
Intensifying intensifiers: Variations in expressivity

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Intensifiers define a larger word class that has fuzzy boundaries. Members of this class modify the degree of a gradable expression (typically a property, an adjective (phrase), by strengthening its property. This word class contains a large set of (partly) paradigmatic words, originating from other word classes and various semantic origins, and it is marked by volatility. From a communicative point of view intensifiers increase the expressivity of an adjective in an attributive or predicative function. Intensifiers do not only inform, they also perform. They function as expressive, emotive words that shift the attention to special, relevant spots in the information stream, as a kind of focus particles. We investigate three recurring, innovative strategies in German CMC from Twitter conversations, and additionally from Blog- and YouTube-Comments:

- (1) a. **Stacking**, by combining multiple intensifiers: *so mega gut* ‘so mega good’
- b. **Lengthening**, mostly realised through repeated graphemes: *soooooo cool* ‘so cool’, *seeeeeehr schön* ‘very nice / beautiful’
- c. **(Modified) duplication**, by repeating the same intensifier: *sehr sehr gut* ‘very very good’

The frequency distribution of intensifiers shows considerable variation with a few frequent and many infrequent words. The referential meaning of intensifiers is relatively fixed, but their expressive meaning varies, also depending on their surprisal or information value, implying that more frequent intensifiers have lower surprisal values. We hypothesize that the above strategies with different form-function patterns in intensifying intensifiers can be traced back to information values and the way these values are distributed over phrases and utterances. We apply alternative, more local information indices (information values from the *Topic Context Model*) instead of global Shannon entropy and information density measures to get a grip both on the tension between variation, convention and creativity in expressing intensification and on the pragmatic and structuring role of information values. At the same time, we claim a more established theoretical status of the concept of information in human communication.

References: • Philipp, J. N., Richter, M., Scheffler, T. & R. van Hout (2022). The role of information in modeling German intensifiers. In R. Lenke, L. Schäfer & I. Reich (eds.), *Information structure and information theory*, 117–145. Language Science Press.