Beyond the adolescent peak of *toykey*

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1 Introduction

The intensifier system is often considered an ideal choice for the study of linguistic change due to its unstable nature. It is one of the grammatical areas most susceptible to rapid change and recycling as forms are replaced by newly coined expressions (Brinton & Arnovik 2006, Hopper & Traugott 1993, Lorenz 2002). For this reason, the intensifier system has been extensively studied in many varieties (Bauer & Bauer 2002, Labov 1985, Lorenz 2002, Partington 1993, Peters 1994, Tagliamonte 2008, Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2009, Tagliamonte and Robert 2005, *inter alia*)

However, only a few studies have explored intensifier use in Korean and most studies on Korean intensifiers have focused on gender differences found in written Korean (e.g. Kang & Kim 2009; Kim 2009; Park 2006). Therefore, little is known about synchronic difference or diachronic change with regard to intensifier use in spoken Korean. Given that the intensifier system is closely related to colloquial usage (Fries 1940) and changes with relative rapidity, studies of the synchronic difference between age cohorts in spoken Korean would provide evidence that explains both the ongoing change and variation of Korean intensifier use.

The current study presents a synchronic quantitative investigation of intensifiers in spoken Korean used in Seoul, Korea. The data are collected from sociolinguistic interviews with 42 native Korean speakers between 8 and 49 years of age. The distribution of intensifiers according to two internal and two external constraints will be examined. Using multivariate analyses, the simultaneous effect of these constraints will be tested.

We first provide the definition of intensifiers and the scope of this study. In Section 2, the methodology employed in this study will be elaborated. In Section 3, results of distributional and multivariate analyses will be presented. In Section 4, the major findings of the study will be further discussed.

1.1. Intensifiers

Intensifiers are adverbial modifiers used as scaling devices (Quirk et al. 1985). In their system, intensifiers belong to broader sets of degree adverbs named amplifiers. There are two types of such adverbs: intensives and downtoners. Intensives are adverbs that "maximize or boost meaning" or "scale a quality up" (Bolinger 1972:17) as do *very* and *really* in (1a) and (1b), respectively. Downtoners, on the

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other hand, "scale downwards from an assumed norm" as *a little* in (1c). The scope of analysis in this paper is limited to an analysis of intensives.

(1) a. They are very nice.
b. She is really cute.
c. She is a little cute.

Intensifiers have a number of labels, including intensives adverbs (Stoffel 1901), degree words (Bolinger 1972: 18) and amplifiers (Quirk et al. 1985: 567). Given its wide usage in recent works (e.g. Maucaulay 2006, Rickford et al. 2007, Tagliamonte & D'Arcy 2009), in this paper, we uniformly call them intensifiers.

Intensifiers can occur with a broad range of syntactic heads. They can boost the meaning of an adjective, verb, another adverb, or even an entire sentence, as *really* does in (2) (Lorenz 2002). In (2a), *really* boosts the meaning of the verb *like*, whereas it modifies the adjective *boring* in (2b). *Really* intensifies the meaning of "being in love" in (2c) and it modifies the entire sentence in (2d).

(2) a. I really like linguistics.
b. Linguistics is really boring.
c. She is really in love with linguistics.
d. Really, I went there.

The scope of intensification in this paper, however, is restricted to the effect of the prototypical function of intensifying grading adjectives. Other contexts such as noun or verb intensification are ruled out.

2 Data and Method

2.1. Participants and data collection

Forty-two native speakers of Korean stratified by age and sex participated in the study. Sixteen were male while remaining twenty-six were female and participants ranged in age from 8 to 49. All participants was born and raised in Seoul, Korea. The participants were grouped into four age cohorts:1) elementary school students between the ages of 8 and 12, 2) teenagers between the ages of 13 and 19, 3) college students between the ages of 20 and 29 and 4) adult speakers between the ages of 30 and 49. The demographic information of the subjects is outlined in Table 1.

Sex / Age	Kids (8–12)	Teens (13-19)	College students (20 –28)	Adults (30-49)	Total
Female	8	6	7	5	26
Male	3	4	4	5	16
Total	11	10	11	10	42

Table 1: Demographic information of participants.

For data collection, sociolinguistic interviews were conducted. Before the interview, participants were told that the interview would be purely for research purposes and that their anonymity would be ensured. All interviews were recorded in the participants' home or at a familiar location in their neighborhoods. The average length of interviews was about 45 minutes. The topics of conversation were mainly daily lives, friends, family, hobbies and problems with family or friends.

