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Correlation between Degree Modifiers and their Effect on Meaning: Iraqi EFL Learners' Perception

A B S T R A C T

The semantics of degree modification and its effect on mutating the meaning of structures that they appear in have held considerable appeal for specialists in areas ranging from lexical semantics to language pedagogy. Although the general concept of degree modifiers received a lot of attention in the twentieth century studies in linguistics, it has been treated only theoretically. The pedagogical side of degree modifiers seems to be a neglected topic. This paper is an attempt at addressing this gap in the literature. The main aim of this research is to examine students' knowledge in the functions of the degree modifiers and their semantic effect. The paper investigates whether the effect of degree modifiers on meaning is distinguished to the same extent by fourth year students majoring in English. To this end, the researcher designed a multiple choice question test to determine whether students are able to find the correlation between the type of degree modifier used and the meaning of the given sentences. Data analysis was performed using a number of descriptive measures in addition to a T-test and a Chi-square test. The results show that the Iraqi English major students face severe difficulty in distinguishing differences in meaning resulting from using degree modifiers in different contexts. The results also show a gradation in difficulty across the different types of modifiers.

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الارتباط بين معززات الدرجات وتأثيرها على المعنى من منظور المتعلمين العراقيين
للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

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ملخص البحث

ان دلالة معززات الدرجة وتأثيرها على تغيير معنى التراكيب اللغوية التي تظهر فيها قد حازت على اهتمام كبير من قبل المتخصصين في مجالات مختلفة تبدأ بالدلالات المعجمية وتنتهي بتعليم اللغة. على الرغم من أن المفهوم العام لمعززات الدرجة قد حظي بالكثير من الاهتمام في دراسات القرن العشرين في علم اللغة ، إلا أن الاهتمام الأكبر بهذا الموضوع كان

من الناحية النظرية فقط حيث يبدو أن الجانب التعليمي لمعدلات الدرجة موضوع مهم. البحث الحالي هو محاولة لتسليط الضوء على هذا الموضوع في الأدبيات حيث ان الهدف الرئيسي من هذا البحث هو اختبار مدى معرفة الطلبة لوظيفة معززات الدرجة والتأثير الدلالي لهذه المعززات حيث يتحرى البحث فيما إذا كان تأثير معدلات الدرجة على المعنى مميّزًا بنفس الدرجة من قبل طلبة المرحلة الرابعة الذين يتخصصون في اللغة الإنجليزية. ولهذه الغاية ، صممت الباحثة اختبارًا متعدد الخيارات لتحديد ما إذا كان الطلبة قادرين على إيجاد الارتباط بين نوع معزز الدرجة المستخدم وتفسير معنى الجمل المعطاة. وبعد الحصول على نتائج الاختبار تم تحليل البيانات باستخدام عدد من المقاييس الوصفية بالإضافة إلى اختبائي (مربع كاي و اختبار T) حيث أظهرت النتائج أن الطلبة العراقيين من دارسي تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية يواجهون صعوبة شديدة في التمييز بين الفروق في المعنى الناتجة عن استخدام معززات الدرجة في سياقات مختلفة. تُظهر النتائج أيضًا تدرجًا في الصعوبة بين الأنواع المختلفة من المعدّلات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: معززات الدرجة, المعنى, الطلبة العراقيين, اللغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية

1.Introduction

Since the early twentieth century, when prominent works like Stoffel (1901) and Borst (1902) were published, the study of degree modifiers has been a major topic in English Historical Linguistics. This is owing to the fact that intensification is regarded as one of the most prolific grammar areas in terms of lexical and semantic change (e.g. Pyles & Algeo 1993: 250; Quirk et al. 1985: 590). Intensity is a linguistic characteristic that reflects how much a speaker's attitude toward an idea deviates from neutrality (Bradac et al., 1979: 258). As the speaker conveys an attitude toward a topic, intensity, as one of the basic human cognitive categories, plays an important role in the communicative context (Lovrović& Pintarić, 2019:106). Leech, (2006:57) clarifies that intensification is a common term for the use of degree modifiers to intensify the meaning or strength of some part of a sentence. This can apply to the intensification of adjectives and adverbs. As a result, it is frequently claimed that intensity is the degree modifiers' markedly emotional function that causes such frequent renewal' for expressivity reasons, and that degree modifiers are thus constantly changing due to the diachronic and the synchronic processes of grammaticalisation and the speaker's need to emphasize what is being said.

In everyday English, degree modifiers are common, and their emphatic effect can be amplified when paired with international focus on the modifier. As a result, degree modifiers are valuable, adaptable expression tools that appear to be quite simple in nature (Ringwood, 2006:7). The fastest and most fascinating semantic advancements in language change are thought to occur with degree modifiers (Quirk et al., 1985:590; Peters, 1994:269). This section of the grammar is constantly causing change in meaning (Stoffel, 1901:2), in part due to "speakers' drive to be 'unique,' to display their linguistic abilities, and to grab the attention of their audience" (Peters, 1994:271).

