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Novel methods of intensification in young people's digitally-mediated communication

Abstract: The following chapter proposes a typology of intensification in German digitally-mediated communication (DMC). Intensification has been conventionally understood as a lexicogrammatical process modifying the quality of an element in a sentence – either amplifying or diminishing it – through the use of another element known as an intensifier. However, developments within DMC have seen intensification strategies progress beyond a traditional understanding of the concept and even beyond grammatical categorisation. Using authentic data from the *NottDeuYTSch* corpus of YouTube comments, the chapter classifies intensification in five categories: morphological, syntactic, expressive, graphemic, and typographical, and explores elements containing multiple aspects of intensification. The typology of intensification presented in this chapter showcases the creative usage of digital resources and how this can influence our understanding of traditional linguistic concepts.

Keywords: intensification, semiotics, digitally-mediated communication, youth language, corpus linguistics, pragmatics, interaction

1 Introduction

Written digitally-mediated communication (DMC) has, since its inception in the late 1970s, been characterised by novel and creative writing strategies, such as the use of repeated graphemes to represent prosody (Carey 1980). As DMC has become ubiquitous in much of the world, the strategies have also evolved and matured, moving from simple emulation of features of spoken language (see Runkehl, Schlobinski, and Siever 1998; Storrer 2001) to a sophisticated and often conventionalised system of signs (Androutsopoulos 2018: 742). These conventions include the use of informal language and graphemes for ‘expressivity’, i.e., writing strategies to convey certain pragmatic functions, such as the use of capital letters (e.g., ‘shouting capitals’, Crystal 2004), emoji or intensifiers. It is this third group of features, inten-

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sifiers, that will be the focus of this chapter, in particular the intensification strategies used by young German speakers in DMC.

Intensification has traditionally been defined as a lexicogrammatical process that refers to the modification (both enhancement and reduction) of the quality of an element (usually an adjective) in a sentence by another element (an intensifier) (Bolinger 1972; Quirk et al. 1985). For example, the adverb *sehr* ('very') in Example 1 modifies the adjective *geil* ('awesome') to increase its quality, or the prefix *semi* in Example 2 reduces the quality of the adjective to which it is attached.

- (1) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/264/013889*
das video war **sehr geil**
[the video was **very awesome**]¹
- (2) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/165/002098*
Also den Humor an sich find ich ja eher so **semigeil**
[Well I find the humour itself sort of **semi-awesome**]

Since the 2010s, however, the definition of an intensifier and the analysis of intensification have moved away from a focus on lexemes and morphemes, which this chapter develops further through the analysis of strategies that occur in DMC, specifically DMC written by young people in YouTube comments as part of the *NottDeuYTSch* corpus (Cotgrove 2018).²

One of the commonly described features of young people's language overlaps with DMC, namely the tendency towards expressiveness in writing, particularly the use of intensifiers (see Tagliamonte 2016b: 81). Intensifiers have been characterised by Tagliamonte (2016b: 92) as important markers of youth identity and are prone to frequent change, as overuse leads to a loss in effectiveness. Similarly, Hilte, Vanderckhove, and Daelemans (2019: 295), in a study of youth language online, noted the high use of 'expressive markers', including intensifiers, by Flemish teenagers. Therefore, the data from the *NottDeuYTSch* corpus are likely to contain diverse and emergent intensification strategies, justifying the rationale for selecting the corpus to develop a typology of intensifiers.

¹ I have taken quite a free approach to translating the intensified expressions, but I have tried to stay consistent with the translations of the same lexical item.

² The *NottDeuYTSch* corpus contains over 33 million words from YouTube comments written under German-language videos published between 2008 and 2018, constructed to be representative of the language used by young people under mainstream YouTube videos. See Section 3 for more details.

The chapter is divided into four parts: Section 2 first defines the concept of intensification used in this chapter, with reference to previous definitions, before discussing the mainly English and German-language literature on intensification, including competing terms for similar functions and intensification strategies used in youth language or DMC contexts. Section 3 outlines the corpus data used for the analysis, before presenting the typology of intensification in youth DMC, analysing each mode and type in turn with examples from the *NottDeuYTSch* corpus, and identifying novel strategies of intensification. The chapter concludes with a discussion of possible extensions to the typology as DMC evolves, and suggestions for further research.

2 Approaches to intensification

2.1 Discussion of term

There are both competing definitions of intensification and competing terms in the English and German language research traditions, which can lead to either a broad or narrow interpretation of the concept. Both Breindl (2009: 397) and Stratton (2020: 187–188) provided lists of competing terms used in previous research to refer to this function, and, while they will not be listed here in their entirety, tend to share various attributes. The terms often contain “degree”, “intensity” or “augmentation”, i.e., they follow the definition provided by Bolinger (1972: 17) that an intensifier “scales a quality, whether up or down or somewhere between the two” (see also “amplifiers” and “downtoners” in Quirk et al. 1985: 589–590). However, the competing terms diverge with regard to the elements that are classified as intensifiers, for example, they are variously referred to as “adverbs”, “particles” or “modifiers”. The terms ‘adverb’ and ‘particle’ (e.g., “Intensitäts-Adverbien” or ‘adverbs of intensity’ in Weinrich et al. 2005: 593) limits the examination of intensification to elements within the grammatical system, but this is perhaps too restrictive for varieties of written language, such as DMC, which tend to creatively use semiotic resources beyond the traditional toolbox of lexicogrammar for meaning-making, as covered later in this section. For a framework that can attempt to account for the semiotic creativity in DMC, this chapter requires a flexible term that can operate outside of grammatical terminology. For this reason, the term ‘intensifier’, i.e., an element that intensifies, is most appropriate to the data used for this analysis, as it is not tied to a word class, instead it simply describes its function, although this must also be defined.

