

# *Fei schee*: The social meaning of intensifier use in Swabian

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# Outline

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- Background
- Data and Methods
- Analysis and Results
- Discussion and Conclusions

# Background

# Intensifiers defined

An **intensifier** is a **device** which scales a quality **upward** or **downward** from an assumed norm (Bolinger 1972:17), for example,

*des find i komisch*

‘I think that’s ∅ strange’

*den find i **total** komisch*

‘I think that’s totally strange’

*das isch e **ganz** komische Konstruktion*

‘that’s quite a strange construction’

Note: Examples are drawn from the Swabian German corpus of sociolinguistic interviews

# Previous Literature: Variationist Sociolinguistic

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<b>English</b>	Ito & Tagliamonte 2003; Tagliamonte 2008; Barnfield & Buchstaller 2010; D'Arcy 2015; Fuchs 2017; Stratton 2021
<b>German</b>	Stratton 2020a
<b>Norwegian</b>	Stratton & Sundquist 2022

# Previous Literature: German

- *Gradadverbien* ‘degree adverbs’ (König, Stark & Requart 1990)
- *Steigerungspartikeln* ‘heightening particles’ (Helbig 1988)
- *Intensivpartikeln* ‘intensive particles’ (Androutsopoulos 1998)
- *Intensitätspartikeln* ‘intensifying particles’ (Breindl 2009)
- *Intensitätsadverbien* ‘intensity adverbs’ (Weinrich 1993)
- *Gradpartikel* ‘scalar particle’ (Altmann 1976)
- *Intensifikator* ‘intensifier’ (Helbig 1988; van Os 1989)
- *graduativer Zusatz* ‘gradable adjunct’ (von Polenz 1988)

# Intensification in Swabian

- In Swabian German, adjectives can be intensified both **syntactically** (analytically) and **morphologically** (synthetically)

- Some examples:

*i bin Ø ald*      ‘I’m old’      →      no intensification

*sehr ald*      ‘very old’      →      syntactic intensification

*urald*      ‘extremely old’      →      morphological intensification

- Morphological intensification is less frequent (e.g., Claudi 2006:352)

*Note: Examples are drawn from the Swabian German corpus of sociolinguistic interviews*

# Envelope of Variation

Intensification in German is found in various contexts:

Adjectives: *das war so super* ‘it was so great’ [lit. ‘super’]

Verbs: *mir gefällts sehr gut* ‘I really liked it’

Adverbs: *ging so schnell* ‘[it] happened so fast’

(English: Bäcklund 1973:279; German: Androutsopoulos 1998:457- 458; Norwegian: Westervoll 2015:4)

Note: Examples are from the Swabian German corpus of sociolinguistic interviews



# Intensifier Types

Intensifiers can be divided into two sub-categories depending on their intensifying function (Quirk et al. 1985:90)

**Amplifiers:** “scale upwards from the assumed norm”

*gued* > *sehr gued* ‘very good’

**Downtoners:** “scale down from the assumed norm”

*gued* > *einigermaßen gued* ‘somewhat good’

*Note: Examples are drawn from the Swabian German corpus of sociolinguistic interviews*

# Cross-Germanic Tendencies

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- **Amplifiers** are more frequent than **downtoners**
- **Women** use **intensifiers** more frequently than **men** (e.g., Fuchs, 2017)

**Women** use **amplifiers** more frequently than men do

**Men** use **downtoners** more frequently than women do

*(German: Stratton 2020a; English: Stratton 2020b Norwegian: Stratton & Sundquist 2022)*

# Why Study Intensifiers?

- Some of the most rapid and interesting semantic change occurs with intensifiers (Quirk et al. 1985:590; Peters 1994:269; Stoffel 1901:2).
- They **provide** speakers with the **opportunity** to **impress, persuade, praise** (Partington 1993:178)
- Intensifiers tend to **lose** their **intensifying uniqueness** over time (Tagliamonte 2008:391)
- Intensifiers undergo perpetual **renewal, recycling, and replacement** (Ito & Tagliamonte 2003; Tagliamonte 2008; Stratton 2020b)

# Sociolinguistic Correlates of Intensifier Use

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## Linguistic:

- **Collocational width** (e.g., Stratton 2022)
- **Syntactic function** (e.g., Tagliamonte & Denis 2014)

## Social:

- **Age** (e.g., Stratton, 2020a; Stratton & Sundquist 2022)
- **Gender** (e.g., Stratton, 2020a; Stratton & Sundquist 2022)
- **Social class** (e.g., Macaulay 1995, 2006)

# Research Questions

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- (1) What are the **frequencies** and **functions** of different types of intensifiers in Swabian German?
- (2) Which **social factors** condition and constrain the intensifier system in Swabian German?
- (3) How has intensifier use changed in **real-time** and **apparent-time** across the lifespan and within the community?

