

# The Influence of Gender on the Use of Intensifiers in Spoken English

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Dvopredmetni sveučilišni studij Engleskog jezika i književnosti i Njemačkog  
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Mentorica: doc. dr. sc. Dubravka Vidaković Erdeljić

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**Prilog: Izjava o akademskoj čestitosti i o suglasnosti za javno objavljivanje**

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## Abstract

This research paper examines the impact that gender has on the use of intensifying adverbs in present-day spoken English. The research is based on the analysis of intensifiers used in the American television series *Euphoria* first aired in 2019 (season 1) and 2022 (season 2). The analysis of transcripts is focused on the efforts to determine what intensifiers are used most frequently in the show, as well as if there is a difference in the frequency and in the context of their use between sexes.

This research has shown that the following intensifiers are most frequently used in the show: *just*, *so* and *really*. We have also come to the conclusion that females use intensifiers much more frequently than males, but that there are no striking differences when it comes to contexts in which males and females use intensifiers.

*Keywords:* intensifier, intensifying adverb, gender, TV series *Euphoria*, spoken English



## **1 Introduction**

This research paper examines the impact that gender has on intensifying adverbs in present-day spoken English, based on the analysis of American television series Euphoria which first aired on June 16, 2019 and is currently one of the most popular teen series. By choosing this TV show, I was hoping to even out the aspect of different age groups as much as possible since most of the characters in Euphoria are teenagers. The paper explores the extent of utilization of the intensifiers among the same-sex persons and persons of different sexes and its corpus includes intensifying adverbs from the transcribed materials of the aforementioned series.

This research paper is divided into several sections. It first starts with the theoretical background of intensifying adverbs, which includes their definition and further classification. The following section focuses on the previous studies dealing with the differences between genders in the use of intensifiers. Section 4 states the research questions and describes the methodology of the research itself. The results of the research are presented in Section 5, while in Section 6 they are discussed and compared with the findings of previous studies on this topic. Finally, in Section 7 the concluding remarks are provided.

## **2 Theoretical background**

### **2.1 Defining intensifiers**

Intensifiers fall into the category of adverbs of degree which “describe the extent to which a characteristic holds” (Biber et. al. 1999: 554). In a sentence, adverbs of degree, also known as adverbs of extent, are used to indicate a level on the intensity scale that can be either higher or lower than the norm. Intensifiers are one of the most popular “degree adverbs that increase intensity” (ibid. 1999: 554) and are regularly used in everyday speech in the English language. Some of the most common adverbs that fall into the category of intensifiers are: *such, at all, well, really, very, too, rather, so, extremely*, and many others. The most significant reason why they have retained their importance to this day is due to the fact that “they are very fast to undergo semantic change, faster perhaps than any other group of lexical items” (Buljan et al. 2019: 158). Their popularity also depends on the speakers of the English language and their use of individual intensifiers that tend to continuously change depending

on a particular period in history. According to Ito & Tagliamonte (2003) speakers of present-day BrE and AmE most frequently use the following intensifiers; *really*, *so* and *very*, in sentences<sup>1</sup> like:

- a) He is a *really* good person.
- b) I'm *so* glad you came.
- c) She has a *very* successful career.

Among these three, intensifier *so* is the most colloquial and is mostly used by representatives of the younger generation.

## 2.2 Types of intensifiers

Intensifiers can be divided into three major classes: emphasizeers, amplifiers, and downtoners (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 214). Quirk & Greenbaum (1973: 121) explain that: “emphasizers have a general heightening effect; amplifiers scale upwards from an assumed norm; downtoners have a lowering effect, usually scaling downwards from an assumed norm.” Normally, intensifiers fall into category of adverbs, but there are also some that have a syntactic function of a noun phrase or even a prepositional phrase (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 215).

### 2.2.1. Emphasizers

According to van der Tuuk (1971: 341), emphasizeers can be defined as “not only the words that give emphasis to another word as a constituent of a sentence, an emphasis that we express by intonation, but also those which are only placed after a word in order to further specify its meaning: these words must not be equated with suffixes”. Some of the most frequently used emphasizeers which can appear with any verb or predication within a sentence are adverbs such as: *surely*, *actually*, *really*, *clearly*, *obviously*, *certainly*, *definitely*, *indeed*, *plainly*, *for certain*, *for sure*, *of course*, and many more (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 215). They can be used as follows in the examples below:

- a) He will *surely* succeed.
- b) This is *actually* a brilliant idea.
- c) He *really* loves you.

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<sup>1</sup> Example sentences from page 2 to page 8 have been provided by the author of this paper.

- d) She *clearly* misses you.
- e) *Obviously*, it is a mistake.
- f) She will *certainly* call you back.
- g) They are *definitely* in the wrong.
- h) Our marriage is *indeed* a happy one.
- i) The truth was *plainly* visible.
- j) You can't know this *for certain*.
- k) Your father will be home for Christmas *for sure*.
- l) *Of course*, I lied to you, what did you expect me to do?

