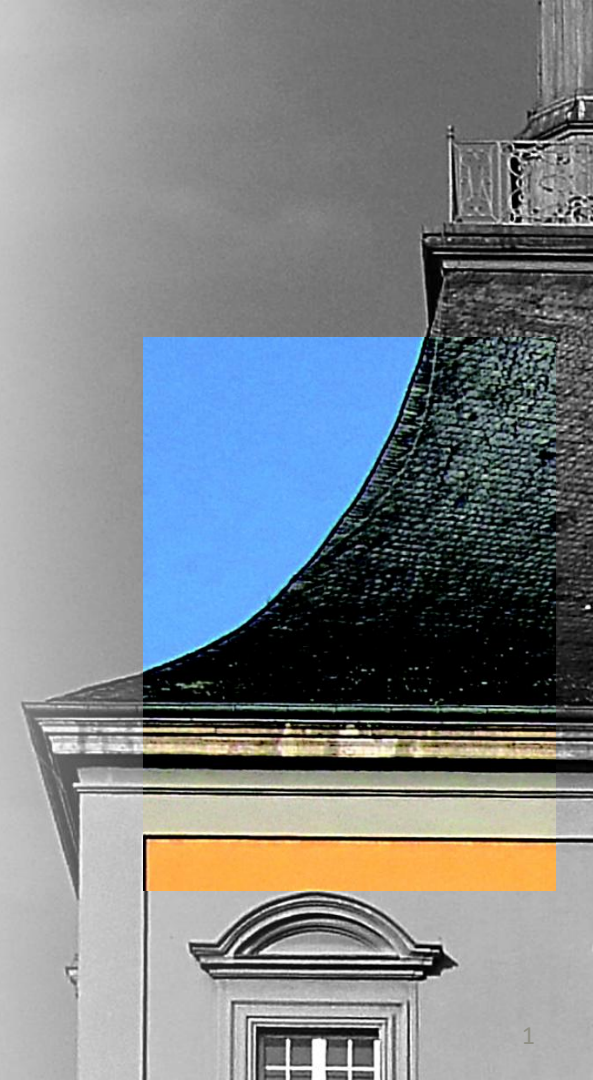# Requests across varieties and cultures

Norms are changing
(but not everywhere in the same way)

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STRUCTURE

1. Introduction: Socio-cultural impact on recent language change

2. Key linguistic features of interest for studies of potential democratization

3. Requests in German and varieties of English

4. Conclusion and outlook

1. Introduction

Socio-cultural impact on recent language change

LINK BETWEEN SOCIO-CULTURAL CHANGES AND RECENT LANGUAGE CHANGE
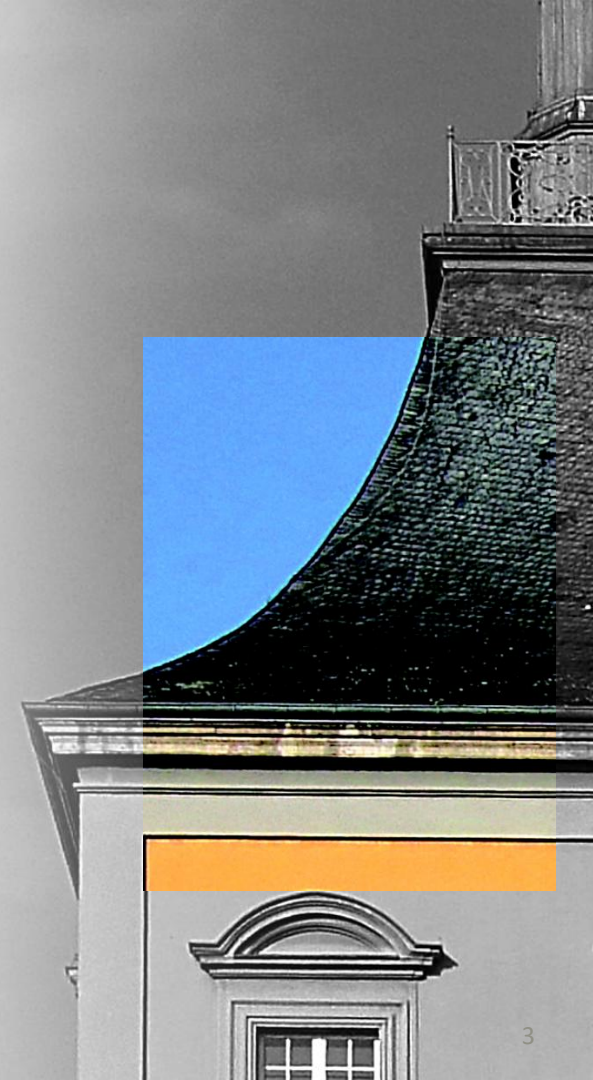
Changes in society between 1960 and today:

- – Decline of overt attention to hierarchy

- – Democratization

- – Globalization of knowledge

- – Globalization of communication (e.g. the internet)

- – […] (cf. Mair 2006: 1-11)

- ➢ Informalization

- ➢ Colloquialization

RECENT LANGUAGE CHANGE (1)

Recent changes linked to colloquialization and democratization in English include:

- Increasing frequency of the progressive (cf. e.g. Mair & Hundt 1995, Smith 2002)

