Positive Appraisals Through English Intensifiers in Café Reviews: A Corpus-Based Study

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This study aims to analyze positive remarks linguistically manifested through English intensifiers, i.e. *very* and *so*, and their collocates in café reviews. The appraisal framework primarily focuses on the feelings or attitudes of speakers or writers. It plays a part in providing communicative resources whereby speech functions are performed subjectively, hence indicating involvement with entities that individuals experience. To understand intensifiers and positive remarks, the appraisal framework comes into play. Previous studies also suggest that intensifiers typically raise degrees of emotivity and evaluation. However, implementing a corpus method to this aspect, especially in such a popular genre as food reviews, should receive more attention. The online reviews of cafés in Chiang Mai, Thailand, from Tripadvisor.com were collected and then analyzed with the aid of a software program called AntConc 3.5.8.0 for Windows (64-bit). The results involve syntactic realizations as well as linguistic behaviors of *very* and *so*, along with semantico-pragmatic viewpoints of the English intensifiers in carrying positive attitudinal stances towards the cafés. The two intensifiers which are subsumed under the umbrella of GRADUATION are employed to intensify the review writers' feelings or emotions, together with the desirable qualities of owners or staff; food and drinks; prices of food, drinks, and services; and decoration and atmosphere. In this regard, it works with ATTITUDE including AFFECT, JUDGEMENT, and APPRECIATION to increase the volume of positive remarks. This pragmatically reflects a high degree of involvement. Additionally, there are some observations on the metaphorical nature of expressing positive remarks in the review language. The study also provides pedagogical implications on corpus methods in English Language Teaching, i.e. identifying common language patterns, encouraging language learners' exposure to real language data, providing valuable sources for language descriptions (e.g. nature of opinions), and using concordance as a crucial tool for text and genre analysis.

Keywords: appraisal, positive remarks, English intensifiers, café reviews

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1 Introduction

Intensification is defined as a linguistic process that scales upwards or downwards a force of an utterance (Bolinger, 1972; Quirk & Greenbaum, 1980). Partington (1993) regards it as "a direct indication of a speaker's desire to use and exploit the expression of hyperbole as a vehicle for impressing, praising, persuading, insulting, and generally influencing the listener's reception of the message" (p. 178). This is related to assessment of intensity degree of certain qualities or processes in appraisal framework (Martin & White, 2005). Intensification is linguistically manifested into a number of intensifiers which can collocate with gradable or non-gradable units (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik, 1985). So, they attenuate a variable quality in the element to which they apply, i.e. adjectives, adverbs, verbs, or even nouns (Paradis, 1997, p. 41). Previous studies also claim that intensifiers convey a speaker's feeling or attitude towards a particular entity (Caffi & Janney, 1994; Jing-Schmidt, 2005; Labov, 1984; Poonlarp, 2009), either positive or negative connotations, based on the degree of intensity that deviates from a neutral state (Bradac, Bowers, & Courtright, 1979, as cited in Pintarić & Frleta, 2014).

Nowadays, users and/or reviewers of products and services employ intensifiers as a means to draw attention to online platform audience, resulting in their higher emotional effects, decision-making and purchasing intentions. This can be exemplified from using adjectives, e.g. *attractive* and *mellow* as in *attractive, mellow aromas of coffee beans*; degree adverbs, e.g. *very* as in *very tasty food, delivered on time by caring staff too*; and superlative adjectives as in *the most high-tech car ever*. Ricci and Wietsma (2006) define reviews as subjective pieces of a text where people provide their knowledge of certain products or services, experiences and opinions after using them, and of course, ratings. The review is also influential, easily accessible, and to some extent, trustworthy enough among travelers. A number of previous studies work on linguistic analysis of reviews (Cenni & Goethals, 2017; Ekiz, 2012; Pupipat, 2018). In this research study, however, the problem can be raised regarding how intensifiers, i.e. degree adverbs, are implemented in review writing. That is, although there are several ways to intensify the quality of things in review language, it is noticeable that degree adverbs are used pervasively. This is because expressing a degree or intensity is a mark of social/interpersonal involvement and emotional information towards linguistic expressions (Labov, 1984).

The study aims to analyze positive appraisals from the English intensifiers employed in café reviews. The research question is: what are positive appraisals from the English intensifiers, *very* and *so*, employed in café reviews? The reason behind choosing the café reviews in Chiang Mai is that this province, located in the northern region of Thailand, is famous for a long history and spectacular attractions, hence well-known among visitors or

foreigners. This province is regarded as a city of coffee due to a place of coffee brews. It is "one of the world coffee culture capitals" (Tanitnon, 2015, as cited in Siri, 2018, p. 201). There are also a large number of global brand and local brand cafés with a wide range of coffee products and cuisines, and many people often check-in via social media networking to give some feelings or comments during their journey. So, this business has been highly competitive in Chiang Mai or even in the whole country (Rodsuwan, 2011). Additionally, the reason behind the selection of *very* and *so* is that these two intensifiers have been widely used in several contexts, particularly in expressing emotions or feelings. As reviews are considered as an expressive text, the use of such intensifiers is worth studying and is assumed to yield a number of linguistic expressions of positive appraisals. The other reason relies on the fact that they are prominent in both speech and written texts found in British and American English (Poonlarp, 2009).

