

*Use of Intensifiers in British and Bulgarian
Newspapers Letters to the Editor*

Irina Stoyanova-Georgieva
Shumen University

Статья исследует количество и разнообразие интенсификаторов, которые использованы в письмах читателей, отправленных в болгарские и британские газеты, с целью подчеркнуть позицию и оценку автора. Результаты исследования показывают различия в употреблении интенсификаторов в британских и болгарских печатных СМИ. С одной стороны, они отличаются большей частотностью в болгарской прессе, как по отношению количества, так и по отношению их разнообразия в текстах. С другой стороны, британские таблоиды рассчитывают на наречия с усиливающим эффектом, в то время как болгарские желтые газеты предпочитают „атаковать“ читателя огромным количеством разных интенсификаторов. В доказательство вышеупомянутых утверждений приведены примеры.

The article studies the quantity and variety of adverbial intensifiers modifying adjectives used for the sake of enhancing the attitudinal and evaluative positions of the writer in Letters to the Editor, sent by readers, and published in British and Bulgarian newspapers. The results of the study show differences between the ways intensification is used in the British and the Bulgarian print mass media. On the one hand, the use of intensifiers is more frequent in the Bulgarian print media, considering both their quantity and variety in texts. On the other, British tabloids rely on intensifiers with reinforcing character, while the Bulgarian yellow press prefers ‘attacking’ the reader with a number of different qualifiers. Examples are presented to prove the abovementioned statements.

Key words: intensifiers, reinforcing character, yellow press

1. Introduction

The general idea behind every text is to present certain events, facts, objects, people, and actions to its recipients. However, the text producer’s aim is not only conveying information but arousing readers’ interest and provoking them in a certain way, thus making them use their minds for thoughtful considerations and comments. In this respect, the text producer’s success in their mission depends on their ability to communicate the facts not in a dull and impassive manner but to fill them in with emotional content, i. e. to put the

necessary amount of subjectivity without going too far (see Brezinski 2001: 50–51). This formulation, though valid for every single text, is particularly important for those texts which belong to media discourse and at the same time have a strong emotive/expressive function besides their informative one.

Authors have a wide variety of options to choose from when it comes to intensifying the attitudinal and evaluative positions they express in their texts. One of these options is the use of intensifiers, modifying adjectives. Adverbs, modifying adjectives, have been the object of study for many years as they have always been widely used they have also been assigned many different names. Stoffel divides adverbs into *intensifying* and *downtoning* (see Stoffel 1901). Quirk et al call them *modifiers* (see Quirk et al 1985: 445). Allerton has named them *intensifiers* despite the somewhat double nature of this concept, implying reinforcement and at the same time including lexemes with an attenuating character (see Allerton 1987: 18). Halliday refers to them by generally calling them *submodifiers* although he mentions the term *qualifier intensifiers* a number of times as well (see Halliday 2004: 356). Paradis (1997: 15) uses the term *degree modifier*. The current article adopts the term *intensifier* after Allerton's classification.

According to Paradis (1997: 13), these particular members of the class of adverbs “are conveyors of speaker attitudes” as well as a simple technique for emphasizing the speaker's information and an instrument to “show involvement and in that respect add to the emotive and subjective dimension of the discourse” (op. cit.: 10). Bolinger, however, states that they are a “linguistic expression of exaggeration and depreciation” (see Bolinger 1972: 20).

On the other hand, Bulgarian researchers express the opinion that they belong to a class denoting *quantity and degree* (see Andreychin 1978: 323; Boyadzhiev et al 1998: 353), with a further clarification that the adverbs, placed in front of the adjective they modify, are predominantly *degree adverbs* and as such they are also called *degree modifiers* (see Boyadzhiev et al 1998: 530). Pashov also states that the adverbs of *quantity and grade* are the most common and natural modifiers of adjectives due to the fact that almost all of the qualities, expressed by adjectives, can have higher or lower degree. According to Popov adverbial modifiers of grade represent a ‘graded evaluation of the action in comparison with another action’ and can also be divided into two categories: *adverbial modifiers of high grade* and *adverbial modifiers of low grade* (see Popov 1983: 205).

