

Adjective Intensifiers in German

James Stratton
Purdue University
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jstratt@purdue.edu

Intensifiers

An **intensifier** is a **device** which scales a quality **up**, **down** or somewhere **between** the **two** (Bolinger 1972: 17)

Adjective Intensifiers: adverbials which intensifies an adjective

it is hot

(In theoretical terms: it is \emptyset hot)

it is *very* hot

it is *really* hot

German Intensification

- **German adjectives** can be intensified both **syntactically** and **morphologically**
- Morphological intensification is less frequent
(Androutsopoulos 1998: 451; Claudi 2006: 352)

Zero: es ist \emptyset alt ‘it is old’

Syntactic: es ist **sehr** alt ‘it is very old’

Morphological: es ist **uralt** ‘it is very old’

Literature on German intensification

Previous Labels

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

Previous Classification

Some attempts have been made to distinguish the **different semantic functions** of **intensifiers** but these are **not consistent** with other scholars:

- > Helbig (1988: 48) **divides** intensifiers into **two categories**
- > Biedermann (1969: 96) **divides** intensifiers into **five categories**
- > Sommerfeldt (1987) **divides** intensifiers into **six categories**
- > van Os (1989) **divides** intensifiers into **eight categories**
- > More recently, Claudi (2006) categorized intensifiers according to their **“source semantics”**

Quirk et al. (1985)

Quirk et al. (1985: 590) divide **intensifiers** into **two sub-categories** depending on their intensifying function

Amplifiers: “scale upwards from the assumed norm”
e.g., hot > *very* hot

Downtoners: “scale down from the assumed norm”
e.g., hot > *a little bit* hot

Quirk et al. (1985)

Quirk et al. (1985) subdivide amplifiers further depending on their semantic function into boosters and maximisers:

Boosters: “a high point on the scale”
e.g., it is *very* warm

Maximizers: “upper extreme point on the scale”
e.g., it is *completely* ridiculous

Why Study Intensifiers?

The study of intensification has revealed a several important findings about language variation and change:

- (1) Intensifiers **function** as part of a **multi-dimensional system**
- (2) **Amplifiers** are more frequent than **downtoners**
- (3) The use of intensifiers is **correlated** with **social factors**
(e.g., sex, age etc)

Sources: (Ito & Tagliamonte 2003; Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005;
Xiao & Tao 2007; Fuchs 2017)

Research Questions

RQ1: How does the **system of German adjective intensifiers** currently look in terms of **frequency** and **function**?

RQ2: Is the **use** of German adjective intensifiers **sensitive** to the **social factors** sex and age?

Methodology

- **FOLK** (*Forschungs-und Lehrkorpus Gesprochenes Deutsch*)
‘Research and Teaching Corpus of Spoken German’
- Approx. **1.6 million words** (spontaneous recorded interactions)
- **A variety of interactions:**
coffee-table conversations, conversations among friends, family and couples, conversations during housekeeping and gaming, service interactions (Schmidt 2016)
- Took a **random sample of 5,000 adjectives** (removed invariable contexts)
- This left **2,493** intensifiable contexts

