How ‘tone of voice’ can change meaning: intensification in everyday talk.

Richard Ogden
University of York
Centre for Advanced Studies in Language and Communication
Department of Language & Linguistic Science
What I want to do...

• Show how everyday language can be explored in empirical ways: ‘tone of voice’ needn’t be (such a) slippery fish

• Illustrate with a phenomenon familiar everyday conversation
The phenomenon: intensification
Sooooo funny! (Watch until the end!!!)

TODAY Sooooo cute!

Thank You SOOOOO Much

This has been such an amazing day. I'm truly blessed! Thank you so much for giving me the chance to probe myself...
The phenomenon: intensification
A few spoken examples

• I’d walk in there and like five people would say hello to me

• you’d be nuts if you went in

• well the traffic

• Joel then turned up the day after I arrived and drove us (.) mad
Data

- CallHome: American English data, 1980s
- Approximately 120 examples in 27 calls (about 540 minutes, 54 speakers)
- Intensified items marked as underlined in transcriptions
Phonetic description of intensification
en_4822.924-961: we had a **bash**

**full form:** [ei]

**closure:** 325 ms

**glottalisation voicing + closure:** 85 ms

**faster**

**slower**
(some years ago) I— had a major heart attack

sharp onset and release
nasality + closure: 260 ms

release into voicing

faster

slower
en_4145.658-672: I did, the baby J— is huge

silence: 230 ms

sharp, late onset
How intensification is produced

• Intensified items are intonationally prominent
• They have a tenser articulatory setting
• They are produced more slowly with consonants and vowels typically stretched
• Before intensified item: gaps and glottal stops; faster speech
Typical durations of segments in (American) English speech
Durations of [m n] and [p t k]

Durations of [m n] and [p t k]

Segmental durations in connected speech signals: current results. JASA 83, 1553-1573.
typical sounds

intensified sounds

duration
What gets upgraded?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word class</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adjectives</td>
<td>33%</td>
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<tr>
<td>huge, intense, major, disastrous, cheap, alive, red, thin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Modifiers and adverbs</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>really, very, totally, so, completely, never, absolutely</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nouns</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>party, traffic, rocks, Maine</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quantifiers and numbers</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>none, no, all, five, fourth</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Verbs</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>smell, believe</td>
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Showing what intensification means
1. Other features in the same speaker’s talk.
Upgrading
Saying the same thing again more strongly

1  A:  makes an assessment

2  B:  demonstrates resistance

3  A:  a stronger, upgraded, intensified, assessment
B makes a negative assessment of A’s friend, who has been staying with B.
B <<all> I mean talk about a little bit th-> `RUDE;

I’m <<p> SORry>

A [`wEll.]

A could come in at * but doesn’t. A starts a response with well, which indicates upcoming trouble (disagreement).
B makes a stronger, upgraded assessment and intensifies *really*
I mean talk about a little bit th-> RUDE;

I’m SORry>

[`wEll.]

[that’s] REALLY ‘rUde if you Ask `mE;
A is organising B’s wedding for her. B has told the bridesmaids to wear black. A reports their parents’ reaction.
Mom and Dad won't HAVE black.

they don't WANT black?

B does an understanding check.
A confirms B’s understanding, and upgrades B’s and her own earlier formulations, with intensification.

01  A  mOm and dAd *won’t `HAVE blAck.*

02  B  they *don’t ‘WANT blAck?*

03  ➔ A  they’re *`R:EALLy op`POSEd to it.*
01  A  Mom and Dad won’t `HAVE black.

02  B  they don’t ‘WANT black?

03  ➔ A  they’re `R:EALLY opposed to it.
B asks A for an update on what she’s been doing.
A responds with this update. It’s a story launch. A story provides a speaker with an opportunity for a longer telling: here, some account for A’s negative assessment.
B’s response provides A with a slot to continue; but by laughing, he displays a non-serious understanding of A’s story-to-be.
What was the time in New Mexico like;

[Oh God it was HORrible.

<<laugh>> Really?

➔ It was > <f, len> ↑HORrible.