After discussing the competing terms for intensification, the next step is to find an acceptable definition. Apart from the definition provided by Bolinger (1972: 17) above, van Os (1989: 2) defined intensification as a “functional semantic category of strengthening and weakening”, and Ghesquière (2017: 34) defined it as the “modification or measuring of the degree of gradable notions”. However, for these definitions to be of use, we must establish which elements can be intensified and how they can be intensified.

Traditionally, only adjectives and adverbs have been considered as “intensifiable entities”, but Salzmann (2017: 235–236) showed that nouns and verbs can also be intensified, providing examples from German and Italian, as shown in Examples 3 and 4.

- (3) *Adapted from Salzmann (2017: 236): intensified noun*
 Er ist **einsame** Spitzenklasse
 [He is simply the best]

- (4) *Adapted from Salzmann (2017: 236): intensified verb*
 corri corri
 [run run]

However, lexical choice is not considered intensification in this investigation, e.g., the difference between *dog* and *cur*, as shown in Example 5, where *cur* can be interpreted as amplifying the negative traits associated with a dog.

- (5) *Adapted and translated from Frege (1983 [1897]: 152)*
 This **dog** howled the whole night.
 This **cur** howled the whole night.

The exclusion avoids issues related to the indexicality of the lexical choice, i.e., the socio-culturally constructed and interpreted semantics of a word and its contexts (see Silverstein 2003). For example, it is subjective to several social factors such as age, geographical upbringing, or class, whether a reader would perceive *sick* as an intensified form of *cool* (to paraphrase Tagliamonte 2016a). Therefore, there is no restriction on word class for intensifiable elements in this investigation. However, the intensifiable element must have a quality that is scalable, without replacing the element itself.

Within previous research, it has not always been made clear how scalability or modification in intensification should be distinguished from conceptually related concepts. The following list outlines a selection of such concepts and provides an example from the *NottDeuYTSch* corpus where it is difficult to conclusively differ-

entiate between the related concept and intensification (and a single element fulfilling multiple functions cannot be ruled out):

Focusing (see Ghesquière 2017: 48), i.e., the use of devices, such as modal particles, that “do not change the element or quality they scope over but rather single it out in relation to alternative values, typically countering expectations and pre-suppositions in the discourse context”. In Example 6, the use of the modal particle *ja* (translated here as ‘indeed’) can be interpreted as expressing mild surprise that the use of emojis could be considered *geil* (awesome), and therefore act as a focus marker.

- (6) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/266/051291*
 Das ist ja geil mit den Emojis 😂😂😂
 [That's indeed awesome with the emojis 😂😂😂]

Expressivity (see Gutzmann 2019), i.e., “utterances that express, rather than describe, the emotions and attitudes of the speaker”. Example 7 contains *geil* prefixed by the onomatopoeic representation of laughter (HAHAHAHA, see Thurlow 2003: 7; Tagliamonte and Denis 2008: 11), which can be interpreted as reinforcing the positive sentiment of the message without necessarily directly intensifying *geil* in this case, or highlighting the semantic salience of the message (see McAteer 1992: 350). However, the use of uppercase letters is a common technique in DMC to represent increased volume in speech (i.e., “shouting capitals” Crystal 2006: 37), which is used to phonologically intensify an element (see Section 3.2).

- (7) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/193/019733*
 Alter. Ich HEULE HAHAHAHA GEIL
 [hahaha awesome]

Illocutionary force (see Searle 1976: 2–3), i.e., the strength of an implication in a message. In Example 8, while the use of *so* functions as an intensifier for *geil*, the use of the ‘crying face’ and ‘red heart’ emoji provide extra metacommunicative context to the comment that can be interpreted as an expression of sadness that the project is finished. However, it is debatable as to whether this also scales the quality of *geil*, rather than relating to the wider proposition. This would imply that the emoji cluster functions as an intensifier, in this case scaling *geil* “somewhere between” up or down, following Bolinger (1972: 17). Indeed, Salzmann (2017: 238) argued that illocutionary force can be considered as intensification.

- (8) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/122/009047*
 Ich fand [das Projekt] so geil 😍❤️
 [I found the project so awesome 😍❤️]

2.1.1 Defining intensification

While it is important to “define [...] and distinguish” intensification from other phenomena to prevent it from becoming a “catch-all” term (Ghesquière 2017: 48), the examples above have shown that this is often difficult, especially when intensification strategies in DMC occur outside of traditional grammatical functions, as will be covered in more detail Section 3. The analysis presented in this chapter takes a pragmatic approach to the analysis of intensification, defining it as the modification of the scalable quality of a lexical item by any semiotic resource, i.e., an intensifier or intensifiers. Section 2.2 now discusses the linguistic and semiotic features of intensification that have been identified in previous studies.

