

A *very* subjective but *really* interesting phenomenon: Intensifier Variation and Change in Salinas, California.

Adolfo Hermosillo¹, Jonathan WuWong¹, Yin Lin Tan^{1,2}, Irene Yi¹, Rhea Kapur¹

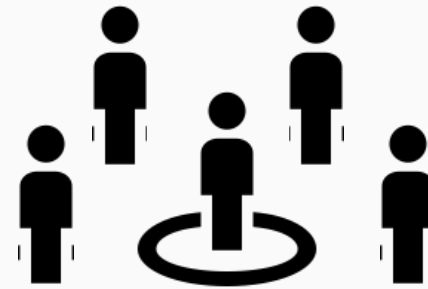
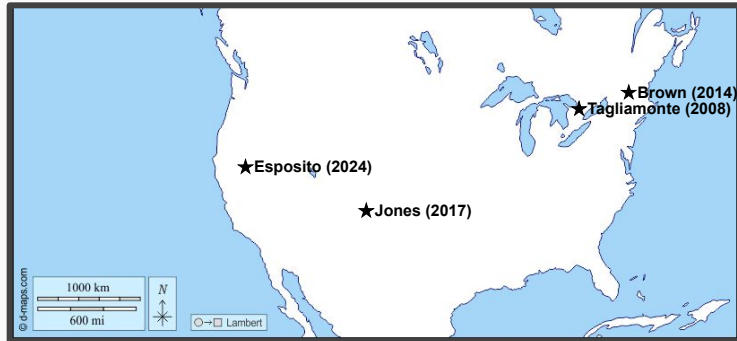
Stanford University¹, National University of Singapore²

NWAV 52

Intensifier Variation

Variation and change in intensifier use can arise from semantic-pragmatic motivations.

1. *Really* is becoming the most frequent intensifier
2. Sensitivity to the semantic properties of adjectives



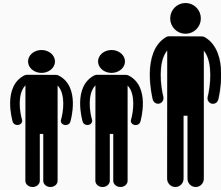
Subjectivity

Different Subjectivity Sources

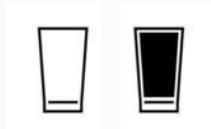
Speakers can disagree on whether *certain* claims are true

Tall-type

short, tall



empty, full



Contextually Subjective Adjectives

Good-type

delicious



good, fun



Lexically Subjective Adjectives

Different Flavors of *really*

Intensification (Kennedy & McNally, 2005; Tagliamonte, 2008)

1. Gonzalez, the small town. It's a ***really*** windy town
2. you know Salinas is a ***really*** nice place

Emphasis (Labov 1984, Gutzmann & Miró, 2011)

1. that didn't ***really*** solve the problem
2. he is not ***really*** secretive

Potential Interpretive Ambiguities

NWAV is **really/very** cool (*good-type*)

- NWAV is cooler than the average conference
- NWAV ought to count as a *cool conference*

Intensification
Emphasis

NWAV is **really/very** long (*tall-type*)

- NWAV is longer than the average conference
- ? NWAV ought to count as a long *conference*

Intensification
Emphasis?

Community + Data

Salinas, California

- Population of 163,542 (Census, 2020)
- Latinx became the majority by 1990
- 8th largest Latinx city in the US
- Voices of California sample (f=23, m=20)
 - Annotated using stanza (Qi et al., 2020)



Method and analysis

Variable context (Tagliamonte, 2008)

