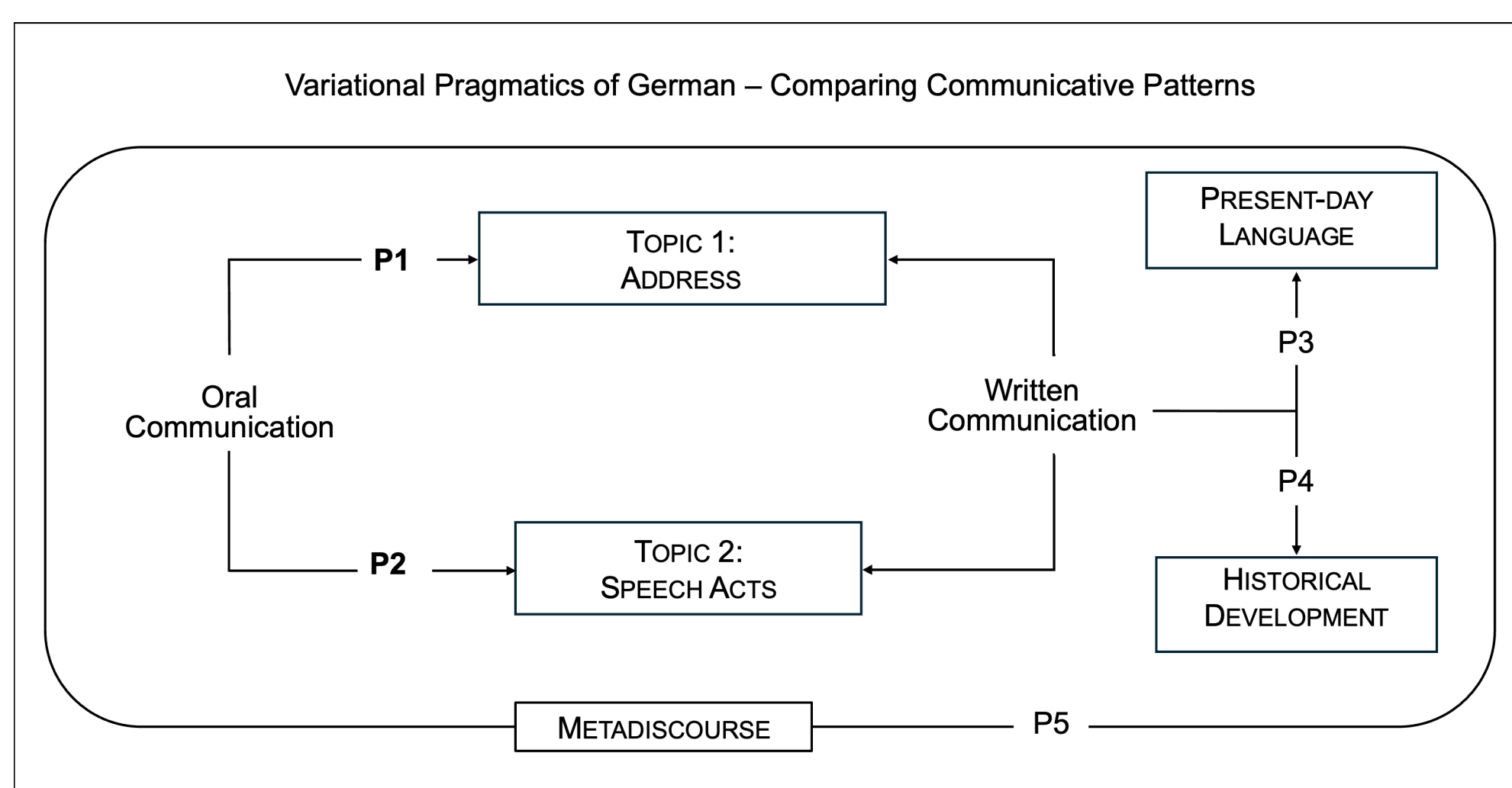


# Variational Pragmatics of German

## Comparing Communicative Patterns

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### 1 The VariPrag Project

- Investigation of sociopragmatic variation in the realization and perception of (im)politeness-sensitive phenomena in Germany, Austria and German-speaking Switzerland as well as their metapragmatic negotiation
- (Ongoing) collaboration between FU Berlin, Bielefeld University, PLUS Salzburg and UZH Zurich between 2023 and 2026

