Papi, keiner sagt 'astrein' mehr

The Linguistic and Social Correlates of German Adjective Variation

James Stratton

NWAV-49, 2021

Purdue University

jstratt@purdue.edu

PURDUE
LIBERAL ARTS

Positive Evaluation Adjectives

geil, krass, top, fett, toll, super, derbe, spitze, prima, klasse, fantastisch,

mega, abgefahren, ausgezeichnet, bombig, cool, nice, gediegen, sauber,

dufte, kultig, genial, knorke, schnafte, astrein

Examples:

a) ohne scheiß ich finde es **fett**, ich find es voll **gut** (FOLK_S_00054) 'no joke, I think it's great, I think it's really good'

b) salzige Butter ist **geil** (FOLK_S_00947) 'salty butter is great'

c) wir starten diese Stunde mit einem **toll**en Lied (FOLK_S_00395) 'we're starting this class with a great song'

d) ich finde die Idee so **klasse** (FOLK_S_00720) 'I find the idea so great'

Positive Evaluation Adjectives

geil, krass, top, fett, toll, super, derbe, spitze, prima, klasse, fantastisch, mega, abgefahren, ausgezeichnet, bombig, cool, nice, gediegen, sauber, dufte, kultig, genial, knorke, schnafte, astrein

- **functionally equivalent**

- **"orderly heterogeneity"**? (Weinreich et al. 1968: 100)

*Weinreich, Uriel, William Labov & Marvin Herzog. 1968. *Empirical Foundations for a Theory of Language Change*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Positive Evaluation Adjectives

- Geographical differences:
  - *leiwand* (Austrian)
  - *pfundig* (Bavarian)
  - *herzig* (Swiss)

- Other conditioning factors? Gender or Age?

Positive Evaluation Adjectives

- English adjective choices:

  o *strange/odd/bizarre* VS *weird* – younger generations (Tagliamonte & Brooke, 2014)

    *Tagliamonte, Sali. & Julian Brooke (2014). A weird (language) tale: Variation and change in the adjectives of strangeness. *American speech*, *89*(1), 4-41.

  o *terrific* Vs *cool* – younger generations (Tagliamonte & Pabst, 2020)

    *Tagliamonte, Sali & Katharina Pabst. 2020. A Cool Comparison: Adjectives of Positive Evaluation in Toronto, Canada and York, England. *Journal of English Linguistics* 48(1), 3- 310.

Research Questions

1. What is the **current distribution** of German adjectives of positive evaluation?

2. Is this **semantic field** influenced by **linguistic** and **social factors**?

German Positive Evaluation Adjectives

<u>Schenker (1977):</u>

o   In the 70s, ***astrein***, ***klasse***, ***dufte*** most popular

o   Incoming use of ***geil*** (among men), and ***poppig*** (among women)

<u>Androutsopoulos (1998):</u>

o   In the 90s, ***geil*** most frequent among younger speakers, followed

    by *genial*, *kultig*, and *korrekt*

*Androutsopoulos, Jannis. 1998. *Deutsche Jugendsprache. Untersuchungen zu ihren Strukturen und Funktionen.*
Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
*Schenker, Walter. 1977. Modewörter als soziale Indikatoren. *Zeitschrift für Dialektologie und Linguistik*, 282-303.

PURDUE
LIBERAL ARTS

Research Questions

3. **How** has this **semantic field changed** in recent history?

Methodology

- Variationist Quantitative methods

    o   Used widely in work on English

    o   Few studies on German (Beaman, 2020; Stratton, 2020)

*Beaman, Karen V. 2020. Swabian relatives: Variation in the use of the *wo*-relativiser. *Advancing socio-grammatical variation and change: In honour of Jenny Cheshire*, ed. by Karen V. Beaman, Isabelle Buchstaller, Sue Fox, & James A. Walker, 134–164. New York, NY: Routledge.

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

PURDUE
LIBERAL ARTS

Methodology

- Compiled a list of positive evaluation adjectives

  - Previous literature (e.g., Schenker, 1977; Androutsopoulos, 1998)

  - Dictionaries/Thesauruses (e.g., *Duden*)

  - Native speaker intuitions

Methodology

- ***Forschungs- und Lehrkorpus Gesprochenes Deutsch*** (FOLK)
  - o **1.6 million** words
  - o **Spontaneous spoken interactions** (from various settings)
  - o Speakers reasonably **balanced** for **gender** and **age**
  - o **21ˢᵗ century** data
- Circumscription of Variable Context
  - o Downloaded the list. **Manually removed semantically non-comparable tokens**

     a) *es war super, es war krass* [incl.]
     b) *es war ~~super langweilig~~, es war ~~krass geil~~* [excl.]

