German *super* and intensifiers in social communication

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Abstract: This study examines the intensifier *super* in German with data taken from *Das Wortauskunftssystem zur deutschen Sprache in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (DWDS, Digitales Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache, Geyken 2020). We inspect the morphosyntactic and semantic development of *super*, and aim to explore its delexicalization tendency. In closing, the development of intensifiers in social communication is presented. The results show that German *super* enjoys morphosyntactic flexibility. The meaning of this versatile intensifier shifts freely among various magnitudes of intensification, from 'more than', 'very', to 'top most', and even has gone lower than the reference point to mean 'actually not good'. German *super* has advanced itself in terms of linguistic performance and is gradually losing its role as an intensifier. A diachronic inspection of the use of German *super* attests linguistic revival in that from a rarely used intensifier, *super* escalates its use in the last decades in German society. Outer world influences have put *super* through lexical competitions. Reports on general intensifiers reveal the inner linguistic motivation of change that intensifiers own, and sociolinguistic factors such as gender, age and education background all contribute to the variability of intensifiers in social communication.

Keywords: Intensifier, German, delexicalization, lexical competition, social communication.

1. Introduction

A "super good beer" is better than a "very good beer". Intensifiers like *super* and *very* have semantic delicacy to strengthen tones and highlight the value of the targeted object or information. In a conversation, intensifiers also serve to "strengthen the speaker's position as well as their attitude towards what they are saying" (Núñez Pertejo & Palacios Martínez 2014: 212). *Very* was the most popular intensifier until the beginning of the 21st century (Lorenz 2002: 153; Paradis & Bergmark 2003: 71). *So, really* and *bloody* are trendy in teenagers' colloquial language (Pertejo & Martínez 2014). The present paper focuses on the intensifier *super* in German (*super*). We examine the morphosyntactic, semantic and delexicalization development of *super* and then approach the internal motivation of lexical change and external sociolinguistic behaviors of intensifiers in society.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 introduces related previous literature. Section 3 presents the roles of *super* in German, starting with the general morphosyntactic pattern and collocation, followed by its semantics discussion. Section 4 reports the motivation of change and sociolinguistic aspect of overall intensifiers in society. Section 5 concludes.

2. Previous studies

This section begins with introducing the terminology of intensifiers. It then reviews the literature on German intensifiers, English intensifiers, the works on specific grammatical categories of intensifiers, the studies on cross-linguistic variations and, lastly, lexicalization of intensifiers.

Stoffel (1901) first refers to intensifiers as *intensive adverbs*. Bolinger (1972: 18) calls them *degree words*, and Paradis (1997) addresses them as *degree modifiers*. Intensifiers are categorized into two types (Stoffel 1901; Quirk et al. 1985), namely, amplifiers and downtoners. For example, *extremely* expresses a higher degree than the assumed standard and is an amplifier, whereas *almost* utters a lower degree than the assumed standard and is thus a downtoner (Quirk 1985: 589-591, 597-598). After comparing German and English intensifiers, Siemund (2000) proposes three uses of intensifiers—adnominal intensifiers, adverbial inclusive intensifiers and adverbial exclusive intensifiers.

Linguists pay attention to German intensifiers such as *äußerst* 'extremely' (Androutsopoulos 2001), *einfach* 'just' (Fronhofer 2015), *echt* 'really' (Dorna & Emele 1996), *total* 'absolutely' (Brumme 2012) and so on. To be more specific, Gehweiler (2010) observes the Early New High German intensifier *lauter* 'pure, unmixed' and indicates that *lauter* originally denotes 'pure, unmixed' but came to be used as an intensifier with a negative connotation in Early New High German, and now *lauter* is a determiner in Present Day German. Also focusing on adjectival intensifiers, Stratton (2020a) reports that amplifiers are used more frequently than downtoners while boosters are more common than maximizers. In addition, Claudi (2006) aims to show that intensifiers are a culture-dependent phenomenon. Siemund (2000) delves into self-form like *sie selbst* "she herself", and Hole (2002) focuses only on the intensifier *selbst* 'self' and asserts that *selbst* conveys the identity function and takes the agentive Voice head as proposed by Kratzer (1996). Nevertheless, Stratton (2020a: 183) was right to express that "intensification in the German language is underexplored" because English intensifiers have been the subject of "much empirical discussion".

