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## A Pragmatic Analysis of the Use of Intensifiers in Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*

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### Abstract

The present study investigates the use of *intensifiers* as linguistic devices employed by *Charles Dickens* in *Hard Times*. For ease of analysis, the data are obtained by a rigorous observation of spontaneously occurring intensifiers in the text. The study aims at exploring the pragmatic functions and aesthetic impact of using intensifiers in *Hard Times*. The current study is mainly descriptive analytical and is based on analyzing and interpreting the use of intensifiers in terms of *Holmes (1984)* and *Cacchiani's model (2009)*. From the findings, the novelist overuses intensifiers to the extent that 280 intensifiers are used in the text. These intensifiers (218) are *undistinguished emotions* constituting 78%, (38) are *personal forming* 13.5% and (24) intensifiers are *specific emotions* comprising 8.5%. Also, the analysis shows that 56 different intensifiers are employed in the text with great variety in frequency in the most frequent intensifier is 'very', used 90 times, followed by 'so', 82 times, and then 'too', 15 times as well as other intensifiers such as *only, highly, eminently, quite, pretty, most, much* and *perfectly*. The rest of the intensifiers are scarcely used. The study significantly concludes that the use of intensifiers helps contribute to typifying the downside and suffering of people in the

Victorian era as such use moves the plot forward so as to discern the way social, economic and political circumstances affect the way the novelist uses intensifiers. This stems from the observation that the very low ratio of *personal intensifiers* 13.5% reflects little subjectivity, if any, and goes in line with the main theme of the novel which is “the people in the Victorian era are like machines without human feelings.” The use of intensifiers assists in unraveling of the interpretation of Dickens’ feelings, impressions, emotions and attitudes towards the Victorian society and makes the latter apt to be criticized.

**Key Words:** intensifiers, pragma-stylistics devices, *Hard Times*, aesthetic function.

### **Introduction**

There are a lot of means to intensify or emphasize what a language user is saying or writing. Meaning can be intensified by adverbs of degree which are referred to by Quirk et al. (1985: 590-1) as intensifiers which, in turn, maximize the meaning of a given word. Peters (1994: 271) indicates that adverbs of degree tend to be so well-known and looked for by the reader(s) in order to boost and fulfill the writer’s desires.

The problem of the study is that literary writers deploy intensifiers in real-life situations in their literary works to express complex human activities. The fact that intensifiers are made use of to achieve certain goals according to the context in which they are used is worth discussing. Intensifiers in fictional texts are not used randomly, but they are a purposeful means of communication. The use of intensifiers is basic for tact message delivery. Such use of intensifiers assumes different types and varieties to communicate insightful messages. Intensifiers are used for strengthening or weakening words to

achieve pragmatic functions. Ayeleru (2012: 126) emphasizes the bond between literature and language as literature represents the presence of imagination, entertainment and emotion, while language provides the devices (e.g., intensifiers) of expressing feelings and thoughts. Intensifiers can be regarded like powerful tools by fictional writers to get the audience's intentions to prompt the feelings of population and achieve their aims and interests.

The study aims at exploring the pragmatic functions of using intensifiers in *Hard Times*. It also aims at finding out the aesthetic impact behind the use of intensifiers. The data to be analysed for the present study is sourced from Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* in which he mirrors the suffering and the downside of the Victorian society. The current study may be helpful to teachers of both grammar and literature as well as translators. Furthermore, it is expected to be an aid to researchers who are interested in pragmatics and pragma-stylistics. There have been a lot of studies on intensifiers in multiple genres, texts and literary works, but, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no study to investigate intensifiers in *Hard Times* or any of Dickens' literary works has been investigated yet. So, this study has set itself to bridge this gap and to be the first attempt in this regard. Also, the study is confined to analyse only the intensifiers in Dickens' *Hard Times* in regard to pragmatics and any other linguistic devices in the novel are excluded from the analysis. It is hypothesized that:

1. *Personal intensifiers* represent a low ratio in the analysis in regard to the theme of the novel: "the people in the Victorian era are like machines without human feelings."

