YOU SAY '*BOYKOTTS*', I SAY '*BOYKOTTE*': UNTANGLING THE GERMAN {-S} PLURAL

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INTRODUCTION

- The **German plural system is notoriously ambiguous** and complex, with 8 available plural markers – can be seen as 4 allomorphs in complementary distribution {-n}, {-r}, {-s}, {-0}. *[1]*
- **{-s} is the most unusual ending**: youngest, least frequent, but highly productive and not restricted by gender – and reportedly dominant in Northern areas. *[2,3,4,5]*
- **Goal:** Two studies explore the **productivity** and **spatial distribution** of {-s}.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- **HOW PRODUCTIVE IS {-S}?**
- **WHICH DIALECTS/REGIONS FAVOUR {-S}?**
- **DO SOCIOLINGUISTIC FACTORS (EG, AGE) EXPLAIN DIFFERENCES?**

METHODOLOGY

1 Elicitation Experiment

- **Participants:** 219 native German speakers (via Google Forms)
- **Completion task:** participants typed plural when presented singular form of real and nonce words in standard language sentence frames
- **Analysis:** frequency of {-s} selection per token

2 Spatial Analysis

- **Data:** Self-reported dialects mapped to dialect regions
- **Stats:** chi², Moran's I, LISA, mixed effects model

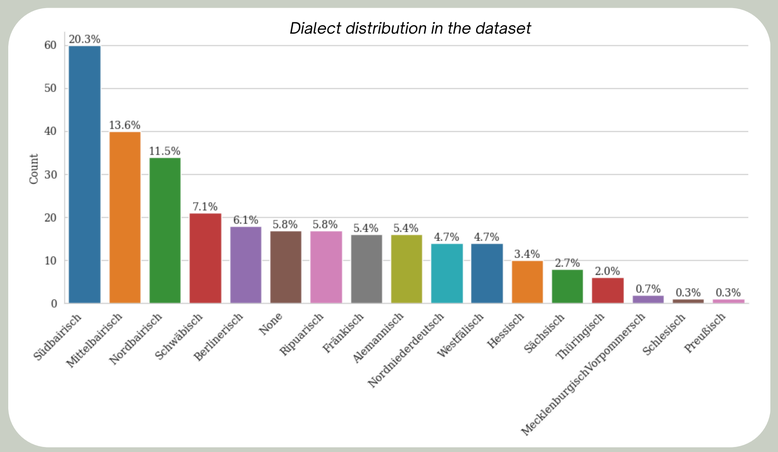

***Fig 1:* Spread of self-reported dialects** that had had the most effect on the participants' German.

RESULTS

- {-s} favoured in **consonant- and vowel-final** environments, sonorants favour {-0}.
- Mixed effects model suggests more **token-level effects – e.g., specifically for 'die Datscha'**: East-West divide – former GDR regions show lower {-s} usage, favouring {-n}, while former West favours {-s}.
- Older speakers favour {-s} more than younger speakers in the dataset.
- Spatial analysis suggests {-s} is **less favoured in eastern central areas** – but small effect size

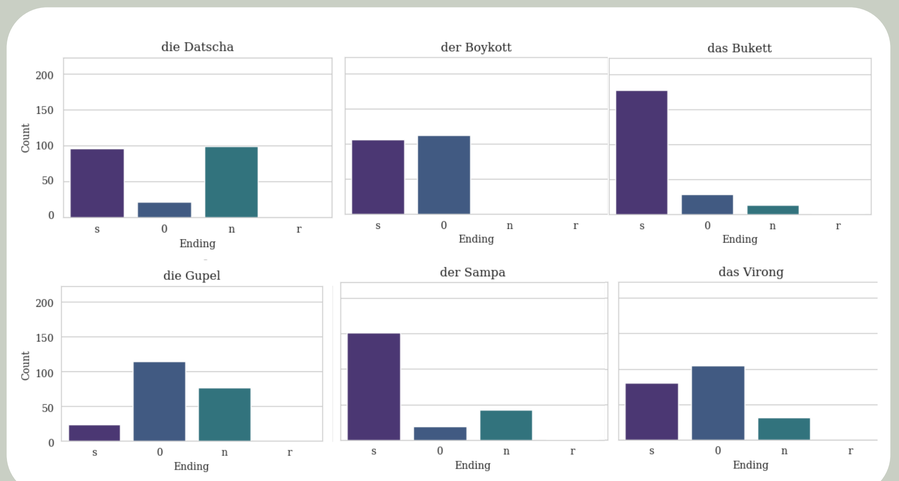

***Fig 2:* Ending choices for a selection of tokens.** Visible effects from noun gender (eg, competition from {-n} in fem nouns).

DISCUSSION

- Plural selection may be influenced by:
  - **analogy** *[6]*: does it match an existing paradigm?
  - **typicality** *[7]*: is it a 'German' word? (cf. Polish GEN.SG *[8]*)
  - ***Numerusprofilierung***: is it too similar to the singular?
  - **phonology**: does it end in a trochee? *[1]*
- Supports a speaker-dependent optimality theory approach
- {-s} surfaces as default in absence of other possibilities?