Various linguistic contexts have been looked into in order to study English intensifiers. Tagliamonte and Roberts (2005) observe data taken from *Friends,* a popular American television series, and conclude that media contribute to producing innovative intensifiers and words. Stratton (2018) explores the intensifier *well* in the British TV show *The Inbetweeners*. Instead of using the intensifier *very*, the Canadian teenagers have been using the adjective boosters *so* and *pretty* more and more frequently (Tagliamonte 2008), whereas the New Zealand teens tend to use *so* and *really* (Bauer & Bauer 2002). Furthermore, Xiao & Tao (2007), based on the spoken data of the British National Corpus, find that female speakers use more intensifiers than male speakers do. English intensifiers do receive much attention. Well documented are also studies on *utterly* (Partington 2004), *wondrously* (Calle-Martín 2014), *very* (Sacks 1971; Troseth 2009), *ass* (Miller 2017), *-ly* (Nevalainen 2008), *pretty* and *fairly* (Nevalainen & Rissanen 2002). Additionally, Méndez-Naya (2008) edited the *Special issue on English intensifiers* published by Cambridge University Press.

Intensification is incorporated in all parts of speech at different levels as indicated by Taboada (2016) and is capable of expressing semantic prosody to communicate negativity or positivity. For example, Louw (1993) declares that the right collocations of intensifiers usually convey negative meanings which makes the entire context negative. Van der Wouden & Foolen (2017: 84) also indicates that adverbial intensifiers "have a strong negative connotation" and vary from language to language. In contrast, Tagliamonte & Pabst (2020) investigate positively evaluated intensifiers in Canada and England. Likewise, Tao (2007) examines the syntactic and pragmatic features of *utterly* and finds that *utterly* is a modifier as well as a discourse marker that usually expresses positive sentiment. In fact, also the Hebrew [X PRD *al* Y] construction[1] expresses intensified emotion of love, desire or adoration (Vardi 2015).

Furthermore, researchers have proposed various communicative behaviors of intensifiers. Concentrating on the adverbialization of intensifiers, Nevalainen & Rissanen (2002) compare *fairly* and *pretty* and indicate that although nearly synonymous, they differ in the path to adverbialization. Partington (1993) investigate intensifiers such as *very, utterly* from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives to reveal their changes of meanings and conversational functions. When asked about how *really*, which can be found in letters from the early 18th century, could become an intensifier, Ito & Tagliamonte respond that, just like the case of *very*, the linguistic development of *really* grows step by step from the meaning of *true, real* to become a predicative adjective (2003: 269).

A good many previous studies on intensifiers have called our attention to the cross-linguistic variations. Comparing German and English, Umbach (2011) expresses that both *very* in English and

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[1] The Hebrew idiomatic construction [X PRD *al* Y] can be translated into English and illustrated as, e.g. [X die/crazy/ill/devastated on Y] where the words *die* or *crazy* are used to express intensified positive emotion (Vardi 2015).

sehr 'very' in German articulate a gradable property. From a different perspective, Greenbaum (1974) examines six verb-intensifier collocations in American and British English with the conclusion that each intensifier collocates with a different kind of expression; for instance, *very much* associates with a favorable attitude, whereas *badly* concerns with requirement. Focusing on adjectival intensifiers in German, Dutch and English, van der Wouden & Foolen (2017) indicate that while German seemingly prefers words from the domain of excrement, words related to diseases are inclined to be selected in Dutch, and the domain of sexuality dominates in English. Furthermore, Depner (2018) compares *super* in German (*super*) and Mandarin Chinese (*chāo jí* 'super' and *chāo* 'super'). She concludes that Mandarin Chinese *chāo* enhances the gradable property of states, and *chāojí* tends to emphasize modern events and technology. In comparison, German *super* has advanced its linguistic performance and gradually lost its role as an intensifier.

Lexicalization is relevant to the present study. Delexicalization is defined as "the reduction of the independent lexical content of a word, or group of words, so that it comes to fulfill a particular function" (Partington 1993: 183), which is also the focus of our study on German *super*. Researchers support the argument that intensifiers start as lexical items with semantic content but gradually undergo delexicalization (e.g. Peters 1992). Kong (2017) investigates the manner of speaking markers in Chinese and English, in which lexicalization, grammaticalization and pragmaticalization are highlighted. Meanwhile, Smirnova (2015) considers secondary grammaticalization as a non-linear path of diachronic development, where lexicalization is an essential step, based on two case studies in German. Taking a cognitive linguistic view, the corpus finding of Neels (2020) reports general subjects in cognitive research such as the from-corpus-to-cognition issue and proposes a cycle of constructional generalization driven by the interaction of frequency and habituation.

Among the different studies, none has examined *super* in a comprehensive manner. The present research examines the use of intensifiers in social communication after exploring the linguistic performance of *super* in German.

