


# The use of *actually* in spoken Xhosa English: a corpus study

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useful benchmark for comparison with MT norms. The source of data for the study is a corpus of approximately half a million words of transcribed spontaneous dialogue between Xhosa English speakers.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Discourse markers, because of their fairly marginal linguistic status, are rarely part of the formal language curriculum (see Romero Trillo, 2002). When it comes to second language curricula, matters are even more complicated: second language (L2) speakers of English in South Africa have had limited first-hand experience of mother-tongue (MT) English, owing to historical factors (including the devastating effect of apartheid on the education of black people in the country) and demographic factors (there are 3.2 million English MT speakers out of a population of 44 million in the country), which means that most L2 English speakers have been taught by second- or third-generation L2 English speaking teachers. To make matters even worse, none of the typical grammar books used for ESL teaching in the 1980s in South Africa makes any mention of discourse markers at all (e.g. Murphy, 1985; Parkin and Blunt, 1988; Dawson, 1988; Mbhele and Ellis, 1988; Murray and Johanson, 1989). The main reason for this is probably the fact that such words are typically spoken and not written. A subsidiary reason is their lack of clear semantic denotation and syntactic role, which makes formal or explicit commentary on their use fairly difficult. Thus typically second language learners of English are left to the mercy of chance encounters with *actually* in the fictional dialogue of prescribed literature that they might read, and in the spoken English around them, to work out the rules for using *actually* themselves.

This study reports on patterns of usage of the discourse marker *actually* in the spontaneous discourse of MT Xhosa speakers who use English as a second language. It is interesting to note, at the outset, that *actually* is a word that has grown phenomenally in MT usage over the last century, particularly in spoken discourse. Several researchers report that it is far more frequent in speech than in writing, with a proportion of 10.3 : 1 in British English (Taglicht citing Aijmer, 1986), and 2.4 : 1 in American English (482 examples of *actually* in a 1 million-word spoken corpus (Oh, 2000: 247)). Using a 2.4 million-word corpus of spoken American English (the Switchboard corpus of informal telephone conversations among 543 speakers) Oh (2000: 247) reports that *actually* was 3.4 times more frequent in spoken than in written English, possibly because contradiction and

correction (one of the prime reasons for using *actually*), and the consequential need for face-saving discourse devices, tend to be more frequent in speech.

It is also claimed that ‘some uses of *actually*...represent a fairly recent innovation originating in Britain’ (Taglicht, 2001: 1). Its use in the speech of non-MT speakers therefore promises to offer some interesting contrasts.

## 2. DISCOURSE MARKERS IN GENERAL

A great deal of work has been carried out on discourse markers in recent years, analysing them from a discourse analytical perspective (e.g. Schiffrin, 1987), from the point of view of conversation analysis (Owen, 1983; Watts, 1987), interactional sociolinguistics (Watts, 1989), relevance theory (Blakemore, 1987; Watts, 1988, Jucker, 1993) and a lexical standpoint (e.g. Bolinger, 1989). Notwithstanding all this work, we still lack a clear definition of exactly what is understood by the term ‘discourse marker’ (Schourup, 2001).

As far as their syntactic identity goes, discourse markers range from non-lexical items (e.g. *oh*) as well as recognised words such as *actually*, and phrases like *of course* and *you see*. They are drawn from a wide range of syntactic categories, including verbs (*look*), adverbs (*now*), prepositional phrases (*in particular*), idioms (*by and large*), literal phrases (*as a result*), interjections (*well*), coordinate conjunctions (*and*), subordinating conjunctions (*so*), and words like *okay* or *right*, which are difficult to categorise at all. Despite their syntactic heterogeneity, they display regularities of occurrence in relation to utterances with a propositional structure, and they form a very important part of speakers’ linguistic competence, typically encoding pragmatic rather than content meaning (Watts, 1988: 246).

There is still no absolute certainty about how many authentic discourse markers there are. For example, it is debatable whether *y’know* and *I mean* are proper discourse markers, because they fail to signify how the current discourse is linked to the preceding discourse (Fraser, 1989). In addition, the meaning of discourse markers has also puzzled theorists. While it is generally agreed (see Schourup, 1985; Schiffrin, 1987; and Fraser, 1999) that each discourse marker has a general core meaning (e.g. topic change (*by the way*), parallelism (*similarly*), or consequence (*so*)), there is little consensus regarding what exactly these core meanings are (see Watts, 1989; Schourup, 2001).

The important pragmatic meanings signalled by discourse markers can, according to Fraser (1988: 21) either signal basic (literal) communicative intent (e.g. *please*), offer commentary (e.g. using *frankly* to imply that what is to come might not be welcomed by the hearer), or provide a parallel message (e.g. *sir* as a vocative signalling deference, independent of the message).