Results

Table 1. **Distribution of Adjectives**

Adjective	N	%
cool	682	22
toll	618	20
INTENSIFIER + *gut*	567	18
geil	388	13
super	289	9
krass	238	8
prima	51	2
klasse	42	1
wunderbar	42	1
genial	22	.8
großartig	20	.6
top	17	.6
OTHER[14]	106	4
Total	3082	100
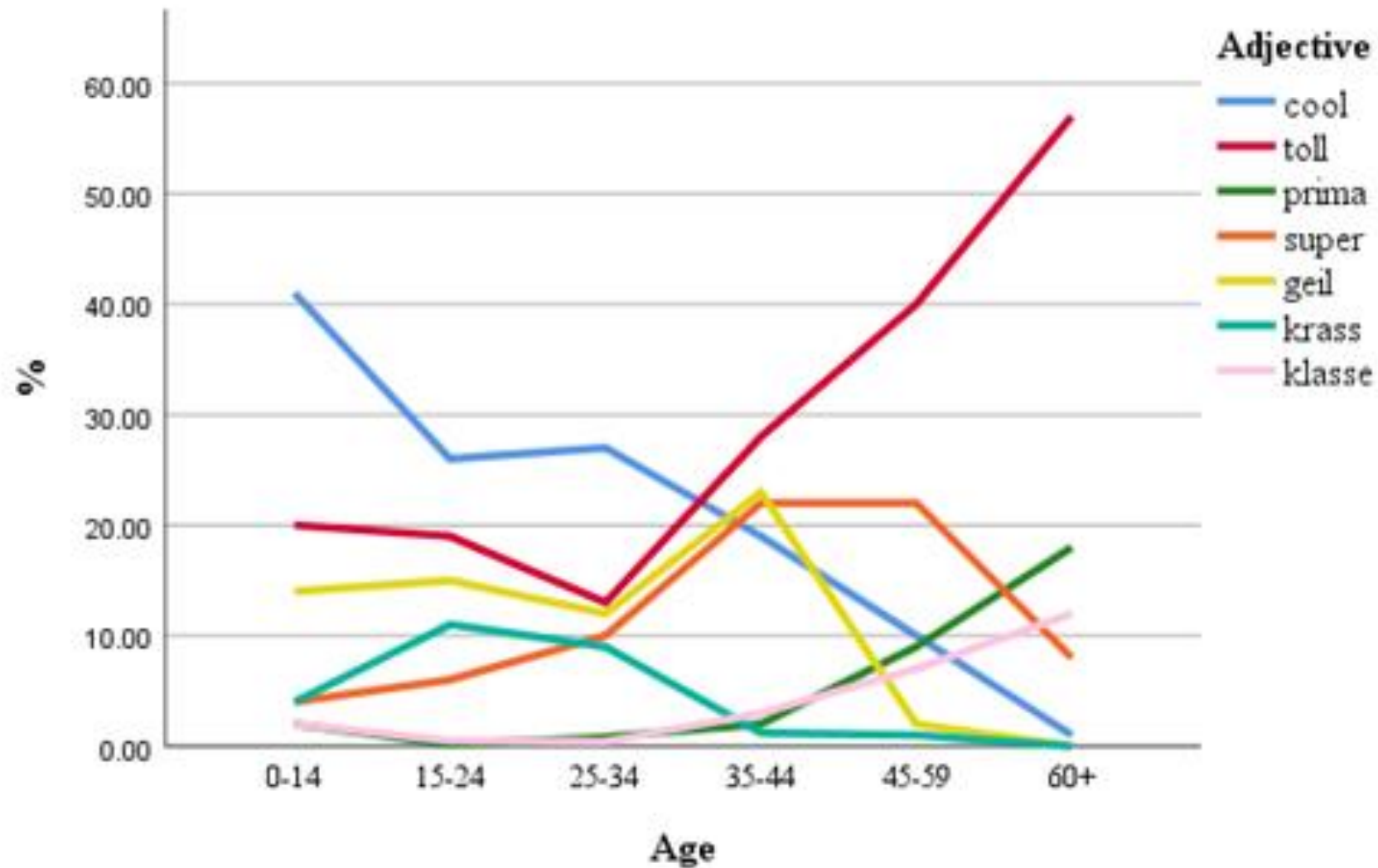
Figure 1. **Variants by Age**
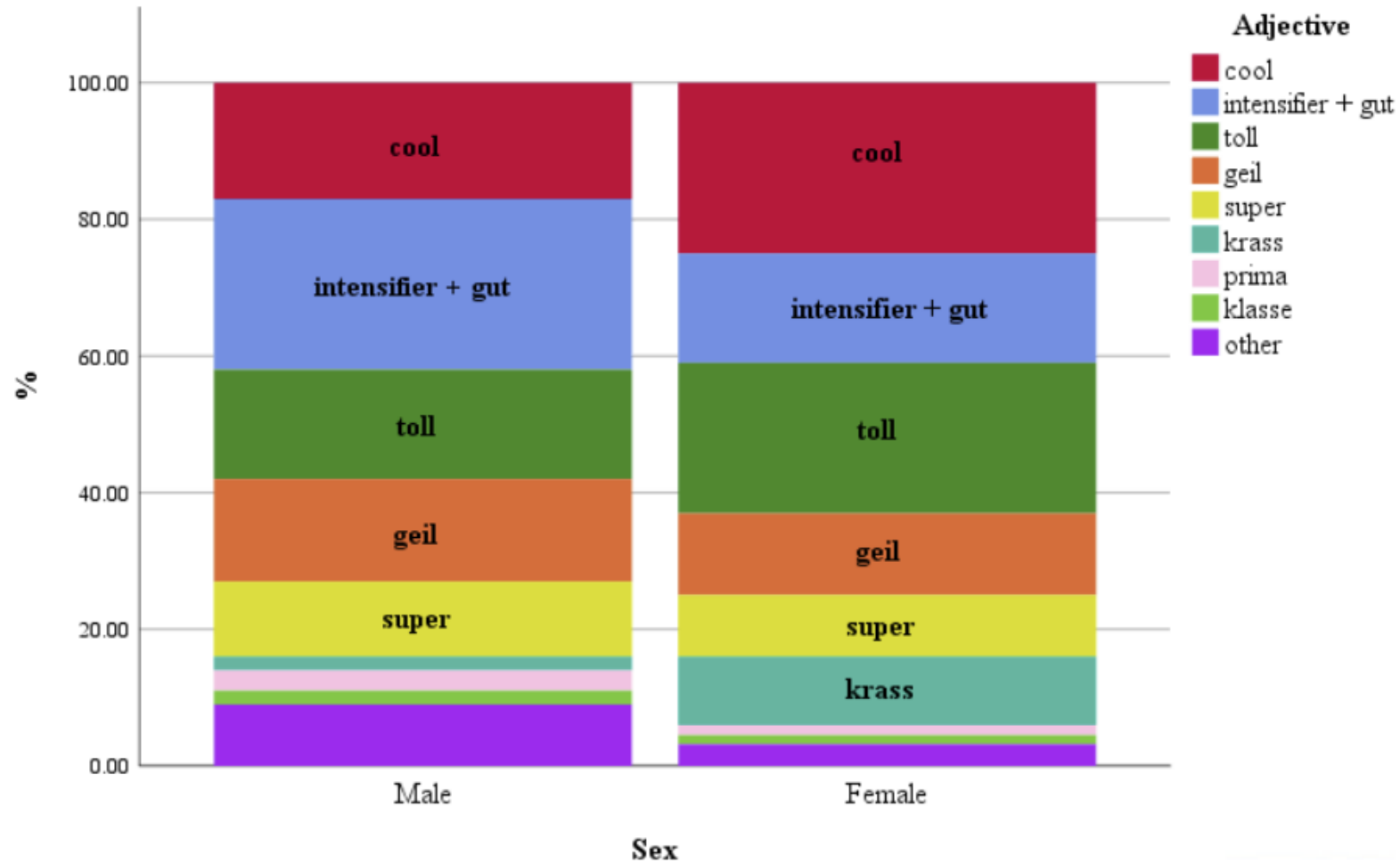
Figure 2. **Variants by Gender**

