

English(es) on the Move

What we can learn about language change from variation in amplifier use

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Slides available at <https://github.com/MartinSchweinberger/EngLingInnsbruck2023>





Motivation: what should I present?

- **A corpus-based acoustic analysis of vowel production by learners and L1-speakers of English**
 - Large scale, acoustic analyses of vowels among Japanese and Chinese English learners
 - Innovative, future-oriented: will continue becoming a bigger topic (Ulrike Jessner-Schmid)
- **Utterance-final *or* as a face-saving strategy in Australian English**
 - Corpus-based pragmatic analysis of utterance final *or* in spoken Australian English based on 4 AusE corpora (Anna Islentyeva | Monika Kirner-Ludwig)
 - Combination of computation and qualitative, interpretative work
- **Vulgarity and swearing on social media**
 - Computational, quantitative analysis of large social media data sets
 - Timely, skill-exhibition, relevant for the research area *Kulturelle Begegnungen – Kulturelle Konflikte* (Monika Kirner-Ludwig | Reinhard Heuberger)

English(es) on the Move: what we can learn about language change from variation in amplifier use

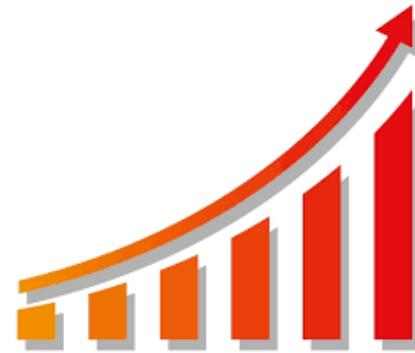
Timeline | Table of Contents

- Background
- Research Gaps | Research Questions
- Methodology (Data and Analysis)
- Results
- Discussion and Outlook



Background

What is adjective amplification?



Intensification is a linguistic category that is related to the semantic category of degree and ranges from low (downtoning) to high (amplifiers) (Quirk et al. 1985: 589–590)

Amplifiers

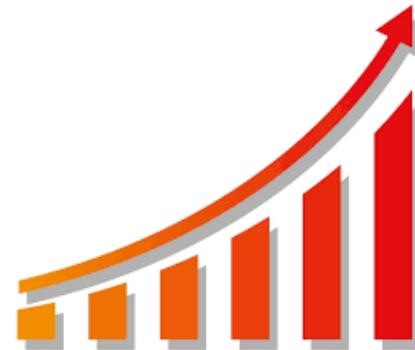
- Boosters, e.g. *very*
- Maximizers, e.g. *completely*

Downtoners

- Approximators, e.g. *almost*
- Compromisers, e.g. *more or less*
- Diminishers, e.g. *partly*
- Minimizers, e.g. *hardly*

Background

What is adjective amplification?



Adjective amplification is a common subtype of intensification where the meaning of an adjective is scaled up (amplified or boosted) through linguistic means (Quirk et al. 1985: 589–590)

- **Prefixation** (e.g., *ubergood* is an amplified version of the base form *good*)
- **Suffixation** (e.g., -ass as in *coldass*)
- **Suprasegmental** phonological features such as prosody or stress
- **Stylistic** means, e.g., hyperbole, litotes (e.g., *not bad*), and rhetorical questions (see Bolinger 1972)
- **Lexical** via degree adverbs that scale upwards such as *really*, *very*, or *so*

Background

What is adjective amplification?

Two syntactic functions (positions)

- **Predicative**

- (1) I think he 's *really nice* (ICE-PHI:S1A-083#222:1:C)
- (2) It 's *so bad* (ICE-PHI:S1A-013#204:1:A)

- **Attributive**

- (3) It is a *very good* training (ICE-HK:S1A-022#433:1:A)
- (4) But it's a *completely different* story (ICE-IND:S1A-073#48:1:A)

Background

Why study adjective amplification?

Adjective amplification is...

- major area of grammatical change (cf. Brinton and Arnovick 2006: 441): found to be a site of **“fevered invention and competition”** that would be hard to come by elsewhere
(Bolinger 1972: 18)
- crucial for **“social and emotional expression”** of speakers (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003: 258)
- linguistic subsystem which allows **precise circumscription** of a variable context
(Labov 1972, 1966: 49)

Adjective amplification represents an ideal case for testing mechanisms underlying language change!

Background

What do we know about adjective amplification?

- **Substantial amount of corpus-based research** on intensification
(e.g. Aijmer 2011, 2018; Fuchs 2016, 2017; Núñez Pertejo and Palacios 2014; Palacios and Núñez Pertejo 2012) but mostly either focused on individual intensifiers or without regard to the intensified adjectives
- Analyses have investigated amplifier use in **different languages** (e.g., Stratton & Sundquist 2022 for Norwegian, Stratton 2020b for German, Roles & Enghels 2020 for Spanish, or Zellermayer 1991 for Hebrew), **across regional varieties** (see next slide), **in learner language** (e.g., Schweinberger 2020a, 2020b; Czerwionka & Olson 2020), and **over time as well as in different periods** (Stratton 2022; Méndez-Naya 2003)
- Over the last 5 or so years, the **role that adjectives play** in amplification has come more into focus (e.g. Schweinberger 2017; Wagner 2017a,b)
- Amplification (and particularly the use of innovative variants such as *so* and *really*) are **associated with teenage talk** and young(ish) (female) speakers (Bauer and Bauer 2002; D'Arcy 2015; Macaulay 2006; Tagliamonte 2006, 2008) -

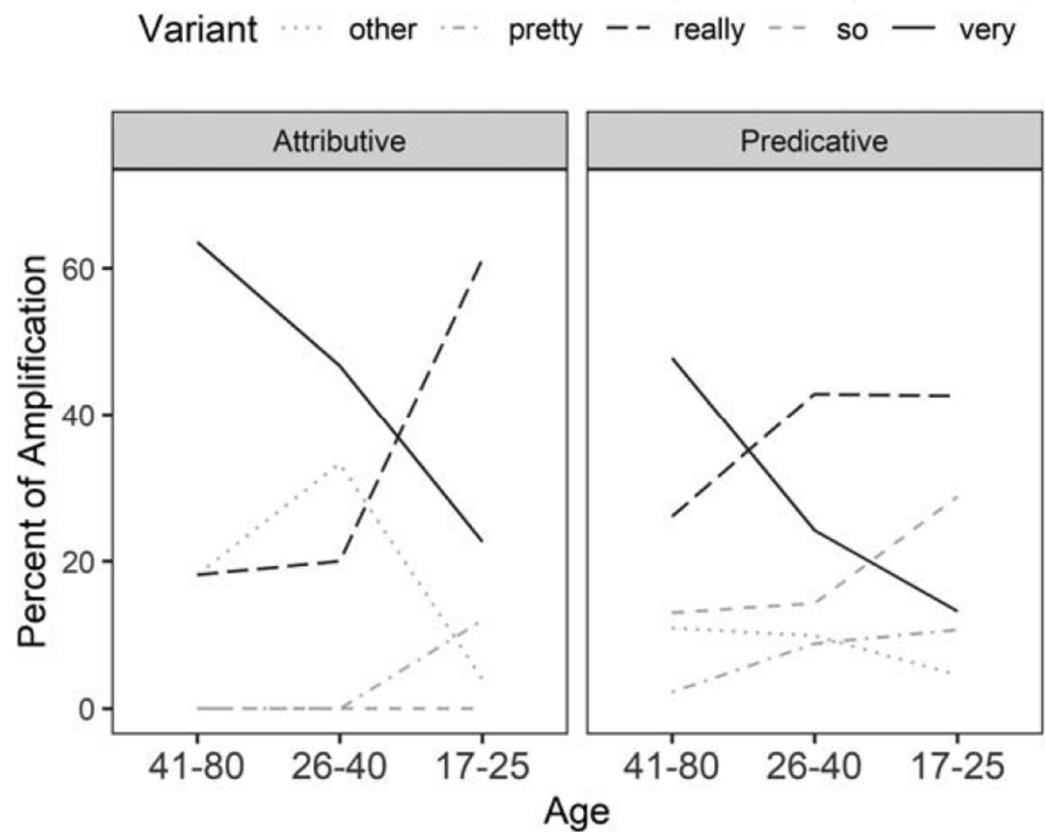
Background

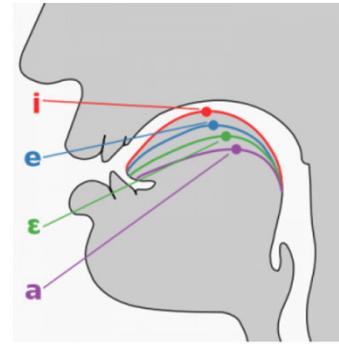
What do we know about adjective amplification?

- **Most consistent finding** in L1 varieties ***really replaces very*** as the dominant amplifier (lexical replacement) in various speech communities

(see D'Arcy [2015] for New Zealand English; Schweinberger [2021] for Australian English; Ito & Tagliamonte [2003], Xiao & Tao [2007], and Barnfield & Buchstaller [2010] for (north-east) British English; Tagliamonte [2008] and Tagliamonte & Denis [2014] for Canadian English; Macaulay [2002] and [2006] for Scottish English, Schweinberger [2022] for Irish English.

Figure 1:
Amplifier use across apparent time in Australian English
(Schweinberger 2021:14)





Research Gaps | Research Questions

Problems and gaps in previous research

- Very little research on amplifier use in Asian Englishes
(notable exceptions are Fuchs & Gut 2016, Fuchs 2022, and Funke & Bernaisch 2022)
- We do not know if the amplifier systems in Asian Englishes are undergoing change
- More generally though, we lack an understanding of what factors are at play during different stages of change!

Current study

- **Multivariate, variationist analysis** of amplification in **Hong Kong English (HKE)**, **Philippine English (PhiE)**, and **Indian English (IndE)** that considers various intra- and extra-linguistics factors

RQ1: What is the **structure of the amplifier systems** in HKE, IndE, and PhiE?

RQ2: Are the amplifier systems in these **varieties** **undergoing change**?

Methodology (Data | Analysis)

Data

- ***International Corpus English (ICE)*** (Greenbaum 1991)
 - Components: **Hong Kong, India, Philippines**
 - Consistent design and annotation (comparability!) plus informal conversation
 - Accompanied by biodata of speakers (extremely interesting resource for variationist analyses)
- Final data set

Variety	Speakers	Adjectives	other (N)	really (N)	so (N)	very (N)
HKE	162	1,562	4.5% (N=71)	10.9% (N=170)	15.3% (N=239)	69.3% (N=1082)
IndE	196	916	8.5% (N=78)	4% (N=37)	14.3% (N=131)	73.1% (N=670)
PhiE	168	818	4.6% (N=38)	21.9% (N=179)	37.7% (N=308)	35.8% (N=293)
Total	526	3,296	5.7% (N=187)	11.7% (N=386)	20.6% (N=678)	62% (N=2045)

Table 1: Overview of the final data set.

What is Data Processing?



EDUCBA

Methodology (Data | Analysis)

Data Processing (all in R 4.2.2, R Core team [2022] in RStudio [Posit Team 2023])

- **Part-of-speech tagged** (udpipe package) spoken private dialogue section of each component
- Retrieved all **adjectives** (PoS-tag JJ) and determined whether an adjective had been **amplified** (member of a predefined set of amplifiers)
- **Sentiment Analysis** of adjectives (*negative, neutral, positive*) using the crowd-sourced *word-emotion association dictionary* (see Mohammad & Turney 2013)
- **Priming**: determined if the same amplifier type had been used to amplify the preceding adjective
- **Removed**. . .
 - **negated** adjectives
 - **comparative** and superlative forms
 - adjectives that were **preceded by downtoners**
 - **strange** forms (e.g. *much, many*)

What is Data Processing?



EDUCBA

Methodology (Data | Analysis)

Data Processing (all in R 4.2.2, R Core team [2022] in RStudio [Posit Team 2023])

- Determined the **syntactic context** of the adjective (**attributive**: *the nice man* | **predicative**: *The man is nice.*)
- Determined the token **frequency** of all adjective types (Tagliamonte and Roberts 2005)
- **Gradability**: likelihood of the occurrence in comparative contexts against occurrence in non-comparative contexts (*pregnant, Chinese*: not gradable | *nice, tall*: gradable)
- **Semantic type** of adjective (simplified version of Dixon 1977): **evaluative** (e.g., good, little, difficult), **descriptive** (e.g., old, young, simple), **relational** (e.g., first, new, next), **membership** (e.g., local, national, british), **dimension** (e.g., small, large, long), **other** (unclassifiable adjectives such as *illiterate, unavailable, heterogeneous*).
- **Manual cross-evaluation** of automated categorisation
- Added metadata and **speaker information** (variety, age, gender)

Methodology (Data | Analysis)

Statistical Analysis

- **Conditional Inference Trees (CIT)**

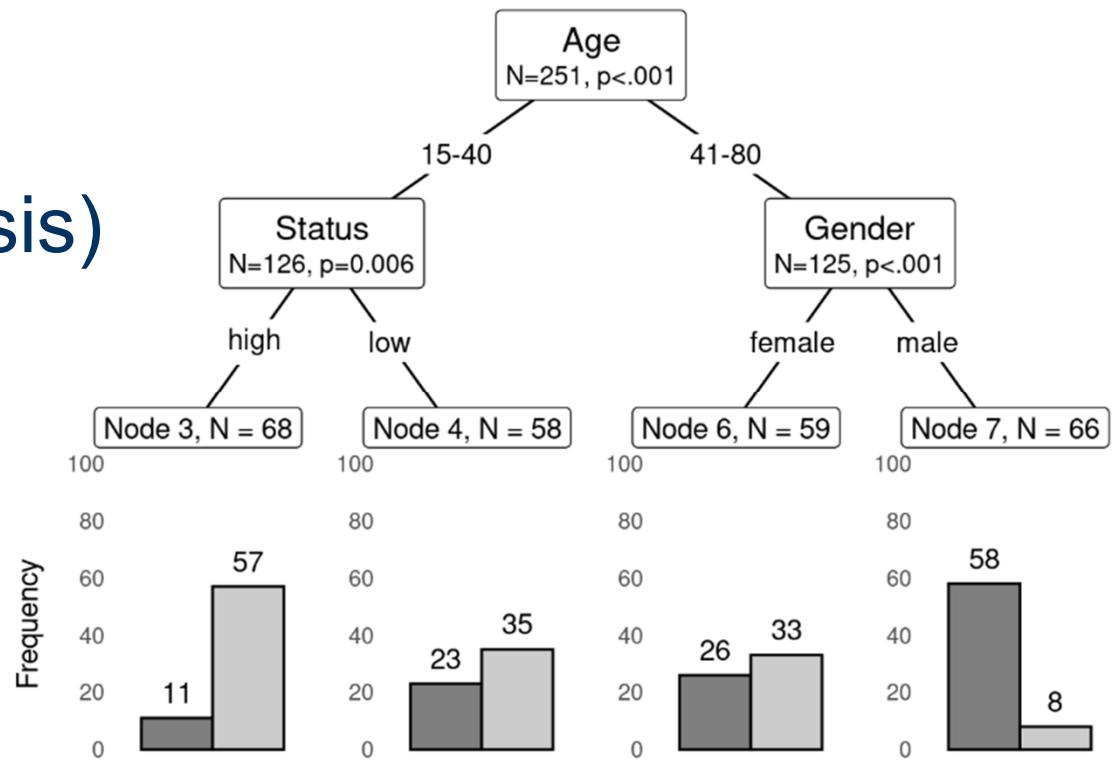
(see Schweinberger 2023, Hothorn & Zeileis 2015)