### Projects P1 and P2 – Oral Communication

## 2 Research Aims

- Focus on the ...
  - Formal-pragmatic level (e.g. syntactically integrated and disintegrated forms of address)
  - Actional-pragmatic level (e.g. speech acts request, complaint and assertion)
- Factor 'region', but also other macro- and micro-social factors within the framework of variational pragmatics (Schneider & Barron 2008)

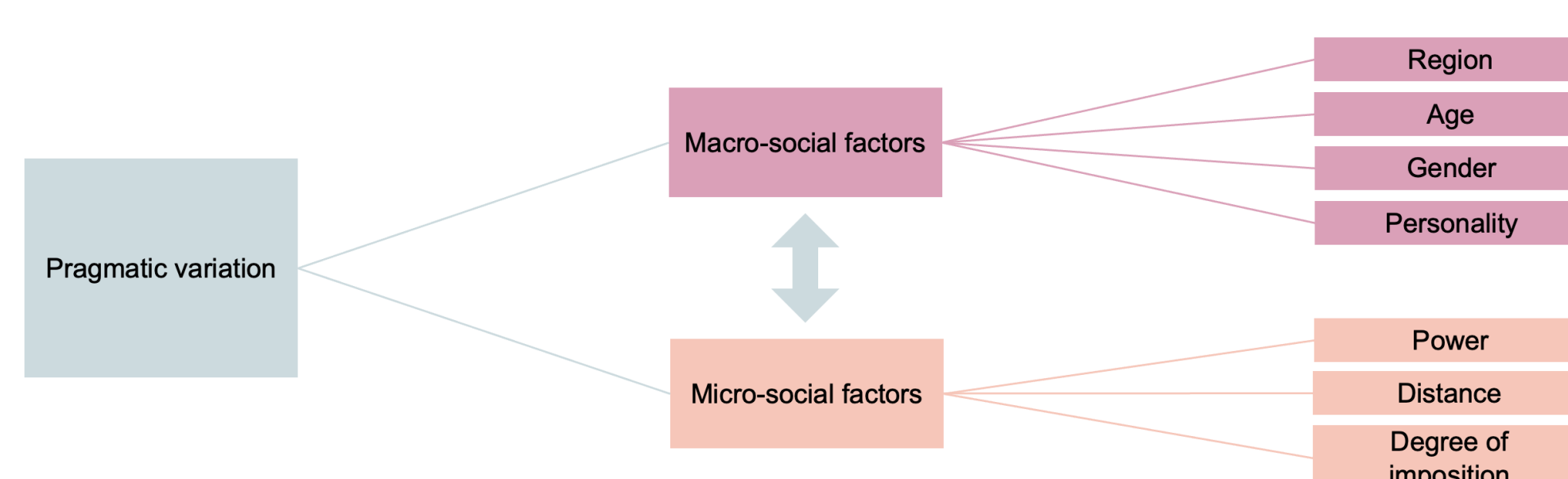


Fig. 1 Macro- and micro-social factors of pragmatic variation (adapted from Barron 2021)

## 3 Methods

- Online questionnaire featuring discourse completion tasks (cf. Ogiermann 2018 for an overview)
- 3,411 participants from Germany, Austria and Switzerland