Table 2. **Variants by Register**

Variant	Institutional		Public		Private		Other	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
cool	105	15	0	0	570	26	7	6
toll	133	19	3	7	454	20	28	23
INTENSIFIER + *gut*	169	25	12	27	346	16	40	33
geil	51	7	0	0	331	15	6	5
super	89	13	3	7	189	8	8	7
krass	22	3	0	0	205	9	11	9
wunderbar	27	4	3	7	11	.5	1	.5
prima	14	2	4	9	32	1.5	1	.5
OTHER	75	12	18	43	94	4	20	16
TOTAL	685	100	43	100	2232	100	122	100

Syntactic Position

Types:

(a) <u>Attributive</u>

es war so ein **cooler** Sommer 'it was such a cool summer' (FOLK_S_00184)

(b) <u>Predicative</u>

der ist total **krass** 'he is totally great' (FOLK_S_00736)

(c) <u>Stand-alone</u>

…voll **geil** '…so great' (FOLK_S_00762)

Constraints with Incoming Variants:

nice (e.g., *sehr nice!*)
- o preference for stand-alone position
- o not attested in attr. position

top (e.g., *der ist top*)
- o more frequent in predicative position

cool (e.g., *oh cool! Es war echt cool!*)
- o favored in pred. & stand-alone position

Proposed Syntactic Cline

"general systemic evolution for newly developing forms":

stand-alone > *predicative* > *attributive*

(Tagliamonte & Pabst, 2020: 22)

*Tagliamonte, Sali & Katharina Pabst. 2020. A Cool Comparison: Adjectives of Positive Evaluation in Toronto, Canada and York, England. *Journal of English Linguistics* 48(1), 3- 310.

PURDUE
LIBERAL ARTS

Multivariate Analysis

- A series of mixed effects binary logistic regression models in *Rbrul* (Johnson, 2009)

- Including *Gender*, *Age*, *Syntactic Position* as independent variables

Table 3. **Logistic Regression of** *Cool* Vs *Other Variants*

	N	%	FW
Input	.92		
N	669		
Total	3031		
SEX (p < .00113)			
Female	2064	24.7	.55
Male	967	17.1	.45
Range			*10*
AGE (p < 1.63e-11)			
0-14	24	50.0	.89
15-24	1318	27.1	.74
25-34	836	26.6	.65
35-44	377	15.6	.55
45-59	319	7.07	.31
60+	157	.006	.03
Range			*86*
POSITION (p < 5.12e-08)			
Stand-alone	870	30.8	.62
Predicative	1803	19.9	.48
Attributive	358	13.1	.40
Range			*22*

Table 4. **Logistic Regression of** *Toll* **Vs** *Other Variants*

	N	%	FW
Input	.146		
N	598		
Total	3031		
SEX (p < 0.00343)			
Female	2064	21.8	.58
Male	967	15.3	.42
Range			*16*
AGE (p < 0.0149)			
0-14	24	12.5	.38
15-24	1318	39.1	.40
25-34	836	42.6	.43
35-44	377	60.1	.60
45-59	319	52.3	.52
60+	157	67.6	.68
Range			*30*
POSITION (p < 3.69e-17)			
Bare	870	12.9	.35
Predicative	1803	19.0	.43
Attributive	358	39.9	.71
Range			*36*

Random Effect (Speaker *n = 385, SD = 1.25*)

