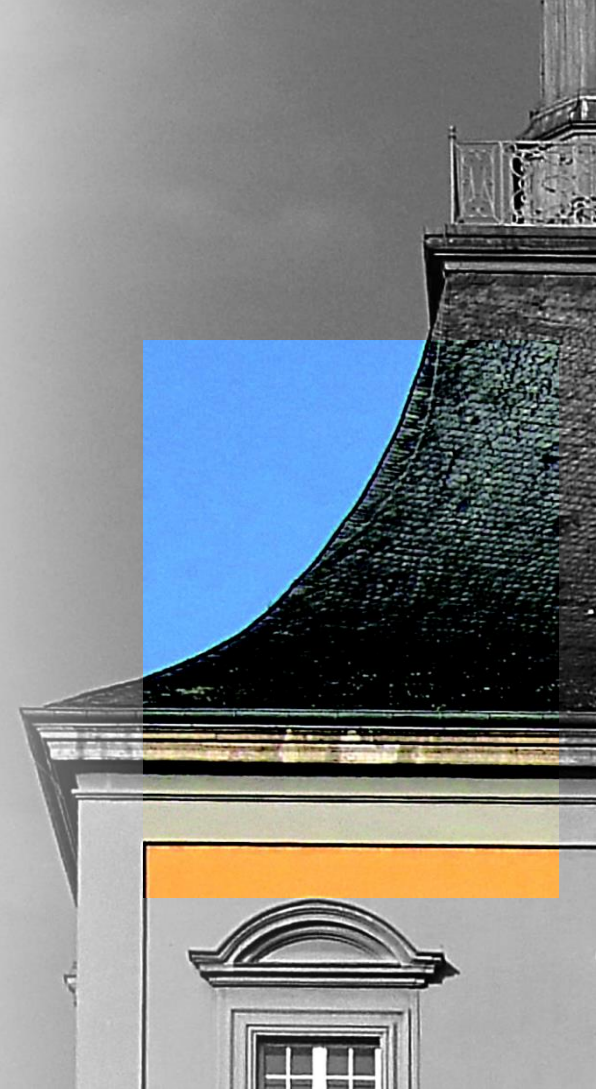


EXCUSE ME, SIR OR HEY GUYS
**CHANGES IN THE USE OF
GENERIC NOMINAL ADDRESS TERMS
IN THE 20TH AND 21ST CENTURY**

Svenja Kranich (University of Bonn)
Hanna Bruns (University of Bonn)



1. Introduction – Socio-cultural impact on language change
2. Method
3. Results – General frequencies and detailed analysis of *guys* and *sir*
4. Conclusion & outlook

LINK BETWEEN SOCIO-CULTURAL CHANGES AND RECENT LANGUAGE CHANGE

Changes in society between 1960 and today determined to be relevant for linguistic practices:

- Decline of overt attention to hierarchy
- Democratization
- Globalization of knowledge
- Globalization of communication (e.g. the internet)
- [...] (cf. Mair 2006: 1-11)
- Informalization
- Colloquialization

DEMOCRATIZATION

- A “rise of more congenial, less face threatening alternatives in a society apparently more egalitarian, democratic, and antiauthoritarian”, leading to “speakers' tendency to avoid unequal and face threatening modes of interaction” (Farrelly & Seoane 2012: 393)
- **Difficulty:** How to prove that a linguistic change is actually linked to social change (cf. also Culpeper & Nevala 2012: 365)
- Project ‘**Socio-cultural Impact on Language Change**’ (SILC): general aim is to track changes in language use and connect them to socio-cultural developments

LINGUISTIC MARKERS (LIKELY TO BE) AFFECTED

- **Modals:** decline of core modals, rise of semi-modals (Mair 2006: 108; cf. also Myhill 1995, Mair & Leech 2006, Collins 2009a, b, Kranich, Hampel & Bruns 2020)
- **Hedges and Boosters:** e.g. more hedging in expert-laymen conversations (Kranich & Neuhäuser 2017), less hedging in expert-expert communication (Kranich 2021)
- **Requests:** prevalence of non-imposition politeness in Present-Day English, possible changes in German (e.g. Flöck 2016, Ogiermann 2009, Kranich, Bruns & Hampel 2021)
- **Address Terms and Person Reference** (e.g. Bruns & Kranich 2022)

ADDRESS & PERSON REFERENCE

- Address “denotes a speaker’s linguistic reference to his/her collocutor(s)” (Braun 1988: 7).
 - Address vs Reference
- Important factor in defining, “establishing and maintaining social relationships” (Norrby & Wide 2015: 2)
- Brown and Gilman (1960): power and solidarity as main factors in choice of form of address → too simplified
- Situational variables (formal/informal), speaker characteristics, e.g. age and gender, the medium, social networks, perceptions of common ground, style, and individual preference (cf. Norrby & Wide 2015: 2-5, Clyne et al. 2009: 18)

ADDRESS AND DEMOCRATIZATION

- Numerous changes related to democratisation: observed in various varieties of English (cf. e.g. Baker 2010; Loureiro-Porto 2020)
- “a progressive familiarization of addressing and naming habits in the English-speaking world” (Leech 1999: 114)
- “move towards non-sexist language, a move towards more informal, equal and colloquial ways of addressing people” (Baker 2010: 144).

RECENT CHANGE IN VARIETIES OF ENGLISH AND GERMAN (BRUNS & KRANICH 2022)

- DCT study: Requests, address terms used for those situations (variational: AmE, BrE, IndE; cross-cultural: Ger)
- Comparison of formal and informal address use, across cultures and over time (apparent-time study, older and younger participants)
- Germans tend to use more formal variants than English speakers
- IndE seems to be the most formal English variety, especially in the situation in which an employee talks to their boss, cf. *Sir*
- **AmE shows most informality; overall increasing use of colloquial Addressers**

DEVELOPMENT OF *YOU GUYS*

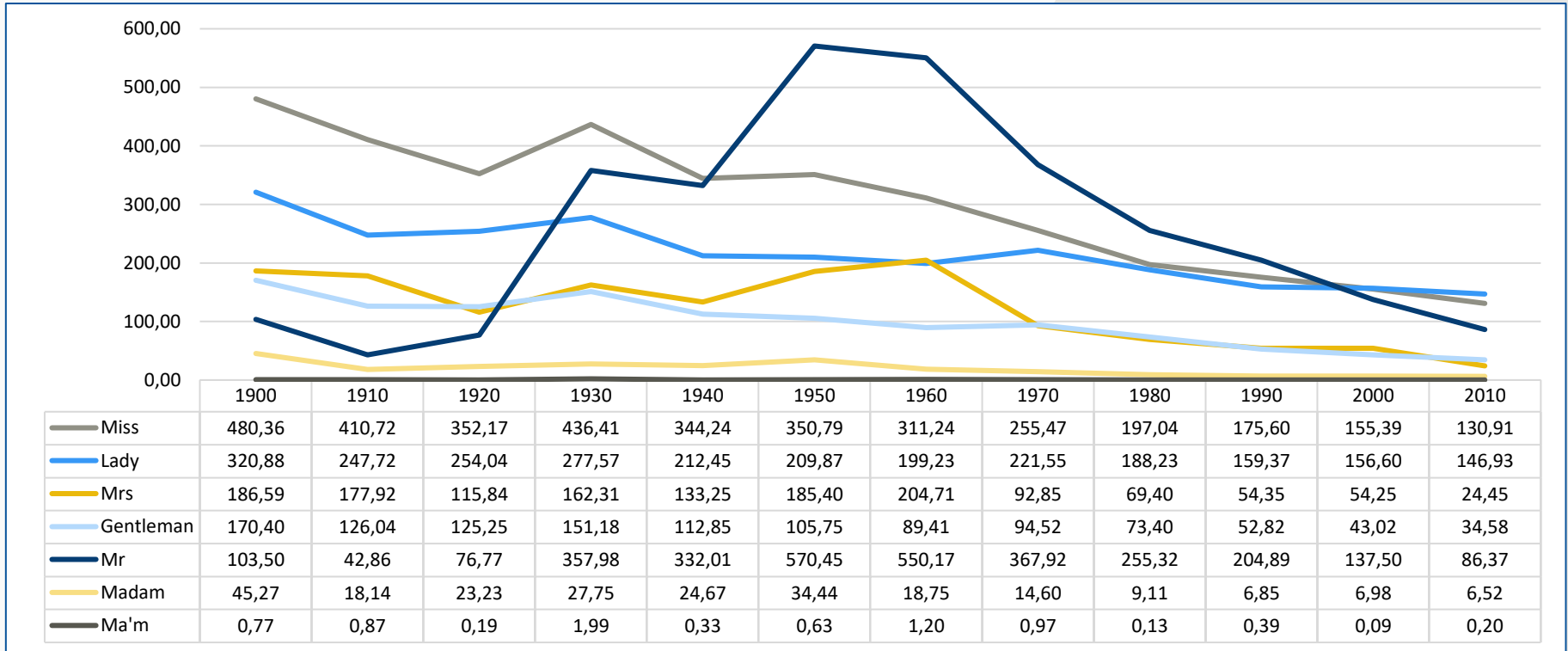
- Grammaticalization to plural marker: Based on COHA (20th) and COCA (20th and 21st c), Sienicki (2014) finds multiple signs of
 - univerbation
 - semantic generalization
 - extension to new contexts: from male-only to gender-neutral and one type of intimate context (mostly male friends) to other kinds of intimate contexts (such as family) (2014: 102-106; cf. also Waksler 1995; Curzan 2003: 173).
- Heyd (2010) investigates *you guys* in Friends and finds most instances refer to mixed groups, but slightly more male-only (17%) than female-only (12%) groups.