# Data and Methods

# Swabian Panel Study Corpus

	1982				2017			
	mid-age >30 yrs		younger <30 yrs		older >60 yrs		mid-age <60 yrs	
	men	women	men	women	men	women	men	women
Community								
Stuttgart	0	1	4	2	0	1	4	2
Schwäbisch Gmünd	1	2	6	4	1	2	6	4
Subtotal by Sex	1	3	10	6	1	3	10	6
Subtotal by Age	4		16		4		16	
Subtotal by Year	20				20			
Total All	40							

# Data Collection and Preparation

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## **Sociolinguistic Interviews**

- Labovian-style, casual interview questions of approximately one hour
- Same interview instrument and techniques used in 1982 and 2017

## **Transcriptions**

- Completed in ELAN by native German speakers
- Followed a strict orthography developed for Swabian

## **Annotation**

- All adjectives were extracted from the transcripts automatically using Python
- All adjectival contexts were coded manually for the internal constraints



# Variationist Sociolinguistic Study

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- Envelope of Variation (Poplack & Tagliamonte 1989:60)
  - Intensifiers with adjectives
- Principle of Accountability (Labov 1969:737-738)
  - All adjective intensifiers were coded in the corpus
- Statistical modeling using multivariate analyses
  - Rbrul (Guy 2018, Johnson 2009, Cedergren and Sankoff 1974)
  - GLMER (Guy 2018, Baayen 2008)

# Narrowing the Envelope of Variation

Following previous work, functionally non-comparable contexts were removed:

- Comparative contexts., e.g., *isch s natiirlich net sehr gued* ‘it’s not very good’
- Superlative contexts, e.g., *e bissle trockener* ‘a bit drier’, *etwas dicker* ‘somewhat fatter’
- Negative contexts e.g., *ist au net schlimm* ‘it’s also not bad’
- Non-gradable adjectives, e.g., *weil halt meine Eltern berufstätig sind* ‘because my parents are employed’
- Classifiers and adjective compounds, e.g., *soziale Intelligenz* ‘social intelligence’

(D’Arcy 2015, Ito & Tagliamonte 2003)

# Linguistic Variables

- **Dependent variable:** all adjectives were coded binomially for intensification: intensified or not intensified; additionally, each intensifier was coded as an amplifier or downtoner

- **Independent variables:**

Recording year: 1982, 2017

Community: Stuttgart, Gmünd

Age group: younger, older

Gender: men, women

Education: *Abitur*, no *Abitur*

Social class: scale from 0-15

Identity: scale from 1-5

Mobility: scale from 0-100

# Results

# Overall Intensification Rate in Swabian

Total words in the Swabian panel study corpus = 206,577

n	Description
7101	total adjectives
-2056	negative contexts
-1075	comparative contexts
-30	superlative contexts
-65	(genau)so ... wie
-746	non gradable, classifiers, compounds
3129	intensifiable adjectives

Intensified	
%	n
<b>26.7</b>	835
	(n=3,129)

# Change in Intensifiers Over Time

Intensifier		1982 ( <i>n</i> =372)		2017 ( <i>n</i> =460)		+/-	X <sup>2</sup> test
		n	%	n	%		
ganz	‘totally’	76	20%	105	23%	stable	n.s.
so	‘so’	62	17%	61	13%	stable	n.s.
sehr	‘very’	34	9%	67	15%	+	p<.05
ziemlich	‘quite’	34	9%	12	3%	-	p<.001
ein bisschen	‘a little’	31	8%	37	8%	stable	n.s.
unheimlich	‘uncanny’	19	5%	3	1%	-	p<.001
relativ	‘relatively’	7	2%	14	3%	stable	n.s.
echt	‘real’	6	2%	9	2%	stable	n.s.
wirklich	‘really’	11	3%	10	2%	stable	n.s.
recht	‘right’	19	5%	4	1%	-	p<.001

