

War es cool, geil, krass oder toll?

A Sociolinguistic Analysis of German Positive Evaluation

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German Positive Evaluation Adjectives

geil, krass, top, fett, toll, super, derbe, spitze, prima, klasse, fantastisch, mega, abgefahren, ausgezeichnet, bombig, cool, nice, gediegen, sauber, dufte, kultig, genial, knorke, schnafte, astrein

Examples:

- a) ohne schein ich finde es **fett**, ich find es voll **gut** (FOLK_S_00054) ‘no joke, I think it’s great, I think it’s really good’
- b) salzige Butter ist **geil** (FOLK_S_00947) ‘salty butter is great’
- c) wir starten diese Stunde mit einem **tollen** Lied (FOLK_S_00395) ‘we’re starting this class with a great song’
- d) ich finde die Idee so **klasse** (FOLK_S_00720) ‘I find the idea so great’

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- **functionally equivalent**
- “**orderly heterogeneity**”? (Weinreich et al. 1968: 100)

*Weinreich, Uriel, William Labov & Marvin Herzog. 1968. *Empirical Foundations for a Theory of Language Change*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

German Positive Evaluation Adjectives

- Geographical differences:
 - *leiwand* (Austrian)
 - *pfundig* (Bavarian)
 - *herzig* (Swiss)
- Other conditioning factors? Gender or Age?
- English adjective choices
 - *terrific* Vs *cool* – younger generations (Tagliamonte & Pabst, 2020)

*Tagliamonte, Sali & Katharina Pabst. 2020. A Cool Comparison: Adjectives of Positive Evaluation in Toronto, Canada and York, England. *Journal of English Linguistics* 48(1), 3- 310.

Research Questions

1. What is the **current distribution** of German adjectives of positive evaluation?
2. Is this **semantic field** influenced by **linguistic** and **social factors**?

German Positive Evaluation Adjectives

Schenker (1997):

- In the 70s, *astrein*, *klasse*, *dufte* most popular
- Incoming use of *geil* (among men), and *poppig* (among women)

Androutsopoulos (1998):

- In the 90s, *geil* most frequent among younger speakers, followed by *genial*, *kultig*, and *korrekt*

*Androutsopoulos, Jannis. 1998. *Deutsche Jugendsprache. Untersuchungen zu ihren Strukturen und Funktionen*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

*Schenker, Walter. 1977. Modewörter als soziale Indikatoren. *Zeitschrift für Dialektologie und Linguistik*, 282-303.

Research Questions

3. **How** has this **semantic field changed** in recent history?

Methodology

- Variationist Quantitative methods
 - Used widely in work on English
 - Few studies on German (Stratton, 2020)
- Compiled a list of positive evaluation adjectives
 - Previous literature (e.g., Schenker, 1977; Androutsopoulos, 1998)
 - Dictionaries/Thesauruses (e.g., *Duden*)
 - Native speaker intuitions

*Stratton, James. 2020. Adjective Intensifiers in German. *Journal of Germanic Linguistics* 32(2), 183-215.

Methodology

- *Forschungs- und Lehrkorpus Gesprochenes Deutsch* (FOLK)
 - **1.6 million** words
 - **Spontaneous spoken interactions** (from various settings)
 - Speakers reasonably **balanced** for **gender** and **age**
 - **21st century** data
- Circumscription of Variable Context
 - Downloaded the list. **Manually removed semantically non-comparable tokens**
 - Query run for all adjectives in the corpus

Results

Table 1. Distribution of Adjectives

Adjective	<i>N</i>	%
<i>cool</i>	682	22
<i>toll</i>	618	20
INTENSIFIER + <i>gut</i>	567	18
<i>geil</i>	388	13
<i>super</i>	289	9
<i>krass</i>	238	8
<i>prima</i>	51	2
<i>klasse</i>	42	1
<i>wunderbar</i>	42	1
<i>genial</i>	22	.8
<i>großartig</i>	20	.6
<i>top</i>	17	.6
OTHER ¹⁴	106	4
Total	3082	100