2.2 Data analysis

2.2.1 Circumscribing the variable context

In line with previous quantitative sociolinguistic studies on intensifiers (e.g. Macaulay 2006, Tagliamonte 2003, 2005, 2008) all adjectival heads that actually appeared in the data and could be intensified were considered in the analysis. For example, the intensifiers *nemu* and *toykey* modifying the adjective *kwiyepta* 'cute' in (2a) were included, as were the adjectives without intensification in (2b). Any contexts that do not allow for intensification, such as comparatives and superlatives in (2c-d), were ruled out. Negative contexts as in (2e) were also excluded because intensifiers modifying negatives do not really have the meaning of higher degree that we intend to see. Only affirmatives were included.

(2)

a.	Ce	inhyeng–un	*nemu*	kwiyep–Ø–ta.		
	that	doll–TOP	very	cute–PRS–DECL		
	'That doll is very cute.'					
b.	Ce	inhyeng–un	Ø	kwiyep–Ø–ta.		
	that	doll–NOM		cute–PRS–DECL		
	'That doll is cute.'					
c.	Ce	inhyeng–un	i-inhyeng	pota	te	kwiyep–Ø–ta.
	that	doll– TOP	this doll	than	more	cute–PRS–DECL
	'That doll is cuter than this doll.'					
d.	Ce	inhyeng–un	choykolo	kwiyep–Ø–ta.		
	that	doll–TOP	best	cute–PRS–DECL		
	'That doll is the cutest doll.'					
e.	Ce	inhyeng–un	cengmal	an	kwiyep–Ø–ta.	
	that	doll– TOP	really	not	cute–PRS–DECL	
	'That doll is not really cute.'					

2.2.2 Data Coding and Analysis

All the adjectival heads were coded based on whether they occurred with intensifiers or not, along with two linguistic constraints (function and semantic type of an adjectival head) and two social factors (age and sex). For each speaker, an average of 50 tokens of adjectival heads was coded. The percentage intensification,

following the principle of accountability (Labov 1972: 72), was calculated as follows:

$$\% \text{ Intensification} = \frac{\textit{The number of adjetival heads occuring with an intensifier}}{\textit{The number of all adjectival heads}}$$

3 Results

3.1 Distributional analysis

3.1.1 Overall distribution

Table 2 provides a breakdown of the intensifiers that occur more than 10 times in the data. Of the 1,849 adjectives that could have been intensified with an intensifier, 621 were actually intensified. Although there are a variety of intensifiers, the vast majority are represented by a small group. *Nemu* and *toykey* account for 56 percent of the intensifiers used in the data. The following analysis will be limited to these two major intensifiers, *nemu* and *toykey*.

Intensifiers	Percent (%)	Number of Tokens
nemu	11	203
toykey	7.9	146
koyngcanghi	3.1	62
cengmal	2.7	55
cincca	2.4	51
manhi	1.3	35
acu	1.1	21
wancen	1.0	18
All other items	1.6	30
Overall intensification	33.6	621
No intensification	66.4	1228
Total	100	1849

Table 2: Frequency of intensifiers by lexical item (N >10)

3.1.2 Distribution by age and sex

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the most frequent intensifier, *nemu*, which occurs with 11 percent of the intensifiable adjectives in the data. *Nemu* robustly occurs in all age groups, but its use gradually decreases from older to younger generations.

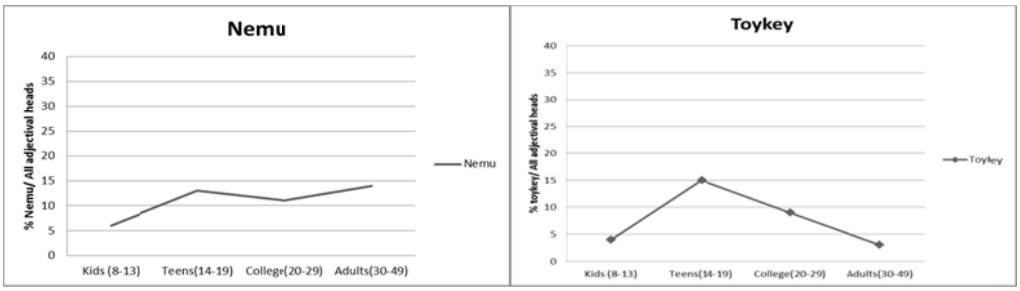

Figure 1a & 1b: Distribution of *nemu* and *toykey* by age.

