

Intensifier Variation in Norwegian

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Intensifiers

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

It is hot

(In theoretical terms: *it is \emptyset hot*)

It is *very* hot

It is *really* hot

*Bolinger, Dwight. 1972. *Degree Words*. The Hague: Mouton.

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*

Amplifiers

Quirk et al. (1985: 590) subdivide **amplifiers** further depending on their **semantic function** into *boosters* and *maximizers*

Boosters: “a high point on the scale”

e.g., it is *very* hot

Maximizers: “upper extreme point on the scale”

e.g., it is *completely* ridiculous

Crosslinguistic Tendencies

Amplifiers are more frequent than downtoners

Boosters are more frequent than maximizers

> English – (Stratton 2020a: 50)

> German – (Stratton, 2020b: 200)

*Stratton, James. 2020a. Fiction as a Source of Linguistic Data: Evidence from Television Drama. *Token: A Journal of English Linguistics* 10, 39-58.

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

Crosslinguistic Tendencies

Adjectives are the most frequently intensified part of speech

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

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

* Bäcklund, Ulf. 1973. *The collocation of adverbs of degree in English*. Uppsala: Uppsala University Press.

* Westervoll, Maria. T. R. 2015. *Dødsinteressant eller sykt unyttig? En korpusbasert tilnærming til grammatikaliseringen av forsterkende elementer i norsk*. [Master thesis: University of Oslo].

Why Study Intensifiers?

They **provide** speakers with the **opportunity** to **impress, persuade, praise**

They **lose** their **intensifying uniqueness** over time (Tagliamonte, 2008: 391)

Intensifiers undergo perpetual **renewal, recycling, and replacement**

diachronically (e.g., Tagliamonte, 2008; Stratton, 2020c)

* Tagliamonte, Sali. A. 2008. So different and pretty cool! Recycling intensifiers in Canadian English. *English Language and Linguistics* 12, 361–394.

* Stratton, James. M. 2020c. A Diachronic Analysis of the Adjective Intensifier well from Early Modern English to Present Day English. *Canadian Journal of Linguistics* 65(2), 216- 245.

Recycling of Intensifiers

Intensifier *wel* used in **Old and Middle English** (e.g., Stratton, forthcoming)

It **declined** in frequency **after mid-14th century** (e.g., Stratton, 2020c)

Picked up again in British English **500 years later** (e.g., Stratton, 2020c)

* Stratton, James, M. Old English Intensifiers: The Beginnings of the English Intensifier System. *Journal of Historical Linguistics*.

* Stratton, James. M. 2020c. A Diachronic Analysis of the Adjective Intensifier well from Early Modern English to Present Day English. *Canadian Journal of Linguistics* 65(2), 216- 245.

Why Study Intensifiers?

Linguistic Correlates:

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

Social Correlates:

- > **Age** (e.g., Ito & Tagliamonte, 2003)
- > **Gender** (e.g., Fuchs, 2017; Stratton, 2020b)

* Fuchs, Robert. 2017. Do women (still) use more intensifiers than men? Recent changes in the sociolinguistics of intensifiers in British English. *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics* 22(3), 345-374.

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

Norwegian Intensifiers

Norwegian Intensification

- Norwegian is underrepresented in the literature
 - **Three master theses** (Bardas, 2008; Westervoll, 2015; Wilhelmsen, 2019)
 - Some **descriptive and formal semantic works** (e.g., Skommer, 1993; Livanova, 1997; Svenonius & Kennedy 2006; Ebeling & Ebeling, 2015).
 - Previous focus on **written language**

* Ebeling, Jarl, & Signe O. Ebeling. 2015. An English-Norwegian contrastive analysis of downtoners, more or less. *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 14(1): 62–89.

* Livanova, Alexandra. 1997. Funksjonell-grammatisk behandling av semantiske gradsforhold. *Folia Scandinavica Posnaniensia*, 4, 89-113.

* Skommer, Grzegorz. 1993. Morphological Intensifiers of meaning in Norwegian. *Norsk Lingvistisk Tidsskrift* 11.

* Svenonius, Peter, & Christopher Kennedy. (2006). Northern Norwegian degree questions and the syntax of measurement. In M. Frascareilli (ed.), *Phases of interpretation* (pp. 133- 162). De Gruyter Mouton.