2. The Nature of Degree Modifiers

Elements that are utilized to modify other elements in terms of degree are referred to in a variety of ways across the literature. For example, Bolinger (1972), Quirk et al. (1985), Partington (1993), and more recently Méndez-Naya (2003, 2006, 2007, 2008) opt for the term

'intensifiers,' whereas Allerton (1987) uses the slightly different term 'degree intensifier,' Peters (1992, 1994) uses 'degree adverb,' whereas Paradis (1997) prefers 'degree modifier'. This lack of agreement on the labeling of these linguistic components, according to Paradis (1997: 12), is due to their "complexity and fuzziness." Indeed, not only the terminology itself, but even the definitions offered differ in this regard. Degree modifiers, according to Greenbaum (1996:151), are adverbs that indicate a position on a scale of intensity, either upward or downward. Degree modifiers were defined previously by Quirk et al. (1985: 445) as adverbs that change other components and serve as a "scaling device" by their ability to modify elements of a diversity of word classes, namely adjectives, as in *she is a really clever girl*, other adverbs, as in *he is coming really soon*, verbs as in *they really hate each other*, and so on. The most typical use of such adverbs is to alter gradable adjectives.

Ringwood (2006:7) declares that the term 'degree modifiers' is at odds with the ordinary, conventional way in which they are utilized. Many people would have no idea what the expression implies in the first place. Degree modifiers such as *really*, *very*, and *fairly* blend in well with the natural flow of sentences and do a great job of serving the purpose behind using them. Degree modifiers, as their name indicates, are used to affect the perceived strength of the language form on which they function (known as the head). Several decades ago, Jacobson (1964:14) highlighted the extent of syntactic dependency between modifiers and the head, whereby the head can pick and decide the modifiers in the first place. The adjective 'cold' (the head), for example, picks degree modifiers such as *fairly*, *very*, *bitterly*, and so on, but not *much*. As a result, the nature of the head plays pivotal role in defining which degree modifiers are available for us to use.

Degree modifiers are defined by Sassoon & Zevakhina (2015:1) as a set of scalar alternatives spanning from weak modifiers (e.g slightly, a bit, somewhat) to strong modifiers (e.g. completely, totally, perfectly). They operate as modifying components in many sorts of discourse "to reinforce or attenuate a variable aspect in the element it applies to," (Paradis, 1997: 41). The same concepts are expressed by Tagliamonte & Roberts in terms of scaling the quality of an adjective or adverb up or down" since they prefer to portray intensity using a scale with two spheres: intensity above and below the norm, while the standard is culturally established (2005: 281).

The collocates of degree modifiers are varied. They can be adjectives, adverbs, verbs, or nouns. The degree of intensity, the dimension they relate to, syntactic restrictions, and specific lexical restrictions of collocation determine which element will be intensified. But they typically modify adjectives, which is not unexpected given that adjectives are a category highly adaptable to gradation. Adjectives are also the paradigmatic substrate for comparative and superlative comparisons, and may be seen as the foundation for the intensification process (Dressler & Barbaresi, 1994: 417).

3. The Classification of Degree Modifiers

To study degree modifiers, a classification system is required to establish which linguistic components can be categorized as degree modifiers. Degree modifiers are classified linguistically into various categories. (Quirk et al., 1985). Various categories have been

proposed to account for the classification of these modifiers. Adverbs and adjectives are the simplest to recognize, which may explain why some degree modifier research relies only on adverbs and adjectives (Zutphen, 2017:5). Degree modifiers are classified as a group due to their common function of adding a degree of specification for the particular object they are used to modify. However, differences exist among the individual members of the category most notably in terms of the precise value that they assign to components. Furthermore, there are conspicuous groups of items that designate nearly the same degree, for instance items such as, *extremely*, *very* and *highly*, which all show a very high degree, and words like *pretty*, *fairly*, and *rather*, which all express a moderate degree. Given the wide range of linguistic items used to refer to degree modifiers, it is somewhat unsurprising that there are several techniques for distinguishing distinct kinds within this broad category (McManus, 2012:6-7). As a result, the primary goal of this section is to examine some of the available degree modifier categorization models.

Prior to a more in-depth treatment (in sections 3.2-3.4) of three major modern models, namely those developed by Quirk et al. (1985), Allerton (1987) and Paradis (1997). In the first subsection, preparatory attention is given to a quick survey of some of the early categories that have affected them.