Table 1. The Overall Distribution of Intensification
Total $N = 2,493$

Intensified		Not Intensified	
%	N	%	N
37	919	63	1574

Figure 1. Amplifiers Vs Downtoners

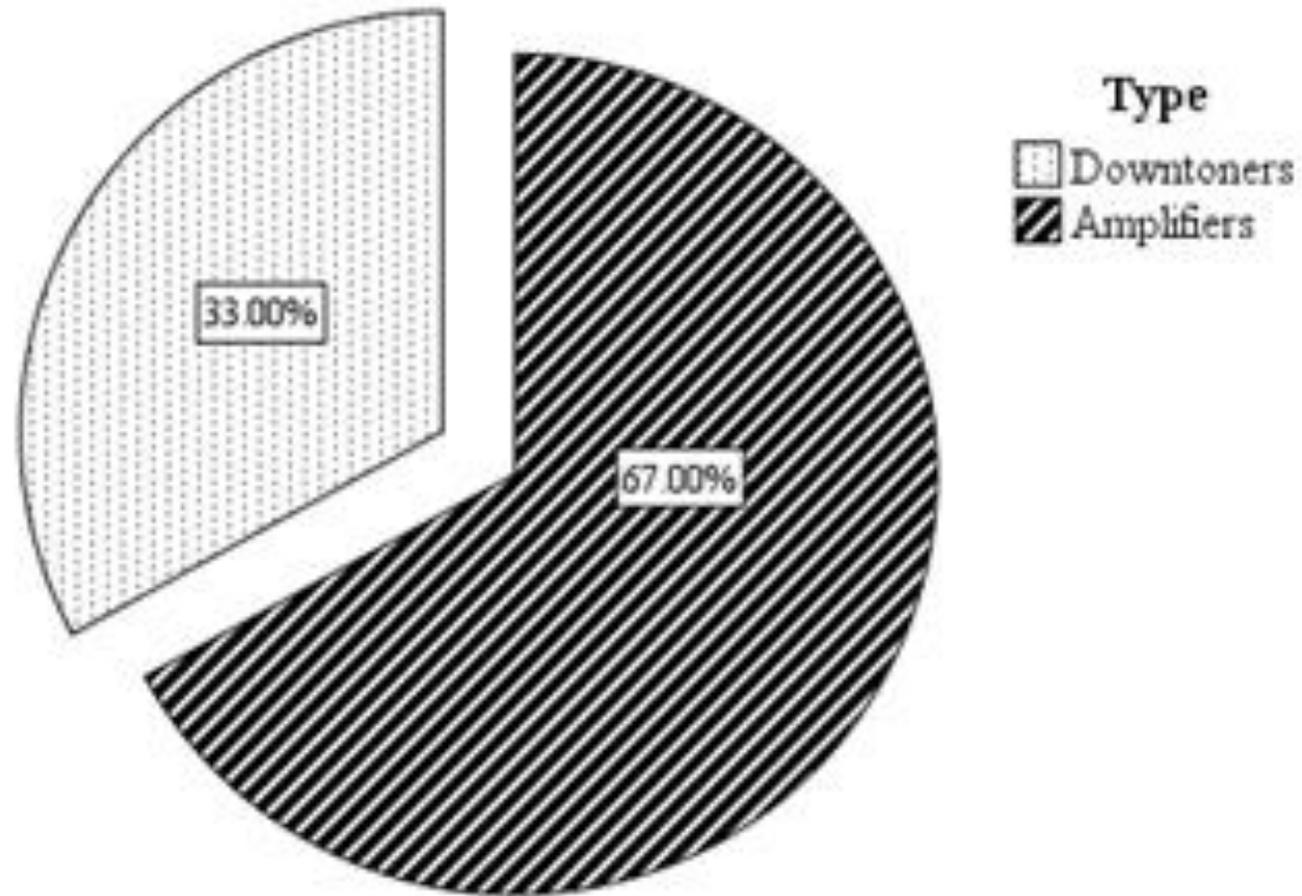
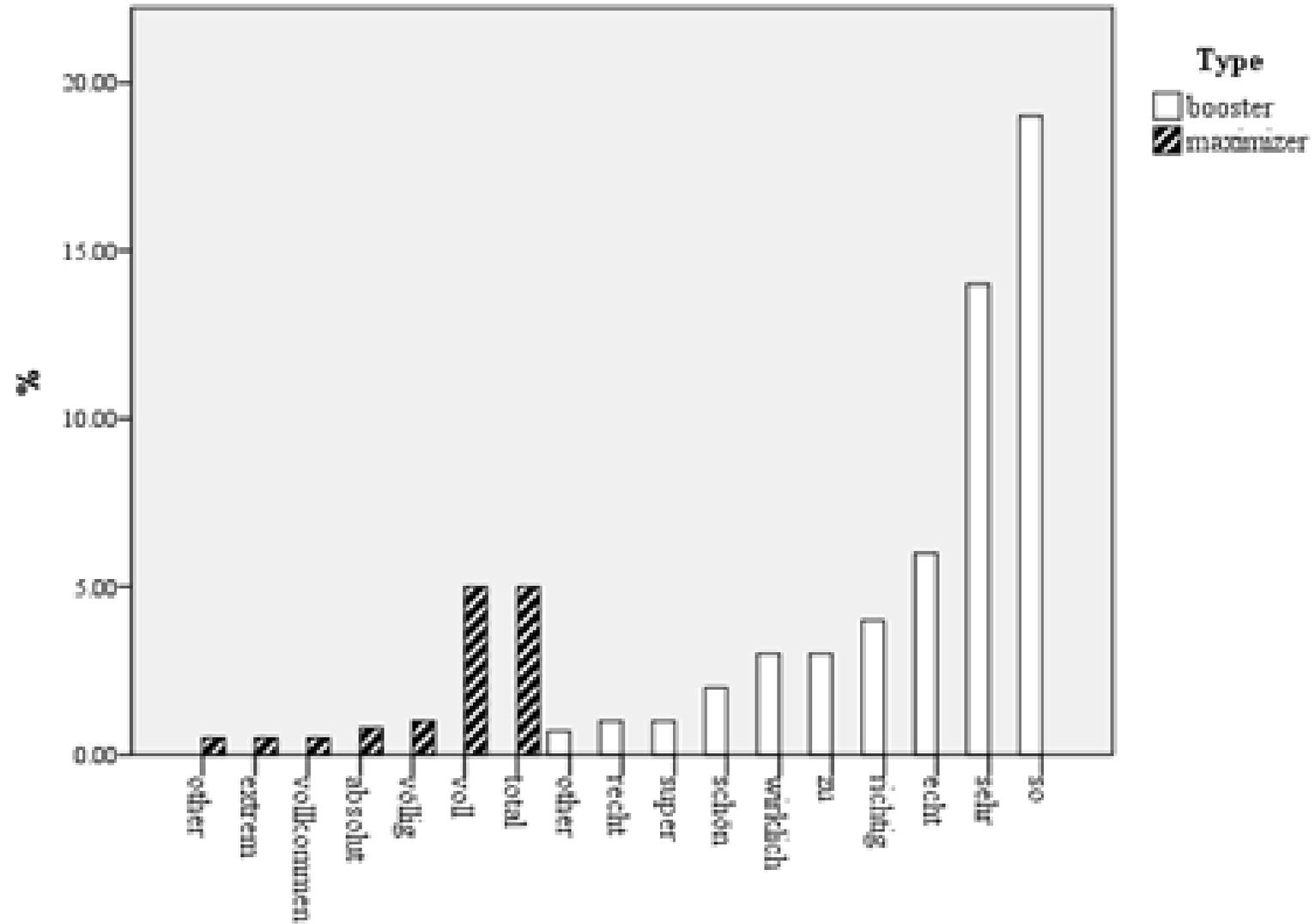