Even though the majority of intensifiers usually precede their subject of intensification, *for sure* and *for certain* act as postmodifiers, as the above mentioned examples display. *Indeed* needs not precede the element that it emphasizes. Just like *for certain* and *for sure* it can also be postposed, normally “after a complement of *be* which is realized by an adjective (particularly if modified by another intensifier) or a degree noun” (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 215):

- a) She is *indeed* so beautiful.
- b) She is so beautiful *indeed*.

When it comes to intensifiers like *frankly*, *honestly*, *literally*, *simply*, *fairly* (BrE) and *just*, it is notable that they are often faced with some sort of limitation in a sentential structure. Quirk & Greenbaum (1973: 215) noticed that the intensifier *honestly* is often accompanied by verbs expressing cognition or attitude, which can be corroborated with the following examples:

- a) Do you *honestly* believe that I would do that to you?
- b) Her diligence is *honestly* admired by her coworkers.

### 2.2.2. Amplifiers

The next branch of intensifiers are amplifiers. The degree expressed by using them in a sentence denotes their subjective tendency to disclose the attitude of the speaker (Xiao 2007: 242). What is specific about them is their mere possibility to be contrasted in alternative negation by using *to some extent*, according to Quirk & Greenbaum (1973: 216). The majority of adverbs that are amplifiers take up either the final position or the position directly before the lexical verb, for instance:

- a) He regretted it *deeply*. → Adverb *deeply* is placed last.
- b) He *deeply* regretted it. → Adverb *deeply* precedes the lexical verb.

This applies in all cases other than when a lexical verb is *be*, in which case an adverb takes a position in front of the complement. This can be verified with the following example: He is *so* violent. Prepositional and noun phrases can be strictly limited to the final position in a sentence. However, in the case of negative, imperative or interrogative clauses final position is required, which can be shown in the sentences below:

- a) Study *more!* → Adverb *more* has taken up the final position in the imperative clause.
- b) Just because some men are bad, one shouldn't avoid them *altogether*. → Adverb *altogether* has taken up the final position in the negative clause.
- c) Did it go *well?* → Adverb *well* has taken up the final position in the interrogative clause.

They can also precede non-gradable verbs:

- a) She *surely* drinks wine.
- b) Just tell them, they *certainly* won't judge you.

Unlike emphasizees which have no subcategories, Quirk & Greenbaum divide amplifiers into two categories; maximizers and boosters (1973: 215). Maximizers “denote the upper extreme of the scale” (1973: 215), while boosters signify “a high point on the scale” (1973: 216). As boosters are an open class, it is normal that the older ones are regularly replaced with the newer and more suitable ones. Some of the boosters that are mostly used include adverbs like: “*badly, deeply, greatly, heartily, much, so, violently, well, a great deal, a good deal, a lot, by far, exclamatory how; more*” (1973: 216). To illustrate their position in a sentence, the following examples are provided:

- a) She *badly* wanted it. / She wanted it *badly*.
- b) He *greatly* loved her. / He loved her *greatly*.
- c) They *heartily* agreed with my proposal.
- d) She can *well* see who he is.
- e) They *much* preferred her idea over his.
- f) This matters *a great deal* to her.
- g) This building seems *a good deal* bigger than the previous one.
- h) They mean *a lot* to me.

- i) You are *by far* a better person than him.
- j) The plane was shaking *violently* for two minutes because of the bad weather.

As shown in the examples above, when it comes to boosters in positive declarative clauses, they are normally placed just before the lexical verb or if it is a case of the lexical verb *be*, then just in front of the complement.

Another already mentioned subdivision of amplifying adverbs, used to fully emphasize the highest degree of the action conducted, are maximizers. They are also occasionally used to modify adjectives. Examples of such words are: *absolutely, completely, fully, altogether, entirely, quite, thoroughly, utterly, in all respects* and *most*, which will be further illustrated with the sentences below (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 216).

- a) He *absolutely* denied all claims made against him.
- b) My dog *completely* ignored my boyfriend.
- c) She *fully* enjoyed the attention.
- d) My daughter abandoned me and the rest of the family *altogether*, when we needed her most.
- e) We *entirely* support you.
- f) He is *quite* confident.
- g) Peter *thoroughly* enjoyed his first date with Anna.
- h) Even though he regretted thinking about it in that way, he felt *utterly* relieved upon finding out that whoever killed his dog wasn't his girlfriend.
- i) The triplets were identical *in all respects*.
- j) My wife mentioned this reason for leaving me *most* frequently.

Some of the adverbs from this subtype of intensifying adverbs denote attention demanding behavior, in both spoken and written communication, or they are used to emphasize exaggeration in an utterance (Wachter 2012: 1).

With regard to the positioning of maximizers within a positive declarative sentence, they usually take up the final position, but if they behave as boosters, signifying “a high point on the scale”, then they are also positioned as such (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 216). This can be illustrated further with the maximizer *completely* in the following example: *She completely regretted his decision.*

Amplifiers can every so often supplement non-gradable verbs in a sentence, in which instance they tend to function as some other type of adjunct (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 217):

- a) She drinks wine *a lot*. – “A lot” in this case, carries the meaning of frequently.
- b) Just tell them, they won’t judge you *severely*. – “Severely” has the meaning of a severe manner.