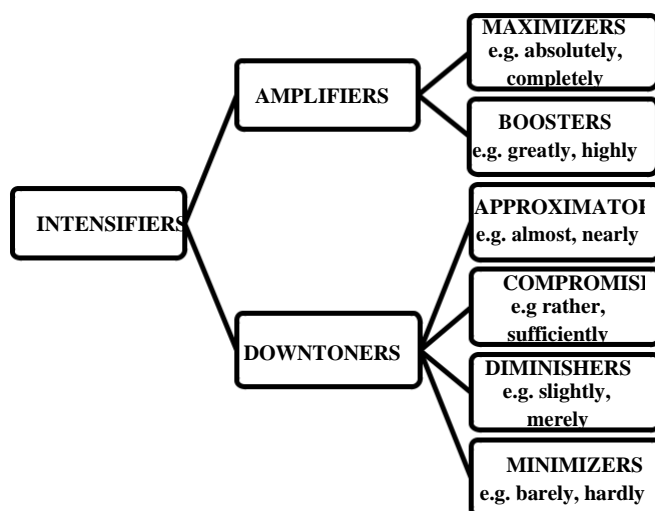
3.1 Initial Classifications

Stoffel (1901:129) created the first division of degree modifiers for English adverbs of degree. He distinguished between INTENSIVERS, which denote an extreme or high degree of a characteristic, and DOWNTONERS which denote a moderate, minor, or hardly discernible degree of a quality. Borst (1902), who was also concerned with English adverbs, maintains the binary categorization, but adds adverbs like *almost* and *all* to the DOWNTONERS group. Bolinger (1972: 17) categorizes degree words into four groups based on the position they occupy on the scale. BOSTERS (such as *very*) refer to the scale's highest point, whereas COPROMISERS (such as *rather*) refer to the scale's midway point. DIMINISHERS (such as *little*) occupy the lower part on the scale whereas MINIMIZERS (such as *a bit*) occupy the lowest point on the scale. Continuing the idea of a more comprehensive review of the many forms of degree modifiers, Bäcklund's (1973) categorization is even more thorough, with the following eight sub-categories named by the degree exhibited by their members. Words like *nearly*, *almost*, *virtually*, *practically* are called complete or partial absence degree, minimum degree include words like *hardly*, *barely*, *scarcely*, *just* low degree refers to words like *slightly*, *mildly*, *somewhat* low degree of a positive idea includes words such as *little*, moderate degree e.g. *fairly*, *pretty*, *rather*, *quite*, increasing degree like the word *increasingly*, high degree e.g. *extremely*, *terribly*, *tremendously*, *very* and highest degree such as *completely*, *absolutely*, *completely*, *totally*, *entirely* Bäcklund (1973:19-194).

In recent years, as interest in this specific linguistic issue has grown, researchers have looked into the nature of various individual degree modifiers in order to learn more about the category as a whole and the diverse types it covers. Such findings led to the suggested classifications of Quirk et al. (1985), Allerton (1987), and Paradis (1997), which are widely regarded as the most important models of recent years. Because of the importance of these three models, subsections 3.2-3.4 are devoted to exploring them individually.

3.2) Classification of Quirk et al. (1985)

Quirk et al. (1985: 589-590) employ the term **INTENSIFIERS** to refer to all adverbial degree modifiers, including both strengthening and softening modifiers. In their taxonomy, **AMPLIFICATION** and **DOWNTONERS** are the two subgroups of degree modifiers with the main distinction being that amplifiers "scale upwards from an assumed norm," but **DOWNTONERS** "have a lowering effect, usually scaling downwards from an assumed norm" **AMPLIFIERS** are further divided into two groups, **MAXIMIZERS** and **BOOSTERS**. **BOOSTERS** e.g. *very, highly* and *severely* suggest a high point on the scale, while **MAXIMIZERS** e.g. *totally, entirely* and *fully* denote an upper extreme point, **DOWNTONERS** are classified into four subtypes: **APPROXIMATORS**, **COMPROMISERS**, **DIMINISHERS**, and **MINIMIZERS**. **APPROXIMATORS** such as *almost, nearly*, and *virtually* are unique in that they "imply a denial of the truth value" of whatever the modified item denotes (Quirk et al. 1999: 598) "She was almost dead," for example, implies that she was not actually dead. **COMPROMISERS** e.g., *sort of, kind of, rather, and more or less* "have just a small lowering effect" and serve to call the changed item's appropriateness into question. **DIMINISHERS**, and **MINIMIZERS** are similar to the two kinds of amplifiers (**MAXIMIZERS** and **BOOSTER**) in that the **MINIMIZERS** are *negative maximizers* like *at all, in the least*, as well as *hardly* and *scarcely* when used to signify 'not to any extent'. But **DIMINISHERS** scale downwards and basically mean 'to a little extent', commonly realized by adverbs such as *slightly, somewhat* and *partially*. Words like *only, merely* and *simply* are included in the group of **DIMINISHERS** because they indicate attitude by "implying that the force of the thing concerned is limited" (Quirk et al. 1999: 598). Figure(1) summarizes the above mentioned classification:



Figure(1) – Quirk et al.'s (1985) classification of degree modifiers

3.3 Classification of Allerton (1987)

Degree modifiers are classified differently by Allerton (1987). His classification is based on adjective degree modifiers. There is no attempt to evaluate the relationships between the various groups of degree modifiers using a scale or a branching hierarchy. Instead, his contribution to the understanding of degree modifiers is a classification system that divides them into four groupings based on the gradable property in question. The following is a synopsis of his classification.