3.   *Super* in German

The German data on *super* in the present study were taken from *Das Wortauskunftssystem zur deutschen Sprache in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (DWDS, The Word Information System for the German Language in Past and Present, Geyken 2020). DWDS is a continuously expanding digital dictionary system based on large electronic text corpora. This system is built on the six-volume dictionary of German contemporary languages (WDG) and currently contains about 22 billion words. Sources include fiction, journalistic prose, technical texts, and utility texts.

3.1 Morphosyntactic pattern and collocation

German *super* is flexible to modify nouns (example (1), *Typ* 'guy'), verbs ((2), *gemacht* 'done'), adjectives ((3), *brutal* 'brutal'), and can also appear in the sentence final position or act as an exclamation (4). *Super* does not limit the syllabic length of its heads either, and is free to modify mono- (1), bi- (3), or multi-syllabic (6)-(7) heads.

(1) *Und er ist charakterlich ein **super Typ***.
     'And he's a **great guy** in character.'
(2) *Das war natürlich **super gemacht***.
     'That was of course **done well**.'
(3) *Stimmt, das ist **super brutal**. Aber das ist ein realer Zustand.*
     'Right, that is **super brutal**. But that is a real state of affairs.'
(4) *Immer noch oben? **Super***.
     'Still up? **Super**.'

(5) *„**Super Ergebnis**", sagt sie dann, „toll gemacht."*
     '"**Great result**", she then says, "well done."'
(6) *Laßt die beiden mal gemeinsam spielen, sie **passen super zusammen**.*
     'Let the two play together, they **go great together**.'
(7) *Freilich könne man die atomare Schrift nur mit einem **Super-Elektronen-mikroskop** lesen.*
     'Of course one can read the atomic writing only with a **super electron microscope**.'

The frequent collocations of *super* are provided in DWDS as a word profile, some of them are presented in Table 1. We see that (A) nouns (ist Prädikativ von), (B) adverbs or conjunctions (hat Adverbialbestimmung), and (C) verbs or verb phrases (ist Adverbialbestimmung von) are listed. The most frequent nouns that German *super* collocates with are *Stimmung* 'spirit' (logDice index 8.3, frequency 113 million tokens), *Atmosphäre* 'atmosphere, environment' (8.0), *Fans* 'fans' (7.6), etc. with adnominal syntactic structure [super + N.] therein. When *super* collocates with adverbs or conjunctions and behaves as an adverbial modifier, the majority of the collocations are *natürlich* 'of course' (3.9), *trotzdem* 'yet' (3.4), *übrigens* 'by the way' (3.2), etc. For example, *Der Start heute war <u>natürlich</u> super* '<u>Of course</u>, the start today was great', *Die haben in Bestbesetzung gespielt und wir in der Defensive <u>trotzdem</u> super gestanden* 'They played in the best line-up and we were <u>still</u> super defensive', and *Der Wein hat <u>übrigens</u> super geschmeckt* '<u>By the way</u>, the wine tasted great'. The highest proportion of verbs and VPs that *super* juxtaposed includes *draufhaben* 'have got' (6.2), *tanken* 'refueling', and *laufen* 'go, run' (3.2).

Note that in (B) the adverbs/conjunctions are usually prepositive of super, but in (C) *super* has its special allocation. Here, *super* can be preposed or postposed on the verbs, and in the case of VP splitting when inflection-medial is applied, *super* will be placed within the VP. For instance, *ich hatte das super drauf* 'I had this super on it; I can do it well' for the VP *draufhaben* 'have got', or *kommt super rüber* 'come super across' for *rüberkommen* 'come across'. Collocations show lexical firmness which gives rise to their partial lexicalization (Strakatova & Hinrichs 2019) and can reveal semantic polarity of the target word.

Table 1: DWDS Word profile for *super*

A. ist Prädikativ von	*logDice*	*Freq.*	B. hat Adverbial-bestimmung	*logDice*	*Freq.*	C. ist Adverbial-bestimmung von	*logDice*	*Freq.*
Stimmung	8.3	113	natürlich	3.9	76	draufhaben	6.2	9
Atmosphäre	8	23	trotzdem	3.4	25	tanken	6	9
Fans	7.6	15	übrigens	3.2	9	laufen	5.7	338
Moral	7.3	6	Doch	2.9	129	rüberkommen	5.4	5
Wetter	7.1	18	irgendwie	2.8	7	hinlegen	5.3	7
Tore	7	8	Alle	2.7	24	finden	5.3	622
Show	6.9	5	Immer	2.2	90	schmecken	5.2	25
Essen	6.9	8	eigentlich	2.1	20	erfinden	5	165
Vorbereitung	6.9	7	jedenfalls	1.7	9	zusammen passen	5	9
Hotel	6.5	5	Heute	1.5	51	anfühlen	4.8	6