In terms of this model, the discourse marker *actually* belongs in the second category, acting as a sort of commentary marker (see also Watts, 1988), and signalling something about the link between the current utterance and prior or subsequent discourse. In this way, *actually* can provide powerful clues about the level of commitment the speaker makes regarding the link between the current utterance and prior (and sometimes sequential) discourse (Fraser, 1988: 22). Discourse markers of this kind thus have a meaning which is more procedural than conceptual (Fraser, 1999: 944), specifying how an ensuing segment is to be interpreted relative to some prior segment.

## 3. THE DISCOURSE MARKER *ACTUALLY*

*Actually* plays an important role in everyday language, as evidenced by its high frequency of occurrence, especially in spoken data (Aijmer, 1986; Oh, 2000; Cheng and

Warren, 2000; Taglicht 2001; Granath, 2002). However, as is usual with discourse markers in general, there has been some disagreement about its meanings and functions. Greenbaum (1969: 127–8) originally distinguished between *actually* (1), which is a discourse modifier or discourse transition marker used as an attitudinal disjunct (e.g. ‘Well *actually* it was me and not him who said that’) and *actually* (2), which acts as a propositional modifier used as an intensifying disjunct (e.g. ‘I was *actually* there when it happened’). Taglicht (2001), like Greenbaum, argues that this distinction is desirable. He further advocates a sub-division of *actually* (1) into *actually* (1a), acting as a pragmatic softener with a face-saving effect (i.e. going against expected assumptions), and *actually* (1b), acting as a signal of topic shift (i.e. going against the expected development of topic).

Halliday and Hasan (1976) classify it as a conjunction with an adversative effect, introducing a proposition that counteracts implicit expectations. Later, in 1985, Halliday sees *actually* as serving an elaborative function, in which a proposition is clarified and made more explicit for purposes of discourse (Halliday, 1985: 303 cited in Oh, 2000: 244). In similar vein, Martin (1992) rejects the idea of a primarily contrastive function (unless it co-occurs with *but*), and recognises the clarifying role of *actually*, its use implying that ‘the original formulation was not quite right’ (cited in Oh, 2000: 244).

A further social function for *actually* has also been identified by several researchers, who note that it can be used (especially clause finally) as a mark of intimacy (Aijmer, 1986: 125) and a means to signal attitudinal stance or commitment (Biber and Finegan, 1988). Speakers have infinitely many ways of expressing their opinions, or often of ‘dissimulating the fact that they are expressing their opinions’ (Halliday, 1994: 355), using useful expressions such as ‘it is obvious that’, ‘everyone knows that’, etc. *Actually* also features frequently in this way, acting as an interpersonal metaphor, expressing mood and modality, colouring the definiteness of a proposition in some way (Halliday, 1994: 354).

### 3.1. *Actually* versus *in fact*

*Actually* has been closely linked to the expression *in fact* by several theorists, many of them assuming that there is little or no difference between the two discourse markers and that they are interchangeable. However, Oh (2000) notes significant differences in patterns of occurrence in spoken discourse (*actually* 1,293 (0.054%) versus *in fact* 345 (0.014%)), and Aijmer (1986) reports a higher incidence of both discourse markers in British than American English, with 0.07% of examples of *in fact* in the London-Lund corpus versus 0.014% in spoken American English (using the Brown corpus). Oh (2000: 248) concludes that ‘as far as speaking is concerned, both *actually* and *in fact* are far more frequent in British than American English.’ He also concludes that they share the core meaning of ‘unexpectedness’, but that there is a subtle difference between them which revolves around the way in which they signal this unexpectedness: *actually* tends to go against the expected proposition, resulting in a mild denial of the assertion or at least a contrast in meaning; *in fact* goes against only some aspects of the proposition, usually the degree of certainty of the assertion, and this usually results in the affirmation or strengthening of the assertion or expectation (Oh, 2000: 266–7). The corpus under discussion in this paper yielded 191 of *actually* (0.036%) versus 71 occurrences of *in fact* (0.013%), which suggests fairly high levels of usage for both of these discourse markers, but for reasons of space this paper focuses on *actually*, while noting the need for further investigation into differences between the patterns of occurrence of these two discourse markers.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

At the time of this analysis the corpus of Xhosa English (XE) stood at 540,000 transcribed words. The 299 contributors to the corpus were all Xhosa speakers of direct Xhosa descent who were at least 15 years old (grade 10) and had either been exposed to formal English tuition at school for at least 8 years or had a more limited education but at least 20 years' exposure to normal use of English in their daily lives. Contributors all resided in the Eastern Cape Province. The corpus comprises unrehearsed spoken English with a tendency towards a somewhat 'formal' bias.<sup>1</sup>

All occurrences (191) of *actually* were identified and extracted along with the surrounding contextual speech. In addition, these occurrences were classified in terms of initial, medial and final position, with the proviso (see Aijmer, 1986: 122) that *actually* could be preceded in initial position by *well, uh, um, yes* or *no*. Using Wordsmith (a commercially available Concordancer), detailed analyses of all instances of *actually* in context were then carried out in an effort to ascertain a clear picture of the rules of usage being followed in the XE community.