Figure 1. Variants by Age - Apparent Time

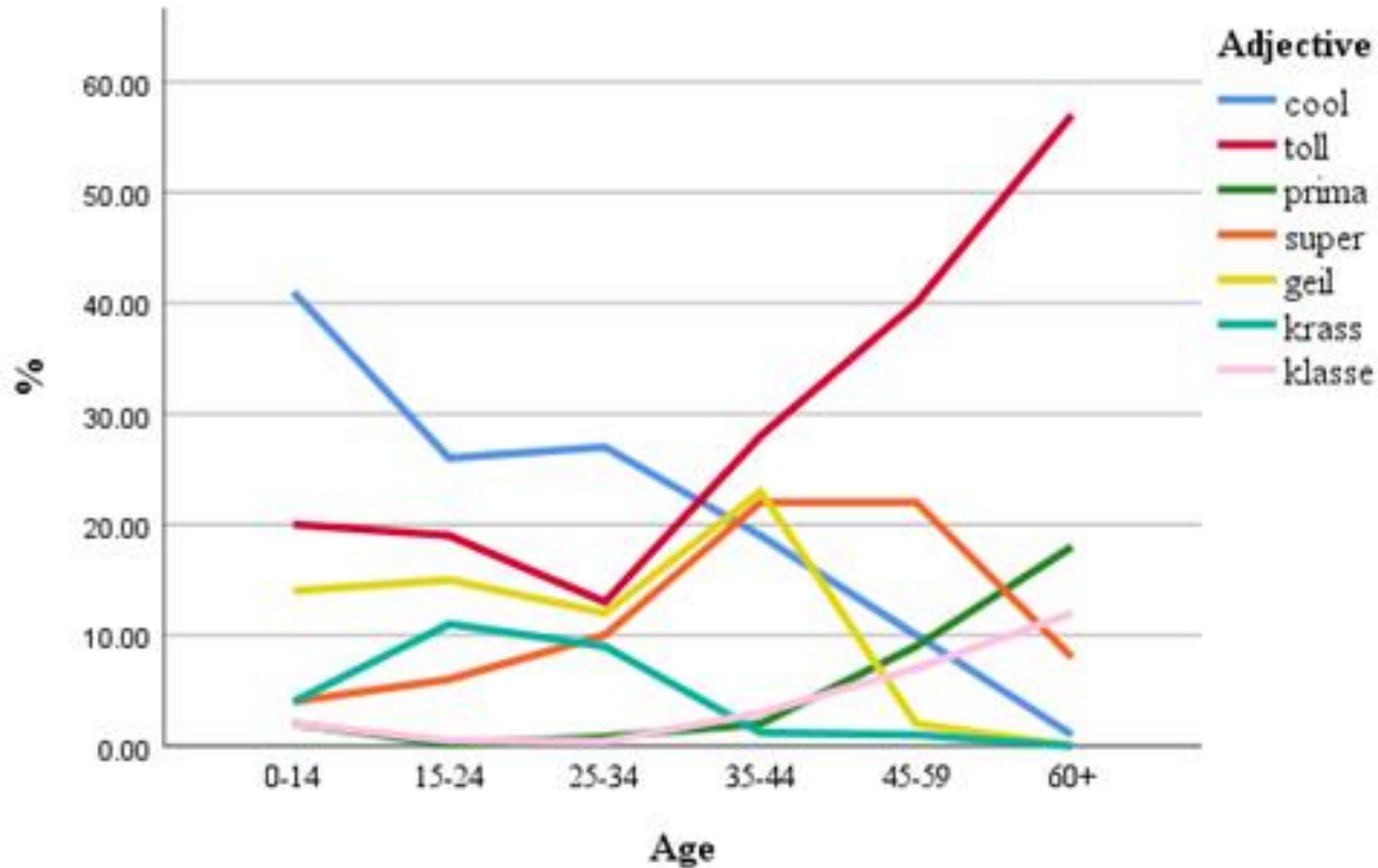


Figure 2. Variants by Gender

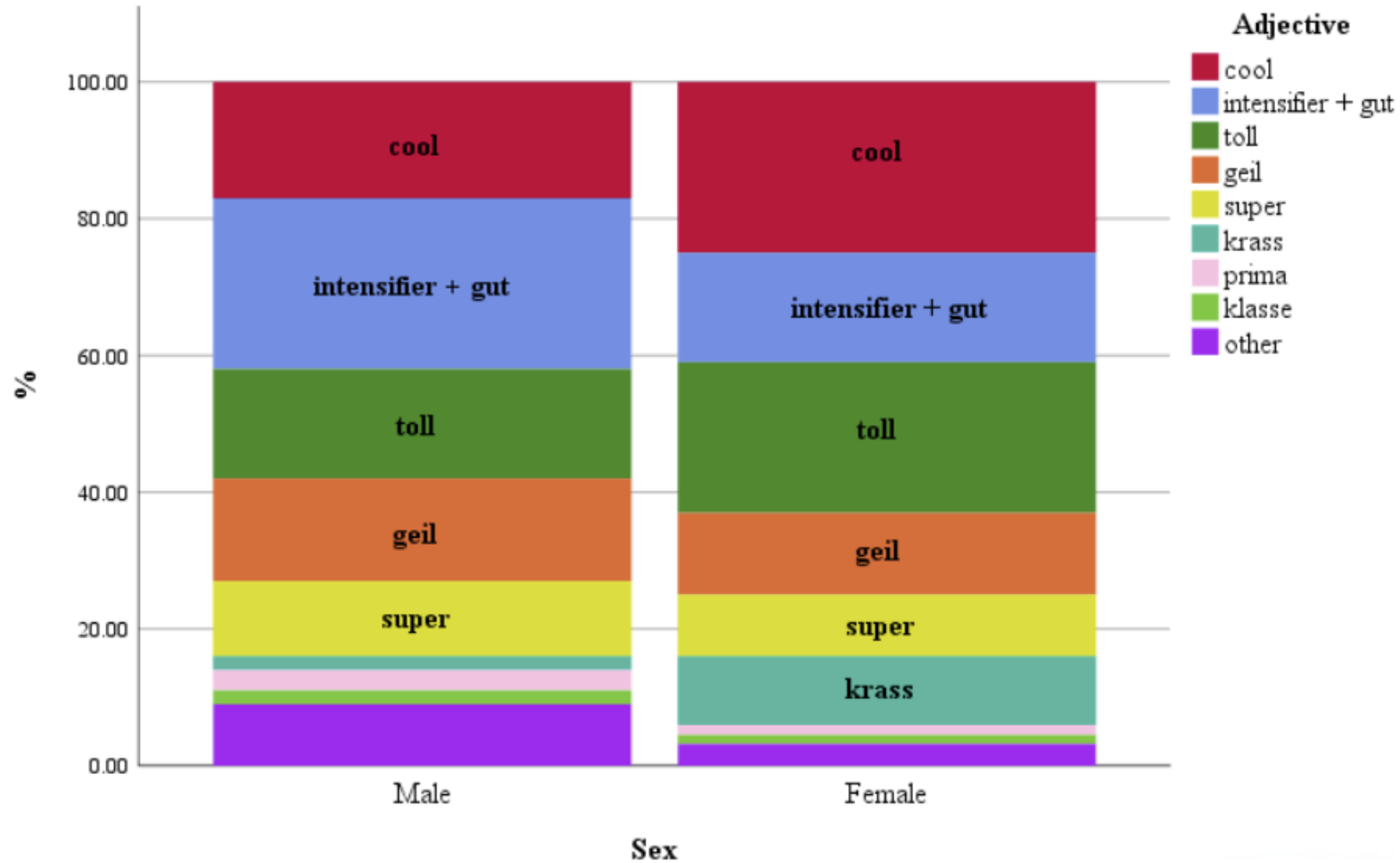


Table 2. Variants by Register

Variant	Institutional		Public		Private		Other	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
<i>cool</i>	105	15	0	0	570	26	7	6
<i>toll</i>	133	19	3	7	454	20	28	23
INTENSIFIER + <i>gut</i>	169	25	12	27	346	16	40	33
<i>geil</i>	51	7	0	0	331	15	6	5
<i>super</i>	89	13	3	7	189	8	8	7
<i>krass</i>	22	3	0	0	205	9	11	9
<i>wunderbar</i>	27	4	3	7	11	.5	1	.5
<i>prima</i>	14	2	4	9	32	1.5	1	.5
OTHER	75	12	18	43	94	4	20	16
TOTAL	685	100	43	100	2232	100	122	100

Syntactic Position

Types:

(a) Attributive

es war so ein **cooler** Sommer 'it was such a cool summer' (FOLK_S_00184)

(b) Predicative

der ist total **krass** 'he is totally great' (FOLK_S_00736)

(c) Stand-alone

...voll **geil** '...so great' (FOLK_S_00762)

Constraints with Incoming Variants:

nice (e.g., *sehr nice!*)

- preference for stand-alone position
- not attested in attr. position

top (e.g., *der ist top*)

- more frequent in predicative position

cool (e.g., *oh cool! Es war echt cool!*)

- favored in pred. & stand-alone position

Proposed Syntactic Cline

“general systemic evolution for newly developing forms”:

stand-alone > *predicative* > *attributive*

(Tagliamonte & Pabst, 2020: 22)

*Tagliamonte, Sali & Katharina Pabst. 2020. A Cool Comparison: Adjectives of Positive Evaluation in Toronto, Canada and York, England. *Journal of English Linguistics* 48(1), 3- 310.