# Intensification Rates Across Time

## 1982

Intensified		Not Intensified	
%	n	%	n
<b>28.5</b>	373	71.5	938

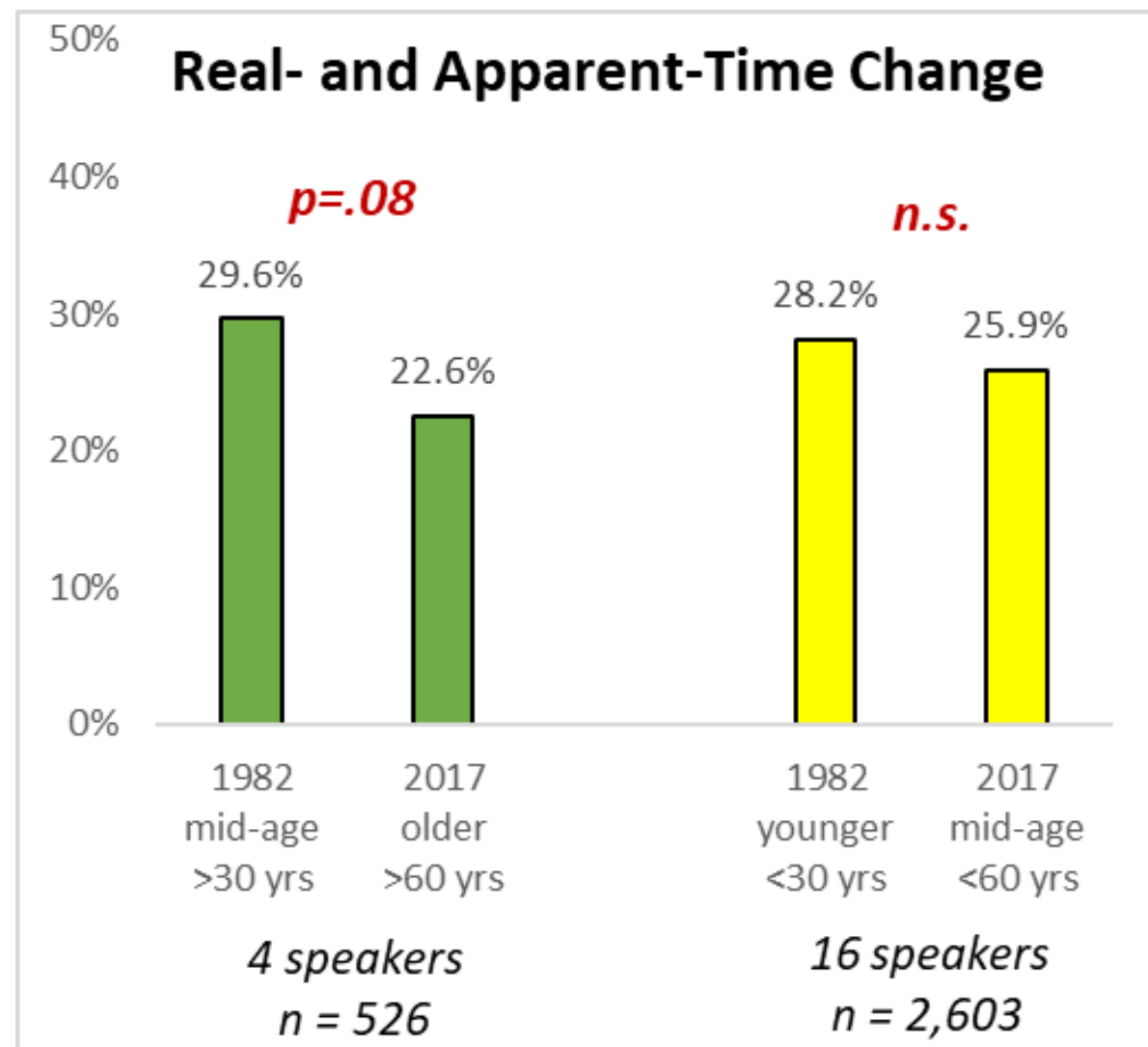
(n=1,311)

## 2017

Intensified		Not Intensified	
%	n	%	n
<b>25.4</b>	462	74.6	1356

(n=1,818)

