

# Amplifier Collocations in Korean EFL Learners' Academic Essay Corpus: Focus on Semantic Prosody

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Koo, Soo-Hyun. (2018). Amplifier Collocations in Korean EFL Learners' Academic Essay Corpus: Focus on Semantic Prosody. *Foreign Language Education Research*, 22, 49-67.

Collocational competence is important part of L2 English amplifier acquisition. This competence entails learners' ability to use the right combination of words with natural-sounding semantic prosody. It is known to be an integral part of mastering pragmatic function of L2 English vocabulary, which also is a challenge for the learners at the same time (Zhang, 2008). Despite the importance, previous studies on ESL/EFL learners' amplifier use lacked empirical evidence and insight about semantic prosody. The purpose of present learner corpora-based study was to fill the existing research gap by finding patterns of amplifiers use for EFL Korean university students, in terms of semantic prosody associated with those amplifiers. Two existing corpora were selected, coded, and analyzed to fulfill this purpose; they are Korean EFL learners and native speakers of English (NE). Results from analysis found Korean learners' overall underuse in amplifiers. Also, frequently occurring amplifier ranks for each corpus differed. Semantic prosody analysis revealed that amplifiers associated with dominantly positive connotation were *very*, *really*, and *highly*. Amplifiers associated with dominantly negative connotation were *extremely*, *absolutely*, *severely*, and *greatly*. Contrast analysis showed that the only amplifier that Koreans and NEs used amplifier to signal same semantic prosody dominantly was *severely* (negative). Other than that, Koreans and NE showed salient discrepancies in semantic prosody use. The pedagogical implication of the present study is that vocabulary teaching need to include semantic prosody, and the first step will be to conduct ESL/EFL teacher education about it (Zhang, 2009). It's important to remind them of the value of semantic prosody in language communication (S Lee, 2011).

**Key Words:** Semantic prosody, Amplifier, Learner corpus, EFL writing

## I . Introduction

Vocabulary learning is widely recognized as one of the most important parts of second language (L2) acquisition to gain proficiency (Hu & Nation, 2000; Nation, 1994). For that reason, volume of studies on ESL/EFL learners' L2 English vocabulary acquisition and usage patterns have been conducted. Though it started out with individual lexical item acquisition, studies have begun to pay attention to acquisition and

use of collocations as time goes by. Hill (2001) called and emphasized “collocational competence” (p.49), which refers to the competence to use adequate collocation in the right context. Out of many kinds of collocations, degree adverbials collocate with verbs or adjectives to amplify or diminish the degree of modification (Kennedy, 2003). When these degree adverbials are used in company of other modifying terms, such combinations sometimes add certain degree of evaluative or attitudinal nuances (Louw, 1993; Sinclair, 1991). These nuances are also known as the semantic prosody and it is known to be an integral part of mastering pragmatic function of L2 vocabulary, which usually is a challenge for the learners (Zhang, 2008). Although several studies on English language learners’ amplifying adverbials and semantic prosody use were conducted in the past, these two features were often observed separately; very few studies considered both features simultaneously.

The purpose of present study was to find out predominant trend of amplifier use among EFL Korean learners of English by carefully examining the argumentative and narrative essays they wrote. In doing so, this learner corpora study investigated overall amplifier collocation use frequency along with the semantic prosody that each amplifier collocation entailed. First, the frequency of amplifier collocations (i.e., *really good*, *highly recognized*) about twelve commonly used amplifiers were first measured. Afterwards, distributive pattern was found by judging whether certain intensifying terms are overused or underused through contrastive analysis. Distribution of modifiers were also analyzed with semantic lens; semantic prosody of each amplifier collocation was identified and analyzed.

The possible contribution of this study to previous volume of study is that the present study considered semantic prosody created with combination of specific degree adverbial, focusing on amplifiers.

## **II. Literature Review**

### **1. Amplifier Collocation**

Degree adverbials are adverbs that modify adjectives or verb phrases (Kennedy, 2003) that further describe the degree of adjectives. Degree adverbials play important roles in language communication of determining and expressing the degree of emphasis that is given to specific characteristics of an entity or an action (Carter & McCarthy, 2006). According to Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvick’s (1985) framework, degree adverbials can be semantically divided into two types; amplifiers and downtoners. While amplifiers (i.e., *absolutely*, *completely*, *really*) enhance and intensify the degree of entity or action, downtoners (i.e., *rather*, *a bit*, *quite*) decrease or dilute the degree of

entity or action. The present study is focused on the use of amplifiers, because it is the kind of degree adverbial that is used frequently in English writings. For instance, "one amplifier appears for every 270 words" in British National Corpus (BNC), and around 50 amplifiers are commonly used amongst British people (Kennedy, 2003, p.469).