METHOD

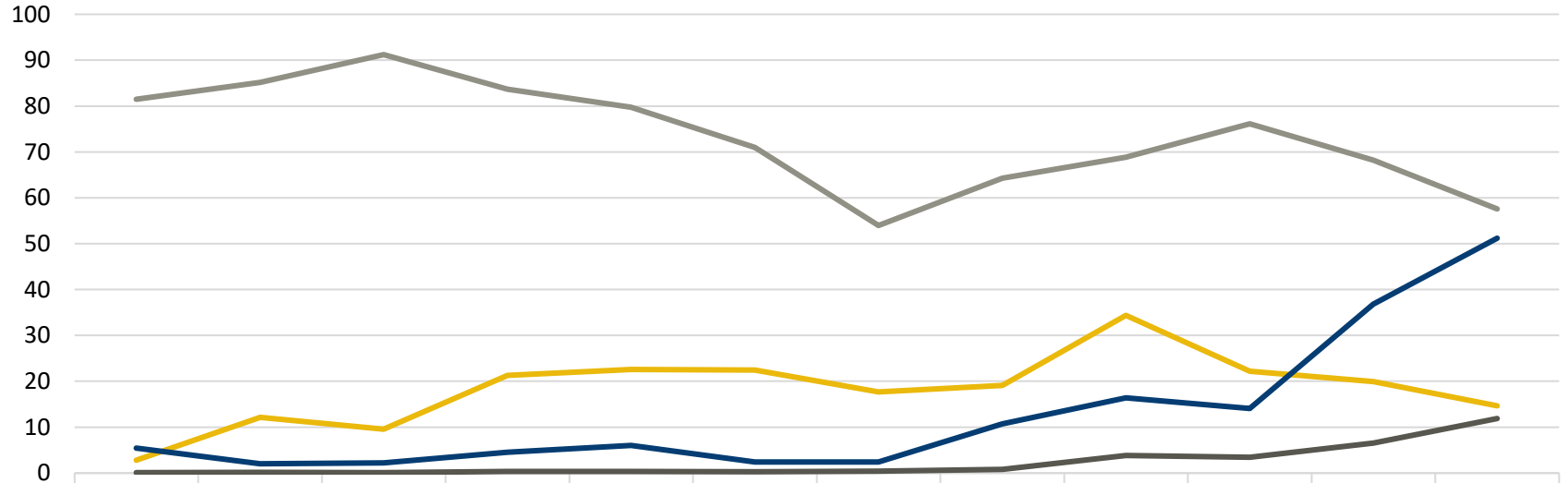
- **Corpus:** COHA (cf. Davies 2012)
- more than 475 mil. words; 1820s-2019
- contains **fiction** (short stories, novels, drama) and **non-fiction** (academic and popular scientific monographs, magazine articles, newspaper articles)
- Frequencies of formal and informal terms (1900-2019)
- Closer look at *sir* and *guys*: Developments since 1900 (1900s, 1930s, 1960s, 1990s, 2010s)
 - 200 randomised hits per term/decade = ~~2000~~ hits in total, extended contexts
 - Comparison of address/reference, power, distance, contexts

RESULTS

FORMAL ADDRESS TERMS (PER MIL)

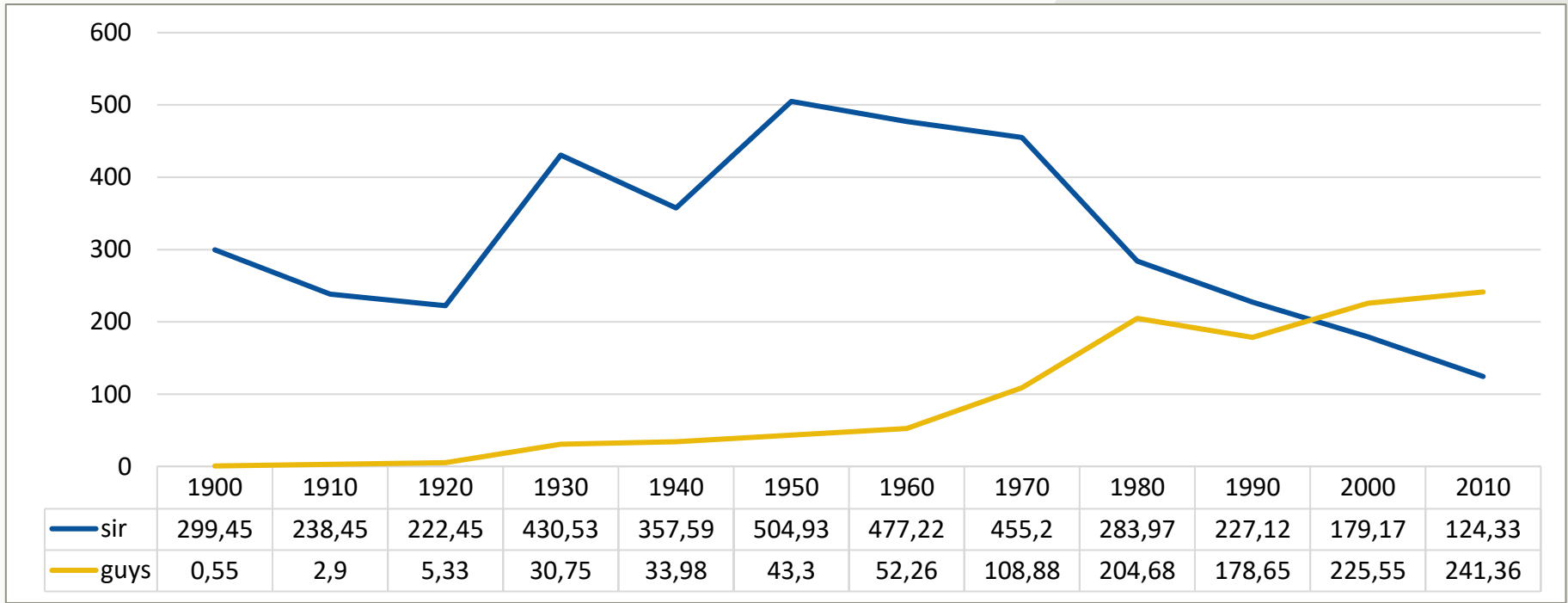


INFORMAL ADDRESS TERMS (PER MIL)



	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
— Folks	81,49	85,14	91,2	83,69	79,71	71	53,94	64,28	68,87	76,14	68,23	57,57
— Pal	2,78	12,16	9,53	21,29	22,59	22,47	17,65	19,11	34,34	22,2	19,93	14,64
— Dude	5,41	1,99	2,18	4,51	6,02	2,37	2,37	10,72	16,38	14,09	36,82	51,17
— Bro	0,09	0,17	0,08	0,36	0,33	0,28	0,38	0,76	3,82	3,44	6,49	11,87

FREQUENCY OF *SIR* AND *GUYS* (PER MIL)