2.2 Previous studies on intensification

Initial research on intensifiers in the German language identified two grammatical sources of intensifiers: syntactic intensifiers, e.g., adjectives as demonstrated in Example 1, and morphological intensifiers, e.g., affixation in Example 2 (see Kirschbaum 2002: 6–7), although English overwhelmingly focused on syntactic intensifiers (referred to as “lexical” intensifiers, see Bolinger 1972).

Syntactic intensifiers, most prominently adjectives and adverbs, have received significant attention in all areas of research, such as the edited collection on adverbial and adjectival intensification by Oebel (2012), and other edited collections, e.g., Napoli and Ravetto (2017a). However, other types of lexical item have also been analysed such as multi-word expressions (e.g., *wie Sau*, ‘as heck [lit. sow]’, for Romansh see Liver 2012; for German and Italian Albert 2017; for Dutch Wouden and Foolen 2017), and interrogatives (e.g., *how wonderful*, Siemund 2017). Syntactic intensification has also been the focus in youth language research, such as in Tagliamonte (2008: 363), who highlighted the (micro-)diachronic tendency of syntactic intensifiers to rapidly change, as each subsequent generation of young people seek to “signal in-group membership” (see also Reichelt and Durham 2017). Similarly, Jindrová (2017: 19) and Ito and Tagliamonte (2003: 274) discussed regional and social differences between the preferred choice of syntactic intensifier in their studies of British Englishes, e.g., the use of “right”, “well”, and “pure” as augmenta-

tive intensifiers in Jindrová (2017: 46–47) (for more on “pure” in Glasgow adolescent context, see Macaulay 2006).

Research on morphological intensifiers in German has mostly investigated prefixes, most commonly the prefixation of adjectives, e.g., *arschkalt* (arse-cold) or *ultracool*, but the prefixation of nouns is also well-documented, e.g., *Höllengeräusch* (hell-noise) or *Affeneschwindigkeit* (monkey-speed) (Kirschbaum 2002: 6). Calpestri (2017: 308) also listed hyphenated compounds, such *Hammer-Mega-Uppercool* (Hammer-Mega-Uppercool), under morphological intensification, and a similar categorisation for Dutch was proposed by Liebrecht (2015: 149). The *NottDeuYTSch* corpus contains numerous examples where the boundaries between morphological and syntactic intensification is not clear cut, which is further discussed in Section 3. Research on Italian also demonstrated intensification through suffixation, e.g., the augmentative *-issima* in *grassissima* (see Salzmann 2017: 237; Costa 2017), and intensification through infixation has been shown in English, such as *-fucking-* in *abso-fucking-lutely* (Adams 1999).³

More recently, additional ways of intensification have been integrated into mainstream research on the topic. Napoli and Ravetto (2017b: 2) argued that linguistic elements that are “involved in the expression of degree” can occur on a “phonological, semantic, grammatical, lexical, pragmatic, cognitive, and textual” level and Salzmann (2017: 235) listed several categories and features that could be used for intensification, including “prosodic devices”, “graphics”, reduplication, morphology, multi-word expressions, and syntax, although both papers do not go into detail on all of the listed ways to intensify. The inclusion of “graphics” and “textual” as categories of intensification indicates that grapheme-based intensification, popularised by research using DMC texts, rather than just written formal language or spoken language as the basis for the data for analysis, has become legitimised and analysed alongside other forms of intensification, although the formal integration of these strategies within intensification has until now only rarely occurred (see Liebrecht 2015: 150).

The three most popular phenomena within previous DMC studies that are associated with intensification stretch back to the beginning of the field. They are the repetition of individual letters or punctuation (also referred to as ‘flooding’, see Hentschel 1998; Androutsopoulos 2000; De Decker and Vandekerckhove 2017; ‘reduplication’, see Herring 2012, although this can refer to the repetition of groups of multiple characters; or as an “Emotionalisierungsstrategie”, ‘emotionalisation

3 The *-fucking-* infix also entered the German consciousness in 2012 as part of the neologism *unfuckingfassbar* (un-fucking-believable) expressed by Rea Garvey on the *Voice of Germany* TV show.

strategy' Frick 2020), as demonstrated in Example 9, and the use of capital letters (Carey 1980; Bader 2002; Lee 2016), as shown in Example 10.

- (9) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/292/006154*
Ihr seid **sooooooooo geeeeeiiiiilll !!!**
[You are **sooooooooo aaaawwwwwwesooooooooommmme !!!**]
- (10) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/193/051547*
WTF?! DAS IST **MEGA**
[WTF?! THAT IS **MEGA**]

However, these features have often not been analysed within the frame of intensification, instead they are highlighted as examples of DMC-typical practices, alongside features such as emoji and other graphicons (e.g., emoticons, kaomoji, see Beißwenger and Pappert 2019). The use of graphicons to modify the illocutionary force of a message has been the focus of previous research (see Dresner and Herring 2010), rather than their potential as intensifiers of a specific lexical item within that message. Graphicons have also been treated instead as intensifiable elements that can themselves be intensified through repetition, akin to expressive intensification (see Hougaard and Rathje 2018: 795; Cotgrove 2024). Furthermore, punctuation marks, such as exclamation marks, ellipsis, question marks (as well as combinations, e.g., !?) might not strictly act as intensifiers, instead, similar to graphicons, they modify the illocutionary force of the whole sentence, not just a single lexical item, although they can themselves be intensified.