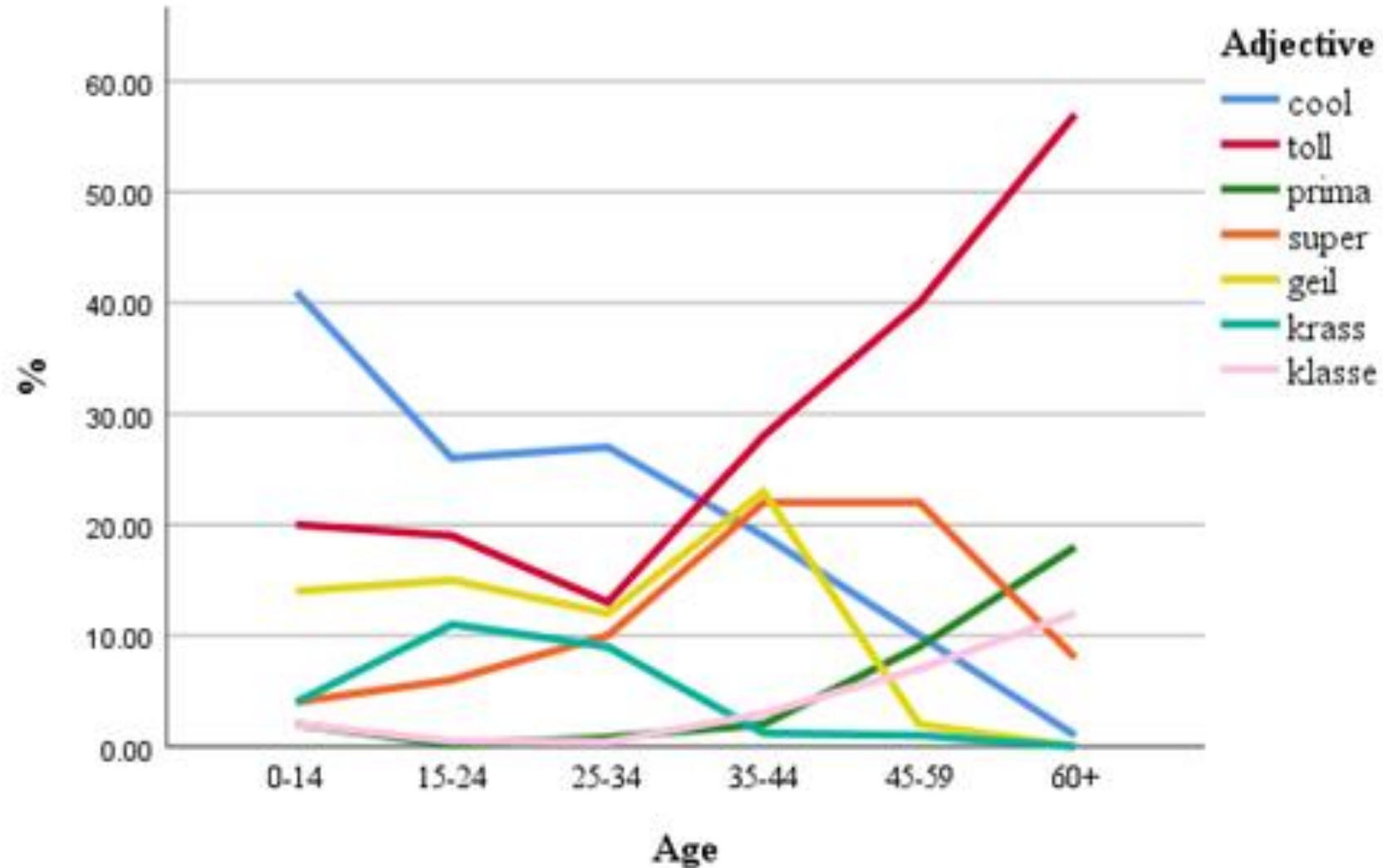# geil

Semantic bleaching:

- *ein **geil**es Moped* 'a great moped' [lit. a horny moped]

- *eine **geil**e Wohnung* 'a great apartment' [lit. a horny apartment]

*NHG meaning of "geschlechtlich erregt" 'sexually aroused' not first meaning of *geil*.
 It used to mean *üppig* 'redundant' in MHG

Use:

- Associated with the speech of young speakers (not anymore)

older generations: **geil, klasse, prima**

Younger generations :

krass

<u>Use:</u>

- Intensified frequently (*voll krass, echt krass, so richtig krass*)

- Favored by 15-35 cohort

nice

<u>Use:</u>

- Favored by younger speakers

Discussion

1. ***Cool*** has become the **dominant variant**
   o Use increases in apparent time among younger generations
   o Change in progress
2. **Changes** within this onomasiological set
   o *astrein* (rarely attested)
   o *kultig*, *korrekt*, *knorke* (not used)
   o A perpetually changing semantic field
   o *geil* once considered *Jugendsprache* 'youth language', but these speakers are no longer
   the youth

Discussion

3. **Linguistic and social factors constrained use**
   - o Significant age and gender differences
   - o In line with recent work (Stratton, 2020) on German LVC
   - o Other factors are at play than geography

4. ***Cool* led by young women**
   - o In line with the Principles of Linguistic Change
     (Labov, 2001: 274-275)

5. **Syntactic cline**
   - o New variants appeared more frequently in stand-alone and predicative position. Older variants favored in attr. position

Thanks for listening!

Stratton, James, M. (2022) Tapping into German Adjective Variation:

A Variationist Sociolinguistic Approach.

Journal of Germanic Linguistics, 63-101.

James Stratton
NWAV-49 – 2021
Purdue University
jstratt@purdue.edu

References

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

Beaman, Karen V. 2020. Swabian relatives: Variation in the use of the *wo*-relativiser. *Advancing socio-grammatical variation and change: In honour of Jenny Cheshire*, ed. by Karen V. Beaman, Isabelle Buchstaller, Sue Fox, & James A. Walker, 134–164. New York, NY: Routledge.

Labov, William. 2001. *Principles of linguistic change, vol. 2: Social factors*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Schenker, Walter. 1977. Modewörter als soziale Indikatoren. *Zeitschrift für Dialektologie und Linguistik*, 282-303.

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

Tagliamonte, Sali. & Julian Brooke (2014). A weird (language) tale: Variation and change in the adjectives of strangeness. *American speech*, *89*(1), 4-41.

Tagliamonte, Sali & Katharina Pabst. 2020. A Cool Comparison: Adjectives of Positive Evaluation in Toronto, Canada and York, England. *Journal of English Linguistics* 48(1), 3- 310.

Weinreich, Uriel, William Labov & Marvin Herzog. 1968. *Empirical Foundations for a Theory of Language Change*. Austin: University of Texas Press.