Having noticed this important function that amplifier plays, several corpora-based studies on native and non-native English speakers' (NE and NNES) use of amplifiers in written essays have been conducted for several decades. This line of previous studies attempted to identify the trends by counting tokens and types and analyzing the lexicogrammatical collocation use. Kennedy (2003) investigated how one group of degree adverbials with amplifying nature build up collocations with adjectives and verbs by analyzing amplifiers in BNC. This study was one of important works on NEs' use of amplifiers because it thoroughly described the semantic and syntactic environment that revolve around amplifier collocation for 24 amplifiers. For instance, the study found the collocating association between amplifier *severely* and verbs that describes constraint or damage (i.e., *curtailed, limited, wounded, incurred*) (p.477). Through enlisting cases and some lexicogrammatical contexts, it was evident that seemingly interchangeable amplifiers like *clearly, badly, heavily, greatly, considerably, and severely* were not used synonymously by NE.

After some works on NE's amplifier use were compiled, many NNES' amplifier use studies were done. Amongst those, several studies were done to investigate EFL Korean learners' (Korean learners, hereafter) amplifier use in argumentative essays, by comparing Korean learners' corpus of essays with that of NE speakers. S Lee (2006), for instance, explored how undergraduate Korean learners use adjective-amplifier collocation and sought whether there's any association between amplifiers and their modified adjectives in the corpora. The study found that Korean learners used amplifiers a lot less frequently than NEs, with limited number of repertoires. It also found Koreans' overuse of two amplifiers, *really* and *very*. These two amplifiers were recognized to be "all-around amplifier" (p.10) for Korean learners. The possible reason for such propensity demonstrated their incomplete knowledge and lack of experience in English collocational relationships between amplifiers and adjectives (p.14). E-J Lee (2006) conducted a similar study with 202 second-year university students' essays. Although this study reported overuse of amplifier amongst Korean learners compared to NE, its analysis nevertheless agreed upon S Lee's (2006) study findings in terms of a significant overuse of *very* and *really*. E-J Lee (2006) suggested several possible reasons for the overuse pattern, such as frequent appearance of *very* and *really* in EFL textbooks (i.e., Kim, 2002; Kwon, 2002) and L1 influence. This potential L1 influence will be further discussed in later parts.

## 2. Semantic Prosody

Along with amplifiers, another fundamental concept for the present study is semantic prosody. Semantic prosody refers to speaker or writers' attitude towards an entity (Hunston & Thompson, 2000). Previous studies (Louw, 1993, 2000; Partington, 2004; Sinclair, 1991, 1996) found that semantic prosody has three integral nature: evaluative, collocational, and unconscious.

Semantic prosody has evaluative characteristics since it entails attitudinal connotation of lexicon, which is evaluative by nature, categorization of semantic prosody goes threefold: positive, negative and neutral (Partington, 2004; Stubbs, 1995). This reflects speakers' feeling of either approving or disapproving the topic (Sinclair, 1996). Positive semantic prosodies are further divided into either pleasant or favorable prosody, whereas negative semantic prosodies are further divided into either unpleasant or unfavorable prosody. It is also collocational by nature, since semantic prosody arises due to the combination of words with two different kinds of part of speech (i.e., adjective+ adverb, verb+ adverb). It is related to the lexical tendency that Sinclair (1991) denoted, a tendency of words or phrases to appear under certain semantic climate (p.121). Lastly, semantic prosody has unconscious nature. Zhang (2009) pointed out that "semantic prosody does not belong to speakers' conscious knowledge of a language" (p.3), meaning that semantic prosody is a phenomenon that speakers/writers themselves are not easily aware of, since it appears not as a product of conscious cognitive thought process (Channell,2000; Louw, 1993; Marcinkeviciene, 2000). Hence, only can be uncovered by investigating speaker/ writers' language use from large pool or dataset, such as corpora.

Several semantic studies conducted in 1990s were about monolingual corpus study, which studied NEs' language use. For example, Stubbs (1995) analyzed the semantic prosody of the word *cause* is negatively associated with nouns like *cancer*, *crisis*, *delay*, and *damage*. Semantic prosody study later was extended to interlinguistic direction (S Lee, 2011; Lu, 2005; Spiepmann, 2005; Tao, 2007; Wang & Wang, 2005; Wei, 2006), which explored the characteristics of semantic prosody in ESL/EFL learners' interlanguage through contrastive analysis. These studies found that NE and ESL/EFL learners associate some terms with different semantic prosody. For instance, Lu (2005) found that although *gain* is perceived positively and *obtain* is perceived negatively for NE, EFL Chinese speakers entitled neutral semantic prosody to both words. Overall, semantic prosody is used to describe negative feelings more often (Louw, 2000), than positive or neutral tones.