A makes the same assessment, but intensifies horrible: ↑HORrible is something more than horrible in line 02.
B takes this version seriously and provides A with the go-ahead for her telling.
What was the time in New Mexico like;

[OH gOd it was HORrible.

<<laugh> ’rEAly?>

➔ it was <<f, len> ↑HORrible>.

↑whY:.}
oh god it was horrible
first version

a bit rude → really rude
won’t have black → are really opposed to it
horrible → ↑ horrible

‘upgraded’

Intensification by itself is equivalent to a reformulation using words.
Intensifying nouns: non-neutral versions of nouns.
When is a party more than a party?
A invited some Russian students round to a party. She describes the quantity of alcohol they drank.
B does a confirmation check. A confirms her own evaluation of how much drinking went on.
She describes the kind of things they drank: hard liquor.
B orients to the ‘hard liquor’.
A describes how drunk they were. `\textsuperscript{\textregistered}SCHNO::Ckered` is intensified; this ties in with the hard liquor.
She describes it as a `\texttt{\textsuperscript{\textregistered}P:A:R\textsuperscript{\textregistered}ty}` with intensification.
B displays appreciation with wow.
A continues to describe the party: it's wild, exuberant...
CH en_4822.924-961

01 A you have never seen so much alcohol consumed b[y a] (*)(*) [re-]
02 B r- re[all]y
03 A [(*)(*)]
04 B Unbelievable.
05 A [they brought all this gIn?]
06 B o[:h
07 A [they got [they got
08 B really, <<laugh> gi[n?>
09 A [they got
10 B <<len> `↑SCHN0::Ckere[d.=] =they they we had a]
11 A [they got
12 B <<len> `↑SCHN0::Ckere[d.=] =they they we had a]
13 A [they got
14 B [oh my god ]
15 A `↑P:AR↑ty he[re.
16 A -dAncing a-rOUNd; -spIlling stUff; still `stIcky EverywhEre...
What is worse than traffic?
A arrived somewhere unfamiliar as a ball game was starting.
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<td>B</td>
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<td>04</td>
<td>A</td>
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<td>05</td>
<td>B</td>
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B displays that she can see there’s trouble brewing: *oh no; CLICK+oh.*
A describes her lack of familiarity with the city.
well we ``arrIved, jUst as the trAffic was going In for the
gA[me? well ↑`I didn’t kn]ow there was a game,
[ `Oh ^nO. ]
I mean I did[n’t even] knOw
where I was gOing.=you kn[ow I was just] `fOllowing
the `dirEction[s. ]
[ mhm ]
the `dirEction[s. ]
[ mhm ]
<<all> well the> `↑TR:A:Ffic.

A mentions the `↑TR:A:Ffic., with intensification. This is in the context of having set it up as problematic.
well we `arrIved, jUst as the trAffic was going In for the
gA[me? well ↑`I didn’t kn]ow there was a game,
I mean I did[n’t even] knOw
where I was gOing.=you kn[ow I was just] `fOllowing
the `dirEction[s. ]
[ mhm ]
[[<<cr>oh>]]
<<all> well the> `↑TR:A:FFic.
I was [beside myself
[<<click>>]
A I said ↑Oh h° my goodness
well we `'arrIved, jUst as the trAffic was going In for the
gA[me? well ↑`I didn’t kn]ow there was a game,
[Oh  ^nO.  ]
I mean I did[n’t even] knOw
[<<cr>oh>]
where I was gOing.=you kn[ow I was just] `fOllowing
[     mhm     ]
the `dirEction[s. ]
[mhm]
<<all> well the> `↑TR:A:Ffic.
I was [beside myself
[<<click>>
I said ↑Oh h° my goodness
Numbers
Extreme case formulations
Extreme case formulations

schnockered          a major heart attack
really opposed       don’t smell at all
never seen so much alcohol
the baby Jack is huge
CH en_4576.394-414

01  B  y’had pEcan ‘pIE?
02  A  [mtk↓] `↑HU::GE `pIEces
02  A  I thin[k <<all> the pie was probably] cut in> `SIX
03  B  [<<-----laughter----->>]
04  B  <<all> ↑oh ^my.>
05  A  you ‘KNOW?
06  B  <<C, p> w[o:w>
07  A  [or `Even `FIVE.
08  B  °ptk
09  A  `HU::GE pieces.
10  B  [uy uy
11  B  <<p> ^wow.>
`O:h `gOd this `COURse Joshua, was <<len> -SO: (.) ?Over>whElming this year. ha[haha [<<p> ‘wO:w.

