

*oooooh mein gott, es isch sooo geil!*<sup>1</sup>

## Lexical Variation in Adjective Intensification in (Swiss) German Dialects

The purpose of this contribution is to investigate syntactic intensification in Swiss German dialects. Intensifiers can be divided into two groups: amplifiers and downtoners. While amplifiers “scale upwards from an assumed norm” as in “it is very warm” and can be divided into two groups depending on their heightening effect, downtoners scale “downwards from an assumed norm” as in “it is a little warm” and they can be subdivided into four groups depending on their “lowering effect” (Quirk et al. 1985: 439).

For English, there is a particularly extensive literature on syntactic intensification, mostly focusing on amplifiers (Aijmer 2018, Ito & Tagliamonte 2003, Stratton 2018, Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005 and many more), though downtoners have received some increased attention of late (e.g. Claridge, Jonsson & Kytö 2021). Other Germanic languages and their respective non-standard varieties have received less attention, giving Stratton (2020: 183) occasion to note that “intensification in the German language is underexplored” (but cf. Christen 2003, Claudi 2006, Meyer 1968, Pheiff accepted). Stratton (2020) offers an initial variationist account. In his corpus, he finds 45 different adjective intensifiers (= types) across 919 intensified adjectives. Furthermore, amplifiers occur more often than downtoners and that within the group of amplifiers, boosters (e.g. *so*, *sehr*) occur more frequently than maximizers (e.g. *voll*, *total*). He also finds that speakers’ gender predicts their use of amplifiers or downtoners.

This talk reports on on-going work to build on these prior studies by examining varieties of German dialects, in particular Swiss German, more closely. It is based around a corpus of SMS chats (Swiss SMS Corpus – Stark, Ueberwasser & Rued 2009–2015) and will attempt to give a preliminary answer to the following questions:

- Which forms occur in which intensifier function in what frequency?
- Which semantic domains do intensifiers in Swiss German draw from?
- Are Swiss German intensifiers associated with specific adjective semantics; and, in the event that an adjective is intensified, is intensification associated with certain syntactic contexts?
- Does the occurrence of amplifiers and downtoners depend on social factors such as the age or gender of a speaker?

### References

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<sup>1</sup> This example has been taken from the Swiss SMS Corpus (Stark, Ueberwasser & Rued 2009–2015).

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