases with a focus on preverbal use of these intensifiers. The results of this study will show contemporary linguistic trends among the researched group. It is hypothesized that today's youth frequently use the words *so* and *totally* preverbally in their everyday speech, primarily for the purpose of intensification. This suggests that these words can be found preceding verbs and making them have a stronger meaning, thus intensifying them. The hypothesis will be tested through an analysis of a small corpus made from YouTube videos of youth YouTubers.

## 2. Theoretical background

This section reviews existing research, their strengths and weaknesses and potential for future research focusing on the research of *so* and *totally*. Firstly, Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005) studied intensifiers in the television series *Friends*. This paper is said to explore “the linguistic innovation” and test “the viability of media-based data as a surrogate to “real-world” data for sociolinguistic study.” In the paper, this is justified by the fact that shows reach an extensive audience and influence the way we talk. Authors state that the dialogue in the show was written by many writers and actors themselves. This is the downside of that study because it is impossible to connect the data with age of those who wrote it. Another downside is that the language in television series is highly scripted and questionable if it can be analysed as everyday language. Tagliamonte and Roberts (ibid.) used unofficial transcripts to find all intensifiers and where they could have occurred but did not. They found over 9000 intensifiable adjectives and that the overall rate of intensification in this television series is similar to that in contemporary British English. The same three intensifiers were found to be predominant (*very*, *really*, *so*), but in the series *so* took the lead whereas in the British data *very* was the most popular intensifier. Authors believe women to be “trend-setters” when it comes to intensifiers because they use them more often than men. They also presumed that the intensifier *so* would take the lead as the most frequently used intensifier. After further research authors conclude that the intensifier *so* is on the rise in American English if they were to judge by the television series which they found to be interesting and informative for dialect study.

The next research by Mai Kuha from 2005 explores the spread of *so* as an intensifier. She mentions that *so* is typically used “as an intensifying adverb that modifies adjectives” but that speakers are “in the process of extending the use of *so* to modify verbs.” The author recognizes intensifier *so*

as a characteristic of female speech. Research used data collected between 2001 and 2003 when *so* was recorded in spontaneous interaction. Then, a list of those sentences was made and given to participants to judge whether they might say it. They concluded that intensifying *so* is associated with the speech of young female speakers. Downside of this research is that they asked participants what they thought, and those results may be inaccurate. This research also concluded that *so* occurs with first person subjects the most. It showed that it appears more with non-auxiliary verbs than modals which is to be tested in my research as well.

Thirdly, research by Lucile Bordet (2015) further explores the frequency of use of *so* and *totally* in a television series *How I Met Your Mother*. She states that intensifiers are popularized by youth speakers and that youth speakers “experiment with language to find the latest trendy expressions.” In this context, youth speakers tend to find a new intensifier and use it until it becomes lexicalized and no longer used by only a specific group – youth. This ends with a loss in trendiness and appeal for youth who then find a new intensifier to use within their group. She named this process “intensification treadmill” because it leads to intensifiers being replaced and then recycled again at some point. The author focuses on four most popular intensifiers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: *very*, *really*, *so*, and *totally*. She found that the intensifier *so* is the most frequent out of the four and concluded that it is the most popular intensifier of the century. The research says that *totally* ranks third but is on the rise. Intensifier *so* is said to denote a higher degree of intensification than *very* or *really*. The author suggests that *totally* may replace *so* one day because it expresses maximal degree and is on the rise. In conclusion, it is said that the use of intensifiers cycle and trends change.