2. The intensifiers are deliberately employed by the novelist to impact his audience.

### **Literature Review**

Intensifiers are linguistic devices that denote modification, degrees of emphasis and force to other linguistic categories (see: Greenbaum 1996: 142). Alexander (2003: 150) indicates that intensification refers to the process by which an adverb modifies adjectives. Similarly, Milroy and Milroy (1997, 52) add that any conveyed message can be intensified and emphasized by the means of adverbs such as: very, exactly, so, too, only, probably, highly, totally, almost, much, quite, perfectly and many others. Intensifiers tend to develop rapidly to constitute an open class of words (Ito and Tagliamonte, 2003: 257). Radden and Dirven (2007: 151) refer to intensifiers as the modifiers that qualify a given word according to the degree of intensification such as adjectives, adverbs and verbs.

As for the position of intensifiers, Barnfield and Buchstaller (2010: 257) add that intensifiers may occur in more than one position in grammatical categories like: noun phrases, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. As for the function of intensifiers, König et al (2013) comment that intensifiers are elements that function as reflexive pronouns because intensifiers can conjecturally be seen to connect a reference in a given sentence. There is a sort of overlap in the terminology of the way a given adverb or adjective is modified. They are *intensifiers*, *degree words*, *modifiers*, *degree modifiers*, *gradational adverbs*, *amplifiers*, *downtoners*, *diminishers*, *detensifiers* and many others (see: Hubler, 1983; Teschner and Evans, 2007; and Bolinger, 1972). The present study prefers to use the term *intensifiers* to typify and highlight the strengthening and weakening adverbs that add a sort of influential modification to the meaning of meant words.

**Hard Times: Themes and Characterization**

It is certainly not an easy task to specify the meaning of intensifiers without a reference to the themes and the nature of characters in *Hard Times*. Albert (2016) opines that Dickens' writing style is to use variable devices and writing techniques to express his thoughts and criticism through his characters' behaviors and dialogues. Funada (2015) avers that Dickens is well-known of his figurative style in his novels and follows the chronological order in order for the reader to visualize the events. Charles Dickens mainly highlights economic, social and political issues such as: industrialism, education, marriage, the relation between bosses and employees and fancy and facts. Charles Dickens writes about the suffering of the poor people especially the children in the industrial society and criticizes the absence of the rules which protect workers from exploitation. He also criticizes the Victorian society because it is the time of the industrial revolution. He sheds the light on the gap between the poor and the rich class in this society. The childhood is darkened and victimized in such a society. They live dark childhood under bad conditions as workers gaining a very low amount of money.

Thomas Gradgrind embodies the notion of reality and illusion. He tries to prevent his children to improve their imagination and made them practical characters. He wants them to be like him, but he fails. Louisa is Gradgrind's daughter. She obeys her father blindly. She loves her brother Tom. Tom is Gradgrind's oldest son. He loves money very much. He robs his master Mr. Bounderby. Bounderby is Gradgrind's friend and Louisa's husband. He is a self-made man. Cecelia Jupe is a daughter of the clown in circus. She is looked after by Gradgrind after her father's disappearance. Sissy is the contrast of Louisa. Sissy embodies the Victorian femininity. Unlike Louisa, Sissy is

imaginative. Stephen is a poor worker in Bounderby's factory. He loves Rachel, but he is unable to marry her because he is already married. He is an honest and compassionate person. Rachael is a simple honest poor worker. She loves Stephen. She is a symbol of purity and domestic happiness. James Harthouse is wealthy young sophisticated from London. He tries to seduce Louisa.