Multivariate Analysis

- A series of mixed effects binary logistic regression models in *Rbrul* (Johnson, 2009)
- Including *Gender, Age, Syntactic Position* as independent variables

Table 3. Logistic Regression of *Cool* Vs *Other Variants*

Input	.92		
N	669		
Total	3031		
	N	%	FW
SEX (p < .00113)			
Female	2064	24.7	.55
Male	967	17.1	.45
<i>Range</i>			10
AGE (p < 1.63e-11)			
0-14	24	50.0	.89
15-24	1318	27.1	.74
25-34	836	26.6	.65
35-44	377	15.6	.55
45-59	319	7.07	.31
60+	157	.006	.03
<i>Range</i>			86
POSITION (p < 5.12e-08)			
Stand-alone	870	30.8	.62
Predicative	1803	19.9	.48
Attributive	358	13.1	.40
<i>Range</i>			22

Random Effect (Speaker $n = 385$, $SD = 1.29$)

Table 4. Logistic Regression of *Toll* Vs *Other Variants*

Input			
Input	.146		
N	598		
Total	3031		
	N	%	FW
SEX (p < 0.00343)			
Female	2064	21.8	.58
Male	967	15.3	.42
<i>Range</i>			16
AGE (p < 0.0149)			
0-14	24	12.5	.38
15-24	1318	39.1	.40
25-34	836	42.6	.43
35-44	377	60.1	.60
45-59	319	52.3	.52
60+	157	67.6	.68
<i>Range</i>			30
POSITION (p < 3.69e-17)			
Bare	870	12.9	.35
Predicative	1803	19.0	.43
Attributive	358	39.9	.71
<i>Range</i>			36
Random Effect (Speaker $n = 385$, $SD = 1.25$)			

Discussion

1. *Cool* has become the **dominant variant**

- Use increases in apparent time among younger generations
- Change in progress

2. **Changes** within this onomasiological set

- *astrein* (rarely attested)
- *kultig, korrekt, knorke* (not used)
- A perpetually changing semantic field
- *geil* once considered *Jugendsprache* ‘youth language’, but these speakers are no longer the youth

Discussion

3. Linguistic and social factors constrained use

- Significant age and gender differences
- In line with recent work (Stratton, 2020) on German LVC
- Other factors are at play than geography

4. *Cool* led by young women

- In line with the Principles of Linguistic Change (Labov, 2001: 274-275)
- New variants appeared more frequently in stand-alone and predicative position. Older variants favored in attr. position

*Labov, William. 2001. *Principles of linguistic change, vol. 2: Social factors*. Oxford: Blackwell.

*Stratton, James. 2020. Adjective Intensifiers in German. *Journal of Germanic Linguistics* 32(2), 183-215.

Thanks for listening!

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Full Paper:

Stratton, James, M. (accepted). Tapping into German Adjective Variability: A Variationist Sociolinguistic Approach. *Journal of Germanic Linguistics*

Appendix

Examples

- a) ohne schein ich finde es **fett**, ich find es voll **gut** (FOLK_S_00054) ‘no joke, I think it’s great, I think it’s really good’
- b) salzige Butter ist **geil** (FOLK_S_00947) ‘salty butter is great’
- c) wir starten diese Stunde mit einem **tollen** Lied (FOLK_S_00395) ‘we’re starting this class with a great song’
- d) ich finde die Idee so **klasse** (FOLK_S_00720) ‘I find the idea so great’ [lit. class]
- e) ...ein **super** Zoo mit ganz vielen Flamingos (FOLK_S_00027) ‘...a great [lit. super] zoo with quite a lot of flamingos’
- f) das ist **echt** abgefahren (FOLK_S_00992) ‘that is real[ly] cool’ (g) Schwarzmeer ist schon echt cool (FOLK_S_00048) ‘the Black Sea is real[ly] cool’

Women As Leaders of Linguistic Change

“any theory of the causes of change must deal with the **general finding** that in the good majority of linguistic changes, **women are a full generation ahead of men**” (Labov, 2001: 501)

Why?

- Women are non-conformists? (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003, Labov 2001)
- Language expresses social meaning (Labov, 2001)

Changes in the Semantic Field

*cheedo, feinst, fresh, chefig, sheesh, sahnig, gril, lit, premium,
schneidig*

(Vogt et al. 2016: 90-119)

Geil

Semantic bleaching:

- *ein geiles Moped* ‘a great moped’ [lit. a horny moped]
- *eine geile Wohnung* ‘a great apartment’ [lit. a horny apartment]

*NHG meaning of “geschlechtlich erregt” ‘sexually aroused’ not first meaning of *geil*.
It used to mean *üppig* ‘redundant’ in MHG

