

“And They Were Like ‘That’s *So Cool*’”: Gender and Lexical Variation in Guided Narrations

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How do individuals of different gender identities tend to speak? While this question has been studied by looking at lexical variation of quotatives and intensifiers (Tagliamonte and D’Arcy 2004, Fuchs 2017), this exploration of lexical variation has yet to be done in a way that is inclusive and considerate of non-binary genders, or genders that are outside of being exclusively male or female. Gender-inclusive studies do exist in other areas of linguistics, such as socio-phonetics (Zimman 2017), but there are no such studies focusing on usage of quotatives or intensifiers. Quotatives are used to report speech, as in example one, below, where *be like*, *say*, and *go* are the quotatives in question.

(1) After that, he was *like/said/went* “it’s hot outside.”

Intensifiers are adverbs used to increase or decrease the intensity of a modified word, which is most often an adjective. This is shown in example two, below, where *really*, *very*, *super*, and *kind of* are the intensifiers that modify the adjective *tall*.

(2) That tree is *really/very/super/kind of* tall.

In this paper, I analyze speech gathered from interviews that use guided narration methodology to see if individuals of different genders use different frequencies of intensifiers or quotatives, or if they use more or fewer of specific variants. The personal interviews consisted of a background questionnaire to collect demographic information, a picture narration task that involved telling a story based on a comic, a spontaneous dubbing task where participants narrated muted video clips, and an open-ended narration for participants to tell a story from their own experience. Each participant (n=15) was able to openly describe their own identity in terms of gender, gender expression, sexuality, and other factors. The interview methodology is based on Koven (2011) and Lara Bermejo (2016), and the analysis in Buchstaller (2006), Hessner and Gawlitzek (2017), and Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005). The interviews were then transcribed, coded, and analyzed in terms of frequency of usage of quotatives and intensifiers in general, as well as looking into specific variants of the intensifiers and quotatives used. The results indicate large amounts of individual variation, with participants using between one and 59 intensifiers each (mean=24), and between one and 101 quotatives each (mean=15.5). However, the highest-frequency users of both quotatives and intensifiers are women and lower-frequency users tend to be men, whereas non-binary speakers have a wide spread of usage but overall use more intensifiers and quotatives than men but fewer than women. Chi-square tests of these gender differences do indicate statistical significance, but due to the large variation and relatively small sample size indicate an area of improvement for future studies. Furthermore, the most common intensifiers are *very*, *really*, and *so*, while the most popular quotatives are *be like*, *say*, *go*, and *like*. Adjectives relating to emotions (eg. *happy*) are most likely to be intensified, and quotatives are most likely to be used in the present tense.

Overall, this paper shows that gender-inclusive quantitative sociolinguistic studies are possible and important. Future research can follow this ideology and could validate these findings with larger sample sizes, different variables of interest, or other elicitation styles.

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