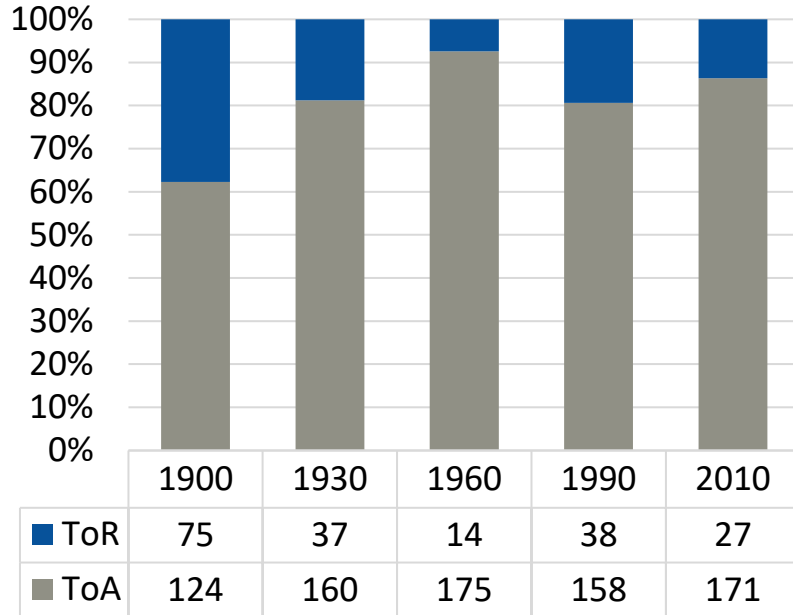
SIR & GUYS



TERMS OF REFERENCE VS. ADDRESS

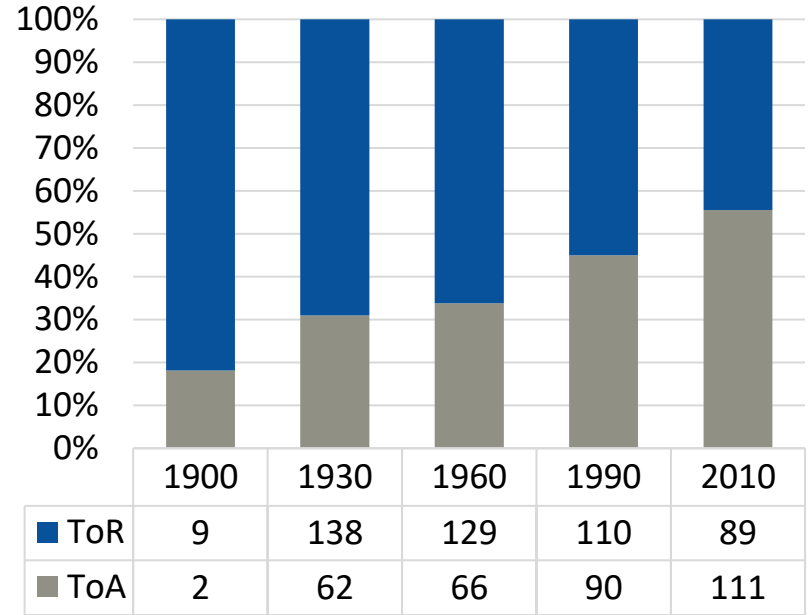
$p < 0.001$

Sir



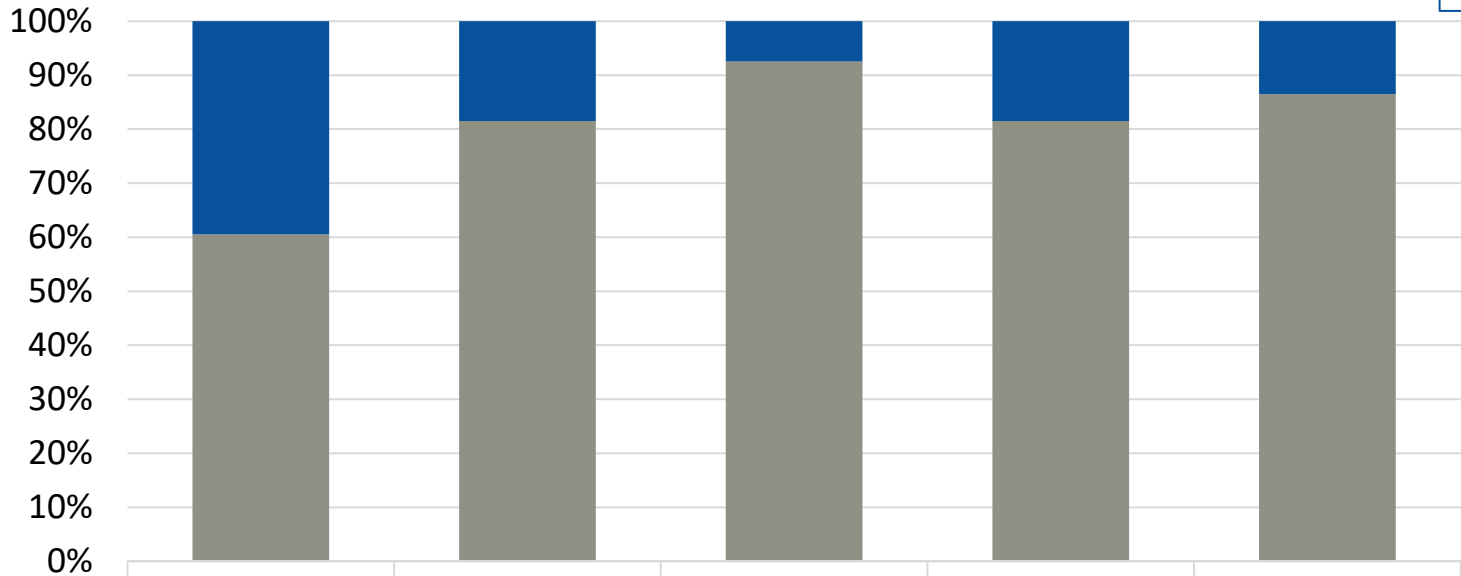
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Guys