**(p = .06)**



# Intensification Rates by Gender

## Women

Intensified		Not Intensified	
%	n	%	n
<b>31.5</b>	415	68.5	903

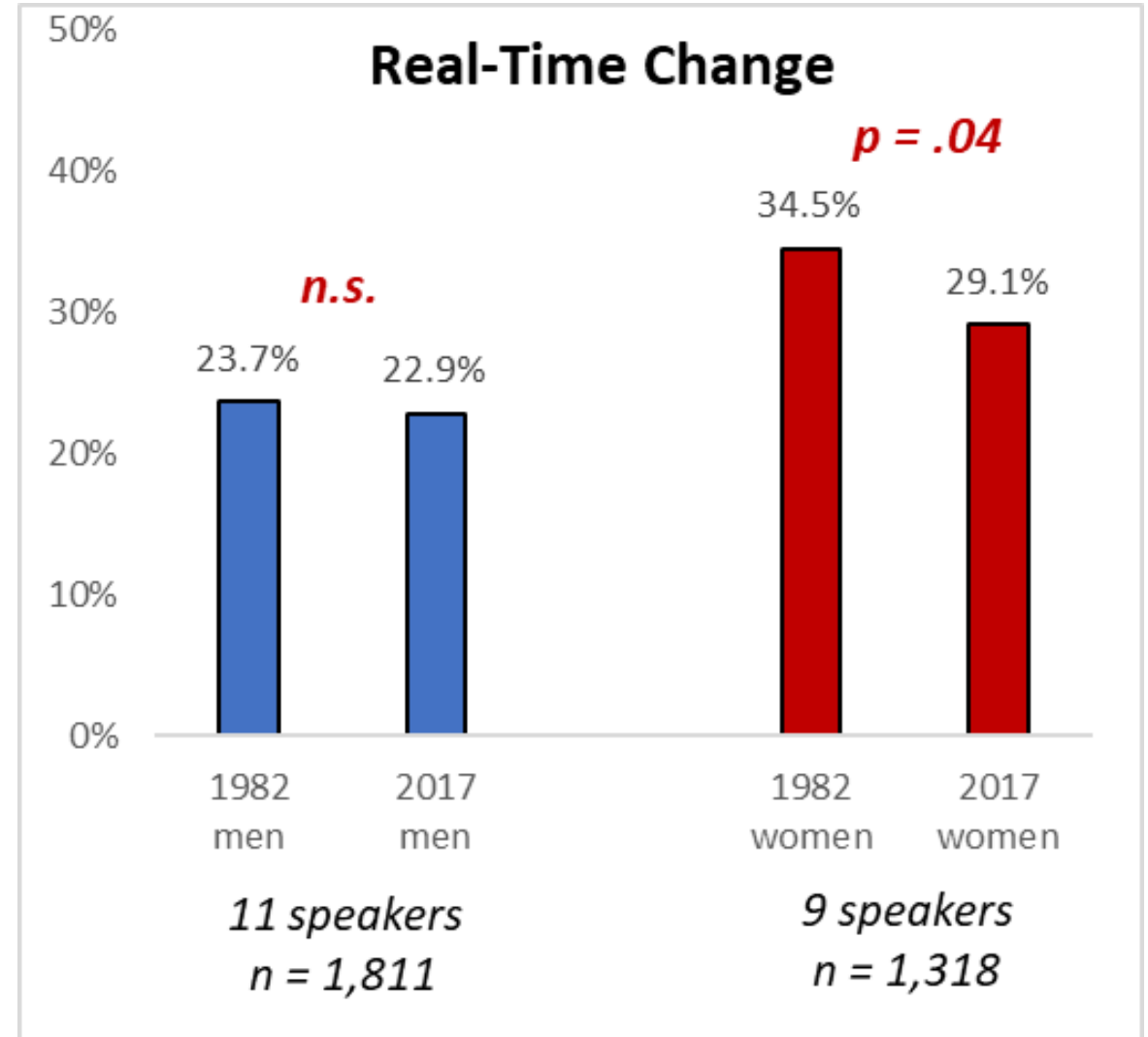
(n=1,318)

## Men

Intensified		Not Intensified	
%	n	%	n
<b>23.2</b>	420	76.8	1391

(n=1,811)

**( $p < .001$ )**





# Intensification by Gender and Intensifier Type

## Women

Amplifiers		Downtoners	
%	n	%	n
<b>83.2</b>	263	16.7	53

(n=316)

