1   Introduction

Adjectival intensification can be defined as the process of increasing or decreasing, compared to some presumed standard, the quality expressed by an adjective (e.g. Bolinger 1972: 17, Van Os 1989: 2, Klein 1998: 5-6). In (1a), for instance, the speaker uses *very* to signal that the man would exhibit the property of happiness to an extent that is, in their view, higher than normal. In (1b), (*ei*)*n bisschen* 'a little' serves to indicate that the speaker displayed the quality of sadness to a degree that they themselves see as lower than average.[1]

(1) a.   he'd be **very** happy to have them both (E, BNC)
     b.   *worüber   ich   natürlich   **n bisschen**   traurig   war*
          about.which   I   obviously   a little   sad   was
          'about which I was obviously a little sad' (G, FOLK)
     c.   *Dat   is   **lekker**   zout.*
          that   is   tastily   salty
          'That is tastily salty.' (D, nlTenTen14)
     d.   *Niks kom tot 'n punt nie.*
          'Nothing ever gets completed.'
          *Dit   is   **so** Suid   Afrikaans.*
          this   is   so   South   African
          'This is so South African.' (A, VivA)

Happy and *traurig* 'sad' convey intrinsically gradable properties and can therefore be intensified easily. Of course, not every modification of a gradable adjective needs to increase/decrease the quality that it expresses, as (1c) shows. Rather than intensifying the saltiness, *lekker* 'tastily' indicates that the speaker appreciates it.[2] Moreover, intensification can occur with non-gradable adjectives too. *Suid-Afrikaans* 'South African' in (1d), for one, is not ordinarily a property that is a matter of degree. The speaker nonetheless adds the common intensifier *so* 'so', thus coercing a reading where they assess the extent to which never seeing anything through is typical of South Africa.

   For West Germanic languages, various aspects of adjectival intensification have received attention over the last few decades. Scholars have, for instance, examined the range of domains that intensifiers arise from (e.g. Klein 1998: 25-62 on Dutch, Claudi 2006 on German, Blanco-Suárez 2017 on English). They have also studied the mechanisms of change behind the development of intensifiers, as well as the phenomenon of their often rapid replacement (e.g. Ito & Tagliamonte 2003 on English, Van Goethem 2014 on Dutch, Neels et al. forthc. on German). Relatedly, the varying expressivity of intensifiers (cf. *extremely/outrageously good*) has been a topic of investigation too (e.g. Gutzmann & Turgay 2012 on German, Bordet 2017 on English, Richter & Van Hout 2020 on Dutch) and so has the role of sociolinguistic factors such as age and gender on their usage (e.g. Fuchs 2017 on English, Hilte et al. 2018 on Dutch, Stratton 2020 on German). What is of note about all this research into West Germanic is that, all in all, it has shown little interest in Afrikaans. There does exist some literature on adjectival

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[1] A after the opening bracket at the end of an example stands for Afrikaans, D for Dutch, E for English and G for German. Any subsequent abbreviation within brackets refers to the corpus from which the example originates (see Section 2). Corpus examples are presented as they occur in the data.

[2] The same holds for other forms of intensification, of course. Not all compounds, for instance, increase/decrease the quality conveyed by the base adjective. *Strogeel* 'straw-yellow' in our Dutch data is a case in point. It is used to characterize white wine and expresses a shade and not a degree of the color. Context plays a crucial role, though. *Feuerrot* 'fire-red' may serve to single out a particular hue too but, in our German data, it is employed to describe an embarrassed person's face and essentially means 'very red' there.

intensification in the language (e.g. Esterhuizen 1974, Dekeukelaere 2016, Berghoff et al. 2020) but the present article wishes to include it more explicitly in discussions about Dutch, English and German.

Our focus, however, is not on any of the issues mentioned in the previous paragraph. We are first of all concerned with the different forms that adjectival intensification can take in West Germanic. Consider the Dutch adjective *sterk* 'strong' and the ways that it is intensified in (2): (i) affixation in (2a) with *oer-*, whose original meaning of 'primal' has essentially disappeared here (Leuschner & Decroos 2007); (ii) compounding in (2b) with *ijzer* 'iron' (Hoeksema 2012); (iii) adverbial modification in (2c) with *zeer* 'very' (Klein 1998); (iv) using a phrasal simile in (2d) to *een paard* 'a horse' (Broekhuis 2016: 3.1.3).

(2) a. ***oer-****sterk*
         primal-strong
         'very strong' (D)
     b. *ijzer-sterk*
         iron-strong
         'very strong' (D)
     c. ***zeer*** *sterk*
         very   strong
         'very strong' (D)
     d. ***zo*** *sterk*   ***als***   ***een***   ***paard***
         so strong   as   a   horse
         'as strong as a horse' (D)

Such variation in the realization of adjectival intensification occurs in the other West Germanic languages too (e.g. Xiao & Tao 2007, Calpestrati 2017, Malloggi 2017, Trollip 2021, Norde et al. 2022). They have been argued to diverge in their preferences, though. Probably the clearest pronouncement on any differences comes from Van der Wouden & Foolen (2017). They write that, in line with Van Haeringen's (1956) general claims about West Germanic, "German tends to more 'synthetic' forms [like (2a) and (2b)], whereas Dutch, and even more so English, tends to 'analytic' forms [such as (2c) and (2d)]" (Van der Wouden & Foolen 2017: 84). Intuitively, their assertion seems plausible. As Malloggi (2017: 241) points out, the "literature [on German indeed] … states that composition and prefix-derivation are the most used methods of adjective intensification" while the research into English (see the references above) deals almost exclusively with adverbs. Still, Van der Wouden & Foolen's (2017: 84) claim is, as they themselves recognize, mainly based on their own "intuitions, reference grammars and selected examples of language use" and should be but has, to our knowledge, not yet been tested against authentic usage data.[3] The present article fills this gap, with a systematic corpus study of adjectival intensification in West Germanic. It seeks to answer not just the question whether German favors synthetic forms and Dutch and English analytic ones but also the question where Afrikaans fits in. Since the latter language is often said to be more analytic than Dutch overall (e.g. Donaldson 1991: 50-51, Noordegraaf 2008, Haspelmath & Michaelis 2017: 17-18; see also Van Sluijs 2013 for an overview of Afrikaans), one might expect it to resemble English the most.

A second concern of ours is the functions that adjectival intensification fulfills. Various classifications of its functional potential have been proposed, differing not only in the number of distinctions made but also in the basis of the distinctions. Both Bolinger (1972: 17) and Van Os (1988: 161-242) take as their point of departure the area that an intensifier occupies on the

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[3] Hendrikx et al. (2017) do compare the intensification of adjectives in Dutch to that in French. Interestingly, their corpus findings suggest that synthetic forms are actually more common in Dutch.

degree scale. However, the former distinguishes four categories and the latter seven. Bolinger's (1972) boosters, for instance, cover the scale's entire upper end but are split up into high, extremely high and absolute intensifiers by Van Os (1988) (e.g. *very*, *awfully*, *completely*). Classifications based on other parameters exist, though. Paradis (2001: 49), for example, starts from boundedness and puts forward a primary division between totality and scalar modifiers. Totality ones involve a boundary, which the property either reaches or fails to reach (e.g. *completely*, *almost*), while scalar ones imply no boundary and vary in degree (e.g. *very*, *somewhat*). Compared to these classifications, the functional distinction used in the present article is simple. It differentiates amplification, like with *very* in (1a), which increases the quality conveyed by an adjective, from downtoning, like with *ein bisschen* in (1b), which decreases the quality. It goes back to Quirk et al. (1985: 597) and has been popular in the research into adjectival intensification. More recent studies of West Germanic where the distinction figures include Tagliamonte (2008) on English, Broekhuis (2016) on Dutch and Stratton (2020) on German. This last author writes that "German amplifiers were found to be more frequent than German downtoners" in his corpus investigation and refers to a variety of studies (e.g. Peters 1994, D'Arcy 2015) to claim that such "a preference [has] also [been] observed in English" (Stratton 2020: 209). His comparison of the two languages could be refined, however. By looking at more similar data, by considering not just adverbial modification but the whole range of different forms and by including intensified adjectives under negation,[4] one would get a more precise and comprehensive picture of adjectival intensification's functions in German and English (e.g. do they favor amplification to the same extent?). We seek to undertake this research here and to add in Afrikaans and Dutch, to determine whether a similar preference exists across the West Germanic languages.

The rest of this article is structured as follows. Section 2 discusses our methodology and in particular the corpora used in the study and our data retrieval and selection. In Section 3, we focus on the forms of adjectival intensification. We first describe our analytical framework and then present the results, including the details about statistics. Section 4 deals with the functions of adjectival intensification. It begins with the ways in which the data is analyzed and moves on to our findings, with the necessary statistical information. In Section 5, finally, we draw the conclusions.

2 Methodology

This section first describes the resources that the present study draws on (Section 2.1) and then turns to the way in which the data is extracted from them (Section 2.2).