SIR TITLE / NON-TITLE

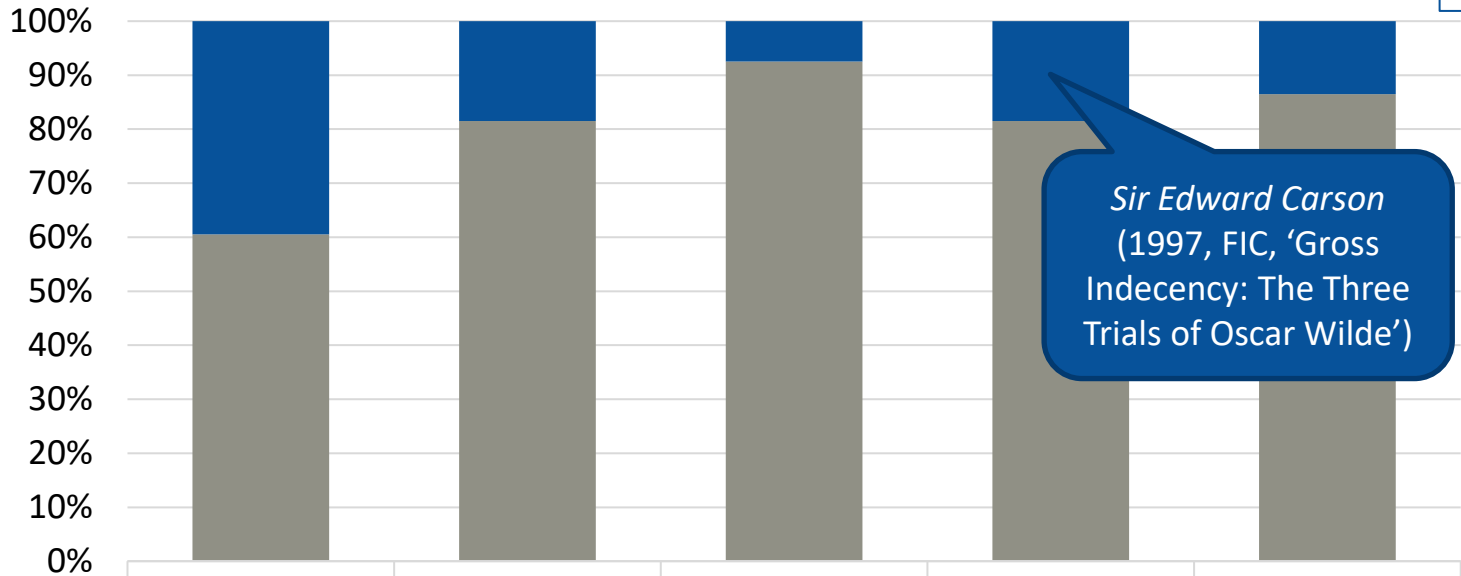
$p < 0.001$



 title
 non-title

SIR TITLE / NON-TITLE

$p < 0.001$



	1900	1930	1960	1990	2010
■ title	79	37	15	37	27
■ non-title	121	163	185	163	173

SIR TITLE / NON-TITLE

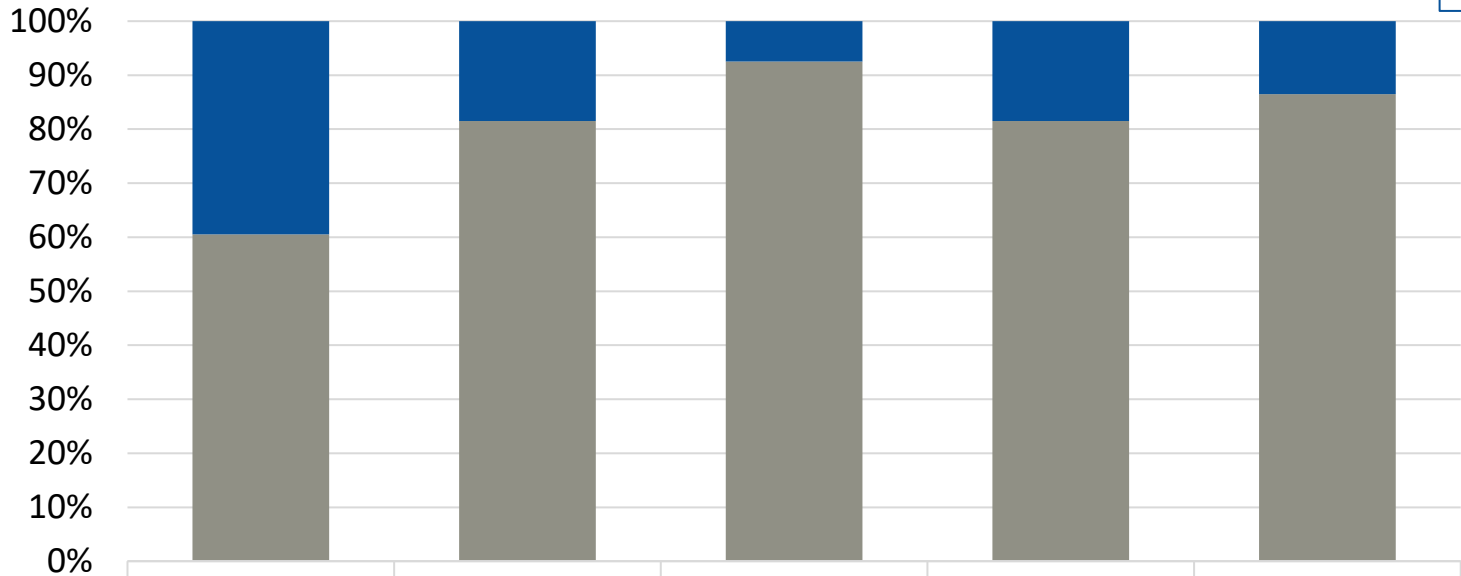
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SIR TITLE / NON-TITLE

$p < 0.001$



■ title	79	37	15	37	27
■ non-title	121	163	185	163	173

TWO FEMALE REFERENTS – *SIR*

2011 (TV/Movie): Sara (Boss)

Sara: I'm really thirsty. Did anybody bring anything to drink?

*Yes, **sir**, I did, **boss lady**. I have juice.*

"Boss lady"?

Boss lady.

2017 (Fiction): Elisabeth "Scotty" McFlynn (Captain's daughter)

"Scotty -"

*"Yes, **sir**,' is the right answer."*

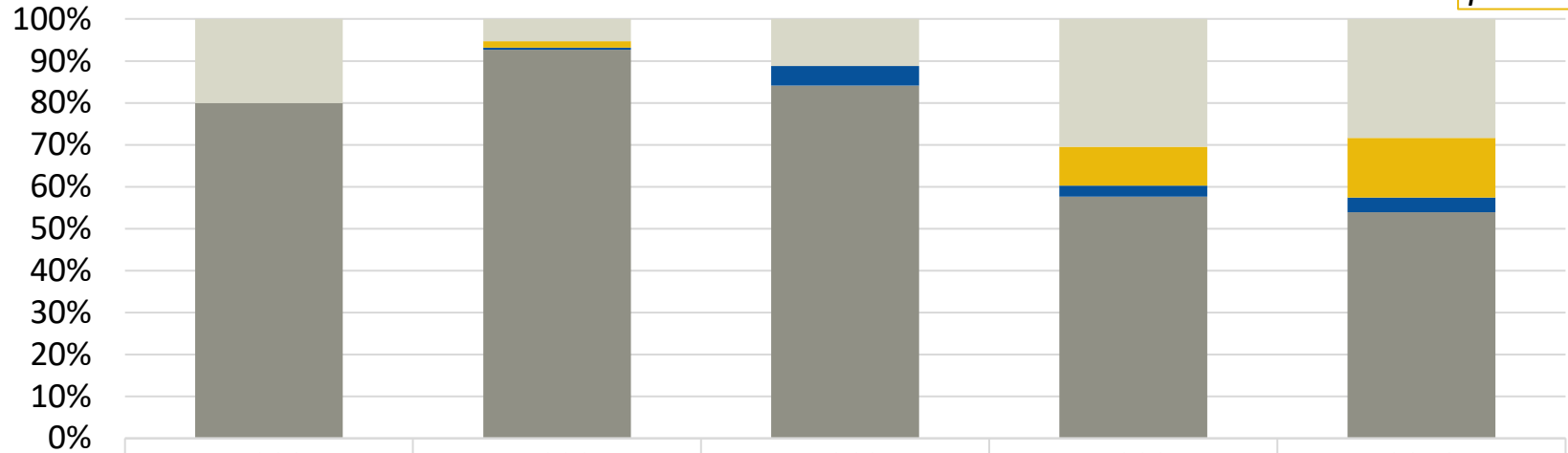
"C'm on, Scotty..."

She untangled herself from his grasp, not looking at him. "Go. Before anyone starts getting ideas."

*His lips tightened. "Yes, **sir**."*

GUYS – GENDER OF REFERENT

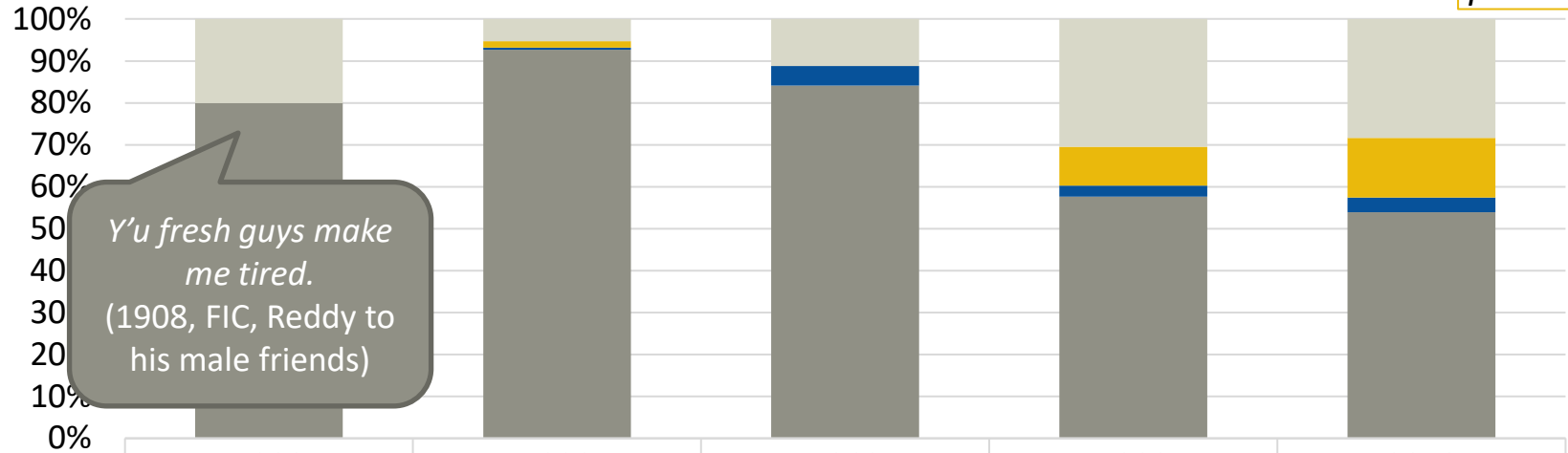
$p < 0.001$



	1900	1930	1960	1990	2010
■ undefined	2	10	19	46	40
■ both	0	3	0	14	20
■ f	0	1	8	4	5
■ m	8	176	143	87	76