Because of the fact that some amplifiers are regularly used alongside certain verbs, they can at times behave as phrases (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 217):

- a) I entirely agree what your cousin just said.
- b) She completely forgot about my birthday.
- c) The employee greatly admired the successful career of her employer.
- d) He seemed to greatly enjoy my company.
- e) My son badly needed help with his homework.
- f) My friend badly wanted to find an apartment near me.

Amplifying adverbs often denote certain implications. As a booster, *greatly* co-occurs with a verb expressing some favorable implication, maximizer *utterly* has some negative connotations tied to it and booster *deeply* stands exclusively beside emotive verbs, suggesting a metaphorical meaning (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 217). The sentences bellow may act as illustrations of the aforementioned statements made by Quirk & Greenbaum (1973: 217):

- a) He is believed to be *greatly* interested in biology. → positive connotation
- b) She was *utterly* disgusted by his reaction. → negative connotation
- c) They were *deeply* moved by her song. → Alongside an emotive verb *move*, *deeply* carries a meaning of emotionally affected.

### 2.2.3. Downtoners

Apart from emphasizeers and amplifiers Quirk & Greenbaum identify another subcategory of intensifiers, called downtoners (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 218). They describe the category as a group of intensifiers with “a lowering effect on the force of the verb”, which can be further divided into four smaller groups; compromisers, diminishers, minimizers and approximators (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 218). One predominant similarity that diminishers and minimizers share is the element of considerable downwards scaling (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 218). However, the difference between the two is evident. While diminishers are

typically not the focal point of negation, minimizers accepting negation tend to “deny the true-value of what is denoted by the verb” (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 219). Those diminishers that are, actually, the negation focus, have the effect of pushing the scaling up (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 219). Diminishers mentioned by Quirk & Greenbaum are: “*partly, slightly, somewhat, in part, to some extent, a little*” (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 218). To further study their role and position in a sentence, their use is exemplified in the sentences below:

- a) I was *partly* at fault for the mishap.
- b) He leaned *slightly* forward to kiss her on the cheek.
- c) Tom felt *somewhat* cooler when he put on his suit.
- d) She received a poor grade *in part* because of her arrogance.
- e) *To some extent* she likes to stay busy.
- f) Can you just clean up *a little*.

Although most downtoners usually take the position immediately before the lexical verb or complement if it is the case of the lexical *be*, some can also be found in the final position (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 219). Diminisher *a little*, for instance, prefers the final position, as shown above, in the sentence f). However, it is not restricted to that position because it can also appear just before the complement in case of lexical *be*: He is *a little* shy. Some diminishers occur initially, which can be noticed in sentence e) (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 219).

Minimizers include adverbs such as: *a bit, scarcely, little, hardly, barely, in the least, in the slightest* and *at all* (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 218).

- a) Please, turn the volume down *a bit*.
- b) I could *scarcely* take care of myself with my poor salary.
- c) She cared *little* for her children.
- d) His behavior *hardly* surprised her.
- e) He *barely* made it through.
- f) Her turning up did not affect him *in the least*.
- g) What he believes doesn't matter *in the slightest*.
- h) I don't care about her *at all*.

*Scarcely, hardly* and *barely* mostly occur “between two auxiliaries or an auxiliary and lexical *be*” (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 208). If that is not the case, they then take up the standard

position of downtoners. Minimizers *a bit* and *at all* appear usually in the final position, as can be seen above, in the sentences a) and h). As previously stated, minimizers used in negative sentences have the role of dismissing the value that the predicator indicates (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 219). Still, it is important to disclose that minimizers like: “barely, hardly, little and scarcely are themselves negative and cannot be negated” (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 219). *Never* is considered to be a negative minimizer in some instances (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 220). The sentence: *He will never leave you for someone else.* discloses the utter impossibility that that could happen. In interrogative sentences it is possible to replace the minimizer *never* with *ever*, which can be seen in the following example: *Will she ever grow up?* (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 220).

The next subtype of downtoners are approximators, which include adverbs such as: *nearly*, *almost*, *all but* and *as good as* (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 218):

- a) He *nearly* died. → But he didn’t, he survived.
- b) They *almost* got into an accident. → But they didn’t, they avoided the accident.
- c) He was *all but* polite to her. → He was rude.
- d) After fixing the old car, it was *as good as* new. → But it was still an old car.

Like minimizers, approximators also tend to deny the true value implied by the verb, which is apparent in the aforementioned sentences (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 219).

Lastly, compromizers are also an indispensable subtype of downtoners. They “have only a slight lowering effect” (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 218). They include intensifying adverbs such as: *kind of*, *sort of*, *more or less*, *rather* and *quite* (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 218).