In the literature, the distinction between *actually* as a discourse modifier and *actually* as a propositional modifier is commonly described. Taglicht's (2001) further sub-division of the discourse modifier into *actually* as pragmatic softener with a face-saving effect and *actually* acting as a signal of topic shift is also useful. However, in analysis of the data in the corpus, an additional sub-type of the use of *actually* emerged: *actually* as contemplative, briefly alluded to by Aijmer (1986: 129). Frequency of occurrence in these classes will be discussed and exemplified further in section 5.

## 5. RESULTS

The corpus yielded 191 occurrences of *actually*, and Table 1 shows the frequency of occurrence in terms of the classification described above. A dispersion plot revealed a fairly even distribution of the word, typically used once only in 32 files (each file comprises approximately 2,000 words), twice in 21 files, and more than that in 22 files. Of the 4 files which contained 8 or more uses, distribution per speaker was checked, and it is worth noting that there were 2 speakers who each used *actually* 10 times during their conversations, another one used it 9 times and another 8 times. Such high usage levels suggest that for these individuals, the word *actually* has become something of a conversational crutch, in much the same way as certain people become overly attached to empty phrases like *you know* or *sort of like*.

In the cited examples which follow, speakers are identified according to the file number, turn number and identity code in the corpus, so <004:125:YN> refers to file number 4, turn number 125 (sequenced in 5s), and speaker YN.<sup>2</sup>

### 5.1. *Actually as a discourse modifier*

5.1.1. *Acting as pragmatic softener.* The most common use of *actually* in the corpus was as a discourse modifier, typically an adjunct to a sentence, and not an immediate constituent of a verb phrase (VP). In this use, it has a 'mild', 'mitigatory' or 'conciliatory' effect, indicating that something possibly undesirable is being said (see example (1)). It is often preceded or followed by a brief pause, and it acts as a gentle warning that

Table 1. Classification of all instances

	Frequency	%
A Discourse modifier		
1. Softener: going against expectations	103	54%
2. Topic shift	13	7%
3. Contemplative filler	11	5%
(Subtotal for A)	(127)	(66%)
B Propositional modifier (adding strength)	64	34%
Totals	191	100%

expectations will not be met in some way, but that the matter has been given due consideration. Similar to some uses of *well*, its use modestly and gently contradicts an expectation or expands or corrects it in a way which is not calculated to challenge or offend (see also Tognini-Bonelli, 1993). Sometimes its use as a discourse modifier even seems to imply a hint of apology (Taglicht, 2001: 3), functioning as a pragmatic softener with face-saving effect. Levinson (1983: 87) also includes *actually* among those discourse markers which are deictic, relating the utterance to a previous portion of the discourse, and Blakemore's claim that such words have procedural (non-conceptual or non-propositional) meaning supports this view.<sup>3</sup>

This use of *actually* to counteract expectations in some way has been noted as particularly characteristic of spoken as opposed to written discourse (Tognini-Bonelli, 1993; Lenk, 1998; Oh, 2000). A possible reason for this (Oh, 2000: 257) is the fact that contradiction and correction, and the consequential need for face-saving discourse devices, tend to be more frequent in speech. Another reason may be its importance in signalling solidarity and intimacy, in making sure that mutual understandings are as they should be as the conversation proceeds (cf. Aijmer, 1986: 125).

Altogether, 54 per cent of all instances of *actually* fell into this group. Examples (1), (2) and (3) below demonstrate this preliminary warning that an expectation will not be met. In (1), IN informs AC that her assumption is wrong; in (2), SP points out that change has already occurred; and in (3), SM embarks on a gentle challenge, indicated later by 'I want to agree with you but uh...'. In (4) one sees fairly clearly the placatory effect of its use, along with *guys* in what is becoming a fairly heated disagreement, marked by overlaps and a code-switch into Xhosa (*hayi* = 'no') to express mild frustration. In example (5), NN first uses *actually* to gently correct the previous speaker, and then later uses it to warn that, contrary to expectations ('I was not going'), in fact the opposite outcome was achieved ('I did go'). Similarly, in examples (6) and (7), the users of *actually* set the scene for disagreeing with or challenging the previous speakers. Collocation with words like *maybe*, *though*, *despite* are also frequent, which further exemplifies its mitigatory effects. It is particularly interesting to note that *actually* collocated 61 times with *no/n't/not*, and 18 times with *but* (see examples (1), (6) and (7)).