- Decline of core modals, rise of semi-modals (cf. e.g. Mair & Leech 2006, Leech 2009, Collins 2009a, b)

- Decline of *be*-passive, rise of *get*-passive (cf. e.g. Leech et al. 2009: 144-154)

- Identification and elimination of sexist language use, e.g. declining use of generic *he*

- The prevalence of non-imposition politeness in Present-Day English

(cf. Mair 2006, Farrelly & Seoane 2012)

RECENT LANGUAGE CHANGE (2)

Recent changes in German:

- Less studied in terms of colloquialization and democratization, but changes in the use of terms of address have been linked to social changes

- Declining use of titles (e.g. *Professor X*) and increasing use of *Du* instead of *Sie* has been linked to the student revolts of 1968 in West Germany (cf. Besch 1998, cf. also Clyne et al. 2006: 292)

DEMOCRATIZATION

– 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)

– Note: Less overt power markers in language may not mean that less power is being exercised, but that it is simply exercised more implicitly (cf. Fairclough 1992: 1-29)

LINK BETWEEN DEMOCRATIZATION AND LANGUAGE CHANGE

"Language and social contexts influence one another, and together constitute social processes." (Culpeper & Nevala 2012: 372)

- Problem: "Sociocultural processes and their related concepts are often introduced into works on the history of English in a piecemeal fashion [...] Indeed, social matters appear to lack the apparent certainty of formal linguistic material. [...] For example, social contact can be partially analyzed empirically [...], but a sociocultural process such as democratization cannot." (365)

- But link between culture of origin, linguistic choices and attitudes in individual speakers (e.g. towards social hierarchies) can be.

2. Key linguistic features of interest for studies of potential democratization
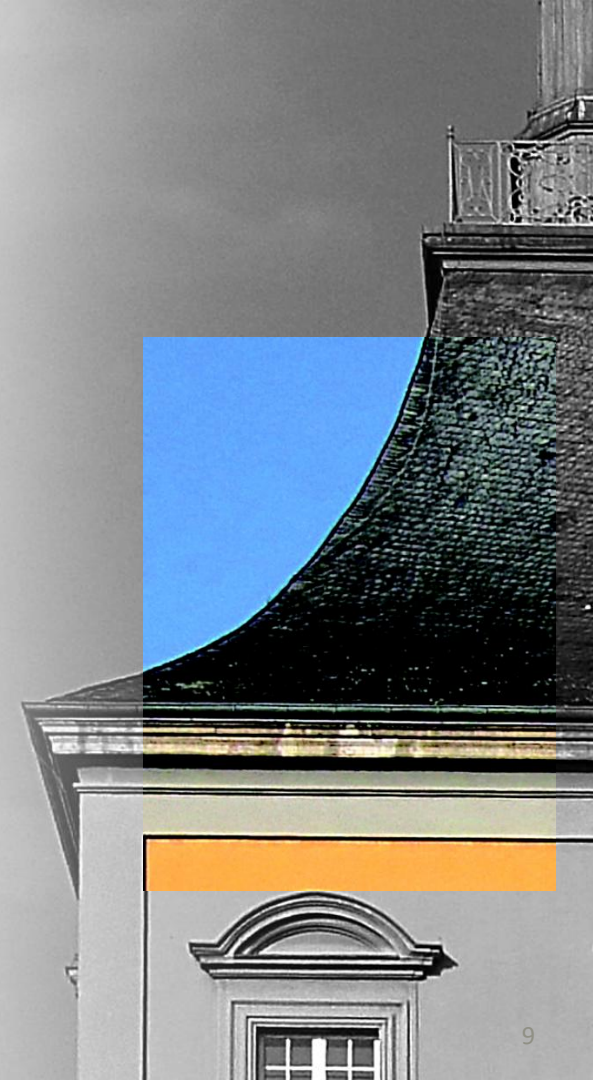
LINGUISTIC MARKERS AFFECTED BY DEMOCRATIZATION

– modals (both deontic uses, as permission and obligation are expressed differently if hierarchies are more or less overtly focused on, and epistemic uses, which are often used as a hedge; cf. e.g. Hyland 1996, Kranich 2011).

– Other hedges as well as boosters (lesser need to downtone, more freedom to boost one's opinion if hierarchies are flatter)

– terms of address (more equality-oriented, less hierarchy-oriented)