1. **Scalar Modifiers** denote different elements of a mental scale of degree that extends from infinitely high to zero, e.g. *extremely, very, pretty, rather, somewhat, fairly, slightly, not at all*.

2. **Telic Modifiers** link the actual degree of the modified item to the extent needed for some purpose and place it above or below that mark, e.g. *easily, only, just, barely hardly, nearly, virtually*.

3. **Absolutive Modifiers** demonstrate that the degree of the modified item is 'superlative', e.g. *absolutely, totally, entirely, and utterly* these combined with adjectives of the superlative type.

4. **Differential Modifiers** show the degree of difference between the item being mentioned and a reference point. They include *a lot, far, slightly, much, marginally, and a bit* when used in conjunction with comparatives.

The properties of the collocating adjectives are taken into account by Allerton's model. He dismisses Quirk et al's model precisely because it fails to account for the fact that the collocating items are gradable in a variety of ways. According to Allerton, the semantic complexity of adjectives limits the choice of degree modifiers. He criticizes previous scholars for their treatment of the concept of gradability, which he claims is applied too broadly when they suggest that some adjectives are gradable and can thus take degree modifiers and have a comparative form, while others are not. Allerton notes that this viewpoint is clearly oversimplified "because, for example, both *very* and *absolutely* express degree, and yet we find *very surprising, absolutely amazing*, but hardly *absolutely surprising* or *very amazing*." There is obviously a need for a more nuanced classification (Paradis 1997:25).

3.4 Classification of Paradis (1997)

The model proposed by Paradis (1997) is influenced by both of the earlier models discussed above, but shares the most with Allerton's (1987). Paradis' model, like Allerton's, is specifically concerned with elements that modify adjectives with particular regard to degree and emphasizes the significance of the relationship between degree modifiers and their adjectival collocates with the intention to distinguish types of each of these elements (Paradis 1997:26). However, using Allerton's classifications of degree modifiers and adjectives as a starting point, Paradis seeks to supply a more refined description of the former by delving into the reasons behind the typical degree modifier-adjective pairings that motivated her distinctions. To that end, she employs a cognitive approach inspired by scholars such as Langacker (1987), Lakoff

(1987), Taylor (1989), Cruse (1995), and Cruse & Togia (1996), assuming that the emergence of the meaning of linguistic expressions takes place when certain conceptual patterns in the cognitive system are activated (Paradis 1997:48). Degree modifiers are classified according to their degree force, i.e. reinforcing or attenuating, and according to their type of grading, i.e. totality or scalar.

The classification encompasses five paradigms, with members of each paradigm exhibiting similar behaviors to varying degrees. See Figure (2). The first distinction to be made between REINFORCERS and ATTENUATORS that REINFORCERS increase the degree denoted by the adjective, while attenuators decrease the degree (Ibid.: 27-28). Thus degree modifiers are divided into two categories. One subset is concerned with TOTALITY grading, while the other is concerned with SCALAR grading.

DEGREE	TOTALITY MODIFIER	SCALAR MODIFIER
REINFORCER ATTENUATOR	MAXIMIZER , e.g. <i>completely</i> APPROIMATOR , e.g. <i>almost</i>	BOOSTER , e.g. <i>very</i> MODERATOR , e.g. <i>rather</i> DIMINSHER , e.g. <i>slightly</i>

Figure (2) Paradis' classification of degree modifiers (adapted from Paradis 1997: 28).

By definition, TOTALITY modifiers are classified into MAXIMISERS, which indicate a perfect match with a maximum (e.g. *completely full*), and APPROXIATORS, which demonstrate that a tradable property falls short of the maximum (e.g. *almost full*). SCALAR modifiers are divided into BOOSTERS, which convey a reinforcing effect on the modified property (e.g. *extremely full*), MODERATORS, which assume the middle range (e.g., *fairly full*) and DIMINSHERS, which significantly reduce the properties they refer to (e.g., *a bit full*). Table (3) illustrates these classifications(Ibid.: 28).