Shushlina believes that the greatest part of adjectives also denote an evaluation of the noun, they modify. In such cases the adverb *много* and its synonyms function as intensifiers, symbolizing multiple manifestations or a degree of a certain dynamic or static attribute. She also states that the use of the adverb *много* is common in ironic expressions and the use of *абсолютно*, expressing evaluation, often results in hyperbolizations. *Абсолютно*, according to her, demonstrates high degree of certainty in the evaluation (Shushlina 1998).

Nitsolova also states that some cases of intensification communicate pragmatic evaluation (see Nitsolova 2008:87).

Taking into consideration all of the abovementioned details and paying particular attention to Marieta Tsvetkova's stand on the use of intensifying adverbs in hyperboles and the functions of the hyperbole in media texts, namely to attract the attention of the interlocutor/reader on a given situation or its details, which 'forces the recipient' to look for some 'hidden meaning and to interpret it as containing author's evaluation' (see Tsvetkova 1998: 158) allows us to deduct that intensifiers can be considered a natural way of lending colour to one's text, highlighting the text producer's attitude, even acting as a validation of the statement. This we believe is a very effective tool utilized for expressing and supporting a personal opinion in the yellow press. We also believe that, as it comes to media language, it is the yellow press that is the main 'utilizer' of qualifying words. The simplest of all reasons is that though the search for breaking news, scandalous revelations, and shocking stories in politics and in other spheres of life is the creed of all newspapers, it is tabloid journalism which exploits it to the full, as it prefers fabricating stories, rather than relying on investigative journalism in order to find ones (Aleksieva 2010: 14). This makes them notorious even for their entertaining and sensational character, often relying on exaggeration, rumours, and ever so often on unconfirmed or even false information (op. cit.: 22). In this respect, we consider that intensification is a key, strategic, and even an auspicious mechanism of tabloid newspapers, while 'serious journalism newspapers' place the accent on the issue that is being discussed and back-up personal opinions with facts.

Though the corpus is not constructed on the basis of standard newspaper articles but on such written by readers, thus depicting the readers' idiolect and not the typical journalist discourse we do not consider this an obstacle. The choice of researched material can be justified in a number of ways. On the one hand, we presume that the language of the letters to the editor corresponds to a certain extent to the language of the media as the letters themselves are written by readers of the newspaper. On the other hand, the language of the newspapers though 'not identical to the language of their ideal readers' (see Douglas 2009: 61) represents 'the newspapers' own version of the language of the public to whom it is principally addressed: its version of the rhetoric, imagery and underlying common stock of knowledge which it assumes its audience shares and which thus forms the basis of the reciprocity of producer/reader' (see Hall 1978: 61). More or less the same position is also stated by Fowler who argues that newspaper language is not a slavish reproduction of 'authentic vernacular', but it is a representation of a style of language with which the readership is comfortable (1991: 48). And last but not least, despite being written by readers, the letters are part of the newspaper and they are always approved for publication and most probably are subject to some editorial intervention before being printed.

The focus of the present study is on intensification through the use of adverbs, modifying adjectives, and is made on a comparative basis, investigating both the British and the Bulgarian print media as the issue is both underexplored from this perspective and extremely interesting.

While discussing the role of intensifiers in the corpus we pay attention both to the qualitative as well as the quantitative characteristics, as though the quantity of intensifiers used in a text is important for its function, their nature is also of great significance. What is meant here is the nature of these words, which allows them to have a strengthening or lowering effect on the adjectives they qualify (see Paradis 1997: 26–27; Quirk et al 1985: 445). For the purposes of the current research, we employ the categories “reinforcer” and “attenuator” used by Paradis (1997: 27), thus dividing the examined words into two opposing groups, reinforcers and attenuators, which are further broken down into maximizers and boosters for the first group, and moderators, approximators and diminishers belonging to the second group (see Table 1).