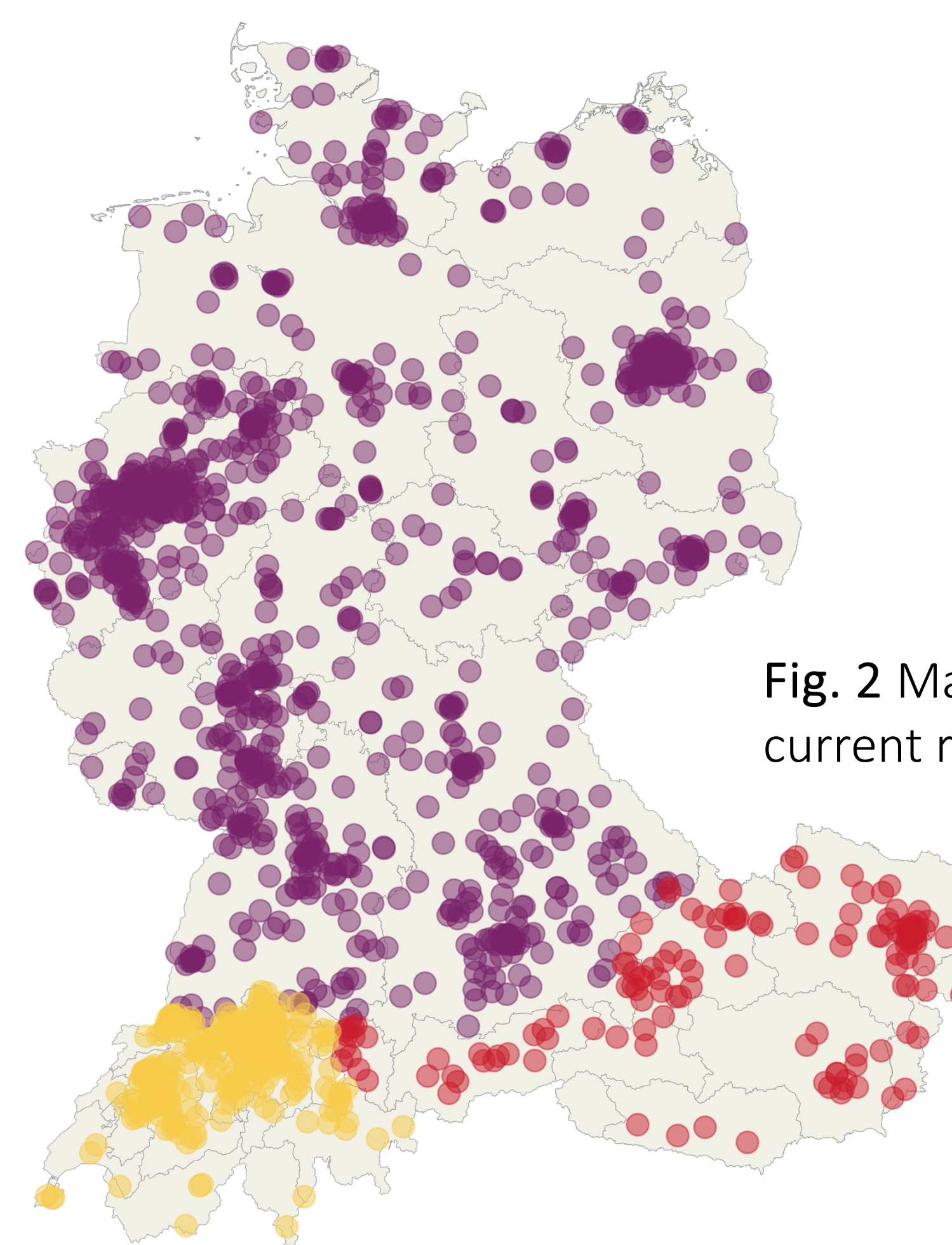


Fig. 2 Map locating zip codes of participants' current residency across countries

## 4 Results

- Data visualizations present only preliminary results as the analysis has not yet been completed (as of June 2025)

### 4.1 Regional and Age Effects in the Use of T/V-Pronouns

- Predominant preference for V-pronoun *Sie* 'you.HON' when addressing strangers in requests
- Participants are more likely to prefer V-pronoun with increasing age
- Younger participants in Austria and Switzerland prefer T-pronoun *du* 'you.SG.NONHON' vs. younger participants in Germany tend to be more formal