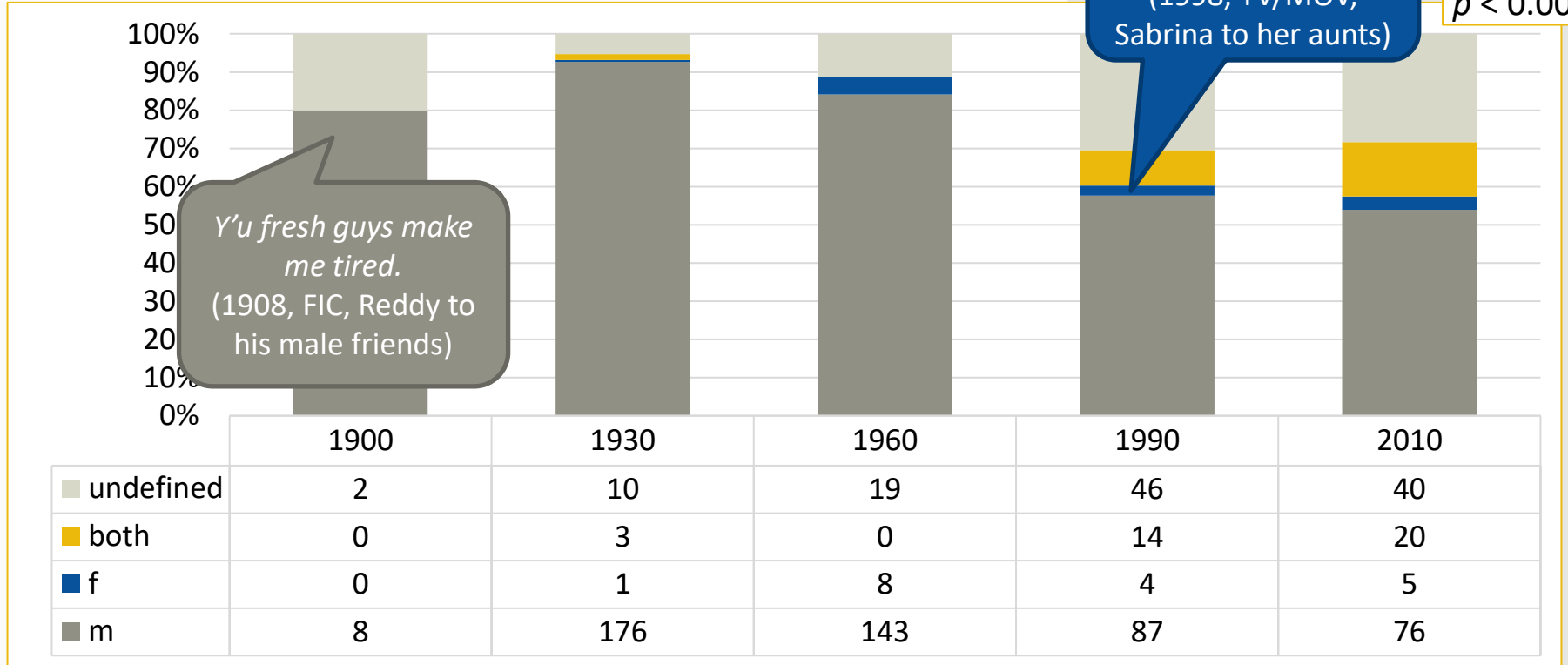
GUYS – GENDER OF REFERENT

$p < 0.001$

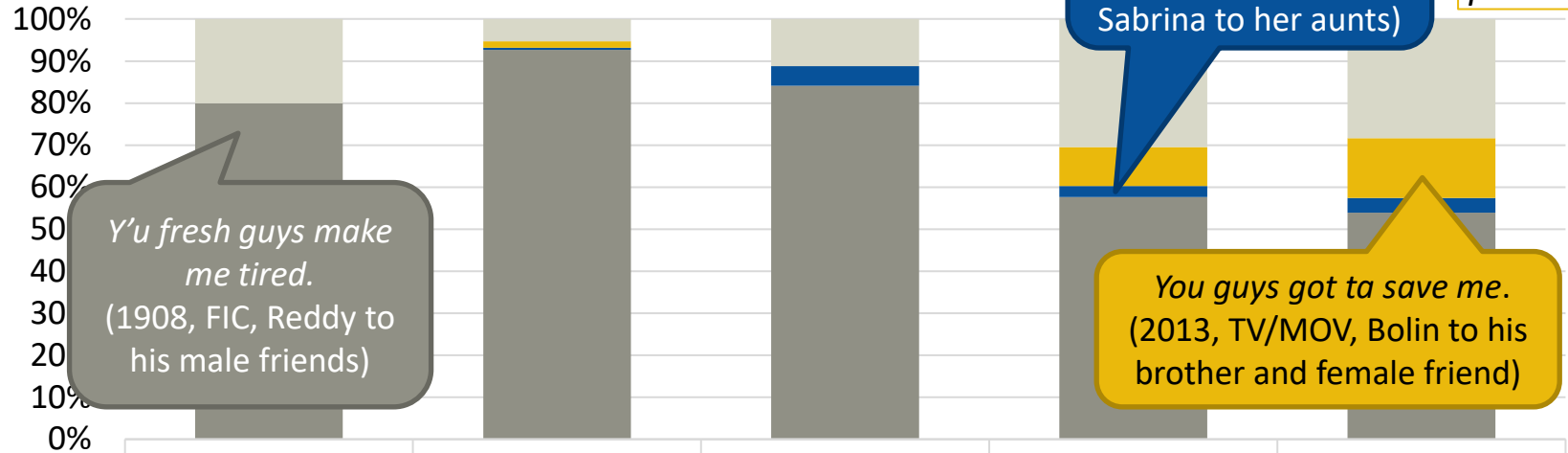


	1900	1930	1960	1990	2010
■ undefined	2	10	19	46	40
■ both	0	3	0	14	20
■ f	0	1	8	4	5
■ m	8	176	143	87	76