### **Research Questions**

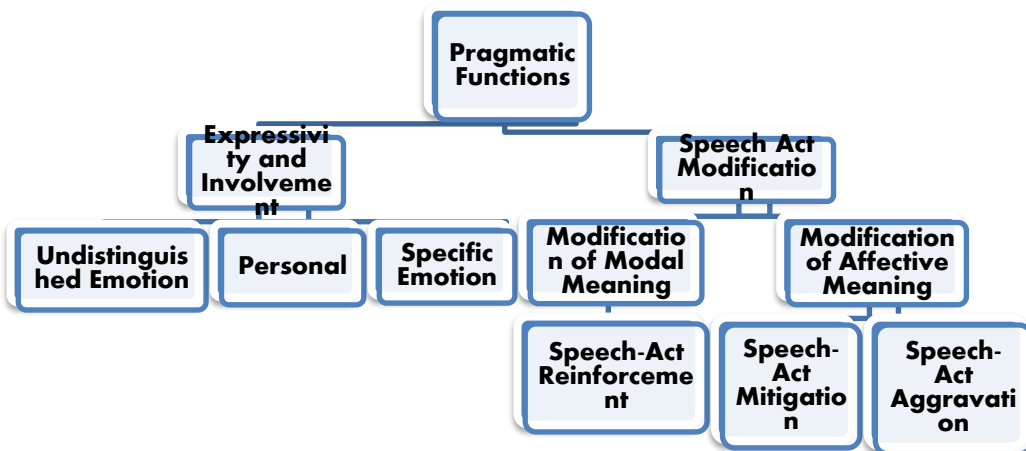
The present study tries to answer the following questions realistically in order to clarify its purpose:

1. What are the intensifiers employed by Dickens in *Hard Times* ?
2. What are the pragma-stylistic interpretations and functions behind the use of the intensifiers in the text ?

### **The Model Adopted**

The study adopts Holmes (1984) and Cacchiani (2009) as an eclectic model for data analysis. The analysis of the pragmatic functions of intensifiers follows Cacchiani (2009) who analyzes intensifiers in regard to their degrees of *expressivity* and *involvement* into: undistinguished emotions, personal (subjective) and specific emotions. Also, *speech act modification*, as a pragmatic function, is analysed in the light of both Holmes (1984) and Cacchiani (2009). To them, illocutionary force modification can be divided into: *modal meaning* which depends on the speaker's attitude to the ideas and thoughts in a given context and *affective meaning* which in turn depends on the speaker's relation to the addressee in a given context and social attitude. However, the modification of speech act either reinforces one's face (i.e., social image) or affects it. Furthermore, if the modification affects or threatens such a face, the intensifiers may mitigate or aggravate the result of speech acts

to the speaker. The following figure summarizes the adopted model followed in analyzing intensifiers:



**Figure (1): Cacchiani (2009) and Holmes (1984) Models for Analysing the Pragmatic Functions of Intensifiers**

**Procedure**

The present study is mainly meant to collect, identify and analyse the use of intensifiers in Dickens’ *Hard Times*. It further investigates, on the bases of a descriptive quantitative analytical method, the pragmatic functions in using the intensifiers as purposeful devices in *Hard Times: expressivity and involvement* and *speech-act modification*. Eventually, the study presents and discusses the results of the analysis to get the aesthetic and artistic functions behind the use of intensifiers.

### **Data Analysis and Discussion**

This section is set to analyse how the intensifiers are streamlined and implemented by the novelist to deliver his artistic intentions regarding the Victorian era.

In *Hard Times*, Dickens speaks of a mechanized society which is presented and embodied in his characters especially Thomas Gradgrind whom Dickens describes as a man of facts and calculations. However, this society cannot deny the existence of human feelings and imagination which is presented in the character of Sissy Jupe.

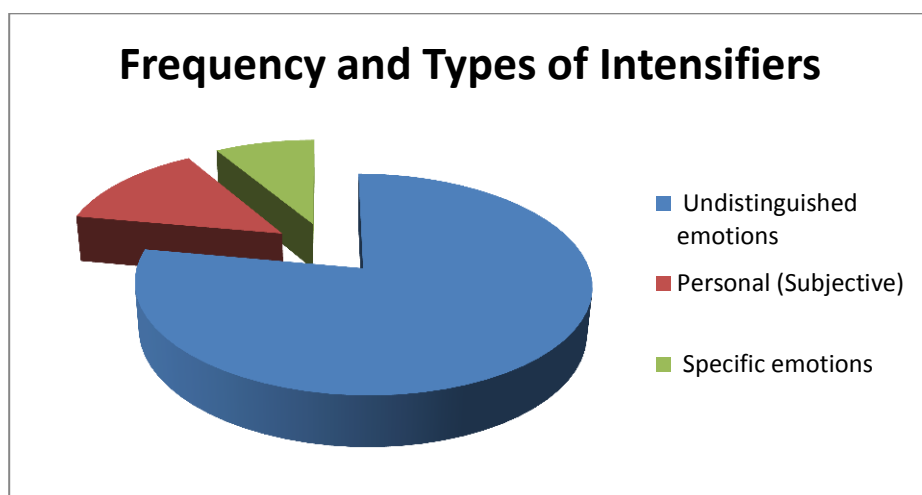
Intensifiers are one of the linguistic devices used by Dickens to reinforce such themes and show the dangers of allowing the Victorian people to be like machines suggesting that without compassion and imagination life would be unbearable.