TOTALITY MODIFIERS	
REINFORCERS	MAXIMIZER quite, absolutely, completely, perfectly, totally, entirely, utterly
ATTENUATORS	APPROXIMATOR almost
SCALAR MODIFIERS	
REINFORCERS	BOOSTER very,terribly,extremely,most,awfully, jolly, highly,frightfully
	ATTENUATORS MODERATOR quite, rather, pretty, fairly
	DIMINSHER a (little) bit, slightly, a little, somewhat

Figure (3) The different members of the five paradigms

4. Gradability and Degree

Words are considered gradable when they can be perceived as being on a range of degree of intensity. Adjectives and adverbs are usually gradable. This gradability is expressed in three ways. They may be changed by degree modifiers, e.g. *extremely hot*, *very badly*. They can be compared to other adjectives and adverbs (*happier*, *more important*) (Greenbaum & Nelson, 2002: 278). And they can be arranged on a scale of comparison. So we can say that something is *a bit cold*, *somewhat cold*, *quite cold*, *very cold*, or *extremely cold*. We may also compare things and claim that one item is colder than another or that one thing is the coldest among several (ibid. 2009:43). But that doesn't mean that other parts of speech are not gradable, Paridis (2003 :8). In some combinations, verbs can be graded. If we take the reinforcer *really* as an example, it comes very close to being a degree as in 'I *really* hate her' or 'He *really* enjoyed the party'. However, unlike adjectives, verbs can only be graded in an extreme way. The scalar modifier *very* cannot be used with verbs, e.g. *'He *very* admires you'. 'He *very much* admires you' is conceivable only by combining the words *very* and *much*. 'Much' is an essential attribute of a scalar adjective, but it must be explicitly expressed using gradable verbs, as in 'How good was the book?' vs. 'How *much* did you say you *liked* it? When we add a degree element, the modifier *really* is essentially remains the same when used with verbs, e.g. 'I *really* love her very much' and 'They *really* enjoyed the party very much'.

To indicate the point on the scale, we basically use degree modifiers. The adverb *very* is the most common intensifier of adjectives. Other examples of degree modifiers include:

fairly warm *entirely* different
pretty difficult *incredibly* dull
rather dark *too* old

Adverbs, like adjectives, are usually gradable and can be adjusted with degree modifiers and comparisons: *very calmly*, *quite calmly*, *less calmly*, *most calmly*. The pre-modifiers *more* and *most* are required with most adverbs that take comparison. The inflections *-er* and *-est* are used on adverbs that have the same form as adjectives (e.g. late – later – latest). The inflections of the following adverbs are irregular; the first three are the same as those of adjectives (Greenbaum & Nelson 2002:98).

Well *better* *best*
Badly *worse* *worst*
Far *farther/further* *farthest/furthest*
Little *less* *least*
Much *more* *most*

Comparison is a grammatical category that may be represented by inflections in numerous gradable adjectives and a few gradable adverbs. Inflectional forms generally end in *-er* or *-est* (Greenbaum 1996:85). There are three types of comparison that are possible with gradable adjectives and adverbs, they are comparison in relation:

- (1) To a higher degree
- (2) To the same degree
- (3) To a lower degree

The following means are used to express the three types of comparisons:

(1) Comparison to a higher degree is conveyed by the inflected forms in *-er* and *-est*, or their periphrastic counterparts *more* and *most*:

Adam is cleverer/more clever than Jack. (comparative)

Adam is the cleverest/most clever student in the class. (superlative)

English has a three-term inflectional contrast for higher degree comparisons:

Absolute *polite, high*

Comparative *politer/more polite, higher*

Superlative *politest/most polite, highest*

(2) Comparison to the same degree is represented by *as*:

Adam is as tall as John.

Adam is not as tall as John.

(3) Comparison to a lower degree is conveyed by *less* and *least*:

This exam is less difficult than the previous one.

This is the least difficult exam of all.

5. The Semantics of Degree Modifiers

According to Kennedy and McNally (2005:345) the distribution and interpretation of degree modifiers are affected by the scalar structure of the adjectives they modify as well as the type of the "standard values" used to determine the truth of sentences incorporating adjectival predications. The distinction between *expensive* and *extremely expensive*, for example, is that the latter signifies a quality with the same meaning as the former, but with the standard value boosted to a certain amount.

Athanasiadou (2007: 561) affirms that an intensifier can assume various meanings and, so, belong to distinct categories depending on the adjective it premodifies and the degree to which it has been semantically bleached or delexicalised. Paradis (2008: 325) agrees with Athanasiadou, by saying that most degree modifiers are employed primarily as either scalar or totality modifiers, e.g. *pretty* and *absolutely* respectively, once they are used in connection with the element they modify, they decide the interpretation of the whole.

Despite the fact that Paradis correctly refers to the intensifier beautiful as a degree modifier that is almost typically employed as a scalar modifier, Wittouck (2011:16) claims that this intensifier may be found in a variety of subcategories. *Pretty* has a connotation that is comparable to that of the intensifier *quite*, but it may also communicate a degree of intensification that is close to that of the word *very*, as the following examples demonstrate.

- *They huddled together in twos and threes, with the **pretty little** church standing back about halfway down the village.*

- *I'm afraid I got very annoyed and left; it was **pretty obvious** to me that there wasn't going to be a proper discussion.*

In (1), *pretty little* characterizes the church as little rather than large, but in (2), *pretty obvious* has a stronger undertone. It was undoubtedly evident that "there wasn't going to be a proper discussion" since the speaker "left" and was "very annoyed." As a result, *rather* or *quite* might be a synonym for *pretty* in the first example, though this intensifier would not indicate the necessary degree of modification in the second (ibid.).