- a) This was *kind of* big deal to her. → *Kind of* is often used in American English, especially in informal speech (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 218).
- b) His comment *sort of* got to my head. → *Sort of*, just like *kind of* is used in informal speech in AmE (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 218).
- c) His campaign was *more or less* a success.
- d) She was *rather* touched by his speech. → Adverb *rather* is used in British English (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 218).
- e) He was *quite* annoyed with her way of acting. → Just like adverb *rather*, *quite* is also used in BrE (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 218).



Compromizers are used to lessen that, what the verb in a sentence denotes (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 219).

### 3 Previous studies

The use of intensifiers has been studied through different perspectives, such as their use in different historical periods (Ito & Tagliamonte, 2003), the influence of age and gender on their use (Corey, 2014; Sardabi & Afghari, 2015), typification of intensifying adverbs on Social Media (Suryaningsih & Dwi Hardjanto, 2021) and many other interesting perspectives. In line with the topic of the paper, in this section I will focus on studies dealing with differences between genders in their use of intensifiers.

Putri et al. (2020) have found that in written English, teenage participants heavily rely on the frequent use of intensifying adverbs. However, it appears that they tend to use them in different manners and with disparate purposes. While females were prone to intensifying human related adjectives, males were more likely to intensify value adjectives. Female participants also preferred to use maximizers, whereas male participants favored boosters more. Furthermore, unlike males who tended to use intensifying adverbs to produce a sentence with a positive connotation, females were found to use them in order to create a negative context sentence. Female participants appeared to use a more notable amount of intensifiers and they relied on a variety of choices, as well. What was also interesting is the fact that this research produced different results in comparison to Lakoff's (1975), who stated that females were found to use intensifying adverbs so as to display their power, while interacting with others. Putri et al. (2020) concluded that in his study male participants utilized intensifying adverbs in order to demonstrate their power and dominate the conversation because they wanted to be listened to. Intensifiers were also used for other motifs such as: "expressions of exaggeration, admiration, complaint, shock, and distastefulness", emotion triggers and in case of male participants exclusively - societal pressure (Putri et. al.: 2020).

Another research paper that engaged in the analysis of gender differences in intensifying modifiers, specifically focusing on intensifiers: *so*, *very*, *really* and *pretty* used in spoken English, also indicated different behavior of male and female research participants with

regard to the use of intensifiers in particular situations (Corey: 2014). However, the study indicated some similar behavioral patterns, as well. It was observed that intensifier *really* was often used by both genders, which may indicate that both genders use similar 'linguistic patterns'. The difference was apparent due to their dissimilar way of conducting themselves, when being put in same situations and therefore having identical variables. It is important to point out that this research was conducted on participants of different age groups, which had certainly affected its results.

Jeon and Choe (2009) studied the topic of intensifiers in spoken English with both male and female corpora within the British component of the International Corpus of English by using the KeyWord function in WordSmith tools (Jeon & Choe: 218). With their first question, they wanted to find out which intensifying adverbs male and female speakers typically used in the aforementioned corpus. When it came to females, they noticed the following: “13 key words of intensifying adverbs such as *really, sort of, so, a bit, that, very, too, slightly, all, quite, completely, at all, much*, while in male corpus, 7 key words are derived such as *entirely, right, around, over, some, relatively, well*” (ibid.: 218)

#### **4 Research questions and methodology**

The focus of this research paper will primarily be on the influence of gender on the use of intensifiers in spoken present-day English.

The analysis of the data set will hopefully provide answers to the following research questions:

- 1) Which intensifiers are used in present-day spoken English?
- 2) Is there a difference in their use between the two sexes?
- 3) What factors affect the difference in the use of intensifiers among opposite sexes?

The data set analyzed in this research paper contains transcripts of the first two seasons of an American teen drama television series “Euphoria”. This TV show was chosen with the aim of equalizing the age aspect as much as possible, as the vast majority of the characters are teenagers. This American show represents the culture of the twenty-first century American high-school teenagers and their families, thus portraying the modern-day society “lingo” and

linguistic trends. The intensifying adverbs were marked and counted via *Sketch Engine* which is an app that helped me filter and collect statistic data on the frequency of the use of intensifiers more quickly and efficiently. In order for this research to be properly conducted, the obtained results had to be manually examined to determine if there was a difference in the usage of intensifying adverbs between the male and female sex and what prompted the speakers to use them. This was done by simultaneously watching the show and comparing it to the transcripts. Because of the large quantities of intensifiers of different priority levels, the focus of this research was put on the most-often-used intensifying adverbs in the corpus. It was observed that female characters were assigned more text amount than their male counterparts in the television series. In order for this factor not to influence this research, I have manually divided lines assigned to male and female speakers into two *Word documents*. After doing this, the words of male and female speakers were individually counted using *Word Count*. Then the total number of adverbs used in the series was divided by the total number of words within the *Word document* containing the lines of male and then female speakers. This result was multiplied by thousand and the end result showed how many times an intensifier was used by both genders separately per thousand words.

