
**ACT, FACT, TRUTH AND REALITY: SEMANTIC – PRAGMATIC CONNECTIONS BETWEEN
ENGLISH ADVERBS.**

In this paper I take a closer look at some English adverbs which express the speaker's commitment to the truth of the proposition. The adverbs *actually*, *in fact*, *truly* and *really* have a semantic core which expresses such commitment by referring to acts, facts, truth and reality respectively. Synchronic and diachronic studies of these adverbs have further shown how they have developed multiple pragmatic meanings in present-day English. Most of these studies are monolingual and focus on one of the adverbs. Detailed intra-lingual comparisons are few (exceptions include Oh (2000), Smith & Jucker 2000), and cross-linguistic ones are equally scarce (exceptions include Aijmer & Simon-Vandenberg 2004; Willems & Demol 2006). Yet the existing research shows how the adverbs overlap in their semantic and pragmatic meanings. This paper examines the connections between the four adverbs making use of monolingual and multilingual corpus data.

Recent cross-linguistic historical research on cognates in English and French, in particular E. *actually*/ F. *actuellement* (Defour et al. forthcoming b) and E. *in fact*/F. *en fait, de fait, au fait* (Defour et al. forthcoming a) has shown how references to what is the case 'in acts' and 'in facts' lead to more subjective meanings of the speaker's commitment to the truth of the proposition. The studies reveal a close cognitive connection between the concepts ACT and FACT, as well as between ACT, FACT on the one hand and REALITY, TRUTH on the other. Further, Willems & Demol (2006) have shown on the basis of a synchronic contrastive study of French and English how the most frequent equivalents *vraiment* and *really* cover overlapping semantic and pragmatic areas and how the concepts of TRUTH and REALITY are expressed differently in the two languages concerned.

This paper focuses on the English adverbs and relies on samples from the British National Corpus for comparing their present-day usage. In addition, the study makes use of French and Dutch translation data from the Triptic-Namur Corpus. It is argued that translation data not only provide intersubjective backing of contextual interpretations (as has been well described in the literature, see e.g. Johansson 2007) but also give information on the closeness and distance between the English words by showing up the degree of overlap between the cross-linguistic equivalents. In addition, the corresponding words in different languages cover different aspects of the semantic area and thus show the connections between the ontological concepts more clearly.

The main theoretical approaches to (some of) the adverbs are – broadly speaking – to be situated in the cognitive and functional frameworks. Within these, semantic and pragmatic developments have been treated as reflecting subjectification, grammaticalisation and pragmaticalisation. Especially relevant is E. Traugott's work in this area, which explains semantic developments from pragmatic inferencing (e.g. Traugott & Dasher 2002). Cognitive studies include Paradis (2003), who shows how *really* has different readings which – though all expressive of epistemic commitment – can be classified as truth-attesting, emphasizing and degree reinforcing. Paradis establishes a link between the different readings in terms of the relative prominence of the content domains [REALITY] and [TRUTH] and schematic domains such as modality and gradability. Both the grammaticalisation and the cognitive approaches lead us to expect plausible developments in different directions, for example, the development of discourse marker functions such as hedging or of intensifying degree words. Starting from this previous research the paper attempts to show which developments are covered by which words, and which ontological concepts are connected to which other ones.

As more translation data (including back-translations) are brought in, more items are drawn into the semantic map, so that different readings of the four adverbs include them in different paradigms. For example, some readings of *actually* belong in a paradigm including *essentially*, *basically*, *fundamentally*, i.e. a paradigm which suggests that PROTOTYPICALITY and ESSENCE are domains which are connected with the

others. Another example is the intensifier reading of *really*, which puts it in a paradigm including degree words such as *very*. This suggests another relevant domain.

The challenging question is how content and schematic concepts such as reality, truth, actuality, factuality, essence, prototypicality, focus, force are connected. The paper makes a modest attempt at a proposal.

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