Figure 2. Maximizers Vs Boosters



Maximizers

- According to the data *voll* ‘completely’ (Eng. cognate *full*) and *total* ‘totally’ are the top two maximizers
- These were categorized as **maximizers** due to **previous research**: referred to as “**Intensivierer des absoluten Bereichs**” ‘intensifiers of absolute degree’ (Androutsopoulos (1998: 451))
- However, these **might not be maximizers** (unlike in English)
- Difference in degree between *voll bescheuert* and *völlig bescheuert*
- If removed, *völlig* is the most frequent maximizer

Binary Mixed Effects Logistic Regression

Dependent: Intensification (1 = occurrence, 0 = absence)

Independent: Sex (two levels: male and female)

Age (six levels: [0-14], [15-24], [25-34], [35-44],
[45-59], [60+])

Table 2. Regression on Intensification of Adjectives

Factor	F	df1	df2	P
Sex	15.748	1	2491	.001
Age	6.033	5	2487	.001
Sex*Age	4.883	11	2481	.001

speaker was run as a mixed effect

Figure 3. Intensification of Adj by Sex

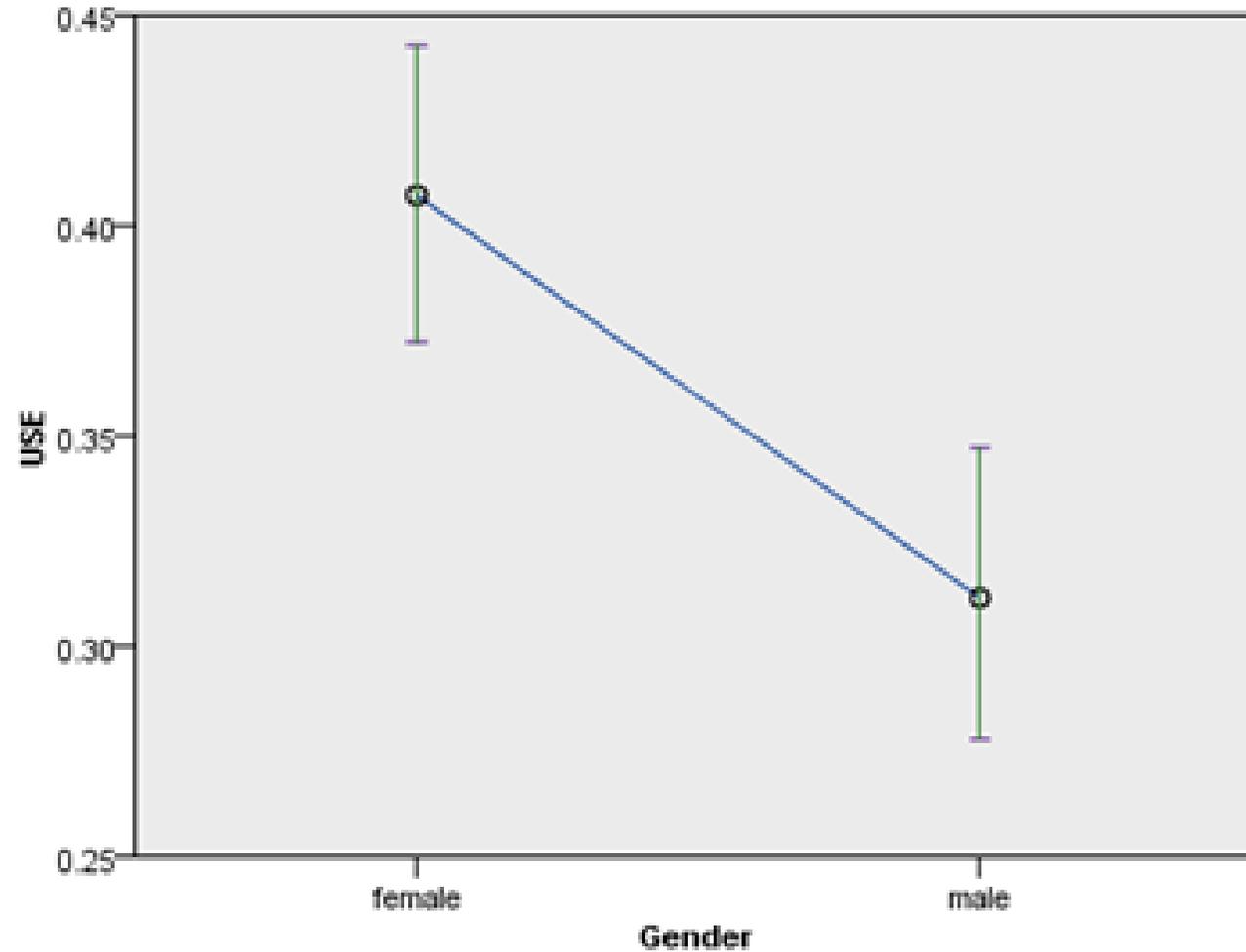
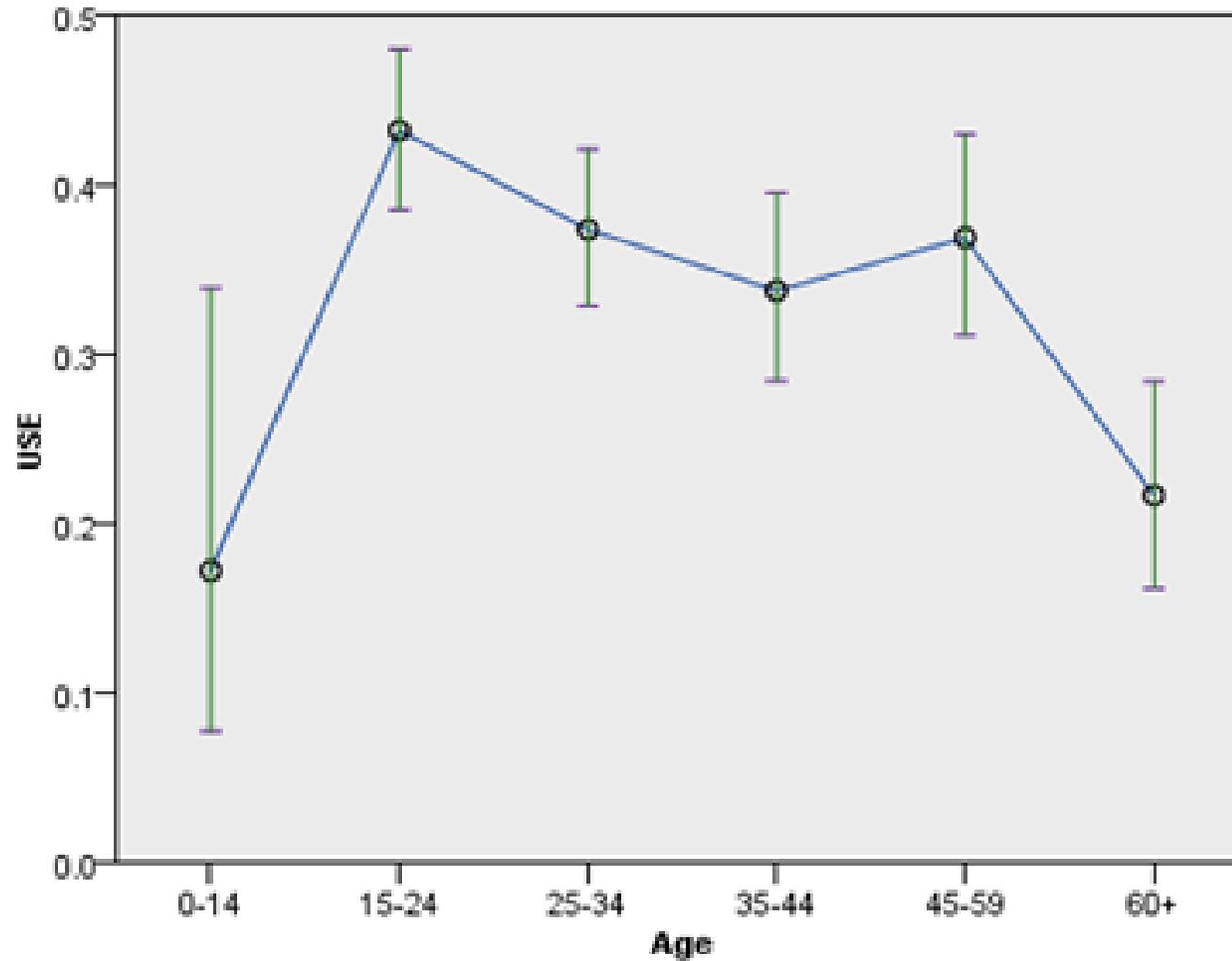