Although initial semantic prosody studies mostly covered verb, corpora-based studies about semantic prosodies have attempted to identify some patterns of semantic

prosody in conjunction and amplifier collocation since early 2000s. According to previous studies, negative prosody was displayed with use of amplifiers like *extremely*, *heavily*, and *utterly* (Louw, 1993; Kennedy, 2003) as they were paired up with adjectives like *difficult* or *biased* (i.e., *extremely difficult*, *heavily biased*). Positive prosody was displayed with use of amplifiers like *absolutely*, *highly*, *greatly* (Kennedy, 2003; Tao, 2007) as they paired up with adjectives like *appreciated*, *acclaimed*, and *delighted* (i.e., *absolutely delighted*, *greatly appreciated*, *highly acclaimed*). Nevertheless, semantic prosody of amplifiers is still a relatively understudied area.

To my knowledge, no study has thoroughly investigated Korean learners' English amplifier semantic prosody usage pattern except S Lee (2011); it compared Korean-NE writers' use of semantic prosody in amplifier collocations. The study did so through investigating university students' sentence writings and example sentences in five bilingual English-Korean dictionaries simultaneously. This study analyzed Korean EFL college students' essay writings, with the prior focus on eight lexical items: *cause*, *incur*, *bring about*, *fully*, *utterly*, *persist*, *persistent*, *be bent on*. This study found that collocation involving amplifier *fully* and *utterly* are predominantly used positively (64.7%), with words like *fully booked*, *fully understand*, *utterly agree*, *utterly believe*, and *utterly a responsibility*. This finding, however, did not match the dominant NE writers' use. For instance, Kennedy (2003) and Louw (2000) found that *utterly* was mostly collocated with negative words like *destroy*, *fail*, and *useless*. This contrasting finding signaled Korean learners' misuse of *fully* and *utterly* collocations in their writings. This study implied that L1 Korean writers did not seem to differentiate the connotation when using these terms. To learners, their uses seemed interchangeable because they share same part of speech. These findings seem to demonstrate Korean learners' limited collocational competence in amplifier collocation.

### 3. The Present study

Previous studies on amplifiers and semantic prosody of EFL Korean learners of English found that compared to NEs who use various amplifiers after considering various semantic and syntactic factors, Korean learners tend to stick to their lexical teddy bear and use them in most cases to modify adjectives or verbs. Moreover, frequent cases of semantic prosody misuse were observed. Such NE-Korean learner use discrepancy in amplifier implied that some combination of amplifier collocation that English language learners make may not sound semantically appropriate (i.e., *heavily unique*, *deeply excellent*, *severely amazing*) to NEs, highlighting the importance of having right semantic knowledge about using amplifier collocation.

To my knowledge, however, semantic prosody regarding to Korean learners'

amplifier use is still a relatively understudied area. Most studies about Korean learners' amplifier use simply delineated type and token numbers, and some underuse or overuse patterns. Also, semantic prosody studies about amplifiers majorly considered verbs, and amplifiers are still left largely unknown. This much finding does not provide sufficient evidence or big enough picture to finalize that EFL Koreans have little understanding of semantic prosody associated with English amplifiers. Previous study findings also provide rather weak ground to make generalization about Korean learners' misuse of semantic prosody. In other words, previous studies on semantic prosody is missing empirical evidence on semantic prosody for relatively often used words like *really* or *very*.

In order to address this issue, the present study conducted contrastive analysis on usage trends of semantic prosody that amplifier collocations entail through comparing EFL Korean and NE corpora. This study also focused solely on investigating Korean learners' semantic prosody of amplifiers, instead of investigating the semantic prosody of various parts of speech simultaneously. In doing so, the present study attempted to provide empirical evidence for more variety of amplifiers than previous studies. The current study hopes to extend from previous amplifier collocations and semantic prosody studies on this end. Following two questions are addressed in the study.

- (1) What is the overall frequency in the analysis of amplifiers in Korean EFL learners' corpora?
- (2) How are amplifier collocations used in Korean university EFL students' academic writing in terms of semantic prosody?

### **III. Method**

#### **1. Corpora**

The present study used two sets of corpora, the EFL learner corpus and the native speaker of English (NE) corpus. The EFL learner corpus is a collection of college essays written by Korean learners of English, and the English native speaker corpus is a collection of college essays written by NE. Yonsei English Learner Corpus (YELC, 2018) is used as a collection of EFL Korean interlanguage sample. YELC is comprised of 3268 Korean undergraduate freshmen's English diagnostic essay, 1,085,879 words of academic essays including argumentative and narrative genre. The word token for each essay revolves around 300 words. NE corpus, which served as reference corpus for the present study is Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays (LOCNESS), which is a reference corpus in the ICLE (International Corpus of Learner English) Project (Granger,

1998). It is comprised of 324,304 words of British and American college students' academic argumentative essays (LOCNESS, 2018). The word token for each essay is about 500 words.