- **Advantages**

- Multivariate statistical method
- Easy to implement and interpret
- Works particularly well for
 - Complex unbalanced data sets
 - Higher-order interactions (effects depend on the presence of other factors)

- **Problems**

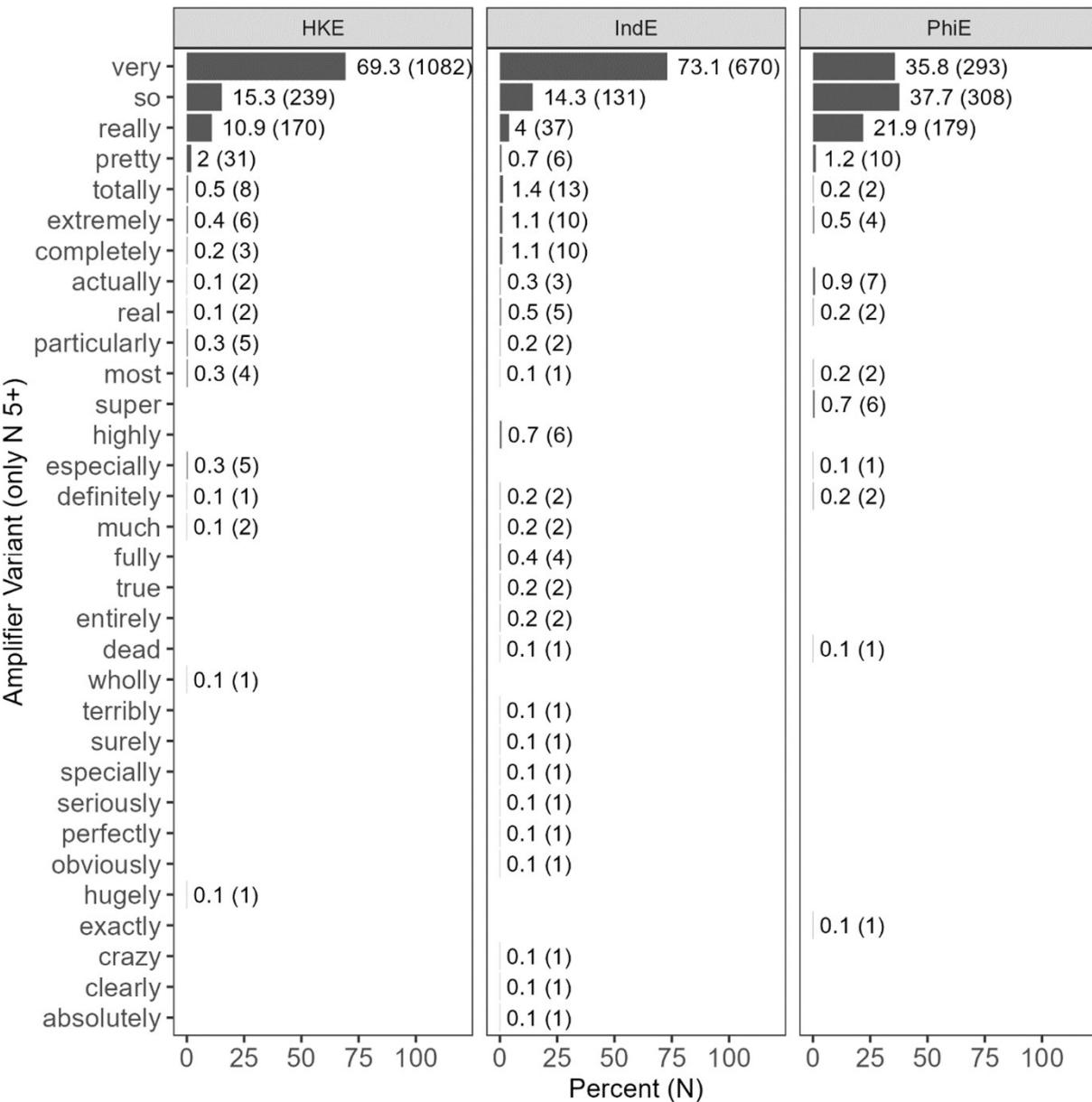
- Not as well-known as (mixed-effects) regressions
- Overfitting (generalisability can be limited)



Results

Descriptives: amplifiers across varieties

- The broadest range of amplifier use is attested for IndE
- very*, *so*, and *really* are clearly the most frequent (dominating) amplifiers in all varieties.
- very* is dominating the amplifiers systems of HKE and IndE.
- In PhiE, *very* is less frequent than *so* and *really* is about half as frequent as *so* (other amplifies are notably rare).

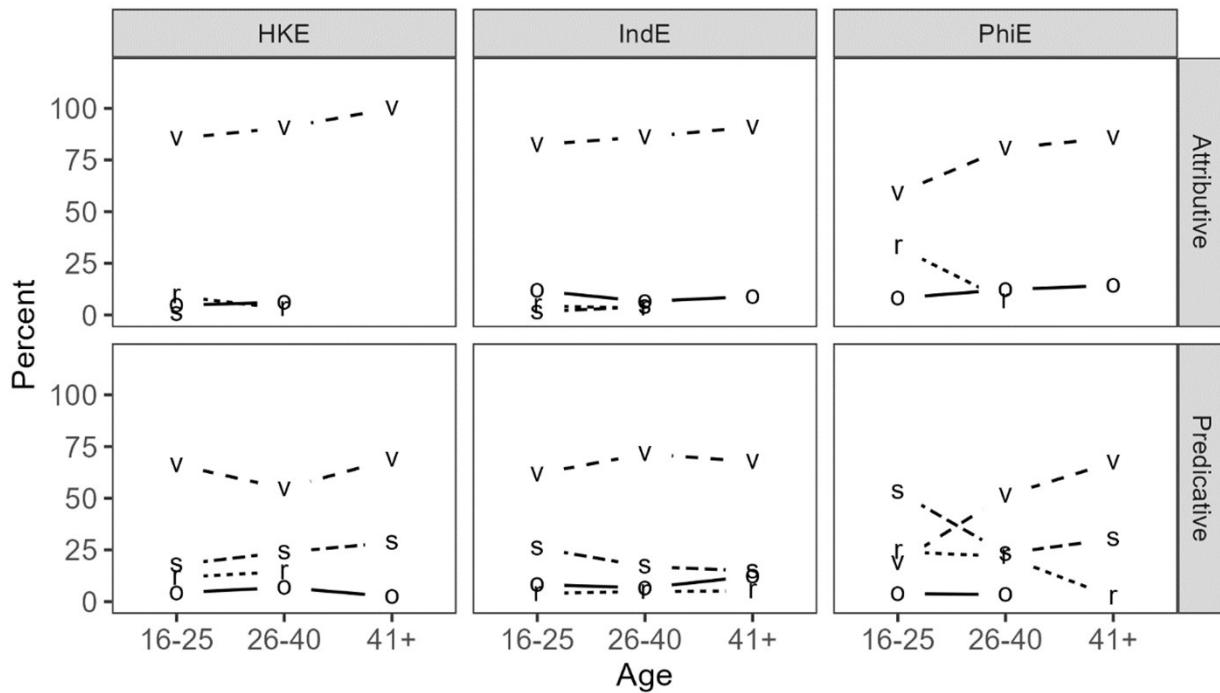
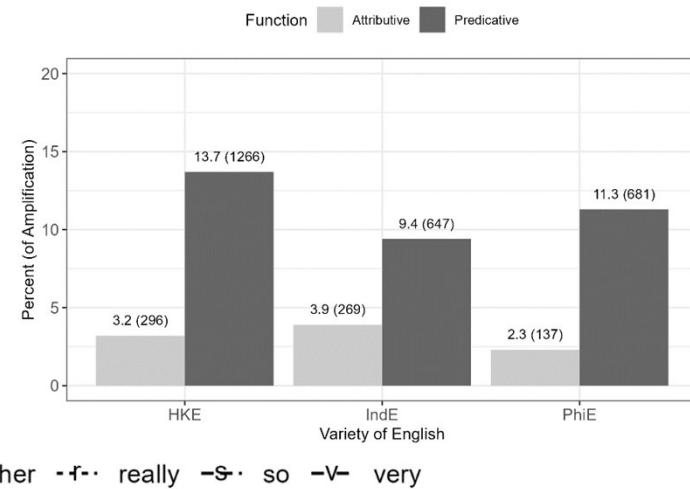


Results

Descriptives: amplifiers across varieties

- Amplification is more common in predicative contexts (*He is very nice.*)
- very* is clearly the dominant amplifier in HKE and IndE
- The amplifier system of PhiE is undergoing change in apparent time with *really* challenging *very* in attributive contexts and so dominating the system among younger speaker in predicative contexts.
- No or few signs of apparent time change in the amplifier systems of HKE and IndE.

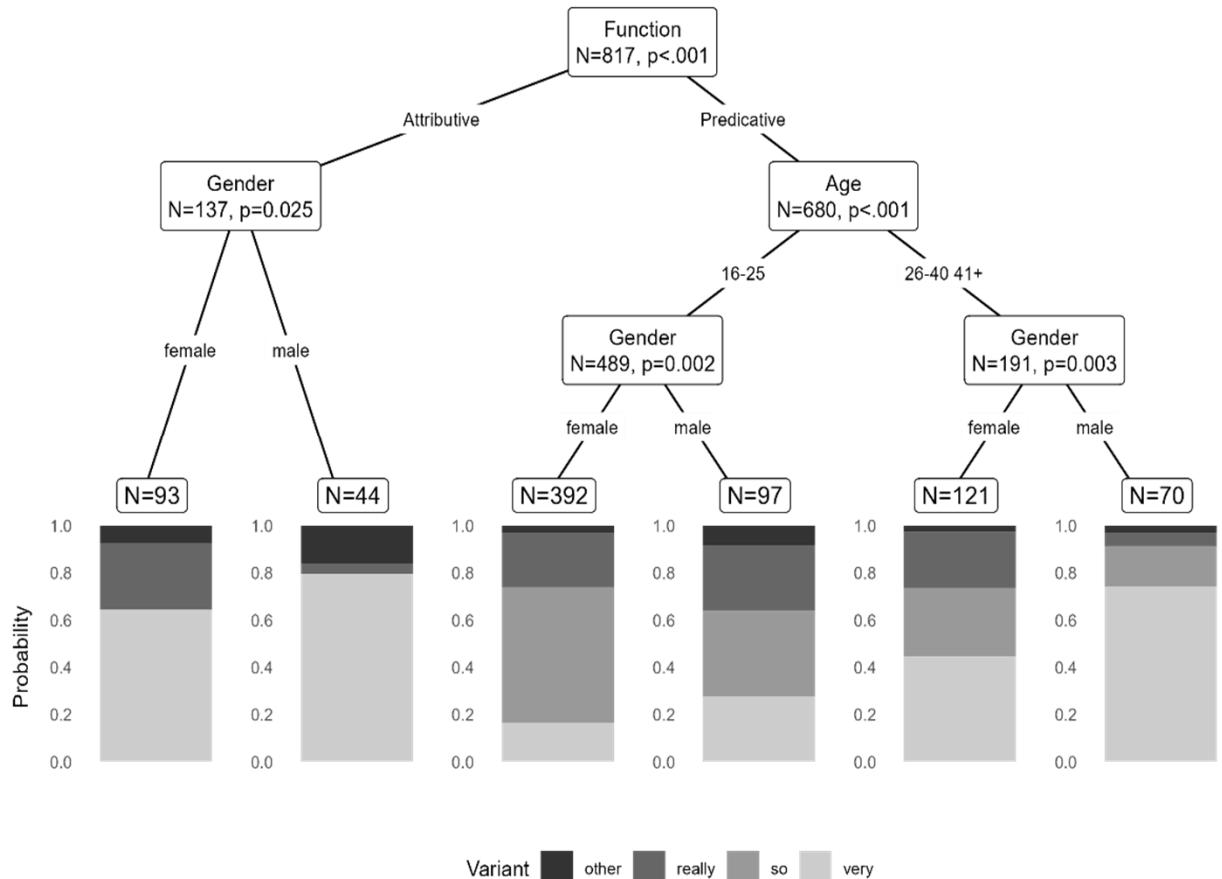
Right: Amplifiers are more common in predicative contexts in all varieties under investigation



Results

Philippine English

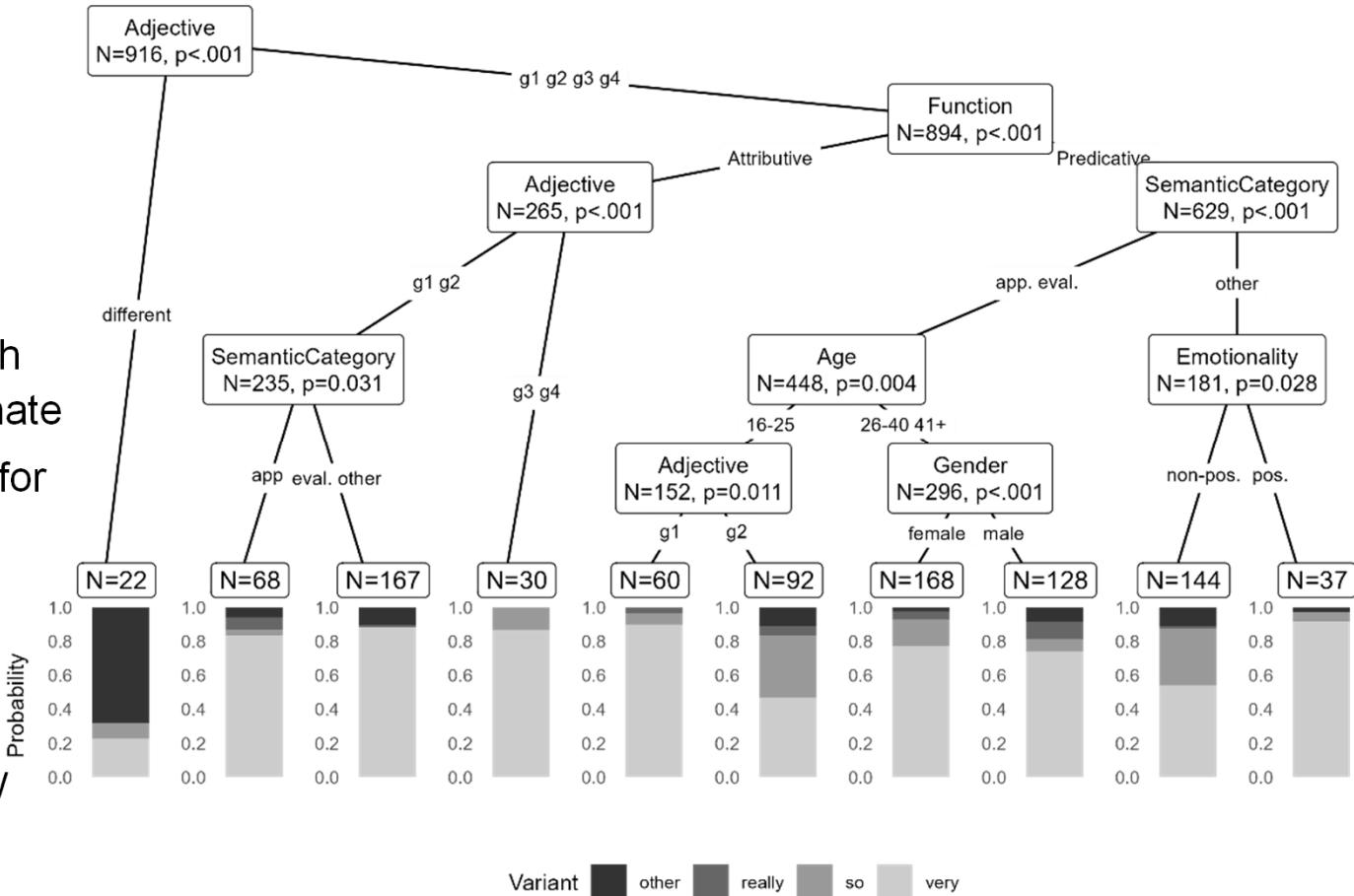
- Function most important predictor (unsurprising as *so* almost exclusively occurs in predicative contexts)
- Significant stratification along social dimensions! (extra-linguistic factors dominate)
- No significant impact of intra-linguistic factors
- *very* dominant only in attributive contexts and among older males.
- Substantive use of *really* and *so*.