A .hhh I mean w- e- we were in -clAss; (. ) ?about `sIx hOUrs a `dAY, and then yOU `hAd to go `hO:me and `dO about twEnty five hOURrs worth of `HOMEwork. to to get `rEAdy for the next dAY.

A long day: 6 hr + 35 hr = 31 hr. No wonder it’s overwhelming.

**Extreme case formulation:** not just busy: overwhelming.
Numbers, quantifiers, extreme case formulations

• ‘External’, ‘objective’ evidence for assessment provided

• Present an assessment as reasonable, making it easier for someone else to go along with

• cf. Pomerantz 1986, Wilkinson & Kitzinger 2006
2. How the recipient treats intensification.
A has been living in a hot climate for six weeks. A and B are talking about the weather where A is.

More complex cases

Participant orientation in the next turn

Co-occurring features: numbers, quantifiers, extreme case formulations

---

8  CH en_4485.127-164
01 B  `0:h `gOd this `COURse Joshua,
02    was <<len> -SO: (. ) ?over>whElming this year. ha[haha
03 → A

9  CH en_4665.1070-1116
01 B  Mary JAn e said she was ?EAten ?a`LI::VE
02    (0.3)
03 → A [<<p> `n[:;0.>
04 B  [<<laughter> [the Other `dAy,>
05 → A <<click>> <<C> ↑-o:::h;>

10  CH en_4807.203-251
01 A  she`s (. ) had her `F:OURTH stro:ke an[d;
02 → B [<<p> oh `go:sh;>
11 CH en_4822.681-722
01 B oh I ↑`THOUGHT he was kind of `cute'
02 <<all> but he was like> ↑`Totally enAmoured of me.
03 → A <<click>> ↑WOW.
04 B [im`MEDiately. <<CR> which was vErY sUs[p]ect.]
05 A [.hh
06 A Even [when you’re- even thOUgh you’re] ‘Older and
07 B [I mean be`fORe he even `kNEw me.]
08 A ‘Ev[erything.

12 CH en_4822.924-961
01 A we had a `B:A::[sh.
02 → B ↑`Oh my `GO:D.
(10 seconds later)
11 A [they got
A <<len> ↓SCHNO::Ckere[d=> =they they we had a]
→ B [ oh my god ]
13 A ↓P:A:R↓ty he[re.
14 → B [<<breathy> wo::w:::
15 A dancing around spilling stuff still sticky everywhere
Done soon after intensification. Treats prior as in some way remarkable or beyond expectation. Doesn’t just treat it as e.g. new information.
Responding
The normative way to respond to intensification

1 A: turn with intensification
2 B: demonstrates understanding: remarkable, beyond expectation not just news
More complex cases:
  having enough evidence
 knowing what we’re talking about
Getting the evidence
To share someone else’s point of view, you need to share knowledge
B makes a complaint about her boyfriend’s eating habits and how thin he is.

\[^{-}\text{SO} \text{SKInny};\] is intensified.
A responds with a ‘continuer’.
This displays no stance towards what
B has just said.
With this continuer, A positions
herself as a recipient of B’s telling.
B treats this as inadequate: I mean prefaces a reformulation, so it treat the prior as problematic. B provides an account for what she said in lines 01-02.
B TRacy; I’ve NEVER seen anybody eat as much as he does. =
and he’s 3:0 SKInny;
A  
B  

h. I mEA:n; .h the amount of cereal he eats like bet-wEEEn -mEAls, and ‘After mEAls?
A  
B  

and we go through a box of cereal every two dA:Ys;
A does a ‘confirmation check’. B confirms.
A displays ‘surprise’.
This is the token that could also have come at line 02.
It takes a lot of negotiation to display ‘surprise’!