The first group aims at “reinforcing” the adjectives it qualifies, as is the case with the following examples:

The recent events at the European Central Bank give a **very** good indication of the future. (Appendix, 12D)

The article makes a **highly** unreasonable assumption. (Appendix, 20D)

The second group “attenuates” the adjectives it qualifies (see Paradis 1997: 26). Consider the example:

I, too, was a **little** surprised that there was no acoustic playing from Bireli, but as I commented at the time to my friend, there was nothing I could find in the evening that was remotely disappointing. (Appendix, 28D)

According to Paradis (1997: 9) the “use of a large number of emphatic expressions... enhances the force of certain parts”, while the use of “attenuating or hedging items” in a text “takes the sting out”, thus holding back the story. In a similar way, we believe that tabloids prefer to follow the pattern of reinforcement and limit, even avoid, the use of attenuators in the construction of information, in order to make the story as spicy and stingy as possible.

2. Data and Methods

The present study is conducted on a comparative basis, and the data in it are compiled from four newspapers, two representing serious journalism and the other two – tabloids. The Financial Times (FT) covers the British serious journalism, while 24 Chasa¹ does this for the Bulgarian one; the tabloids are The Daily Express (DE) and Lichna Drama (LD; Personal Drama; trans. author’s),

¹ While 24 Chasa may not be the most appropriate representative of serious journalism, given the current tendencies in the selection of topics and means of expression, it is the lack of corresponding material or rather its scarcity in other more suitable daily papers that predisposed its choice.

respectively. Each paper is represented by 100 *Letters to the Editor* gathered from July 2012 to December 2014. In order to limit the scope of research we focused only on a list of 10 adverbs, modifying adjectives, and their Bulgarian counterparts. They cover all five paradigms, offered by Paradis (1997: 27), as a method of differentiating the qualifying adverbs:

Table 1 Intensifiers, according to function, after Paradis’s classification

No	Category	Subcategory	English	Bulgarian
1.	Reinforcers	Maximizer	absolutely	абсолютно (absoljutno)
			totally	напълно (napulno)
2.	Reinforcers	Booster	very	много (mnogo)
			highly	извънредно (izvunredno)
3.	Attenuators	Moderator	quite	съвсем (suvsem)
			rather	доста (dosta)
4.	Attenuators	Approximator	fairly	сравнително (sravnitelno)
			almost	почти (pochti)
5.	Attenuators	Diminisher	a little	малко (malko)
			a bit	мъничко (munichko)

The list in Table 1 consists of the examined intensifiers and their translation equivalents in Bulgarian. The entries were compiled through the use of Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (2008), Merriam-Webster Dictionary (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/>), and PONS Business Dictionary English-Bulgarian/Bulgarian-English (2002). They, however, represent the meaning of the words as separate entities, and not as part of a certain context or in collocation with other lexical items, where words can get a slightly different connotation.

As the corpus of the study consists of written texts, which are presumably carefully planned and non-spontaneous, and as written language is not so easily modified because it follows strictly organized rules and uses more or less fixed lexical items and constructions, the intensifiers chosen for the study are among the most widely used ones. *Absolutely* could be considered as the ultimate symbol of maximizers due to its semantic concept, suggesting the utmost boundary. *Very* is presented as the most common intensifier in numerous works from the 20th century (see Stoffel 1901; Quirk et al 1993; Paradis 1997). According to a current study of Tagliamonte’s (2008) on the English language intensifiers used in Toronto, Canada, *very* is a prerogative for the population over 50, which means it is now losing its popularity and its place is slowly being taken by other words. The present paper gives us the opportunity to test this statement for British English and even see what the situation with its Bulgarian equivalent is. *Quite* has a somewhat peculiar nature as it can function both as a

reinforcer and as an attenuator, which makes it a powerful device, despite the fact that we have initially attributed it to the group of attenuators.

3. Results

In the course of the writing 400 letters to the editor were analyzed according to the abovementioned rules. They contained 145898 lexical items, 193 of them being the adverbs listed in Table 1.