- Adjectival heads intensified by boosters
- Non-negated contexts
- N=949

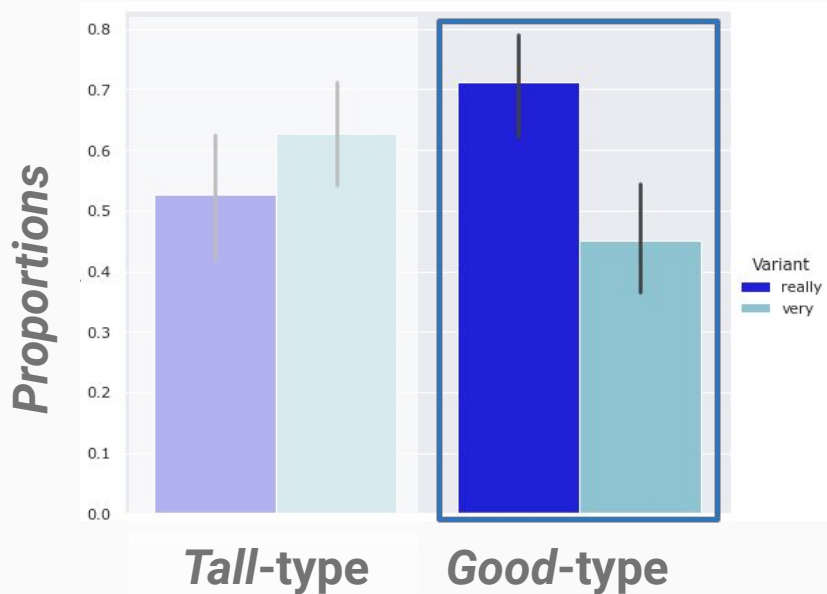
*'It's a **very** small town'*

*'it's **really** cool'*

Generalized mixed effects logistic regression model in R

- **really** ~ Function + Subjectivity + Birth year + Gender + (1|ID) + (1|Adjective)

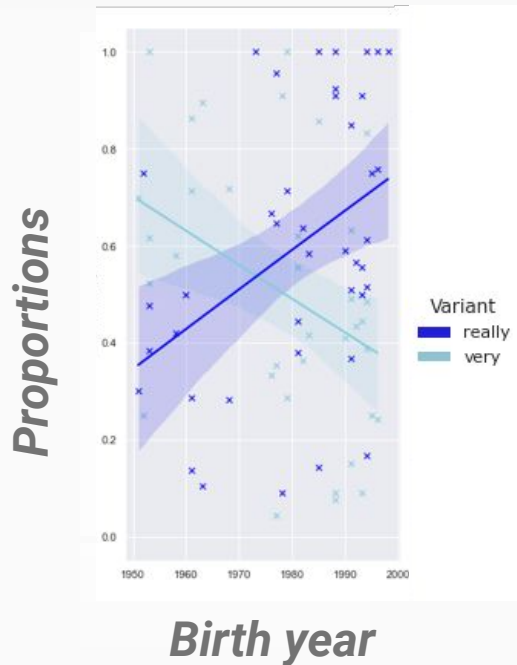
Effect of subjectivity



Good-type adjectives favor the use of **really**

Birth year?

Effect of birth year

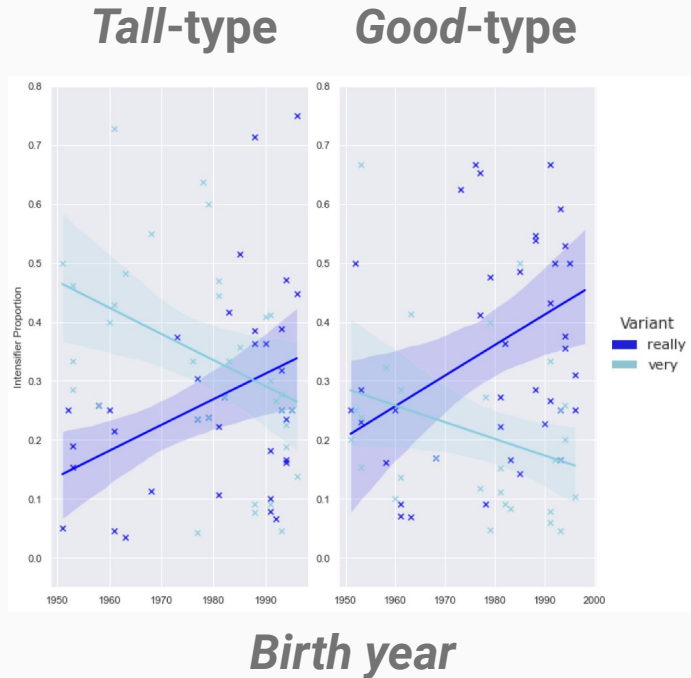


Older speakers favor the use **very** (↓)

Younger speakers favor the use **really** (↑)

What about the interactions?

The effect birth year by subjectivity



Tall-type favor the use
very (↓)

Good-type favor the use
really (↑)

Explaining asymmetries

Intensifiers that modify *good-type* adjectives can be ambiguous

- Semantic intensity (prototypical function of **very**)
- Pragmatic emphasis (observed function of **really** in other contexts)

Older System

really/**very**

Good-type

very

Tall-type

Newer System

really/very

Good-type

really/ **very**

Tall-type

Conclusion

1. Intensifiers are sensitive to different sources of semantic subjectivity
2. Lexically subjective adjectives might contribute to the rise of *really*
3. Differences in variants can be crucial for understanding change
4. What is the role of subjectivity in semantic change?

Acknowledgements

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