Norwegian Intensification

- Only one sociolinguistic study (Fjeld, 2020)
- No variationist sociolinguistic studies

Variationist Sociolinguistics:

- Circumscribing the variable context
- Principle of Accountability (Labov, 1966: 49)
- Rigorous statistical modelling

* Fjeld, Ruth. 2020. Helt sjukt å være så jævlig god. bruk av adjektivforsterkere i moderne norsk. *Oslo Studies in Language*, 11(2), 113-133.

* Labov, William. 1966. *The social stratification of English in New York City*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics.

Research Questions

RQ1: What is the **current distribution** of intensifier variants in the Oslo speech community in terms of **frequency** and **function**?

RQ2: Which **linguistic** and social **factors** condition and constrain the intensifier system in Oslo-Norwegian?

Methodology

Corpus

- **NoTa-Oslo** (*Norsk talespråkskorpus – Oslodelen*)
‘Norwegian Spoken Language Corpus – Oslo Part’
- **166 informants** born and raised in **Oslo** and the surrounding area,
144 stratified [*we used the stratified component*]:
 - gender (f = 72, m = 72)
 - age (16-25 = 48, 26-50 = 48, 51+ = 48)
- NoTa-Oslo contains **957,000 words**
transcribed, lemmatized, and tagged
- Interactions were semi-formal interviews with informants and
informal conversations between two informants
(Johannessen & Hagen, 2008)

Data Collection

- Took a **random sample of 5,000 adjectives** (removed invariable contexts)
- Examples of **non-intensifiable adjectives** that were **excluded**:
 - Classifiers (e.g., *finansiell* ‘financial’, *daglig* ‘daily’)
 - Negatively modified adjectives (e.g., *ikke så gammel* ‘not that old’)
 - Comparatives (e.g., *litt bedre* ‘a little better’)
 - Superlatives (e.g., *viktigste* ‘most important’)
 - Fossilized, non-gradable collocations (e.g. *vær så snill*)
- Removed adverbial tokens that were tagged as adjectives (e.g., *det gikk så fint* ‘it went so well’)

Data Coding

- Of the 5,000 randomly chosen adjectives, **1,910** were deemed intensifiable
- Each adjective was coded for **ABSENCE** of an intensifier (e.g., *huset er Ø stort* ‘the house is big’) or **OCCURRENCE** of a preceding intensifier (e.g., *huset er veldig stort* ‘the house is very big’)
- Each intensifier was **coded** for **scalar function** (i.e., amplifier vs downtoner; booster vs. maximizer)

Examples

- (1) det var en **veldig bra** kamp ‘it was a very good fight’
- (2) første min var en **dritgammel** Sony ‘my first was a very old Sony’
- (3) jeg var **så bråkete** ‘I was so noisy’
- (4) de hadde hatt **skikkelig lang** dag ‘they had had a really long day’
- (5) det var **jævlig morsomt** ‘it was very funny’ [lit. devilishly funny]

Results

Distributional Analysis

Table 1. Overall Intensification Rate

<i>N</i> = 1910			
Intensified		Not Intensified	
%	N	%	N
44.7	854	55.3	1056

Table 2. Frequency of Intensifiers

Intensifier	Gloss	N	%
<i>veldig</i>	‘very’	264	31%
<i>litt</i>	‘a little bit’	186	22%
<i>helt</i>	‘completely’	121	14%
<i>så</i>	‘so’	89	10%
<i>skikkelig</i>	‘proper’	50	6%
<i>ganske</i>	‘quite’	44	5%
<i>kjempe-</i>	‘very’ [lit. giant]	22	3%
<i>jævlig</i>	‘very’ [lit. devilish]	15	2%
<i>dritt-</i>	‘very’ [lit. shit]	14	1%
<i>others</i> ⁹		49	6%
TOTAL		854	100