3.1. The Situation in the British Media

Chart 1 presents the results from the analysis of the British newspapers and it shows a picture rather different from what was expected. Namely, the number of different intensifiers in FT is bigger (5 different modifiers) than that used in DE (only 4 different modifiers); the same holds good for their quantity. The FT corpus contains 24 qualifiers while the DE one contains only 9.

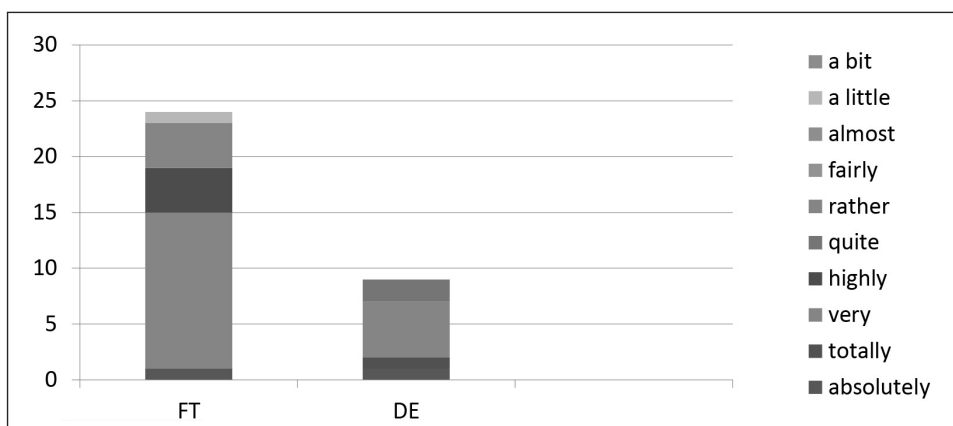


Chart 1 Number of intensifiers in the British media

As the data come from letters by newspaper readers it was impossible to single out only texts with similar length, which leads to the assumption that the letters by FT readers contained more qualifying words only due to their length. That is the reason why a distributional analysis of intensifiers was carried out and its results are shown in table 2.

Table 2 Distribution of intensifiers by lexical item in the British newspapers

Lexical identity	%	Number	< / >	%	Number
	Financial Times			Daily Express	
Absolutely	0.005%	1	<	0.008%	1
Totally	0%	0	<	0.008%	1
Very	0.069%	14	>	0.041%	5
Highly	0.02%	4	>	0%	0
Quite	0%	0	<	0.016%	2
Rather	0.02%	4	>	0%	0
Fairly	0%	0	=	0%	0
Almost	0%	0	=	0%	0
A little	0.005%	1	>	0%	0
A bit	0%	0	=	0%	0
Total % of intensifiers	0.119%	24	>	0.074%	9
Non-intensifiers	99.881%	20185	<	99.926%	12114
Total	100%	20209		100%	12123

Table 2 shows a detailed distribution analysis and reveals results, which shows that the abovementioned speculation was not correct as the intensifiers in the FT represent 0.119% of the whole FT corpus and the degree adverbs in the DE constitute only 0.074%. In general, the percentage of maximizers in the DE texts is higher. The maximizers *absolutely* and *totally* represent 0.016% of the words in the texts (see Appendix D31 – D33). The moderator *quite* also has 0.016% (see Appendix D41; D42). Unfortunately, these are the only three intensifiers that outdistance the FT results, and when it comes to the boosters *very* and *highly*, as well as the moderator *rather* and the diminisher *a little* the FT shows a higher percentage. What is more interesting is the fact that there are no approximators such as *fairly* and *almost* in any of the examined letters. The situation with the diminisher *a bit* is similar. In conclusion, the total percentage of intensifiers is higher for FT than it is for DE which absolutely disproves the initial hypothesis.