## **5 Findings**

The study has shown that in the American teen drama television series “Euphoria”, a total of 281 different adverbs were used. Additionally, their frequency of use amounted to a total of 7, 434. If the fact that the transcripts of season one and two combined consist of approximately 81 000 words is considered, this would mean that every 11<sup>th</sup> word on average is some type of an adverb. In other words, adverbs make up 9.18% of all of the word classes present in both seasons of “Euphoria”. Around 37% of these adverbs were used at least once as intensifiers in the corpus. The most commonly used intensifying adverb was *just*, followed by *so* and *really*. *Just* is a type of emphasizing adverb, which is an adverb used as an emphasis to a constituent, a word or a sentence that it modifies. If placed after a word, it can also be used to further specify its meaning. In this teen series it was used 607 times (see Table 1 below). If the total frequency of the use of adverbs is compared with how often the intensifier *just* was used, it can be concluded that this intensifier constitutes 8.2 % of all usages of that word class. Furthermore, adverb *so*, with 376 hits, is the second most commonly used intensifier in this series. It is used almost half as much as the previous

intensifier. *Really* took the third place in the ranking of the most used intensifying adverbs, as it was produced 272 times by either male or female speakers. Just like *just*, *really* also falls into the category of emphasers. But it was used more than half as much as *just*.

Table 1 below provides a more detailed review of the studied intensifiers listed in the first column, followed by their total number of occurrences in the second column and the percentages of the total number of adverbs in the third column.

| <b>Intensifier</b> | <b>Total number of occurrences</b> | <b>Percentage in the total number of adverbs</b> |
|--------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| just               | 607                                | 8.2 %  |
| so                 | 376                                | 5.1 %  |
| really             | 272                                | 3.7 %  |
| well               | 138                                | 1.9 %  |
| more               | 38                                 | 0.5 %  |
| most               | 21                                 | 0.3 %  |
| too                | 101                                | 1.4 %  |
| right              | 98                                 | 1.3 %  |
| some               | 68                                 | 0.9 %  |
| much               | 64                                 | 0.9 %  |
| very               | 37                                 | 0.5 %  |
| pretty             | 14                                 | 0.2 %  |

*Table 1: The list of the most frequent intensifiers in the TV series Euphoria*

Because there is a large number of intensifying adverbs in the television series “Euphoria”, to answer the question whether or not there is a difference between sexes when using intensifiers, I chose to narrow the field of research and focus on only certain ones which in order of frequency include: *so*, *really*, *too*, *right*, *some*, *much*, *very* and *pretty*. The study has shown that female speakers definitely tend to use intensifying adverbs more often than their male counterparts. In fact, the majority of the aforementioned intensifiers were predominantly used by females, and less so by males. *Really* was utilized by female speakers more than twice as often as male speakers, as they used it 4.07 times per thousand words, while their male counterparts utilized it only 1.59 times. Intensifier *much* was also used

almost twice as much by female speakers in comparison to their male counterparts, as females used it 0.94 times per thousand words and males only utilized it 0.52 times per thousand words. *So* and *too* were primarily utilized by female speakers. They used *too* 1.32 times for every thousand words, while their male counterparts also utilized it but only 1.07 times. Intensifier *so* was used by female speakers 4.99 times, whereas male speakers were prone to using it only 3 times per thousand words. The use of intensifiers *some*, *very* and *pretty*, utilized only slightly more by male speakers, showed a roughly equal amount of uses by both sexes. While male speakers used *some* 0.95 times, *very* 0.49 times and *pretty* 0.15 times per thousand words, their female counterparts relied on using intensifying adverb *some* 0.74 times, *very* 0.42 times and *pretty* 0.1 times for the same amount of words. Finally, it can be stated that intensifier *right* was used predominantly by male speakers during conversation. They utilized it 1.59 times per thousand words, while females used it almost half as much with 0.94 times per same amount of words.

To further corroborate these findings, the table below showcases the number of intensifiers used for every thousand words spoken by female speakers and their male counterparts. Studied intensifiers are listed in the far left column. The column in the middle displays the number of intensifiers used by female speakers per thousand words, whereas the far right column shows the number of intensifying adverbs utilized by male speakers for every thousand words.

| <b>Intensifier</b> | <b>Number of intensifiers used by female speakers per thousand words</b> | <b>Number of intensifiers used by male speakers per thousand words</b> |
|--------------------|--|--|
| so                 | 4.99   | 3  |
| really             | 4.07   | 1.59   |
| too                | 1.32   | 1.07   |
| right              | 0.92   | 1.59   |
| some               | 0.74   | 0.95   |
| much               | 0.94   | 0.52   |
| very               | 0.42   | 0.49   |
| pretty             | 0.10   | 0.15   |

*Table 2: The number of intensifiers used by female and male speakers per thousand words*

The table 3 below shows the order of the most frequently utilized intensifiers by both genders from the most used to the least used ones. It is apparent that *so* and *really* are the two intensifiers preferred by both genders. Intensifying adverbs with the least amount of hits in the case of both genders are *very* and *pretty*.