2 Literature Review

2.1 Intensifiers

Quirk et al. (1985) point out that intensifiers are mostly deemed as degree adverbs. There are two major categories of intensifiers: amplifiers and downtoners. Both suggest a point on an intangibly perceived intensity scale, i.e. a relatively high for the former or a relatively low scale for the latter. That is, amplifiers scale upwards in terms of high degree of intensity, and they are further categorized into maximizers (e.g. *completely*, *absolutely*, and *extremely*) and boosters (e.g. *very*, *so*, *greatly*, *really*, and *terribly*). King (2016) also adds excessivizers (e.g. *overly*) as a category of amplifiers with regard to an image schema approach. On the other hand, downtoners function in an opposite manner to the amplifiers, and they include approximators (e.g. *almost* and *nearly*), compromizers (e.g. *quite*, *sort of*, and *kind of*), diminishers (e.g. *slightly*, *partially*, and *just*), and minimizers (e.g. *barely*, *little*, *a bit*, and *at all*).

In addition, intensification is regarded as metaphorical by nature. When individuals experience a thing, this may be talked about in terms of quantity or intensity, i.e. more or less. The most common tool for intensification is human's bodily experience (Poonlarp, 2009). For example, the word *overly* comes from the semantic domain of CONTAINMENT; that is, the image of liquid spilling over evokes an excessive degree of qualities. The semantic domain for metaphorical language use is commonly represented in small capitals. Another case in point is that metaphorical language can be found in some evaluative words that highlight or emphasize praising remarks, e.g. *amazing* in English and وتشبهممغ مييم (Subhan Allah) "glorified as Allah/God" in Urdu, pertaining to the semantic domain of

MYTHS/SUPERSTITIONS; and 눈이부시다 (noon e boo shi da) "gorgeous" (literally means radiant or dazzling), pertaining to the VISUAL experience and hence used metaphorically to denote a beautiful person in Korean.

2.2 Appraisal framework

As the study puts an emphasis on analyzing positive or praising remarks, appraisal framework comes into play as it deals with evaluative language in a discourse-semantic level which can be manifested through lexical and grammatical units, based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) during 1960s. This appraisal framework is said to offer communicative resources whereby speech functions are performed with subjectivity. In the same manner, it typically reflects involvement with particular entities in which individuals experience. The relationship between SFL and appraisal framework can be illustrated as follow:

Table 1. The Relationship Between SFL and Appraisal Framework

| SFL | | | APPRAISAL | |
| Elements | | | Appraiser | |
Carrier	Process (relational)	Attribute	Appraised	Appraising (positive)
The staff	*is*	*helpful*	*The staff*	*is helpful*

In SFL, on the one hand, the example represents the relational process (i.e. *is* as a copular verb) that involves the carrier (i.e. *The staff*) and the attribute (i.e. *helpful*). For the appraisal framework, on the other hand, it shows the relationship between an appraised (i.e. *The staff*) and an appraising (i.e. *is helpful*) in the viewpoint of an appraiser or a person who appraises. So, this framework deals with how the appraiser, the appraised and the appraising interact and generate meanings in evaluation language.

Using the SFL framework is not the focus of the present study. SFL heavily focuses on the lexico-grammatical level and deals with three main metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal and textual. However, to deal with evaluation language, the appraisal framework tends to be situated in the discourse-semantic level and it primarily focuses on the interpersonal functions. It provides a more complicated but systematic frame to see the structure of evaluation language.

Martin and White (2005) suggests three folds or sub-systems of appraisal including ATTITUDE, ENGAGEMENT, and GRADUATION. The three systems are capitalized as they represent concepts, while linguistic expressions are written in italic, manuscript letters. ATTITUDE involves an individual's feelings and attitudinal stances towards entities. It consists of three subsets: AFFECT, i.e. feelings/emotions as in *my favorite hotel in Bangkok*; JUDGEMENT, i.e. attitudes towards personalities or behaviors as in

the staff was great; and APPRECIATION, i.e. attitudes towards objects, people's appearance, and natural phenomena as in *very nice property, EXCELLENT food, and good location*). These three subsets exhibit either positive or negative polarity, and either inscribed (i.e. stated explicitly) or invoked (i.e. stated implicitly) realizations.

ENGAGEMENT concerns sources of attitudes as interpersonal negotiation; that is, when ones say anything, they put their viewpoint(s) in it (Stubbs, 1996, as cited in Martin & White, 2005). It is related to a dialogistic positioning referred to as "linguistic resources by which speakers/writers adopt a stance towards to the value positions being referenced by the text and with respect to those they address" (Martin & White, 2005, p. 92). Two orientations in terms of discourse include MONOGLOSS and HETEROGLOSS. The first deals with utterances not having references to other voices and not allowing dialogistic perspectives, e.g. *The banks have been greedy*. The latter deals with utterances having reference to other voices and allowing dialogistic perspectives, e.g. *Everyone knows the bank are greedy*. It includes disclamation (e.g. *don't…* or *although…*) and proclamation (e.g. *admittedly…*, *I contend that…* or *X has shown that…*) as dialogistic contraction; and entertainment (e.g. *it seems…* or *perhaps…*) and attribution (e.g. *X said…* or *X claims…*) as dialogistic expansion.