Even more thought-provoking is the fact that not only is the sheer number of intensifiers greater for the representative of serious journalism, but so is their variety. *Very* constitutes the greatest proportion in both papers: 58% in the FT (see Appendix D4 – D17) and 56% in the DE (see Appendix D35 – D39). It is followed by *highly* (see Appendix D19 – D22) and *rather* (see Appendix D24 – D27), both having 17% shares in the FT corpus, while *absolutely* (see Appendix D2) and *a little* (see Appendix D29) have 4% shares. The state of affairs in DE is similar, only with *quite* taking the second place – 22% (see Appendix D41 – D42), and *totally* – 11% (see Appendix D33) substituting *rather* and sharing the third place with *absolutely* with 11% (see Appendix D31). The difference may not be great but it disproves our hypothesis as DE ‘highlights the text producer’s opinion’ only with four qualifiers while FT authors of *Letters to the Editor* use five.

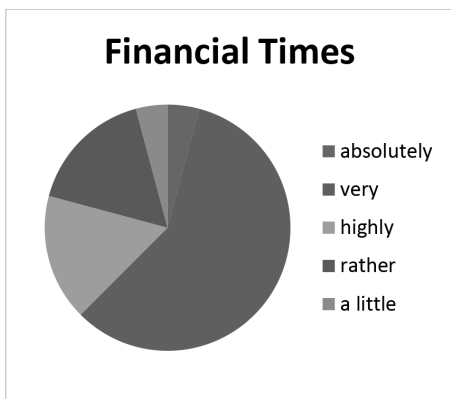


Chart 2 Division of intensifiers used in FT

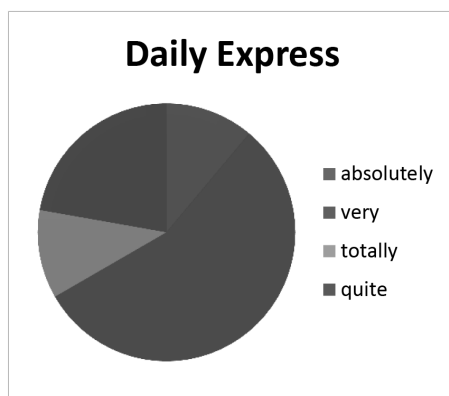


Chart 3 Division of intensifiers in DE

3.2. The Situation in the Bulgarian Media

The situation in the Bulgarian print media is different, though not that much. Table 4 below shows that the examined Bulgarian letters contain 4 times more intensifiers in the serious journalism section and 7 times more in the tabloid newspaper section compared with their British equivalents. As before, this could be attributed to the differences in the length of the texts, i. e. FT letters contain 20209 words, while 24 Chasa corpus has 75426 words, and the yellow press representatives display almost the same difference in numbers: DE has 12123 words but LD has 38140. That is why we mark as meaningful only the results of the distributional analyses.

The variation of intensifiers in the Bulgarian media corresponds to some degree to that in the British papers. Both media have 7 of the examined grade words represented in their texts. As it comes to quantity of intensifying words, 24 Chasa exemplifies more than 33% more than Lichna Drama but this issue is analyzed further in the article.

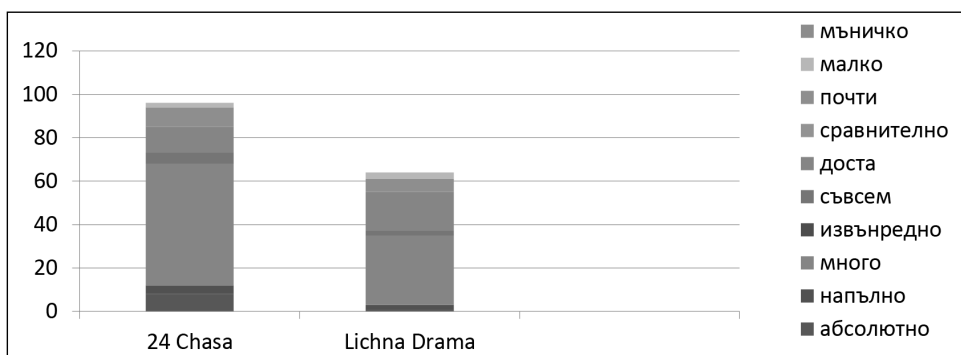


Chart 4 Number of intensifiers in the Bulgarian media

Table 3 Distribution of intensifiers by lexical item in 24 Chasa and Lichna Drama