Figure 1b shows the distribution of *toykey* by age. *Toykey*, the "runner-up" in the use of Korean intensifiers, dramatically increases from the adult group to the teenager group, where it occurs most frequently. At this point, some might ask whether the high percentage of *toykey* is merely because teenagers use intensifiers much more often than other age groups. To make a more reliable comparison among age groups, the percentage of *toykey* out of only intensified adjectival heads, excluding non-intensified adjectival heads, was obtained (see Figure 2). Although the actual percentages have changed, the pattern—a sharp increase from the adult group to the teens—is maintained.

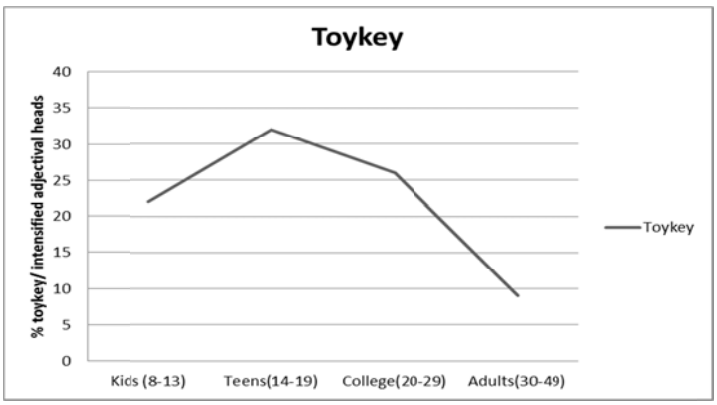

Figure 2: Distribution of *toykey* by age.

Figures 3a and 3b plot the distribution of *nemu* and *toykey* by age and gender. In Figure 3a, *nemu* is favored more by female speakers in every age group. The difference is greatest among the oldest speakers (30-to 49-year-olds). It can be speculated that the grounds for the high status of *nemu* may be the loyal users of *nemu*, including female speakers in the older generation.

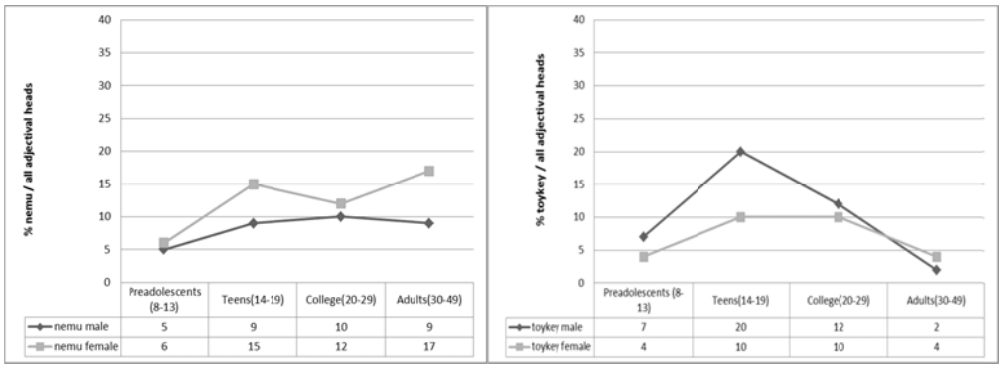

Figure 3a-b: Distribution of *nemu* and *toykey* by age and sex.

Figure 3b shows the use of *toykey which* is much more frequently used by men than women among people younger than 30. More precisely, the use of *toykey* is most prevalent among male speakers in the teenager group.

3.1.2 Distribution by function and semantic type of adjectival heads

Previous studies have identified two significant linguistic factors on the intensifier use. One is functional types of adjectival heads. There are two types of adjectives in terms of their functions. Attributive adjectives are part of the noun phrase, which is headed by the nouns they modify, as in (3). The other function is predicative. Predicative adjectives are linked to the nouns or pronouns they modify through a copula or other linking mechanism, as in (3b). The literature indicates that this functional difference influences the occurrence of intensifiers (Tagliamonte 2008, *inter alia*).

(3) a. Attributive:

Kutul–un toykey thukihan munhwa–lul kaciko–iss–eyo.
They–TOP very unique culture–ACC have–PST–HON–DECL.
'They have very unique culture.'

b. Predicative:

Ce–nun nemu hayngpok–ha–yss–eyo.
I–TOP so happy–do–PST–HON–DECL
'I was very happy.'