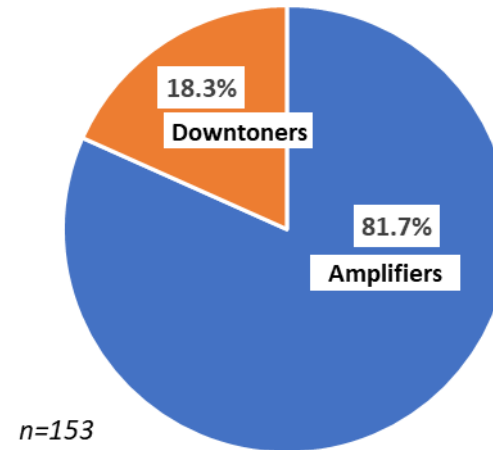
## Men

Amplifiers		Downtoners	
%	n	%	n
<b>59.1</b>	195	40.9	135

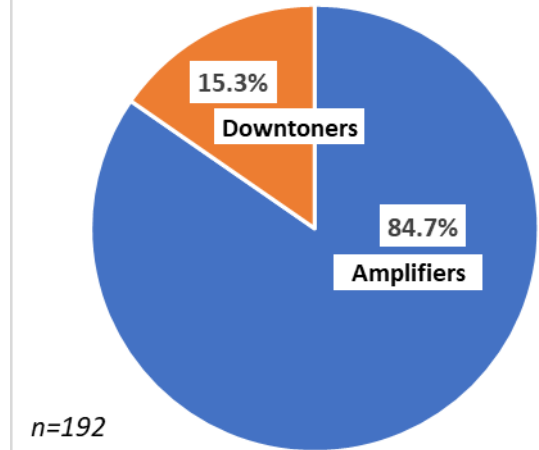
**(p < .001)**

(n=330)