Lexical identity	%	Number	< / >	%	Number
	<u>24 Chasa</u>			<u>Lichna Drama</u>	
Абсолютно (Absolutno)	0.011%	8	>	0.003%	1
Напълно (Napulno)	0.005%	4	=	0.005%	2
Много (Mnogo)	0.074%	56	<	0.084%	32
Извънредно (Izvnuredno)	0%	0	=	0%	0
Съвсем (Suvsem)	0.007%	5	>	0.005%	2
Доста (Dosta)	0.016%	12	<	0.047%	18
С р а в н и т е л н о (Sravnitelno)	0%	0	=	0%	0
Почти (Pochti)	0.012%	9	<	0.016%	6
Малко (Malko)	0.003%	2	<	0.008%	3
Мъничко (Munichko)	0%	0	=	0%	0
Total % of intensifiers	0.127%	96	<	0.168%	64
Non-intensifiers	99.873%	75330	>	99.832%	38076
Total	100%	75426		100%	38140

Table 3 deals with a detailed analysis of the percentage of intensifiers in both newspapers. What impresses us here is the fact that Lichna Drama shows preference for the same 7 intensifiers 24 Chasa does. The authors of letters in 24 Chasa used the maximizer *абсолютно* more often (0.011%) (see Appendix D44 – D51) in comparison with 0.003% for LD (see Appendix D147), and the moderator *съвсем* 0.007% (see Appendix D125 – D129) compared to 0.005% for LD (see Appendix D192 – D193), while readers of LD expressed more serious disposition to the use of the booster *много* (0.084% / see Appendix D152 – D183/ to those of 24 Chasa (0.074% / see Appendix D58 – D113/), the moderator *доста* 0.047% (see Appendix D195 – D212) for LD and 0.016% (see Appendix D131 – D142) for 24 Chasa, the approximator *почти* (0.016% / see Appendix D185 – D190/), and the diminisher *малко* (0.008% / see Appendix D214 – D216/). Though having numerical superiority there, degree adverbs are less common in 24 Chasa compared to the results of LD on a proportional basis. The demonstration that yellow press newspapers utilize more qualifying adverbs in order to highlight their position proves our hypothesis right to some extent, though not fully because both newspapers avail themselves of the same 7 adverbs.

As it comes to the overall preference for emphasizing adverbs, *много* is the leading degree word in 24 Chasa (57%) and LD (49%) of all intensifiers, at the same time followed by *доста*: 13% in 24 Chasa and 29% in LD.



Chart 5 Intensifiers used in 24 Chasa



Chart 6 Division of intensifiers in LD

4. Comparison

The total inclination to use the intensifying devices listed in table 1 is higher in the Bulgarian print press than in its British counterparts. Analyzed together the yellow DE expresses the least tendency (0.074%) followed by the FT (0.119%), while 0.127% of the words in the Bulgarian 24 Chasa are intensifiers, and the corpus of LD exemplifies even higher preference for them – 0.168%. From what we can see in tables 2 and 3, we can deduce that our hypothesis is partly valid for the Bulgarian media, but is totally disproved for their British semblances.

In the course of the analysis we came across several conspicuous details:

1. The intensifying *very* and its Bulgarian equivalent *много*, acting as boosters, are the most widely used intensifiers in all of the examined media. Of all examined words in all newspapers *very* and *много* represent about 50% (24 Chasa – 58%; FT – 58%; DE – 56%; LD – 49%). In other words, at least for these media, *very* is still the most popular intensifier and is certainly not declining in use.
2. The second most frequent intensifiers in the British and the Bulgarian print press, respectively, are *rather* and *доцма*, classified in the subgroup of moderators (LD – 29%; FT – 17%; 24 Chasa – 13%; DE – 0%).

Discussing the quantity of intensifying words in the media is not enough for the full consideration of the situation with intensification in quality journalism newspapers and tabloids. At the beginning of the research we suggested that yellow press newspapers rely more on reinforcers than on attenuators to give strength to their propositions. That is why we made a comparison between the attenuators used in the tabloids and those used in the other two papers.