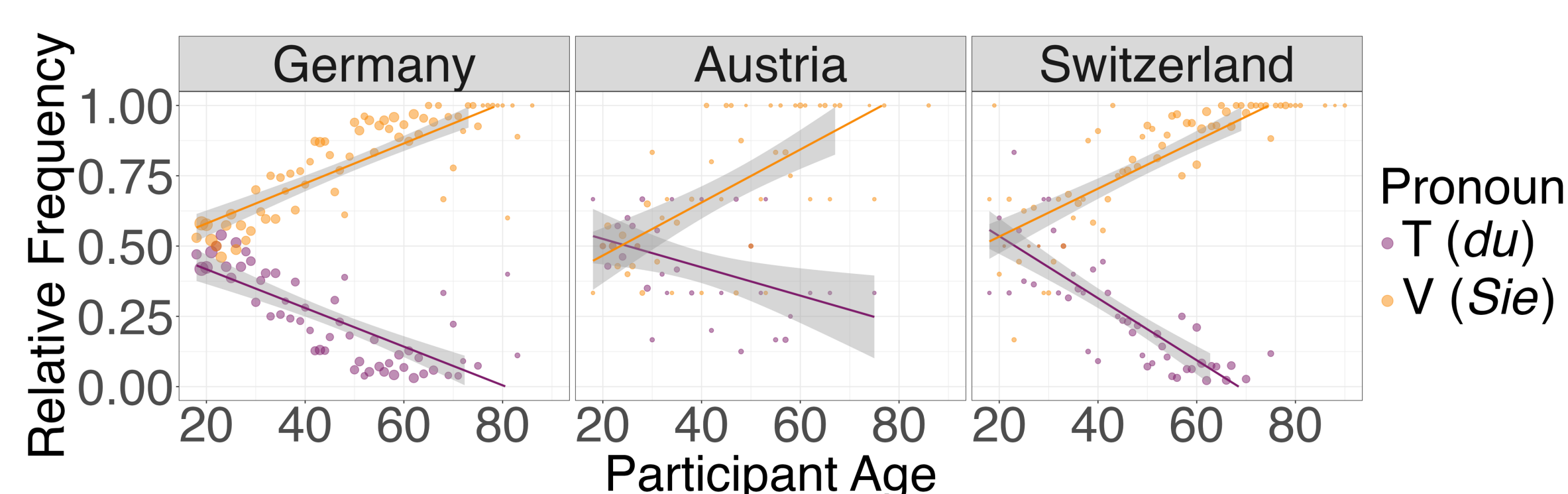


Fig. 3 T-pronoun *du* 'you.SG.NONHON' and V-pronoun *Sie* 'you.HON' in requests to strangers by participant age and country (N = 4,310 observations)

### 4.2 Age Effects in the Use of *Bitte* 'Please'

- Older participants tend to use *bitte* 'please' in requests more often than younger participants across countries
- Younger participants tend to prefer tentativeness-indicating downtoners such as *vielleicht* 'maybe' in similar contexts
- Potential apparent-time change, i.e. *bitte* 'please' as politeness formula for older participants vs. directive marker for younger participants (cf. Ackermann 2023)