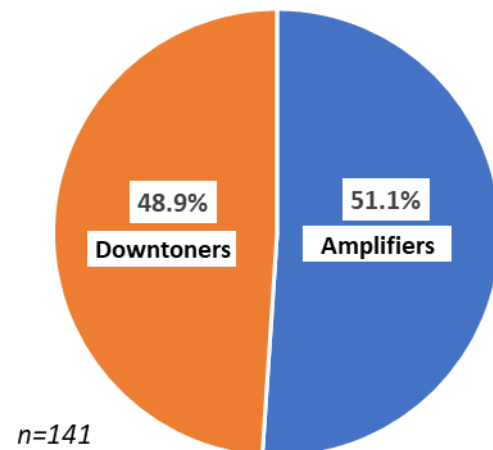
1982 Women



2017 Women

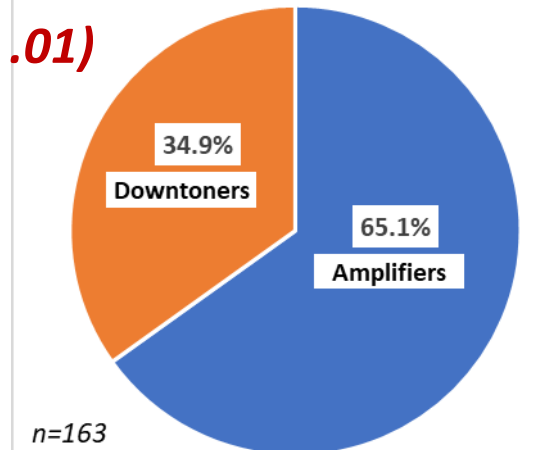


1982 Men



**(p < .01)**

2017 Men



# Intensifier Rates by Community

## Stuttgart

Intensified		Not Intensified	
%	n	%	n
<b>31.4</b>	364	68.6	796

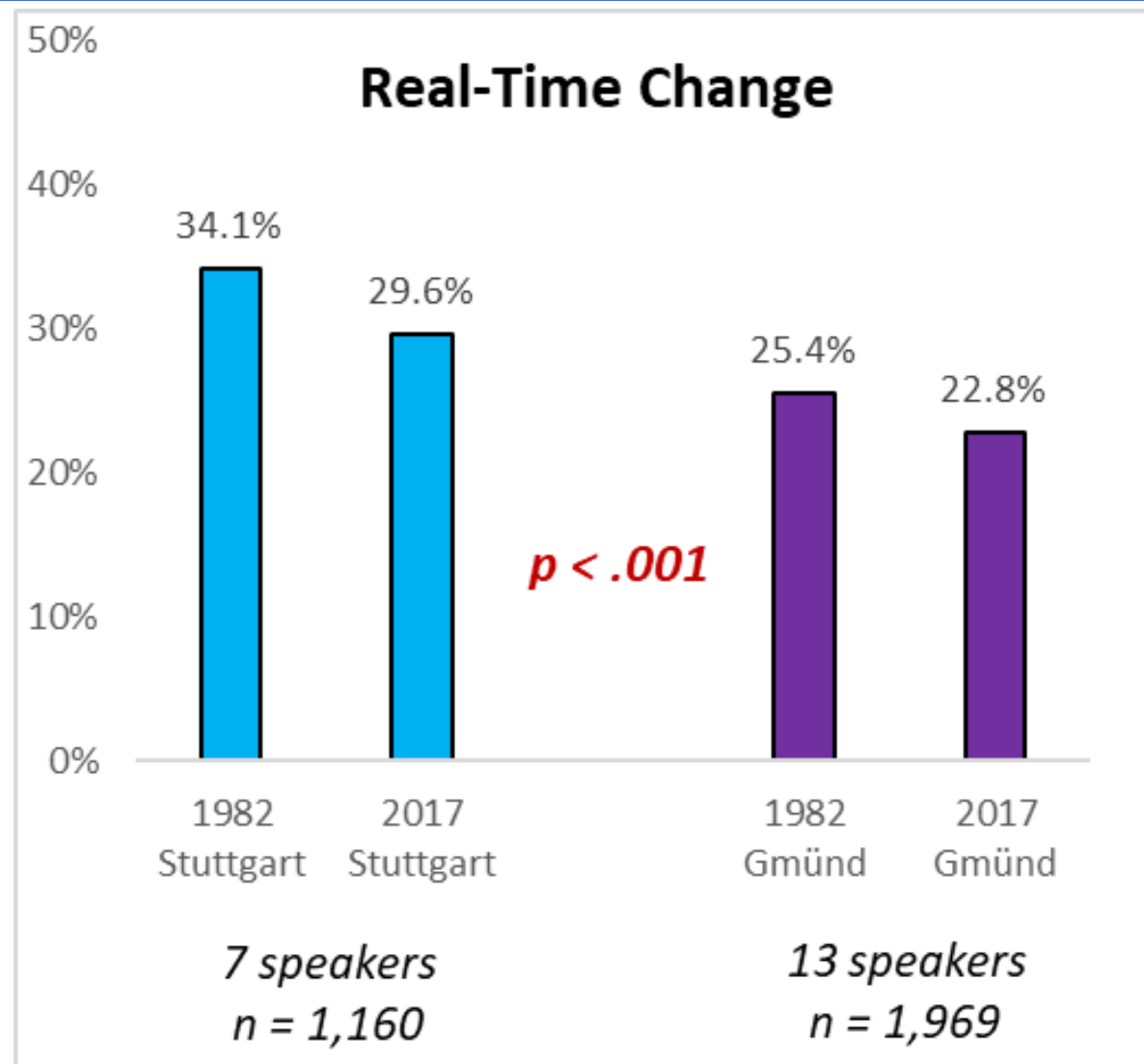
(n=1,160)

## Schwäbisch Gmünd

Intensified		Not Intensified	
%	n	%	n
<b>23.9</b>	471	76.1	1498

**(p < .001)**

(n=1,969)