– FTAs, e.g. requests = our starting point (Power: changes in conceptualisation of hierarchical relations should affect realisation of FTAs)
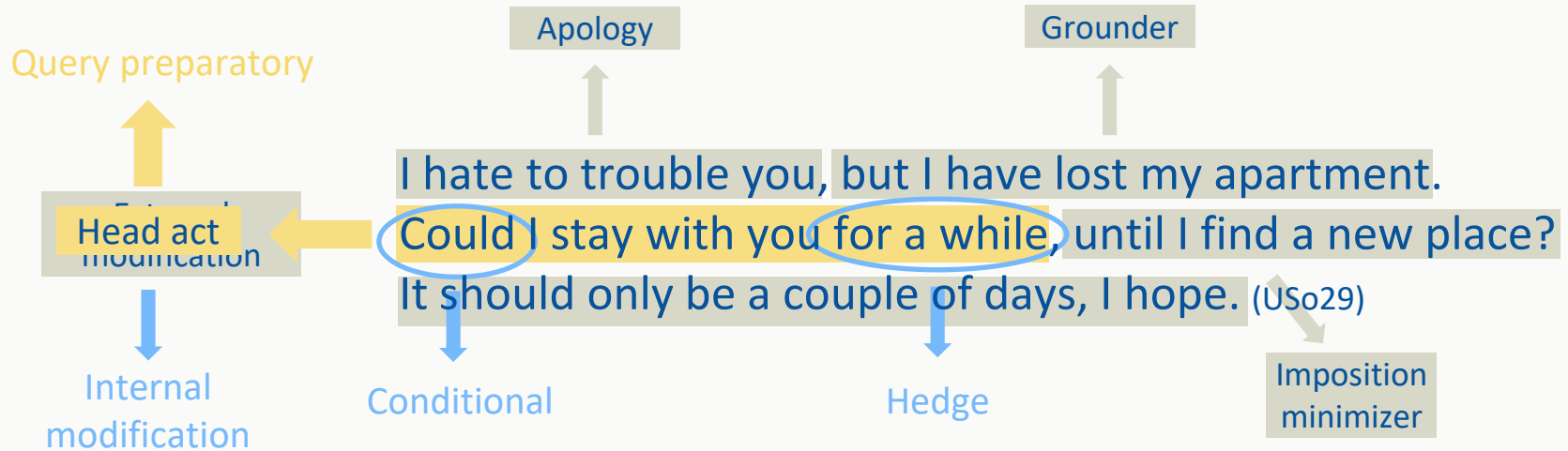
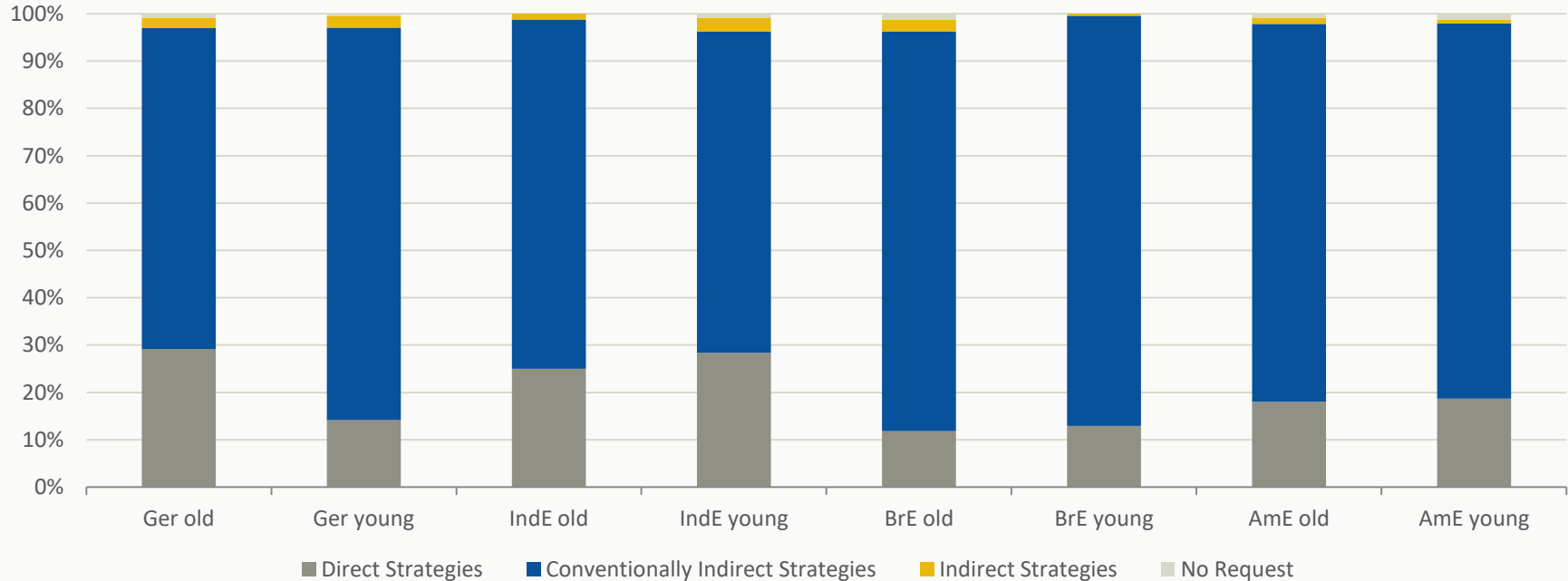# 3. Requests in German and varieties of English
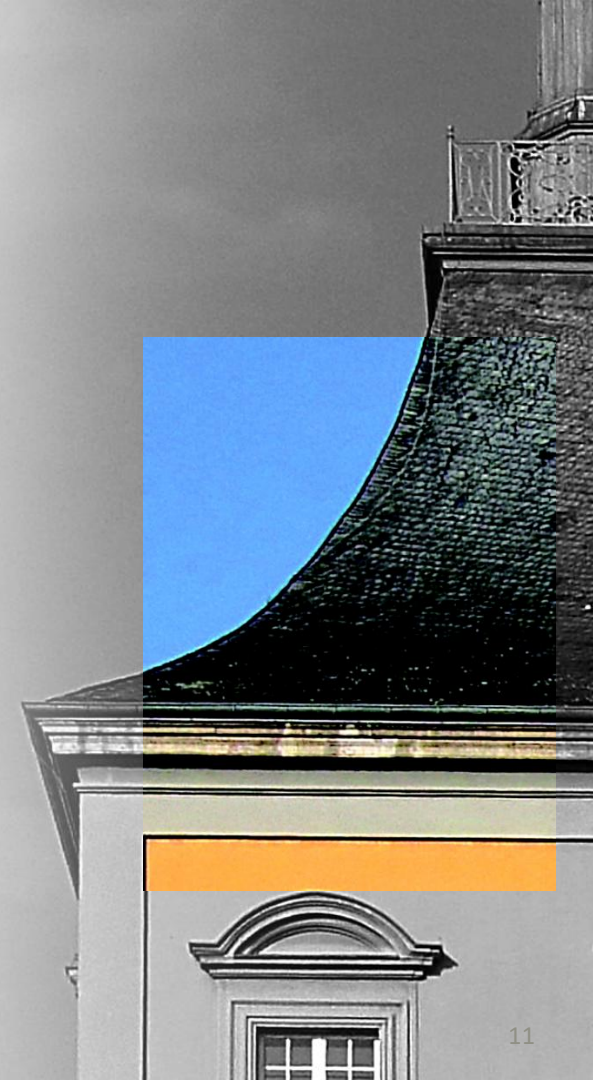
STUDY DESIGN AND METHOD