A further form of intensification that has been remarked in previous research, although not as extensively analysed, is the repetition of a lexical item, referred to as “expressive repetition” (see Quirk et al. 1985: 981; van Os 1989: 106; Aitchison 1994: 19–20), as demonstrated in English in Example 11, and in German in Example 12 (and Italian in Example 4 above). Repetition is commonly seen as a rhetorical device in poetry and has multiple functions, such as anaphora and epistrophe, such as to create rhythm and movement in the text, or to link ideas, but it can also be used to intensify emotions or feelings (Attridge 1994; Engelberg 2022).

- (11) *Macbeth* 2.3.73, adapted from Aitchison (1994: 20)
O horror, horror, horror
- (12) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus* NDY/107/004061
geil geil geil geil geil geil geil
[awesome awesome [...] awesome]

While the case for the expressive repetition of adjectives is well established, Ghomeshi et al. (2004) argued that the repetition of other lexical elements can also intensify, referring to it as “contrastive reduplication”, and later Frankowsky (2022) provided an in-depth examination of this phenomenon in German nouns, calling these structures “identical constituent compounds” (ICCs). Example 13 shows a compound containing the repetition of *Oma* (‘grandma’), which, according to Frankowsky, invokes the archetypal characteristics of the lexical item, one of which, in this case, is a tendency to (over-)feed dinner guests. This phenomenon is similar to the use of *real* + *NOUN*, e.g., a real grandma (see Freywald 2015), although this would be categorised under syntactic intensification, not as expressive repetition. The use of repetition to highlight archetypal characteristics is however not limited to nouns, Frankowsky (2022) also provided examples of adjectives (*neu-neu*, ‘new new’, i.e., really new) and verbs (*schlafen-schlafen*, ‘sleep-sleep’, i.e., really sleep).

(13) *Adapted from Frankowsky (2022: 13)*

das ist so ne richtige **Oma-Oma**, die auch immer noch nachfragt und immer nochmal nochwas aufn Teller.

[she's a real **grandma-grandma** who always asks and always puts more on your plate.]

Although Quirk et al. (1985) and Aitchison (1994) discuss the two phenomena together, I would argue that expressive repetition and contrastive reduplication, as per Examples 11 to 13, should be treated as their own separate category, iterative intensification, from the repetition of existing intensifiers, as shown by the repetition of *very* in Example 14. As an illustration, the repetition of *geil* in Example 12 induces the intensification, but in Example 14, intensification has already been induced by *very*, and the repetition here changes the quality of intensification, but does not change whether or not the intensification has occurred.

(14) *Adapted from Quirk (1985: 981)*

very, very, very good

The use of multiple (syntactic) intensifiers in the same phrase is referred to as “stacking” by Scheffler, Richter, and Van Hout (2023), in an investigation that argued that the intensity of syntactic intensifiers increased from left to right in German. Furthermore, they reported that multiple intensification strategies, e.g., grapheme repetition and syntactic intensifiers, predominantly occur in shorter intensifiers like *so* or *echt*, as in Example 15 (Scheffler, Richter, and Van Hout 2023: 10–11). However, the phenomenon has not received other significant attention in previous literature on intensification; only DMC research has discussed how multiple intensification stra-

gies used in synthesis are a feature of digital writing (see Runkehl, Schlobinski, and Siever 1998; Frick 2020), as demonstrated by the modification of *mega* in Example 16 by the combination of capital letters, graphemic repetition and syntactic intensification, which further increase the intensity. The use of multiple intensification strategies is discussed in more detail in Section 3.3.

- (15) *Adapted from Scheffler et al. (2023: 5)*
so echt total hübsch
 [so really totally pretty]
- (16) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/255/024535*
MEEEGAAA COOLES VIDEO!
 [MEGA COOL VIDEO!]

Overall, four kinds of intensification have featured prominently in previous research: morphological, syntactic, iterative, and graphemic, as well as the possibility to combine these strategies together to further increase the intensification of a lexical item. Section 3 discusses how the data in the *NottDeuYTSch* corpus of YouTube comments contain new forms of intensification that expand our understanding of the above-mentioned categories, but also contain forms of intensification that require their own category, namely typographical intensification.

3 Intensification in youth DMC

The following section presents a typology of intensification used in written youth DMC, based on data examined in the *NottDeuYTSch* corpus (Cotgrove 2018). The *NottDeuYTSch* corpus was constructed in 2018 and comprises over 33 million words, taken from roughly 3 million YouTube comments published between 2008 and 2018, written by a young, German-speaking demographic. The comments have been extracted from popular German-language YouTube channels aimed at young people, covering a wide range of topics, such as Social Media Entertainment (e.g., vlogs, gameplay, beauty, Cunningham and Craig 2017: 71–72), films, science, sports, news, and animals. The *NottDeuYTSch* corpus, therefore, provides an authentic and representative linguistic snapshot of young German speakers for this time period, and offers significant opportunities for in-depth research in several linguistic fields and using a variety of methodologies. Potential sites of study include lexis, morphology, syntax, orthography, multilingualism, and conversational and discursive analysis, as well as genre analyses, longitudinal stud-

ies, and both qualitative and quantitative approaches. For an in-depth overview of the methodology behind the construction of the corpus, see Cotgrove (2023).