GUYS – GENDER OF REFERENT

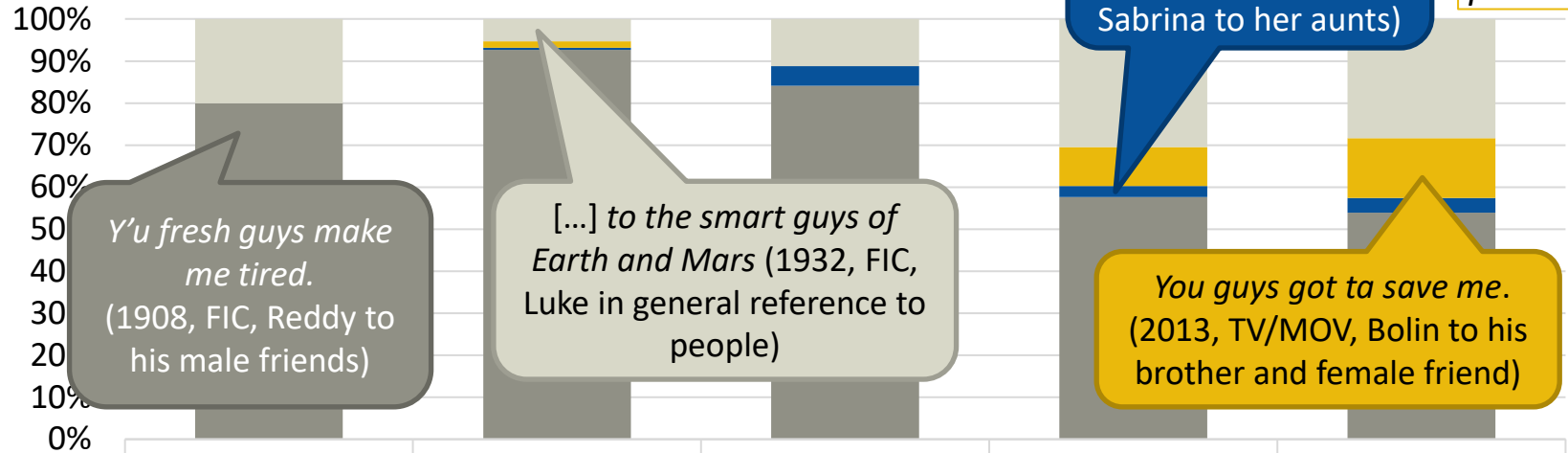


GUYS – GENDER OF REFERENT



	1900	1930	1960	1990	2010
■ undefined	2	10	19	46	40
■ both	0	3	0	14	20
■ f	0	1	8	4	5
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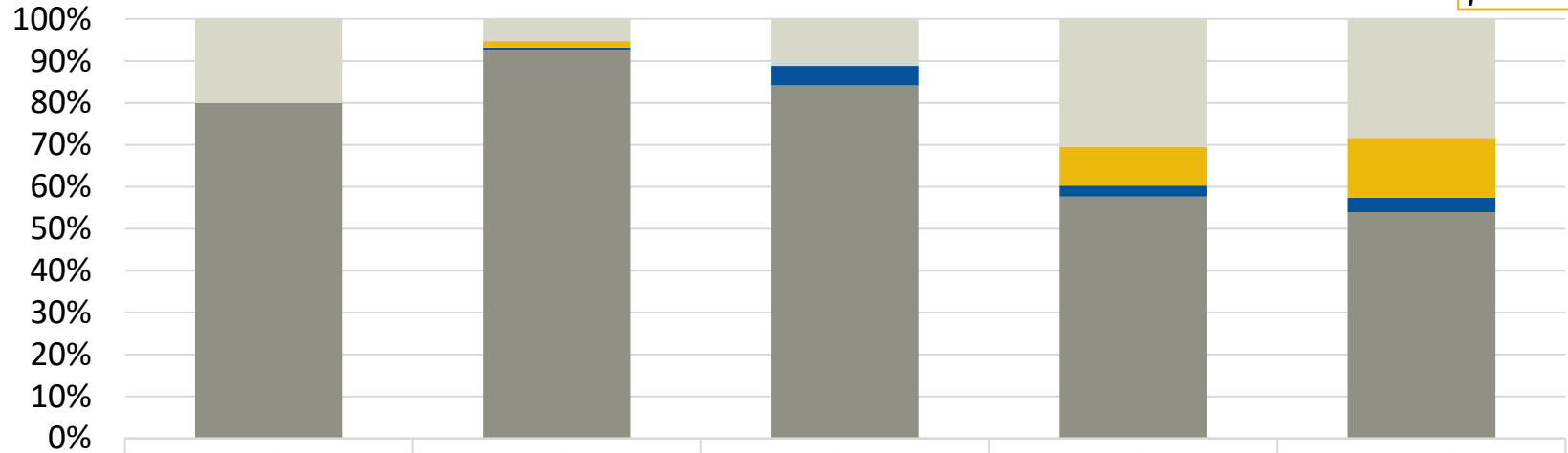
GUYS – GENDER OF REFERENT



	1900	1930	1960	1990	2010
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GUYS – GENDER OF REFERENT

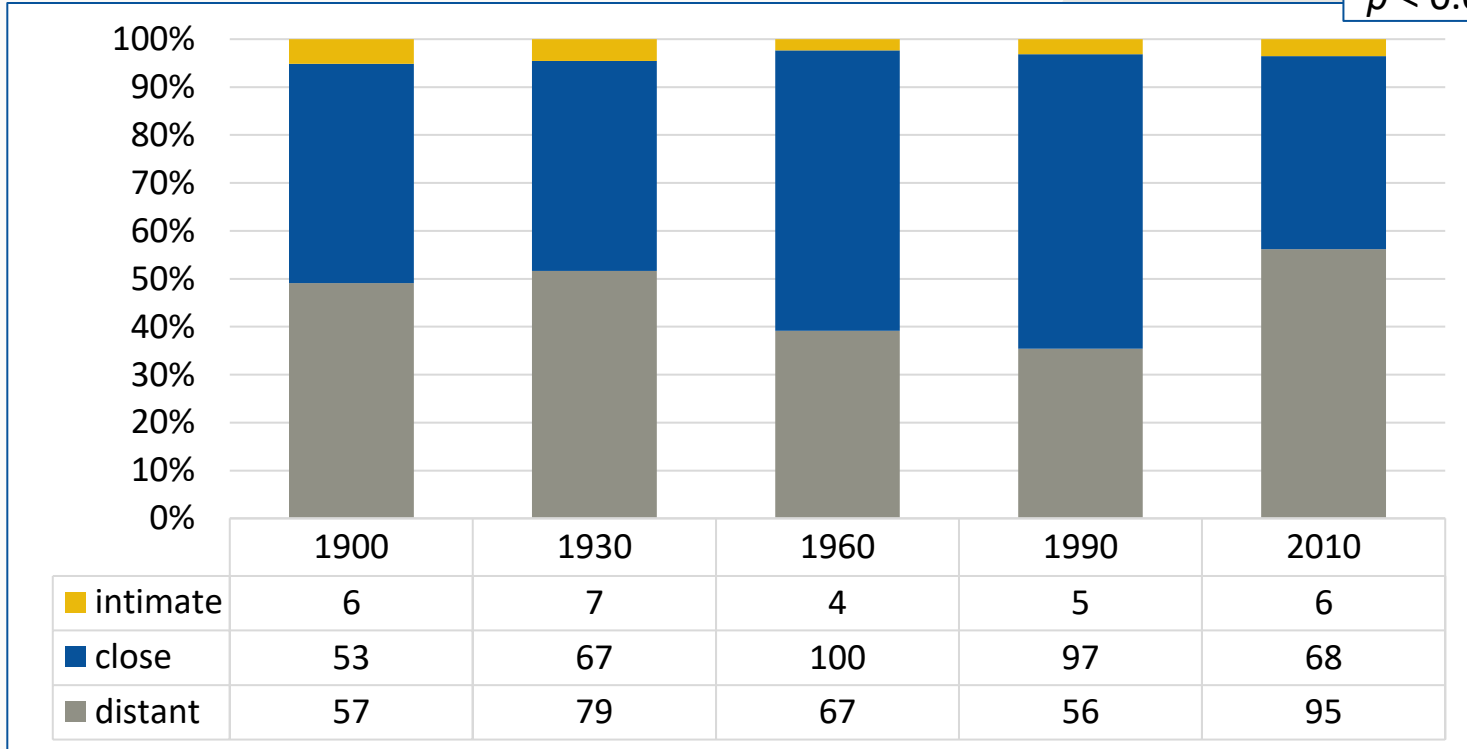
$p < 0.001$



	1900	1930	1960	1990	2010
undefined	2	10	19	46	40
both	0	3	0	14	20
f	0	1	8	4	5
m	8	176	143	87	76

SOCIAL DISTANCE – SIR (TOA/NON-TITLE)

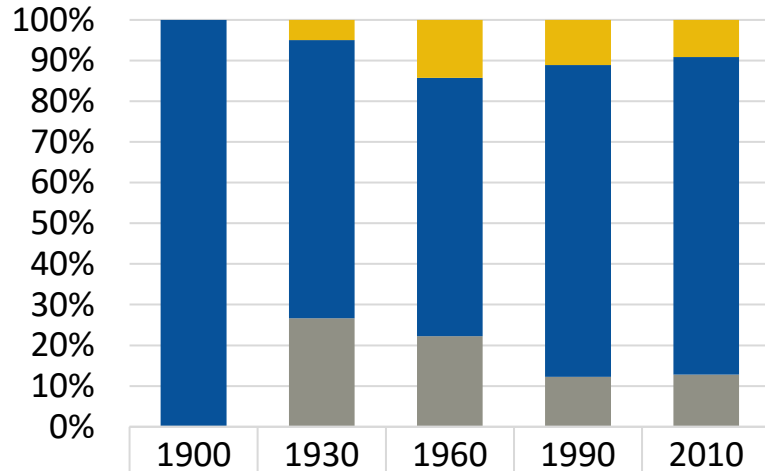
$p < 0.01$



SOCIAL DISTANCE – GUYS

n.s.

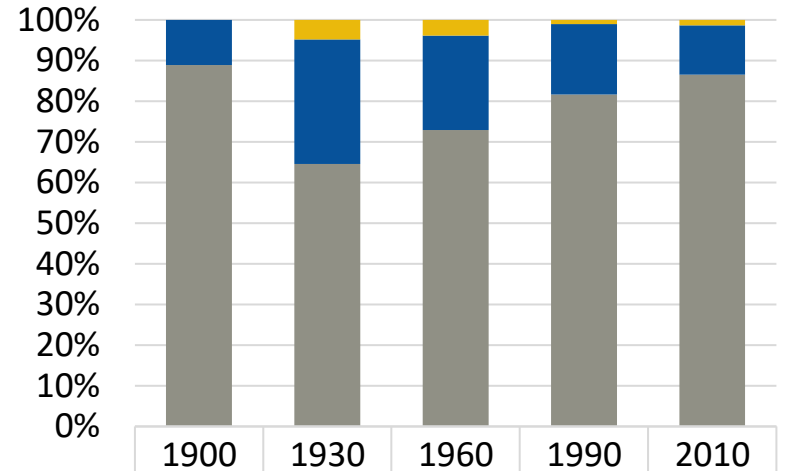
ToA



	1900	1930	1960	1990	2010
intimate	0	3	9	10	10
close	2	41	40	69	85
distant	0	16	14	11	14