Intensification Rate in Apparent Time

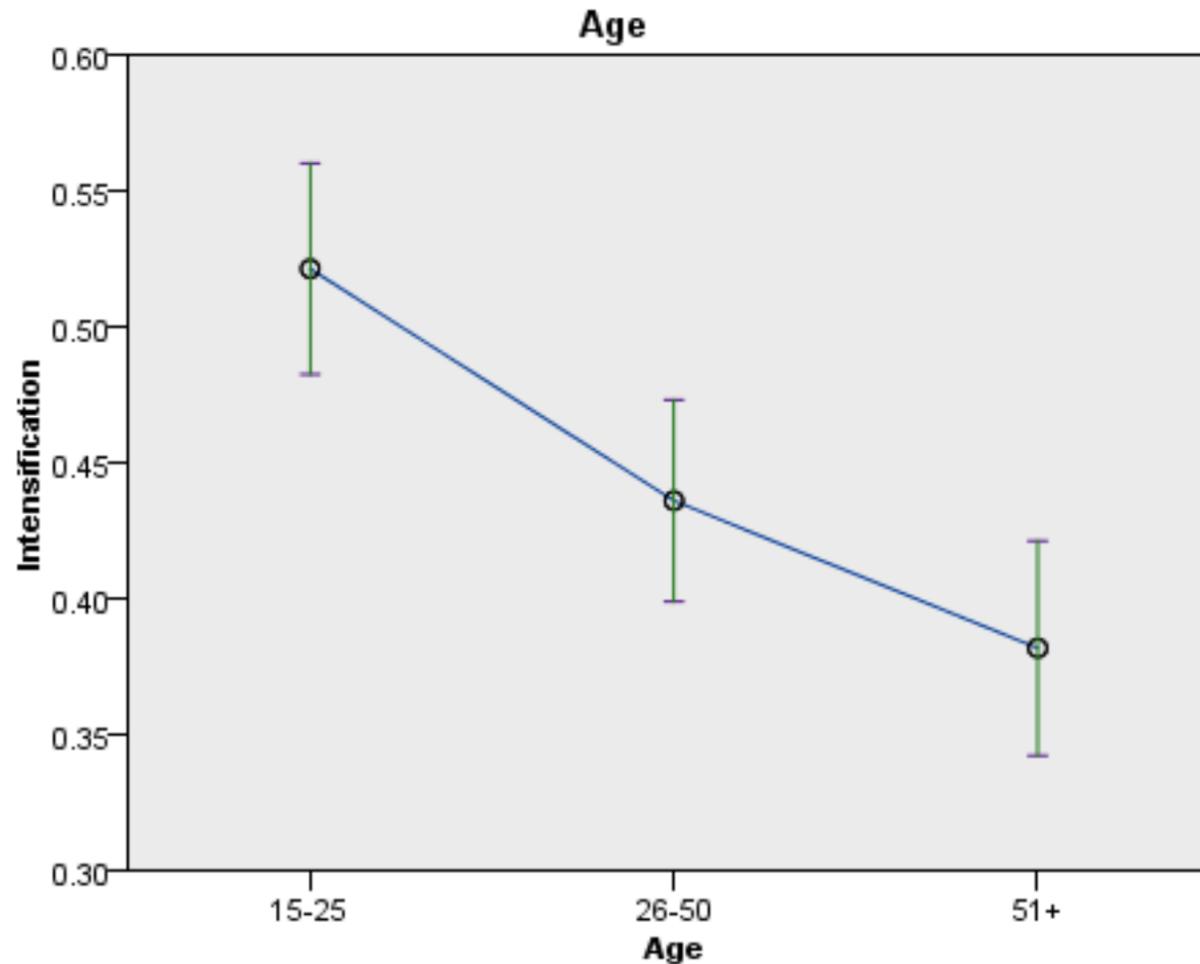


Figure 1: Intensification Rate of Adjectives in Apparent Time

Intensification Rate by Gender

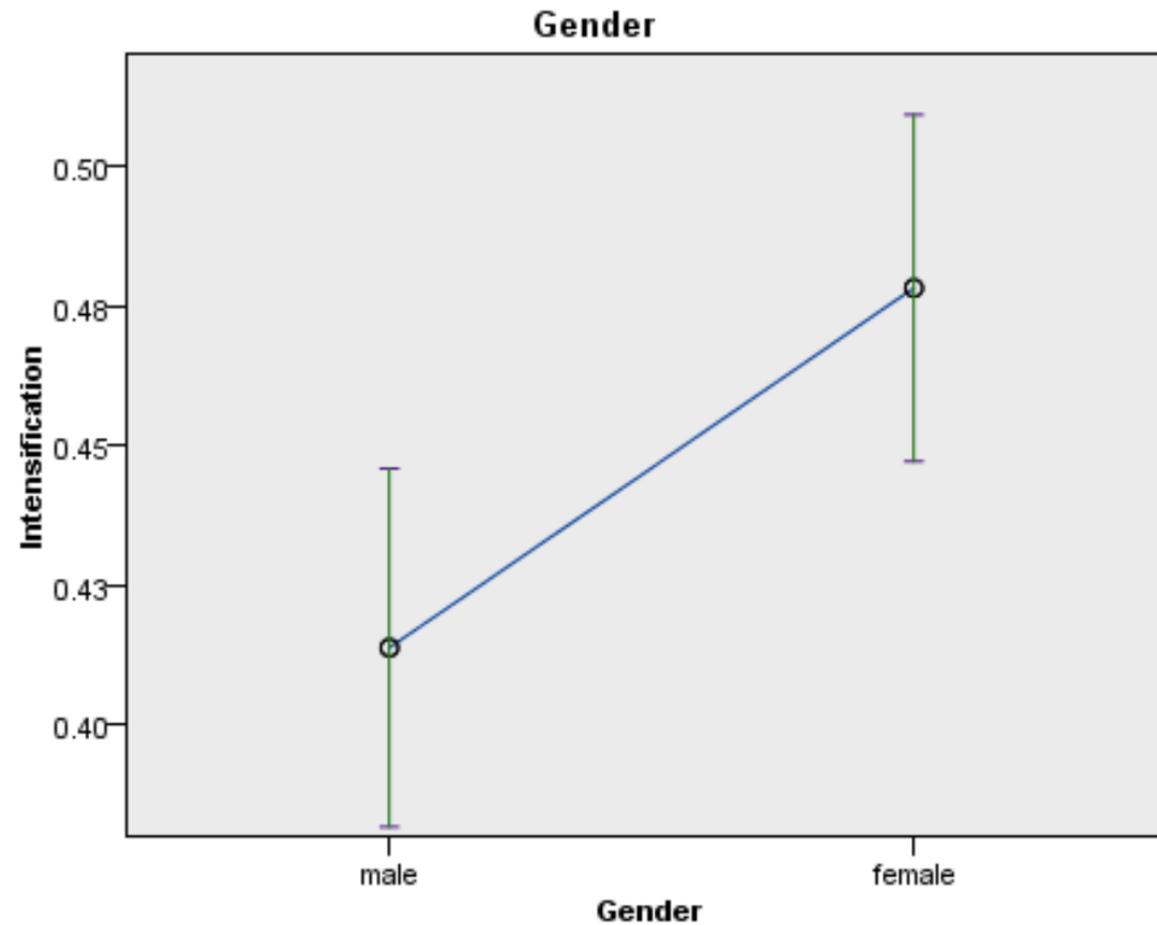


Figure 2: Intensification Rate by Gender

Frequency of Intensifier Types

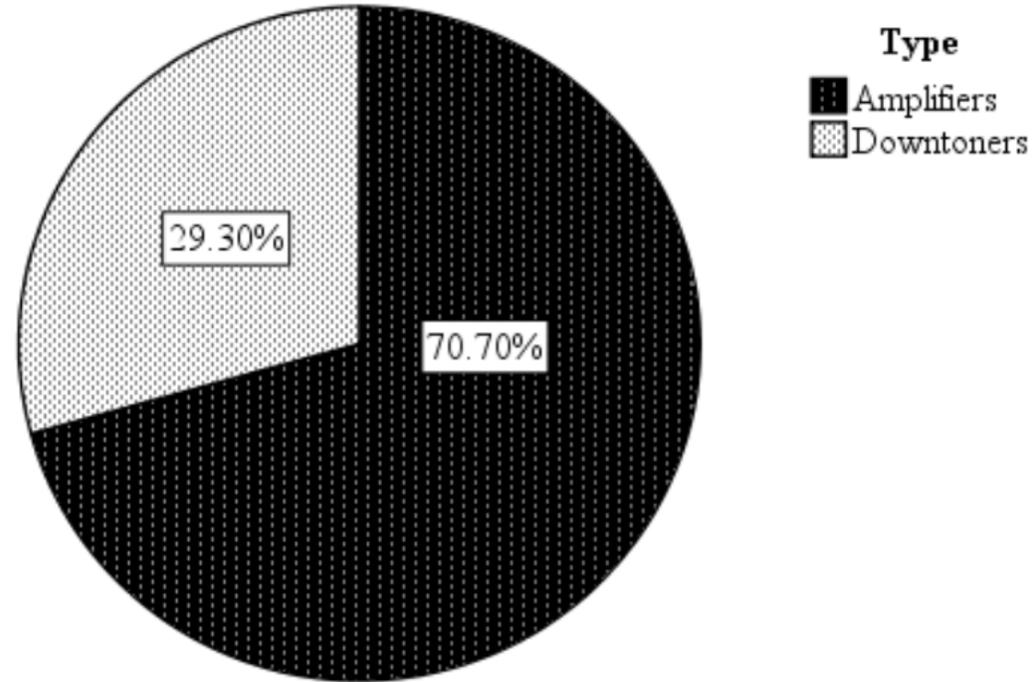


Figure 3: Proportion of Amplifiers to Downtoners

Boosters and Maximizers