– **DCT**, 8 situations, request elicitation

– Focus on power difference, social distance and weight of imposition

– Informants (n = 232): speakers of AmE, BrE, IndE and German, 18-30 and 50+ years

– Coding: CCSARP coding manual (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989, cf. Economidou-Kogetsidis 2010)

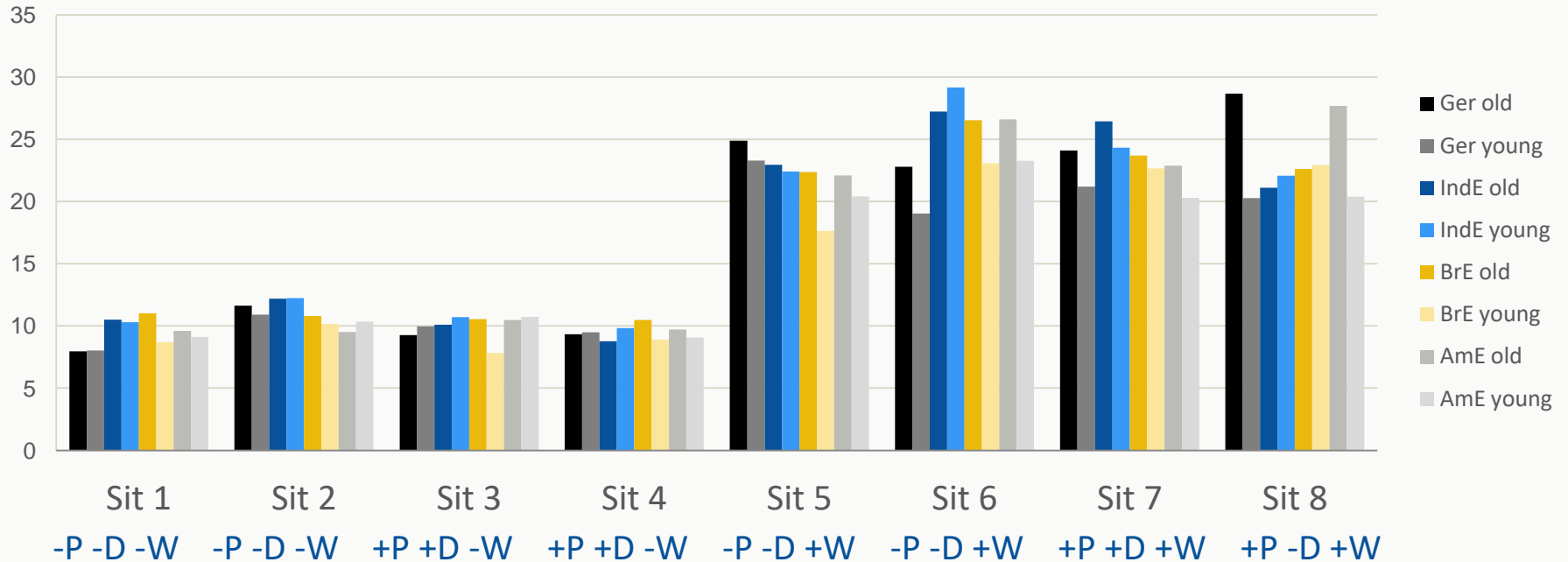– **Interviews** with 8 participants in UK (n = 3) and Germany (n = 5)

CODING EXAMPLE

Query preparatory

Apology

Grounder

Head act

Internal modification

I hate to trouble you, but I have lost my apartment.
Could I stay with you for a while, until I find a new place?
It should only be a couple of days, I hope. (US029)