Figures 4a and 4b show the distribution of *nemu* and *toykey* in each age group according to the two adjectival functions. Both *nemu* and *toykey* tend to occur more frequently with predicative than attributive adjectives. Figure 4a shows that *nemu* occurs much more frequently with predicative adjectives in every age group. Figure 4b reveals that the occurrence of *toykey* is also more frequent with predicative than attributive adjectives in most age groups.

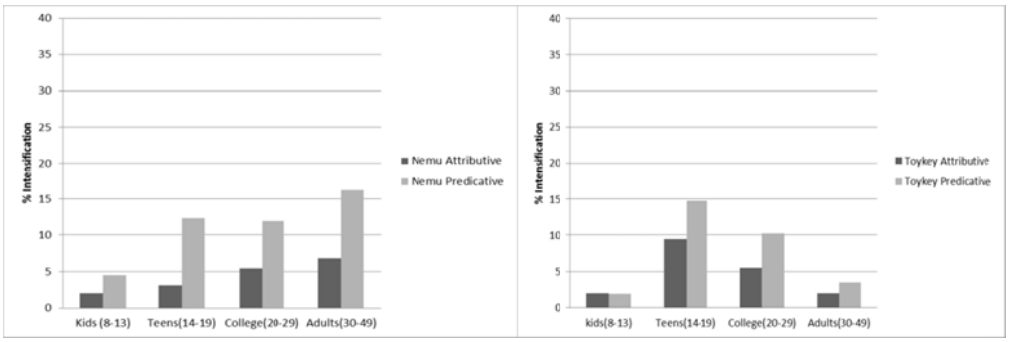

Figure 4a & 4b: Distribution of *nemu* and *toykey* by function of adjectival heads.

We now look at the distribution of intensifiers by another linguistic constraint: the different semantic features of adjectival heads. In the preceding discussion, we noted the different patterns in the distributions of *nemu* and *toykey* according to adjectival functions. As such differences might obscure a precise comparison, we limit the analysis of semantic features to intensifiers occurring with predicative adjectives only.

For the analysis by semantic types of adjectival heads, we use a modified taxonomy first proposed in Dixon (1982) and usefully operationalized in previous studies (e.g. Ito & Tagliamonte 2003, Rickford et al. 2007, Tagliamonte 2008). Dixon proposed seven semantic types of adjectives: physical property (e.g. *loud, empty*), age (e.g. *young, middle-aged*), color (e.g. *red, bluish*), speed (e.g. *fast, slow*), human propensity (e.g. *upset, excited*), value (e.g. *awesome, depressing*), and dimension (e.g. *tall, big*). Rickford et al. (2007) added one more category, other, which comprises adjectives that do not fit into any of Dixon's seven categories. Examples of each category of adjectives are illustrated below in (6). We analyze the data based on these eight types of adjectives.

(6) Eight semantic types of adjectives

a. The sound was very loud.[physical property]
b. The witch was really old. [age]
c. Strangely, the sky was really red! [color]
d. The flight was really fast. [speed]
e. I was very excited. [human propensity]
f. The chocolate bar was very delicious. [value]
g. Willy Wonka is very tall. [dimension]
h. The weather there is really exaggerated. [other]- different, mixed

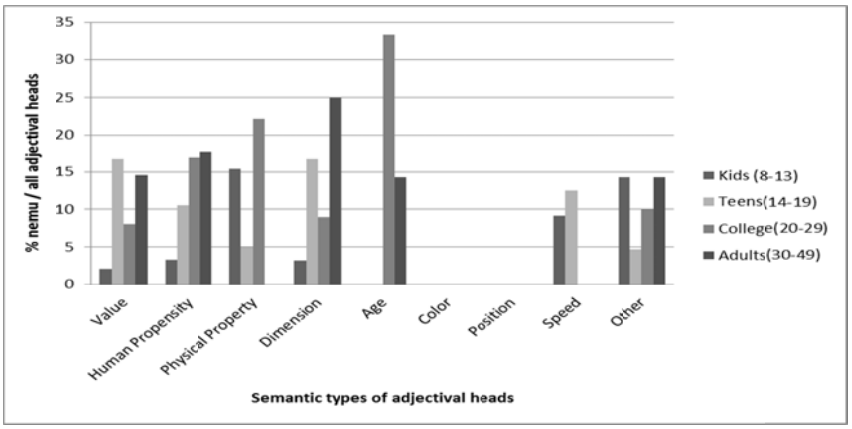

Figure 5a: Distribution of *nemu* by semantic type of adjectival heads.