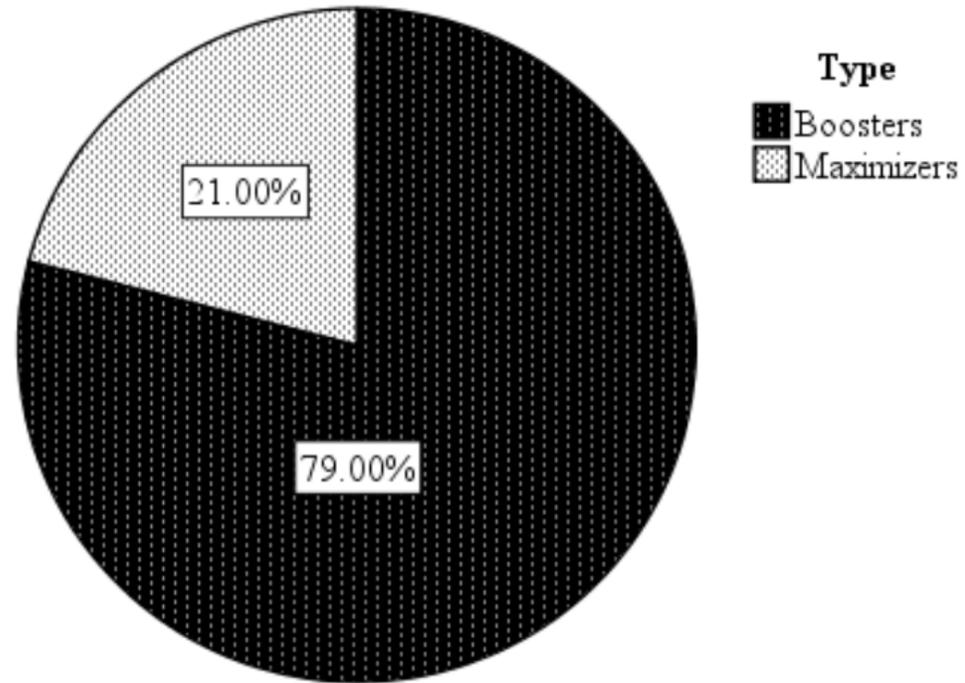


Figure 4: Proportion of Boosters to Maximizers

Distribution of Boosters

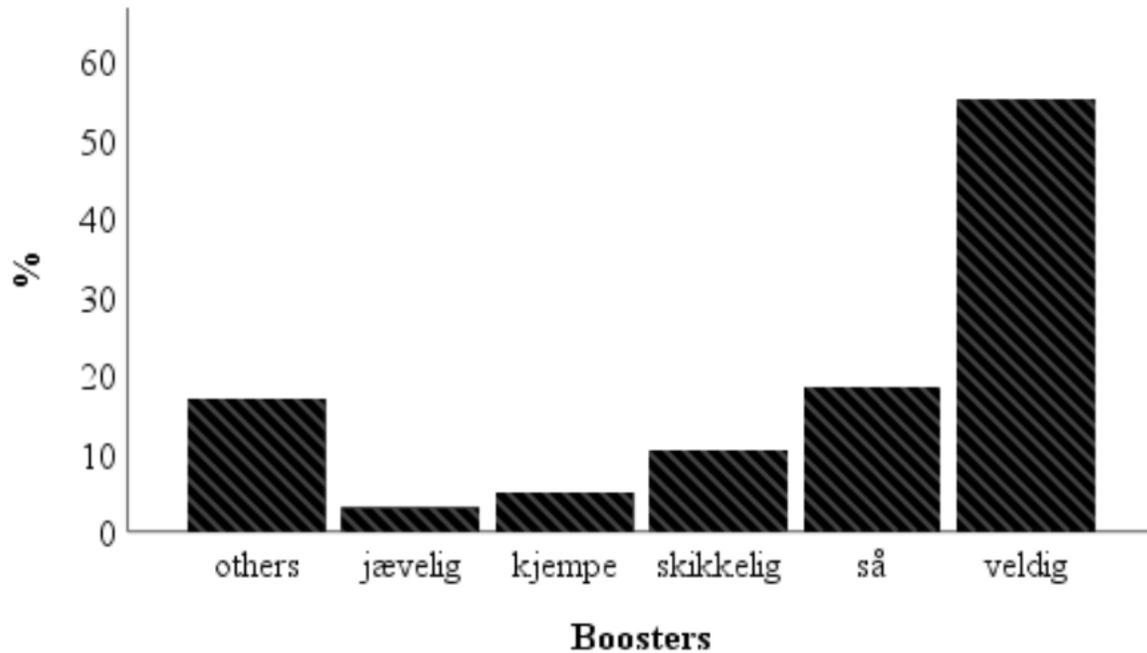


Figure 5: Distribution of Booster System

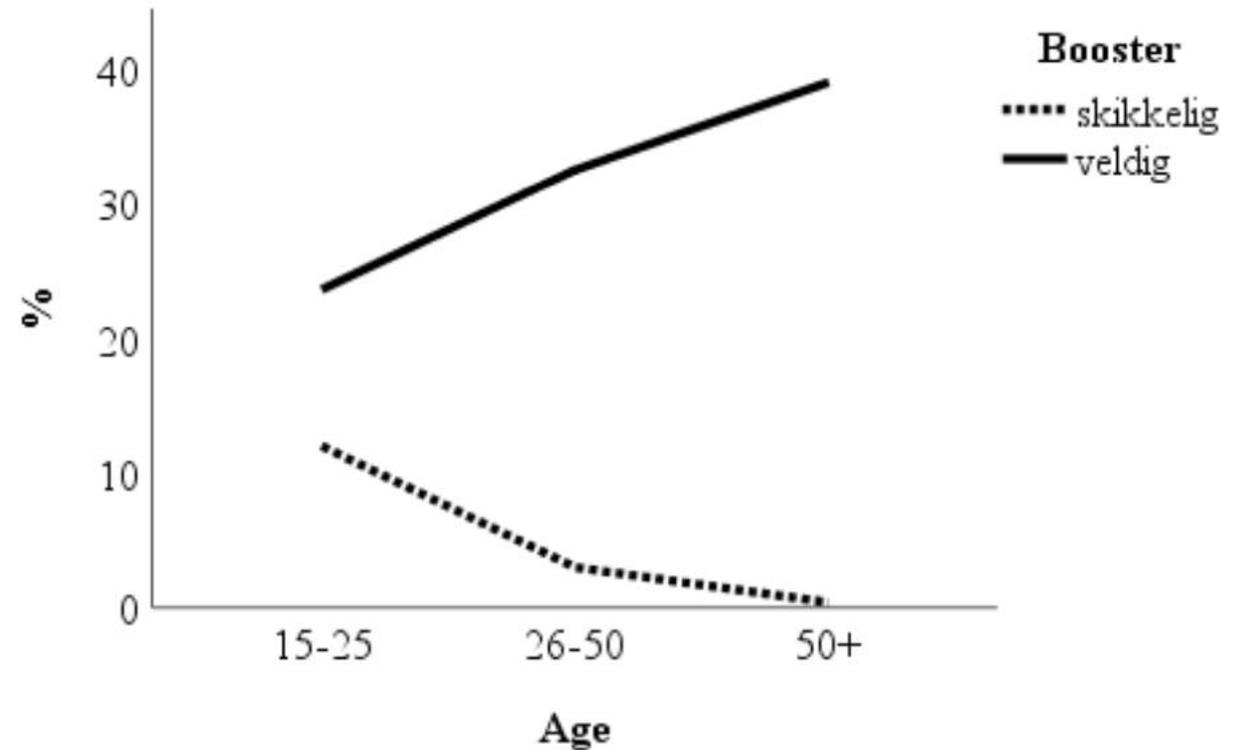


Figure 6: The Use of *veldig* and *skikkelig* in Apparent Time

skikkelig as an intensifier

- Data on *skikkelig* ‘proper’ indicates it makes up a larger share of the female booster system ($n = 36/286$, 13%) than the male ($n = 14/182$, 8%)
 - (6) det er **skikkelig skummelt** ‘it is proper scary’
 - (7) du er **skikkelig barnslig** ‘you are proper childish’
- According to apparent type analyses, *skikkelig* is used predominantly by younger speakers

dritt- as an intensifier

- The intensifier *dritt-* ‘very’ [lit. ‘shit’] was used most frequently among **younger speakers**, with 13 (out of the 14 tokens) exclusively used in the 16-25 age cohort, especially with novel adjectives and loan words (*dritkeen* ‘really keen’, *drittaz* ‘really boring’)
 - (8) den er egentlig **dritfunny** ‘it is actually really funny’
- *dritt-* is used in both positive (*dritgod* ‘very good’) and negative semantic evaluation (*dritstreng* ‘very strict’)