(Wilkinson & Kitzinger 2006)
`TRAcy; I’ve `NEver seen anybody eat as much as he does.=
and he’s ↑-S:O `SKInny;

<<p l> `mhm;>

h. I mEA:n; .h the amount of cereal he eats like bet-wEEn mEAls,
and ‘After mEAls?

<<p> ‘yeah,>

and we gO through a box of cereal every two dA:Ys;

<<p> ^rEAlly.>

<<p> -yEAh;>

<<pp> wOw>
```
\begin{verbatim}
This sequence would have worked just as well.
\end{verbatim}
```
What are we talking about?
To agree, you need to be sure you are both talking about the same thing.
A produces the first turn on a new topic.
B gives A the go-ahead to tell more about the house
A makes a strong, intensified assessment.
B checks on which house he is referring to (understanding check): she can only go along with his assessment if she knows what he is assessing (epistemic access).
A confirms B’s understanding check. Now A and B both know they are talking about the same thing, the way is clear for B to display her stance and align with A.
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<td>01</td>
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<td>you would’ve loved this house we saw honey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>oh yeah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>&lt;&lt;all&gt; it was&gt; †<code>U:N:be</code>lievable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>frAnk lloyd ‘WRI:GHT[s, huh,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>[&lt;&lt;p&gt; `yEAh.&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>aw</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B produces a response token.
A you would’ve loved this house we saw honey
B oh yeah
A <<all> it was> †`U:N:be\`lievable
B frAnk lloyd ‘WRI:GHT[s, huh,
A [<<p> `yEAh.>
B aw
you would’ve loved this house we saw honey

oh yeah

<<all> it was> †`U:N:be`lievable

This sequence would have worked just as well.

aw
uh-huh
mhmm
OK
really?
you mean...?
wow
oh my god
gosh
oh no
Responding
The normative way to respond to intensification

1  A:  turn with intensification

2  B:  demonstrates understanding:
   remarkable, beyond expectation
   wow, oh my god, oh my... etc.
Responding
Sometimes the response is delayed

1  A:  turn with intensification

   Insert sequence:
   A/B:  deal with problems with shared knowledge or evidence, make sure we are talking about the same thing

2  B:  demonstrates understanding:
   remarkable, beyond expectation
   wow, oh my god, oh my… etc.

We negotiate the details of what we know, have access to, or what we’re talking about.
Resisting the other person’s line
or being heard to resist
A makes a strong and intensified claim about babies’ excrement if they are breast fed.
but if they’re ‘tOtally `brEAst milk;
for like the `fIRst `cOUple of `‘mOnths,=
=m`HM;=
=they don’t-
thei:r ‘nUmber ‘twOs don’t smEll ?at `↑?ALL.
<<p l> `oh o`ka[y.>

B’s response accepts the claim but
does not display any orientation to
the extraordinariness of A’s claim.
but if they’re ‘tOtally ‘brEAst milk;
for like the `fIRst `cOUple of ‘mOnths,=
=they don’t-
their ‘nUmber ‘twOs don’t smEll ?at `↑?ALL.
<<p l> `oh o`ka[y.>
[↑-thEy don’t ↑-smEll like ↑↑`?ANything;>
but if they’re ‘tOtally `brEAst milk;
for like the `fIRst `cOUple of `‘mOnths,=
=they don’t-
thei: r ‘nUmber ‘twOs don’t smEll ?at `↑?ALL.
<<p l> `oh o`ka[y.>
<<h>[↑-thEy don’t ↑-smEll like ↑↑`?ANything;>
it’s like <<*sniff* *sniff*>>
<<h> it `↑lOOks like ‘shIt
...and then makes her claim again at very high pitch.
but if they’re ‘tOtally `brEAST milk;
for like the `fIRst `cOUple of `‘mOnths,=
=m`HM;=
=they don’t-
thei:r ‘nUmber ‘twOs don’t smEll ?at `↑?ALL.
<<p l> `oh o`ka[y.>  
<<h> [↑-thEy don’t ↑-smEll like ↑↑`?ANything;>
it’s like <<*sniff* *sniff*>*>
<<h> it `↑lOOks like ‘shIt
but it doesn’t ‘smEll [like ↑↑`ANyth]i:ng;>
[`O:ky; <<click>>]