An analysis of the YouTube comments in the *NottDeuYTSch* corpus shows that intensification in youth DMC includes methods of intensification that have not been covered in existing research in this area. These include new ways of intensifying that would fit into existing categories, as well as ways of intensifying that require an additional category. Intensification in youth DMC can be divided into two modes: lexical and graphical. Lexical intensification contains three types: morphological, syntactic and expressive strategies, as these operate through the use of lexical items to modify the scaleable quality of another lexical item. These types of intensification are the most common. Graphical intensification includes strategies that modify the spatio-visual interpretation of a lexical item, e.g., through graphemic strategies, such as altering the spelling (graphemic intensification), or other modifications of appearance, shape or position, such as changing the font, weight or size (typographical intensification). An additional category not considered in this chapter is phonological intensification, which would include all strategies that use phonological modification, such as volume, prosody, or tone (see Cosentino 2017). However, as multimodality within DMC expands, such as the integration of additional audio or video features in messaging applications or the dynamic rendering of graphic-based intensification by screen readers and other accessibility devices, the typology will need to be expanded.

3.1 Lexical

Lexical intensification contains the morphological, syntactic, and iterative intensification, as they all use lexical items, including words and parts of words to intensify. Morphological and syntactic intensification have often been treated as separate in German due to the productivity of compounding, but the two concepts are not as distinct in other languages. Additionally, iterative intensification, i.e., intensification through the repetition of a single lexical item, is classified here as a sub-category of lexical intensification.

3.1.1 Iterative intensification

Iterative intensification, i.e., the repetition of a lexical item to modify the quality of the same lexical item, is ubiquitous in DMC, and is attested in a variety of word classes, such as the repetition of *haben* in Example 17, where *haben* is a clipping of *ich will es haben* ('I want it'), popular in children's speech. Here the desire of the commenter for the item is intensified through repetition.

- (17) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/056/006405*
 Supiiiiiiii haben haben haben ;D
 [Suuuuuuuper I wannit wannit wannit ;D]

Pragmatically, there is perhaps not so much difference between the use of a particular kind of intensifier if the lexical item is identical, as demonstrated in Examples 18 and 19 with *mega* and *hammer*, functioning as both a morphological and syntactic intensifier. There might be phonological differences if the comments were spoken aloud (see Cosentino 2017), but YouTube comments are (at time of writing) a written medium. The distinction between the two is further blurred in DMC due to the orthographic creativity and flexibility within that medium of communication, or if the commenter has deliberately or accidentally inserted or deleted spaces between *mega*, *hammer*, and *geil*.

- (18) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/178/000946*
 Megahammergeil bitte mehr davon
 [Mega-hammer-awesome more of the same please]
- (19) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/076/005657*
 geil geil super mega hammer geil
 [awesome awesome super mega hammer awesome]

3.1.2 Morphological intensification

While research on German intensification focused on the use of prefixes for intensification, intensification through suffixation is also present in German (and other languages), as demonstrated by *-omatico* in Example 20 (also see Mroczynski 2018: 334). Morphological intensification is also communicated through derivation, i.e., changing the word class of a lexical item, such as *-heit* in Example 21, which changes an adjective into a noun, in this case *geil* to *geilheit* ('awesome' to 'awesomeness'). The effect is similar to ICCs, as mentioned in Section 2.2, as derivation to a noun here increases the archetypical qualities of the adjective.

- (20) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/173/026800*
 Dass du so oft geklickt wurdest ist doch gar kein Wunder. Du bist einfach
geilomatico!!!!
 [It is no wonder at all that you get so many views. You are simply
awesomatic!!!!]

- (21) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/023/003693*

einfach nur **Geilheit**

[just simply **awesomeness**]

These processes have not been considered within the existing definition of morphological intensification. However, in youth DMC, such constructions are relatively common and productive, for example we find *geilo*, *geili*, and *geilonachtsman* in the *NottDeuYTSch* corpus (as well as graphemic variations, e.g., *geilooo*). Additionally, stacking of multiple affixes is commonplace (Example 22), alongside reduplication (Example 23, also see Kentner 2023). Expanding on Scheffler, Richter, and Van Hout (2023), we can interpret that not just the number of affixes, but also the length of an affix can strengthen the intensification. This is further discussed alongside other aspects of combining intensification strategies in Section 3.3.

- (22) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/182/004386*

weil du einfach **oberhammermegaaffectittengeil** bist

[because you're simply **above-hammer-mega-monkey-tits-awesome**]

- (23) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/181/014866*

Meeeeega **geilomaticofabricatio** ❤️❤️❤️🥰🥰🥰🥰🥰🥰👆👆👆👆👆👆.

[Meeeeega **awesomatic-systematic-hydromatic** (*lit. factory-atio*) ❤️❤️❤️

🥰🥰🥰🥰🥰🥰👆👆👆👆👆👆.]

While morphological intensification most commonly occurs with lexical items, the *NottDeuYTSch* corpus contains rare cases where graphicons function as morphological intensifiers. These seem to be restricted to the mimetic replacement of a lexical item, e.g., 🍌 for *Hammer* in Example 24. It is not clear if the 'smiling face with heart-eyes' emoji belongs to the compound or the previous sentence.