Multivariate Analysis

- **Statistical significance** and **relative weight** of **linguistic** factors (Syntactic Position, Semantic Type) and **social** factors (Gender, Age, Education) were considered in *Rbrul* analysis (Johnson, 2009)
 - **Predicative adjectives** were intensified more frequently than **attributive**
 - **Some semantic types** of adjectives more than others (e.g., human propensity, difficulty, similarity vs. age and color adjectives)
 - **Women** intensified adjectives more frequently than **men**
 - **Younger** speakers intensified adjectives more often than **older** speakers

* Johnson, Daniel. E. 2009. Getting off the Goldvarb standard: Introducing Rbrul for mixed effects variable rule analysis. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 3(1). 359-383.

Discussion

1. Rearrangement in the intensifier system

- *skikkelig* increases in **apparent time** among younger generations
- change led by predominantly **women**
- in line with the Principles of Linguistic Change
(Labov, 2001: 274-275)

2. Recycling of Intensifiers

- intensifier *skikkelig* is **not novel**
han er skikkeleg galen ‘he is proper crazy’ (Norsk Ordbok, 1743)
- once used → went out of vogue → recently reemerged
Hypothesis supported by its lack of use in TAUS (1971-1973)

Discussion

3. *en skikkelig løsning* ‘an **appropriate** solution’ > *skikkelig bra* ‘**very good**’

○ BrE: *proper*: that’s **proper** cool (Stratton, 2020)

○ German: **richtig** ‘correct’ → *richtig geil* ‘really cool’ (Stratton, 2020)

○ Dutch: **behoorlijk** ‘proper/decent’ → *behoorlijk schoon* ‘very clean’

○ Nor: **ordentlig**: *det var ordentlig stille* ‘very quiet’

Tendency: Appropriateness → Intensifier Status

4. Crosslinguistic Trends

○ **amplifiers** more frequent than **downtoners**

○ **boosters** more frequent than **maximizers**

○ **women** use intensifiers more frequently than **men**

○ **younger** speakers have **higher** rates of **intensification**

Conclusion

Contributions:

- **Represent Norwegian** in the sociolinguistic study of intensification
- Several **crosslinguistic** (*cross-Germanic*) **tendencies**

Moving Forward:

- **Real time analysis** (e.g., TAUS: *Talesmålsundersøkelsen i Oslo*)
- Other Norwegian speech communities
- Further quantitative work on other Germanic languages

Thank you for listening!

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Appendix

Table 3. Logistic Regression of the Factors Conditioning Intensification

Input	.402		
Total <i>N</i>	1767		
	<i>N</i>	%	FW
Linguistic			
POSITION (.0001)			
predicative	1388	50.5	.62
attributive	379	.26	.38
<i>Range</i>			.24
ADJ TYPE (.0008)			
human propensity	252	63.1	.72
difficulty	34	55.9	.65
value	654	53.7	.63
similarity	55	52.7	.62
physical property	214	41.6	.51
dimension	241	37.8	.47
qualification	166	33.7	.43
speed	21	33.3	.43
color	23	30.4	.39
age	107	13.1	.18
<i>Range</i>			.54
Social			
GENDER (.01)			
female	921	49.5	.53
male	846	43.3	.47
<i>Range</i>			.6
AGE (.003)			
16-25	608	54.1	.57
26-50	684	45.4	.50
51+	525	39.0	.43
<i>Range</i>			.14
EDUCATION (2.72)			
higher	1038	46.8	.50
lower	729	46.1	.50
<i>Range</i>			0

Random Effect (Speaker: *SD* = .40, *n* = 126)

Additional Examples

Boosters

hun blir **rimelig** sur

han er jo **altfor** gammel

er **virkelig** god

å bo på et **knøttlite** hotellrom

jeg var **så** trøtt bestandig

Maximizers

en **komplett** umulig oppgave

det var jo **helt** fantastisk