2.1 Corpora

Adjectival intensification should not be assumed to exhibit the same behavior in different types of discourse. It is well-known, for one, that intensification occurs more often in speech than in writing and that there is also considerable variation in frequency between spoken/written genres and registers (e.g. Xiao & Tao 2007: 245-251 on English, Malloggi 2017: 259 on German). Moreover, ample evidence exists, especially for adverbial modifiers, that discourse types vary in their preferences for individual intensifiers too (e.g. Klein 1998: 31, 57, 144 on Dutch, Tagliamonte 2016: 22 on English). They also have been argued to differ in the forms of adjectival intensification. Leuschner & Decroos (2007: 93), for instance, point out that synthetic patterns such as Dutch *kei-slecht* 'stone-bad' and German *sau-schlecht* 'sow-bad', both meaning 'very bad', are particularly productive in spoken language. Other formal means more characteristic

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[4] The latter was suggested to us by one of the reviewers. See Section 2.2 for more information.

of speech are repetition/reduplication (e.g. *he's bad bad bad*; Bonacchi 2017) and prosody (e.g. *he's baaaad;* Cosentino 2017). Furthermore, in view of the above, it does not seem implausible that the functions of adjectival intensification may vary across discourse types too. Therefore, we draw on a number of different corpora for each language here. These resources are as diverse as possible in terms of discourse types but our selection is constrained by two requirements. The corpora need to be tagged for parts of speech (see Section 2.2) and comparable data needs to be available for all four languages under investigation.

The first set of corpora features speech. For English, we use the spoken component of the British National Corpus 2014 (BNC; Love et al. 2017), which contains everyday conversations recorded between 2012 and 2016. The closest Dutch and German equivalents to our knowledge are the *Corpus Gesproken Nederlands* (CGN; Dutch Language Union 2004), the spontaneous conversations from 1999 to 2003 in particular, and the *Forschungs- & Lehrkorpus Gesprochenes Deutsch* (FOLK; Schmidt 2014), the private interactions recorded between 2008 and 2021 to be exact. Only the (more sizable) data from the Netherlands and Germany is taken into account, though, since the English corpus is country-specific too. For Afrikaans, we rely on the *VivA Spraakkorpus* (Virtuele Instituut vir Afrikaans 2022). It comprises interviews conducted in 1984 with speakers of the Griqua variety and clearly differs from our other speech corpora in several respects. However, as the only tagged corpus of spoken Afrikaans in existence, its use is inevitable. The second set of corpora represents written online language in its many forms. For Dutch, English and German, we avail ourselves of the TenTen corpora (Jakubíček et al. 2013). They are large collections of texts crawled from the web (e.g. forum posts, news articles, encyclopedia entries) applying the same criteria for each language. The nlTenTen[20]14, deTenTen[20]18 and enTenTen[20]18 corpora – of which only the material on .nl, .de and .uk websites is used here – can thus be regarded as comparable. For Afrikaans, which is currently not covered by TenTen, we combine five VivA resources with online data (Virtuele Instituut vir Afrikaans 2022): the 43-million-word *Kommentaarkorpus* (user comments), the 42-million-word *Maroela Media-Korpus* (news), the 27-million-word Wikipedia corpus and the 2-million-word NCHLT (web pages by the South African government) and *Wat Kyk Jy?* (blogs) corpora. Our third and last discourse type is literature, where language is arguably employed in a more considered way. The Afrikaans data is made up of the short stories and novels, from the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, in the *Taalkommissiekorpus* (TK, Taalkommissie 2010). For Dutch, we draw on the *Stevin Nederlandstalig Referentiecorpus* (SoNaR; Oostdijk et al. 2013) and particularly the component with books from the Netherlands, dating from 1995 to 2011. Our English literature comes from the fiction, published between 2010 and 2017, in the so-called baby version of the British National Corpus 2014 (Brezina et al. 2021) and the German data, finally, from the *DWDS-Kernkorpus 21 (2000-2010)* (Digitales Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache 2023) and its *Belletristik* 'fiction' from Germany specifically.

To sum up, Table 1 lists all the corpora, per language and discourse type, and gives, for each one, the total size of the component(s) used in this study.

	Speech	Online language	Literature
Afrikaans	VivA	VivA	TK
	363,756 words	116,125,000 words	11,120,245 words
Dutch	CGN	nlTenTen14	SoNaR
	1,747,789 words	1,684,044,675 words	22,361,923 words
English	BNC	enTenTen18	BNC
	10,495,185 words	1,470,063,571 words	1,007,359 words
German	FOLK	deTenTen18	DWDS
	1,344,951 words	3,945,472,270 words	3,477,000 words

Table 1: Corpora

The varying sizes of the corpora are of little concern here, as we randomly sample 200 intensified adjectives from every type of discourse in every language (see Section 2.2). What *should* be borne in mind for the findings is that the Afrikaans speech is substantially different from the spoken data for Dutch, English and German and the online Afrikaans too has been compiled in another way than the TenTen corpora.

2.2 Data extraction

Our article's focus is on predicative adjectives. This choice is motivated by earlier observations that they are intensified more frequently than attributive ones (e.g. Ito & Tagliamonte 2003: 272). Searches aimed only at the former are thus likely to be more efficient and effective in producing relevant results. Hendrikx et al. (2017: 404) can serve as a point of reference: they consider both syntactic contexts and have to go through 21,200 Dutch adjectives in their corpus to obtain a mere 307 intensified ones (i.e. 1.45% of cases). By limiting ourselves to predicative adjectives, we also sidestep the problem of the potential ambiguity of certain intensifiers within noun phrases. Richter & Van Hout (2020: 344) formulate this issue as follows: "We made the plain restriction to analyse intensifiers in a straightforward, predicative context … such as *zij zijn echt zo fucking goed* (lit., 'they are really so fucking good') and not in an attributive context such as *het echt zo fucking goede book* (lit., 'the really so fucking good book'), to be sure that the intensifiers are all functioning as adverbials in direct relation to an adjective." Importantly, our decision to focus on just one syntactic context does mean that we should be cautious about generalizing our findings to West Germanic adjectival intensification as a whole, since predicative and attributive adjectives need not behave in the same way (e.g. Tagliamonte 2008: 373-375).

To target predicative adjectives in our data, we query all corpora for the various forms of the verb 'be' in the language with a word tagged as an adjective occurring to the left or right of them, either immediately or with one or two other words in between. The rationale behind these searches is four-fold. First, in most of our corpora, adjectives are not tagged for syntactic function. So looking for those in the vicinity of a copula serves to single out cases with a high likelihood of being predicative. Second, 'be' is certainly not the only possible cue for predicatively used adjectives in West Germanic but adding other copulas, for example, would make it more difficult to keep the searches comparable across the languages under investigation (e.g. *grow,* as in *they've grown very old*, should be included for English but *groeien* 'grow' should not for Dutch). 'Be' is probably the most frequent copula anyhow in Afrikaans, Dutch, English as well as German. Third, the fact that no words need but up to two words can appear between the adjective and 'be' allows for a range of forms of intensification to be captured – such as the compound in (3a), the adverb in (3b) and the structure in (3c). Undoubtedly, even longer forms exist but, with the maximum of two intervening words, we aim to keep the amount of irrelevant hits to a minimum.

(3) a. *Die   vader   is **skat**-ryk.*
          the   father   is treasure-rich
          'The father is very rich.' (A, TK)
    b. *Der Morgen war **relativ**   kalt.*
          the   morning was relatively   cold
          'The morning was relatively cold.' (G, DWDS)
    c. I'll be **more than** pleased to get rid of it. (E, BNC)

Fourth, adjectives regularly precede 'be' in West Germanic languages other than English. Consider, for example, the German declarative main clause in (4a), with the infinitive *sein* 'be' in

the non-finite verb slot, and the Dutch subordinate clause in (4b), with the whole verbal cluster *moeten zijn* 'have to be' in final position. Our queries therefore also retrieve adjectives occurring to the left of the copula.

(4) a. *Die   rechtlichen Rahmenbedingungen   werden   dann **sehr** ungünstig*
          the   legal   framework   will   then very unfavorable
          sein.
          be
          'The legal framework will then be very unfavorable.' (G, deTenTen18)
     b. *Ik zeg   alleen   dat   we   **heel** zeker moeten   zijn.*
          I say   only   that we   very sure must   be
          'I'm only saying that we have to be very sure.' (D, SoNaR)
     c. **How** wrong **I was**! (E, BNC)

This search window also enables us to pick up specific forms of intensification in English that would otherwise be overlooked, like the exclamative in (4c) (see Section 3.1).

Our actual queries vary slightly from one corpus tool to another.[5] The SketchEngine one for English in (5) can serve as an example for most of them, though: *[lemma="be"]* looks for all forms of *be* and *[tag="J.*"]* for all adjectives; *[]{0,2}* accepts up to two items in between *be* and adjective; and / means that the adjective-first formula to its right and the adjective-last one to its left are searched for simultaneously. Only the queries for German speech and literature are genuinely different. These corpora's online interfaces force researchers to select a type of adjective and we thus have to specify the adjective as a non-attributive one.

(5) [lemma="be"] []{0,2} [tag="J.*"] | [tag="J.*"] []{0,2} [lemma="be"]

Table 2 presents, for the sake of completeness, an overview of the numbers of results that these searches produce for our four languages and three discourse types.