* retrieved on April 9, 2020
** per million tokens

3.2 Semantic analysis and delexicalization
We first refer to the etymological meaning of *super*. According to *Duden-das Herkunftswörterbuch* (Duden-the Dictionary of Origin, Pescheck et al 2020) and *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Deutschen* (Etymological dictionary of German, Pfeifer et al. 1993), *super* was derived from the Latin meaning *über* 'more than' or *obendrauf* 'on top'. It underwent semantic broadening by the sixteenth century and meant *sehr* 'very', *überaus* 'exceedingly', *äußerst* 'ultimate', or *höchst* 'top most', an excerpt taken from the theologist Timotheus Kirchner's work in the year 1592 where *super* modifies the verbal *erkläret* 'explains'.

(8) *Solches rein und* ***superfein*** *Silber* (Cundisius 1648)
      'Such pure and **super fine** silver'
(9) *Aber wie können* ***superkluge*** *Leute hören?* (Sarganeck 1740)
      'But how can **super smart** people hear?'
(10) *es steckt unter der Dummheit eine Art* ***Superklugheit*** (Börne 1832)
   'there is a kind of **super cleverness** under stupidity'

Pfeifer et al. (1993) gave a chronological list of the development. *Superfein* 'extremely fine' appears in the sixteenth century (8), *superklug* 'particularly clever, overreacting' in the seventeenth century (9), *Superklugheit* 'super cleverness' eighteenth century (10), and *superfaul* 'super lazy' nineteenth century. Note that *super* and the heads appeared as compounds. Contexts were not provided in Pfeifer et al. for interpreting the specific meaning of each example, but exemplars can be found in DWDS to match the time when the compounds appeared. *Super* was not as flexible morphosyntactically as it is at the present time, yet these meanings have been widely used as Riecke and Wermke (2014) pointed out that it was since the late twentieth century due to the influence of American English. When it is used independently (11), it means *erstklassig* 'top, first class', *großartig* 'great', or *toll* 'awesome'. This suggests that German *super* tended to shift among various magnitudes of intensification, from 'more than', 'very', 'exceedingly', to 'top most' with the strengthening growing stronger and stronger.

(11) ***Super***! (Die Zeit 1998)
      '**Super**!'
(12) *Mit der Maus läßt der 14jährige in fünf bis sechs Stunden eine Stadt*
      entstehen, die rein ***theoretisch super*** *funktioniert*. (Berliner Zeitung 1994)
      'With the mouse, the 14 year-old can create a city in five to six hours that
      works purely **theoretically super**.'
(13) ***Das Prinzip ist super****, die Umsetzung könnte aber schwierig werden*. (Die
      Zeit 2008)
      '**The principle is super**, the transformation, however, could be difficult.'

Nonetheless, German *super* also has gone lower than the reference point - namely, from top to bottom as we can see in (12) to (13) where *super* means 'actually not good'. In (12), the modifier *rein* 'purely, clearly' releases negation, because it is now "clearly/only theoretically super". While in (13) *könnte aber schwierig werden* 'could be, however, difficult' also implies the real judgement from the speaker and reveals the truth value of *Das Prinzip ist* super 'The principle is super'. Pragmatic operation is at work here. We can now postulate the semantic development of *super* before going on with the pragmatic survey. German *super* set out its spatiotemporal movement (see Fig. 1), whereby the trajector glided up from right above the point of reference (the standard point) and meaning *über*,

obendrauf, to the topmost, meaning *äußerst*, *höchst*. Then in modern German, the trajectory slipped down to under the reference point and acquired the antonymous connotation meaning 'actually not good'.