- (24) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/228/014455*

Ju du bist einfach der Hammer! 🥰🍌 **Geil**, einfach geil! Mehr kann man nicht sagen! 🥰

[Woo you are simply the best! 🥰🍌 **-awesome**, simply awesome! You can't say more than that!! 🥰]

The examples from the *NottDeuYTSch* corpus demonstrate that the previous definition of morphological intensification needs to be expanded to account for the novel and creative strategies used in DMC to intensify lexical items, and raises questions if emoji and other graphicons can be considered either as elements that can intensify, be intensified themselves, or be interpreted as lexical items altogether. Therefore,

we can expand the definition of morphological intensification to encompass all affixation or alteration of word class through semiotic resources where the scalable quality of the lexical item is increased.

3.1.3 Syntactic intensification

Similarly to morphological intensification, the *NottDeuYTSch* corpus contains examples of syntactic intensification analysed in research to date, e.g., adjectives and adverbs such as *so* in Example 25, and multi-word expressions and phrases, such as *wie sau* later in the same example. Additionally, intensification using particles (e.g., *aber* in Example 26), and indefinite pronouns (e.g. *etwas* in Example 27) are also attested in the corpus, alongside the use of interrogatives (e.g., *wie* in Example 28). Syntactic intensification is defined therefore as the use of lexical items to modify another, separate lexical item. Frick (2020: 172) stated that keyboard mashing, the seemingly random pressing of letters, e.g., *shahskhhshksa*, could also be considered as intensification, although I would argue this instead would be classified as expressivity or modifying the illocutionary force of a message, similar to representations of laughter (indeed, keyboard mashing is used to represent laughter in some languages and youth cultures, such as Turkish, where it is called *random atmak/gülmek*, ‘random throwing/laughing’, Urhan Torun 2018: 629). Keyboard mashing can itself be intensified through other strategies, such as the number of characters and letter case, but this is covered in Section 3.2.

- (25) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/292/020504*
so so geil **wie sau** XD
 [so so awesome as hell XD]
- (26) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/001/004090*
 [PERSON] tanzt bei Party Rock **aber** geil o.o
 [[PERSON] dances to Party Rock **surprisingly** awesomely o.o]
- (27) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/211/010276*
 Haha, ja, die Augenbrauen waren **etwas** strange.
 [Haha, yes, the eyebrows were **somewhat** strange.]
- (28) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/122/019058*
 Alter **wie** geil!!! :D
 [Man **how** awesome!!! :D]

Example 28 also contains the use of the interjection, *Alter* (man), which, alongside other interjections that precede an intensifiable lexical item, such as *omg*, *jaaa*, *wow*, could additionally be considered as intensifiers, but it is more likely that they modify the illocutionary force at sentence level, rather than directly modify the scalable quality of the lexical item. The quality conveyed by interjections can, however, be intensified through other means, such as the repetition of the grapheme *a* in *jaaa*, which is covered in the following section.

3.2 Graphical

As mentioned in Section 2.2, intensification using strategies that modify the scalable quality of a lexical item by changing its spatio-visual interpretation has not been fully incorporated into mainstream research on the subject. Previous work on such phenomena initially focused on how graphemes and other characters represented “conceptual orality” (Koch and Österreicher 2007), i.e., the compensation for the lack of spoken features in written communication. Although research on the pragmatics of “digitale Schriftlichkeit” (‘digital writing’, e.g., Androutsopoulos and Busch 2020) is increasing, graphemic intensification has not frequently been the primary subject of analysis (e.g., Liebrecht 2015). However, the data in the *NottDeuYTSch* corpus contain a wealth of examples demonstrating creative intensification using grapheme and other character-based strategies that not only expand our understanding of intensification, but also our general understanding of the features of digital writing. For example, there is considerable creative use of letter case for intensification that is not just restricted to capital letters, as demonstrated by the alternating letter case of *best* in Example 29. Alternating letter case has since 2017 been used in DMC to symbolise irony or to represent alternate ‘voicing’ (see Cotgrove 2024: 133; Androutsopoulos 2024), and in some cases, this can be interpreted within the framework of intensification, as it modifies the scalable quality of the lexical item.

- (29) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/002/001732*
 hater is the **BeSt!!!**

3.2.1 Graphemic intensification

The repetition of graphemes and punctuation marks is still ever-present in the corpus, as demonstrated by the exclamation marks in Example 29, although the use of exclamation marks here modifies the illocutionary force of the message, albeit

intensified through repetition. In Example 30, the repetition of full stops can be interpreted as an awed silence and the capital letters and exclamation marks represent the excitement of the commenter, rather than intensify any one particular lexical item. However, the use of stylised arrows to bracket *FRESH* are a form of intensification using graphemic deixis (analogous to intensification through “speaker signals” in spoken language, see Salzmann 2017: 238), as do the Backhand Index Pointing Left and Right emoji in Example 31, which intensify the negative quality communicated by the Thumbs Down emoji.⁴

- (30) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/109/001687*
 DIGGA.....DU HAST DIE PUNCHLINES GEFLOWT!!!!!!!!!!!! DAS WAR —>FRESH<—
 [BRO.....YOU FLOWED THE PUNCHLINES!!!!!!!!!!!! THAT WAS —>FRESH<—]
- (31) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/263/014338*