The next research by Ulrike Stange from 2022 explores the use of preverbal *so* via survey. The author provided native speakers a survey with 27 sample sentences obtained in American soap operas. She explains that there is not a fitting corpus, so she had to resort to soap opera transcripts. Participants were asked if they use or have heard someone use the sample sentences. She concluded that the use of *so* may be going down and that GenX uses it more often than post-GenX speakers. The main issue with this research is that people were asked whether they use these sentences or not which can produce false results as they may think that they use them but actually do not. They were also asked whether they have heard those sentences in use from other speakers which can also easily produce false results. Stange (2021) did another research on the use of *so* as a modifier of verb phrases. In that paper, the author introduced the use of *so* as a modifier of non-gradable items as “a fairly recent innovation in the English language.” She recognizes the difference between intensifier *so* and emphazier *so*. “Intensifiers express the notion of degree and are found with gradable lexical

items” (as in “It’s so easy to say, and it’s so impossible to do.”) while emphasizeers, on the other hand, express the truth value of the proposition in question and can be used with gradable and non-gradable lexical items (as in “We are so going to get in trouble for this.”). Stange (ibid.) aimed to provide a deeper understanding of preverbal *so*, which had only been researched in small-scale studies. She studied data drawn from the Corpus of American Soap Operas with approximately 100 million words from 2001 to 2012. Author believes scripted language to be similar enough to natural spoken language, at least when it comes to the use of intensifiers. She also used exactly this corpus because it shows the language of young people. She argues that soap operas reflect what is perceived as linguistically young to provide entertainment for the youngest, hippest audiences. Her results show that *so* is frequently used by young women. More importantly for my research, she found that “younger speakers outweigh older ones by 2:1.” While my research does not compare the use of *so* throughout all age groups, this was important to mention since the topic is chosen based on the fact that previous research found preverbal *so* and *totally* to be mostly used by younger speakers.

While Stange deals with the uses of *so*, Beltrama (2018) discusses the use of *totally*. What Stange (2021) classified as intensifiers, Beltrama (2018) called lexical use of intensifiers (as in “The bus is totally full.”) and what Stange (2021) classified as emphasizeers, Beltrama (2018) called a non-lexical or speaker-oriented use of intensifiers (as in “You should totally click on that link! It’s awesome.”). The author states that speaker-oriented *totally* is more rare than lexical one which is tested in my research as well. Beltrama (ibid.) also mentions that intensification systems are often researched because they are unstable and change rapidly. As the author states, the use of intensifier varies across demographic categories, age and gender. This paper does not test the way the use of *so* and *totally* varies among different age groups but does mention the difference in use among men and women. It is stated that the use of preverbal *totally* has only been spread in the past years which is why it needs to be researched more.

### **3. Methodology**

The main aim of this paper is to explore the preverbal use of *so* and *totally* in youth language. Because this is such a specific subject with a very specific research group, I had to make a small corpus to be sure that the data comes from aimed ages and is recent enough for this study. Within the limitations of this paper, I have decided to go with the following. To investigate the use of preverbal *so* and *totally* in youth language, I made a small corpus using YouTube videos. I chose YouTube videos because they provide a source of authentic spoken

language that is not scripted by third parties, but YouTubers themselves which shows natural speech patterns. Additionally, it is possible to verify speakers' ages in YouTube videos by a simple Google search which is important for research focused on youth language. For this research, youth are individuals aged from 16 to 23. I selected YouTubers through the Famous Birthdays website because their ages can be easily found there, which I assumed to be correct. I then chose two individuals of each age and one video from each individual which resulted in having sixteen videos altogether. The videos are aimed to be as recent as possible, most of them being no older than four months. This ensures that the data is recent enough and that individuals were of youth age when they made their videos. The sample consists of sixteen individuals, six males and ten females. Both genders were taken into consideration so that the whole of youth is represented. In this sample, there are only native English speakers both from United States of America and United Kingdom. There are 12 YouTubers from the USA and 4 from the UK. The selected videos vary in length, ranging from a minimum of 5 minutes and 27 seconds to a maximum of 22 minutes and 50 seconds. Videos also vary in theme in order to avoid any possibility of connecting the usage of these words to a specific theme. To begin the analysis, I used the automatically generated transcriptions provided by YouTube and transferred them into a Word document. To make sure that I didn't skip any words, I used the control+F navigation function and searched for instances of *so* and *totally*. I then highlighted those words and manually counted them. I counted all the instances of *so* used as intensifiers (e.g. *so* pretty, *so* cute) and wrote that number down, then I counted all the instances of *so* in other uses (e.g. conjunctions, discourse markers, pronouns) and wrote that number down. The same process was done for the word *totally*. Finally, I put the results of this analysis into an Excel spreadsheet to make the data organized and ready for further analysis of patterns and trends in the use of *so* and *totally* among youth. By examining the frequency of use and the context in which they are used, I aimed to discover whether there is a trend in youth language for the use of these two words. Since the aim of this paper is to analyse preverbal use of intensifiers *so* and *totally*, I also made a table showing how many instances of those words were used preverbally. In the end, I made a comparison on how preverbal *so* and *totally* are used among men and among women.