Figure 4. Interaction between Sex and Age



Social Correlation

- **Women** used **more intensifiers** (spec. *amplifiers*) than men
- However, **men** used **more downtoners** than women
- **Women** may **prefer to scale up** the quality of an adjective **more frequently than men**
- **Men** **prefer to scale down** the quality of an adjective **more frequently than women**

Conclusions & Implications

- German **amplifiers** were **more frequent** than downtoners
- German **boosters** were **more frequent** than maximizers
- The top three boosters were *so* ‘so’, *sehr* ‘very’ and *echt* ‘real(ly)’
- **Women** used **amplifiers** more frequently than men, but men used downtoners more frequently than women
- The latter finding may **provide** some **crosslinguistic support** to the claim that **women use intensifiers more frequently than men**

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Thank you for listening!

James Stratton

jstratt@purdue.edu

Purdue University

Purdue Linguistics Program

Some Examples

- (a) *das wäre eine **sehr** gute Idee* ‘that would be a very good idea’
(b) *das ist **echt** krass* ‘that is real(ly) cool’
(c) *das Ding ist **echt** super* ‘the thing is ‘real(ly) super’
(d) *meine Mutter ist **so** anstrengend* ‘my mother is so tiring’

> The most frequent booster among adolescents was *so*, then *voll* and then *echt*