Figures 5a and 5b depict the distribution of *nemu* and *toykey* according to these eight categories occurring only in predicative adjective contexts. Figure 5a shows that *nemu* has a wide distribution. In the kid group, *nemu* occurs among six adjective types – value, other, human propensity, physical property, dimension and speed. Among the teenager group, it occurs with the same six types although in a different order in terms of frequency. Among the college student group, it also occurs among six types: value, human propensity, dimension, age and other. Among the oldest generation aged between 30 and 49, it occurs with five types of adjectives – value, human propensity, dimension, age and other. *Nemu* seems to occur with many adjectival types in every age group. †

Figure 5b shows the occurrence of *toykey*. In the kid group, *toykey* occurs with five adjective types – value, human propensity, physical property, dimension and speed. The teenagers and college students use another five types – value, human propensity, physical property, dimension and other. Among the adult speakers, the four adjective types – dimension, physical property, human propensity and value – are used with *toykey*. These findings suggest that *toykey* has also diffused into a wide range of adjectival types in contemporary Korean and that *nemu* and *toykey* do not occur only with a certain type of adjectival head.

† In case of the type 'color' and 'position', it is not that *nemu* never occur with these types of adjectives, but rather there were no narratives relating to these topics.

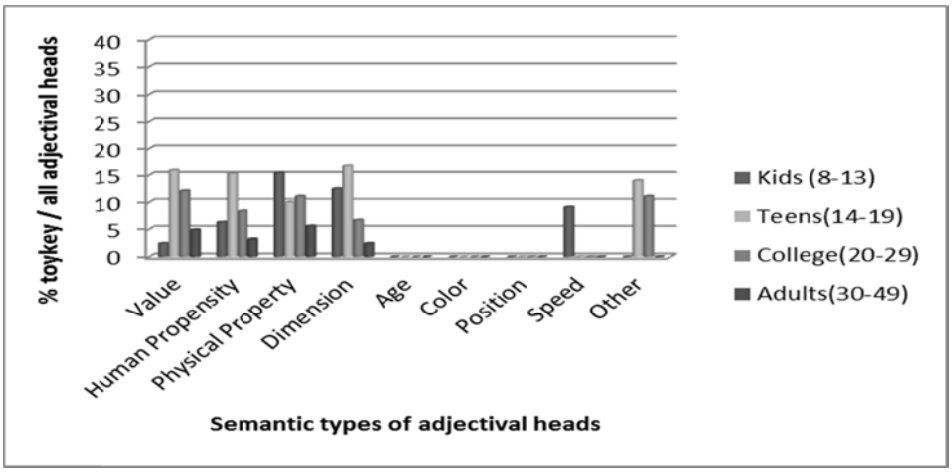

Figure 5b: Distribution of *toykey* by semantic type of adjectival heads.

3.2 Multivariate analysis

In this section, we will examine the multifaceted effect simultaneously affecting the use of *nemu* and *toykey* by using the mixed effect model with the speaker random effect in Rbrul. The dependent variable is the rate of occurrence of *nemu* and *toykey*. The independent variables include two social factors, age and sex and two linguistic factors, adjectival function and semantic type. Among the eight semantic types of adjectives, the categories of 'age', 'color', 'speed' and 'position' were collapsed into the 'other' category because they had small number of tokens.

Table 3 shows the results of multivariate analyses of the probability for *nemu* and *toykey* used by all the speakers of the four age groups. For *nemu*, the strongest constraint is age (the range value of 29). Adult speakers aged between 30 and 49 strongly prefer the use of *nemu*, whereas the kids disfavor it. The adjective function is the second strongest condition (the range value of 26). Speakers prefer using *nemu* with predicative to attributive adjectives.