Figure 1: Semantic change of German *super*
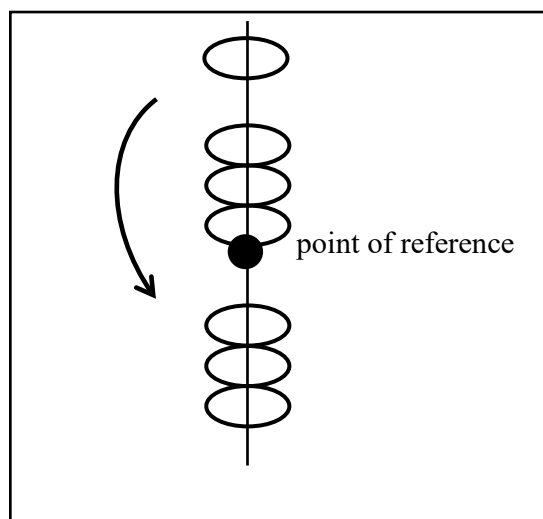
Super meaning 'actually not good' performs innate drive of semantic change as well as pragmatic competence. According to Eckert (2008), Hock & Josepf (2009), Beaton & Washington (2015), in the realm of lexical indexicality, pejoration (gradual worsening of meaning) and melioration (meaning improved, more positive) can be found in succession. It is not a surprise that the meaning of *super* goes under the point of reference. The meaning 'actually not good' (e.g. (12) and (13)) usually appears as [adjective/adverb + super] construction with collocates such as *eigentlich* 'actually', *natürlich* 'naturally, of course', *echt* 'really', *absolut* 'absolutely', *jedenfalls* 'in any case', or *schon* 'already'. (For example, *Der war <u>eigentlich</u> super gesprungen* 'He had jumped <u>really</u> well' and *Wir sind <u>natürlich</u> super glücklich* 'We are <u>of course</u> super happy'.) Such collocates are degree adverbs or adverbs of manner that carry the semantic prosody of 'totality' (e.g. absolutely, really, naturally); their truth value can vary depending on the pragmatic purpose of the speaker.

In other words, the formulaic [adjective + super] can show the speaker's personal opinion, which may not coincide with the facts or may even contradict the truth value oriented by the speaker's subjectivity. Pragmatically, *super* in German can be a replacement for irony (14), disappointment (15), politeness (16), etc. Example (14) is an irony for it "would be kind of great, but predictably boring". The colleague in example (15) said "It works great" to show sarcasm as well as disappointment when the outcome of their cooperation was not satisfactory, whereas the speaker in (16) tried to be polite by just voicing the pleasing training.

Let us observe this semantic development from another perspective and consider examples like (17). For the *super bequem* in (17), though positivity remains, the meaning of *super* has been reduced in terms of intensity and can now weaken the gradable property of the head, thus *super bequem* in (17) can mean "very comfortable" or just "comfortable", but not necessarily "*very much* comfortable" any more. The semantic bleaching of *super* has its reasons, including delexicalization and societal motives, just as Hock and Joseph (2009: 232) expressed: "social factors cause words to change from one sphere to the other". We shall elaborate social factors in the next section and continue the discussion here with delexicalization.

(14) *…plötzlich bei ihm zu Hause auftauchen würde (was zwar **irgendwie super**,*
     aber vorhersagbar langweilig wäre).
       '…would suddenly show up at his home (which would be **kind of**
       super, but predictably boring)'
(15) *Das **klappe super**, sagt die Kollegin.*
       'It **works super**, says the colleague'
(16) Die seien doch jetzt ***super ausgebildet***.
       'They're **super trained** now.'
(17) ***Super bequem*** zu tragen.
       '**Super comfortable** to carry.'
(18) Danke dass ich bei euch ***super Information*** bekommen habe.
       'Thank you that I got **super information** from you.'

As demonstrated above, *super* has advanced itself in terms of morphosyntactic, semantic and pragmatic performance and has gradually lost its role as an intensifier. Such loss is referred to as delexicalization, a general process of grammaticalization (Sinclair 1992; Partington 1993). Either diachronically or synchronically, one way to study on-going delexicalization is to observe the function patterning (Mustanoja 1960: 326-7). Partington (1993) indicated that there is a relation between delexicalization and collocational patterns; the more delexicalized an intensifier is, the more widely it collocates, hence expanding its "width of collocation". In other words, some intensifiers tend to collocate with specific clusters of lexical items, while others regularly collocate with broader selections. As illustrated in the above discussion of German *super*, we see that *super* collocates with a generous set of lexical items. The head of *super* can refer to an event (14), an outcome (15), a training (16), a person (1), a piece of work (2), and an event (3), etc.

Pejoration and melioration can be found in succession as cited in the above. Much earlier, Partington (1993) also demonstrated that the delexicalization of *awfully* is advanced because its head can have positive connotations (e.g. *cute*, *funny*, and *pretty*) or have negative ones (e.g. *boring* and *silly*), whereas *terribly* tends to collocate only with negative expressions. In the case of *super*, it can collocate with positive connotation heads as in (6), (8), (9), (10), (16) and (17), as well as negative modifiers, as in (3) and (12). Example (12) can be paraphrased as *super Theorie* 'super theory', but it is often said as *theoretisch super* 'theoretically super' and with a further supplement as to why the topical subject is actually not doable. Other German examples with negative modifiers include *super schlecht* 'super bad', *super hässlich* 'really ugly', and *super unwohl* 'super uncomfortable', among others. Subjectification is likewise apparent in the above examples in that the degree of *super* depends on the speaker, rather than the epistemic fact. In terms of exclamation, *Super!* (11) can mean the exact opposite of *super*, constituting subjectivity understood based on the spot-on deictic realization.