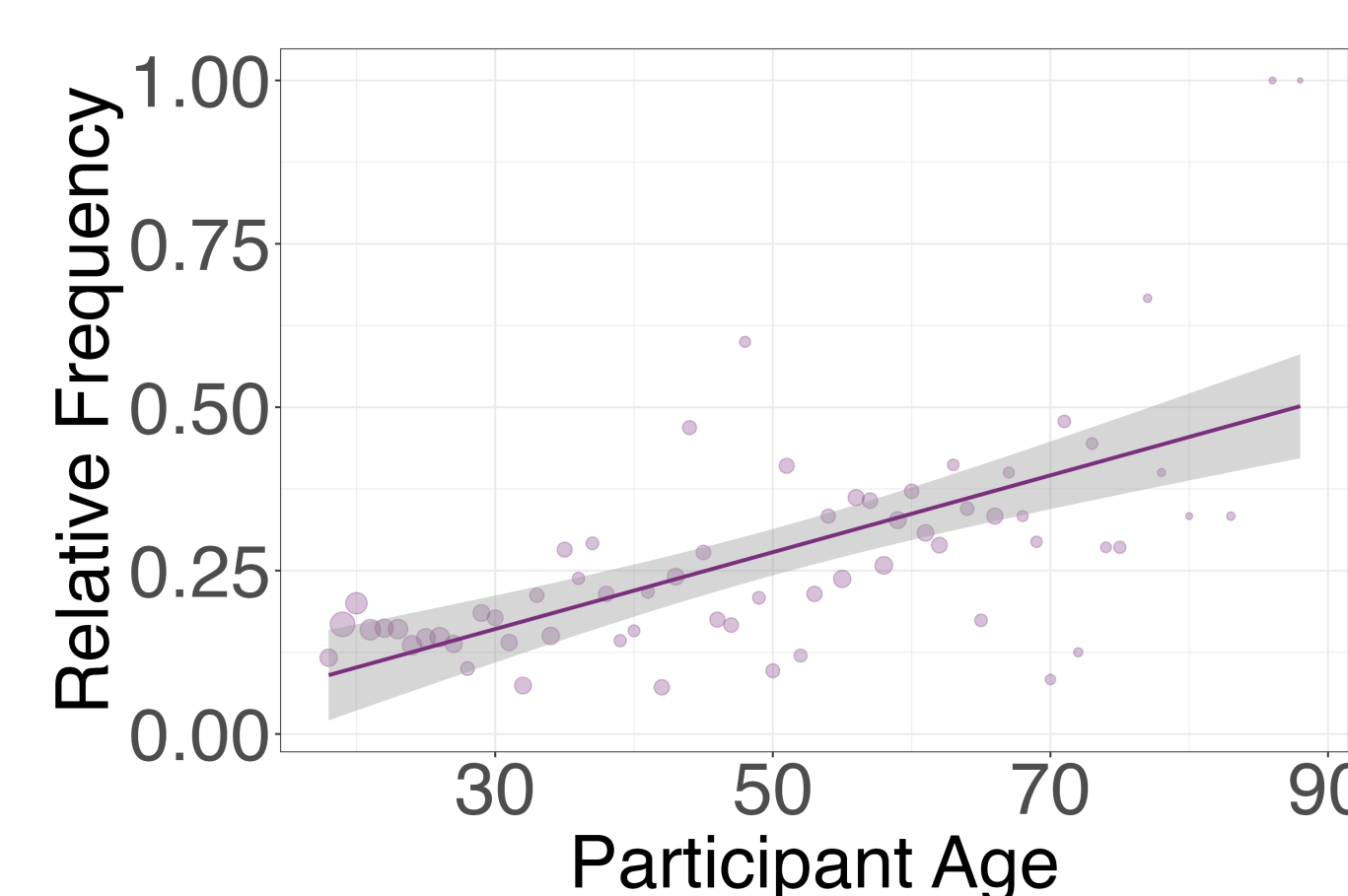


Fig. 4 *Bitte* 'please' in requests to strangers by participant age (N = 2,498 observations)