Another strategy used in the corpus, but which has not received much attention in previous research on intensification, is the use of spacing to modify lexical items, most commonly whitespace characters, such as spaces, tabs and line breaks, as demonstrated by the spacing between the letters of *MÜLL* in Example 32. Theoretically, altering the letter spacing of the font of a lexical item would also be included, but this is rarely an option in DMC platforms. Within research on visual design, the use of spacing alters the “spatio-visual demarcation” of the lexical item and so alters how it is interpreted (Wyss and Hug 2016), but this aspect has not been incorporated into research on intensification, although it has been discussed in early DMC research (e.g., Werry 1996). Based on previous research and the examples in the corpus, we can define graphemic intensification as the use of characters to modify the spatio-visual interpretation and scalable quality of a lexical item.

- (32) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/017/001228*
 Das Video is M Ü L L
 [The video is R U B B I S H]

⁴ Outside of intensification, deictic gestures can also have a focusing function to highlight a particular element within a text (see Cotgrove 2024: 155).

3.2.2 Typographical intensification

Alongside graphemic strategies, the data in the *NottDeuYTSch* corpus contain examples of the use of typographical intensification, i.e., modifying type face, weight, size, style, colour, and other visual aspects of a lexical item so that it differs from the surrounding text (these techniques are referred to as emphasis in the field of typography, see Bringhurst 2012). While YouTube only offers basic alterations to the text, such as italic or bold, as in Examples 33 (*geil*) and 34 (*legendär*) respectively, this is likely to change as bandwidth, processing power, and multimodal communication increase, as such, we can expect typographical intensification to become more commonplace over the next few years, for example changing the position, orientation, shape, and size of words within a coordinate plane (see Rude 2016: 107). Typographical intensification follows the typographical design credo by McAteer (1992: 347–348) that “the physical salience of a word signals its informational salience”, and can be defined as the use of typographical methods to modify the scalable quality of a lexical item. It is up for debate whether the use of spacing should be classified as typographical, rather than graphemic intensification, but it is undoubtedly a strategy of graphic intensification.

- (33) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/266/027155*
 [...] Omg und dann auch noch 50 übertrieben Geile Verlosungen 🥰 geil
 einfach nur geil 🥰🥰❤❤❤❤❤❤❤❤❤
 [...] Omg and then also 50 brilliantly Awesome giveaways 🥰 awesome
 simply awesome 🥰🥰❤❤❤❤❤❤❤❤❤]
- (34) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/002/000026*
LEGENDÄR...
[LEGENDARY...]

3.3 Multiple intensification strategies

Within DMC, the use of multiple strategies to intensify a single lexical item is commonplace, although research with the field of intensification on such combined strategies has been limited. Example 35 demonstrates the use of syntactic intensification (*so*), combined with the repetition of graphemes and the use of capital letters in both the syntactic intensifier and intensified element, as well as the intensification of the illocutionary force imparted by the use of exclamation marks. Stacking, as per the original definition of Scheffler, Richter, and Van Hout (2023) to mean the use of multiple intensifiers in series to intensify a single lexical item, is also classi-

fied under multiple intensification, and is demonstrated by the use of multiple prefixes for morphological intensification in Example 36.

- (35) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/114/011335*
 DANKE [...] SOOOOO GEEEEIIIIILLLLL!!!!!!!!!!
 [THANKS [...] SOOOOO AWWEEEESSOOOMMMEEE!!!!!!!!!!]
- (36) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/203/012046*
 Einhornpupsiglitzerstickerdonutgeiles 🦄 video [...]
 [Unicorn-fart-glitter-sticker-donut- awesome 🦄 video [...]]

The *NottDeuYTSch* corpus contains examples that demonstrate that any intensification strategy can be combined with another. **Megagigaatomfacepalmdestotes** in Example 37 illustrates the use of typographical intensification through bold font style combined with stacking several prefixes for morphological intensification, as well as a suffix (*destotes*, ‘of death’). Example 38 shows how both kinds of graphical intensification: graphemic and typographical, are used together, as well as with lexical intensification. The use of bold font style and upper case letters are combined with the lexical intensifier *mega* to intensify the lexical item *cool*, which itself is further intensified by the repetition of the grapheme *o* and upper case (graphemic intensification). The corpus also shows that different kinds of lexical intensification can be combined, as in Example 39, which contains the repetition of syntactic intensification (*ganz*), combined with the stacking of prefixes for morphological intensification, two of which are reduplicated for further intensification (*superduper* and *hyperdyper*).

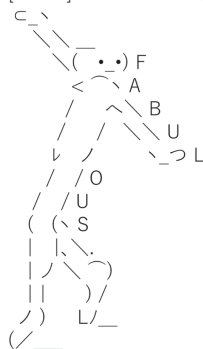
- (37) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/176/004002*
 Echt...xD an alle Leute die das glauben **Megagigaatomfacepalmdestotes**
 [Really...xD for all those who believe that
mega-giga-atom-facepalm-of-death]
- (38) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/228/008986*
MEGA COOOOOOOOL
- (39) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/002/002426*
 Mal n ganz ganz superdupergeilelhyperdyper[v]ollabgekrasstes Video . Das war keine Beleidigung sondern ein Kompliment .
 [Quite a totally totally superduper-awesome-el-hyperdyper-fully-sicked-up video . That was not an insult but a compliment .]