The outcome was also quite impressive:

Though FT did not show great affinity to qualifiers with an attenuating function, it still showed some: the moderator *rather* is used 4 times and the diminisher *a little* – only once.

(Rather)

Peter Mason is **rather** disingenuous when he states the case for the Tideway Tunnel. (Appendix 24D) (see also 25D; 26D; 27D; in all examples emphasis mine)

(A little)

I, too, was **a little** surprised that there was no acoustic playing from Bireli, but as I commented at the time to my friend, there was nothing I could find in the evening that was remotely disappointing. (Appendix 29D)

The DE corpus, on the contrary, displayed no attenuators, apart from the moderator *quite*. But, when examined in context, *quite* seems to manifest a reinforcing nature, not an attenuating one. This is the list of the cases of *quite* in the DE corpus:

COLUMNIST Leo McKinstry is **quite** correct with his views about Ukip's rise in popularity. (Appendix 41D)

WE'VE known for a long time that most so-called beggars are not what they seem and often live **quite** nice lifestyles that do not reflect the impression they try to give us. (Appendix 42D)

Hence, there are no attenuators in the DE corpus, which demonstrates the fact that our assumption is correct about the British yellow press and that text producers prefer reinforcing adverbs, thus preserving its acrimonious style. But is that the case about the Bulgarian press? The Bulgarian papers, and especially the yellow one, however, display an astounding variety of attenuators. Such words not only exist in the corpus; on the contrary, the corpus abounds in them. 24 Chasa has 4 of the 6 examined attenuators (*съвсем, доста, почти* and *малко*), which was expected taking into consideration the nature of the paper. The situation with Lichna Drama corpus is the same, thus proving that the Bulgarian tabloids do not prefer maximizers and boosters to attenuators in order to make their texts more interesting because they count on their variety. Consider the following example:

Самият той е дори **малко** тъжен в дните след катастрофата. (He himself is a little sad after the accident; trans. author's) (Appendix 144D)

The following example is from Lichna Drama:

Втория път се ожених за домошарка, не беше красавица, ама не беше и **съвсем** грозна. (The second time I married a stay-at-home girl, she wasn't a beauty, though she wasn't quite ugly too; trans. author's) (Appendix 192D)

3. Our last observation concerns the nature of the intensification practices applied by the British and the Bulgarian media, which turns out to be quite different. Relying on our results we could say that the British tabloids rely on intensifiers with reinforcing features in order to strengthen the author's opinion, while the Bulgarian yellow press newspapers prefer 'attacking' the reader with many different qualifiers, be they reinforcers or attenuators.

5. Conclusion

Unfortunately, we can only make conclusions on the basis of the analyzed corpus and the selected intensifiers, i.e. on the previously compiled list of well-known intensifiers, used in written discourse. This automatically indicates that some of the lexical items, already mentioned by Tagliamonte (2008) as overused and present in the English language for a very long time, may be gradually losing their positions in the oral communication to newly coined and freshly recycled expressions (as Tagliamonte calls them). This idea, however, could be an incentive for further research in the trends of use of intensifiers in oral and written communication in different generations.

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*Употреба на интензификатори в писма до редактора,
публикувани в британски и български вестници*

Ирина Стоянова-Георгиева

Шуменски университет „Епископ Константин Преславски“

Статията изследва количеството и разнообразието на интензификаторите, поясняващи прилагателни, използвани в писма до редактора, изпратени от читатели и публикувани в британски и български вестници, с цел подчертаване на авторската позиция и оценка. Резултатите от изследването, показват различия в употребата на интензификатори в британските и българските печатни издания, като се установява, че в българските печатни медии има както по-голямо количество, така и по-голям брой различни наречия. В британските издания те са не само по-малко на брой, но се показва и склонността на „жълтите“ вестници да разчитат на наречия от висока степен, докато българските „жълти“ вестници предпочитат да „атакуват“ читателя с множество различни интензификатори.

e-mail: i.stoyanova-georgieva@shu.bg
Shumen University
115 Universitetska Street
Shumen 9700