

STUDIES IN  
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# Exploring Intensification

Synchronic, diachronic  
and cross-linguistic perspectives

*Edited by*  
Maria Napoli  
Miriam Ravetto

JOHN BENJAMINS PUBLISHING COMPANY



This book is the first collective volume specifically devoted to the multifaceted phenomenon of intensification, which has been traditionally regarded as related to the expression of degree, scaling a quality downwards or upwards. In spite of the large amount of studies on intensifiers, there is still a need for the characterization of intensification as a distinct functional category in the domain of modification. The eighteen papers of the volume contribute to this aim with a new approach (mainly corpus-based). They focus on intensification from different perspectives (both synchronic and diachronic) and theoretical frameworks, concern ancient languages (Hittite, Greek, Latin) and modern languages (mainly Italian, German, English, Kiswahili), and involve different levels of analysis. They also identify and examine different types of intensifiers, applied to different forms and structures, such as adverbs, adjectives, evaluative affixes, discourse markers, reduplication, exclamative clauses, coordination, prosodic elements, and shed light on issues which have not been extensively studied so far.

"Maria Napoli and Miriam Ravetto have successfully put together an edited volume, focussing on theoretical aspects of the semantics and pragmatics of intensification, and corpus based studies of realizations of intensification ranging from single word forms to larger chunks, intensification and prosody, and the appearance of new expressions and the decline of others. The book takes stock of previous work in this fascinating field of research, provides new insights in a range of languages and poses questions for future research. It is a most stimulating and extremely readable book – a must for anybody interested in intensifiers and intensification."

**Carita Paradis**, *Lund University*

"This volume provides new data, descriptions, and insights in the challenging and intriguing phenomenon of intensification. Recurring themes in the volume are the relation between intensification and other notional categories like comparison, focusing, and evaluation, the distribution of intensifiers across different text types and sociolinguistic parameters, and in particular the objective vs. subjective, emotional-evaluative, dimension of intensification. As Ekkehard König, in his contribution to the volume, puts it: "More often than not, the use of intensifiers tells us more about a speaker than about the situation described."

**Ad Foolen**, *Radboud University*

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NAPOLI & RAVETTO

Exploring Intensions



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## **Volume 189**

Exploring Intensification  
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# Table of contents

New insights on intensification and intensifiers <i>Maria Napoli and Miriam Ravetto</i>	1
<b>Part I. The category of intensification</b>	
CHAPTER 1	
The comparative basis of intensification <i>Ekkehard König</i>	15
CHAPTER 2	
Intensification and focusing: The case of <i>pure(ly)</i> and <i>mere(ly)</i> <i>Lobke Ghesquière</i>	33
CHAPTER 3	
Intensification processes in Italian: A survey <i>Nicola Grandi</i>	55
CHAPTER 4	
Noun classification in Kiswahili: Linguistic strategies to intensify or to reduce <i>Marina Castagneto</i>	79
<b>Part II. Strategies of intensification in ancient languages: Hittite, Greek and Latin</b>	
CHAPTER 5	
Intensification and intensifying modification in Hittite <i>Paola Dardano</i>	101
CHAPTER 6	
Diminutives in Ancient Greek: Intensification and subjectivity <i>Chiara Meluzzi</i>	127
CHAPTER 7	
<i>Nulla sum, nulla sum: Tota, tota occidi</i> : Repetition as a (rare) strategy of intensification in Latin <i>Chiara Fedriani</i>	147



### **Part III. Strategies of intensification in modern languages: Italian, German, English**

#### **CHAPTER 8**

- Intensifiers between grammar and pragmatics: A lesson from  
a language contact situation 173  
*Ilaria Fiorentini and Andrea Sansò*

#### **CHAPTER 9**

- Stress and tones as intensifying operators in German 193  
*Gianluca Cosentino*

#### **CHAPTER 10**

- English exclamative clauses and interrogative degree modification 207  
*Peter Siemund*

### **Part IV. Contrastive analysis of intensification in Italian and German**

#### **CHAPTER 11**

- A pragmatic view on intensification: Expansions in German and Italian 231  
*Katharina Salzmann*

#### **CHAPTER 12**

- Intensifying structures of adjectives across German and Italian 251  
*Patrizio Malloggi*

#### **CHAPTER 13**

- The coordination of identical conjuncts as a means of strengthening  
expressions in German and Italian 265  
*Marina Foschi Albert*

#### **CHAPTER 14**

- What does reduplication intensify? The semantics and pragmatics  
of reduplicated forms in Italian and their equivalents in German 289  
*Silvia Bonacchi*

#### **CHAPTER 15**

- Intensification strategies in German and Italian written language:  
The case of *prefissi intensivi* or *Fremdpräfixe*. A corpus-based study 305  
*Nicolò Calpestrati*