We can make the tentative assumption, following Scheffler, Richter, and Van Hout (2023), that the more intensification strategies used concurrently (i.e., the more effort), or the more space a set of intensifiers occupies (such as repeated graphemes, see Mroczynski 2018: 339), the more intensified a lexical item becomes. However, as an intensification set occupies increasingly more space, the intensification of the lexical item becomes increasingly less effective, and instead the intensifiers can be interpreted as ludic embellishments, in line with the informal and playful nature of DMC (Androutsopoulos 2011: 155). Example 40 is from a comment containing *geil* repeated 101 times, but it is not clear how much more intensified *geil* is compared to Example 12, which only contained seven repetitions of *geil*. If we analyse the regular re-occurrence of *geilgeil* in Example 40, we can infer that the commenter typed *geil* out 14 times and then repeatedly copied and pasted the phrase, which takes far less effort. Instead of using the number of repetitions of *geil*, in this instance, it is perhaps better to use how much space the comment takes up on a reader's screen as an indicator of intensification. This method can also be applied to graphical intensification strategies that break out of the confines of linear text production, e.g., in Figure 1 with the use of an ASCII illustration of a person dancing to intensify the word *fabulous* (as well as the combination of graphemic intensification of the syntactic intensifier *so*).

(40) *NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/002/002426*

geil geil geil geil geil geil geil geil geil geil geil geil geil geil geil geil
 geil geil geil geil geil geil geil geil geil geil geil geil geil geil geil geil
 geil geil geil geil geil geil geil geil geil geil geil geil
 [awesome awesome [...] awesome awesome]

[NAME] ist sooooooooooooooooo



('[NAME] ist sooooooooooooooooo FABULOUS')

Figure 1: NottDeuYTSch Corpus NDY/193/011190: Comment containing ASCII art to intensify.

4 Conclusion and future research

The examination of YouTube comments in the *NottDeuYTSch* corpus has demonstrated the wide variety of intensification strategies in DMC, which expands our current understanding of intensification. The examples from the corpus exhibit considerable innovation and creativity using the semiotic resources available in DMC to intensify, which justifies the overhaul of the typology and definition of intensification provided in this chapter, i.e.,:

1. The definition of intensification needed to be refined to delineate it from similar concepts, such as focusing, expressivity and illocutionary force.
2. The definitions of existing types of intensification needed to be expanded to account for emergent strategies. For example, I have shown that morphological intensification can occur using not just prefixes, but all kinds of affixes, derivation and the combination of multiple affixes.
3. Additional types of intensification needed to be added to account for the increase in the diversity of semiotic resources used in DMC. For example, graphical intensification strategies, such as the manipulation of the spatio-visual interpretation, alternating letter case, or graphemic deixis have not traditionally been considered within the scope of intensification.
4. The relationship between the types of intensification needed to be reorganised to demonstrate and differentiate the various strategies. This also aids analyses of the use of multiple intensification strategies for the same lexical element.

Figure 2 presents a simplified diagram showing the modes and types of intensification and their relationships. Further developments of the typology would be aided by including more data from other languages, especially those written with logograms or syllabaries, to examine the distribution of intensification types. More work is also needed to analyse how different types of intensification interact with each other (or cannot interact with each other) and with other intensification strategies of the same mode or type, building on the preliminary analyses of Scheffler, Richter, and Van Hout (2023), as well as quantitative analyses of how often these categories of intensification occur in the data. As multimodality in DMC increases, the typology should be extended to include phonological and physical (i.e., body language) intensification strategies, perhaps phonological differences between the perception of syntactic and morphological intensification, and other interactions between emergent combinations of intensification strategies, as well as non-type-based writing such as handwriting (see Rude 2016) and sign languages.

With the typology of intensification presented in this chapter, researchers can take a holistic and pragmatic approach to intensification outside of traditional

grammatical categories to more fully understand the creativity, interaction, and dynamic nature of language use within DMC contexts.

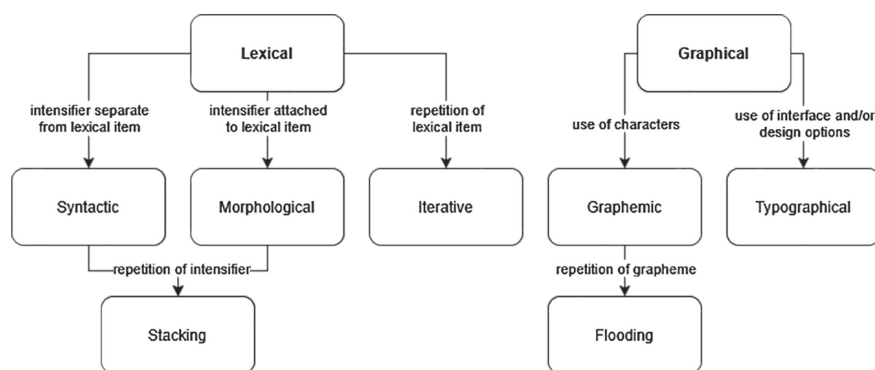


Figure 2: Diagram of intensification categories and types.

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