GRADUATION operates in terms of FOCUS as prototypicality or preciseness, and FORCE as intensification and quantification (Martin & White, 2005). FOCUS deals with sharpening or softening an evaluation. Sharpening flags a positive evaluation by means of reflecting prototypicality, e.g. *authentic* as in *the restaurant serves authentic Thai food*, contributing to an effect of "maximal investment" (p. 139) voiced by the speaker or the writer who advances their positive or negative evaluations and thus strongly align the hearer or the reader into such evaluation. Softening is, however, in the opposite manner. It flags a negative evaluation by means of marginality in a vague and hedging language, e.g. *sort (of)* as in *it was an apology of sorts*. It shows an effect of "lessening investment" (p. 139) by mitigating or putting an end to conflict (i.e. acting friendly). FORCE deals with raising or lowering degree of intensity and amount. It can grade qualities, e.g. *very* as in *very greedy*; processes, e.g. *greatly* as in *this greatly improves its appearance*; or verbal modalities, e.g. *just* as in *it's just possible that….* This process is related to intensification. Additionally, it can suggest quantification in terms of number, e.g. *many worries* and measurement, e.g. *nearby mountains*. As the present study focuses on intensifiers, FORCE will be explained in detail through the case of café reviews, along with ATTITUDE, the subsystem that occurs with it.

3 Research Method

3.1 Data

In this study, the data were collected from the reviews of cafés in Chiang Mai from Tripadvisor.com. Social media or travel sites, in general, tend to be an influential online platform that encourages individuals to experience desirable situations or to prevent them from undesirable situations. Established in 2000, tripadvisor.com has altered tourism industry nowadays as its emergence affects habits of consumers, i.e. relying on other people's positive and negative opinions that can help them decide to purchase commercial products and services. In addition, Tripadvisor.com has been regarded as the large travel site where travelers across the globe can search for "more than 760 million reviews and opinions of 8.3 million accommodations, restaurants, experiences, airlines and cruises" based on their own interest (tripadvisor.mediaroom.com/us-about-us).

The analysis was carried out with an aid of a small self-constructed corpus of 44,875 English words in the text document file (.txt). The reason behind implementing the self-constructed corpus was there has not been any language corpus built for specifically investigating the café reviews before. The corpus involved the first 10 reviews of the 4.5 or 5-star cafés and located in Chiang Mai province, Thailand. Since the study focused on positive appraisals, an assumption was that such cafés had received much more positive comments than negative ones. With regard to this, the occurrences of negative comments were also crossed out to ease the analysis. In addition, the selected cafés must have a minimum of 10 reviews. Regarding the period of the data, the collected reviews or comments dated from October 2018 to August 2019, and the corpus was created in September 2019.

3.2 Research tool

The automatic software program implemented in this study was AntConc version 3.5.8.0 for Windows (64-bit) developed by Lawrence Anthony from Waseda University. It is now a freeware corpus analysis device which helps concordance words and analyze texts. The two most common intensifiers including *very* and *so* were concorded to explore the number of tokens of each, along with their collocates. These two intensifiers are considered the most common in British and American English despite some varying preferences in the two varieties (Altenberg, 1991; Biber et al., 1999; Ito & Tagliamonte, 2003; Poonlarp, 2009; Swales & Burke, 2003; Tagliamonte & Roberts, 2005). Another reason for the selection was based on Word List tool in the software. That is, *very* and *so*, by linguistic forms, had occurred more than 100 tokens or concordance hits in the self-constructed corpus. The former was ranked 19th, whereas the latter was ranked 28th in terms of high-

frequency words. The first 30 words ranging from highest to lowest in frequency according to the corpus include: *the, and, a, coffee, to, in, is, I, of, it, for, was, good, place, great, with, we, this, very, you, nice, cafe, are, but, food, on, had, so, they,* and *my*.

Rank	Freq	Word
1	2085	the
2	1927	and
3	1344	a
4	1046	coffee
5	871	to
6	717	in
7	712	is
8	689	i
9	640	of
10	569	it
11	568	for
12	554	was
13	458	good
14	446	place
15	443	great
16	441	with
17	414	we
18	390	this
19	368	very
20	340	you
21	312	nice
22	310	cafe
23	283	are

Figure 1. Word List tool and high-frequency words in AntConc version 3.5.8

3.3 Framework of analysis

The framework of analysis was the appraisal framework proposed by Martin and White (2005) to work on the language of positive remarks. As the study had focused on the selected intensifiers, the analysis also involved how they appeared and functioned to scale up desirable qualities or favorable imports of certain entities.