#### 4. Results

This section presents the results of an analysis of the use of *so* and *totally* in youth language based on transcriptions from 16 YouTube videos featuring individuals aged 16-23.

#### 4.1. Usage of *so*

*So* was found 589 times in these videos. It was mainly used as a conjunction and an intensifier, and other uses include discourse markers, pronouns, and adverbial phrases. Table 1 shows the total instances of various functions of the word *so* across the 16 videos.

Table 1: Usage of *so*

<b>Video</b>	<b>Intensifier</b>	<b>Intensifier – double use (<i>so so</i>)</b>	<b>Conjunction</b>	<b>Discourse marker</b>	<b>Pronoun</b>	<b>Adverbial phrase</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>1</b>	39	0	5	10	1	0	55
<b>2</b>	4	0	4	1	0	0	9
<b>3</b>	20	0	13	6	0	0	39
<b>4</b>	8	0	24	16	0	0	47
<b>5</b>	7	0	20	6	1	0	35
<b>6</b>	49	2	38	4	0	2	95
<b>7</b>	9	0	2	8	0	0	19
<b>8</b>	7	0	36	2	0	0	45
<b>9</b>	4	0	2	0	0	0	6
<b>10</b>	16	2	12	5	0	0	35
<b>11</b>	10	0	11	3	0	0	24
<b>12</b>	12	0	17	10	0	0	39
<b>13</b>	0	0	8	8	0	0	16
<b>14</b>	4	0	3	8	0	0	15
<b>15</b>	8	0	7	3	0	0	18
<b>16</b>	41	0	37	13	0	1	91
<b>Total</b>	238	4	239	103	2	3	589
<b>Total frequency</b>	40,41%	0,68%	40,58%	17,49%	0,34%	0,51%	

#### 4.2. Functions of *so*

The primary function of *so* was as an intensifier, as in (1), 41,09% (242) of all instances. It was frequently used to intensify adjectives.

(1) I also got two PR packages that I am *so* excited about.

The second most common usage was as a conjunction, as in (2), 40,58% (239) of all instances.

(2) She takes me everywhere but now I can drive myself, *so* she doesn't have to take me anywhere.

*So* was used as a discourse marker in 17,49% (103), frequently to start a sentence, as in (3).

(3) *So*, another person asked which sister am I closest to.

Pronouns and adverbial phrases were much less common, used as a pronoun in 0,34% (2), and as an adverbial phrase in 0,51% (3) instances.

#### 4.3. Preverbal use of *so*

Table 2: Preverbal and non-preverbal usage of *so*

<b>Video</b>	<b>Preverbal</b>	<b>Non-preverbal</b>
<b>1</b>	1	54
<b>2</b>	0	9
<b>3</b>	0	39
<b>4</b>	0	47
<b>5</b>	0	35
<b>6</b>	0	95
<b>7</b>	0	19
<b>8</b>	0	45
<b>9</b>	0	6
<b>10</b>	0	35
<b>11</b>	0	24
<b>12</b>	0	39
<b>13</b>	0	16
<b>14</b>	0	15
<b>15</b>	0	18
<b>16</b>	1	91
<b>Total</b>	2	587
<b>Total frequency</b>	0,34%	99,66%



Table 2 shows that *so* is not used preverbally frequently. Out of 589 instances, *so* was used preverbally in only 2 instances which is 0,34%. Out of those two instances, one was used as an emphasizer (4) and one as an intensifier (5).