Both corpora contained argumentative and narrative essays of mostly university students. Two corpora were chosen because they were thought to be comparable, as they are one of the largest scale corpora which are easily accessible to the public. Such big pool of data was reckoned to be a good starting point to the present preliminary study to integrate semantic prosody framework with existing amplifier collocation analysis. It was perceived to be good starting point for this line of study, to investigate the overall trend of findings with existing corpora first and plan follow-up studies by compiling corpus, with clearer idea of data collection and coding. Another point that raises two corpora's comparability is that both corpora mostly entail writing sample of first year university students that was written under timely condition (i.e., 30 minutes). In addition, argumentative writings in two corpora mutually shared several themes in essay topics like animal testing, juvenile discipline (i.e., corporal punishment in classroom, premarital sex, early age drinking), substance use (i.e., smoking, marijuana legalization), and socially controversial issues (i.e., abortion, gun control, military service). Although specific essay topics varied according to the social context of each country, the topics could be grouped into similar themes as mentioned above, which can be argued that the vocabulary that students may have chosen during writing could have been similar. Table 1 below shows more comprehensive list of essay topics from each corpus.

**TABLE 1.**

List of essay topics for two corpora

YELC	LOCNESS
Animal testing	Animal testing
Public smoking	Marijuana legalization
Corporal punishment in classroom	Teachers deserve recognition and reward
Using cellphone while driving	Rules and regulation
Military service	Gun control
Using real names on the internet	Capital punishment
Person you admire the most	Early age drinking
Travelling	Premarital sex
Favorite extracurricular activity	Transportation
	Gender roles and Feminism
	Abortion
	Lottery

Overlap in topics raise the likelihood of guarantee some topic relevant terms to be

used, which enables the present study to observe the occurrence of amplifier collocation in similar contexts. Some issues about variable written genre and writers' demographics, nevertheless, may have had some influence in analysis. This issue will be discussed more extensively in later part of the present study.

## 2. Procedure

The present study was comprised of two data analyzing steps; overall amplifier token counting, and semantic prosody token counting. *Wordsmith Tools* version 5 was used to search and sort the concordance lines with relevant features. As a result, the total number of concordance tokens reviewed and analyzed for semantic prosody coding were 1714 tokens; 897 tokens from YELC and 817 token from LOCNESS.

In order to investigate the difference in the amplifier collocations between EFL Korean learners and NEs, two aspects of corpora were calculated and later compared. First aspect was the number of types and tokens of amplifiers in the two corpora, which represented the overall frequency of amplifier occurrence. Another aspect was tokens of individual amplifiers, which represented the occurrence pattern of different amplifiers. This analysis allowed to find out most frequently used amplifiers from each group, and certain overuse or underuse of some amplifiers. During the first step, overall amplifier collocation use frequency analysis, all types of amplifiers found from YELC and LOCNESS were identified while counting tokens. As a result, 17 types of amplifiers were found from YELC and 19 types of amplifiers were found from LOCNESS. Table 3 below is the visual representation of this initial step. However, the later analysis process focused on 10 amplifiers. They are as follows: *really, very, particularly, extremely, highly, deeply, absolutely, severely, completely, greatly*. Such decision was made because they were mentioned and studied in previous corpora-based studies on amplifiers and semantic prosodies (i.e., Kennedy, 2003; E-J Lee, 2006; S Lee, 2006; S Lee, 2011; Partington, 2004; Zhang, 2009), and found to have some meaningful insights to reflect EFL Koreans' use of amplifier collocation. Hence, the present study chose to focus on these features, which would enable to broaden and deepen the understanding of these amplifiers. Table 4 to 7 are the visual representation of these later analysis steps.

After comparing overall and individual amplifier frequency of two corpora, semantic prosody of each concordance line was coded. In order to carry out this coding process, concordance lines were transferred to *Microsoft Excel* spreadsheets. Afterwards, each token's semantic prosody was coded based on Partington's (2004) categorization scheme. The scheme comprised of three categories; positive, negative, and neutral. Samples of semantic prosody coding is given in table 2 below.

**TABLE 2.**  
Example of semantic prosody coding

Corpora	Concordance lines	Semantic prosody
YELC	Japan has beautiful scenes and <b>very nice</b> city.	Pos (+)
YELC	I think it was <b>extremely wrong</b> to pass the law.	Neg (-)
YELC	It could damage the other people <b>particularly pregnant</b> women.	Neu (0)

As shown in table 2, concordance lines were tagged either [Pos (+)] or [Neg (-)] when intensifier collocation conveyed is perceived to be either positive or negative messages. For instance, *very nice* depicted positive impression about Japanese city that the writer visited so it was coded positive. However, when collocated form had no specific nuances and connected to modify certain qualities instead, neutral under [Neu (0)] sign was assigned. Semantic prosody coding was done by the researcher of present study, a college-level English instructor with ten years of teaching experience, who also lived and studied abroad in NE background for thirteen years.