	Speech	Online language	Literature
Afrikaans	4,411	627,822	25,928
Dutch	33,137	25,568,743	369,419
English	305,234	28,965,439	14,876
German	31,320	54,286,680	23,228

Table 2: Corpus query results

For our analysis, we extract a random sample of 10,000 hits, with as much context as possible for every hit, from each of the eleven data sets for which it is possible. For Afrikaans speech, we look at the 4,411 cases in a randomized order. We then go through each sample by hand to identify the first 200 intensified predicative adjectives combining with 'be'.[6]

This selection process entails skipping obvious false hits like (6a), where *Giesens* 'Giesen's' is tagged incorrectly as an adjective, as well as adjectives that play an adverbial role, are attributive or convey a predication but are not intensified (see also Section 4.1) – like

ongelukkig 'unfortunate(ly)' in (6b), *special* in (6c) and *ruhig* 'quiet' in (6d) respectively.

(6) a. *Dat is ook Giesens missie.*
    that is also Giesen's mission
    'That is also Giesen's mission.' (D, nlTenTen14)
  b. *Ongelukkig is ons volkie maar so.*
    unfortunately is our people just like.that
    'Unfortunately, our people are just like that.' (A, VivA)
  c. *This was a special occasion.* (E, BNC)
  d. *alles war ruhig*
    everything was quiet
    'everything was quiet' (G, FOLK)

We also follow Ito & Tagliamonte (2003: 264) and many others in excluding a number of other contexts. They comprise environments involving a(n implicit) comparison or dependent. Comparatives such as (7a), for instance, may be intensified but they often require distinct modifiers: *weitaus* 'far' cannot occur with *hoch* 'high' and an adverb like *sehr* 'very' cannot combine with *höher* 'higher'. Functionally, their intensification is different too: strictly speaking, the statement that costs are far higher than revenue does not say anything about the exact level of costs itself. Other examples of such contexts are (7b) and (7c). For one, (7b) asserts little about Soft Caress's specific degree of neatness and *zo groot* 'so big' in (7c), with its ensuing 'that'-clause, cannot be replaced by synthetic *kei-groot* 'stone-big/very big'. To study the variation of adjectival intensification in the formal domain, it thus appears better to concentrate on contexts that do not limit the options.

(7) a. *Die Kosten sind **weitaus** [*sehr] höher, als die Einnahmen*
    the costs are far very higher than the revenue
    'The costs are far higher than the revenue.' (G, deTenTen18)
  b. 'Soft Caress' is neat **enough** to be grown in a container. (E, enTenTen18)
  c. *Zijn angst is **zo** groot [*kei-groot] dat hij … die [gift]… niet durft*
    his fear is so big stone-big that he that gift not dares
    terughalen.
    retrieve
    'His fear is so big that he doesn't dare retrieve that gift.' (D, nlTenTen14)

It is important to add, though, that our restriction to what could be described as "self-contained" cases does not extend to hits like (8a) and (8b). Expressions of comparison frequently develop into intensifiers proper (see König 2017) and the superlative in (8a) is one of them. It does not convey here that the addressee displays the quality of helpfulness to the greatest extent relative to all others but simply means 'very helpful'. Likewise, in (8b), rather than truly comparing the clarity of their claim to that of daylight, the speaker is just employing the simile to signify 'very clear'.

(8) a. Well, sir, you have been **most** helpful. Thank you. (E, BNC)
  b. *Dit is **so** duidelik **soos daglig** dat jy ook groot bewonderaar … is.*
    it is so clear as daylight that you also great admirer are
    'It is as clear as daylight that you are a great admirer too.' (A, VivA)

Other contexts left out in much research are (implicitly) negative ones, like (9), for two reasons. The first one concerns forms of intensification: negation is not equally compatible with all of

them. Take the compound *yskoud* 'ice-cold': it has a similar meaning to *baie koud* 'very cold' but only really works in (9) when the sentence serves as an explicit rebuttal of a previous claim that the beer is ice-cold (cf. the simile *so koud soos ys* 'as cold as ice' too). Negation is, in other words, a potentially confounding factor when looking at adjectival intensification's formal variation and Section 3 will thus only look at positive contexts.

(9) *Die   bier   is nie   **baie**   koud [*?ys-koud*] nie.*
     the   beer   is not   very   cold ice-cold   not
     'The beer is not very cold.' (A, TK)

The second reason why cases like (9) are often omitted is that intensifiers fulfill different functions under negation. *Baie* 'very', for example, ordinarily conveys amplification. Sentence (9), however, does not deny that the beer is very cold. Rather, it indicates that the beer is moderately cold and *baie* with *nie ... nie* 'not' has more of a downtoning function. Ignoring negative contexts therefore makes it easier to determine the levels of amplification versus downtoning: one can simply count the intensifiers like 'very' versus those like 'a little' without considering how they are actually employed (e.g. Stratton 2020: 195, 199-201). Such an approach is problematic, though. Not only does it run the risk of underrepresenting the function of downtoning (e.g. if it takes the form of "negated amplifiers"), it may also fail to capture (dis)similarities between languages (e.g. if one relies more on "positive downtoners" and another one more on "negated amplifiers"). Consequently, for Section 4, where the functions of adjectival intensification are investigated, we *will* take into account hits such as (9).

The amount of data checked in the way outlined above can be gathered from Table 3. It gives, for each corpus, the number of the hit in the random sample that contains the 200th intensified predicative adjective with 'be', excluding negative contexts for Section 3 and including them for Section 4.

	Speech		Online language		Literature	
	- negation	+ negation	- negation	+ negation	- negation	+ negation
Afrikaans	3,858	3,440	7,253	7,171	4,686	4,283
Dutch	3,627	3,290	2,747	2,670	4,084	3,588
English	1,565	1,465	2,558	2,454	5,646	5,336
German	799	726	2,864	2,739	2,099	1,865

Table 3: Corpus sample data analyzed

3   Forms

This section seeks to answer our first research question (see Section 1), about differences within West Germanic in the linguistic means that they employ and favor for adjectival intensification. We first discuss the ways in which the data is analyzed (Section 3.1) and then move on to our results (Section 3.2).

3.1   Analytical framework

It should be clear by now that adjectival intensification can assume a variety of forms in West Germanic languages. For the present purposes, a primary distinction needs to be made between analytic and synthetic ones (cf. Hendrikx et al.'s 2017: 401 division between syntax and morphology). The analytic forms include the well-studied category of adverbial modifiers (e.g. Klein 1998, Tagliamonte 2008, Stratton 2020). It subsumes items of very different origins – such as the adverb *so* in (10a), the adjective *unglaublich* 'unbelievable' in (10b) and the noun phrase *a little bit* in (10c). Other examples from our data can be found in (1a), (1b), (3b), (4a),

(4b) and (8a).

(10) a. *Ag shame en almal is **sooo** onskuldig!*
   oh shame and everyone is so innocent
   'What a shame and they are all sooo innocent!' (A, VivA)

   b. *Juliane war **unglaublich** gut.*
   Juliane was unbelievably good
   'Juliane was unbelievably good.' (G, DWDS)

   d. Wednesday was **a little bit** blowy. (E, BNC)

Intensification can also be expressed analytically by structures that are more complex than the modifiers in (10). Such periphrastic constructions comprise, among other things:

- similes (e.g. Esterhuizen 1974: 89, Van der Wouden & Foolen 2017: 82-83, Norde et al. 2022), which may be (semi-)fixed but are more often coined for the occasion in our data – such as (11a) and (11b) respectively;
- comparative constructions like (11c) and (11d) (e.g. Broekhuis 2016: 3.1.2, König 2017);
- formulae like *te ... vir woorde* 'too … for words' in (11e);
- exclamative clauses such as (11f), which Siemund (2017: 210) analyzes as a form of amplification (see also Broekhuis 2016: 3.1.2).[7]

For more corpus examples, consider (3c), (4c) and (8b).

(11) a. *Julieta, die **zo** gek **als** **een deur** is, …*
   Julieta who as crazy as a door is
   'Julieta, who is very crazy, …' (D, SoNaR)

   b. The second [thief] is **as ugly as a babarusa licking urine off a thistle**. (E, BNC)

   c. *Reëndae saam met Alexander was erg**er** **as** **erg**.*
   rainy.days together with Alexander were grimmer than grim
   'Rainy days together with Alexander were grimmer than grim.' (A, TK)

   d. *… dass Deutschland **mehr als** reif sei für diese Debatte.*
   that Germany more than ready is for this debate
   '… that Germany is more than ready for this debate.' (G, deTenTen18)

   e. *Die hele SAA debakel is **te** kostelik **vir woorde**.*
   the whole SAA fiasco is too funny for words
   'The whole SAA fiasco is too funny for words.' (A, VivA)

   f. ***Wat ben je** toch stom **stom stom**!*
   what are you yet stupid stupid stupid
   'How stupid stupid stupid you are!' (D, SoNaR)

Sentence (11f) is of further interest here, because of its reiteration of *stom* 'stupid'. Repetition

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[7] One reviewer indirectly asked whether exclamatives should be analyzed as an adverbial rather than a periphrastic form. We agree with them that they crucially involve an interrogative adverb in the languages under investigation – such as *how* in (4c) and *wat* 'what' in (11f) – but would argue that their exclamative and therefore intensifying meaning here derives from more than just the adverb. Exclamative constructions in West Germanic possess idiosyncratic syntactic properties – note, for instance, the constituent order of *I was* in (4c) and the distance between *wat* and the adjective that it can be said to modify in (11f) – as well as distinctive prosodies. This last feature characterizes "elliptical" exclamatives like *how ugly!* too (but see Siemund 2017 on the issue of ellipsis). They may not be part of our query results, which focus on adjectives cooccurring with 'be' (see Section 2.2), but their exclamative nature is again not simply a matter of the adverb, as the prosodic differences between *how UGly!* and *HOW ugly?* show.

and reduplication are known means of intensification (e.g. Esterhuizen 1974: 99-106, Bonacchi 2017) but the two phenomena are not always easy to tell apart. Following Hendrikx et al. (2017: 397), we regard (the few) cases (in our data) for which no evidence exists that reiteration results in a new single unit as simple repetition and thus as analytic. *Stom stom stom* in (11f) is one of them. Beyond our samples, we have happened upon one hit from the corpora for which we do have such evidence, i.e. *easy-peasy*. It would have been categorized as an instance of reduplication and as synthetic.