(4) Like, *so* play this clip.

(5) Emily Henry has absolutely raved about this book, and I *so* understand why now.

#### 4.4. Usage of *totally*

*Totally* was found 13 times in these videos. It was only used as an intensifier, as in (6), and other uses were not found. Table 3 shows the total instances of the word *totally* across the 16 videos. *Totally* was generally very rarely used and the maximum amount in these videos is 6 occurrences per a video. It was not used by anyone under the age of 17 and was rarely used among those over the age of 20. It was mostly used in video 6 which is from an 18-year-old. As there were only 13 instances of *totally* in the broad spectrum of sentences and videos, we cannot come to a valid conclusion regarding the usage of *totally* in general, but only in the corpus used.

(6) Seeing someone you know well in a *totally* different context is always disorienting and vaguely impressive.

Table 3: Usage of *totally*

<b>Video</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>1</b>	0
<b>2</b>	0
<b>3</b>	0
<b>4</b>	1
<b>5</b>	2
<b>6</b>	6
<b>7</b>	0
<b>8</b>	1
<b>9</b>	1
<b>10</b>	0
<b>11</b>	0

<b>12</b>	0
<b>13</b>	0
<b>14</b>	0
<b>15</b>	0
<b>16</b>	2
<b>Total</b>	13

#### 4.5. Preverbal use of *totally*

Table 4 shows that *totally* is used preverbally frequently, in 61,54%. Out of those 8 preverbal uses, *totally* was used as an intensifier, as in (7), in 1 instance, and as an emphasizer, as in (8), in 7 instances. It was used non-preverbally, as in (9), in 38,46% (5 times).

(7) I have no idea what this is, but they like *totally* changed this.

(8) I will *totally* be wearing that outfit to the beach.

(9) This maxi skirt, it's so cute and I feel like this is *totally* vacation vibe.

Table 4: Preverbal and non-preverbal usage of *totally*

<b>Video</b>	<b>Preverbal</b>	<b>Non-preverbal</b>
<b>1</b>	0	0
<b>2</b>	0	0
<b>3</b>	0	0
<b>4</b>	1	0
<b>5</b>	1	1
<b>6</b>	5	1
<b>7</b>	0	0
<b>8</b>	1	0
<b>9</b>	0	1
<b>10</b>	0	0
<b>11</b>	0	0
<b>12</b>	0	0
<b>13</b>	0	0
<b>14</b>	0	0

<b>15</b>	0	0
<b>16</b>	0	2
<b>Total</b>	8	5
<b>Total frequency</b>	61,54%	38,46%

#### 4.6. Preverbal usage of *so* and *totally*

Following up is a list of all preverbal uses found in my corpus.

- a. Like, *so* play this clip.
- b. Emily Henry has absolutely raved about this book, and I *so* understand why now.
- c. Evangeline would *totally* wear this.
- d. I would *totally* live in this room.
- e. I will *totally* be wearing that outfit to the beach.
- f. I would *totally* wear this top with like some jeans.
- g. I can *totally* see myself bringing this to college.
- h. I wish you guys could feel it it's so cozy and comfy, but I would *totally* wear this to go out with friends.
- i. Like if you're looking for some amazing activewear I *totally* recommend but the set is super super cute it's in this burgundy color and I'm so excited.
- j. I have no idea what this is, but they like *totally* changed this.