6. Methodology

6.1 Participants

Eighty six fourth year students majoring in English at the University of Misan, College of Education, for the academic year 2021/2022 participated in the present study.

6.2 The Test

The researcher constructed a test based on Parides' (1997) model of degree modifiers classification. A multiple choice question test was constructed to determine whether participants are able to discriminate meaning according to the type of degree modifiers and the adjectives they combined with. The test consists of twenty two items divided into four groups to test learners in each type of degree modifiers. Points 1-7 concern the TOTAL MAXIMIZERS modifiers (absolutely, completely, perfectly, totally, entirely, utterly) in addition to the TOTAL APPROXINMATOR (almost). Points 8-15 deal with the SCALAR BOOSTERS (very, terribly, extremely, most, awfully jolly, highly, frightfully). Points 16-19 relate to SCALAR MODERATORS (quite, rather, pretty, fairly). And finally, points 20-22 pertain to SCALAR DIMINSHERS (slightly, a little, somewhat). Each point presents a sentence which contains a degree modifier attached to an adjective followed by four choices, suggesting four different interpretations for the sentence's meaning. The participants were asked to infer the correct meaning and identify the option that reflects it. To ensure the face and content validity of the test, the researcher presented it to a jury of experts to judge the appropriateness of the test items for the intended purpose. The jurors were asked to read the test, add, delete or change the items. The jurors agreed upon the appropriateness of the test items since none of the included items were deleted.

6.3 Data Analysis

In an attempt to accomplish the aim of the study, which is determining whether the students are able to distinguish the difference in meaning according to the type of degree modifiers used, a number of descriptive measures, including mean, standard deviation and person correlation in addition to a T-test and a Chi-square test were employed.

According to Tavakoli (2013: 59), the Chi-square test compares actual or observed frequencies with expected frequencies in a sample data to decide if the two frequencies differ statistically. It is also employed to investigate the relationship between the variables, which provides the researcher with information on how the variables may influence each other (Paltridge & Phakiti, 2015:155). This may propose that Chi-square is the suitable data analysis instrument in the present study since it aims to investigate whether the effect of degree modifiers on meaning are distinguished to the same extent by the subjects.

7. Results and Discussion

In an attempt to examine students' knowledge in the function of the degree modifiers and the semantic effect of these modifiers, the statistically treated data of students' test showed the following result as it illustrated in the below tables:

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total Maximizers Total Approximator	86	6.5	3.160024498	3.40754205
Scalar Boosters	86	1.3	2.076125260	2.23874344
Scalar Moderators	86	3.4	3.034083369	3.27173624
Scalar Diminishers	86	1.4	2.121907845	2.28811207
age	86	22.12	3.62604	3.9101
Total	86	12.6	5.12917	5.5309

Table (1) Descriptive Measures

Table (1) shows the descriptive measures: mean, standard deviation and standard errors mean of the participants' responses, in addition to the mean age of the subjects. A quick inspection on the values of the total mean which equals (12.6) reveals that Iraqi students find it extremely difficult to discriminate the different meanings resulting from using all the types of degree modifiers that appeared in the test. The results shows a variation in the level of difficulty in distinguishing between the different types of degree modifiers. As the table shows, the subjects find the SCALAR BOOSTERS the most difficult type to distinguish in terms of meaning with a mean of (1.3). TOTAL MAXIMIZERS and TOTAL APPROXIMATOR represent the easiest types to identify with an estimated mean of about (6.5). The calculated mean of the SCALAR MODERATORS is (3.4) and that of the SCALAR DIMINSHERS is (1.4)

	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Total Maximizers Total Approximator	19.078	85	.000	6.501057082	5.82354643	7.17856773
Scalar Boosters	5.902	85	.000	1.321353065	.87623089	1.76647524
Scalar Moderators	10.501	85	.000	3.435517970	2.78500915	4.08602679
Scalar Diminishers	6.237	85	.000	1.427061311	.97212333	1.88199929
Age	56.592	85	.000	22.12791	21.3505	22.9053
Total	22.935	85	.000	12.68499	11.5853	13.7847

Table (2) T-test

Table (2) shows the T-test for each type of the degree modifiers tested, degree of freedom, significance level, upper and lower limits of the mean under confide level -95% .By comparing the *P*-value with the significance level $\alpha=0.05$, it was noted that the *P*-value is less than α , which means that the mean of the students' answers that test each type of degree modifiers in addition to the mean of the total test answers $\neq 0$

Gender					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	77	89.5	89.5	89.5
	Male	9	10.5	10.5	100.0
	Total	86	100.0	100.0	