## IV. Results and Discussion

### 1. RQ 1: Overall Frequencies of Amplifier Use

The present study first looks at the result from the comparison of the number of types and tokens of amplifying adverbs between the EFL Korean learners and NEs. Table 3 indicates the frequencies of amplifiers in the corpora. Since two corpora have different sizes, number of tokens per 10,000 words were calculated as well as tokens, types, and type-token ratio. Number of tokens per 10,000 words is the actual number that is used to compare and determine amplifier overuse/underuse.

**TABLE 3.**  
Frequencies of amplifiers in the corpora

	YELC (EFL Korean)	LOCNESS (NE)
Tokens	897	817
Tokens/ 10,000 corpus words	8.26	25.19
Types	17	19
Type-token ratio	1.9	2.33

As shown in table 3, EFL Koreans' amplifier frequency was 8.26 tokens per 10,000 words, which was around only one third of NEs' frequency of 25.19 tokens per 10,000

words. The number indicates that EFL Koreans use amplifiers less frequently than NEs. This study finding is in line with S Lee's (2006) previous study, which also found relative underuse of amplifiers among Korean learners (i.e., 10.67 Korean learners VS 11.43 NE token per 10,000 words) when *very* was not part of the study. In terms of the number of amplifier types, the present finding contrasted with several studies (E-J Lee, 2004; E-J Lee, 2006; S Lee, 2006) about the type of amplifiers used in Korean learners' essays. Although many studies found limited number of repertoire, this study found that Korean learners used type of amplifiers as diverse as NE writers. This finding corresponds to Y-Y Park's (2013) study on Korean learners' use of conjunctive adverbials.

Table 4 and 5 represent the frequency distribution of top seven amplifiers, as they occurred in YELC and LOCNESS respectively. For YELC, there are actually eight amplifiers in the list, since two amplifiers evenly occurred in concordances. As shown in table 4 and 5, seven most frequently occurred amplifiers in Korean learners' essay is *very*, *really*, *extremely*, *deeply*, *absolutely*, *highly*, *severely*, and *greatly*, while seven most frequently occurred amplifiers in NE essay is *really*, *greatly*, *very*, *highly*, *completely*, *extremely*, and *particularly*. *Very* is the most frequently used amplifier, which takes more than half (i.e., 57.41%) of entire amplifier tokens. This pattern does not correspond to NE's use of *very* amplifier, which took only 6.49% of entire amplifier tokens. Also, in terms of token per 10,000 words, *very* is used almost 4 times as much by Koreans than NEs (4.74 Koreans VS 1.63 NE token per 10,000 words).

**TABLE 4.**

Seven most frequent amplifiers for Korean learners (YELC)

Rank order	Amplifiers	YELC Tokens	YELC Tokens/10,000 words	% (Tokens/ 897)
1	Very	515	4.74	57.41
2	Really	123	1.13	13.71
3	Extremely	50	0.46	5.57
4	Deeply	47	0.43	5.24
5	Absolutely	42	0.39	4.68
5	Highly	42	0.39	4.68
6	Severely	22	0.20	2.45
7	Greatly	16	0.15	1.78

**TABLE 5.**  
Seven most frequent amplifiers for NEs (LOCNESS)

Rank order	Amplifiers	LOCNESS Tokens	LOCNESS Tokens/ 10,000 words	% (Tokens/817)
1	Really	101	3.11	12.36
2	Greatly	55	1.70	6.73
3	Very	53	1.63	6.49
4	Highly	42	1.30	5.14
5	Completely	34	1.05	4.16
6	Extremely	32	0.99	3.92
7	Particularly	21	0.65	2.57

It suggests that *very* functions as all-arounder for Korean EFL writers, just like *really* in S Lee's (2006) study. *Really* comes after *very*, taking up 13.71% of occurrence in Korean corpus. *Really* took 12.36% of NE amplifier token, which made approximately three times more token (3.11) than that of Koreans (1.13). Other than these two, none of other six amplifiers took more than seven percent of tokens in either corpora. This finding implies that Korean learners of English have smaller pool of amplifier tools and tend to stick to all-around amplifiers and repeat them over (E-J Lee, 2006; S Lee, 2006). This may be attributed to lexical teddy bear tendency - learners' inclination to stick to familiar expression and use it as all-rounder, instead of exploiting various expressions to describe the phenomenon.

Lastly, amplifiers that is ranked top seven in Korean corpus but not in NE corpus are *deeply*, *absolutely*, and *severely*. In the meantime, amplifiers that ranked top seven in NE corpus but not in Korean corpus are *completely*, and *particularly*. This indicates that two corpora showed differences in frequency distribution, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Frequency and ranking for previously mentioned amplifiers other than *really* and *very* hardly had any common or consistent finding with other previous studies. The rankings, percentage of tokens, or even the amplifiers on the rank all varied. Although that could account for some individual variation of Korean learners that each corpus collected, it also partially demonstrates how there's no fixed pattern for amplifier use. The fact that there's no set rule adds weight to earlier discussion about over reliance tendency on *very* and *really*.