Conditional

Hedge

Imposition minimizer

RESULTS: HEAD ACT STRATEGIES

All situations

Mean number of words
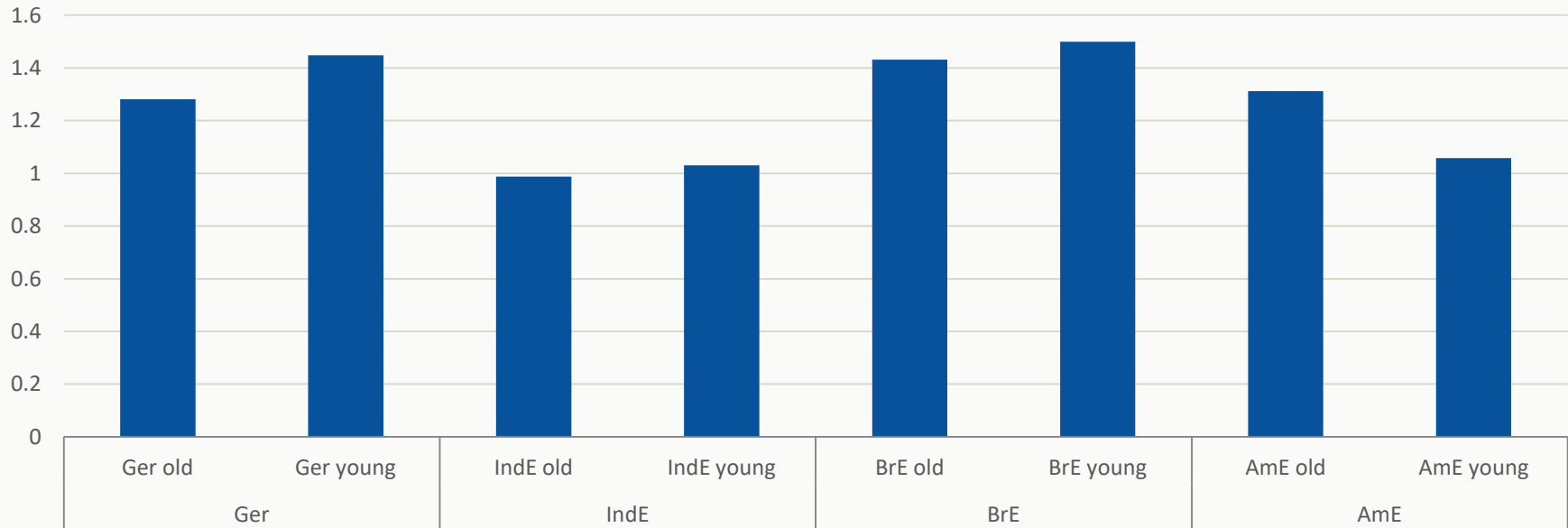
Normalized frequencies of supportive moves in all situations
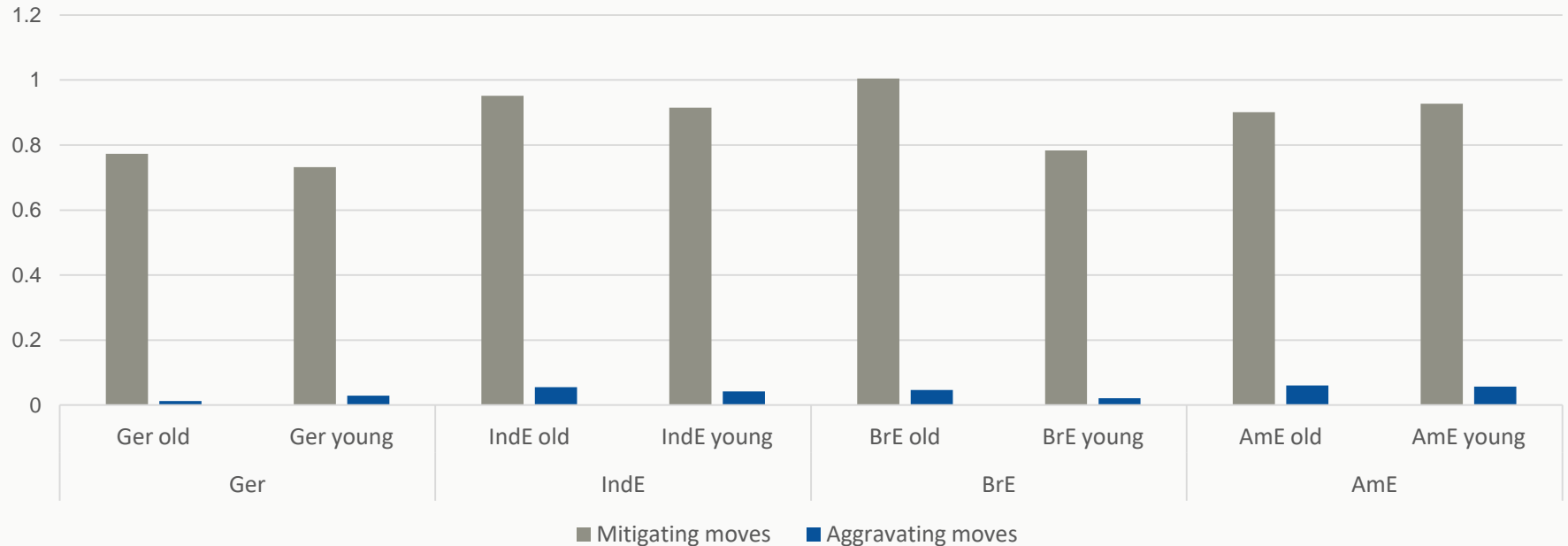
Normalised frequencies of internal mitigating moves