German *super* is now losing its emphasizing tone. Consequently, instead of *super gut* 'super good', the following are often used among youth in the German society: *krass gut*, *total gut*, *cool gut*, *mega gut*, *voll gut*, *endgut*, *hamma*, *hammer*, *tiptop*, *genial* and *todschick*, that all mean 'super good'. Further, girls have developed *supi* 'super good' with an "endearment" manner.

4.   Sociolinguistic study of intensifiers
Having demonstrated the morphosyntactic pattern and semantic development of German intensifier *super*, this section moves on to examine the use of German *super* over time to show the motivation of such change as well as reporting the general use of intensifiers in social communication.

As a matter of fact, *super* was not a popular intensifier in German history. One can see the frequency spectrum of *super* and the lexical competition with its synonyms based on DWDS newspaper corpus (DWDS-Zeitungskorpus). In the graph, *krass* (see the red line in Fig. 2) had always

been in the lead and, since 1945, it was the most frequently used among the four synonyms (7.63 million tokens) until 2004 when *super* took over. *Super* (see the blue line) itself has had a remarkable increase in use over the years. It had been the least used intensifier among the four, and then it was used a little bit more than *geil* in 1951 (*super* 0.39 : *geil* 0.35). *Super* and *geil* competed with each other for over a decade from 1951 to 1966. The popularity of *super* took a sudden increase around 1985 and surpassed that of *geil* in 1992 (*super* 2.94 : *geil* 2.91). Subsequently, *super* won over *spitze* in 2002 (*super* 7.40 : *spitze* 7.24) and finally exceeded *krass* in 2004 (*super* 8.65 : *krass* 8.56). The dramatically increasing use of *super* since the late twentieth century is due to the influence of American English.

Figure 2: Frequency spectrum of *super* and synonyms
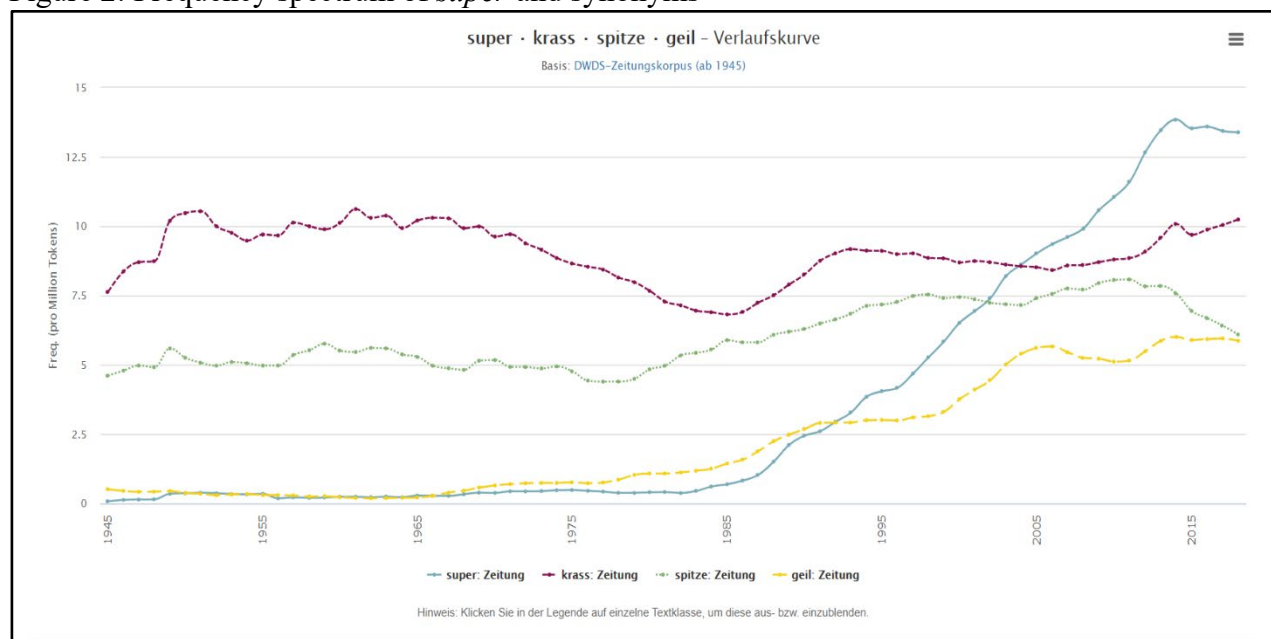
We see that society itself is an external factor that facilitates the development of intensifiers. The influence of English on German is certainly a result of the development of the global village. Although *super* did not die out before the contact with English, such linguistic change is referred to as revival by Mustanoja (1960: 59), also known as competition and recycling of intensifiers (Altenberg 1991; Bolinger 1972; Ito & Tagliamonte 2003). *Well* as an intensifier (as in *well cool*, *well dirty*) is also recognized as a revival (Denison 1999; Andersen & Hasund 2002). Research has found that *well* became less popular after the mid fourteenth century (Mustanoja 1960: 319-327) but appeared again in Present Day British English (Stenström 2000; Stenström, Andersen & Hasund 2002; Stratton 2018).