In addition to reduplication, the synthetic forms consist of affixes and compounds (e.g. Hoeksema 2012, Calpestrati 2017, Van der Wouden 2017: 84-87).[8] The former are illustrated in (12); the latter in (13) and also in (3a).

(12) a. *Ek is   swakk-**erig***.
      I   am   weak-ish
      'I am weak-ish.' (A, VivA)

    b. *Het is **over**-duidelijk dat…*
      it   is over-clear   that
      'It is very clear that…'
      …ze Evil Activities van plaats hebben laten wisselen.
      '…they let Evil Activities change places.' (D, nlTenTen14)

    c. The T850 has been designed to be **ultra-**compact. (E, enTenTen18)

    d. *Das seien viele junge Menschen,*
      'There are many young people'
      *die **hoch**-motiviert   seien.*
      who high-motivated   are
      'who are highly motivated.' (G, deTenTen18)

(13) a. *Julle   is   **skreeu**-snaaks   vandag!*
      you.all   are   shriek-funny   today
      'You all are very funny today!' (A, VivA)

    b. *Een deel van de   tarwe   was **kurk**-droog.*
      a   part of   the   wheat   was cork-dry
      'Part of the wheat was bone-dry.' (D, SoNaR)

    c. The boy … looked positively suicidal. He was **stick**-thin, pale. (E, BNC)

    d. *Auch hier ist es **Kinder**-leicht*
      also   here is it child-easy
      'Here too, it is very easy'
      die einzelnen Programme zu bewerben.
      'to advertise the individual programs.' (G, deTenTen18)

A number of comments are in order, however. The first one concerns a set of items sometimes called "affixoids" (e.g. Leuschner & Decroos 2007, Trollip 2021). Dutch *kei* in our corpus hit *keileuk* 'very fun' can serve as an example. What it shares with compounds is that it can occur on its own, as the noun 'stone' (the same is true of *leuk* 'fun', of course). With affixes such as *hyper-* 'hyper-', it has in common its purely intensifying meaning in *keileuk*. A problem arises with *keihard* 'very hard', also attested in our samples. For many speakers of Dutch, this complex word is the only one where *kei* can actually express intensification and this effect is readily attributable to the semantics of 'stone' plus 'hard' ('hard as stone'). It can therefore be argued to be a compound. The issue also manifests itself when comparing languages. *Riesengroß* 'very

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big' in our German data is perhaps best analyzed as a compound, since *groß* 'big' is basically the sole adjective that can combine with *Riese* 'giant' and the intensifying meaning of the whole is still evident from its parts ('as big as a giant'). *Riese*'s Dutch equivalent in the hit *reuzerustig* 'very quiet', by contrast, is probably better regarded as an affix: *reuze-* can appear on many an adjective and its original sense of 'giant' is completely gone from *reuzerustig*. It is essential to point out, however, that these categorizations appeal to two criteria that are far from clear-cut, i.e. semantic transparency and productivity (e.g. Booij & Hüning 2014). In the Afrikaans corpus hit *splinternuut* 'very new', for one, there is no obvious link (anymore) between *splinter*'s intensifying contribution and its meaning of 'chip' as a noun. Analyzing it as an affix(oid) does not seem desirable, though, given that *nuut* 'new' is the only adjective to which it can attach in this way. In the Dutch attestation *stokoud* 'very old', *stok*'s nominal sense of 'stick' is entirely absent too but this noun *can* occur with a handful of adjectives other than *oud* 'old' (e.g. *stokdoof* 'stone-deaf', *stokdood* 'stone-dead', *stokongelukkig* 'very unhappy' in nlTenTen14, along with semantically more transparent *stokstijf* 'stock-still, very rigid'). It can be said to exhibit at least some productivity[9] and, for that reason, cases like *stokoud* are classified as affixation here. Some other such examples from our samples are given in (14).

(14) a. ***arsch**-freundlich*
          butt-friendly
          'very friendly' (G, FOLK)
      b. ***dol**-enthousiast*
          mad-enthusiastic
          'very enthusiastic' (D, SoNaR)
      c. ***dood**-tevrede*
          dead-content
          'very content' (A, TK)
      d. ***poes**-cool*
          pussy-cool
          'very cool' (A, VivA)
      e. ***sau**-gut*
          sow-good
          'very good' (G, FOLK)
      f. ***stom**-vervelend*
          mute-boring
          'very boring' (D, SoNaR)

A second remark has to do with the question whether certain intensifiers are to be considered as affixes or adverbial modifiers. Especially for English, which has seen a dramatic decline in synthetic means of intensification over the last millennium (e.g. Méndez-Naya 2021), elements like *super* in (15a) are sometimes regarded as adverbs (e.g. Rhee 2016: 99) rather than affixes. This view is reflected in the not uncommon practice of writing them separately, as in the literature sample hit (15b), and is likely influenced by their potential to appear on their own, as in (15c). We, however, follow Dixon (2014: 141), among many others, in arguing that something like *supercool* satisfies enough "tests" simultaneously to count as a single word. Little, if anything, can intervene between *super* and *cool*, for instance. It would also be fairly marked to use the intensifier by itself as the answer to a degree question: *How cool was it? – ??? Super!* (cf. *Very!*). Moreover, in running speech, *supercool* is typically pronounced as a phonological unit,

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[9] Compare *reuze-*: a random nlTenTen14 sample of fifty hits contains eleven different adjectives (e.g. *blij* 'happy', *populair* 'popular', *handig* 'useful', *trots* 'proud').

with primary stress on *cool* and secondary stress on *super*, i.e. [ˌsuːpəˈkuːl]. Accordingly, corpus attestations such as (15a), (15b), *ultra-compact* and *well-aware* are subsumed under affixation here. The same holds for cases like *reuzerustig*, notwithstanding the existence of the uses in (16). As shown by Van Goethem (2014) for Dutch, some affixoids have undergone a process of debonding and can function as independent adjectives or adverbs, like *reuze* 'great' in (16a) and 'very much' in (16b). Before an adjective, though, they can still be argued to make up one word with it. For example, attributive ˈreuzeˌrustig has the same initial primary stress as attributive ˈkeiˌrustig 'very quiet', an adjective with an affixoid displaying no real signs of debonding, and attributive ˈreuzeˌgroot 'very big', a compound.

(15) a. He is **super-**smart. (E, BNC)
     b. It was **super** cool to be on a skateboard again. (E, BNC)
     c. The 'new' kitchen looked **super**! (E, enTenTen18)
(16) a. *Dat is een* **reuze** *idee.*
        that is a   giant   idea
        'That is a great idea.' (D, nlTenTen14)
     b. *Zonder al die poespas bevalt het me* **reuze***.*
        without all that fuss   pleases it me giant
        'Without all that fuss, it pleases me very much.' (D, nlTenTen14)

Our third and final comment again mainly relates to English. Distinguishing compounds from multi-word expressions is not straightforward as a rule but this language especially – compared to its West Germanic relatives, for instance (see Booij 2019: 97-104, Schlücker 2019: 70-74) – is known to have few reliable parameters to tell them apart (see Van der Wouden & Foolen 2017: 87, Bauer 2019: 45-47). Dixon (2014: 47), for one, writes that recognizing compounds in English involves "a combination of syntactic [i.e. they do not allow modification or coordination of their components], semantic [i.e. they often have a non-compositional meaning], and phonological [i.e. they tend to possess only one primary stress] criteria (plus some attention to frequency)". We believe that this description fits our small number of hits in question and that they would generally be considered compounds. The list is comprised of the relatively familiar combinations *stick-thin*, as in (13c), and *pitch-black*, alongside the less established one in (17).

(17) With the real-world pollution of diesel cars likely to be under scrutiny for the next few years, the Ioniq [a hybrid] looks like it will finally offer a price competitive alternative to derv. It'll be **whisper-**clean in urban areas. (E, enTenTen18)

3.2   Results

Figure 1 provides, for every language, the proportions of analytic forms of adjectival intensification, i.e. the light gray bottom segments for periphrastic constructions and adverbial modifiers, and synthetic ones, i.e. the dark gray top segments for affixes and compounds, in each of the three discourse type samples and in total. Note that, if an adjective is intensified by more than one type of form at the same time, each type is counted separately here. Sentence (18) can serve as an example: *so* 'so' is included in the numbers for German adverbial modifiers while *potthässlich* 'butt-ugly' in those for compounds in the language. Such hits are, however, very rare in the data.