Intensifiers		Nemu				Toykey			
Corrected Mean		0.11				0.08			
Total N		1849							
Intercept		–4.08				–6.09			
Speaker STD		0.35				0.49			
Factor groups	Factors	Log-odds	FW	N total	% nemu	Log-odds	FW	N total	% toykey
Age	8-13	-0.75	0.32	454	0.06	-0.44	0.39	454	0.04
	14-19	0.21	0.55	424	0.13	0.83	0.70	424	0.14
	20-28	0.11	0.53	562	0.12	0.35	0.59	562	0.09
	30-49	0.44	0.61	409	0.14	-0.74	0.32	409	0.03
	Range		29				38		
Sex	Female	0.21	[0.55]	1235	0.12	0.32	0.42	1235	0.06
	Male	-0.21	[0.45]	614	0.09	-0.32	0.58	614	0.12
	Range						16		
Adjective functions	Predicative	0.53	0.63	1553	0.12	0.37	0.59	1553	0.09
	Attributive	-0.53	0.37	296	0.05	-0.37	0.41	296	0.04
	Range		26				18		
Adjective types	Value	2.93	[0.95]	759	0.08	3.12	[0.96]	759	0.07
	Human propensity	3.24	[0.96]	571	0.13	3.22	[0.96]	571	0.09
	Physical trait	-10.94	[<0.001]	7	0	3.04	[0.95]	7	0.07
	Dimension	3.41	[0.968]	202	0.14	3.23	[0.97]	202	0.09
	Age	2.96	[0.95]	30	0	-10.35	[<0.001]	30	0
	Color	-10.84	[<0.001]	17	.10	3.28	[0.96]	17	0.06
	Position	-10.94	[<0.001]	7	0	-10.98	[<0.001]	7	0
	Speed	3.459	[0.97]	29	0.14	2.18	[0.90]	29	0.03
	Other	2.913	[0.95]	252	0.08	3.17	[0.96]	252	0.09

Table 3: Multivariate analysis of *nemu* and *toykey* on all groups

Likewise, for the use of *toykey*, the strongest condition is age (the range value of 38). Teenage speakers most prefer its use, whereas the oldest group disfavors it. The second strongest constraint is adjectival function (the range value of 18). As with the use of *nemu*, speakers prefer the use of *toykey* with predicative than attributive adjectives. Sex of the speakers is also significant (the range value of 16). It is male speakers who prefer the use of *toykey*. Semantic type of adjectival heads was not statistically significant.

Considering that each age group is greatly differentiated with regard to the patterns of intensifier use (See Table 3 and 4), multivariate analyses for each age

group were carried out. Separate multivariate analyses reveal that adjective function is only significant among teenagers for *nemu* and college students for *toykey*. Gender difference for *nemu* is statistically significant only among adult speakers between the age of 30 and 49. Women (factor weight (FW): 61) prefer the use of *nemu* while men (FW: 40) disfavor it in the adult group. Also, gender effect for *toykey* is significant only among teenagers. Men (FW: 64) prefer the use of *toykey* whereas women (FW: 36) do not in the teenager group.

4 Discussion

4.1 Waning *nemu*

We have seen that the use of *nemu* is gradually waning from older to younger generation. To look at the history of *nemu* briefly, its use as an intensifier can be found as early as the fifteenth century (Lim 2004). It originally had the denotational meaning of 'exceedingly' or 'too' so it collocated only with words with negative connotations only as in a sentence 'it was too heavy'. Over time, however, its original meaning had faded away, and *nemu* began to collocate with words with positive or neutral connotation as well. And it eventually gained a pure function of intensifier.