## CHAPTER 16

- Ways to intensify: Types of intensified meanings in Italian and German 327  
*Maria Napoli and Miriam Ravetto*

## CHAPTER 17

- Augmentatives in Italian and German: From contrastive analysis  
to translation 353  
*Marcella Costa*

## CHAPTER 18

- Intentional vagueness: A corpus-based analysis of Italian and German 371  
*Miriam Voghera and Laura Collu*

- Index 391



# New insights on intensification and intensifiers

Maria Napoli and Miriam Ravetto

Università del Piemonte Orientale

This volume originates in papers presented at the international conference on *Intensity, intensification and intensifying modification across languages* organized by Maria Napoli and Miriam Ravetto at the University of Eastern Piedmont (Vercelli) from November 5th to November 6th, 2015, and financially supported by the *Alexander von Humboldt Foundation*. The conference aimed at contributing to the debate on various questioned topics in this thematic area, and at discussing many issues related to intensification which have not been extensively investigated so far.

Intensification has been a popular topic since the publication of Bolinger's (1972) book on *Degree Words*, where this category was directly connected with the expression of *degree* and, then, with the notions of *gradability* and *scale*. Bolinger (1972: 17) used the term intensifier "for any device that scales a quality, whether up or down or somewhere between the two", which means that intensifiers may be positively or negatively oriented on a scale of intensity (cf. Quirk et al. 1985; Nevalainen & Rissanen 2002). Others, later, have adopted a more restricted view of intensification, considered as involving only the upper part of the scale, and have focused on a more semantically or, on the contrary, more pragmatically oriented approach (cf. Salzmann, this volume).

To our knowledge, no volume specifically devoted to intensification has been published in the last few years, although many papers on this topic have more or less recently appeared in various journals and books, especially by scholars dealing with semantic accounts of intensification and related phenomena (cf. the recent papers published in a volume edited by Gehrke & Castroviejo 2015) or with evaluative morphology (cf. Grandi & Körtvélyessy 2015; Orozco 2016). However, in spite of the abundance of studies on intensifiers, more work needs to be done in order to delineate intensification clearly and to distinguish it from other categories which are closely related from a functional point of view, but not overlapping (cf. Ghesquière, this volume). Moreover, the major part of these studies concern English, whereas the expression of intensification in other languages (such as Romance languages,

German or ancient languages) has not been widely explored. This state of affairs has led us to think of dedicating first a conference, then a volume, to this topic. For the same reason, we have chosen to mention the label *intensification* explicitly in the title and, as a consequence, to highlight its status as an autonomous category in the realm of modification.

As a matter of fact, when dealing with this phenomenon, several questions arise. Among them, the following are particularly relevant: (i) according to which constitutive features we may define intensification as a distinct category; (ii) whether and how intensification is related to other phenomena like, among others, comparison, focusing, evaluative morphology (especially in terms of augmentation and diminution), vagueness; (iii) which means of intensification are the most widespread across languages, how they can be classified and interact with each other; (iv) to what extent distinct linguistic levels are involved in the expression of degree (phonological, semantic, grammatical, lexical, pragmatic, cognitive, textual); (v) how intensifiers develop and evolve from a diachronic point of view; (vi) on the basis of which parameters distinct word classes vary with respect to their being intensified, or, in other words, which entities are (more or less) intensifiable.

This volume was conceived of by the two Editors as matching the requirements for providing the answers to these questions: as pointed out above, notwithstanding a large number of studies on intensification (mainly on English), this category should still be investigated from a more general and comparative point of view. The papers collected here may contribute to fill this gap, since they offer a broader and multifaceted picture of the topic under study, analyzing it from different perspectives and theoretical frameworks (mainly synchronic, diachronic and cross-linguistic, but also contrastive, sociolinguistic, functional-typological, semiotic), with regard to different levels of analysis (from morphology to lexicon, from semantics to pragmatics) and concerning both ancient languages (Hittite, Greek, Latin) and modern languages (mainly Italian, German, English, Kiswahili).

The main approaches followed throughout the volume are:

- i. corpus-based approach: analyses pursued in studies relying on data from different kinds of written and spoken corpora (including, for instance, a corpus of academic talks, a corpus of journalistic prose, textual literary corpora, bilingual and translation corpora, monolingual and bilingual lexicography, recordings of speech, questionnaires, etc.);
- ii. cross-linguistic and contrastive approach: analyses which aim at identifying similarities and differences between various languages with regard to their strategies of intensification;



- iii. sociolinguistic and language contact approach: analysis of the variation of intensifiers depending on sociolinguistic features (like registers, social identity and age of speakers/hearers); analysis of the use of intensifiers in specific language contact situations;
- iv. diachronic and historical approach: analysis of the development of intensifying strategies, including their diachronic sources; analysis of different forms of intensification in ancient languages.