(18) *Der ist doch* **so pott-***hässlich!*
     he is yet   so pot-ugly
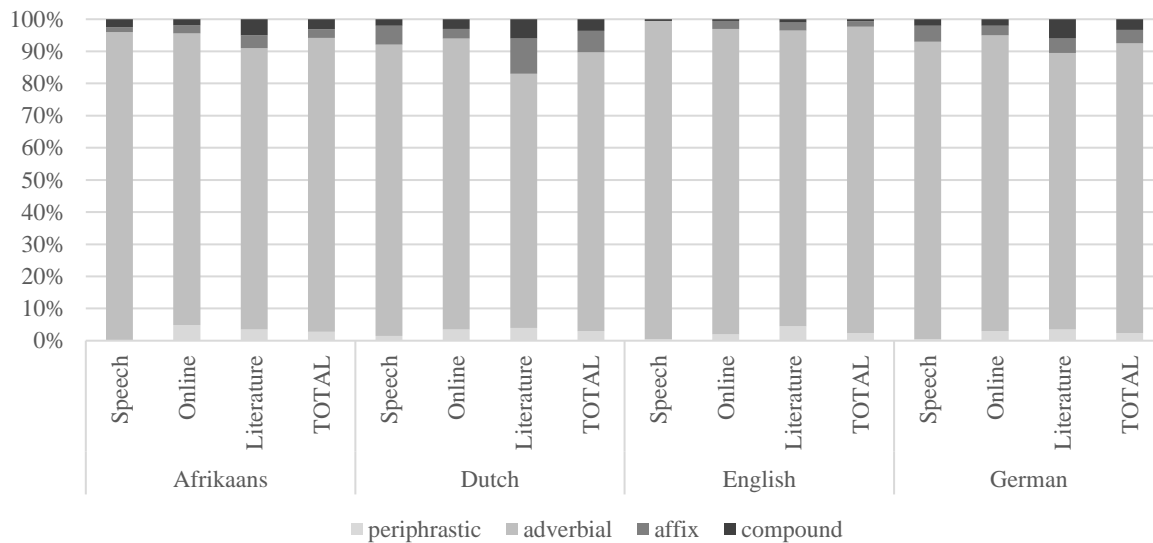   'He is so butt-ugly!' (G, deTenTen18)

Figure 1: Forms of intensification

What is immediately evident from the results in Figure 1 is that, as far as the intensification of predicative adjectives is concerned, there is no evidence whatsoever for any claims that certain West Germanic languages favor synthetic means. Such assertions are not uncommonly made about German in particular (e.g. Malloggi 2017: 241, Van der Wouden & Foolen 2017: 84) but the language is found to employ adverbial modifiers in 90.20% of all cases. Their proportions also display little variation between discourse types, from 86.00% in literature over 92.04% in online language to 92.54% in speech. The same is true of the other three languages under investigation. Afrikaans uses adverbial modifiers in 91.39% of all cases (ranging from 87.50% in literature and 90.69% in online language to 96.00% in speech), English in 95.33% (varying from 92.00% in literature over 95.00% in online language to 99.00% in speech) and Dutch in 86.71% (going from 79.00% in literature to 90.50% and 90.59% in online and spoken language respectively). In other words, there is a clear and very strong preference across West Germanic for analytic means of adjectival intensification.[10]

It is obviously still possible that the languages differ in the extent to which they employ the minor options of affixes and compounds. To uncover this potential variation, we fit a conditional inference tree, with R (R Core Team 2022) and the *ctree* function of the R *party* package (Hothorn et al. 2006). Conditional inference trees stem from binomial "choices" made on the basis of statistical significance that inform the results of the dependent variable (Levshina 2015: 291-297). A useful way to think of such a tree is to regard it as a set of pathways, each leading to a final distribution of the dependent variable's values. Each pathway consists of a series of junctures, also known as nodes, representing statistical decisions that are required for the significant distribution at its end. The higher a juncture is in the tree, the stronger the decision's statistical significance is or, put differently, the smaller the p-value is. Let us now look at Figure 2, which plots form of intensification (analytic or synthetic) as the dependent variable and both language and discourse type as the independent variables (for which function, as discussed in Section 4, and base adjective could be considered too but the former is found to have no impact and, with 1,153 distinct values for 2,405 hits, the latter is unviable as an independent

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[10] The frequencies of the periphrastic constructions are low, of course. This fact, however, is due at least in part to the search window of a maximum of just two words between the adjectives and 'be' (see Section 2.2), which fails to capture more elaborate structures.
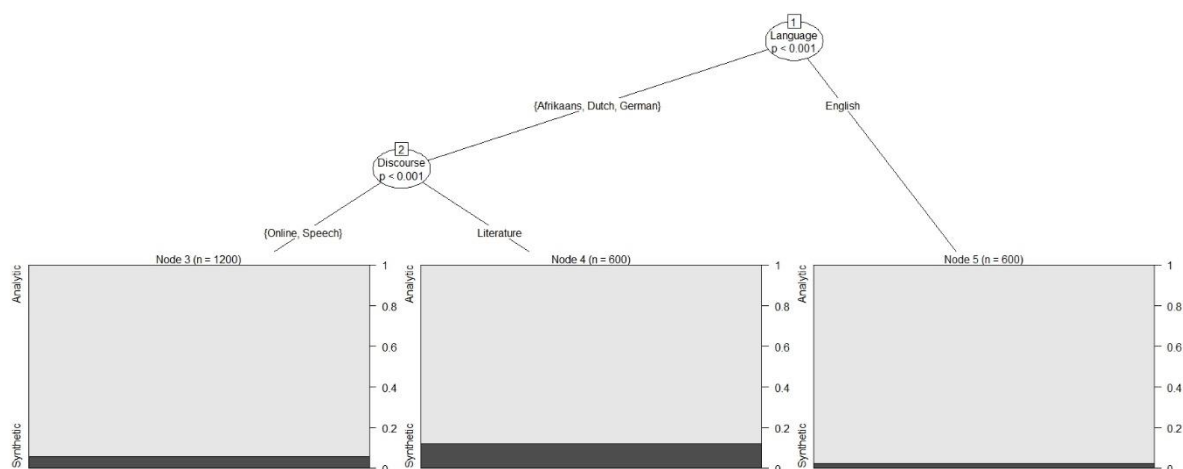
variable).[11]

Figure 2: Conditional inference tree for forms of intensification

The highest juncture in Figure 2 (node 1), i.e. the most significant partition in our data, singles out English from the other West Germanic languages. This result means that Afrikaans, Dutch and German all use more synthetic forms for adjectival intensification than English. Their respective proportions are 5.79%, 10.30%, 7.48% and 2.33%. Moreover, the fact that no further language-based splits are present in the tree indicates that there are no statistically significant differences between the first three languages. Together, these observations can be said to support Van der Wouden & Foolen's (2017: 84) claim that English is the most analytic language in West Germanic when it comes to adjectival intensification. They do not, however, back their assertion that Dutch is positioned in between German and English and is, if anything, closer to English. Dutch is actually found to employ synthetic means to more or less the same degree as German (and Afrikaans) and perhaps even slightly more often. Returning to Figure 2, we can see a second juncture (node 3), which sets apart literature from both online and spoken language for Afrikaans, Dutch and German. More specifically, adjectival intensification appears to be more synthetic in literary texts (9.00%, 17.00% and 10.50% respectively) than in online writing (4.41%, 6.00% and 4.98%) and speech (4.00%, 7.92% and 6.97%). One way to interpret this finding would be that the synthetic potential of these three languages is only genuinely exploited in carefully planned discourse where linguistic forms may serve symbolic, aesthetic and other purposes (cf. Biber 2009: 76 on writing providing the opportunity "for styles of linguistic expression not found in the spoken mode", Schröder 2023 on full-fledged exclamative clauses in English as a feature of narrative fiction).

The above approach to (dis)similarities in synthetic adjectival intensification between the West Germanic languages revolves around frequency of usage. An alternative would be to look at the range of affixes and compounds that Afrikaans, Dutch, English and German have at their disposal. Such a study should consider as many synthetically intensified adjectives as possible and is therefore beyond this article's scope. The present data can only give an initial impression.

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[11] Following up on one reviewer's suggestion, we coded our data for clause type too, in two ways: a broad distinction between main and subordinate clauses (78.50% and 21.50% of the hits respectively) and a more detailed analysis differentiating between declarative (76.79%), complement (8.96%), adverbial (6.63%), relative (5.92%), exclamative (1.00%), interrogative (0.54%), imperative (0.13%) and optative (0.04%) clauses. We subsequently fitted a conditional inference tree with the general classification as an extra independent variable and another one with the more fine-grained taxonomy. Neither differed from Figure 2, however. In other words, clause type does not appear to have an effect on the form of intensification in our data.