In this text, 280 intensifiers are used. These intensifiers are divided into those which express undistinguished emotions, those that are personal, and those which have specific emotions. The hereunder table and figure clarify the division:



**Table (1): Frequency of Intensifiers and their Types**

| Types of intensifiers    | Frequency | %    |
|--------------------------|-----------|------|
| Undistinguished emotions | 218       | 78   |
| Personal (Subjective)    | 38        | 13.5 |
| Specific emotions        | 24        | 8.5  |
| Total                    | 280       | 100  |

**Figure (2): The Distribution and Types of Intensifiers in the Data**

The findings presented in table (1) show that 218 intensifiers constituting 78 % of the intensification in the text are achieved by intensifiers that express undistinguished emotions. As in the following examples:

1. *A very regular feature on the face of the country.*
2. *... far too busily employed in making himself.*

These intensifiers add nothing to the emotional quality of the utterance; however, they merely express a reinforcement or attenuation of the existing emotional content of the element.

Also, 13.5 % of intensification is made by subjective intensifiers. These intensifiers are personal in the sense that they show the speaker's own assessment and evaluation of the modified element. As in the following:

3. ... *the eminently practical father.*

4. ... *another man perfectly devoid of sentiment.*

Whereas only 8.5 % of intensification is made by intensifiers that express specific emotions. They subtly suggest to the hearer / reader what emotions should be felt, as in the following examples:

5. *His skin was so unwholesomely deficient in the natural tinge.*

6. ... *was invariably stunned by some weighty piece of fact...*

The reason behind such a high percentage of undistinguished-emotion intensifiers and such a low percentage of specific-emotion intensifiers is that Dickens wants the reader(s) to feel and live the dullness and monotony of such a mechanized society, a society in which people, especially children who are supposed to be the source of imagination and fancy, are treated like emotionless objects. Moreover, it is a society where one can not express him/herself or what one feels. Also, it is a society in which one is just a machine. Consequently, these intensifiers contribute to the creation of such atmosphere in the novel.

**Table (2):Frequency of Individual Intensifiers**

| Intensifiers  | Types                   | Frequency |      |
|---------------|-------------------------|-----------|------|
| Very          | Undistinguished emotion | 90        | 32.1 |
| Exactly       | Personal                | 1         | 0.4  |
| So            | Undistinguished emotion | 82        | 29.3 |
| Intensely     | Personal                | 1         | 0.4  |
| Hardly        | Personal                | 1         | 0.4  |
| Unwholesomely | Specific emotion        | 1         | 0.4  |
| Only          | Undistinguished emotion | 9         | 3.2  |
| Quite         | Undistinguished emotion | 4         | 1.4  |
| Much          | Undistinguished emotion | 3         | 1.1  |
| Infinitely    | Specific emotion        | 1         | 0.4  |
| Virtually     | Personal                | 1         | 0.4  |
| Tremendously  | Specific emotion        | 1         | 0.4  |
| Probably      | Personal                | 2         | 0.7  |
| Strictly      | Personal                | 1         | 0.4  |
| Highly        | Personal                | 9         | 3.2  |
| Eminently     | Personal                | 8         | 3    |
| Perfectly     | Personal                | 3         | 1.1  |
| Constantly    | Personal                | 1         | 0.4  |
| Invariably    | Specific emotion        | 1         | 0.4  |
| Indifferently | Specific emotion        | 1         | 0.4  |
| Favourably    | Specific emotion        | 1         | 0.4  |
| Woefully      | Specific emotion        | 1         | 0.4  |
| Too           | Undistinguished emotion | 15        | 5.4  |
| Severely      | Specific emotion        | 2         | 0.7  |