Table (3) Gender

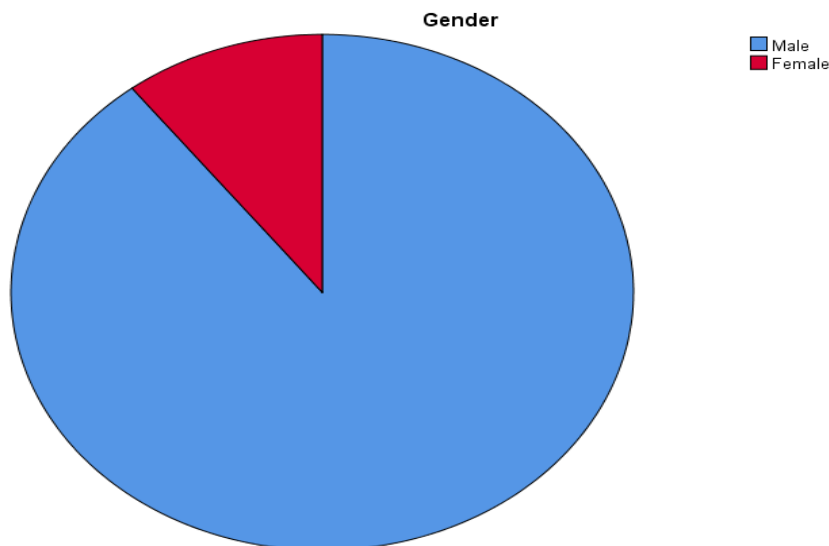


Table (3) and its digram show the number and percent of male and female participants of this test. The males represent 10.5% of the subjects while females represent 89.5% .

Gender * Total Crosstabulation									
Count									
		Total							Total
		.00	4.55	9.09	13.64	18.18	22.73	27.27	
Gender	Male	1	3	30	25	12	5	1	77
	Female	1	1	3	0	4	0	0	9
Total		2	4	33	25	16	5	1	86

Table (4) Gender * Total Crosstabulation

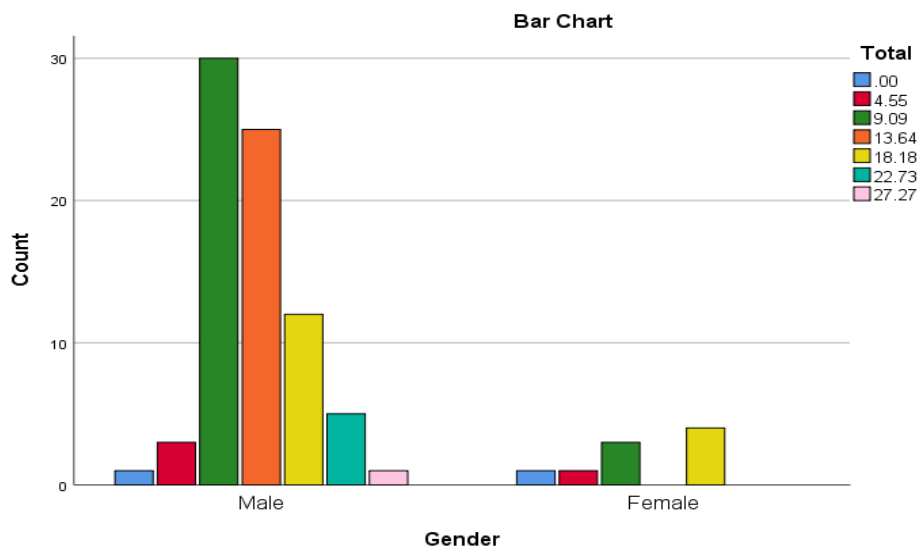
Table (4) is a concordance table that shows the intersection between gender and students' scores in the test. The existence of a relationship between the gender of the student and the total mean can be tested through the chi-square test shown in the table below.

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.535 ^a	6	.073
Likelihood Ratio	12.280	6	.056
Linear-by-Linear Association	.436	1	.509
N of Valid Cases	86		

a. 11 cells (78.6%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 10

Table (5) Chi-Square Test

The above table shows the Chi - square test of the assumption of the relation between gender and participant's scores. Through comparing the standard test with the *P*-value, we notice that it equals 0.073, which means that the *P*-value > $\alpha = 0.05$, indicating that there is no relation between learners' gender and their ability to distinguish the difference in meaning resulting from the effect of using different types of degree modifiers (Table 5 Chi-Square Test)



Pearson Correlations

		Total	age
Total	Pearson Correlation	1	-.166
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.127
	N	86	86
age	Pearson Correlation	-.166	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.127	
	N	86	86

Table (6) Pearson Correlations

Table (6) shows the value of the Pearson correlation coefficient between age and the participants' scores. It is clear that the value of the correlation coefficient equals -0.166, which means there is a weak inverse relationship between participants' score and age.