4 Results

4.1 *Very* and *so* in the corpus

In this study, out of 368 tokens of *very* in the corpus, 348 tokens functioned as the intensifier. Although the rest were the intensifier, they did not convey positive evaluations. There were only 104 out of 242 tokens of *so* functioning as the intensifier. The rest, however, did not perform as the intensifier. This involved a discourse connector suggesting an effect/consequence as in *so +* clause and a purpose as in *so that +* clause; or fixed expressions as in *so-called, so long, so so, so far,* and *(and) so on*. Some did not show positive evaluations as well. Overall, there were 452 tokens of *very* (348 tokens) and *so* (104 tokens) that were employed in the analysis. Below is the example of the word *very* in the concordance.
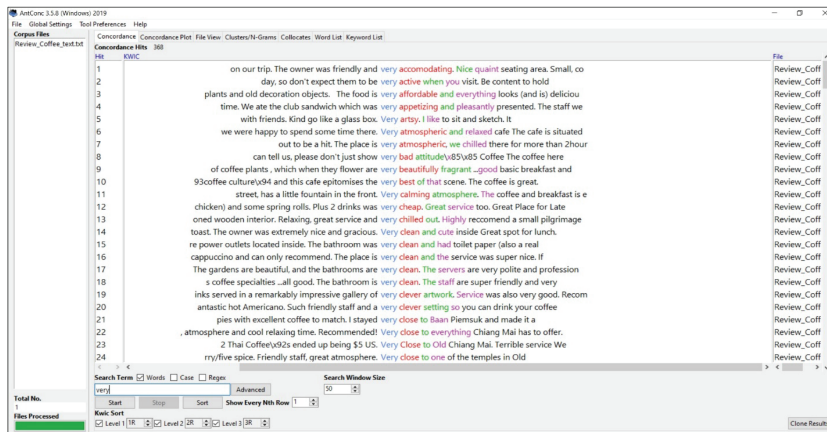
Figure 2. The concordance of the word *very* from AntConc version 3.5.8

Based on the appraisal framework, the intensifiers *very* and *so*, pertaining to the semantic domain of FORCE, was said to be subsumed under the umbrella of GRADUATION. They were also treated as "common devices" in review discourse (Pupipat, 2018, p. 135). These two intensifiers had raised degree of intensity or amount in personal investment through utterances advanced in the café reviews in this study. That is, they operated over upscaling qualities mostly manifested through their occurrences with adjectives. It is also noticeable that *very* and *so* can occur with the adverbial quantifier *much* to upscale verbal processes but in only a few occurrences.

Regarding distribution, these two intensifiers were deemed as an isolating lexeme, i.e. performing as an individual item modifying other words and indicating the intensity level. Such intensifiers were highly conventionalized to modify other adjectives and adverbs and were normally treated as grammatical items due to their existence in closed class category and their lack of referential meaning (Martin & White, 2005). This isolating realization involved pre-modification of adjectives and adverbs to strengthen qualities; and adverbial modification to emphasize verbal processes in the case of *very much* and *so much*. To begin with, the vast majority of *very* functioned as the pre-modification of adjectives in this study as in (1) and (2), while a few were found in pre-modification of adverbs as in (3). As regards upscaling the verbal process through adverbial modification, it can be exemplified in (4).

(1) *The owner was friendly and <u>very accommodating</u>.*
(2) *The interior deco is also <u>very soothing and stylish</u> at the same time.*
(3) *The man working spoke English <u>very well</u>, which made it easier for me to ask questions about the menu.*
(4) *The salad contained snow fungus, which gave it an interesting texture that I liked <u>very much</u>.*

The isolating realization of *so* involved the majority of pre-modification of adjectives as in (5), followed by a few occurrences of pre-modification of adverbs to upscale the verbal process as in (6).

> (5) *Mark was <u>so welcoming and chatty</u>, giving his best recommendations from the menu and advice for what to see in and around Chiang Mai.*
> (6) *My friend and I went to this café twice on our trip to Chiang Mai because we loved it <u>so much</u>!*

Interestingly, *very* can be reduplicated. The use of *very*, *very* in this study can support De Klerk (2005) who suggests that, in a variety of English, *very* is still preferred most (i.e. both the single *very* and the reduplicated *very*). However, there were only three tokens of the reduplicated *very* found in this study, and the example can be drawn in (7).

> (7) *They do a <u>very very good</u> coffee and open early in the morning.*

Additionally, the intensifier *so* can be partially reduplicated with *very*, followed by particular adjectives to suggest emphatic force of utterances. This pattern is known as "complex collocation" (Cacchiani & Reggio, 2006, as cited in Poonlarp, 2009, p. 50). Although the previous literature pointed out that this pattern can be found in negative and interrogative statements, e.g. *Is that so very remarkable?* (Bäcklund, 1973), it was found to carry positive evaluations in the affirmative statement, for example:

> (8) *But probably the best part of this restaurant is the staff – friendly, enthusiastic, and <u>so very helpful</u>.*

It can also be argued that *very* and *so* are deemed as "general-purpose amplifiers" (Altenberg, 1991, p. 134) since they are found with high frequency compared to other degree adverbs and exhibit collocational freedom with regard to co-occurrences with either scalar or non-scalar adjectives. In dealing with scalarity (or gradability), the scalar (e.g. *sweet*, *rich*, *high*, *cheap*, and so forth) denote a quality that can be possessed in varying degrees, whereas the non-scalar cannot be graded into different levels of qualities (e.g. *Thai*, *medical*, *typical*, *herbal*, and so on). Flexibility in terms of scalarity tends to be much more common in *very* than *so* in this study. That is, *very* was mostly found with scalar adjectives as in *the cream is light and have very rich coconut flavour*; and non-scalar adjectives as in *all in all this is very typical to good café food back in New Zealand*, or superlative adjectives showing an end point or polarity (i.e. best) as in *and this café epitomizes the very best of that scene*. However, it was found that *so* cannot be used with the superlative degree of adjectives.