B’s response is still not valenced; it does not orient to the extraordinary part of A’s claim.
but if they’re ‘tOtally ‘brEAst milk; for like the ‘fIRst ‘cOUple of ‘‘mOnths,=
=they don’t–
their ‘nUmber ‘twOs don’t smEll ?at `↑?ALL.
<<p l> `oh o`ka[y.>
<<h>[↑-thEy don’t ↑-smEll like ↑↑`?ANything;>
it’s like <<*sniff* *sniff*>>
<<h> it `↑lO0ks like ‘shIt
but it doesn’t ‘smEll [like ↑↑`ANyth]i:ng;>
[`O:kay; <<click>>]
°hhh <<p> and did you ‘pÜmp or `NO[T>
01 A but if they’re ‘tOtally `brEAsT milk;
02    for like the `fIRst `cOUple of `‘mOnths,=
03 B =m`HM;=
04 A =they don’t-
05 thei:r ‘nUmber ‘twOss don’t smEll ?at `↑?ALL.
06 → B <<p l> `oh o`ka[y.>
07 A                        <<h>[↑-thEy don’t ↑-smEll like ↑↑`ANything;>
08 it’s like <<*sniff* *sniff*>>
09    <<h> it `↑lOOks like ‘shIt
10 but it doesn’t ‘smEll [like       ↑↑`ANyth]i:ng;>
11 B                         [`O:ka[y; <<click>>]
12 → B °hhh <<p> and did you ‘pUmp or `NO[T>
13 A                      [yeah I pumped
Responding
Resisting the other person’s line

1  A:  turn with intensification
2  B:  resists aligning with A
(3  A:  turn with intensification)
(4  B:  resists aligning with A) ↩
... exit sequence

Evidence that turns with intensification are designed to get an aligning response from the recipient.
You say the right thing...
but it’s not enough for the other person.
A describes a pecan pie she and her family ate at a restaurant. She uses a number to describe the size of the pieces.
A has been living in a hot climate for six weeks. A and B are talking about the weather where A is.

A: It's horrible.

B: It's so disgusting.

B: I mean I hear weather reports for there and I'm like "Oh gee.

A: You would've loved this house we saw honey.

B: Oh yeah.

A: It was unbelievable.

B: Frank Lloyd Wright, huh.

A: Yeah.

B: Aw.

B has updated a play for a peace movement she is involved with. They have now designated her 'playwright' because she has updated a play the group had used in earlier years.

B: You know that's not my expertise in any way.

A: Hehe.

A: But they're making it. Hahaha.

B: Uh huh.

Resistance from recipient

A: Their numbers don't smell at all.

B: Oh okay.

A: They don't smell like anything. It's like "sniff sniff" but it doesn't smell anything.

B: Okay. "sniff sniff" and did you pump or not.

A: Yeah I pumped.

B produces a response.
A has been living in a hot climate for six weeks. A and B are talking about the weather where A is.

A: it's **Horrible.**

B: it's **SO disgusting and**

A: you would've loved this house we saw honey

B: oh yeah

A: **U:N:be**lievable

B: Frank **WRI:GHT[s, huh,**

A: **yEAh.**

B: **aw**

B has updated a play for a peace movement she is involved with. They have now designated her 'playwright' because she has updated a play the group had used in earlier years.

B: you know that's **N:Ot my expertIse** in [[any] `WAY `shape or `fOHrm;`

A: [hehe]

A: **thEy don't** -smEll like [↑↑ `ʔ ANything `]

it's like [*sniff* *sniff*]

A: `shIt but it doesn't smell [like `]

B: `O:kay; <<click>>

B: and did you 'pUmp or `N:OT>

A: [yeah I pumped

A: **HU::GE** `pIEces

I think [<<all> the pie was probably] cut in> `SIX

B: [<<-----laughter----->]

B: oh ^my.>

A: **KNOW?**

A pursues a further response; it's as if **oh my** isn't adequate.
B produces a quiet, creaky **wow**.
A modifies her description: fewer pieces means bigger pieces.
A has been living in a hot climate for six weeks. A and B are talking about the weather where A is.