Sit. 3: Boss – employees, + Power, + Distance, - Weight

It's really noisy in the office, so the boss asks the workers to be quiet.
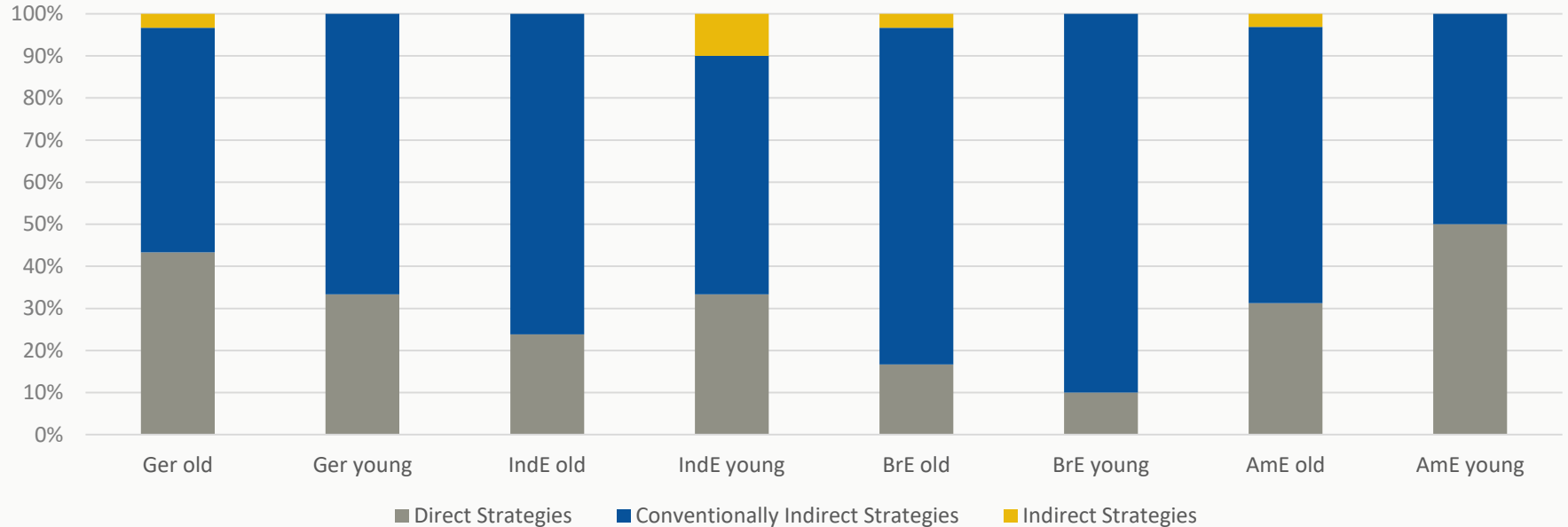
– Boss: _____

– Other workers: Sure, sorry.

Sit. 3: Boss – employees, + Power, + Distance, - Weight

– Direct:

   – Hold down the noise, folks. (USo21)

– Conventionally indirect:

   – Würden Sie bitte die Lautstärke mäßigen? (GERy27)
      ("Would you please moderate the noise level?")

– Non-conventionally indirect:

   – Hey guys it's feels like I'm in fish market (INDy18)

Sit. 3: Boss – employees, + Power, + Distance, - Weight

Sit. 3: Boss – employees, + Power, + Distance, - Weight

Sit. 2: Wife – husband, - Power, - Distance, - Weight

Wife (F) asks husband (M) to check the tyre pressure of their bikes. (IndE: to pick up the car from the service center today)

– F: _____

– M: Why?

– F: Because we have a date today with the Johnson family to go on a cycling tour. (IndE: Because we have quite a long drive to my cousin's birthday party tomorrow)

Sit. 2: Wife – husband, - Power, - Distance, - Weight

– Direct:

    – Mani, please pick up our car today from the service centre without fail. (INDo09)

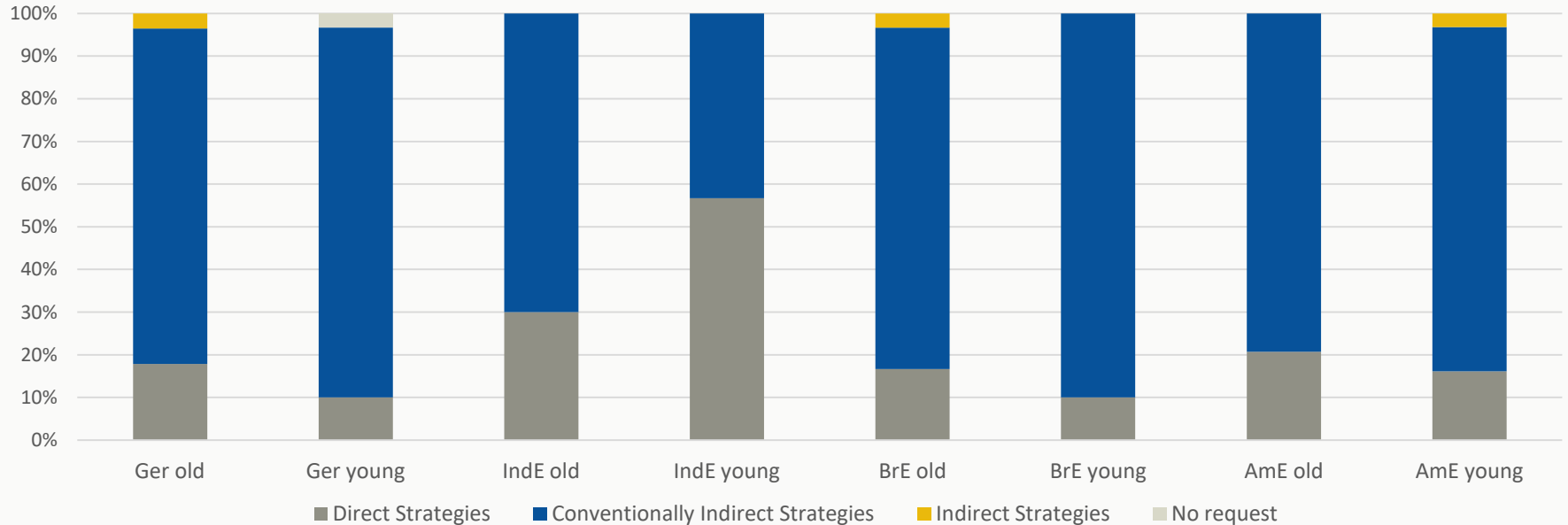– Conventionally indirect:

    – Honey, can you check the tyre pressure of the bikes? (UKy04)

– Non-conventionally indirect:

    – Ich glaube, bei mir am Rad müsste der Reifendruck mal geprüft werden. (GERo12)
      ("I guess the tyre pressure on my bike would need to be checked")

Sit. 2: Wife – husband, - Power, - Distance, - Weight

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS

English, UK: **F, 25, student & F, 24, international relations degree**

- "I think you got a better response from people if you sort of look like you're working with them and not, you know, just demanding them to do things."

- "I think it depends on the role they're in and also the person rather than generation."

- "But I also think nowadays there's a lot more of like office culture and people like being told of like […] other people's sensitivities that I don't think back then there were so maybe their boss would just kind of like, um, not verbally abuse, but you know, kind of be more like 'Shut up!', you know, straight forward with their employees whereas now everyone is a bit more like sensitive and we kind of like respect everyone else."

English, UK: **F, 45, sales employee**

− "we have a couple of young ones, and they don't listen. They're rude. […] And they are not very respectful. The way they speak to all of us. […] if they are asking FOR something, if they WANT something, then obviously they can be quite polite and they can say 'please'."

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS

German, Germany: **F, 21, two students**

– "Also generell würde ich schon sagen, dass die [Machtstrukturen] stärker waren [damals], und ich kann mir vorstellen, das kommt darauf an was für eine Stellung man hat." (F1)
   ("Well I would confirm that power structures were stronger back then, and I can imagine that it depends on the position one is in.")

– "Ich glaube nicht, dass es damals anders war." (F2)
   ("I don't think that it used to be different.")

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS

− German, Germany: **F, 51, secretary**: "Ich glaube, das verändert sich ganz stark. Also, Respektspersonen gibt's da nicht mehr so... ist mein Eindruck." ("I think this has really been changing a lot. Authority figures no longer really exist that much... that's my impression.")

− German, Germany: **F, 60, secretary**: "Ich denke schon, dass meine Generation grundsätzlich höflicher war. Vielleicht ist das aber auch eine Krankheit meiner Generation oder der Älteren, die immer sagen, früher war alles besser oder früher waren die Leute höflicher. Ich erlebe es hier aktuell ja auch, dass jüngere Leute sehr zuvorkommend sind [...] da ist die Umgangsform einwandfrei... bis auf ganz wenige Ausnahmen." ("I do think my generation was generally more polite. Maybe that's an illness of my generation or of older people, who always say, everything used to be better, or in my days, people used to be more polite. Actually I also experience here (at the University of Bonn) that younger people today are very polite [...] their manners are impeccable... with very few exceptions.")