# Intensifier Rates by Speaker Mobility (SMI)

## High SMI

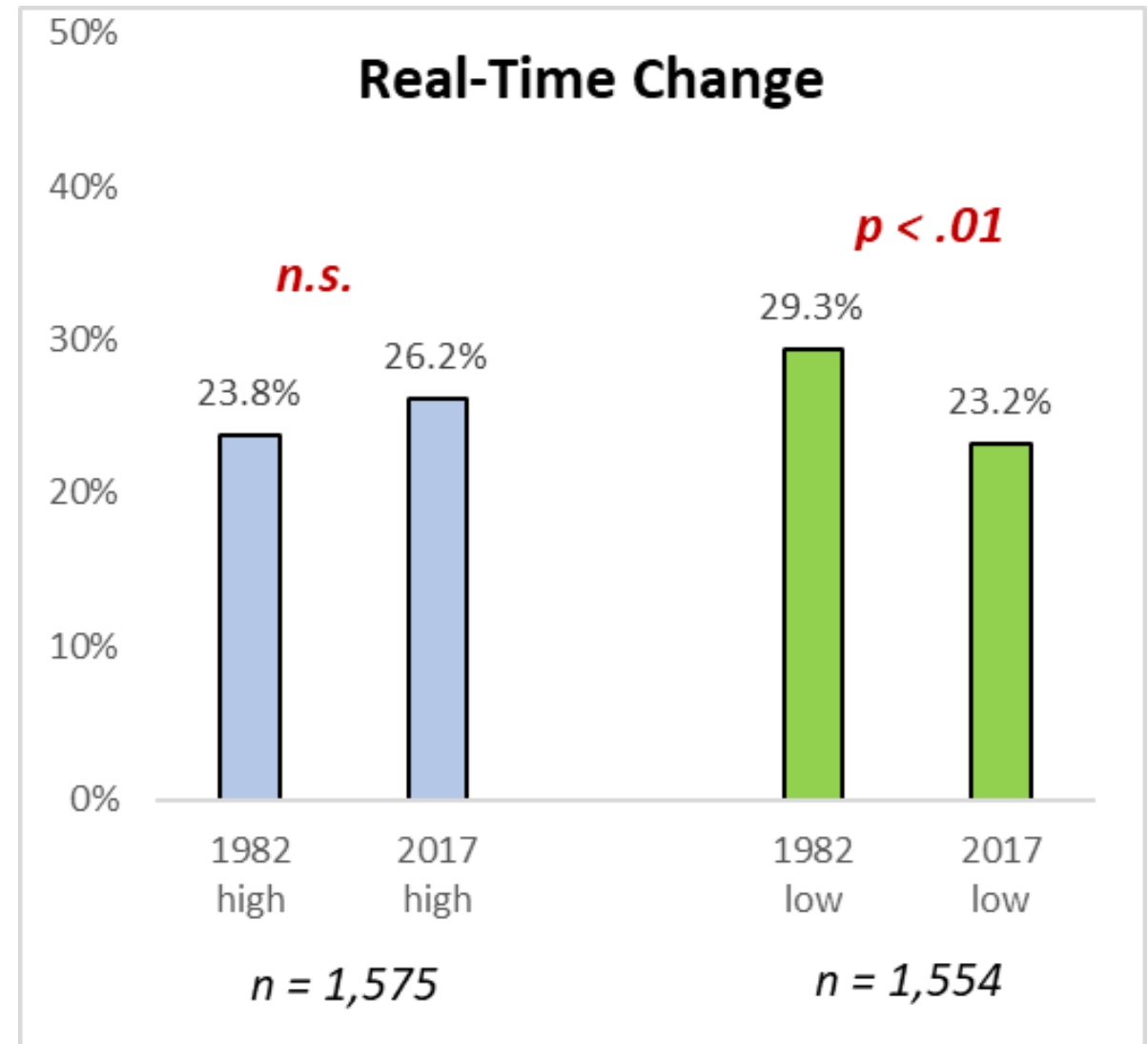
Intensified		Not Intensified	
%	n	%	n
<b>25.8</b>	407	74.2	1168

(n=1,575)

## Low SMI

Intensified		Not Intensified	
%	n	%	n
<b>27.5</b>	428	72.5	1126

(n=1,554)



# Multivariate Analyses

- **GLMER (in R Project)**
  - generalized linear regression models with random effects
  - uses *sum contrasts*, shows the level of each predictor as the difference from the mean
  - output shown as coefficients, estimates, effect sizes, intercept, etc.
- **Rbrul (GoldVarb/VARBRUL)**
  - stepwise regression using maximum likelihood method
  - uses *treatment contrasts*, shows the effects of each predictor at a baseline of 0
  - output shown as factor weights, ranges, odds ratios, input probabilities, etc.

(Guy 2018; Johnson 2009)

# Social Factors Conditioning Intensification

*Intercept=3.203; speakers=20; lemmas=561; n=3129*  
*Random effects = speaker, lemma*

	GLMER		RBRUL		n
	Estimate*	p-value	Weight**	Percent	
<b>Recording Year = 1982</b>			.524	28.5	1311
2017	-0.002	.002**	.476	25.4	1818
<b>Gender = Men</b>			.444	23.2	1811
Women	0.448	.000***	.556	31.5	1318
<b>Mobility = Low</b>			.529	27.9	1513
High	-0.122	.025*	.471	25.6	1618
<b>Community = Gmünd</b>			.441	23.9	1969
Stuttgart	0.444	.001**	.559	31.4	1160

*\*Positive estimates = greater degree of intensifier use; \*\* Factor weights = probability of intensifier use*

# Discussion

# Age and Lifespan Change

*Younger speakers have higher intensification rates than older speakers. As speakers age, they tend to use fewer intensifiers.*

- Younger speakers may feel the need to compensate for their lower social standing (lower seniority)
- Lifespan change is likely due to effects of the *linguistic market* in which speakers feel less need to compete as they age (Baayen, Beaman, & Ramskar 2021, Bourdieu 1991, Sankoff & Laberge 1978)

# Gender

## *Women use intensifiers more frequently than men*

- Women are generally more expressive than men (Carli 1990)
- Women are at a social disadvantage with respect to men and thus feel a greater need to compete (Lakoff 1975, Erikson et al. 1978)

## *Women use amplifiers more frequently, and men use downtoners more frequently, although this effect evens out as speakers age*

- Women want to appear positive, enthusiastic, and cooperative
- Men want to convey masculinity, nonchalance, toughness, and indifference