| <b>Intensifiers most frequently used by male speakers</b> | <b>Intensifiers most frequently used by speakers</b> |
|---|--|
| so  | so   |
| really  | really   |
| right   | too  |
| too   | much   |
| some  | right  |
| much  | some   |
| very  | very   |
| pretty  | pretty   |

Table 3: Table of the most common intensifiers for male and female speakers

To further investigate factors that affect the different way of intensifier utilization, it is crucial to observe in which context and situations they were used. The following tables showcase the examples of intensifier usage by female speakers in the rows on the left and male speakers in the rows on the right:

| FEMALE SPEAKERS                           | MALE SPEAKERS   |
|---|---|
| 1. a) I'm just <i>so</i> happy.           | 2. a) You're <i>so</i> clean.                         |
| 1. b) I'm <i>so</i> proud of you.         | 2. b) You're <i>so</i> hot.                           |
| 1. c) Dad's <i>so</i> fucking proud, Mom. | 2. c) Why you gotta make everything <i>so</i> sexual? |

Table 4: The use of intensifier *so* by female and male speakers

It appears that male and female use of intensifier *so*, tends to differ in contextual meaning. While female speakers use it to express their or other people's feelings, male speakers, on the other hand, prefer to use it to describe things or people. In this case male characters in the series were either describing their sexual attraction towards the same or opposite sex or exchanging information with their friends about their remarks regarding sexual desire, frustrations or needs. In contrast, female speakers were likely to use this intensifier as a form

of exaggeration, to invoke sympathy and showcase their interest for a person or a topic that was of interest to someone with whom they were having a conversation.

The next intensifying adverb upon which further contextual research was conducted is *really*.

| FEMALE SPEAKERS  | MALE SPEAKERS  |
|--|--|
| 1. a) Sometimes, when I get <i>really</i> high, I kind of think I'm psychic.   | 2. a) This motherfucker <i>really</i> pissed me off. |
| 1. b) I'm just trying to get back at my <i>really</i> shitty ex-boyfriend.   | 2. b) College is <i>really</i> stressing me out.     |
| 1. c) I mean, ever since I gave my life over to my lord and savior Jesus Christ, things have been, like, <i>really</i> good. | 2. c) I <i>really</i> love spending time with you.   |

Table 5: The use of intensifier *really* by female and male speakers

I have found that both genders were prone to using this particular intensifier to describe their state of mind, emotional state as well as to describe another person. This means that in this case for both genders *really* has the same meaning and it serves the same purpose. However, female speakers seem to have used this intensifying adverb with the goal of getting attention from the interlocutor. There are several possible reasons why females prefer the utilization of *so* and *really*. Since female speakers are still perceived as more gentle and polite in comparison to the opposite sex, they are forced by the societal norms, which are imposed upon them to be more mindful about their way of expressing themselves.

Just like *really*, *too* was also used for the similar purposes; for characterization of things or people, for describing the state of mind or physical condition. The only difference is that it was utilized for denoting both the quality and quantity of inanimate objects or occurrences, especially in the case of male speakers (example 2. c)). The utilization of intensifier *too* is shown within the table 6 below.

| FEMALE SPEAKERS  | MALE SPEAKERS   |
|--|---|
| 1. a) And every now and then, if I focused <i>too</i> closely on the way I breathed... | 2. a) Well, they're <i>too</i> gentle.                              |
| 1. b) He was <i>too</i> out of it to know I was high.                                  | 2. b) I'm <i>too</i> high to be having this conversation right now. |
| 1. c) Like, classy, but not <i>too</i> arty.   | 2. c) There's <i>too</i> many ODs, and I don't                      |

|  |                |
|--|----------------|
|  | want the heat. |
|--|----------------|

Table 6: The use of intensifier *too* by female and male speakers

Female and male speakers used the intensifier *right* in similar contexts. *Right* was either used to put an emphasis on time or on place of happenings, and it wasn't used for any other purposes. This observation is supported in the table 7 below.

| FEMALE SPEAKERS                                 | MALE SPEAKERS                            |
|---|--|
| 1. a) Can we not do this <i>right</i> now, Mom? | 2. a) I can't help you <i>right</i> now. |
| 1. b) Oh, <i>right</i> there.                   | 2. b) Stay <i>right</i> here.            |

Table 7: The use of intensifier *really* by female and male speakers

Intensifying adverbs *very* and *much* have both been investigated in Table 8, as they were sometimes used as double intensifiers (example 1. b) and 2. b)). In this case a fixed combination of adverbs that reads *very much*, was utilized by both genders to further emphasize the exaggeration of their statements. As a single intensifier, *very* was utilized by females mostly to denote the emotional state or support to others, while male speakers were more inclined to use them for making superficial statements, for striving to be perceived as humorous or for attention gaining. *Much* was, on the contrary, utilized with an adverb *how* in front of it, to denote the quantity of animate and inanimate objects or to try and measure the emotion that the speaker was feeling. I believe that by trying to express the immeasurable quantity of one's emotion, one tries to either create a deeper bond with the interlocutor or to provoke some kind of a reaction from him. While the female speaker used the phrase *how much* to showcase her emotion in the example 1. c), the male speaker had the goal of showcasing the aspect of power to the interlocutor in the example 2. c).

