

*That's absolutely crap, totally rubbish.* The use of the intensifiers *absolutely* and *totally* in the spoken language of British adults and teenagers

Paloma Núñez Pertejo  
Ignacio Palacios Martínez

*Abstract*

The use of intensifiers in English speech has received considerable attention because of their flexibility, ongoing change and grammaticalisation processes some of them undergo. This paper starts by showing that intensifiers do not behave similarly in the language of adults and teenagers and it next focuses on the analysis of two maximisers, *absolutely* and *totally*, which have been selected because of their relative frequency within the group of *-ly* adverbs, their special syntactic behaviour and the lack of previous contrastive studies. Two comparable samples of data from COLT (*The Bergen Corpus of London Teenage English*) and DCPSE (*The Diachronic Corpus of Present-Day Spoken English*) have been closely examined. The results obtained indicate that teenagers opt for *so*, *really* and taboo words (*bloody*, *fucking*) when they want to intensify their expression. In turn, adults prefer to use *very* as well as some *-ly* adverbs (*totally*, *absolutely*, *completely*) for emphatic purposes. In addition, both *absolutely* and *totally* are shown to be more flexible in the language of teenagers, as they seem to be gradually spreading to new syntactic environments by performing new functions which are more discourse-oriented, since they can be used as emphatic, affirmative response items. This is in keeping with the innovative nature of teen talk as well as with grammaticalisation and delexicalisation processes characteristic of the intensifier system.

**Key words:** maximisers, intensifiers, youth language, grammaticalisation, taboo words