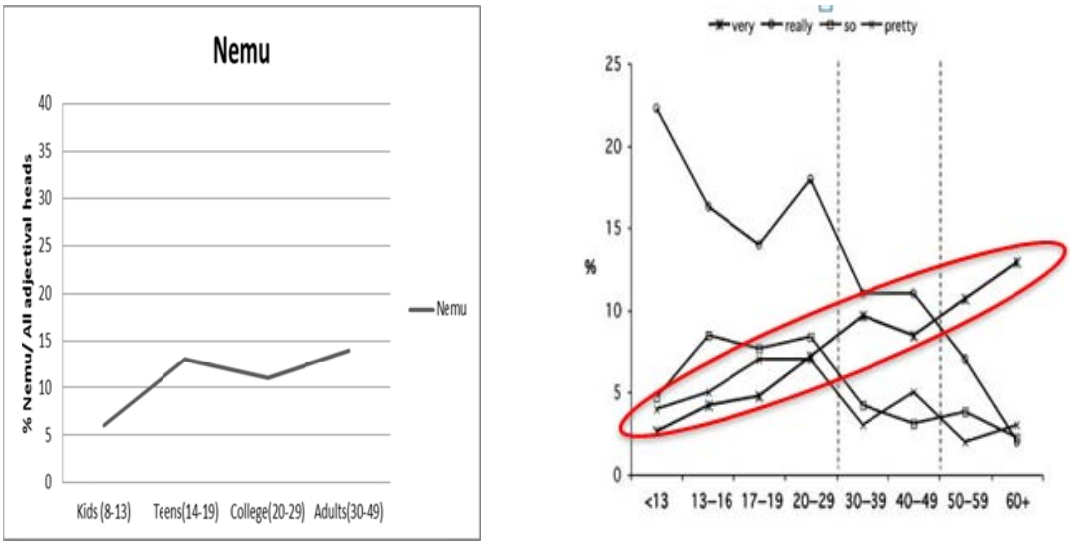

Figure 6: Apparent time trajectories of *nemu* and *very*

I conjecture that *nemu* is now gradually waning as the English intensifier *very* does. Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2009 have found that *very* is waning. The apparent time trajectories of *nemu* and *very* in Figure 6 are quite similar. They are robustly occurring across all age groups but it appears they are gradually waning from older to younger generation.

4.2 Rising *toykey and its adolescent peak*

In contrast, the runner-up *toykey* appears rapidly rising: the use of *toykey* is highest among teenagers but it sharply decreases to older generation. To look at the etymology of *toykey*, the inception of *toykey* dates back to the fifteenth century, and the original meaning of *toykey* was the combination of the adjective *toyta* 'thick without moisture' and the adverb suffix *key* '-ly' (Ahn 2003). It then has gained the abstract meaning of 'challenging + -ly' as well as 'excessively'. It then has functioned more frequently as an intensifier without original denotational meanings. Its use as an intensifier has been much more recent than that of *nemu*.

The first possible interpretation is that *toykey* is rising rapidly. In the apparent time trajectory of *toykey*, we find an adolescent peak, which suggests a change in progress. This relates to Labov's (2001) and Tagliamonte and D'Arcy's (2009) findings that in linguistic change in progress, there appears a peak in the teenager group, which indicates that adolescents use the innovative forms more frequently than their immediate youngers because younger speakers have not had enough incrementation of change. Therefore, this seems to suggest that the rise of *toykey* is a change in progress.

If the rise of *toykey* is a change in progress, who leads the change? The separate multivariate analyses of *toykey* reveal that the strongest condition on the use of *toykey* was gender. Teenage boys highly prefer the use of *toykey*. We can further presume these teenage boys are leading the diffusion of *toykey*. This result is quite interesting because it contradicts previous findings in literature that women usually lead the diffusion of innovative forms (Labov 1990).

However, we suggest some possible explanations on the basis of the social or listener perception of *toykey*. *Toykey* has largely been regarded as informal, vernacular or even slangy rather than as formal or standard language (Ahn 2003: 150). These findings in the current study may suggest a possibility that teenage boys may actively lead diffusing innovative forms when they are strong vernacular or non-standard forms.

Adolescent years are characterized by 'a peer-based social order' and adolescents establish 'communities of practice' whose members share a set of orientation constructing the boundaries of membership and indexing their own identity (Eckert 2005, Meyerhoff 2002). Such an orientation includes linguistic features. In the community of practice among Korean teenage boys, *toykey*, combined with other linguistic features, may function as an index of their own identity distinguishable from that of adults. The use of *toykey*, which is considered somewhat slangy, can indicate their desire to keep autonomy and distance from the institutionalized society such as school. Given the fact that adolescents are excluded from the adult society and confined to age-homogeneous institution (Coleman et al. 1974), we may well conjecture there might be some anti-institutional sentiment within the group. A group of speakers that has anti-institutional feelings expresses those feelings by using strong vernacular (Eckert 1989, 1996, 2000, Labov 1972a, Laks 1983). Therefore it is presumable that it is not the entire teenage male popu-

lation that leads the diffusion of *toykey*, but rather some groups of speakers who wish to break free from the restrictions of their institutions.

Still, the same story can support another possible interpretation: age-grading. Under this interpretation, the use of *toykey* is most frequent in one's teens and its use decreases across one's lifespan. It is plausible that this teenage boy group can be considered a group of speakers who are using strong vernacular or slangy forms exceptionally frequently and this renders the apparent time pattern where teenage boys' use of *toykey* is most frequent. Teenage boys with these strong anti-institutional feelings may use this innovative form and they abandon later in their life.

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