| FEMALE SPEAKERS                                     | MALE SPEAKERS  |
|---|--|
| 1. a) I'm <i>very</i> happy for you, Rue.           | 2. a) I have a <i>very</i> pretty dick.  |
| 1. b) You seem <i>very much</i> at home here.       | 2. b) But you're cute, and you're awkward, and you're like... kind of clumsy but you're <i>very much</i> a whore, intentionally, which is great. |
| 1. c) That's <u>how</u> <i>much</i> they loved her. | 2. c) You don't know <u>how</u> <i>much</i> power you have.  |

Table 8: The use of intensifier *very* and *much* by female and male speakers



During the observation of the contextual correlation between male and female sexes and their usage of intensifier *pretty*, I have found that both genders were prone to using it in similar ways i.e. situations. *Pretty* was used to indicate the state (example 1.a)) of the speaker, to explain the relationship between two people (example 1. c)) or to express manner in which something has been conducted (example 1. b)). Female speakers and their male counterparts used this intensifier to overemphasize something important for their conversation (example 1. a), 2. b) and 2.c)). The aforementioned examples can be found in Table 9.

| FEMALE SPEAKERS   | MALE SPEAKERS   |
|---|---|
| 1. a) It's <i>pretty</i> fucked up.   | 2. a) Yeah, she's a <i>pretty</i> cool girl.  |
| 1. b) And so on the same way that mass shootings, sex scandals, and stolen elections do, the whole thing blew over <i>pretty</i> quickly and we all moved on to the next thing. | 2. b) According to the paperwork that your mother filled out, it appears that you have some <i>pretty</i> extreme substance abuse issues. |
| 1. c) When we first started hanging out, I thought we'd be <i>pretty</i> close, but... guess not.   | 2. c) I was <i>pretty</i> tough, and then I got injured.  |

Table 9: The use of intensifier *pretty* by female and male speakers

## 6. Discussion

The purpose of this research was to study the influence of gender on intensifier usage in present-day spoken English based on “Euphoria”, an American teen drama television series.

Firstly, to answer the question: *which intensifiers are used in present-day spoken English*, the following information has been provided. Organized by their frequency of usage, it seems that, nowadays, *just*, *so* and *really* fall into the category of the most popular intensifying adverbs. Among all types of intensifiers, amplifiers are particularly favored, with *well*, *more* and *most* being the ones mainly utilized. Ito & Tagliamonte (2003: 266) and Tagliamonte & Roberts (2005) came to the conclusion that speakers of present-day BrE and AmE most often use intensifiers like: *really*, *so* and *very*. Although in this case my results are slightly different, I believe this might be the case because the majority of the speakers in “Euphoria” are playing teenagers. Their way of communication is adapted to the age group they represent

and to the target age group of the series' viewers, which is teenagers and adolescents. Apart from the narrower age group of interest, Ito & Tagliamonte (2003) were also focused on speakers of both British and American English, whereas my focus was exclusively on the speakers of American English. "Euphoria" is an American drama television series and all of the speakers play the role of American characters, which requires the sole use of American English.

If the type of adverb that prevails is taken into account, amplifiers definitely stand out, as the majority of intensifiers used in the television series fall into this particular category. The ones that stand out the most are *well*, *more* and *most*. The amplifier that is most represented within this series is *well*, with 138 hits, followed by *more* with 38 hits and *most* with 21 hits. This surely suggests that teenage speakers of American English rely heavily on the recurrent usage of intensifying adverbs in spoken English.

Secondly, regarding the question: *Is there a difference in their use between the two sexes?*, there are both some striking differences in the frequency of the use of intensifiers, as well as some similarities in the manner in which they were used. To answer this question, I have narrowed down the group of intensifiers represented within the corpus to: *so*, *really*, *too*, *right*, *some*, *much*, *very* and *pretty*. It was found that both sexes preferred the utilization of amplifiers *so* and *really*, both of which fall into the category of amplifiers, i.e. boosters or maximizers. On the other hand, *very* and *pretty* appear to be the least favored studied intensifiers among both male and female speakers. Intensifier *right* was predominantly favored by male speakers. Although male speakers were the ones with the majority of hits regarding intensifiers; *some*, *very* and *pretty*, female speakers also utilized these adverbs in their conversations almost as frequently as males.

Furthermore, it was shown that female speakers have a tendency to use intensifiers considerably more often than males, with intensifier *right* being the exception, as it was utilized by male speakers more frequently. *Some*, *very* and *pretty* were used in almost equal amounts by both genders. There were some notable sociolinguistic differences between female speakers and their male counterparts when using intensifiers in their speech. Females were utilizing *so* and *very* with the aim of showcasing their emotions and support, as well as interest for someone. They also seem to gravitate towards usage of *very* in order to denote their state of mind, invoke sympathy and exaggerate statements. *Pretty* was used to indicate their state of mind and to clarify their relations or relations of others within society. On the

contrary, their male counterparts were prone to using intensifier *so*, not only to make remarks about their needs, desires and frustrations but also to describe their surroundings or social environment. To gain attention, show off power or their humorous side, they were inclined to the utilization of the intensifier *very* or the fixed phrase *very much*.