Results

Indian English

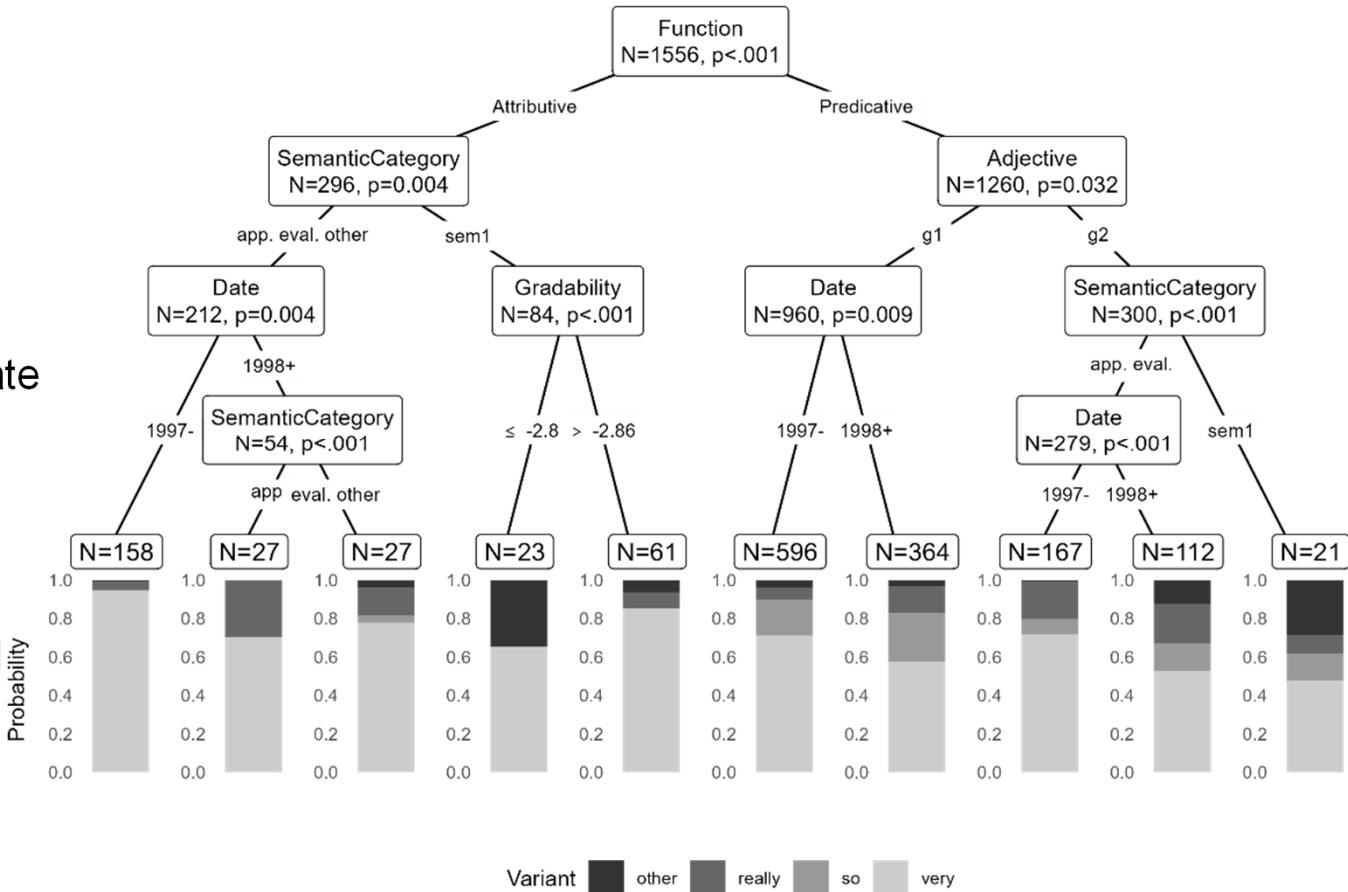
- More complex than PhiE
- Adjective most important predictor (due to *quite different*)
- Intra-linguistic factors associated with the semantics of the adjective dominate
- Extra-linguistic factors only relevant for very specific subgroups
- Notable dominance of *very* (with only 3 subgroups showing dominance of innovative variants)
- Use of *really* and *so* is comparatively rare.



Results

Hong Kong English

- In-between IndE and PhiE
- Function again most important factor
- Intra-linguistic factors associated with the semantics of the adjective dominate
- Signs of real-time change (date is an important factor indicating that the system has changed between data collection phases)
- Very is dominant but use of *really* and *so* is relatively common across subgroups
- Lack of social stratification (age and gender do not affect amplifier use)



Summary and Discussion

Main take aways

- Main amplifiers: **very, so, really** (others notably rare)
- **IndE**: no ongoing change: use is determined by language-internal factors!
- **PhiE**: apparent-time change and social stratification
- **HKE**: real-time change but use is determined intra-linguistically

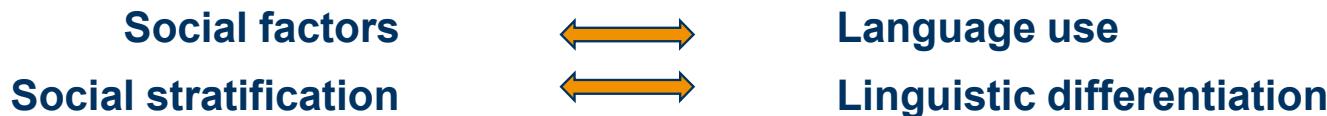
What does this mean?

Discussion

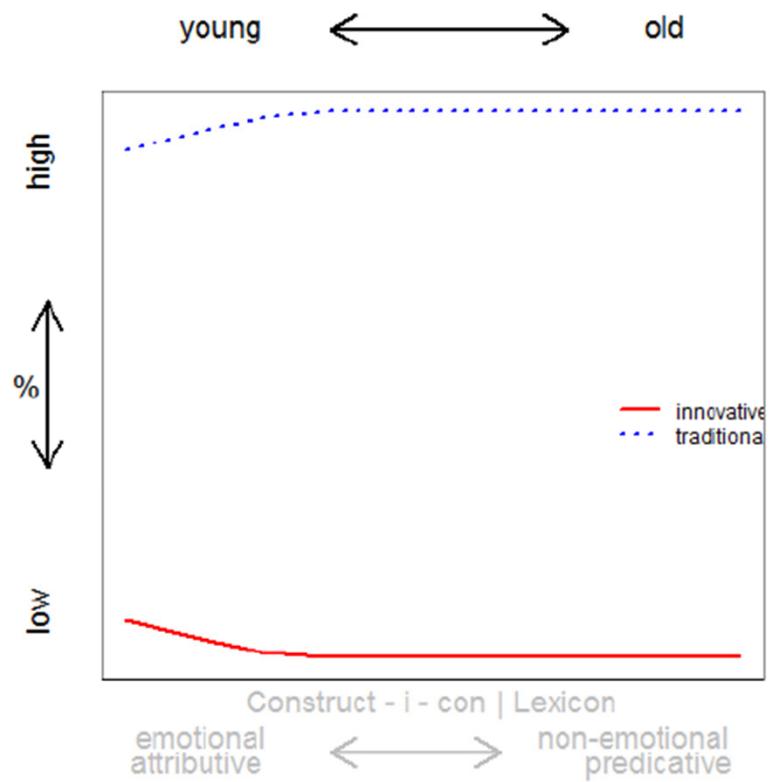
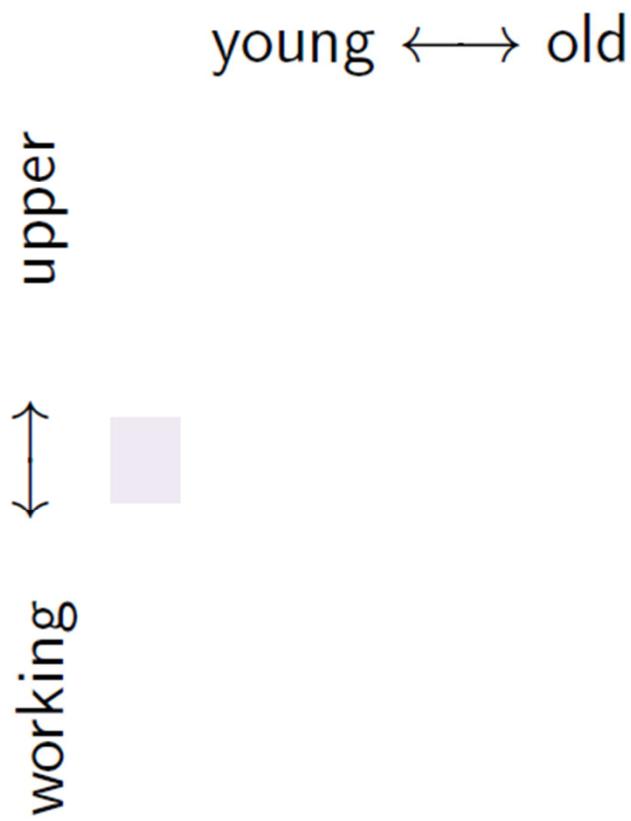
What is the bigger picture here?

Variationist Sociolinguistics

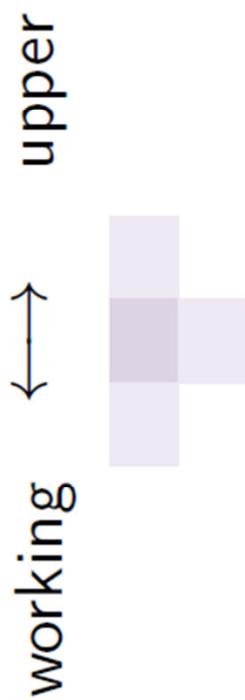
- Language is not homogeneous: variation is ubiquitous (see e.g. Labov [1994], 2001, 2011], Tagliamonte [2011])



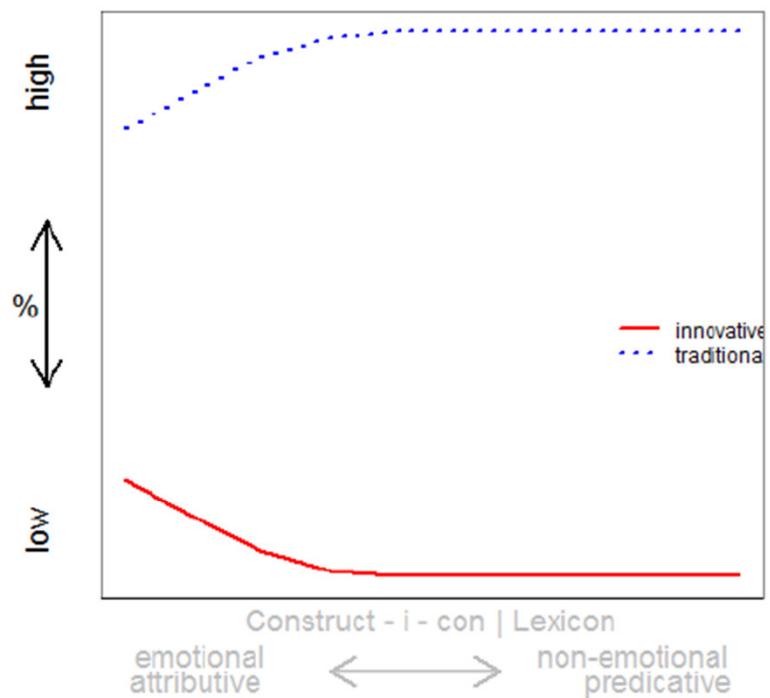
Linguistic variation not random
systematic correlation between certain social factors
(age, gender, class, ethnicity, etc.) and language use