One possible reason accounting for this tendency is that *very* and *really* are vocabularies that are easy by nature, which are easily learnt during the earlier stage of L2 English acquisition. Another possible reason is varying degree of L1 transferability of lexical items. While *really* and *very* have directly transferrable Korean word substitute *maewoo* and *cengmal* (E-J Lee, 2006, p.13), most other amplifiers do not have direct

substitute as such. For instance, S Lee (2011) found that four out of six English-Korean bilingual dictionaries he investigated translated amplifier *utterly* as *wanjeonhee*, or *jeonjukuro* (p.262). Although these translations are accurate description of *utterly*, they also can be translation of other amplifiers on the list, such as *absolutely*, or *completely*. While most EFL Korean learners of English associate and write *very* to express their Korean thought of *maewoo*, those who want to express their Korean thought of *wanjeonhee* into English may use one of three possible and seemingly interchangeable amplifiers: *utterly*, *absolutely*, and *completely*. So it may lead to less frequent occurrence of these amplifiers.

## 2. RQ 2: Semantic prosody use in amplifier collocation

Table 6 shows the distribution pattern of semantic prosody for eight most frequent amplifiers from EFL Korean learners of English. Bolded numbers for each amplifier represent the most dominant semantic prosody that Korean learners associated each amplifier with. Overall, four of amplifiers are associated more with positive tone, and four of them with negative tone. None of them is dominantly associated with neutral tone. However, that trend was not shown in NEs' data. As shown in table 7 below, NE writers did not predominately associate positive tone with any of those eight amplifiers. The most predominant tone they used was neutral tone (5 amplifiers).

**TABLE 6.**  
Semantic prosody distribution for Korean learners (YELC)

Amplifiers	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total frequency
Very	<b>235 (45.63%)</b>	108 (20.97%)	171 (33.20%)	515
Really	<b>70 (56.91%)</b>	33 (26.83%)	20 (16.26%)	123
Extremely	15 (30%)	10 (20%)	<b>25 (50%)</b>	50
Deeply	<b>23 (48.94%)</b>	20 (42.55%)	4 (8.51%)	47
Absolutely	15 (35.71 %)	6 (14.29%)	<b>21 (50%)</b>	42
Highly	<b>24 (57.14%)</b>	10 (23.81%)	8 (19.05%)	42
Severely	0 (0%)	3 (13.64%)	<b>19 (86.36%)</b>	22
Greatly	3 (18.75%)	3 (18.75%)	<b>10 (62.50%)</b>	16

**TABLE 7.**  
Semantic prosody distribution for NEs (LOCNESS)

Amplifiers	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total frequency
Very	13 (24.50 %)	15 (28.30 %)	<b>25 (47.17 %)</b>	53
Really	18 (17.82 %)	<b>41 (40.59 %)</b>	38 (37.62 %)	101
Extremely	9 (28.13 %)	<b>17 (53.13 %)</b>	6 (18.76 %)	32
Deeply	2 (22.22 %)	<b>6 (66.67 %)</b>	1 (11.11 %)	9
Absolutely	1 (16.67 %)	2 (33.33 %)	<b>3 (50 %)</b>	6
Highly	16 (39.02 %)	6 (14.63 %)	<b>19 (46.34 %)</b>	41
Severely	0	0	<b>7 (100 %)</b>	7
Greatly	19 (36.54 %)	8 (15.38 %)	<b>25 (48.08 %)</b>	52

*Deeply*, however, showed similar use for positive and neutral (23 % VS 20 %), meaning that EFL Koreans used this amplifier to convey value-free context, as much as positive context. But except for this case, EFL Koreans tended to use amplifiers to denote either approval or disapproval of collocates. This overall distribution pattern is interesting because it counters Louw's (2000) claim about negative semantic prosodies occur much more frequently than positive or neutral. Considering that Louw's study was on semantic prosody of monolingual L1 English speakers, this contrasting finding can be additional empirical evidence for EFL Korean users' misuse of semantic prosody.

As shown in table 6 above, amplifiers associated with dominantly positive connotation were *very*, *really*, and *highly*. Examples of amplifier collocations with positive semantic prosody are as below in table 8. As they represent, adjectives that Koreans collocated positively with were words that describes positive quality of an entity such as *interesting*, *beautiful*, *progressed*, *educated*. Verbs they associated were verbs like *impressed*, *loved*, and *appreciate*, which are related to respecting gestures towards other entity.