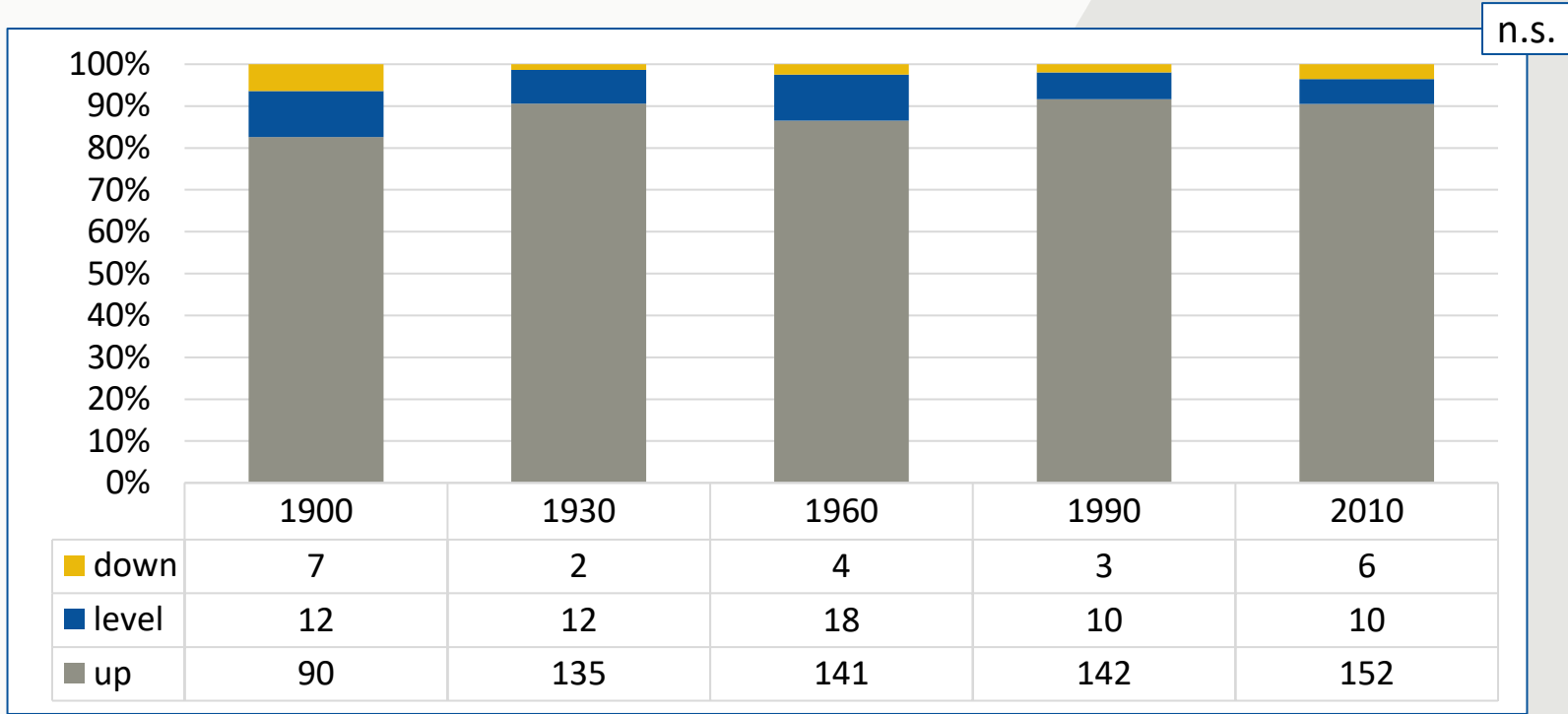
$p < 0.05$

ToR



	1900	1930	1960	1990	2010
intimate	0	6	5	1	1
close	1	38	30	17	9
distant	8	80	94	80	64

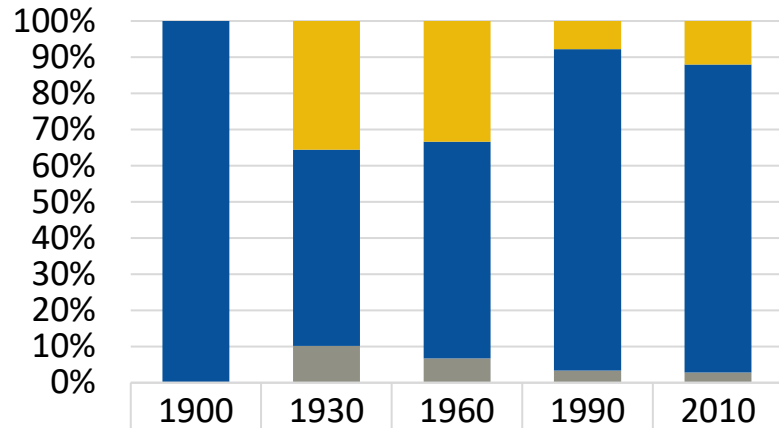
POWER – SIR (TOA/NON-TITLE)



POWER - GUYS

$p < 0.001$

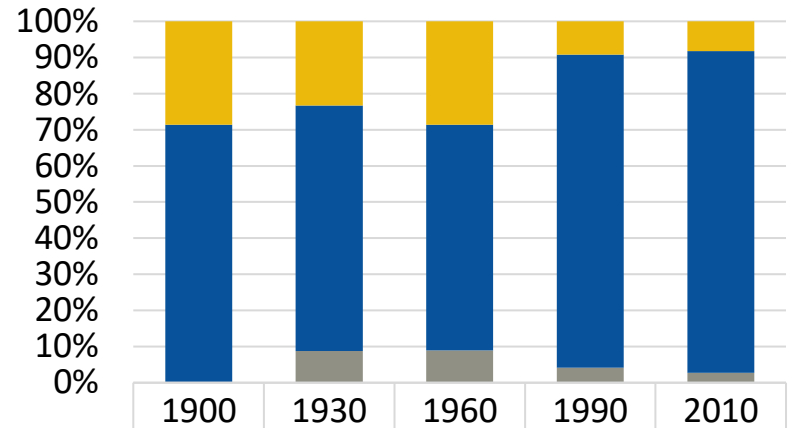
ToA



down	0	21	20	7	13
level	2	32	36	80	92
up	0	6	4	3	3

$p < 0.001$

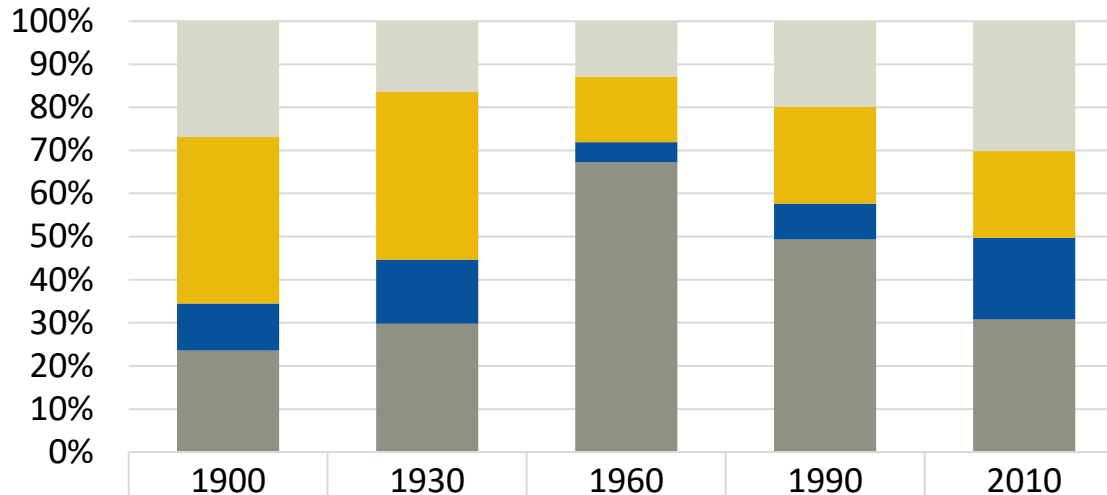
ToR



down	2	24	32	9	6
level	5	70	70	85	65
up	0	9	10	4	2

CONTEXTS OF OCCURRENCE – SIR (TOA)

$p < 0.001$



	1900	1930	1960	1990	2010
■ Interpersonal	32	23	22	31	51
■ Work	46	55	26	35	34
■ Customer Service	13	21	8	13	32
■ FPC	28	42	115	77	52

Formal Power Contexts (FPC):

- Naval
- Police
- Prison
- Courtroom
- Military
- Interrogation

CONCLUSION & OUTLOOK

MAIN FINDINGS

- *Guys* starts out as an informal, colloquial and relatively infrequent term of address and reference. Over time, it spreads out into more and more neutral contexts in terms of the register, style, as well as gender of referents
- *Sir* shows the reverse development: From a relatively common term in the early 20th c, it has been retreating to specific contexts, i.e., formal power contexts, addressing a superior, or service encounters.
- One could call these contexts *Sir's* “ecological niche”: "When obsolescent constructions are losing frequency, they tend to retreat to certain (temporary) niches of survival." (Kempf 2020: 318; cf. also Hundt 2004)

CONCLUSION

- Democratization seems to be a valid explanation for the observed changes:
- Formal power marking remains an acceptable practice in those contexts where formal hierarchies are preserved, such as the military, police... In most daily interactions, however, hierarchical power relations are less and less marked explicitly by speakers.
- Positive politeness (signalling closeness, casualness, and symmetry), on the other hand, is valued more and more, especially in American English, allowing *guys* to spread into more and more general, unmarked contexts.
- Corpus-based findings of the present study thus corroborate DCT-based findings and results from first interviews (Bruns & Kranich 2022; Kranich, Bruns & Hampel 2021).