To that end, Table 4 presents, for every language, the number of distinct compounds (with the total amount of compounds) and the number of distinct affixes (with the total amount of affixed adjectives) in our data.

	Distinct compounds / all compounds	Distinct affixes / all affixed adjectives
Afrikaans	13/19	8/16
Dutch	19/22	13/40
English	3/4	5/10
German	13/20	9/25

Table 4: Variation in compounds and affixes

The numbers for the compounds show first of all that, for no language, their contribution to its overall level of synthesis in Figures 1 and 2 can be attributed to one or two combinations being used time and again. If type/token ratio is taken as a measure of variation (Baayen 2009: 901-902), all four languages can be said to exhibit substantial diversity. Afrikaans and German have similar ratios of 68.42% and 65.00%. The compounds occurring only once include *bibberkoud* 'very cold' (lit. 'shiver-cold') and *kliphard* 'very hard' (lit. 'stone-hard') in the former language and *nagelneu* 'brand-new' (lit. 'nail-new') and *sonneklar* 'clear as day' (lit. 'sun-clear') in the latter. Some recurrent ones are, respectively, *skatryk* (four times) and *splinternuut* (twice) and *wunderschön* 'very beautiful' (lit. 'wonder-beautiful'; four times) and *riesengroß* (three times). English scores higher with 75.00% but this figure is based on only four cases (see Section 3.1 for the list). Dutch, by contrast, *can* be argued to stand out, with a type/token ratio of 86.36%. With few exceptions, such as *ijskoud* 'ice-cold' (twice) and *drijfnat* 'very wet' (lit. 'drift-wet'; twice), its compounds appear only once in our data. Some examples are *messcherp* 'very sharp' (lit. 'knife-sharp') and *glashelder* 'crystal-clear' (lit. 'glass-clear'). In short, although the absolute frequencies in our samples are low and more research is needed, Dutch seems to employ a wider range of compounds than Afrikaans, German and English. Interestingly, the language is also found to use more distinct affixes here than its West Germanic relatives. Probably unsurprisingly, English has just five unique ones (e.g. *-ish*, *well-*) and *super-* accounts for half of the affixed adjectives. German (e.g. *hoch-* 'high', *stock-* 'stick') and Afrikaans (e.g. *oor-* 'over', *kak-* 'shit') are alike again, with nine and eight distinct affixes respectively. The most frequent ones are *super-* and *tod/tot-* 'death/dead' in the former language and *dood-* 'dead' and *-erig* '-ish' in the latter.[12] Dutch, finally, features thirteen unique affixes (e.g. *door-en-door-* 'through-and-through', *kei-* 'stone') and, together, *super-* and *dood-* 'dood' make up half of the affixed adjectives.

From the discussion in the present section, we can draw the following conclusions. First, the four West Germanic languages all favor analytic forms for the intensification of predicative adjectives, adverbial modifiers in particular. Second, Afrikaans, Dutch and German all employ more synthetic means than English and they do so more frequently in literature than in speech and online language. Third, and most tentatively, Dutch seems to use a wider range of synthetic forms than Afrikaans and German (as well as English).

4   Function

This section aims to answer our second research question (see Section 1), about (dis)similarities within West Germanic in the functions that adjectival intensification fulfills. We first describe the way that the data is analyzed (Section 4.1) and then present our findings (Section 4.2).

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[12] *Super-* is attested only once in Afrikaans. In the other West Germanic languages, this affix is especially common in speech. Its near absence from the Afrikaans data is likely due to the fact that the speech sampled for the language is considerably older and comes from speakers of a very specific variety (see Section 2.1).

4.1   Analytical framework

As mentioned in the introduction, our study makes a functional distinction between amplification and downtoning. To identify them, we apply the following two tests by Broekhuis (2016: 3.1.2) to our data. Amplification scales upward from some presumed standard and should therefore be compatible with the formula in (18a) while downtoning scales downward from some assumed standard and should thus be compatible with the formula in (18b). The examples in (19) demonstrate how the tests work for the well-established amplifying affix *super-* and downtoning affix *-ish* in English.

(18) a.   X is ADJECTIVE; X is even INTENSIFIED ADJECTIVE.
      b.   X is ADJECTIVE; X is INTENSIFIED ADJECTIVE anyway.
(19) a.   It's difficult; it's even **super-**difficult.
      b.   ?It's difficult; it's **super-**difficult anyway.
      c.   ?It's difficult; it's even difficult-**ish**.
      d.   It's difficult; it's difficult-**ish** anyway.

Identifying amplification and downtoning inevitably begins with the exclusion of cases where no intensification is expressed. This step is actually part of the data extraction process (see Section 2.1) and involves the tests in this way: if neither formula in (18) makes sense for a hit, we do not take it into account. Consider *particularly* in (20a), for instance. This adverb may function as an intensifier in some contexts but, as (20b) and (20c) show, the tests fail to capture what it conveys in (20a), i.e. 'specifically'. *Lekker* 'nicely' in (21a) can serve as another example.

(20) a.   His initial degrees were Civil and Environmental Engineering, and he is **particularly** interested in how sustainability can be incorporated into design. (E, en-TenTen18)
      b.   ?… and he is interested in … he is even **particularly** interested in …
      c.   ?… and he is interested in …; he is **particularly** interested anyway in …
(21) a.   *De   onderlinge rolverdeling   in het   studentengroepje   is **lekker***
            the   mutual   division.of.roles in the   little.student.group is nicely
            traditioneel.
            traditional
            'The student group's division of roles between themselves is nicely traditional.'
            (D, nlTenTen14)
      b.   ?*De … rolverdeling ... is traditioneel; ze is zelfs **lekker**   traditioneel.*
            the   division.of.roles is traditional   it is even nicely   traditional
            'The … division of roles … is traditional; it is even nicely traditional.'
      c.   ?*De … rolverdeling ... is traditioneel; ze is **lekker**   traditioneel   in ieder*
            the   division.of.roles is traditional   it is nicely   traditional   in any
            geval.
            case
            'The …. division of roles … is traditional; it is nicely traditional anyway.'

The formulae in (21b) and (21c) are infelicitous because the adverb does not express intensification here but the speaker's appreciation of the traditional division of roles.
      Of the hits for which the tests do work, most contain intensifiers that are fairly unambiguously amplifying – such as *geweldig* 'immensely' and *mehr als* in (22), which are compatible

with (18a) but not with (18b) – or downtoning – like *-erig* and *ein weinig* 'a little' in (23), for which the opposite holds.

(22) a. *Die prys van boeke is **geweldig** duur.*
the price of books is immensely expensive
'The price of books is immensely expensive.' (A, VivA)

b. *Ihr Zuhälter ist **mehr als** verärgert, wenn er das sieht.* (G, deTenTen18)
her pimp is more than annoyed when he that sees
'Her pimp is more than annoyed, when he sees that.'

(23) a. *Isabel kan sweer haar oë is rooi-**erig**. Blink ook.*
Isabel can swear her eyes are red-ish blinks also
'Isabel can swear that her eyes are a little red. [She] is also blinking.' (A, TK)

b. *Meine Tochter … ist schüchtern,*
'My daughter … is shy,'
***ein wenig** prüde ist sie,*
a little prudish is she
'a little prudish,'
benutzt unsere Sauna am liebsten nur mit mir.
'prefers to use our sauna only with me.' (G, DWDS)

For intensifiers in negative environments (see Section 2.2), consider *geweldig* and *entirely* in (24) with a downtoning function and *baie* and *remotely* in (25) with an amplifying function.

(24) a. *De arbeidskansen zijn niet **geweldig** hoog lieverd.*
the employment.opportunities are not immensely high darling
'The employment opportunities are not very high, darling.' (D, nlTenTen14)

b. Its death-black sockets and leering toothy grin weren't **entirely** reassuring. (E, BNC)

(25) a. *Was dit nie **baie** vermoeiend gewees nie?*
was it not very tiring been not
'Had it not been very tiring?' (A, VivA)

b. The West is not **remotely** interested in protecting anyone's "freedom". (E, enTenTen18)

However, there also exist intensifiers in West Germanic that do not seem to fit neatly into either amplification or downtoning. As the acceptability of both formulae in (26) evinces, *quite* is one of them. Other such intensifiers in our data are *pretty*, Afrikaans *nogal(s)* and *taamlik*, Dutch *behoorlijk* and *redelijk* (Broekhuis 2016: 3.1.2) and German *ganz* and *ziemlich* (Stratton 2020: 189, 200) (note that we do not offer translations here because of their ambiguity).

(26) a. It's difficult; it's even **quite** difficult.
b. It's difficult; it's **quite** difficult anyway.

Still, in combination with specific adjectives and/or in context, it is often possible to determine whether an intensifier of this type has an amplifying or downtoning function. As Claudi (2006: 366) indicates, for instance, *ganz* normally expresses amplification when preceding an adjective with a negative meaning. *Schlimm* 'bad' in (27a) matches this description and the context (e.g. *hochverrat gleichgekommen* 'tantamount to treason') clearly supports an analysis of *ganz* as conveying amplification here. In the same vein, the presence of *regtig* 'really' in (27b) makes a reading of *nogals* as anything other than amplifying very unlikely. An example of a context

pointing to an interpretation as downtoning is (27c). Given how questionnaires like the one referred to in the sentence are typically formulated, it is reasonable to presume that *redelijk* scales downward from some standard level of satisfaction (i.e. 'they are moderately happy anyway'). The rest of the news article confirms this assumption, stating that the Dutch are generally satisfied with the performance of judges but not happy with the turnaround of cases.