In fact, revivals take place in language contact time and again. Hsieh & Hsu (2006) investigated Japanese loanwords in Mandarin and found that the lexical item *jiào shòu* (teaching; professor) is a revival because this lexical item was found to have been used around 90 AD (*Shiji*, *Annals*) but was lost or unpopular until the language contact with Japanese. Depner (2016) studied fruit naming and indicated that the names can vanish due to rare use, but they can also find a way to survive through a revival, such as the fruit name of apple in Mandarin Chinese (*píng guǒ*). Whether it is fruit names, academic titles like Mandarin *professor* or intensifiers like German *super*, various linguistic domains, target words and routes are all under the same social and linguistic contact influence in the use of lexicon.

Lexical changes such as revivals are influenced by an internal linguistic factor—motivation for change. Meillet (1905-6/1948) said that words are able to adjust their meaning for linguistic, historical or social reasons. Current intensifiers can lose their intensifying force (Stoffel 1901; Tagliamonte 2008) or change due to prosodic evidence, such as phonological stress (Stratton 2020b). Tagliamonte (2008: 389-391) indicated that some intensifiers do not die off but persist at the speakers' low-frequency variants word bank which "are available to be co-opted back into the active system" at any time. Aitchison stated that words like these do "exist in embryo in the language" (2001: 144), and Hsieh & Hsu (2006: 62) referred to such words as "linguistic seeds".

The change of intensifiers also involves external linguistic factors that are brought in from society, such as the preference of the speakers and the diffusion of certain intensifiers. Diffusion rarely starts with a variant used in a remote area. Rather, linguistic changes usually spread among highly populated communities (e.g. cities) and may even skip rural regions altogether (Trudgill 1972, 1974; Chambers and Trudgill 1980; Labov 2001). Yet, for the diffusion of the intensifier *well*, the data in Stratton's study (2020b) indicated that the intensifying use of *well* has been preserved in some dialects. Presumably, this retained dialectal use eventually spread in the twentieth century, and those who had not already used it regularly found it to be a new expression.

On the other hand, some studies have provided a rather complete set of arguments and interesting research outcomes to prove that the language speaker's gender, age, education, register, etc. are important social factors for the change of intensifiers. Specific gender guides the use of intensifiers (Stoffel 1901). Stoffel (1901) and Jespersen (1922) recorded that ladies delight in saying *He is so charming!* and *It is so lovely!* As such, women's leading role in the progress of intensifiers has been documented (Lakoff 1973; Bradac et al. 1995; Holmes 1995; Stenström 1999; Christie 2002; Ito and Tagliamonte 2003; McEnery & Xiao 2004; Tagliamonte & Roberts 2005; Xiao & Tao 2007; Tagliamonte 2008; Murphy 2010; Hancock et al. 2015). Then Fuchs (2017) asked, "Do women still use more intensifiers than men?" and explored recent change of intensifiers in British English. He came to the conclusion that both genders have come to use intensifiers frequently and speculated that the reason for the new development is "the spread of a stereotypically feminine, positively polite linguistic style in British society", as people have changed the way they perceive gender roles (2017: 365).

Age is a variable, too. Teenagers utilize intensifiers less than the 20-30-year age group (Núñez Pertejo & Palacios Martínez 2014; Palacios Martínez & Núñez Pertejo 2012; Tagliamonte 2008). Intensifiers are used frequently by the younger generation when the topics and settings are "right" (Peng 2009; Ito and Tagliamonte 2003). Ito & Tagliamonte (2003) found a noteworthy generation gap in York English as Figure 3 indicates: The intensifier *very* is used by adults aged over 35 while younger speakers tend to use *really*.

