

## Adjective Intensifiers in German

Intensifying adverbs have revealed various findings about language variation and change. For instance, studies have found that intensifiers function as parts within a multi-dimensional system which are sensitive to social factors such as sex and age. As a result, this has led to the claim that women use intensifiers more frequently than men (Xiao & Tao 2007). While the study of English intensifiers has been a topic of much empirical discourse (Ito & Tagliamonte 2003; Xiao & Tao 2007), intensification in the German language is underexplored. To date, no studies have investigated how German intensifiers are distributed within a multi-dimensional system and no studies have empirically investigated the effects of social factors on their use.

Using the largest available corpus of present-day spoken German (*Forschungs- und Lehrkorpus Gesprochenes Deutsch* ‘Research and Teaching Corpus of Spoken German’) the present study addresses the following questions. Firstly, which are the most frequently used German intensifiers and are specific types of intensifiers (i.e., *Verstärker* ‘amplifiers’) more frequent than others (i.e., *Begriffsminderung* ‘downtoners’)? Secondly, is the use of intensifiers sensitive to the social factors sex and age?

Methodologically, 5,000 adjectives were randomly extracted from the corpus and were coded based on whether they had been intensified or not (1 = yes, 0 = no). This approach of including both occurrence and absence of intensifiers is in line with the established practice in variationist sociolinguistics. Doing so, allowed for an analysis of the overall intensification rate, the most frequently used adjective intensifiers, and the influence of social predictors.

Results indicate that German adjectives are intensified by intensifiers at a rate of 37% which corroborate crosslinguistic findings from English (Tagliamonte 2016). As for the distributional frequency, amplifiers were found to be more frequent than downtoners, and boosters were found to be more frequent than maximizers, which also corroborate findings from English (D’Arcy 2015: 460). Finally, a mixed effects logistic regression model was run which included the ‘speaker’ as a mixed effect and used intensification (1 = yes, 0 = no) as the dependent variable. Results indicated that women do have a statistical tendency to use German intensifiers more frequently than men. However, men were found to use downtoners, which are intensifiers which scale down the meaning of an adjective (e.g., *ein bisschen* ‘a bit’), more frequently than women.

Therefore, the present study provides support to the claim that women have a statistical tendency to use intensifiers more frequently than men but this study also suggests that men have a statistical tendency to use German downtoners more frequently than women. Broadly speaking, this finding may suggest something about the anthropological and sociological nature of being male or female in general, namely that women tend to describe a property as being higher than the assumed norm whereas men have a tendency to describe it as being lower than the assumed norm. This study also suggests that the distribution of the German intensifier system resembles what has been observed previously in other Germanic languages.

### Selected References

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