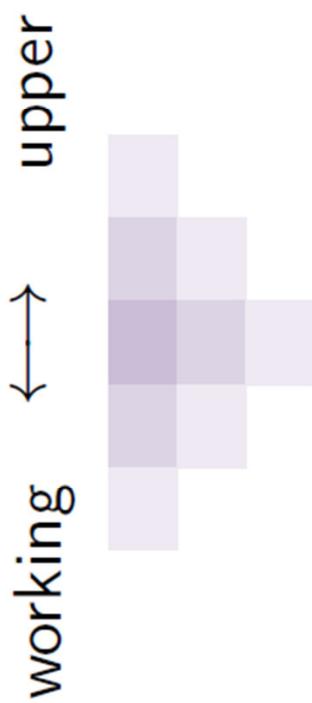
young \longleftrightarrow old



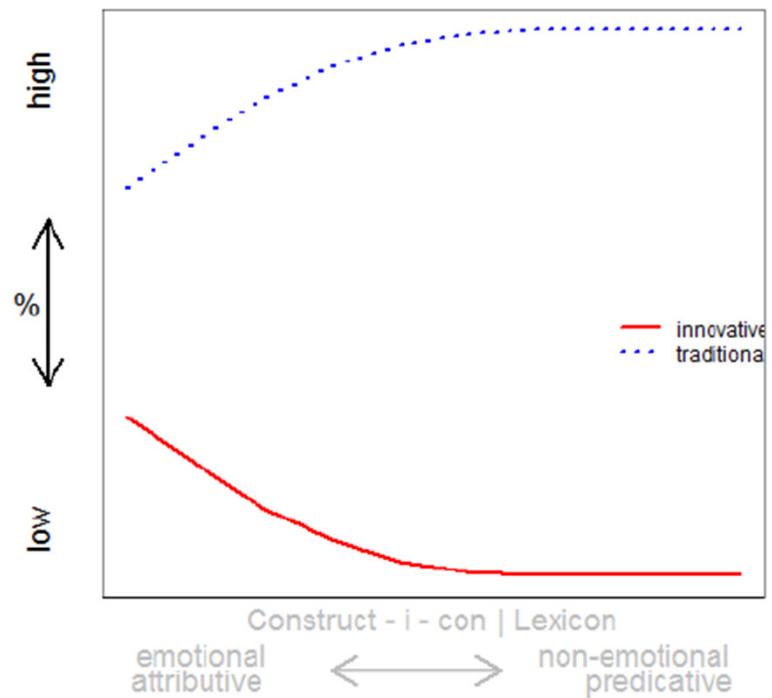
young \longleftrightarrow old

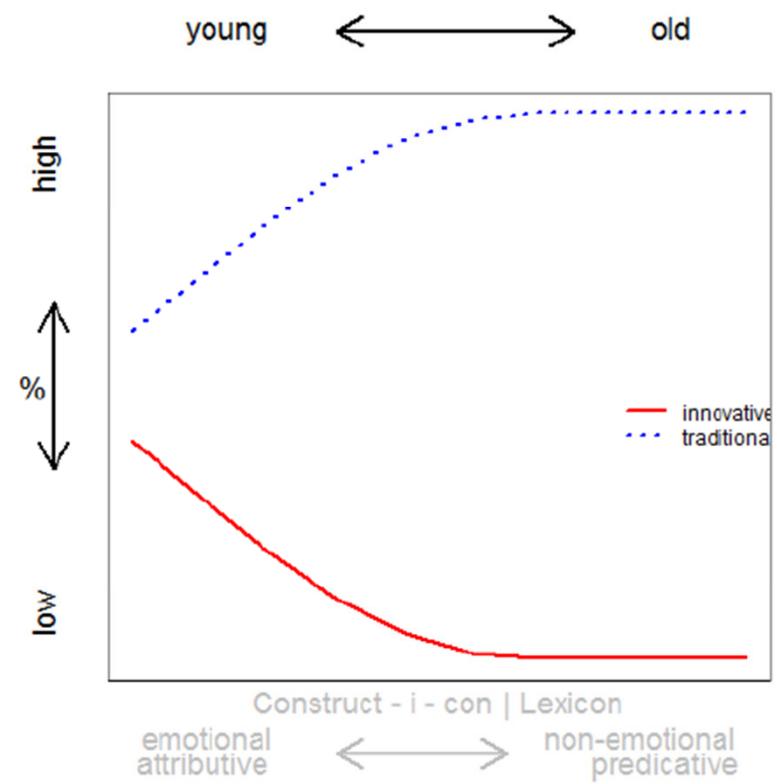
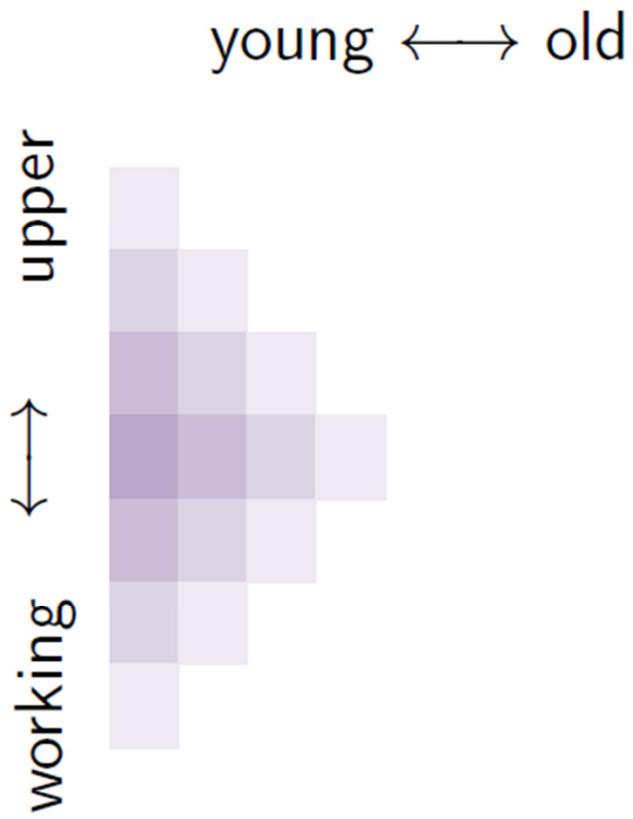


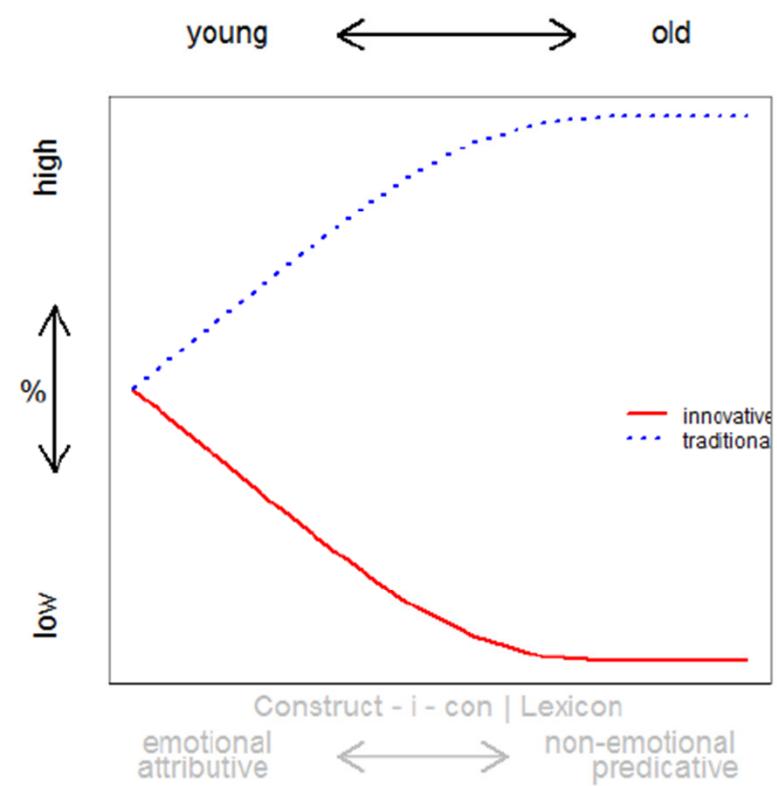
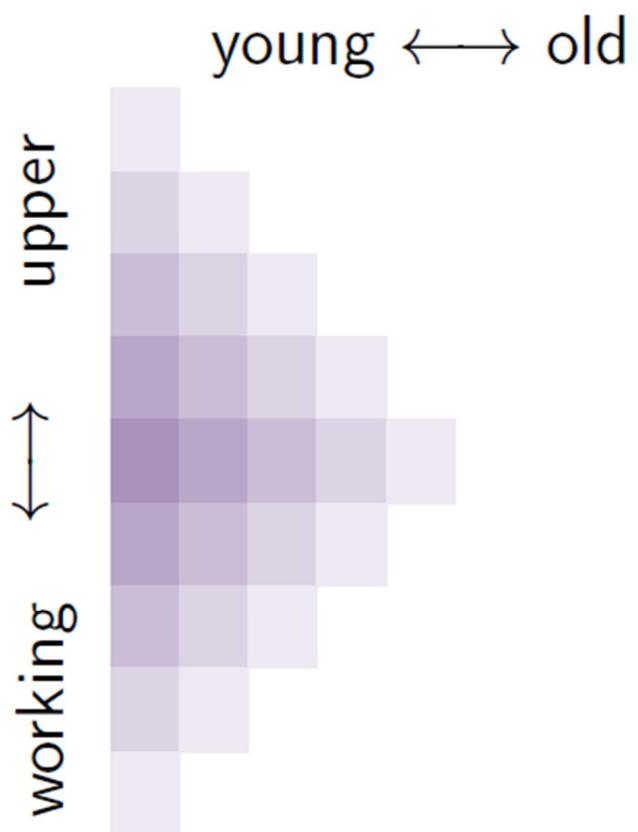
young ↔ old

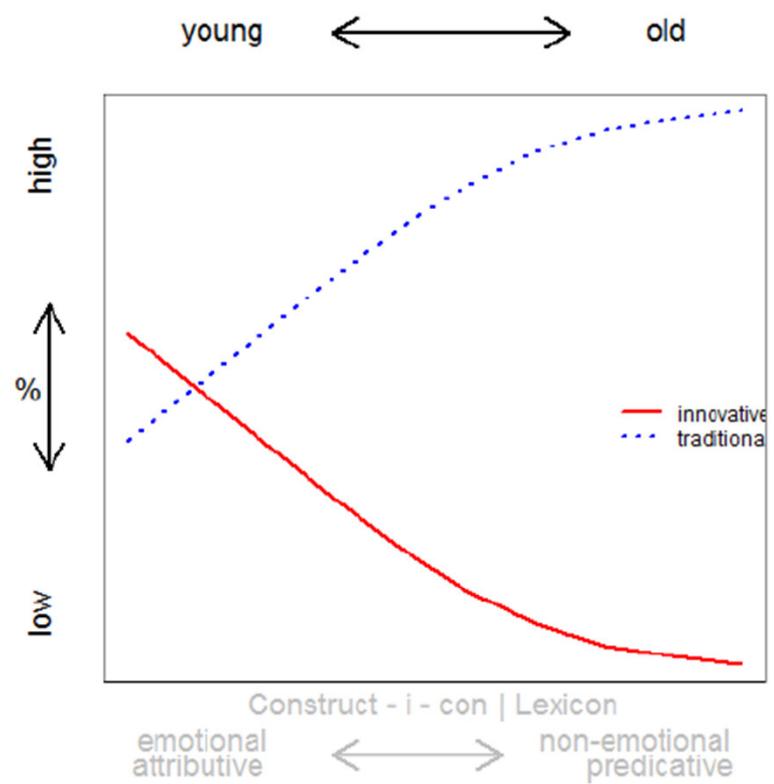
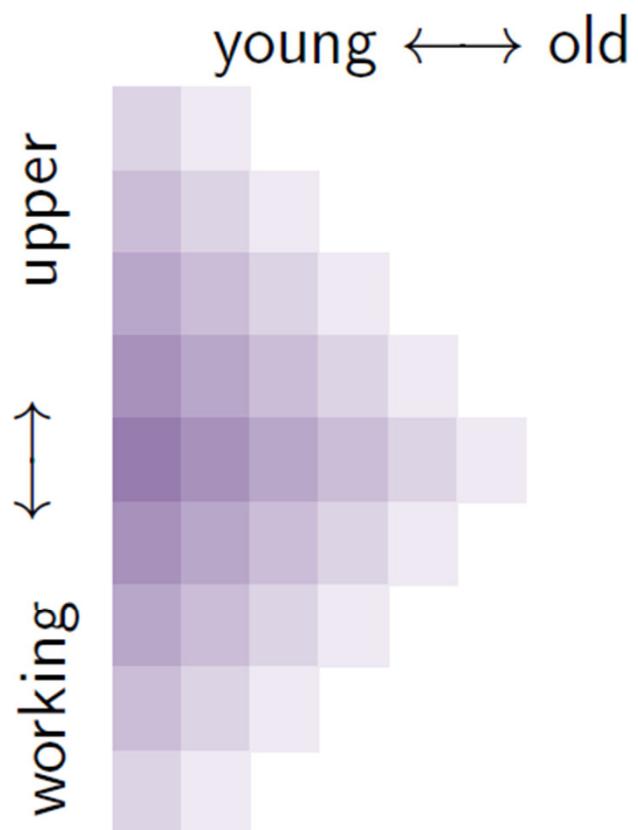


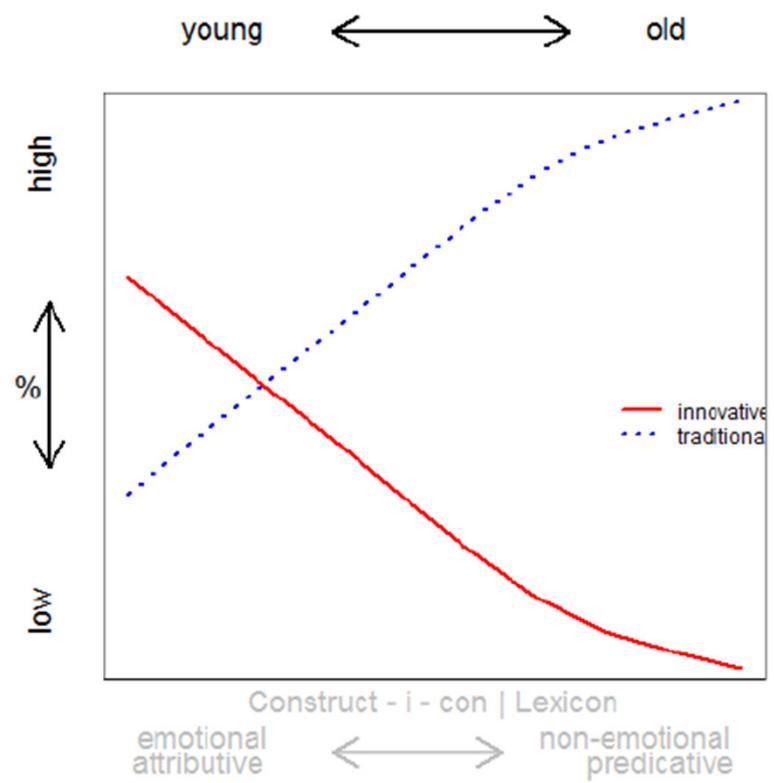
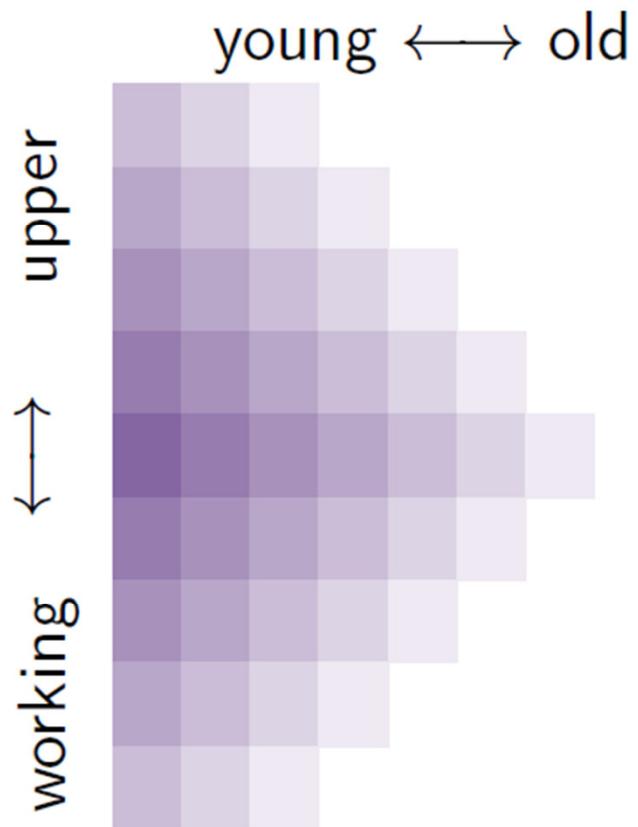
young → old

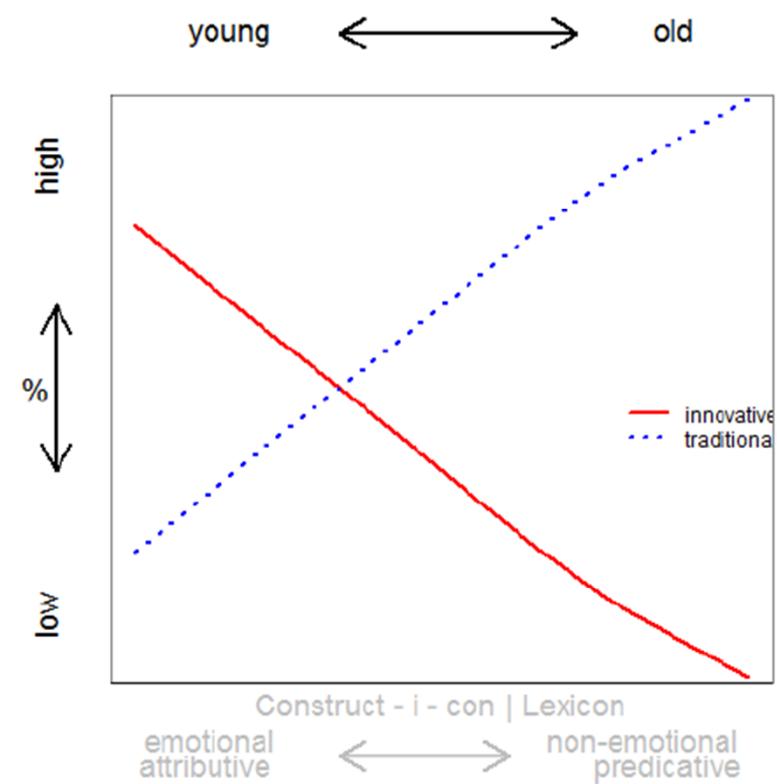
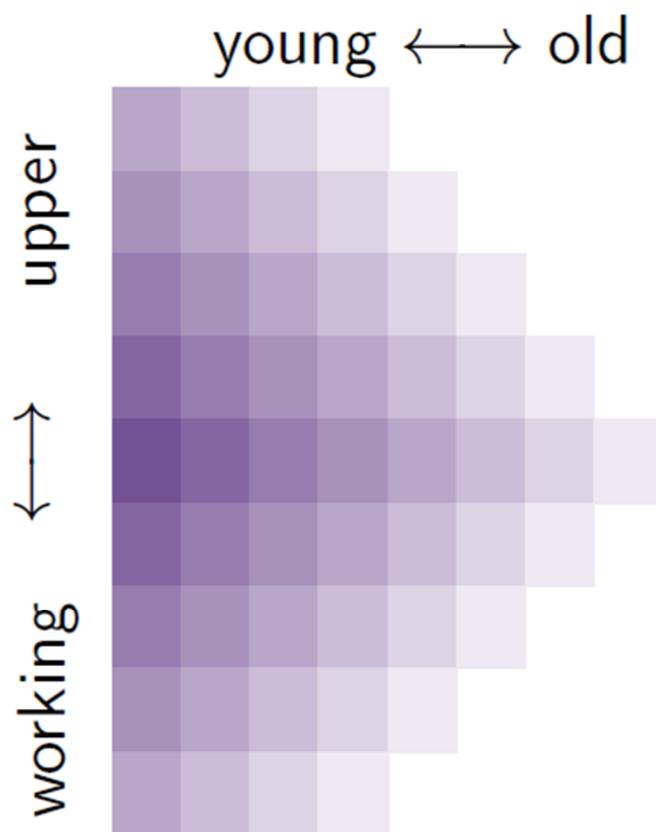


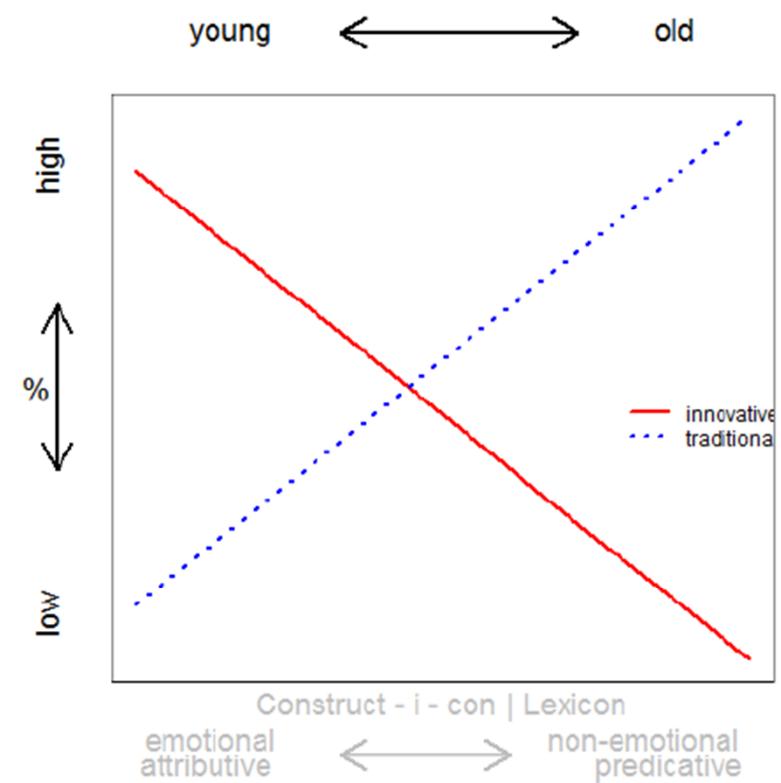
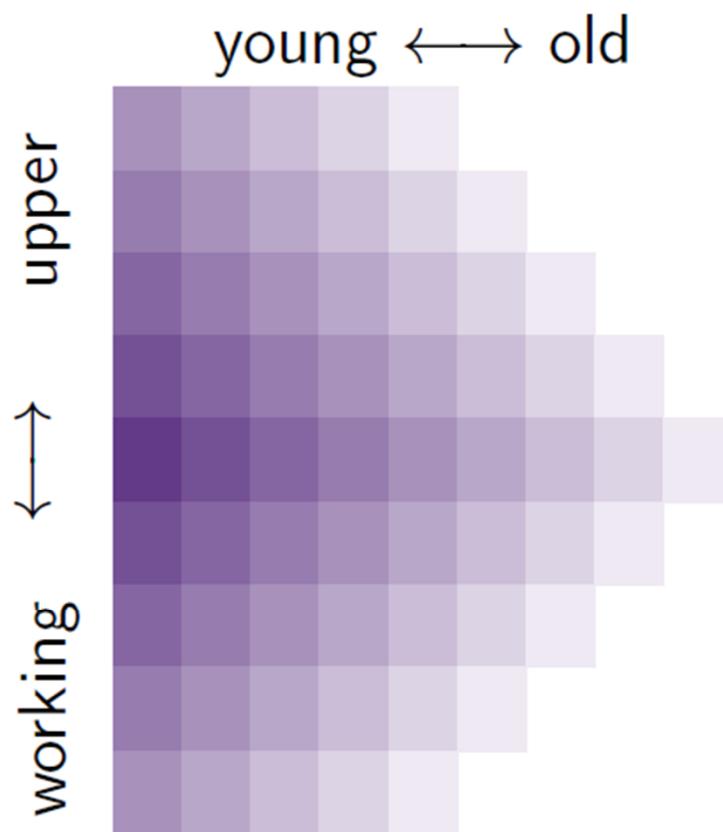


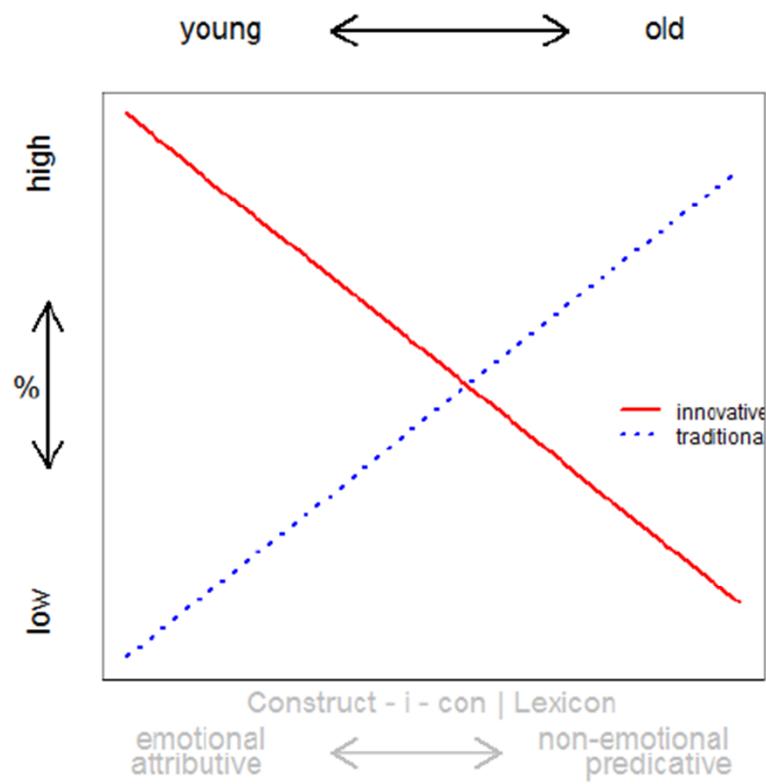
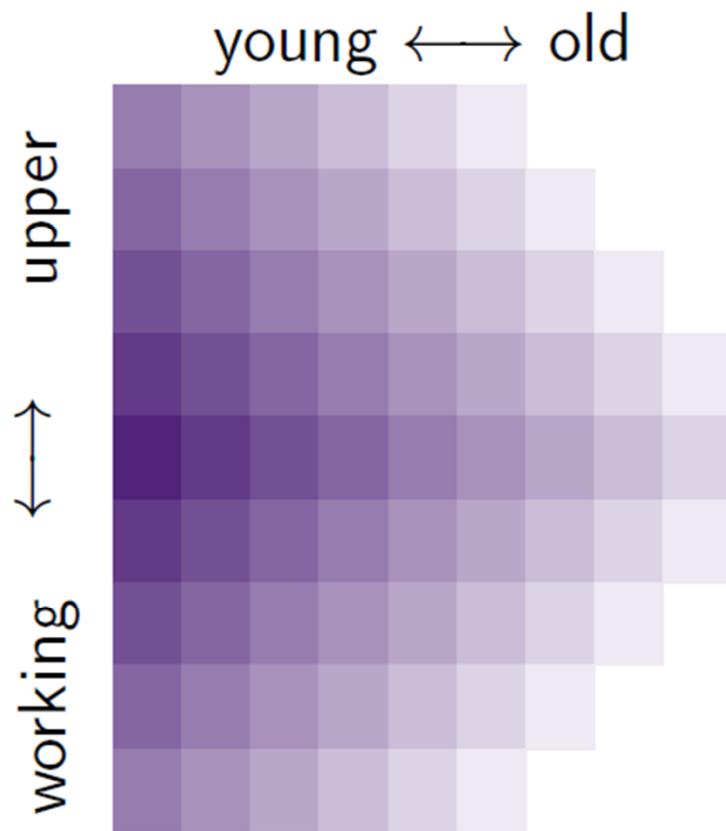


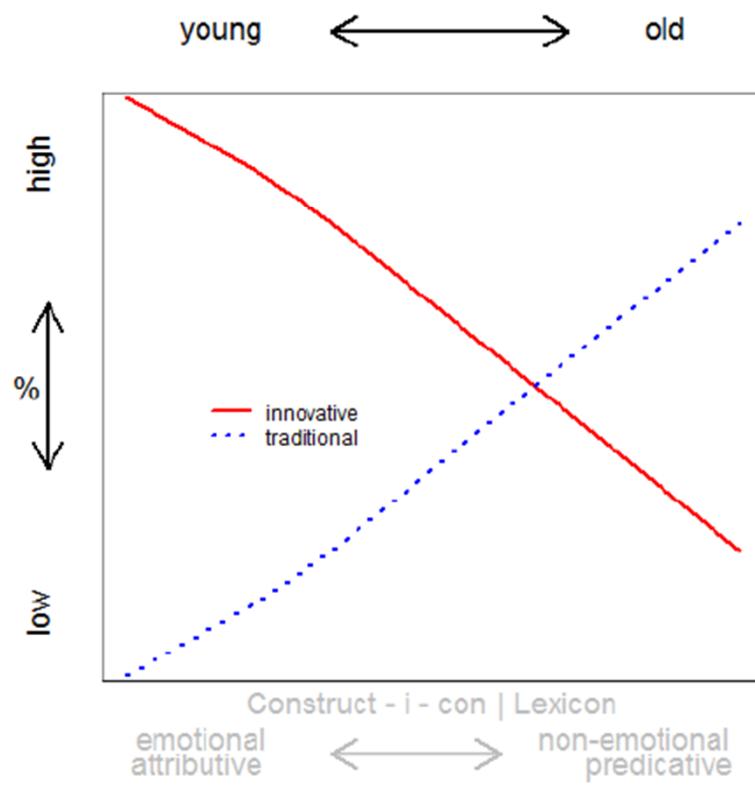
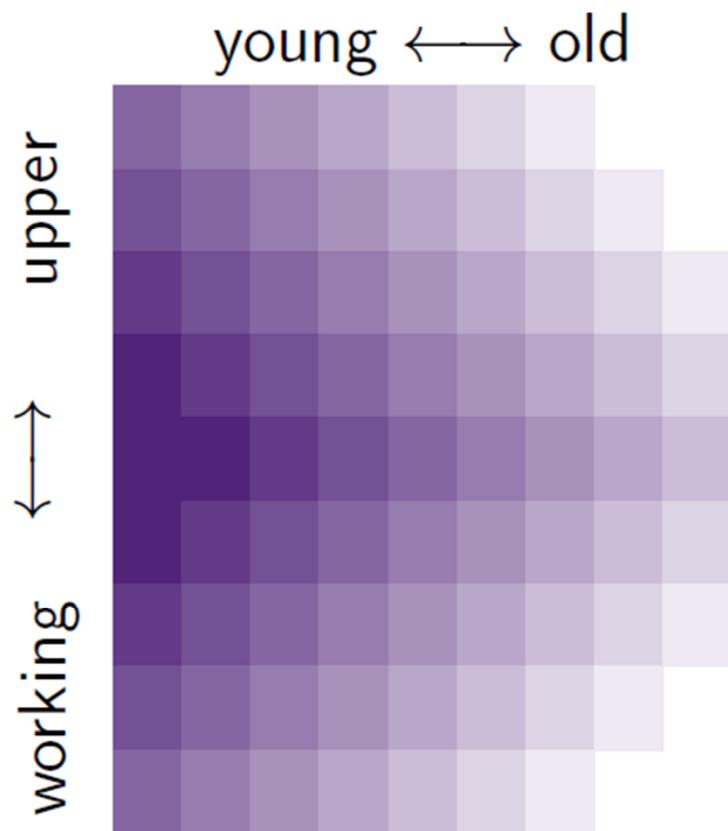


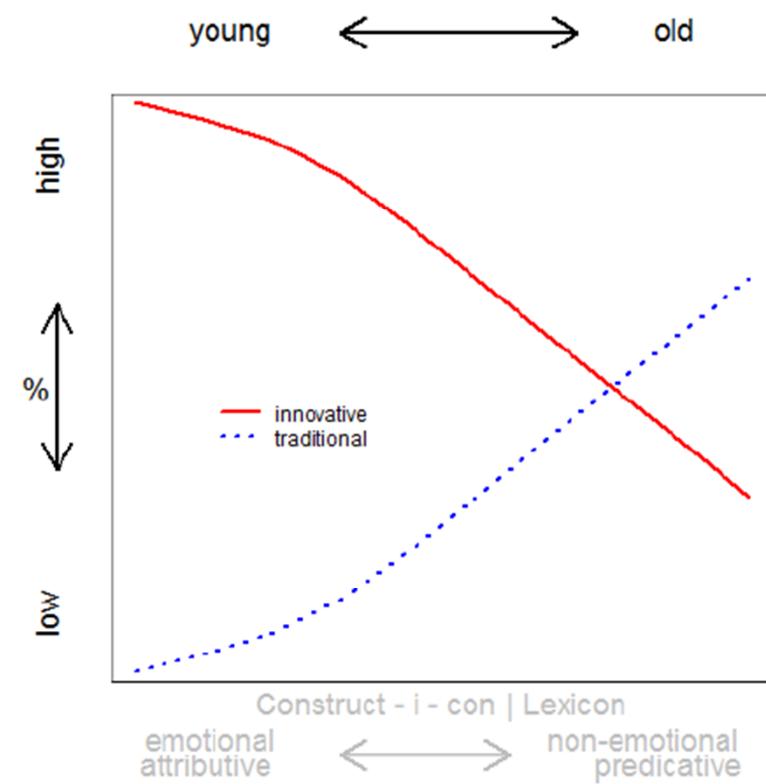
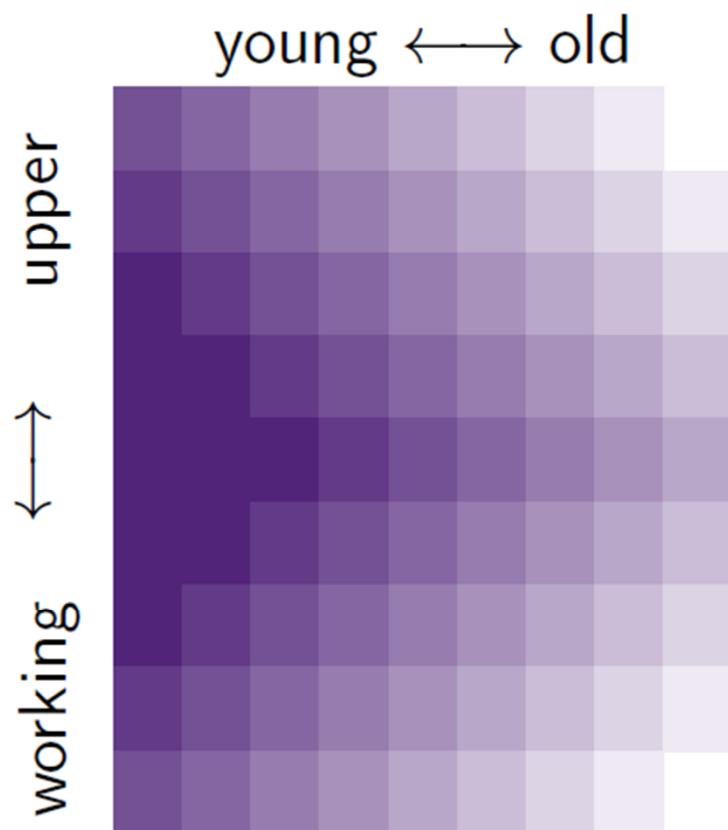


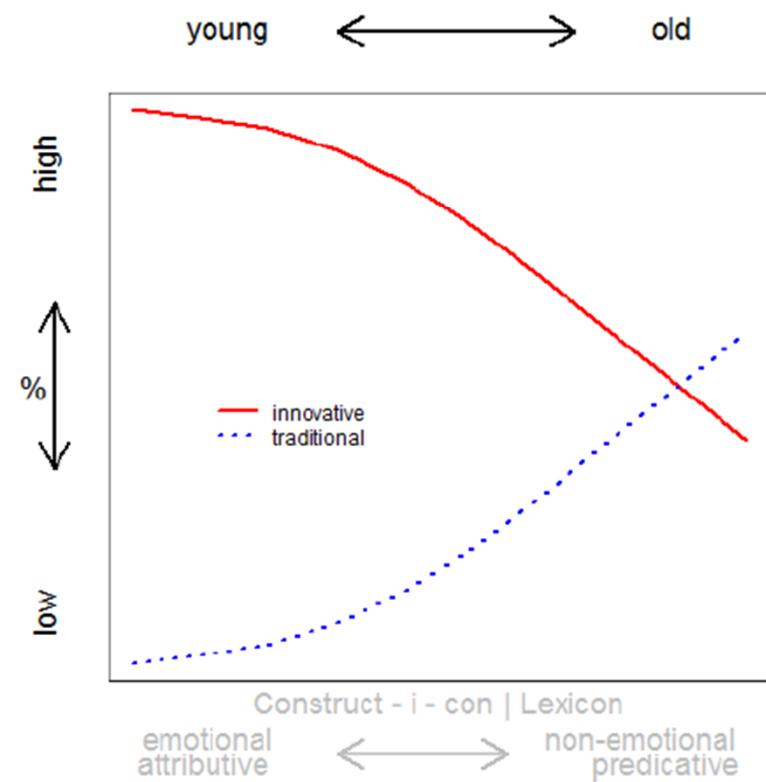
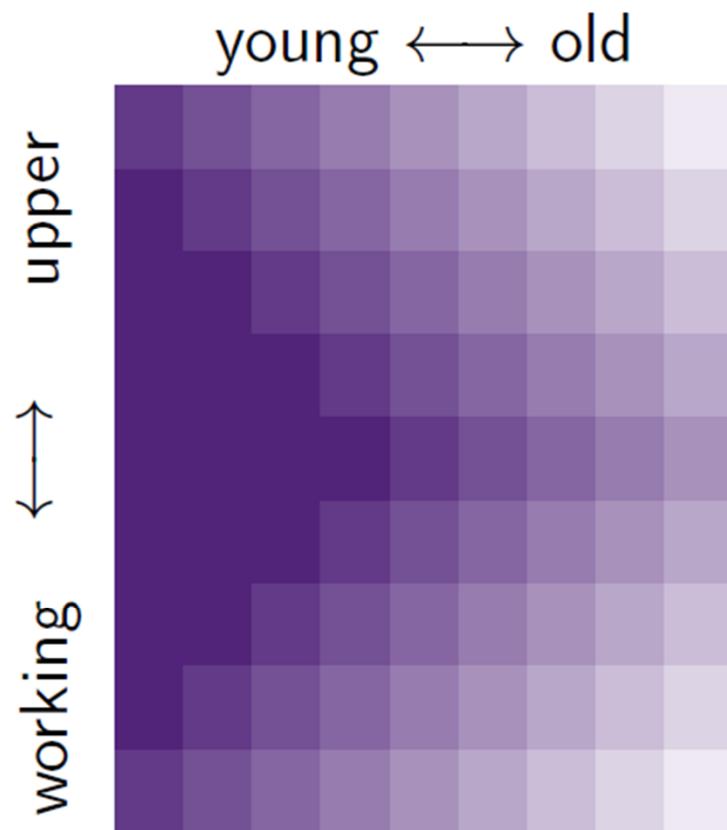


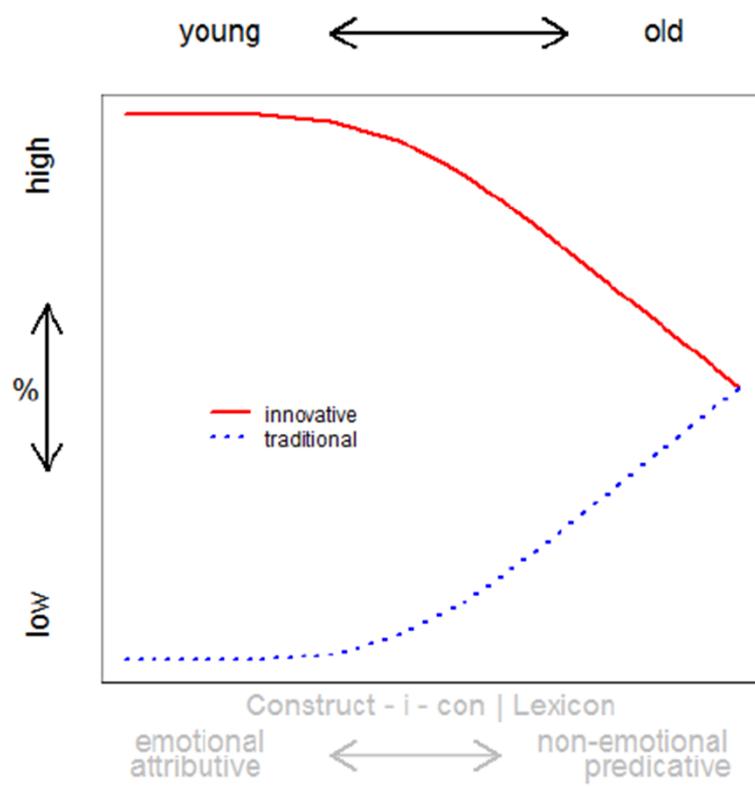
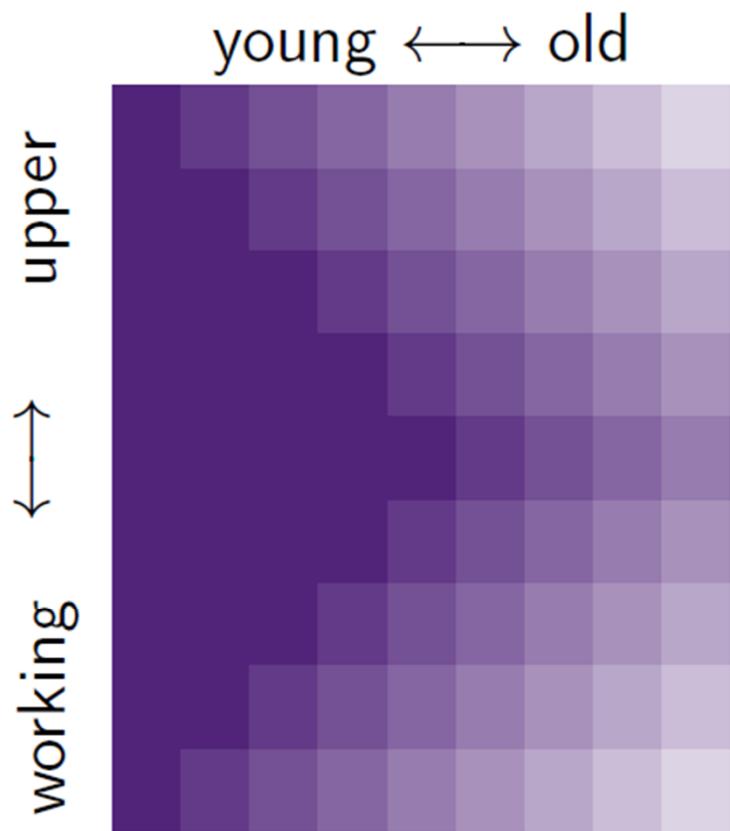


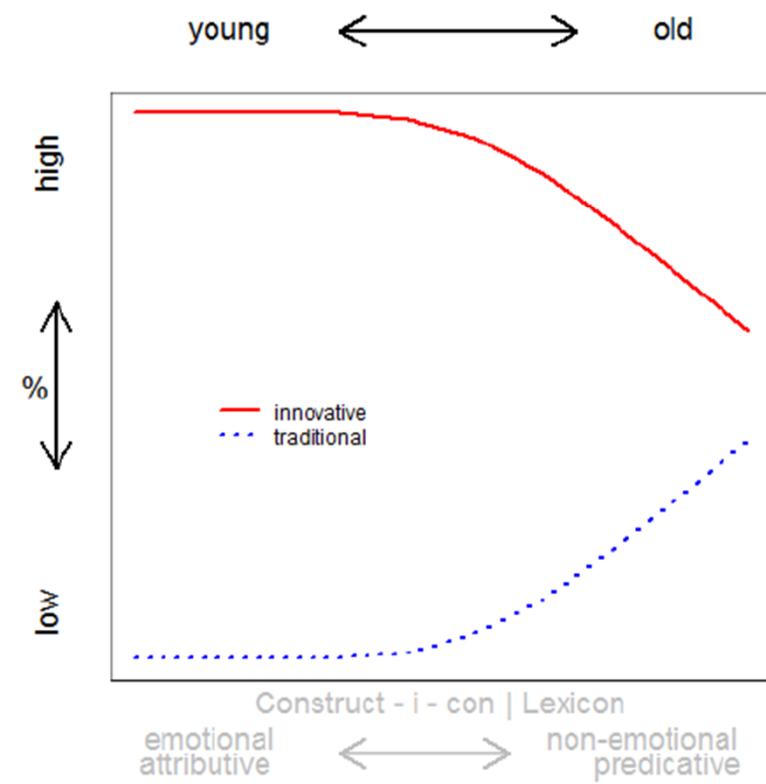
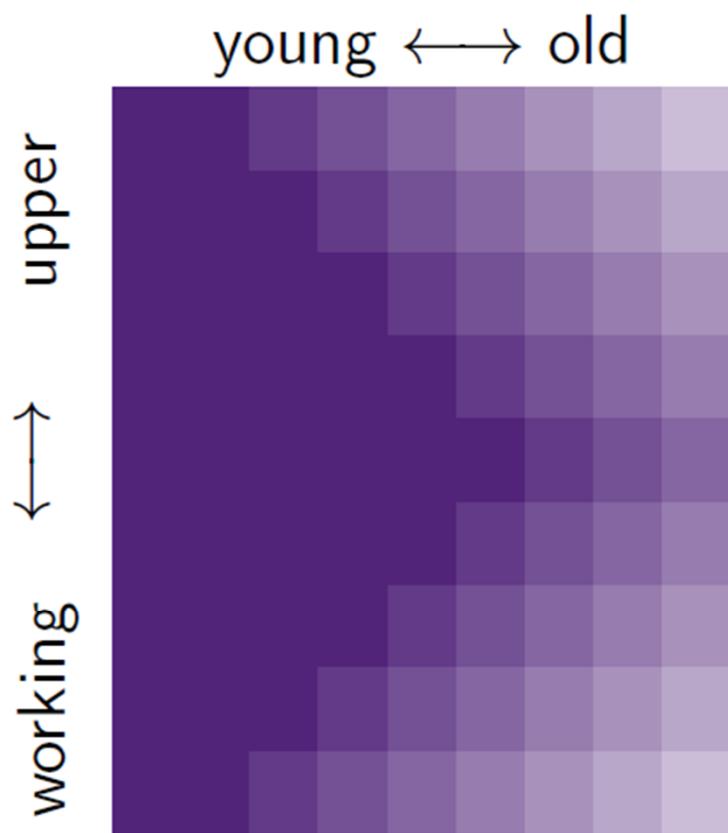


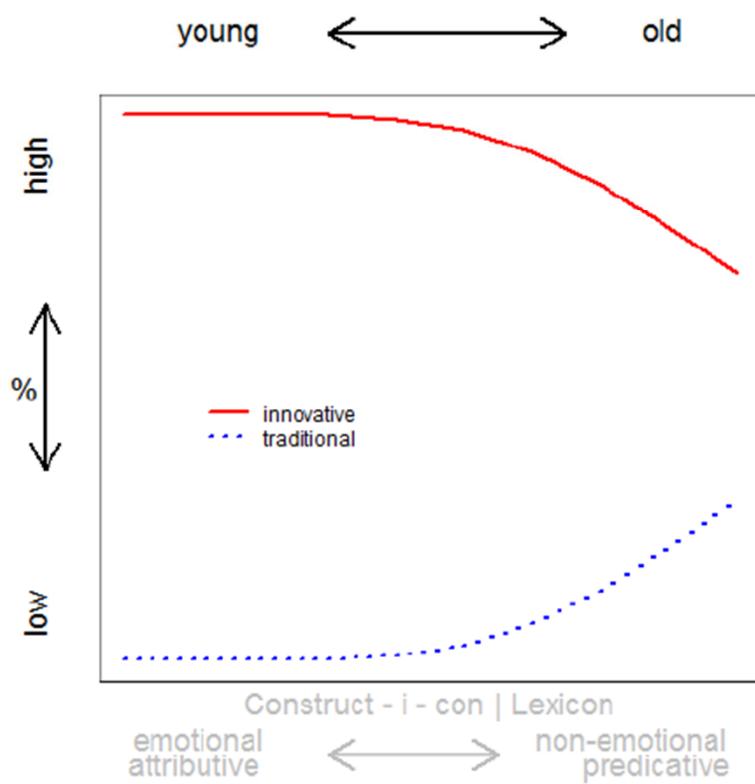
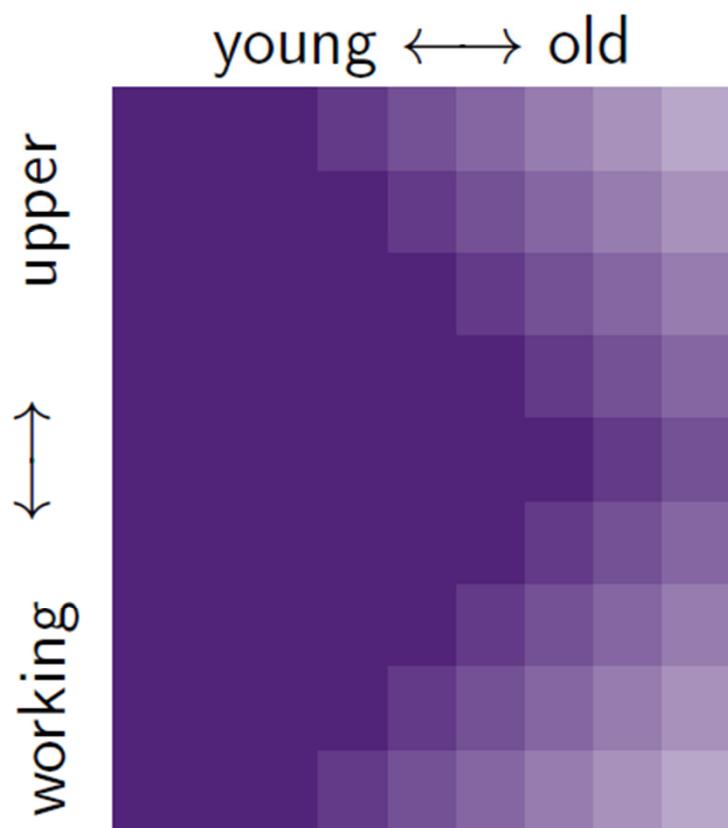


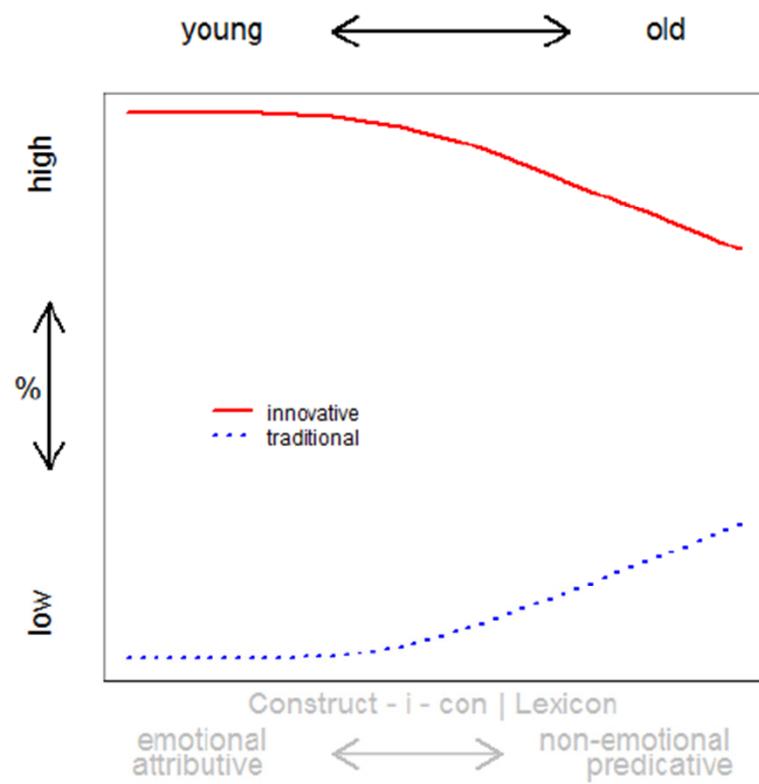
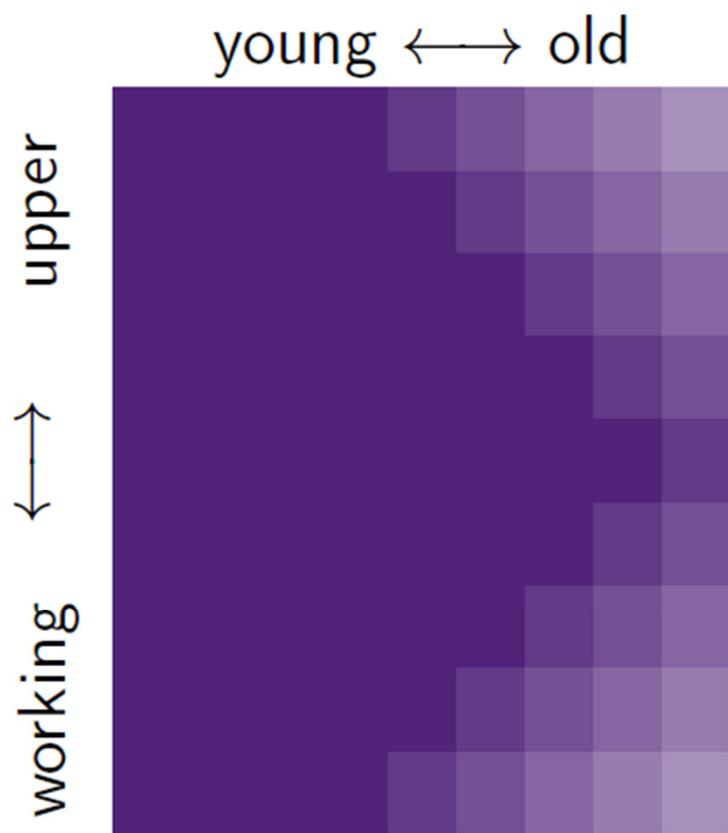


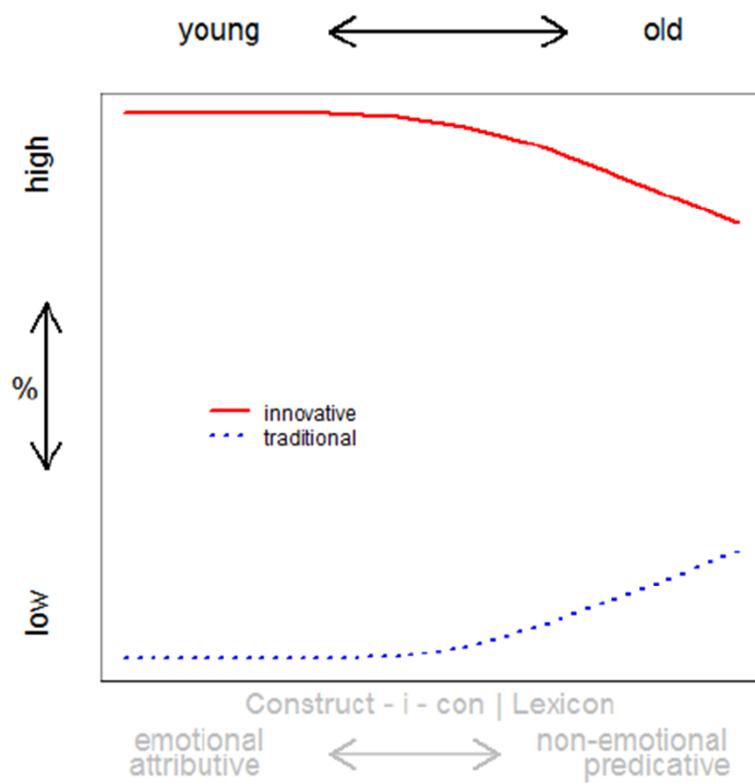
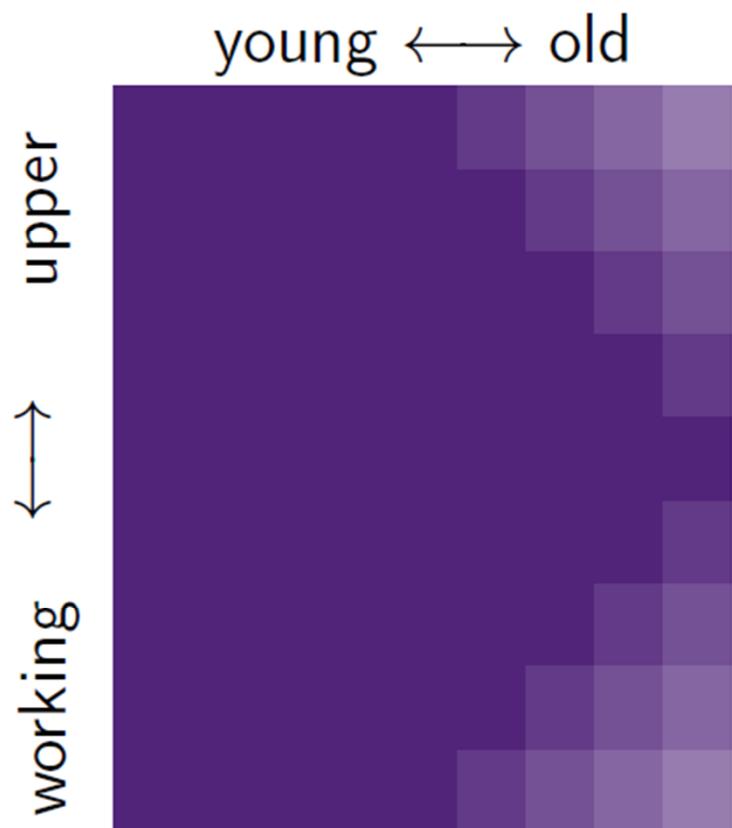


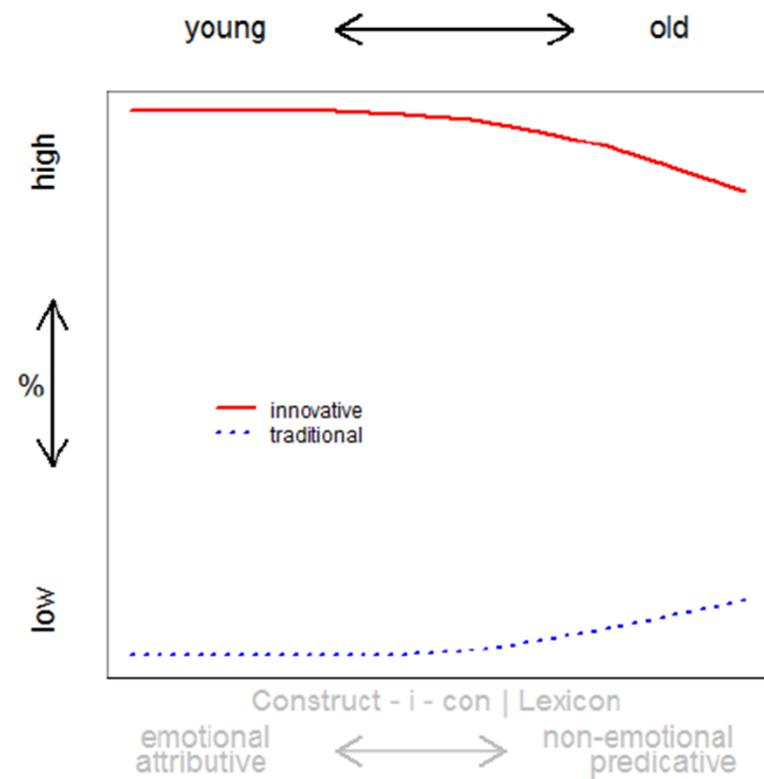
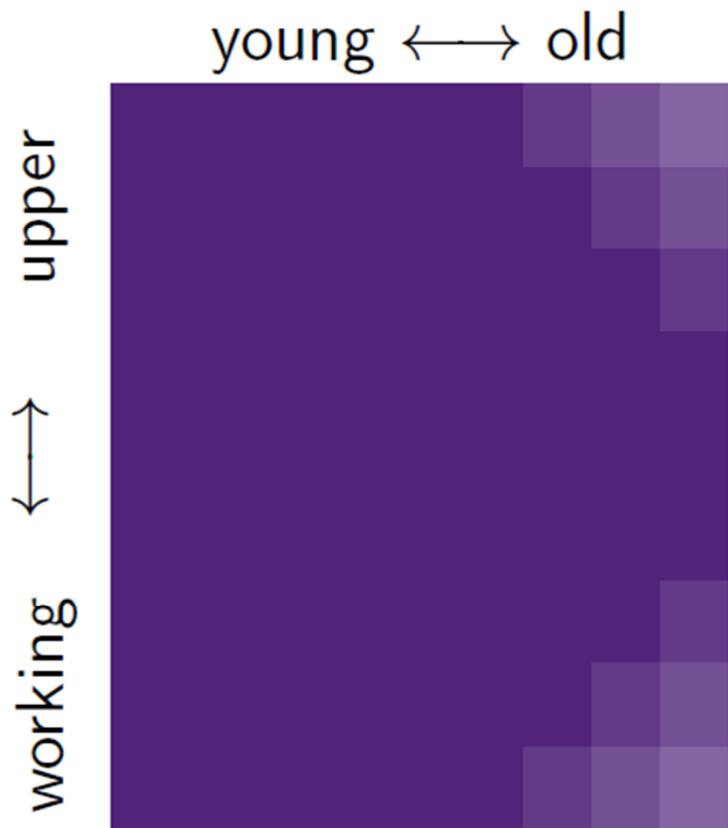


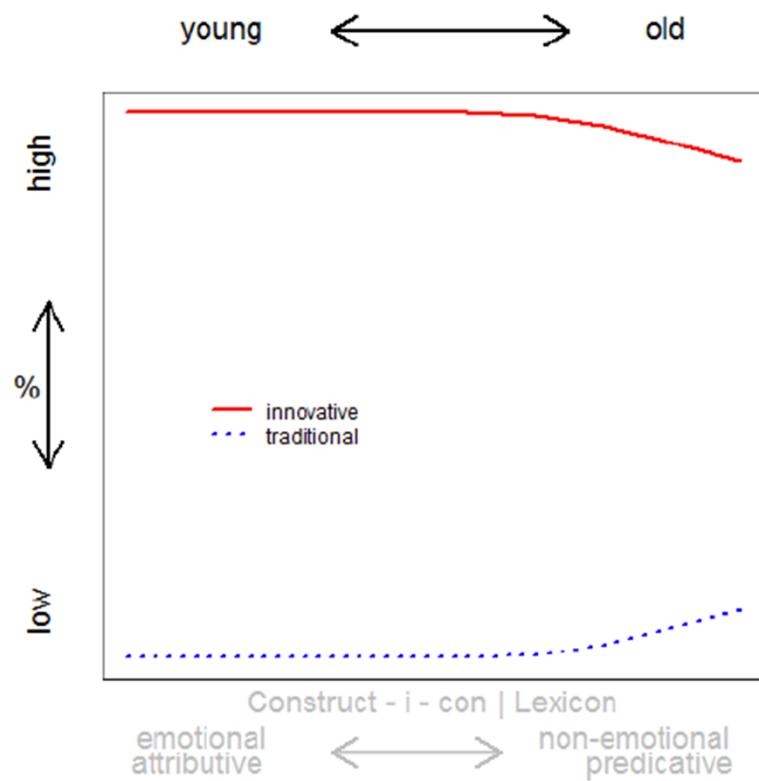
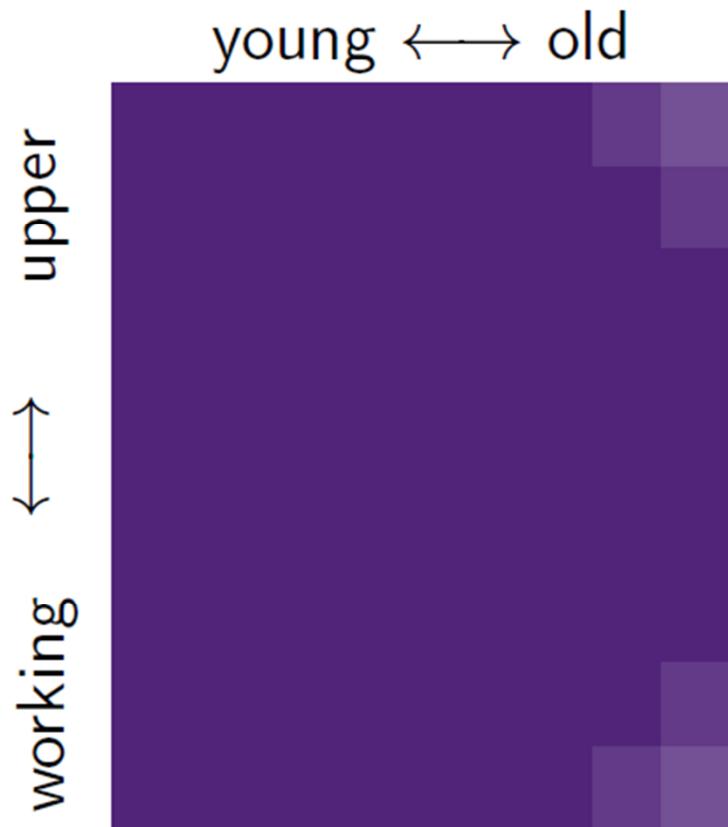


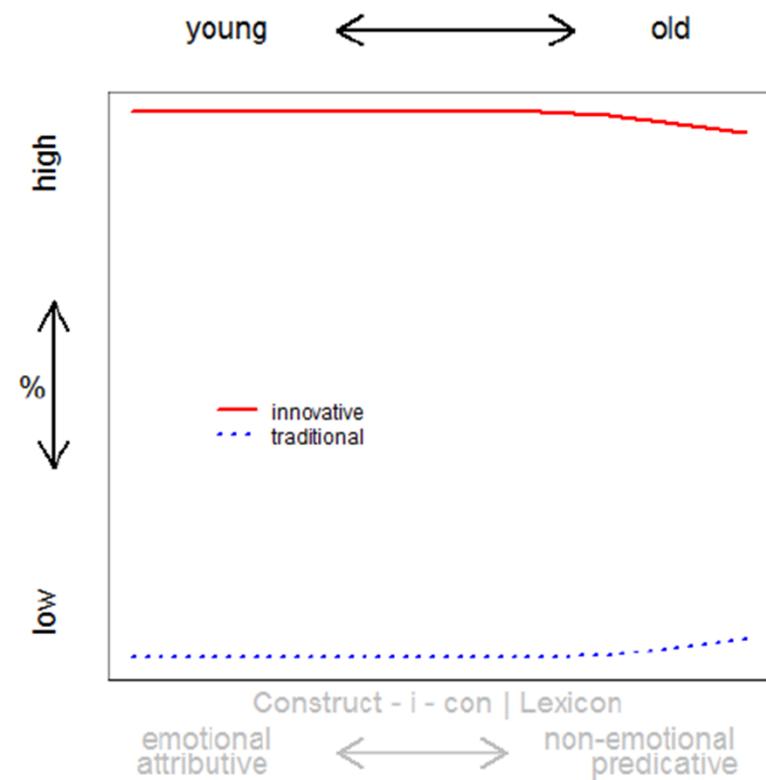
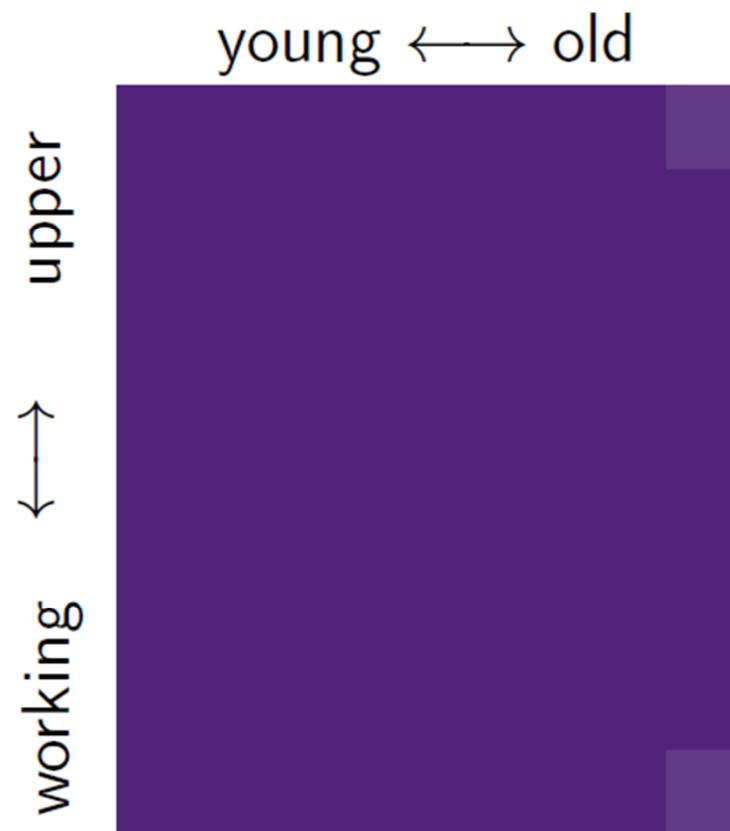


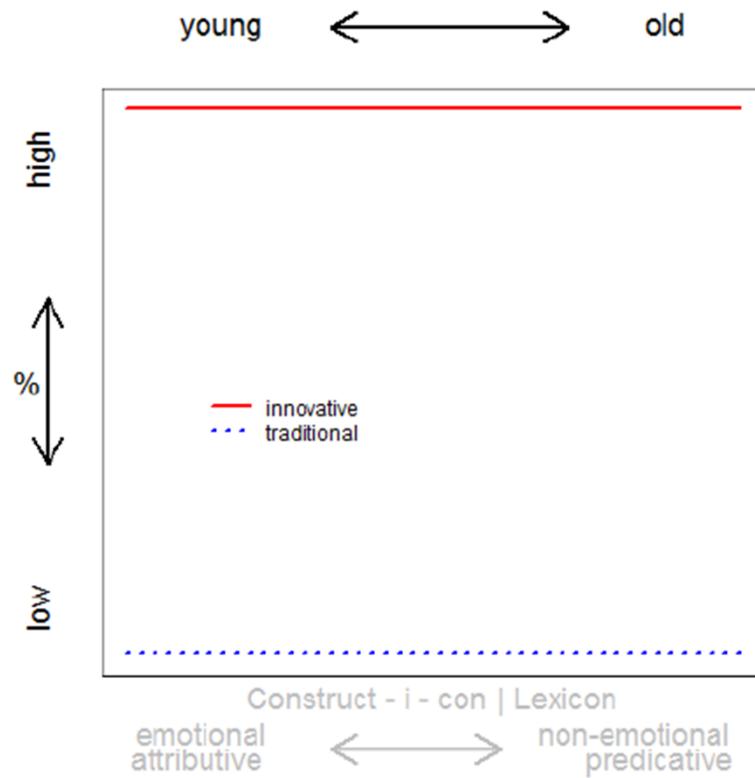
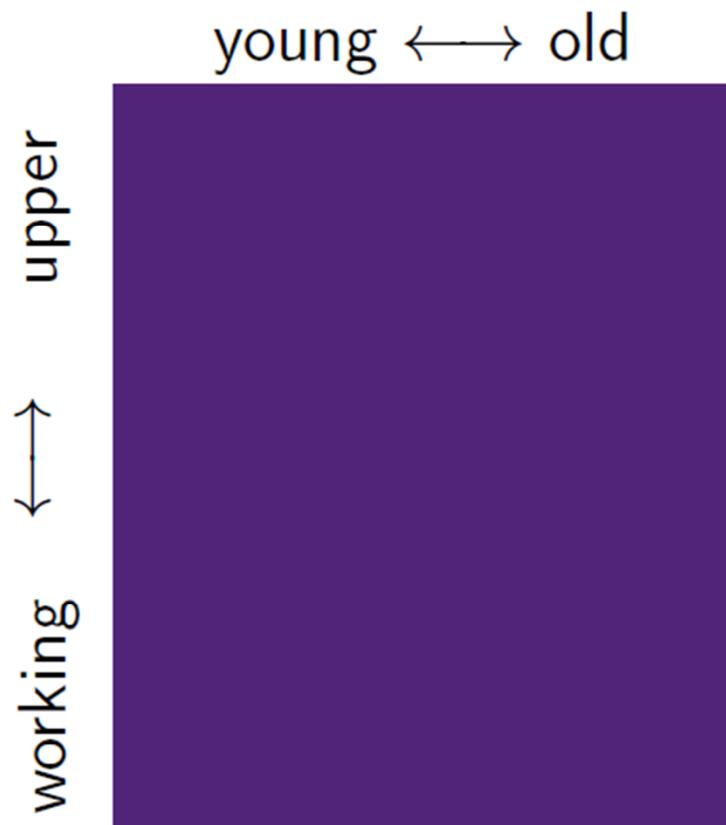












Discussion

What does this mean?

- Changes only progress to finalisation if variants attract a social meaning (**actuation problem**)
- Support for Labov's (2002) hypothesis that **change represents an “opportunistic process that reinforces social distinctions by associating them with particular linguistic variants”**
- What is new about the present study is the **tie between different stages of change and the importance of intra- and extra-linguistic factors:**
 - During stasis and **initial stages** of change, **language-internal** factors could represent determining factors of variation, but **language-external social** factors (social meaning) becomes important when the change progresses to **mid-range** (and probably beyond).
- This means that the study
 - On the one hand **confirms hypotheses** about the underlying mechanisms of language change
 - On the other, it **generates hypotheses** that can be tested in future research

Potential Applications

Significance

- One of the **first corpus-based studies** that
 - focus on adjective amplification in **Asian Englishes**
 - address the issue of **what factors are at play during different stages of change.**

Prototype (proof-of-concept)

- Extend study to other phenomena and other varieties of English
(does this trend hold more generally: could it be a principle of language change?)

Possible Applications

- Follow-up: PhD | MA theses that investigate this in other varieties and for other phenomena where we know that there is ongoing change (e.g., discourse markers, quotative systems, t/d-deletion, relativization)

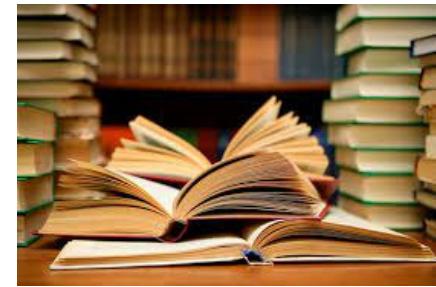


Thank you really very much!

Martin Schweinberger

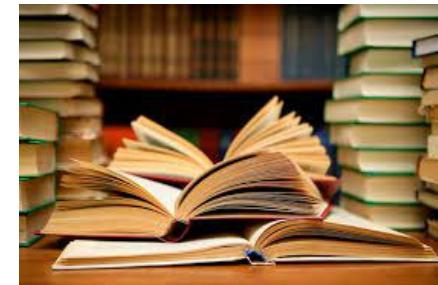
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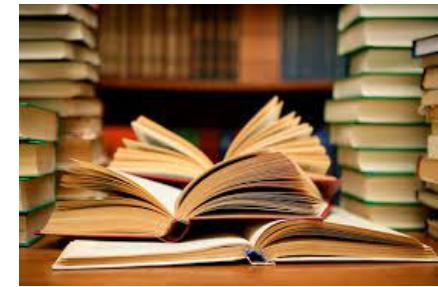
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English(es) on the Move

What we can learn about language change from variation in amplifier use

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Slides available at <https://github.com/MartinSchweinberger/EngLingInnsbruck2023>