4.2 Positive appraisals from *very* and *so* and their collocates

With an aid of Clusters/N-Grams in the AntConc software, the top-three high-frequency clusters of *very* and adjectives or adverbs were *very good* (55 tokens), *very nice* (43 tokens), and *very friendly* (42 tokens). As regards *so*, the top-three high-frequency clusters were *so much* (15 tokens), *so nice* (14 tokens), and *so good* (11 tokens). For *so much*, the collocates included *loved*, *liked*, *excellent*, and *better*. Moreover, it can occur with nouns to denote quantity, e.g. *their smoothies are so full of flavour. So much fruit.* The similar case was found from *very much* co-occurring with *enjoyed* and *liked*, but the number of *very much* was less than that of *so much*. In this regard, to express qualities along with quantities, *so much* can be more subjective, emotional involvement than that of *very much* due to the token frequency, resulting in casual, colloquial and conversational tones of the reviewer's evaluation of a situation (American Heritage Dictionary of English Language, 2000).

In this study, the clusters with *very* and *so* exhibited positive attitudinal stances due to the adjectives or adverbs that collocated them. To clarify this point, *very* and *so* functioned to intensify qualities of certain entities, i.e. positive feelings or emotions of the review writers; desirable characteristics of owners and staffs; food and drinks; prices of food, drinks and services; and characteristics of cafés, i.e. decorations and atmosphere.

Table 2. Entities Intensified

Entities intensified	Number of tokens	Percentage
Writers' feelings or emotions	25	5.5
Owners or staffs	113	25
Food and drinks	158	34.95
Prices of food, drinks and services	18	5.11
Decorations and atmosphere	138	30.53
Total	452	100

According to table 2, qualities of food and drinks accounted for the highest number of tokens where *very* and *so* co-occurred with (34.95%), followed by decorations and atmosphere (30.53%), and owners and staffs (25%). However, writers' feelings or emotions and prices of food, drinks and services exhibited the low percentage, 5.5% and 5.11%, respectively. The findings align with Siri (2018) showing that international tourists highly value on service and atmosphere of cafés in Chiang Mai in the highest level. Such perceived value of products and services will then provide contributions to strategic marketing to meet customers' demand. In terms of 7Ps marketing mix (Booms & Bitner, 1981), i.e. product, price, place, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence, it is found that customers give and intensify their opinions on products (i.e. food and drinks) most. Decorations and

atmosphere can also be perceived as a crucial aspect to evaluate and intensify since a number of customers treat this as their first impression (Banpato, 2013).

Table 3 indicates the use of *very* and *so* to intensify such qualities of things. *Very* is more commonly employed in this regard, and *so* tends to be used with higher percentage in expressing writers' feelings or emotions and in commenting on food and drinks. It is obvious that when expressing positive emotions or feelings, *so* is used more to show involvement.

Table 3. Entities Intensified by *Very* and *So*

Entities intensified	Intensifiers	
	very	*so*
Writers' feelings or emotions	12	13
	(3.44%)	(12.5%)
Owners or staffs	93	20
	(26.72%)	(19.23%)
Food and drinks	117	41
	(33.62%)	(39.42%)
Prices of food, drinks and services	17	1
	(4.88%)	(0.96%)
Decorations and atmosphere	109	29
	(31.32%)	(27.88%)
Total	348	104
	(100%)	(100%)

In addition, it is worth pointing out that *very* and *so* can interact with the subsystem of ATTITUDE to increase the volume of the positive remarks. So, this exhibits the inscribed realizations whereby specific lexical items (i.e. adjectives and adverbs) are graduated by reference to intensity (Oteíza, 2017). The pragmatic function under the upscaling of positive attitude is to construe the review writer as "maximally committed to the value position being advanced and hence as strongly aligning the reader into that value position" in terms of the writer-reader relationship (Martin & White, 2005, p. 152).

The comments on the entities aforementioned can be grouped into three categories based on subdomains of ATTITUDE including AFFECT, JUDGEMENT, and APPRECIATION. To begin with AFFECT, *very* and *so* functioned to intensify the writers' positive feelings or emotions. The example can be drawn from the word *impressed* as in *We weren't looking for food but ended up so impressed we ordered lunch*. The positive emotive words involved *very/so happy*, *very/so glad* for happiness; *very/so pleased*, *very satisfied and delighted* for satisfaction; and *so lucky* as in *it is so lucky we can have a cup of good coffee* for security, i.e. confidence or trust. AFFECT also involved intentions to show feelings rather than reactions to certain

objects, hence linguistically realized into either realis (i.e. present or existing emotive states) from the word *like* as in *I like this place so much, especially after a long afternoon walk* or irrealis (i.e. future or unrealized desiderative states) from the phrase *you won't be disappointed* as in *go when you're very hungry and you won't be disappointed*.