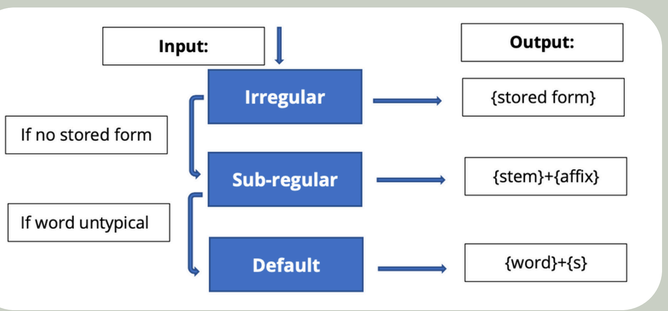

***Fig 4:* Three-level model of German plural inflection**. If no stored or regular form is available, the default {-s} emerges.

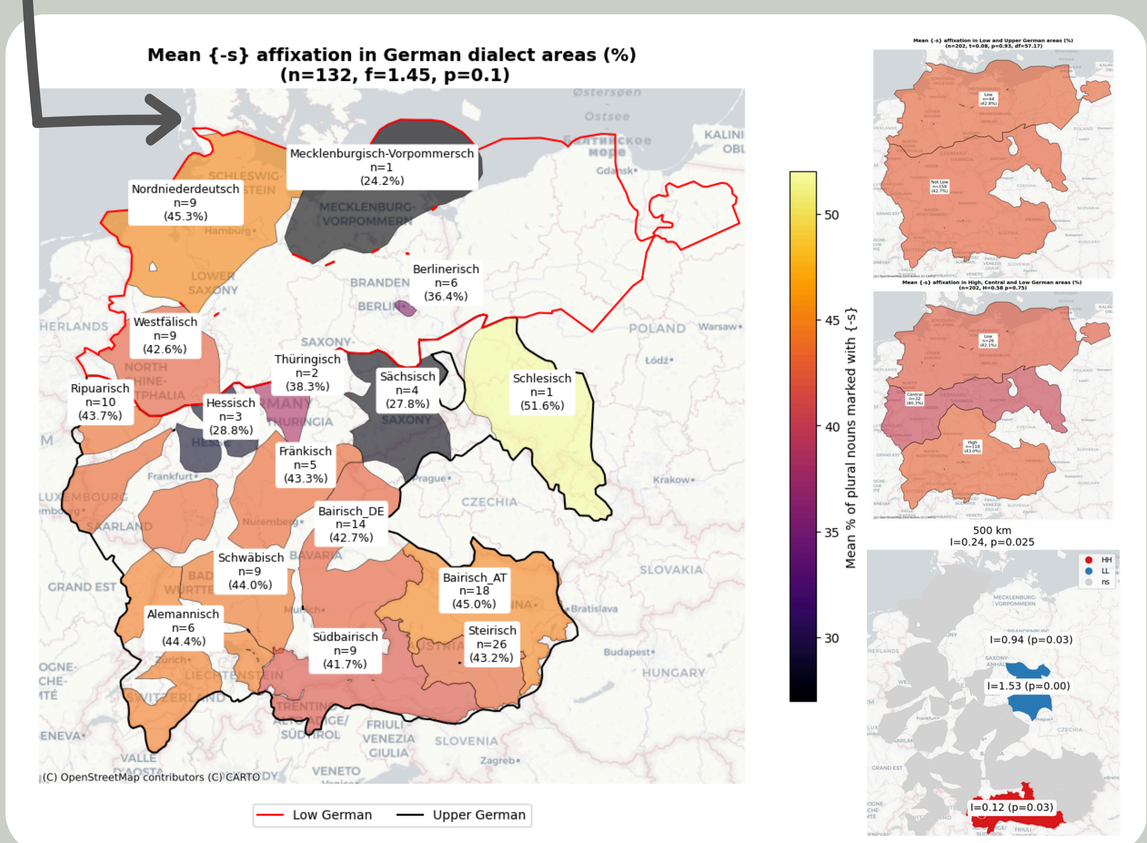

***Fig 3: Mean* {-s} affixation and LISA clustering** (500km distance bands) suggest minimal differences across the DACH area, although individuals affiliated with Thuringian, Berlin and Upper Saxon dialects exhibit less {-s}.

TAKEAWAYS

- **{-S} IS BECOMING MORE PRODUCTIVE**
- **{-S} IS NOT A SIMPLY NORTHERNISM**
- **NEXT STEPS: STATS ON LARGER CORPORA & TEST THREE-LEVEL PLURAL INFLECTION MODEL COMPUTATIONALLY**

RELATED LITERATURE

[1] Wiese (1996) *The phonology of German*. Clarendon Press. **[2]** Öhmann (1924) *Der S-plural im Deutschen*. Suomalainen tiedeakatemia. **[3]** Glück & Sauer (1995) 'Directions of change in contemporary German'. In Stevenson, P. (Ed.), *The German Language and the Real World*. OUP. **[4]** Fehringer (2009) 'Plural-s within compounds in colloquial Northern German'. *Journal of Germanic Linguistics*, 21(2). **[5]** Durrell (2012) *Using German: A guide to contemporary usage*. CUP. **[6]** Marcus et al. (1995) 'German inflection: The exception that proves the rule'. *Cognitive Psychology*, 29. **[7]** Wunderlich (1999) 'German noun plural reconsidered'. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 22(6). **[8]** Divjak et al (2020) 'What is learned from exposure: an error-driven approach to productivity in language'. *Language, Cognition and Neuroscience*, 36(1).