8. Conclusions

This study has examined the correlation between the use of different types of degree modifiers and their effect on meaning through testing students' ability to identify the correct interpretation of the intended meaning. Based on the data analysis, it is concluded that Iraqi English major students face severe difficulty in distinguishing differences in meaning resulting from using degree modifiers in different contexts. Furthermore, the outcome showed a gradation in difficulty among different types of modifiers. The SCALAR BOOSTERS represent the most difficult type to distinguish in terms of their effect on meaning. They were followed by the SCALAR DIMINISHERS as the second most difficult type to distinguish. The SCALAR MODERATORS appeared to be less challenging to students. While TOTAL MAXIMIZERS and TOTAL APPROXIMATES represent the easiest type to identify regarding meaning diversity resulting from their use.

Based on these results, the researcher recommends more focus on the area of intensification, and specially degree modifiers usages, through incorporating them in all the curriculums whether they were literary or linguistic contexts and trying to shed more light on them in different courses since this can affect the delivered meaning and lead to conveying a completely different message.

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Appendix (1) Degree modifiers test with correct answers.

Degree Modifiers Test

Read the following sentences and try to distinguish the correct interpretation for each of them.

1. **Adam's idea was absolutely fascinating.**
 - a. His idea is just fascinating.
 - b. His idea is kind of fascinating.
 - c. His idea is fascinating.
 - d. His idea is totally fascinating.
2. **He is completely bald.**
 - a. He has some hair.
 - b. He has no hair at all.
 - c. He doesn't have hair.
 - d. Non of the above.
3. **He was a perfectly normal person.**
 - a. He was just a normal person.
 - b. He looked like a normal person.
 - c. He was 100% normal person.
 - d. Non of the above.
4. **A totally new situation arose.**
 - a. The situation is new.
 - b. The situation occurs for the first time.
 - c. It's a new total situation.
 - d. Non of the above.
5. **Miss Brown had told them something entirely different.**
 - a. She told them the truth.
 - b. She told them something totally different.
 - c. She told them part of the truth.
 - d. Non of the above.
6. **On the other side of the tower, the view is utterly changed.**
 - a. The view has totally changed.
 - b. The view has slightly changed.

- c. The view has new change.
d. The view hasn't changed.
- 7. John has shown him his shirts, He liked almost all of them.**
- a. He liked a number of the shirts, but not all of them.
b. He liked the whole collection of shirts.
c. He liked most of them except a number of shirts.
d. Non of the above.
- 8. In his research, he used the very latest techniques.**
- a. He used the most modern technique.
b. He used the latest technique.
c. He used modern technique.
d. Non of the above.
- 9. It's terribly important for parents to be consistent.**
- a. It's not necessary for parents to be consistent.
b. Parents consistency is very important.
c. It's terrible when parents become consistent.
d. Non of the above.
- 10. Earthquakes are extremely difficult to predict.**
- a. It's difficult to predict earthquakes.
b. It's kind of difficult to predict earthquakes.
c. It's very difficult to predict earthquakes.
d. All of the above.
- 11. Most research in this field has been carried by the Russian**
- a. The greatest part of the research carried by the Russian.
b. All the research carried by the Russian.
c. Part of the research carried by the Russian.
d. Research about most carried by the Russian.
- 12. It's awfully cold in here.**
- a. It's just cold in here.
b. It's very cold in here.
c. Its beautifully cold in here.
d. Non of the above.
- 13. They provided a jolly good service.**
- a. Their service was bad.
b. Their service was good.
c. Their service was very good.
d. Jolly has received a good service.
- 14. The documentary is highly critical of these politicians.**
- a. The documentary critical the politicians severely.
b. The documentary critical the politicians slightly.
c. The documentary criticizes the high politicians.
d. Non of the above.
- 15. He said he was frightfully sorry about the delay.**
- a. He was very sorry about the delay.
b. He was sorry about the delay.
c. He was not sorry about the delay.

d. He was fruitful and sorry about the delay.

16. The food was quite bad.

- a. The food was very bad no one could eat it.
- b. The food was bad, but they ate it.
- c. The food was not bad.
- d. The food was good.

17. Ali said that the novel was rather long.

- a. The novel is too long for Ali to read.
- b. The novel is not long.
- c. The novel is long to a certain extent that Ali can read.
- d. The novel is long enough so Ali can't read it.

18. After the accident, she got hurt pretty badly.

- a. Her injury was serious.
- b. Her injury was bad to some extent.
- c. Her injury was minor.
- d. Non of the above.

19. The design that he showed to us was fairly old.

- a. The design was very old.
- b. The design was not old.
- c. The design was kind of old.
- d. The design was fair.

20. January's sales were slightly better than average.

- a. January's sales were the best comparing the average.
- b. January's sales were better to a small degree.
- c. January's sales were completely better than the average.
- d. All of the above.

21. She was a little disappointed at his request.

- a. His request made her disappointed.
- b. His request made her very disappointed.
- c. His request made her disappointed to a certain degree.
- d. All of the above.

22. The price of the car is somewhat higher than He expected

- a. The price is more expensive than he thought.
 - b. The car is cheap he can buy it easily.
 - c. The car is affordable.
 - d. Non of the above.
-