In addition, *very* and *so* flagged positive attitudinal assessment by intensifying JUDGEMENT on proposals/norms the owners or the staffs in the cafés should behave. The positive terms involved *very competent, (speak) very good (English)*, *very knowledgeable* for capacity, i.e. staffs' abilities; *very/so friendly*, *very/so kind*, *very pleasant*, *very/so polite*, *very skilled*, *so sweet* for propriety, i.e. decency, courtesy, and acceptability as behavioral standards; *very attentive*, *very patient* for tenacity, i.e. expressing determination; and *very accommodating*, *very/so welcoming*, *very helpful* for normality, i.e. typically expected characteristics in services. Veracity, i.e. conformity to accuracy and honesty, was not found to evaluate the staffs in this study.

As regards APPRECIATION, *very* and *so* can intensify the positive assessment of food and drinks; price of food, drinks and services; and decorations and atmospheres. So, this corresponds to Martin and White (2005) suggesting that APPRECIATION deals with objects by reference to aesthetics. The first group deals with impact, i.e. impressions judged from five senses of perceptions. It involves such positive words as *very last mouthful (coffee)*, *very smooth (coffee, taste)*, *very delicious*, *very imaginative (drink selection)*, *so tempting*, *so full of flavor*, *so light and fluffy (pancake)*, *so amazing* for food and drinks; and *very beautifully fragrant (flowers)*, *very quiet*, *very soothing*, *very smooth (music)*, *very cool (handcrafted furniture, music, place)*, *very much in character with the old city*, *so peaceful*, *so chilled and cool* for decorations and atmosphere. The positive term like *so engaging* can also exhibit impact based on a person's physical appearance. In APPRECIATION, human can be treated as entities/objects (e.g. *beautiful*, *charming*, *gorgeous*, *fascinating*, *engaging*, *appealing*, etc.). This is different from JUDGEMENT which focuses on human behaviors. The second group relies on complexity (or simplicity) as in *very simple but elegant*, *very clever (artwork)*, especially for decorations. The third group exhibits quality, i.e. price, convenience and available facilities as in *very good (wifi)*, *very/so convenient*, *very affordable*, *very reasonable (price)*, *very open (and enough seating)*, *very/so close to…(place)*, and *so easy to find*. The last group is valuation on a stay, as in *very quaint and relaxing (environment)*, *very warm*, *very cozy*, *very comfy*, and *so relaxing*.

As regards discussions on the appraisal framework, *very* and *so*, pertaining to the domain of FORCE in the GRADUATION subsystem, had occurred with APPRECIATION most, compared to the rest, i.e. AFFECT and JUDGEMENT. This is because providing comments on concrete things or tangibles tends to be less subjective, thus evoking more politeness and less

egotism (Drasovean & Tagg, 2015). This finding also supports Pupipat (2018) working on hotel reviews in Bangkok and pointing out that APPRECIATION is found with the highest number of occurrences. In addition, reviewers or customers typically have much more contact with food, drinks, and services. Intensification on the qualities of the tangibles seems to be more frequent than that on people's behaviors or personal feelings. As for AFFECT, it is used less since the writers try not to include their own emotion/self in their reviews, and the readers might not expect to see only an individual's feeling. Less AFFECT can therefore help avoid conflicts that might happen later as well. For JUDGEMENT, commenting on the staffs' behaviors is not much found. Also, the writers pragmatically seem not to direct their own feelings at the staffs. They hardly refer to a specific person in their reviews. With regard to the points aforementioned, the semantics of GRADUATION is considered central or important to the appraisal system. ATTITUDE (and ENGAGEMENT) can be domains of GRADUATION which differ according to "the nature of the meaning being scaled," as Martin and White (2005, p. 136) suggest. The intensifiers are marked to show the act of "appraising" mostly on the "appraised," along with the few occurrences of marking the "appraiser." Anyway, the case of ENGAGEMENT is worth studying further due to the limitation of this research which focuses only on the intensifiers, *very* and *so*, in GRADUATION and ATTITUDE.

The concordance of *very* and *so* in the corpus also provides an insightful observation on figurative or metaphorical use of positive remarks, particularly in the part of APPRECIATION. The adjectives that hold a certain positive value on the appraised epitomize metaphorical extension from human experiential basis. This accounts for lexes attributing to food and drinks; and decorations and atmosphere, i.e.