(27) a. *… meine freundinnen au auch auf die couch (.) setzen zu lassen das (.) wäre (.)*
          also hochverrat gleichgekommen
          '… letting my girlfriends also sit on the couch, that would have been well tanta-
          mount to treason,'
          *das   wär   **ganz** schlimm gewesen*
          that   would.be   quite bad   been
          'that would have been really bad,'
          mami des hätte meine mutter niemals erlaubt.
          'mommy my mother would never have allowed it.' (G, FOLK)
      b. *En   stilstaan   is regtig   **nogals**   moeilik.*
          and   standing.still is really   quite   difficult
          'And standing still is really quite difficult.' (A, VivA)
      c. *Uit een recent onderzoek blijkt dat*
          'A recent study shows that'
          *burgers en   professionals **redelijk**   tevreden   zijn*
          citizens and   professionals relatively   happy   are
          'citizens and professionals are relatively happy'
          over het functioneren van de rechterlijke macht in Nederland.
          'with the performance of the judiciary in the Netherlands.' (D, nlTenTen14)

Similarly, *quite*'s function too can frequently be deduced from the adjective that it modifies or from the context. For instance, as Levshina (2014: 112) writes, with adjectives that "describe a high degree of some quality" or "imply a clear boundary", it usually serves to amplify. Corpus hits where this is the case include *quite shocking*, *quite indestructible* and *quite true*. In (28a), it is the wider context that suggests a specific interpretation of the adverb, as downtoning: the subsequent statement that one or two kids were lost is compatible with 'bluebells are quite safe anyway' but not with 'bluebells are even quite safe'. Importantly, though, such indications are not always present in our data. In (28b), for example, we are unable to establish whether *quite* conveys amplification or downtoning and, accordingly, we analyze it as vague.

(28) a. "You didn't poison the kids, though?" "Oh no, bluebells are **quite** safe to eat. We
          only lost one or two who got carried away." (E, BNC)
      b. I had quite bad acne as a teenager but it came back a year ago – I am in my early
          thirties and I was **quite** distressed. I was referred back to my GP who was asked
          to prescribe antibiotics. (E, enTenTen18)

Intonation could, in principle, disambiguate. *Quite*, for one, tends to have an amplifying func-
tion if the adjective is more prominent than the adverb prosodically and a downtoning function in the reverse situation (Levshina 2014: 110; see Claudi 2006: 366 for a similar point about *ganz* and adjectives with a positive meaning). However, we can only guess how online and literary language is intended intonationally (potential cues like capitalization and bold face do not appear in our data and are open to interpretation at any rate). We also do not have access to the sound recordings of all of our speech corpora and, to our knowledge, they do not even exist for our Afrikaans material. To keep the analysis comparable across languages, we

therefore only look at the transcripts here.

4.2 Results

Figure 3 provides, for every language, the proportions of amplified, "vaguely intensified" and downtoned adjectives, in each of the three discourse type samples and in total.
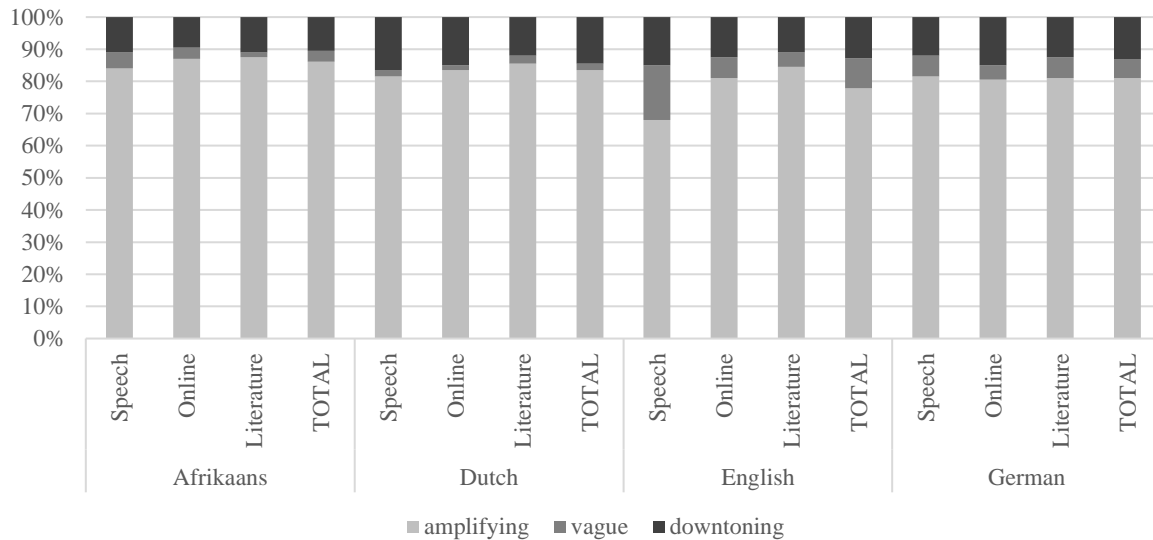

Figure 3: Functions of intensification

Stratton (2020: 209) argues, based on his own corpus study of German and on others' research into English, that both languages favor amplifying adjectives over downtoning them. It is clear from Figure 3 that our more comparable data on predicative adjectives corroborates his claim and that it can be extended to Afrikaans and Dutch. Excluding the vague hits, which Stratton (2020: 200) does not seem to take into account, we can observe that, across all discourse types, German adjectives are amplified in 86.02% of cases, English in 85.85%, Afrikaans in 89.14% and Dutch in 85.20% (counting the vague hits, the respective percentages are 81.00%, 77.83%, 86.17% and 83.50%). There is thus a strong overall preference in the West Germanic languages for amplification. A possible reason for this result is not easy to find, though. As Stratton (2020: 204) points out, the idea, for instance, that their "speakers prefer to amplify the quality denoted by an adjective because they are optimistic; that is, they wish to make the adjective semantically more positive" has little merit, since they "amplify the meaning of adjectives with negative semantic prosody" too. Any attempt at an explanation should probably wait for more research into other (non-European) languages anyhow, to see whether the preference is specific to West Germanic or perhaps of a cross-linguistic nature. A final comment necessary here concerns the proportions of downtoning in our data (e.g. 13.98% in German, without the vague hits), which are much lower than those in other work (e.g. 33.00% in Stratton 2020: 200). This discrepancy may partially be due to the use of different corpora but we believe that it results primarily from our decision – rare in the relevant literature – to include in our study periphrastic constructions and synthetic forms, of which 97.57% have an amplifying function.

To get a more fine-grained picture of adjectival intensification's functions in West Germanic, we also plot a conditional inference tree (see Section 3.2 for information). Figure 4 has intensifying function (amplifying, downtoning, vague) as the dependent variable and language, discourse type and polarity (positive, negative) as the independent variables (form is found to have no statistically significant impact).
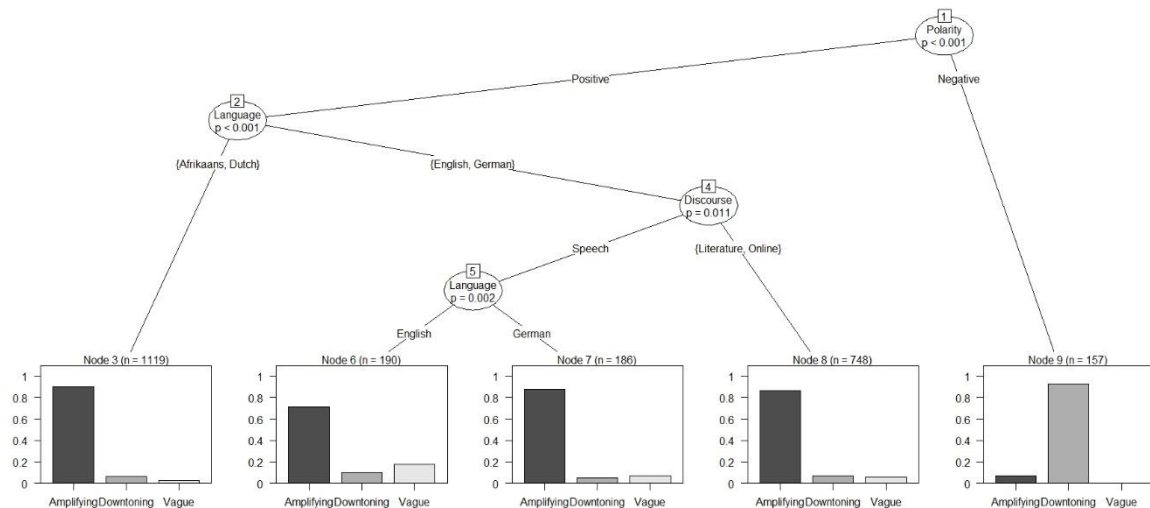
Figure 4: First conditional inference tree for functions of intensification