Converging evidence from this volume shows that intensification is a complex and pervasive phenomenon, involving modification but going beyond the boundaries of semantic gradability, and “affecting different aspects of everyday communication” (Fiorentini & Sansò, this volume).

Intensifiers – which are widely attested across languages and frequently affected by processes of change, i.e. both renewal and obsolescence (König, this volume) – come out as heterogeneous elements, whose nature and behaviour significantly vary. As mentioned before, in this volume, strategies of intensification are identified – and, in some cases, compared with each other, in the attempt of defining their specific ground of application – at lexical, morphological, syntactic, pragmatic and prosodic levels. To quote some examples, what is analyzed here is the intensifying function of adverbs, adjectives, particles, discourse markers, affixes (evaluative affixes), reduplication, repetition, interrogatives, exclamative clauses, coordination, expansions, prosodic features like accents and tones, etc. These several strategies may be distributed along an “intensification cline” (Grandi, this volume), which means that intensifiers have neither exactly the same semantic and pragmatic properties (also when they combine with the same parts of speech) nor the same intensifying force.

Intensifiers are highly context-dependent: they strengthen or mitigate a given element, and, more importantly, they may assume different textual and pragmatic meanings on the basis of context-related factors (this means that the same intensifying form may denote different kinds of feelings and attitudes, for example approval as well depreciation, depending on the modified form and on the situation). Intensifiers are also connected with subjective factors – using Athanasiadou’s (2007: 554) words, they are “markers of subjectivity” – to the extent that intensifying sentences “may tell us more about the speaker than about the ‘reality’ described” (König, this volume).

Another crucial point concerns the nature of intensified elements: what is usually assumed is that intensification primarily affects gradable elements like adjectives and adverbs, since it is connected with degree. However, already Bolinger (1972) pointed out that also verbs and nouns may be intensified when they are gradable. Further studies have shown that the property of being intensifiable is

shared by linguistic elements which in principle are not associated with grading (Kennedy & McNally 2005; Paradis 2008).

This book confirms that different parts of speech may be intensified: e.g., adjectives, adverbs, nouns, verbs, quantifiers, pragmatic markers, but also comparatives (Foschi, this volume) and superlatives (Fedriani, this volume; Napoli & Ravetto, this volume). Moreover, intensifiers do not simply operate at a propositional level (modifying the degree or intensity of a given quality, property etc.), but also at the level of speech acts, as already stated, for instance, in Searle & Vanderveken (1985), Bazzanella, Caffi & Sbisà (1991: 7–11), Dressler & Merlini Barbaresi (1994: 419 f.), and confirmed in many papers through this volume. Intensifiers may scale upwards or downwards the content of the utterance itself, in the sense that they modify the degree of intensity of the speaker's attitude towards "the truth value" of sentences, expressions etc. (cf. Nevalainen & Rissanen 2002: 361). However, they may also scale upwards and downwards "the illocutionary force of the utterance depending on the sociolinguistic characteristics of participants, the situational and linguistic context, and the perlocutionary effects that speakers may want to obtain" (Fiorentini & Sansò, this volume), i.e. they may act at an *intersubjective* level.

We have organized our 18 papers thematically around 4 Sections, according to the two following criteria: (i) languages analyzed; (ii) discussion of theoretical issues connected with the characterization of intensification as a specific linguistic category. Following them, Part I includes four papers which devote much space to the discussion of the relationship between intensification and close functional domains such as comparison, focusing or evaluation. The other three Sections are organized according to the languages analyzed. In particular, Part II concerns intensification in ancient Indo-European languages, where this phenomenon is underinvestigated. Finally, Part III and Part IV both concern modern languages (in particular, Italian, German, English), focusing on different kinds of approaches and strategies and identifying, in some cases, empirical methods for the recognition and interpretation of intensifiers in these languages. Now we will look more closely at the individual contributions of this book.

**Part I** is entitled *The category of intensification* and consists of four chapters. The first, authored by **Ekkehard König** and concerning *The comparative basis of intensification*, deals with the intensifying function of degree adverbs. The focus is on the question – never asked in this way – whether intensification is grounded on the semantic and cognitive process of comparison. In order to provide an answer, the Author analyzes the relationship between intensifiers and demonstratives (of degree, manner and quality), exclamatives and comparative constructions, using examples taken mainly from German, Italian, French and English. On the basis of four semantic parameters, a typology of comparative constructions is provided, which does not simply include those constructions implying an explicit standard



of comparison (e.g. *John is shorter than Bill*) and, then, traditionally classified as ‘comparatives’. In particular, according to the third parameter, which concerns the *semantic type* instantiated by the (implicit or explicit) standard of comparison, eight subtypes are distinguished: one of them is the construction corresponding to the so called ‘positive’ degree, and presupposing covert comparison sets (e.g. *John is tall*, which is comparative and evaluative at an implicit level, entailing that the height of the person referred to is noteworthy). This provides the background for the analysis of constructions with intensifiers, which are interpreted as “endocentric expansions” of the basic positive degree constructions (e.g. *Fred is extremely/incredibly/moderately/modestly intelligent* vs. *Fred is intelligent*): the two structures share the property of being highly context-dependent, i.e. connected with subjective factors to a great extent. The conclusion is that judgments of similarity and dissimilarity, which typically result from comparison, also belong to the domain of intensification, and that its comparative basis comes to light in the properties of at least some subtypes of intensifiers.