Figure 3: Distribution of *very* and *really* by age (Ito & Tagliamonte 2003: 267)
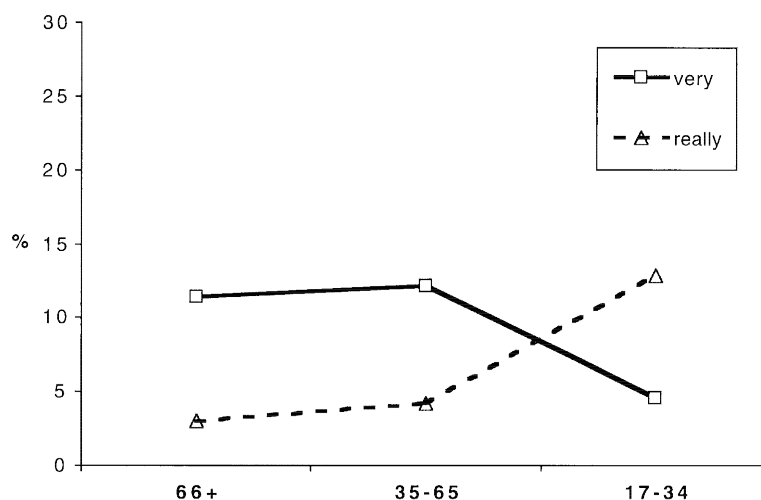
Furthermore, setting and register play a role as well. Labov (1985: 44) noted that *really* is one of the most frequently used intensifiers in daily conversation in American English. Speakers are liable to utter *really* in familiar talks more than in formal speech or writing. Likewise, Stenström (1999) found that *really* is the most common intensifier among teenagers in London. On the other hand, while investigating German intensifiers, Umbach (2011) found in the novel she examined that intensifiers were used predominantly when adults converse with children. "Neutral" intensifiers like *zu Tode* 'to death' are used (e.g. *zu Tode langweilen* 'bored to death'). The text in the novel reflects a social interaction pattern in which adults often use intensifiers when talking to children to generate a hyperbolic effect that would draw the listeners' attention. Other settings can be found in economic discourse (Griffin 2007), children's literature (Pugh & Wallace 2006) and conversational interactions (Korobov 2005). In addition to the above reported external linguistic factors regarding the preference of the speakers, social class (Wodak 2015) and dialect variants (Biber et al. 1999; Fuchs & Gut 2016; Holmes et al. 1998) are all variables known to influence the frequency of an intensifier.

An intensifier can escalate its popularity as a result of language contact. When intensifiers are changing and developing, both internal linguistic motivations and external social factors are exercising their influence.

5. Conclusion

This paper investigated the multi-dimensional nature of *super* in German and general internal and external push that change intensifiers in the social communication. I conclude that (a) the intensifier *super* in German is flexible on its morphosyntactic behavior in that *super* has minimum constraint in its modification position. It can be at pre-or post-verbal position, sentential final or act as an exclamation (*Super*!); and its collocation environment is varied. (b) German *super* set out its spatiotemporal movement since deriving from Latin, its semantic trajector glided up from right above the point of reference to the topmost (meaning very, ultimate, etc.). Then in modern German, the trajectory slipped down to under the reference point and acquired the antonymous connotation meaning 'actually not good'. (c) The truth value of the [super + modifier] construction varies depending on the pragmatic purpose of the speaker. (d) A diachronic survey of the frequency spectrum shows that *super* has achieved a lexical revival, thus winning over its synonyms. Linguistic and social factors are involved in intensifier development in language communities.

Is a "super good beer" better than a "very good beer" in German? Not before 1992, as the above

investigation has revealed, and presumably not in the late twenty-first century if *super* goes on to lose its intensity through delexicalization. The intrinsic motivation of linguistic change, extrinsic sociolinguistic factors of overall intensifiers and special semantic functions of *super* allow the syntactic flexibility and pragmatic participation. The linguistic revival that started in the early twenty-first century has made the intensity of German *super* what it is today.

Acknowledgement

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Appendix

Detailed source of examples taken from archives and newspapers.

(8) Cundisius, Gottfried: Der Geistreiche Prophet Haggaj. Leipzig, 1648.

(9) Sarganeck, Georg: Ueberzeugende und bewegliche Warnung vor allen Sünden der Unreinigkeit und Heimlichen Unzucht. Züllichau, 1740.

(10) Börne, Ludwig: Briefe aus Paris. Bd. 1. Hamburg, 1832.

(11) Die Zeit, 20.05.1998, Nr. 22.

(12) Berliner Zeitung, 27.09.1994.

(13) Die Zeit, 16.10.2008, Nr. 42.