The first juncture in this tree (node 1) sets negative contexts apart from positive ones. Polarity is, in other words, the strongest predictor for the functions of adjectival intensification: negated intensifiers (e.g. 'not very') primarily serve a downtoning function (92.99%) whereas positive intensifiers mainly express amplification (87.38%). Of note is that polarity does not appear to differentiate languages or discourse types. This fact is not surprising, since negated intensifiers are rare across the board, i.e. 6.67% of cases in Afrikaans, 6.83% in Dutch, 5.67% in English and 7.00% in German. Accordingly, the conditional inference tree in Figure 5, without polarity as an independent variable, has the same structure as the tree under the second juncture (node 2) in Figure 4.
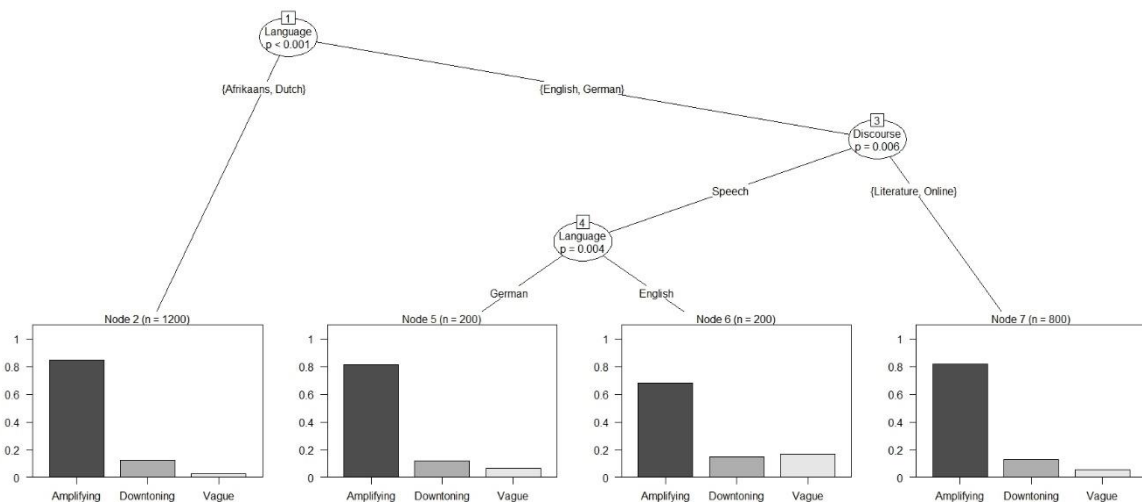

Figure 5: Second conditional inference tree for functions of intensification

The first juncture in Figure 5 (node 1) distinguishes Afrikaans and Dutch on the one hand from English and German on the other hand. The former have very similar overall functional profiles (Afrikaans: 86.17% amplifying, 10.50% downtoning, 3.33% vague; Dutch: 83.50% amplifying, 14.50% downtoning, 2.00% vague). The same holds for the latter but the numbers of amplified cases are generally lower and the number of vague instances generally higher (English: 77.83% amplifying, 12.83% downtoning, 9.33% vague; German: 81.00% amplifying, 13.17% downtoning, 5.83% vague). The second juncture (node 3) reveals that, unlike Afrikaans and Dutch, English and German exhibit further differentiation, between discourse types to be exact.

Their functional profiles are comparable in online and literary language but diverge in speech, as the third juncture (node 5) reveals. English has fewer amplified adjectives in this type of discourse than German (68.00% versus 81.50%) and more downtoned ones (15.00% versus 12.00%) and especially more vague ones (17.00% versus 6.50%). In short, English in particular can be argued to stand out here, with its relatively high number of adjectives in spoken language whose intensification is vague.

An important question to address, though, is whether the findings in Figure 5 could not just be an artefact of the analysis. The answer is, in our view, negative. Focusing on the intensifiers that are potentially ambiguous (see Section 4.1), i.e. all instances of all forms of which at least one hit is classified as vague, we do observe some variation but the ambiguous intensifiers in Afrikaans (*nogal, redelik, taamlik*) are actually analyzed as vague more often (62.50%) than those in Dutch (*best, nogal, redelijk, behoorlijk*; 54.55%) and English (*pretty, quite, rather*; 54.37%), which in turn are classified as vague more frequently than the ambiguous intensifiers in German (*eher, ganz, ziemlich*; 42.17%). When we consider the frequencies of these intensifiers in our data, it becomes clear that English and German just employ them more often (103 and 83 cases respectively) than Afrikaans (32) and Dutch (22). Moreover, while they are fairly evenly distributed across the three discourse types in German (29 in speech, 22 in online language and 32 in literature), ambiguous intensifiers are especially common in spoken language in English (54 versus 21 in online language and 28 in literature). The intensification of adjectives in English speech is therefore more likely to be vague and it is tempting to assume that it is not accidental. Using ambiguous intensifiers may be a way for speakers to avoid disclosing their actual evaluation of the extent to which some adjectival quality applies and/or to avoid forcing it onto others (cf. Levshina 2014: 110 on *quite*). These possible motivations fit well with characteristics of British English politeness such as "emotional reserve" and "non-imposition" (Culpeper et al. 2019: 196-197).

From the discussion in the present section, we can draw the following conclusions. First, there exists a strong preference in the intensification of predicative adjectives for amplification not just in English and German but also in Afrikaans and Dutch. Second, this preference appears to be even more prominent in the latter languages than in the former and than in English speech particularly. Third, and most tentatively, the comparatively higher number of "vaguely intensified" adjectives in English speech, related to its higher frequency of ambiguous intensifiers, may reflect a politeness culture that values indirectness.

5   Conclusions

With this article, we hope to have shown that the recurrent claim that German tends to employ synthetic forms for adjectival intensification is not supported by the data. In actual usage, the language clearly favors analytic means and adverbial modifiers in particular. It closely resembles its relatives Afrikaans, Dutch and English in this regard. We have nevertheless found differences in the extent to which these West Germanic languages avail themselves of synthetic forms of adjectival intensification but they do not fully match earlier hypotheses. Dutch is neither more like English, which does almost exclusively employ analytic means, nor in between English and German. It is comparable in its relative reliance on synthetic forms in usage, which manifests itself especially in literature, to German and Afrikaans and may even exhibit a wider range of such means at its disposal than the other two languages.

While our findings go against previous claims, the position of Dutch within West Germanic, i.e. on the side of German, should perhaps not come as such a surprise. Van Haeringen (1956: 58-62) already pointed out in his pioneering work on Dutch between German and English that the two continental languages are more similar to each other in word formation, surfacing in the affixed and compound adjectives here, than to their relative across the Channel.

Dutch and German, as well as Afrikaans, have not experienced the same kind of loss of affixes as English has and, in these languages, affixation remains a highly productive pattern that continues to recruit new members. Their compounds can be argued to constitute a more distinctive pattern too, displaying more prosodic and morphological cohesion than English ones (e.g. Van Goethem 2014: 34-36). Dutch and German, and also Afrikaans, clearly draw on these resources when intensifying adjectives. The fact that they mainly seem to do so in literary texts could be taken as confirmation of the primacy of analytic means, in less planned and deliberated forms of expression, in these languages. It suggests at the same time that discourse type is one of the factors – alongside, for instance, expressivity – potentially motivating the choice in an individual language between analytic and synthetic means. More research into such factors is needed, though.

Furthermore, we hope to have shown that an earlier assertion that both English and German favor amplifying adjectives over downtoning them is supported by the data, which is more comparable and formally diverse than that of previous work. We have found the same preference – and even somewhat more prominently – in Afrikaans and Dutch, which makes it a pan-West Germanic tendency and raises the question whether it is perhaps a truly cross-linguistic one. Answering it would require the in-depth examination of many other (non-European) languages and is thus beyond the present article's scope. Still, we have seen some variation in our languages of study already, with English speech in particular containing more ambiguous intensifiers and therefore more adjectives whose intensification is vague. A very tentative explanation relates this fact to the importance of indirectness in British English politeness. The issue deserves to be studied in more detail, however. Such research could also consider refining the functional analysis of adjectival intensification. Subtler distinctions (e.g. approximators, compromisers, diminishers, minimizers) are bound to make the categorization of data more difficult and uncertain but our three-way classification has probably failed to capture some of the more fine-grained (dis)similarities between the West Germanic languages.

Two final comments are in order. First, this article has only looked at predicative adjectives. We do not expect the intensification of attributive ones in West Germanic to behave in a substantially different way but this assumption should be checked in follow-up research. Second, our study is based on samples. It thus says little about the absolute frequencies with which, for instance, the intensification of adjectives is achieved through affixes or adjectives are downtoned. So if German adjectives are intensified much more often than Dutch ones, it is possible, for example, that the exact number of compounds in a corpus of German is actually higher than that in a comparable corpus of Dutch. We again do not expect the rates at which adjectives are intensified to vary so widely across West Germanic that our findings would be invalidated but this assumption deserves to be tested in the future. Note for now that Tagliamonte (2016: 21) reports a rate of intensification for English ranging between 22% and 41% and Stratton (2020: 197) one of 37% for German (there are considerable differences between the corpora used for these figures, though).

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