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|                |                         |   |     |
|----------------|-------------------------|---|-----|
| Eternally      | Personal                | 1 | 0.4 |
| Pretty         | Undistinguished emotion | 4 | 1.4 |
| Shabbily       | Specific emotion        | 1 | 0.4 |
| Softly         | Specific emotion        | 1 | 0.4 |
| Most           | Undistinguished emotion | 4 | 1.4 |
| Equally        | Undistinguished emotion | 1 | 0.4 |
| Rather         | Undistinguished emotion | 1 | 0.4 |
| Chiefly        | Personal                | 1 | 0.4 |
| Weakly         | Specific emotion        | 1 | 0.4 |
| Widely         | Personal                | 2 | 0.7 |
| Tolerably      | Specific emotion        | 1 | 0.4 |
| Serenely       | Specific emotion        | 1 | 0.4 |
| Scarcely       | Personal                | 1 | 0.4 |
| Unquestionably | Specific emotion        | 1 | 0.4 |
| Literally      | Personal                | 1 | 0.4 |
| Faintly        | Specific emotion        | 1 | 0.4 |
| Closely        | Personal                | 1 | 0.4 |
| Just           | Undistinguished emotion | 1 | 0.4 |
| Fairly         | Specific emotion        | 1 | 0.4 |
| Excessively    | Specific emotion        | 1 | 0.4 |
| Quietly        | Specific emotion        | 1 | 0.4 |
| Deeply         | Undistinguished emotion | 1 | 0.4 |
| Remarkably     | Personal                | 1 | 0.4 |
| Really         | Personal                | 2 | 0.7 |
| Deadly         | Specific emotion        | 1 | 0.4 |
| Almost         | Undistinguished emotion | 1 | 0.4 |

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|               |                         |     |     |
|---------------|-------------------------|-----|-----|
| Horribly      | Specific emotion        | 1   | 0.4 |
| Totally       | Undistinguished emotion | 1   | 0.4 |
| More          | Undistinguished emotion | 1   | 0.4 |
| Superlatively | Specific emotion        | 1   | 0.4 |
| Swiftly       | Specific emotion        | 1   | 0.4 |
| Miserably     | Specific emotion        | 1   | 0.4 |
| Total         |                         | 280 | 100 |

As Table 2 above shows, fifty-six different intensifiers are used in the text with great variability in frequency. The most frequent intensifier in this text is *very*, followed by *so* then *too*. Next in frequency are the intensifiers *only* and *highly*, followed by *eminently* then *quite*, *pretty*, and *most*, and then *much* and *perfectly*. The rest of intensifiers are scarcely present. The table also shows that the most frequent intensifiers are those that increase emphasis, degree, and focus. These intensifiers help to give the required force to the text as well as bring the readers' attention to the main moral, legal, spiritual, and intellectual issues discussed in the text.

From the point of view of speech act modification, in most utterances intensifiers are used to modify modal meaning (i.e., they modify the speaker's attitude towards the content of the utterance in which they occur).

7. *it is tolerably clear to me.* (boosting the representative speech act of stating)

8. *I only entreat you to believe ...* (attenuating the directive speech act of entreating)

On the other hand, there are some intensifiers that result in a modification of affective meaning indicating the speaker's attitude towards others. As the following examples illustrate:

9. *They are a very good natur'd people.*

10. *This is a very obtrusive lad.*

In sentence (9), the intensifier has the effect of boosting the positively affective meaning resulting in a mitigation of the expressive speech act of complement. Whereas in sentence (10), it has the effect of boosting a negatively affective meaning resulting in aggravation of the representative speech act of stating.

The above mentioned facts indicate that most utterances in which intensifiers occur, intensifiers are used to modify modal meaning indicating the speaker's attitude to the content of what he says. Such intensifiers are used in order to modify (i.e., attenuate or boost) the illocutionary force of the representative, commissive, and expressive speech acts that occur in the text. Face work is also found in some utterances in which the intensifiers mitigate and aggravate the illocutionary force of the utterance.