Out of these 10 uses of preverbal *so* and *totally*, in sentences a., b., c., d., e., f., g., h., and i. they are used as what we call emphaziers and in sentence j. *totally* obtains a role of intensifier. In these sentences, preverbal *so* was once used with first person subjects. *Totally* was used with first person subjects 6 times and in other uses 2 times.

#### 4.7. Verbs preceded by preverbal *so* and *totally*

Table 5: Verbs preceded by preverbal *so*

<b>Verbs</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Play</b>	1
<b>Understand</b>	1

Table 6: Verbs preceded by preverbal *totally*

<b>Verbs</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Wear</b>	4
<b>Live</b>	1
<b>See</b>	1
<b>Recommend</b>	1
<b>Change</b>	1

Table 5 and table 6 show that in this corpus *so* and *totally* only ever precede non-auxiliary verbs and uses with auxiliary verbs were not found.

#### 4.8. The use of *so* and *totally* among men and women

Table 7: Usage of *so* and *totally* among men and women

	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b><i>So</i></b>	115	474	589
<b><i>Totally</i></b>	3	10	13
<b>Total</b>	118	484	

Out of 589 uses of *so* in total, this research shows that women use *so* more frequently than men as shown in table 5. I found a total of 474 uses of *so* among women, and 115 uses of *so* among men. The same conclusion can be drawn for the word *totally* as well. Out of 13 cases of the word *totally* found, women used it 10 times and men used it 3 times.

Table 8: Preverbal usage of *so* and *totally* among men and women

	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Preverbal <i>so</i></b>	0	2	2
<b>Preverbal <i>totally</i></b>	1	7	8
<b>Total</b>	1	9	

Table 6 shows the use of preverbal *so* and *totally* among men and women. As far as the preverbal use of *totally* goes, men used it preverbally only once, while women used it preverbally a total of 7 times. Preverbal use of *so* is found in only two sentences and both of those were spoken by

women. This shows that men used preverbal *so* and *totally* only 1 time, while women used it 9 times in total. The word *totally* is found to be used preverbally more than *so*.

## 5. Discussion

The analysis of the use of intensifiers *so* and *totally* in youth language based on this corpus from YouTube videos shows linguistic trends among individuals aged 16 to 23. This section discusses results, compares them to previous research in the field and points to questions for further and deeper study.

### 5.1. Usage of *so*

The data shows that *so* is used quite frequently in youth language in comparison to *totally*, appearing 589 times across the analysed videos. This is in line with Bordet's (2015) study in which she found that the intensifier *so* is the most frequent out of the four most popular intensifiers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: *very*, *really*, *so*, and *totally*. Its primary functions were as an intensifier (41,09%) and a conjunction (40,58%). This aligns with research by Tagliamonte and Roberts (2008) who found *so* to be used frequently. On the other hand, the data showed that the preverbal use of *so* was minimal, occurring only 0,34% of the time. This contrasts with the hypothesis that *so* would be frequently used preverbally for intensification purposes in youth language. The results of the present study could also suggest that the corpus may be too limited and that a much larger database should be researched to draw a more precise conclusion. However, this is in line with Stange's (2022) observation that the use of preverbal *so* is declining among the generation following the Generation X. Interestingly, out of 2 occurrences of preverbal *so* in this corpus, 1 was used in an imperative sentence which Stange (2021) found to be very rare.

### 5.2. Usage of *totally*

In contrast to *so*, *totally* was found only 13 times in the videos analysed. This shows that *totally* may not be a frequent word used by youth. Its preverbal use as an intensifier or emphasize was frequent, 61,54%, unlike with *so*. This supports the hypothesis that *totally* would be used frequently for intensification purposes in youth language. However, the data sample is quite small, and conclusions cannot be drawn in general, but only for this corpus. The fact that this corpus doesn't have many uses of *totally* as an intensifier agrees with Stange (2021) who had drawn her examples from soap operas because she found that soap operas are more likely to have innovative instances of language, such as intensifiers, than natural spoken language. That is, as she says,

because “soap opera storylines are typically very dramatic, and the language spoken is emotionally loaded.”