> (9) *...the staff were amazing and the drink selection was <u>very imaginative</u>. My first drink was something called Bad Blood – it was simply divine!*
>
> (10) *I highly recommend the cocoa oats for breakfast served with heaps*
>   *of fruits (the tzatziki is also <u>amazing</u> – <u>so amazing</u>).*
>
> (11) *It really is <u>a little gem</u> of a secret garden style café away from the hustle and bustle. Expect <u>smooth coffee</u> and <u>very smooth music</u>...LOL! Refreshing!*
>
> (12) *The food was fantastic, <u>full of flavor</u> and great portion sizes.*

From the examples above, the positive remarks can be subsumed under the semantic domain of MYTHS/SUPERSTITIONS to denote extraordinariness or superiority as in *amazing*, *imaginative*, *divine*, and *fantastic*. Some positive remarks exhibit the use of words pertaining to the semantic domain of VALUABLE OBJECTS to denote the highlight of the place

which should not be missed as in *a little gem*. The other metaphorical use relies on linguistic synesthesia (Day, 1996; Williams, 1976; Yu, 2003), i.e. one sensory perception is characterized in terms of another, which denotes imagery as well as expressivity. It is exemplified from the expressions: *very beautifully fragrant*, i.e. VISUAL used to characterize OLFACTORY, and *very smooth taste*, i.e. TACTILE used to characterize GUSTATORY. This means that a fragrant smell and a pleasant taste can be evoked by a beautiful visual image and a smooth tactile sensation, respectively. Good atmosphere can also be characterized by warm temperature, i.e. TACTILE, as in *very friendly, warm and happy place to be in*. This can correspond to the conceptual metaphor, i.e. AFFECTION IS WARMTH, where WARMTH can be applied to the concept of AFFECTION or, specifically, FRIENDSHIP (Kövecses, 2000).

Indeed, functioning as intensification devices, *very* and *so* themselves are also metaphorical. This corresponds to Poonlarp and Luksaneeyanawin (2009) suggesting that intensifiers carry a conceptual mapping of MORE IS UP in terms of FORCE or DEGREE, i.e. the higher number of entities is, the more intense it may have. The evidence supporting this claim is in terms of grammaticalization. According to Online Etymology Dictionary, the intensifier *very* started its life as an adjective denoting truth, i.e. in late 13th Century, *verray* means "true, real, genuine" (Harper, 2003), until it was used as the degree word (e.g. as greatly or extremely) in Middle English. Then, *very* has been widely used to precede adjectives or adverbs since the 15th Century. Regarding *so*, it derived from *swa* meaning "in this way" or "to that extent" until holding more specific meaning to "more intense," when compared to *very* (Poonlarp, 2009, p. 50). The evidence in the self-constructed corpus in this study also supports the cline of intensifiers, i.e. weak and strong intensifiers or "over-the-top intensification" (Waksler, 2012). That is, *very* which has been typically treated as the weak intensifier was found far more in frequency (i.e. more commonly used, more conventionalized) than the stronger one, *so*, according to this study. The first was also perceived more neutral than the latter (Poonlarp, 2009). The corpus-based study of metaphorical language in review language can be worth studying further as it shows the so-called interpersonal function in a text.

5 Discussion

In this study, it is noteworthy that the use of FORCE in GRADUATION (i.e. intensifiers) along with ATTITUDE can pragmatically suggest a high degree of involvement. This aligns with Drasovean and Tagg (2015) in that the reviewers who use the intensifiers tend to be fully committed to the thing being said. With regard to this, their emotions, opinions and even factual information are intensified or reinforced to persuade other commenters or readers. Also, the intensifiers are employed in order to impress the readers

that the reviewer's viewpoints are valid. Appraisal tends to be, therefore, an effective tool to study the language use in reviews, compared to other kinds of texts, i.e. academic or fictional texts. So, this framework will provide an insight on studying expressive linguistics, particularly in the present situation that people rely on others' opinions. Just as one metaphorically says, "we're living in the sea of opinions."

6 Conclusion

To sum up, the study employs the corpus method to analyze positive remarks which are linguistically manifested through the English intensifiers, i.e. *very* and *so*, and their collocates in the online reviews of cafés in Chiang Mai. To answer the research question on how the appraisal framework can be applied to the analysis of the selected English intensifiers in café reviews, the concordances of the two intensifiers exhibit certain syntactic distributions, i.e. the isolated lexeme co-occurring with particular word classes. In semantico-pragmatic aspects, they also function to upscale the qualities of things by means of FORCE or GRADUATION accompanied with linguistic expressions belonging to the subsystem of ATTITUDE in order to show commitment and social involvement. Some insightful observations can be seen in terms of the entities to which reviewers or customers pay attention when they go to the cafés, and the metaphorical nature of some lexes found in this study.

Regarding the limitations of the study, it is based on a limited set of data, i.e. 44,875 words in terms of corpus size. Moreover, it only focuses on positive evaluations, so there should be other studies focusing on negative evaluations used in café reviews. In the same manner, positive and negative evaluations should be studied beyond the word level. This is because there may be some ironic, satirical expressions or some idiosyncrasies in the evaluation language. Appraisals collected from other websites or other corpus resources should also be under investigation as they can provide more interesting results. Besides, the review data comes from either native or non-native speakers of English, and there might be variations in terms of language use among them. It is also difficult to detect the real comments coming from reviewers or customers. So, this study has a limitation in terms of demographic background of the café review writers, i.e. personal information, which cannot be accessed to. To study the relationship between the background of language users and their language use needs more practical methods, e.g. an experimental study in second language acquisition or psycholinguistics. In this regard, the corpus-based study is just a starting point to see a certain language phenomenon. As the present study has just started its life to observe appraisals in a corpus-based manner, it only provides some tendencies and generalizations on the English language use

from the naturally occurring data. To study further, such aspects aforementioned need to be more concerned.