The aim of the second chapter, entitled *Intensification and focusing: The case of pure(ly) and mere(ly)*, is to draw clear lines of demarcation between intensification and focusing, and to demonstrate that these are related, although distinct, functional categories. The Author, **Lobke Ghesquière**, adopts a classification of intensifiers and focus markers built on previous literature: on the basis of it, she identifies the different functions of four prenominal adverbs and adjectives through a corpus-based approach, taking into account their actual distribution and meaning, but also their diachronic development. According to Ghesquière, the data show that the first criterion for distinguishing between intensification and focusing relies on scalarity: this is an inherent – i.e., semantic – property of intensification (which, in her view, pertains only to gradable elements), while the scalarity associated with focusing is exclusively pragmatic (i.e., focus markers may be non-scalar or may be *contextually* scalar). Secondly, intensification is defined as subjective, since it involves speaker’s attitudes and evaluation, whereas focusing is interpreted as intersubjective: this means that focus markers are textual elements with a “discourse-organisational” function, singling out a specific value (without necessarily grading it) and, consequently, guiding hearer’s understanding of the text/discourse.

The third chapter, on *Intensification processes in Italian: A survey*, is authored by **Nicola Grandi**. His starting point is a characterization of intensification in semantic and functional terms, according to which this category belongs to the domain of evaluation: given that evaluation takes place on the basis of a semantic scale, which can be represented as an axis with a positive and a negative end, intensification consists in a “shift” towards the positive end of the axis itself in a qualitative or, rarely, quantitative perspective. Grandi focuses on different types of intensifiers in Italian (such as affixes, reduplication, adverbs and constructions), that combine with

different parts of speech. In the second part, he investigates whether these strategies are distributed along an “intensification cline”, i.e. whether they are intensive to the same extent or have different semantic or pragmatic properties. The analysis is based on data concerning multiple intensification from an annotated corpus of contemporary written Italian (CORIS corpus), compared with data from Google, and on a questionnaire prepared by the Author and filled by 64 Italian native speakers aged between 20 and 30 years. This allows to see that the different intensifying strategies used in Italian are far from being synonymous or interchangeable. Their use depends on different parameters (like the regional origin of the speakers and their age, but also the register), and their intensifying power is not the same: in particular, the strongest intensifiers seem to be the superlative suffix *-issimo* and lexicalized collocations.

In the fourth and last chapter, on *Noun classification in Kiswahili: Linguistic strategies to intensify or to reduce*, **Marina Castagneto** discusses how the intensifying value assumed by a given noun (mainly in terms of the evaluative notions of augmentation or diminution) may have an effect on the mechanism of class assignment in Kiswahili. She also takes into account the diachronic perspective and describes how noun classes specifically dedicated to the expression of evaluative meanings in Proto-Bantu are lost in Kiswahili: in this language, noun classes may be “re-functionalised” to denote “augmented” and “diminished” referents. In particular, nouns tend to shift to class 5, typically including nouns for fruits (which are “large” by definition, in the sense that they can be eaten only after reaching the peak of their growth) when they have an augmentative meaning, not only in terms of dimension but also of quality (for emotive reasons: compare the noun *ki-kombe* ‘cup (won in a football championship)’, belonging to class 7, with *kombe* from class 5, used to designate a special cup, such as the one won by our favorite football team). Furthermore, nouns shift to class 7, typically including terms for instrumental artefacts (“small enough to hold in the hand”), when they have a diminutive value. Finally, the Author shows how the prefix *ji-*, which was originally associated with class 5, has developed the function of a derivational morpheme for intensification and evaluation.

**Part II**, consisting of three papers, is devoted to *Strategies of intensification in ancient languages: Hittite, Greek and Latin*. Until now intensification has not been extensively investigated with regard to ancient languages, which means languages documented by written texts (mainly of literary genre), where intensifying strategies only partially emerge. This is not surprising, since intensification is mainly linked (although not limited) to spontaneous oral speech. Moreover, as pointed out by Dardano (this volume) with regard to Hittite, in many cases we can hardly reconstruct sentence accent and intonation, i.e. “identify any distinctive tonal pattern in a stretch of speech”, which could be helpful in the interpretation of the feeling