- More linguistic markers to be investigated
- More data triangulation with
 - Questionnaires, e.g. on attitudes
 - More specialized DCTs on address and person reference
 - Interviews
- More interdisciplinary comparison to changes in other areas

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WITH CODING AND ANALYSIS

“WHY, THANK YOU. BYE, GUYS.”

(1992, TV/MOV)

QUESTIONS?

COMMENTS?

IDEAS?

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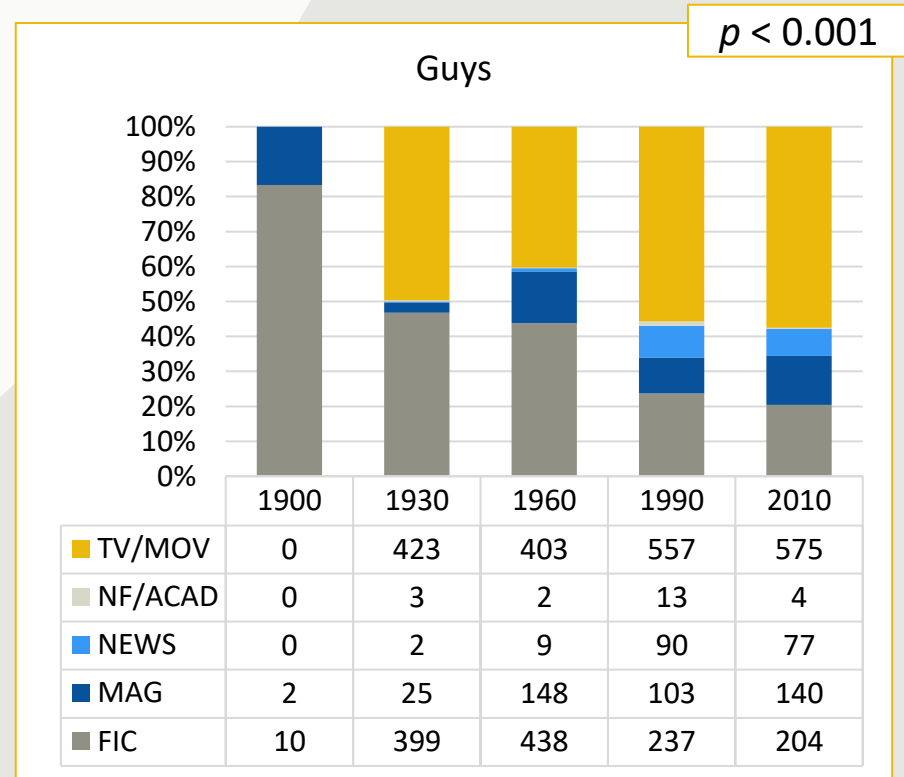
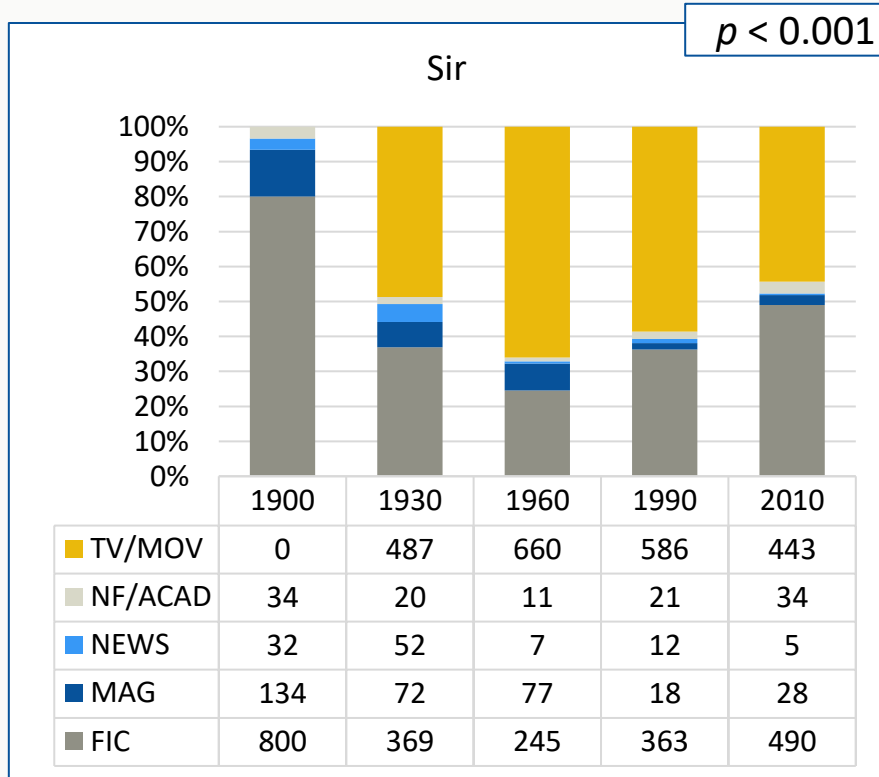
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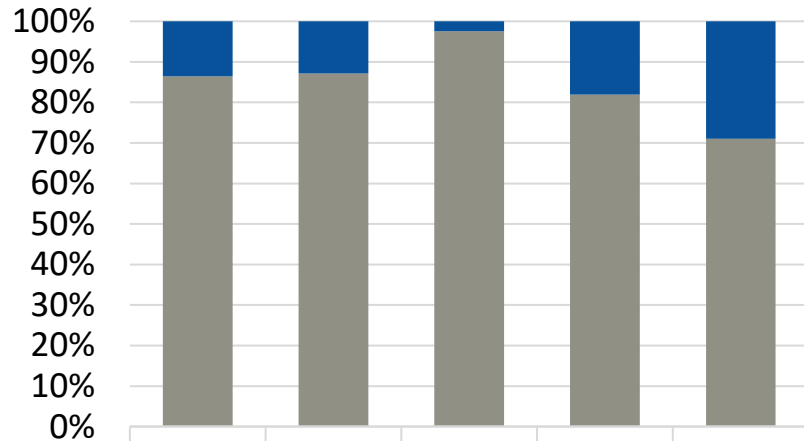
GENRE (1000 INSTANCES)



GENDER OF SPEAKER

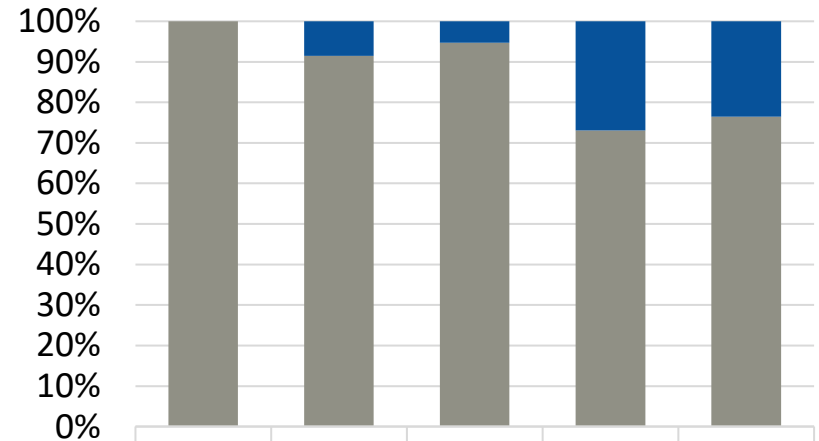
Comparisons between *sir* & *guys* for each decade are n.s.

Sir (non-title) Speaker Gender



■ female	16	18	4	26	40
■ male	102	122	158	118	98

Guys Speaker Gender



■ female	0	13	8	24	24
■ male	7	139	143	65	78

DISTANCE X POWER (ALL DECADES/ TOA)