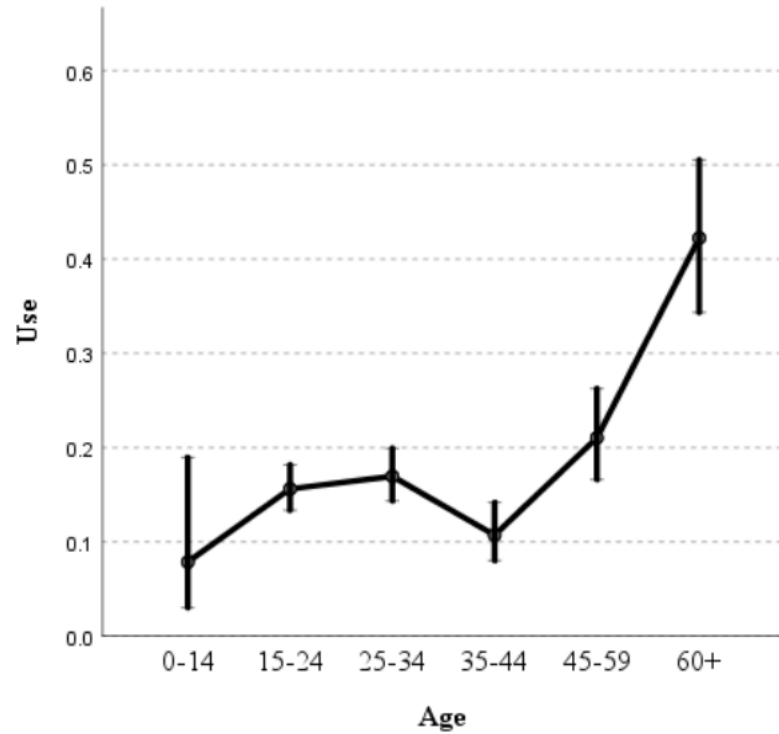
Use:

- Descriptively more frequent among men than women.
- Men are more mindful with speech due to societal pressures

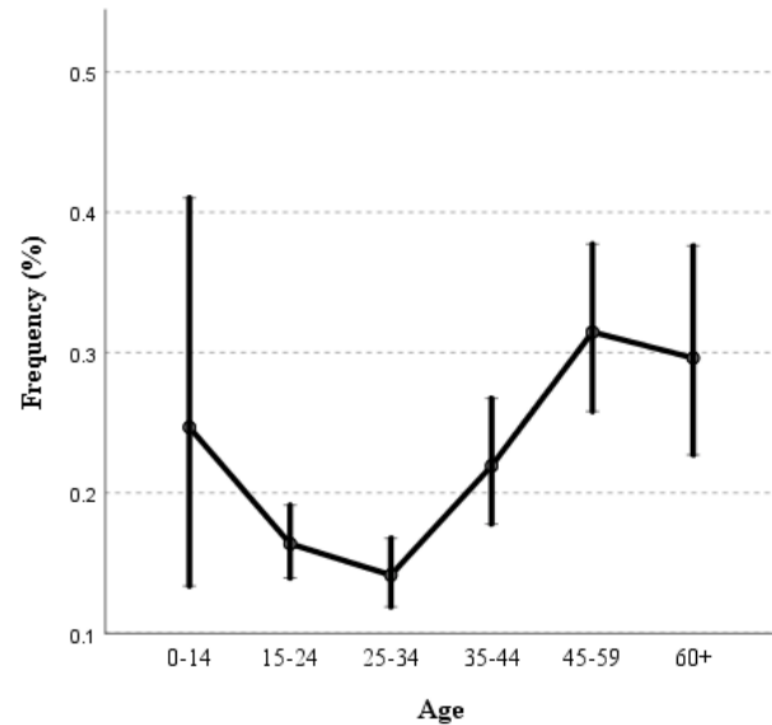
Table 3. Logistic Regression of *Geil* Vs *Other Variants*

Input	.957		
N	387		
Total	3031		
	N	%	FW
SEX (p < 0.333)			
Female	2064	11.9	.47
Male	967	14.7	.54
<i>Range</i>			
AGE (p < 1.41e-08)			
0-14	24	25.0	.98
15-24	1318	15.3	.90
25-34	836	12.1	.85
35-44	377	19.4	.87
45-59	319	16.0	.41
60+	157	0.00	.00
<i>Range</i>			
POSITION (p < 0.00991)			
Bare	870	13.9	.57
Predicative	1803	13.5	.55
Attributive	358	.064	.38
<i>Range</i>			
Random Effect (Speaker n = 385, SD = 17.7)			

Age Differences



INTENSIFIER + *gut*



toll