A: it's Horrible.
B: it's SO disgusting and... you know that's Not my expertise in any way shape or form.

A: (hehe)
B: oh yeah.
A: (↑ unbelievable)
B: Frank Lloyd Wright, huh,
A: yEAh.

B has updated a play for a peace movement she is involved with. They have now designated her 'playwright' because she has updated a play the group had used in earlier years.

B: you know that's Not my expertise in any way shape or form;
A: but they're making it. hahaha
B: uh (↑↑)

A: their 'Numbers' don't smell at ALL.
B: (oh okay.)
A: (↑ they don't smell like anything, ↑↑)

B: (↑↑)
A: (↑ looks like shit but it doesn't smell like anything)
B: (okay; <<click>>)
A: (°hhh and did you 'pump or NOT>
B: (uy uy)
A: (°w)
B: (w[w[w)
A: (or 'Even 'FIVE.
B: °ptk

B opens her mouth and prepares to take a turn.
A repeats her claim about the size of the pieces.
A has been living in a hot climate for six weeks. A and B are talking about the weather where A is.

A: It's horrible.

B: It's so disgusting and...

A: I mean, I hear weather reports for there and I'm like...

B: Frank Lloyd Wright, huh,

A: Yeah.

B: Aw

B has updated a play for a peace movement she is involved with. They have now designated her 'playwright' because she has updated a play the group had used in earlier years.

B: You know that's not my expertise in any way. Making it, hahaha

A: Yeah.

B: Uh huh, ^Yeah.

Resistance from recipient

B: Their 'numbers don't smell at all.

A: But they're making it.

B: Okay. ^Yeah.

A: They don't smell like anything; it's like *sniff* *sniff* but it doesn't smell anything.

B: Okay; ^Click^

B: And did you pump or not?

A: Yeah I pumped

B: °hh °and did you pump or not? °ptk

A: °GE pieces.

B: °uy ^uy °ptk°

A: °GE pieces.

B: °uy °uy °ptk°

B: °Wow.°

So anyway that was fun.

B takes the turn she started at line 08, and produces and appreciation of A's telling.
A closes the sequence down with a summarising assessment; **so anyway** marks the start of something disjunctive and new.
A has been living in a hot climate for six weeks. A and B are talking about the weather where A is.

A: It's [insert word] horrible.
B: [insert word] SO disgusting.

A: I mean, I hear [insert word] weather reports for there and I'm like [insert word] Gee.

A: You would've loved this house we saw honey.
B: Oh yeah.
A: [Insert word] unbelievable.

B: Frank Lloyd Wright, huh.
A: Yeah.

B: Has updated a play for a peace movement she is involved with. They have now designated her 'playwright' because she has updated a play the group had used in earlier years.
B: You know that's not my expertise in any way.

A: But they're making it. Hahaha.

B: [Insert word] uh huh...[Insert word]

A: Their numbers don't smell at all.
B: Oh okay. They don't smell like anything.

A: It's like [sniff] [sniff] it looks like shit but it doesn't smell like anything.
B: [Insert word] okay. [Insert word] and did you pump or not.

A: Yeah I pumped.

A: [Insert word] huge pieces.
B: [Insert word] so anyway that was fun.
Conclusions

• We find intensification in many social activities: complaining, informing, story-telling

• Intensification involves more than just ‘tone of voice’: there’s a lot of other linguistic structure involved

• Intensification is used to solicit a response from someone else that aligns with the speaker’s stance: one device to persuade
‘The science of language’

• There are technical ways to describe speech, the organisation of language into units, and the organisation of linguistic units into conversations

• Everyday talk, despite our intuitions, is orderly: there is linguistic and social order, and we can find evidence for these levels of order by careful examination
Thank you!

Richard Ogden
richard.ogden@york.ac.uk
University of York
Centre for Advanced Studies in Language and Communication
Department of Language & Linguistic Science

Talk based on: