

Phonetics Colloquium at UoS  
on Wednesday, **30 April 2025**, 14:15  
location: building C7.2 in room 5.09

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### **Intensification in everyday talk**

Intensification is a term I use to describe a way of saying words – typically adjectives, but sometimes nouns, modifiers or verbs – that changes the meaning of the word into something 'more intense'. In written English it's often done by repeating letters: "soooooo cute", "huuuuuuge!", 'grrreat!' (cf. German "Eine Dose Red Bull verleiht Flüüügel!").

The phonetics of the phenomenon is more complex than 'lengthening'. In spoken English, it involves lengthening, tempo, the use of glottal stops and micropauses, and dynamic intonation contours. In terms of duration, the consonants and vowels implicated in intensification are outliers as compared to neutral productions.

The talk will show examples of intensification in spoken (American) English. I will use the methods of Conversation Analysis to show participants' own understandings of the practice; and that reveals some very common patterns of use, as well as showing where the sense of 'intensification' comes from.

We will see that intensification is commonly used in certain places in talk, for example as a second, upgraded, assessment; or in order to solicit an appreciative response like 'wow' (and not something like 'uh-huh'). We will see how participants deal with responses that are not well fitted. We'll also see that intensification as a phonetic phenomenon can change the way words are understood: a 'paaaarty' is definitely not the same as a 'party'!