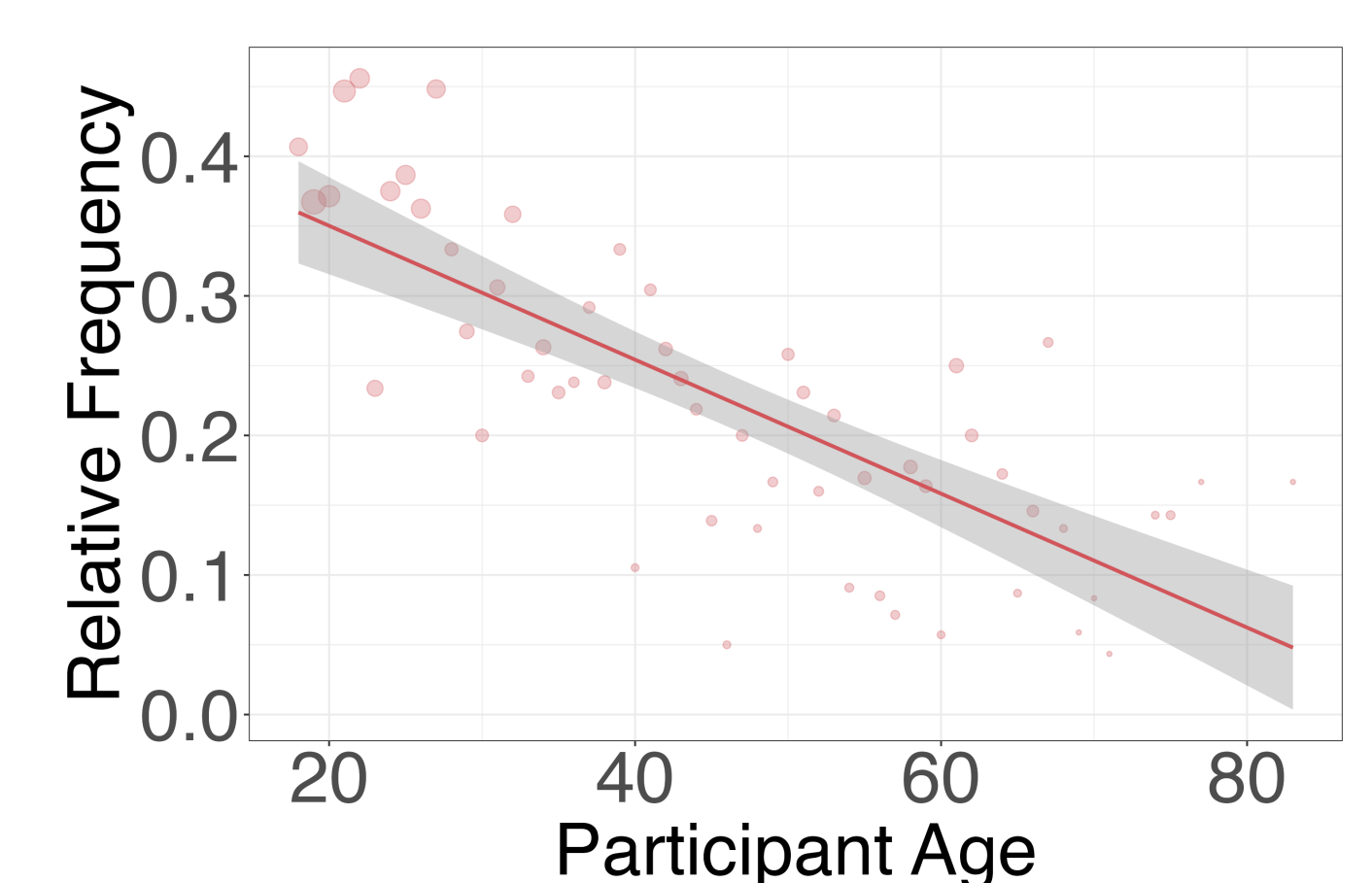


Fig. 5 Tentativeness-indicating downtoners in requests to strangers by participant age (N = 2,498 obs.)

## 5 Additional and Future Studies

- Sociolinguistic interviews for speaker norms
- Participant observations for naturally occurring data
- Adequacy rating tasks for perception of (im)politeness

### (Selected) Publications

- Ackermann, Tanja, Horst J. Simon, Henrik Discher & Janel Zoske. Accepted. Variation und Wandel im Bereich höflichkeitssensitiver Ausdrücke. In Annelen Brunner, Gabriele Diewald, Sandra Hansen, Kristin Kopf & Angelika Wöllstein (eds.), *Deutsch im Wandel: Jahrbuch des Instituts für Deutsche Sprache 2025*. Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter.
- Discher, Henrik. In preparation. *Pragmatic variation of requests, complaints and assertions in German: Modeling (im)politeness-sensitive speech acts*. FU Berlin: Dissertation.
- Zoske, Janel. In preparation. *Variation in German address practices*. FU Berlin: Dissertation.

### References

- Ackermann, Tanja. 2023. Die formale und funktionale Entwicklung von *bitte*: Eine diachrone Korpusstudie zur Entstehung eines höflichkeitsrelevanten Markers. *Zeitschrift für germanistische Linguistik* 51(1). 152-195.
- Barron, Anne. 2021. Contrastivity and comparability: Pragmatic variation across pluricentric varieties. *Sociolinguistica* 35(1). 189–216.
- Ogiermann, Eva. 2018. Discourse completion tasks. In Andreas H. Jucker, Klaus P. Schneider & Wolfram Bublitz (eds.), *Methods in pragmatics*, 229–256. Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter.
- Schneider, Klaus P. & Anne Barron (eds.). 2008. *Variational pragmatics: A focus on regional varieties in pluricentric languages*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: Benjamins.