**TABLE 8.**  
Examples of amplifier collocations with positive semantic prosody

NE	Korean
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• His audience was an attribute that he found <i>very</i> <b>powerful</b> and <b>positive</b> (+)</li> <li>• This is when I <i>really</i> <b>appreciate</b> my ATM card (+)</li> <li>• This idea is <i>extremely</i> <b>beneficial</b> to married couples (+)</li> <li>• He is <i>deeply</i> <b>moved</b> by the thought (+)</li> <li>• Society has never actually compared teachers to <i>highly</i> <b>respected</b> futures in our society (+)</li> <li>• Martin <b>contributes</b> <i>greatly</i> to Candide's education of society... (+)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each of these contents are <i>very</i> <b>interesting</b>. (+)</li> <li>• He had passion in his job and <i>really</i> <b>loved</b> it. (+)</li> <li>• So I <i>really</i> <b>appreciate</b> that point. (+)</li> <li>• The food was <i>extremely</i> <b>delicious</b> (+)</li> <li>• They can <b>think</b> more <i>deeply</i> because of the experience in army. (+)</li> <li>• I <i>absolutely</i> <b>agree</b> with the physical punishment (+)</li> <li>• And find the ways to use <i>highly</i> <b>educated</b> and professional young man (+)</li> <li>• China's international power has been <i>greatly</i> <b>improved</b> (+)</li> </ul>

Amplifiers associated with dominantly negative connotation were *extremely*, *absolutely*, *severely*, and *greatly*. Examples of amplifier collocations with negative semantic prosody are shown as below in table 9. As shown in examples, adjectives that Koreans collocated positively with were words that describes negative quality of an entity that is mostly related with jeopardization of security like *violent*, *harmful*, *dangerous*, *painful*. Verbs they associated were verbs *disagree*, *banned*, *punished*, *damage*, which were related to qualities like disapproval or violent actions.

**TABLE 9.**  
Comparison of amplifier collocations with negative semantic prosody

NE	Korean
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The British will find it <i>very</i> <b>difficult</b> to take orders from other government (-)</li> <li>• He realizes he <b>did not</b> <i>really</i> <b>care</b> for these people (-)</li> <li>• British politicians on the European issue appears <i>extremely</i> <b>ambiguous</b>. (-)</li> <li>• As far as the health risk goes, they are <i>absolutely</i> <b>wrong</b>. (-)</li> <li>• Whilst the idea of killing an innocent child is <i>highly</i> <b>unpleasant</b>... (-)</li> <li>• But continual hitting can <i>severely</i> <b>damage</b> the brain (-)</li> <li>• Sex in the media is <i>greatly</i> <b>overrated</b> these days. (-)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is not useful to those of <i>extremely</i> <b>violent</b> students. (-)</li> <li>• Of course smoking a lot of ciga is <i>extremely</i> <b>harmful</b>. (-)</li> <li>• I <i>absolutely</i> <b>disagree</b> with the animal testing. (-)</li> <li>• That kind of action should be <b>banned</b> <i>absolutely</i>. (-)</li> <li>• Animal harassment is <i>severely</i> <b>punished</b> and strictly prohibited. (-)</li> <li>• Student can <b>hurt</b> their body <i>severely</i>. (-)</li> <li>• It <i>severely</i> <b>damages</b> the idea of democracy. (-)</li> <li>• Animals that are used in medical experiments become <i>greatly</i> <b>painful</b> (-)</li> <li>• Speaking on the phone in the car is <i>greatly</i> <b>dangerous</b> (-)</li> </ul>

Table 6 and 7 above represent the result of contrast analysis between EFL Korean learners and NEs. The overall result show that there is a great mismatch between the semantic prosody that Koreans associate with and the semantic prosody that NEs associate with. For instance, NEs dominantly used five amplifiers (i.e., *very*, *extremely*, *deeply*, *highly*, *greatly*) to set neutral tone in collocates while Koreans used them mostly to set positive (i.e., *very*, *deeply*, *highly*) or negative (i.e., *extremely*, *greatly*). As shown, NEs used amplifiers for neutral tones, while Koreans used amplifiers to signal either positive or negative. These discrepancies imply that Korean learners have limited understanding of semantic prosody, and use them with the studied, forced pattern. As a result of that, they may face miscommunication risen from lack of semantic competence (Wang & Wang, 2005; Wei, 2006).

As seen in table 9 above, the only amplifier that Koreans and NEs used amplifier to signal same semantic prosody dominantly was *severely* (negative). For both groups, *severely* was collocated with negative verbs like *scold*, *punish*, or *hurt* for Koreans, and *shaken*, *attacked*, *damage* by NEs. All of these words are associated with qualities and one individual or party is being harshly treated, and even physically attacked, by other individual or party. Findings in this study show that the context that Korean learners and NEs associate with are almost the same, leading to a match in semantic prosody use in academic writing. Another matching case was *absolutely*. When Korean learners collocated *absolutely* with negative verbs like *disagree*, *ban*, *not allowed*, *forbidden*, NEs collocated it with adjectives like *unacceptable*, *ridiculous*, or *wrong*. Interesting observation made is that while Koreans seem to associate *absolutely* with the quality of disapproval, NEs used it for evaluative quality. In short, while Koreans and NEs both associated it with negative context, the specific context they associated it with was slightly different.