In some instances, both male and female speakers appear to use the intensifiers *really*, *too*, *right* and *pretty* for similar purposes. Both genders opted for intensifying adverbs *really* and *too* to communicate their feelings, or as means of exaggeration in regards to either the interlocutor or the third party. Moreover, *right* was utilized to further stress the importance of time and place. *Pretty* was solely used for emphasizing key components of speech, the speaker wanted to put across.

Finally, to answer the question, *what factors affect the difference in the use of intensifiers among opposite sexes*, the following conclusions have been drawn. Each of these intensifying adverbs can be utilized not only in a positive context, but also in a negative context, depending on the desire, remark or feeling the speaker wants to express. Furthermore, both genders were motivated to use intensifiers in a heightened emotional state. Since males are commonly known to keep their emotions to themselves, they don't use them as often as female speakers do, but they indeed tend to incorporate them in their conversations with others quite frequently, as well. There are also differences in the way that people of the same gender and people of the opposite gender communicate with one another, which surely enforces some non-spoken rules learned throughout years of integration into society. Thus, it is beyond doubt that gender does pose as some kind of external factor that has a prominent influence on the use of language.

My findings were mostly in line with those of Putri et. al. (2020), as I have also noticed the frequent use of intensifiers among teenage speakers in my corpus, as well as amplifiers being the type of intensifiers, which were utilized the most.

Additionally, female speakers were the ones who opted for the use of intensifiers more often than their male counterparts and they seemed to utilize a broader scope of intensifiers, as well.

Putri et. al. (2020) concluded that male and female speakers chose the same intensifiers in dissimilar manners and intentions. Although this coincides with some of my findings on intensifiers *so* and *very*, intensifying adverbs *really*, *too*, and *right* were utilized for similar purposes. Depending on the context, *pretty* was sometimes used for different and other times

for conducting similar purposes. Putri et al. (2020) claimed that male speakers were leaning towards intensifying adverbs in order to showcase dominance and power, but this was not the case within my corpus, as the aspect of power was communicated only with fixed phrases *how much* and *very much*. The results of Corey's (2014) research depicted *really* as an intensifier most often used by both genders, which is in accordance with my results because alongside *so*, *really* was the intensifier that was utilized the most by both genders, thus indicating similar linguistic patterns.

Jeon and Choe's (2009) study provided thirteen key words of intensifiers for female speakers and seven for their male counterparts, which partially matched my list of intensifying adverbs. *So*, *really*, *too* and *very* were included among the thirteen intensifying adverbs utilized by females. Nevertheless, out of seven intensifiers, only *right* and *some* were included in my findings as some of the most popular intensifying adverbs male speakers are prone to use.

It is important to note that males had less amount of text assigned to them in comparison to female speakers. The number of intensifiers per 1000 words for both genders individually, was counted which in turn yielded a clearer picture of their use by males and females.

## **7. Conclusion**

There is no doubt that both males and females opt for the use of intensifying adverbs in order to better express themselves, when speaking with one another. *Just*, *so* and *really* belong to the most popular intensifiers used by both sexes in the TV drama series "Euphoria". Females' usage of intensifying adverbs was predominant, when compared to that of males. The way of interacting also differs, depending on the gender, as they exhibit some sociolinguistic differences. Female speakers cared more about communicating their emotional state or support, plain exaggeration for dramatic effects and for further explanation of relations with others. Male speakers were mainly drawn to intensifier usage with the aim of expressing their needs, frustrations, desires, as well as making remarks about their surroundings, portraying their dominance and humorous side and even as an attention seeking method. Although these differences are striking, there are some instances where both genders utilized the same intensifiers in similar manners and situations, which may imply the strength

of social norms and paradigms within our society. This refers to intensifying adverbs; *really*, *too*, *right* and *pretty*.

Putri et. al. (2020), Corey (2014) and Jeon & Choe (2009) came to similar conclusions in their researches with some minor differences. Contrary to the claim of Putri et. al. (2020), who came to the conclusion that the aim and way of using intensifiers is completely different in terms of male and female utilization, I have found that they are in some cases the same. In their research male speakers opted for intensifiers in order to predominantly demonstrate their power within society, whereas in my corpus intensifiers were more often utilized to communicate their thoughts about their environment, their wants, wishes and annoyances predominantly in heightened emotional states. Aligned with Corey's (2014) research, *really* was indeed one of the most popular intensifying adverbs among both sexes. However, due to the smaller scope of intensifying adverbs within my research, Jeon and Choe's (2009) findings only partially coincided with mine. In line with their research, *so*, *really* and *too* were mostly used by females, while *right* and *some* were more preferred by their male counterparts.

There is no denying that gender plays a major role with regards to the way male and female speakers conduct themselves within society but there are also clearly some linguistic patterns that are similar, which is supported by my research results.

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