# Geographic Mobility

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*Speakers who have moved the least over their lifetime show greater reduction in intensifier use as they age*

- Immobile speakers have a narrower and smaller sets of contacts and thus have less interest and/or need to impress or persuade others by using more intensifiers (Baayen, Beaman, Ramsar 2021)

# Community

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*Speakers from the large urban center of Stuttgart use more intensifiers than those from the mid-sized, semi-rural town of Schwäbisch Gmünd*

- The competitiveness and anonymity speakers feel in a large, urban setting may drive individuals to establish themselves and project their identities, whether through positivity and cooperation with amplifiers or through toughness and indifference with downtoners

# Summary and Conclusions

- *Use of intensifiers in Swabian German exhibits similar patterns as in other Germanic and English languages*
  - Younger, female, urban, mobile speakers, intensify the most, using amplifiers to project a positive, confident, and cooperative persona
  - Younger, male speakers use more downtoners to convey a social meaning of cool, nonchalance, indifference, and tough
  - Women show greater change in intensifier use across their lifetimes, reflecting their greater sensitivity to cultural norms and expectations
  - Men remain stable in their use of intensifiers over their lifespan, however, converge toward women as they age by using fewer downtoners

# ~~Limitations and~~ Opportunities

- Integration of linguistic factors, such as collocational width, syntactic function, co-occurrence conditions, etc.
- Consideration of lexical frequency effects on both the adjective and the intensifier
- Incorporation of negative statements of intensification to assess the impact of polarity, e.g.,  
*fei schee* ‘very nice’  
*net so schee* ‘not so nice’
- Larger dataset to broaden the apparent-time analysis and further investigate change across the lifespan and different age groups

**Many thanks!**

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# **Extra Slides – Not Used**

# Intensification defined

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*“funktional-semantische Kategorie der Verstärkung und der  
Abschwächung intensivierbarer sprachlicher Ausdrücke”*

(Van Os 1989:2)

‘functional semantic category of **strengthening** and **weakening** of  
intensifiable linguistic expressions’

(our translation)

# Swabian and Dialect Intensifiers

## *fei*

*des fei schee ja da Handarbeite*, ‘very nice’ (Louise, 2017)

*des schrotet mã ganz fei*, ‘totally nice’ (Rupert, 1982)

## *gut*

*die sind gut froh* ‘quite happy’ (Louise, 2017)

*der mit dem Lääbe gut fertich wird* ‘well finished’ (Berdine, 1982)

## *bissle*

*der isch e bissle bleed*, ‘a bit dumb’ (Rachael, 2017)

*da find i e bissle komisch* ‘a bit odd’ (Herbert, 1982)

*Note: Examples are drawn from the Swabian German corpus of sociolinguistic interviews*

# Panel Speaker Demographics

Community	Pseudonym	Sex	HigherEd	Age		SOI		SMI	
				1982	2017	1982	2017	1982	2017
Gmünd	Alfried	M	yes	23	59	4.5	4.2	15	37
Gmünd	Angela	W	yes	18	53	4.5	4.4	0	84
Gmünd	Anneliese	W	yes	22	57	3.5	3.8	44	73
Gmünd	Berdine	W	yes	21	57	3.9	3.5	17	83
Stuttgart	Bertha	W	no	19	54	3.6	3.6	16	45
Stuttgart	Egbert	M	yes	24	59	4.0	3.7	25	23
Gmünd	Elke	W	no	22	57	4.2	4.4	0	0
Stuttgart	Ema	W	no	49	83	4.2	4.4	7	5
Stuttgart	Helmut	M	yes	22	57	3.3	2.1	18	57
Gmünd	Herbert	M	no	51	85	4.2	4.4	14	9
Gmünd	Jurgen	M	yes	20	55	3.8	3.8	0	75
Gmünd	Louise	W	no	54	88	4.3	3.8	0	0
Stuttgart	Manni	M	yes	24	59	3.7	2.7	27	17
Gmünd	Markus	M	yes	22	57	4.3	2.6	0	51
Stuttgart	Pepin	M	yes	26	60	3.4	3.8	31	46
Gmünd	Rachael	W	no	48	83	4.4	4.1	0	0
Stuttgart	Ricarda	W	yes	18	53	3.5	2.0	15	67
Gmünd	Rupert	M	yes	24	58	4.0	2.4	39	52
Gmünd	Siegfried	M	yes	22	57	4.2	4.8	0	0
Gmünd	Theo	M	yes	18	54	4.0	3.6	0	33