To sum it up, the ratio of the *undistinguished emotions* predominates the frequency of intensifiers and such a highest ratio, as shown in the above findings, denotes expressive meanings and proves a sense of reinforcement and strengthening, from one hand, and mitigation and reduction, from another hand. While *personal intensifiers*, the lowest ratio, implies little subjectivity in the text. The study verifies hypothesis No. (1) which states: "Personal intensifiers represent a low ratio in the analysis in regard to the theme of the novel: "the people in the Victorian era are like machines without human

feelings.”” Also, the study verifies hypothesis No. (2) which states: “The intensifiers are deliberately employed by the novelist to impact his audience.”

### **Conclusion**

The study arrives at depicting that the use of intensifiers in the novel is thematically significant in that they contribute to the development of the plot. Throughout the novel, 280 intensifiers are used and they are divided into: 218 intensifiers are *undistinguished emotions* constituting 78% followed by 38 *personal* intensifiers comprising 13.5% and 24 intensifiers are *specific emotions* constituting 8.5%. Fifty-six different intensifiers are used in the text with great variability in frequency. The most frequent intensifier in this text is *very*, used 90 times, followed by *so*, 82 times, then *too*, 15 times. Next in frequency are the intensifiers *only* and *highly*, followed by *eminently* then *quite*, *pretty*, and *most*, and then *much* and *perfectly*. The rest of intensifiers are scarcely used.

Furthermore, the researcher defends the idea that the intensifiers are deliberately employed by the novelist to draw a well-planned impact on the reader(s) and to leave little room for haziness. The influence of the highest ratio of intensifiers (undistinguished emotions) in *Hard Times* plays a key role to vividly express the aesthetic and artistic effects of reinforcement and attenuation of the existing emotional content in the novel. The low ratio of *personal intensifiers* reflects the low degree of subjectivity and this goes in line with the main theme that people in the Victorian era are like machines without feelings and values. Utilizing intensifiers, Dickens stylizes the fictional language as an effective and influential strategic medium so as to make the readers think critically about the characters' feelings, orientations and behaviors in regard to their thematic roles. Thus, *Hard Times* has been

and continues to be an immensely popular literary criticism throughout the world for certain reasons, one of which is the use of intensifiers.

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## تحليل تداولي لاستعمال المشددات في رواية "أوقات عصيبة" لـ جارلس ديكنز

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## خلاصة البحث

لعل هذه الدراسة تستكشف استعمال الأدوات البراغمية المستعملة من قبل تشارلز ديكنز في روايته المعروفة "أوقات عصيبة" التي هي من المشددات, و لسهولة التحليل, تم الحصول على البيانات نتيجة الملاحظة الدقيقة للمشددات التي وجدت بشكل عفوي في النص الروائي. و لعل هذه الدراسة انتهجت المنهج الوصفي في سبر أغوار النص و كشف استعمال المشددات وتحليلها وتفسيرها طبقا و اتباعا لهولمز (1984) وكاشيتاني (2009). وخلص البحث الى نتائج متعددة أهمها: استعمال الراوي المشددات بشكل مبالغ فيه, اذ وصل الى 280. وتمخض عن هذه الدراسة بروز الجوانب السلبية في العصر الفيكتوري تلك الناجمة عن تكرار هذه المشددات و شيوع الطابع العاطفي الذي زخرف و لون حبكة القصة بشكل كبير. رغبة من الراوي في تمييز الطابع الاجتماعي والاقتصادي والسياسي قام باستعمال اللغة الخيالية غير المطابقة للواقع من اجل تحريك ذهن القارئ النقدي و رسم استراتيجية واضحة للجذب الفكري المهيمن على عقلية متلقي النص و التي يروم من خلالها شد الاهدان و جعلها تتفاعل و تتلاقح مع انطباعات منتج النص و خلاته و لعل المشددات حيلة لغوية من حيل الراوي لجذب الانتباه الى نصه و التفاعل معه.

الكلمات الاساسية: المشددات, الأدوات البراغمية الأسلوبية, أوقات عصيبة, الوظيفة الجمالية.

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