On the last note, it is important nevertheless to note that none of the amplifiers is associated with single semantic prosody. Taking *greatly reduced* as an example, even though it is the same expression, this collocate can pertain negative, positive, or neutral meaning, depending on the context of phrase or sentences. Such insight somehow provides solutions to fix learner errors that are associated with semantic awkwardness; the ones that EFL Korean learners of the present study has made with *highly* collocations. Semantic mistakes like *\*highly attractive* can only be fixed if learners mistakes imply that learners have to be exposed to various possibilities of sentence combinations with varying semantic prosody, in order to produce texts flexibly. Limited contact hours with limited variety of English inputs may not be the solution to this learner problem.

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## V. Conclusion

The purpose of present study was to find patterns of amplifiers use in EFL Korean university students, both in terms of overall amplifier collocation use frequency, and also in terms of semantic prosody associated with those amplifiers. Results from analysis found Korean learners' overall underuse in amplifiers. Amplifiers with top seven frequency were *very*, *really*, *extremely*, *deeply*, *absolutely*, *highly*, *severely*, and *greatly*. These ranks are different from that of NEs. Out of those, *very* took half of total amplifier tokens, demonstrating its all-rounder use among Korean learners. In terms of semantic prosody analysis, amplifiers associated with dominantly positive connotation were *very*, *really*, and *highly*. Amplifiers associated with dominantly negative connotation were *extremely*, *absolutely*, *severely*, and *greatly*. Contrast analysis showed that the only amplifier that Koreans and NEs used amplifier to signal same semantic prosody dominantly was *severely* (negative). Other than that, Koreans and NE showed salient discrepancies in semantic prosody use. Especially when NEs used amplifiers for neutral tones, Koreans used amplifiers to signal either positive or negative semantic prosody.

Such findings give two pedagogical implication. The first is the need to make vocabulary learning data-driven, in order to enhance EFL Korean language learners' collocational competence. As it is already emphasized in other studies (Hunston, 2002; Kennedy, 2003; Zhang, 2009), the need to use data-driven and corpora-based teaching material in EFL writing class seems greatly necessary. It will help to situate amplifiers in real-life context to students, and "restructure learners' collocational competence" (S Lee, 2006, p. 3). Learners can only expand their repertoire through exposure and usage of various degree adverbial in many circumstances. In other words, accumulated experience and continuous exposure to inputs under various circumstances may help English language learners to effectively pick up and exploit probabilistic knowledge about semantic prosody of amplifier collocates (Bybee & Hopper, 2001; Kennedy, 2003).

Another pedagogical implication is the need for teacher training. Several studies (Wang & Wang, 2005; Wei, 2006; Zhang, 2009) agreed that let alone learners, many ESL/EFL instructors themselves may be unaware of the concept and significance of semantic prosody (Zhang, 2009) and certain propensity seem to be shown amongst EFL teachers in Korean (S Lee, 2011). This may be the main reason why L2 vocabulary instructions focused solely on explaining 'dictionary definition' of single lexical items. This study brings attention to amplifier collocations and the possible implicit nuances that the words could deliver to the intended audience (i.e., reader, listener). Indeed, amplifying adverbs are used to further describe the specific characteristics of entities or phenomenon by setting the evaluative tone of verbs or adjectives. If learners of English are more aware of those amplifier uses, their utterances or written accounts would

achieve higher level of communication, with greater command in that language. Hence, I believe that it's important to raise teachers' awareness first about the role of semantic prosody in language communication and make them recognize the need to include these in part of their lessons.

The present study, to my knowledge, is one of the first studies on Korean EFL learners' semantic prosody use that focused solely on amplifier collocation. The possible contribution that the present study may have made is that it provided empirical evidence about semantic prosody that Korean learners' mostly associate with *really* and *very*, which are amplifiers that is found to be overused amongst Korean learners. Considering that investigation of amplifiers was done very limitedly with smaller pool of corpora, addition of present study's finding certainly is a worthwhile extension.

However, the present study had some limitations that future study may need to address. One lies beneath the genre of two corpora. Although Korean learner and NE corpora both dealt with argumentative writing of university students, some of essays in YELC also included narrative writing and some of essays LOCNESS included argumentative paper from British A level exam. The present study admits the possibility that such factor may have affected the analysis to some degree. Further study should be stricter in controlling the genre, or include both descriptive and argumentative writing, in order to cover much wider scope of undergraduate level writing. Another suggestion for future semantic prosody study is to have second rater to code semantic prosody. The work of two raters and their calibration will definitely raise the reliability of semantic prosody coding.

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Received on 1 May 2018

Reviewed on 15 May 2018.

Revised version received on 6 June 2018

Accepted on 10 June 2018