### 5.3. Preverbal usage of *so* and *totally*

Data showed that preverbal uses of *so* and *totally* are much less frequent than their uses as intensifiers of adjectives. However, the results of the present study show that speaker-oriented uses of *totally* used preverbally are more common than such preverbal lexical uses which runs counter to Beltrama’s conclusions (2018) that lexical uses of *totally* are much more frequent than speaker-oriented. However, absolute numbers of preverbal *so* and *totally* in the corpus analysed in this research are low which is in line with Mai Kuha (2005) observation that preverbal use of *so* and *totally* is only on the rise and has not been established in the language yet, which may be a potential reason why there is so little uses of preverbal *so* and *totally* in my corpus. Data also showed that *so* and *totally* were mostly used with first person subject which is in line with what Kuha (2004) previously found out about *so*. She also found that *so* was more frequently used with non-auxiliary verbs than modal verbs and this research showed that the same goes for both preverbal *so* and *totally* in youth language.

### 5.4. Usage of *so* and *totally* among genders

The analysis showed that women tend to use *so* and *totally* more than men in both, preverbal and non-preverbal uses. This is in line with Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005) who found women to be “trend-setters” when it comes to intensifiers because they use them more often than men. It is also in line with Stange’s (2021) research which also showed that *so* is used mostly by young women. This was also found in Kuha (2005) who recognizes the use of *so* as a characteristic of female speech.

## 6. Conclusion

This study aims to explore preverbal use of *so* and *totally* in youth language. Unlike research done previously which studied language from television series, this research studies natural spoken language. This was done in a corpus of sentences drawn from YouTube videos whose creators are aged 16 to 23 years. In those 16 videos, there is a total of 10 sentences with preverbal uses of *so* and *totally*. *So* occurred 589 times in total, and preverbally only twice. On the other hand, *totally* occurred 13 times in total, with 8 of those being preverbal. The minimal preverbal use of intensifier *so* suggests that while it is still a popular intensifier among youth, it is not a trend to use it preverbally. The frequent preverbal use of *totally* indicates a possible trend in youth language. The

study shows that *so* is used frequently as an intensifier but not preverbally, and that *totally* is a common preverbal emphaser in youth language. It also shows that women tend to use *so* and *totally* more than men. This research is very limited by data collected because *so* was used as a preverbal intensifier only once and *totally* was found in only 13 instances altogether. Exploring a larger corpus may provide a more accurate representation of today's youth language. The limitation of this research restricts the generalizability of these findings.

## Appendix

In order to analyse the use of preverbal *so* and *totally* in youth language I made a corpus based on selected YouTube videos. Detailed information about these videos, including links follow ordered by age, first being the youngest and last the oldest. This is also the order in which these videos appear in the tables above.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iEHIEQWIFR4>. Accessed: 27th June 2024.
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- 5) Matter, Hudson. 2024. Destroyed My Sister's Room And Built Her A New One. YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nISIZIijjA8>. Accessed: 27th June 2024.
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- 8) Davis, Kayla. 2024. Dying My Hair!. YouTube. Available at:  
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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7XABdh2qGE>. Accessed: 27th June 2024.
- 11) Bennett, Klailea. 2024. I Moved Across the Country Alone. YouTube. Available at:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWPmCDFmnNU>. Accessed: 27th June 2024.
- 12) Lambert, Maddie. 2024. GRWM for Our Baby Shower!!. YouTube. Available at:  
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- 13) Aarons, Danny. 2024. 10 Things Danny Aarons Can't Live Without. YouTube. Available at:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QIS\\_80J7tuY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QIS_80J7tuY). Accessed: 27th June 2024.



- 14) Khattri, Jarvis. 2024. Epic Unbanned Me & Put Me in Fortnite. YouTube. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wgS8\\_iDVBII](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wgS8_iDVBII). Accessed: 27th June 2024.
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