From the researcher's viewpoints, there are some recommendations for further studies. First, the café's reactions/responses to the comments/remarks should be studied. Another case in point relies on applying the appraisal framework to other fields of studies, especially in expressive linguistics. To illustrate, such framework can complement such linguistic issues as language and emotions, metaphor studies, speech act theories, metalinguistic awareness, and even in different genres of writings. The other aspect relies on the use of other types of intensifiers, e.g. maximizers or downtoners, to account for expressivities employed in a review language.

Last but not least, the study provides some pedagogical implications on English Language Teaching (ELT). The first aspect relies on implementing a corpus method to identify either common or unique language patterns in a particular language situation, e.g. expressing opinions. The case of *very* and *so* suggests that language corpora play an important role in analyzing language use more objectively. Learners can come up with other English intensifiers they want to know and use the corpus method to investigate their linguistic behaviors. This may then support the research-based learning in an English grammar course.

In addition, using a concordance program in language classrooms can enhance learners' exposure to authentic language data, i.e. actual examples that help them learn grammar, vocabulary, collocations, and even reading or writing. Murison-Bowie (1996) suggests that evidence from corpora can be a valuable resource to provide language descriptions, especially in terms of lexico-grammatical aspects of language use along with frequency and statistical information. This study is, therefore, an example of using authentic language data to explore a certain language phenomenon, i.e. intensifiers used in a language. It can provide some insights in terms of evaluation language. That is, learners will know how to use certain language patterns and vocabularies to write an evaluative text in their daily life and in both online and offline platforms. To illustrate, the co-occurrence of intensifiers under GRADUATION and evaluative words under ATTITUDE can help learners to study (near) synonyms (e.g. *informative* and *knowledgeable* or *delicious* and *tasty*) as well as collocations of positive words (e.g. *reasonable* which can collocate with *price* or *very* which can collocate with such superlative as *best*). So, they will come up with a wide range of positive expressions for their evaluative writing in certain aspects, e.g. food, decorations, and services. Additionally, teachers can demonstrate some grammatical errors or mistakes to the learners. For example, such errors include **coffee, espressos, cappuccino were also very*; and **Hanna coffee is very recommend for everyone*. This can raise learners' awareness of grammaticality based on the information in the corpus.

Furthermore, learners will be able to see the nature of opinions, especially in hospitality English, through naturally occurring data. For instance, the use of corpus helps detect certain language patterns in review language. The examples can be drawn from criticism-then-praise patterns, e.g. *a bit pricey but TOTALLY worth it for this kind of quality bean*; *a little limited on food options but worth the visit for coffee and some time to chill*; and *the service is fine, sometimes a bit awkward but friendly enough*; or even praise-then-criticism patterns, e.g. *good food but pricey*. The review writers can also praise more and more, e.g. *The coffee tasted divine, but what really got me was that the pattern, and of course smoothness [...]*. Another aspect relies on the use of other stronger intensifiers which sound natural in English, e.g. *The cinnamon scrolls are absolutely to die for*!!, which exhibits the spoken, colloquial style. These findings can be further investigated in terms of a discourse study. However, in a classroom, learners can practice using these patterns to give comments (to mitigate or to blame) on the things they experienced.

The recommendation concerns the way teachers employ real language data for learners to experience, as Louw (1991, p. 152) suggests, "if the most frequent words in English are taught in all of their forms and in well-structured materials, they will carry with them most of the grammatical and discourse detail that the second and foreign language learners are ever likely to need." So, this will bring about the use of language corpora in data-driven learning where learners play a role as a researcher and their learning is driven by linguistic data. Self-discovery and active learning are also possible in this regard. Instead of learning language from textbooks, their learning can be complemented by inductive learning, i.e. observations, classifications and generalizations; and deductive learning, i.e. formation of a hypothesis, classification of corpus to test the hypothesis, and refinement of rules and theories (Murison-Bowie, 1996, as cited in Mallikamas, 2015).

Concordance serves a crucial tool for text and genre analysis; that is, concordance offers detailed information about certain texts in both content and organization. So, this can be beneficial in studying discourse. For example, the high-frequency words will suggest what the text should be like (i.e. in this study, the high frequency words involve such content words as *coffees*, *good*, *place*, *great*, *very*, *nice*, *cafe*, *food*, and *so*, which are found related to the findings of the study. Another recommendation relies on teaching vocabulary and collocations, especially using concordance, Key Word in Context (KWIC), and Left-Right context, to distinguish certain words having either literal or metaphorical sense and to explore those having nuances in meaning. With an aid of technology, these implications are possible in ELT, especially in this digital age where active learning classrooms tend to be of great importance.

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