4. Conclusion and outlook
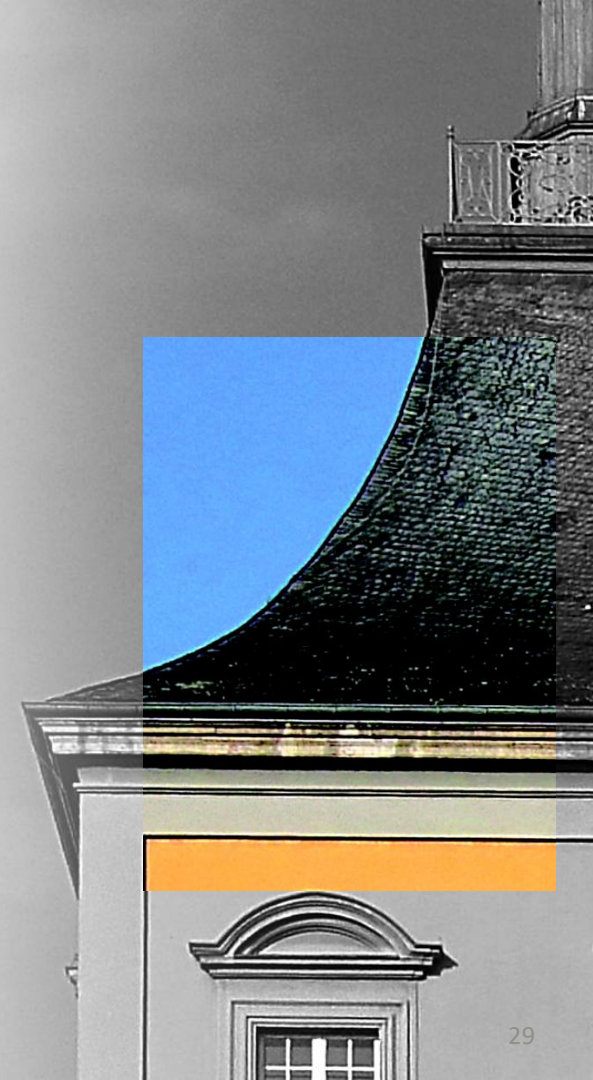
CONCLUSION

− Pilot study reveals generational and cross-cultural differences

− Preference for conventionally indirect strategies (esp. QP) across all data sets

− Tendency towards increasing directness in some situations and varieties

  → Less need for indirectness due to increasing democratization?

− Young Indians prefer direct strategies in situations of -P and -D (cf. Bruns 2017)

− Older German speakers tend to be more direct than BrE and AmE speakers (confirming results by e.g. House 1996), but this pragmatic contrast seems to be changing in the younger generation.

OUTLOOK (1)

– **Aim**: A more fine-grained perspective on the reasons why more direct and more indirect strategies are chosen

– **Hypothesis**: Frequency changes of the relevant linguistic expressions closely connected to changes in cultural, social conventions and the ensuing changing genre norms. > Differences between different varieties of English and German explicable partly as differences in cultural norms. Impact of language structure (e.g. with regard to types of hedging) will also become visible because of the English-German contrastive perspective.

OUTLOOK (2)

Future plans:

– More interviews

– Questionnaires on attitudes towards hierarchical relations in society to see connection more clearly between linguistic choices and attitudes

– Correlation with frequency changes in corpora

– Inclusion of Austrian German (pragmatically very different according to e.g. Muhr 1995, 2008; e.g. clear differences concerning terms of address, cf. Kretzenbacher 2011)

– Further analysis of modals, other hedges, boosters, personal pronouns and address terms

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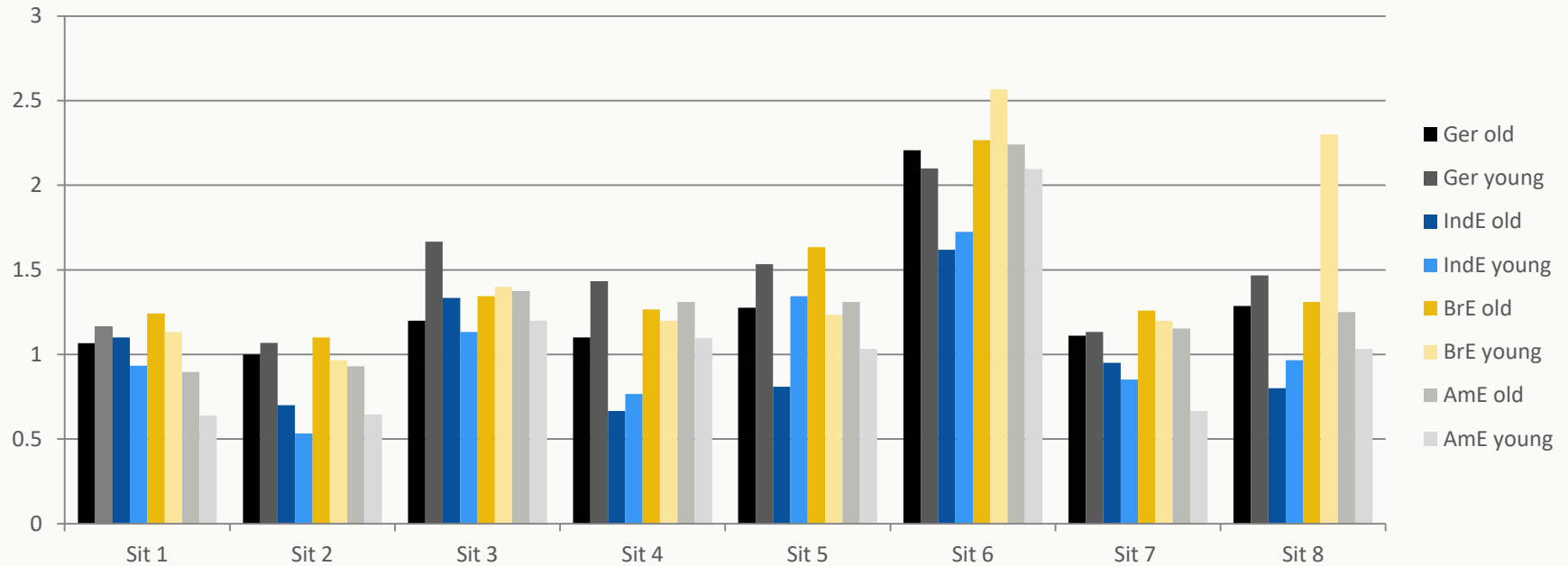
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Thank you for your attention!

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Normalised frequencies of internal mitigating moves

Preparatory Condition in all QP head acts