- (1) <159:980:AC> Ja those are your stars your favourite stars?  
 <159:985:IN> *Actually* not  
 <159:990:AC> [ja

- <159:995:IN> [my favourite star is Ruth Cele  
 <159:1000:AC> Ruth Xele, Ruth Cele
- (2) <173:1370:IT> Now you are going to write the your final exams, don't you think you have to change like [don't go  
 <173:1375:SP> [actually i'm changed  
 <173:1380:IT> You have changed  
 <173:1385:SP> Mm, as you can see now I'm I'm I'm here at home
- (3) <043:1050:MG> Ja so it's just going to be easy to to to just famili- familiarise yourself with other people because you know these people the Xhosa people he just uh it's easy for him just to socialise with them okay especially if you just get to know the guys I mean as you say with the coaching basketball so you just  
 <043:1055:SM> Well *actually* when you say that Xhosa people=  
 <043:1060:MG> =Ja  
 <043:1065:SM> I want to agree with you but uh there's there is there is most people are not aware.
- (4) <019:725:NM> It's as if those people are [real  
 <019:730:KN> [ja *actually* guys I mean that's not that's not the case. People re- relates to stories, not so much on characters.  
 <019:735:MG> *Hayi* then what's your point?
- (5) <DPC109:170:SD> Wh- what about this one third percent is the LRC that is demanding this money from the school or?  
 <DPC109:175:NN> *Actually* it came with the s r c and some other students. There is I think something that they cooked up in the location and then they came to school like they bulldozed everybody to into it.  
 <DPC109:180:SD> Okay  
 <DPC109:185:NN> *Actually* they said **I I was not going** with this third percent of the school fees hey we were suppose to go to hamburg you know hamburg he=  
 <DPC109:190:SD> =Yes yes yes  
 <DPC109:195:NN> Ja to the beach there they said I was not going to go **I did go**
- (6) <032:115:AN> Okay  
 <032:120:PS> But now uh it seems as if like I don't know, okay, *actually* it's a matter of preference but still I I feel that so much exposure of like women who are like toned and who have, you know, go to the gym and=
- (7) <035:1590:TM> =You will just see a map maybe or a particular photograph of the area, but myself I saw the area with my naked eyes.  
 <035:1595:PJ> Ja.  
 <035:1600:TM> So that is the difference, *actually* I can say you did not see the area you saw the photograph of that area.  
 <035:1605:US> I don't care but I can describe it and I you can describe it and at the end of the day we describe it the same way. What's the difference then?

One clear sub-category emerged within the broad 'softener' category, namely the use of *actually* to clarify a point or correct. Instead of gently preparing the listener for slight 'conflict', as it were, *actually* here acted more as a prelude to redefining and adding detail (examples (8–10)), or requesting clarity (example (11)). Self-corrections (examples (12) and (13)) also fell into this category. While still syntactically 'marginal' as a discourse marker (Taglicht, 2001: 3–4), this usage serves not so much to be placatory, but rather to embellish and elaborate for the sake of clarity.

- (8) <079:000:PM> ... and okay my grandmother made means for me to pay that money, half of it *actually* not all of it okay then she paid then I had to come in come in here they said I did have a have a place at at res.
- (9) <133:035:ST> Did you report it with the ward councillor or?  
<133:040:NB> The committee of this the street committee, *actually* so- called *ibayaya*, they just going uh they go for the meetings
- (10) <132:300:NB> I feel, well I feel  
<132:305:ST> Badly  
<132:310:NB> Nie badly  
<132:315:ST> Why?  
<132:320:NB> Not *actually* not not badly I wouldn't say badly I *actually* i'm a person of who uh uh have got a lot of patience well I I've got that hope that some someday something will happen
- (11) <035:390:US> Nquza  
<035:395:TM> What is a nquza *actually*?  
<035:400:MJ> Uh I can't explain that you know.
- (12) <113.170:SL> That's what I believe.  
<113.175:CY> Okay alright Thabo Mbeki had that fight not a fight *actually* that incident with Winnie Mandela.  
<113.180:SL> Okay ja on June sixteen.
- (13) <080:000:PM> I think I would have seen that he is rude. I mean now it's been three months, yo three years *actually*, so I would say three years, so I don't really think that's true.

5.1.2. *Acting as a marker of topic shift* In a related but slightly different vein, *actually* was used sometimes in the corpus to signify a slight shift in direction of the conversational topic or focus, or, in the words of Taglicht (2001: 10), as 'a signal given by the speaker that he [sic] is initiating a distinct move, which deflects the discourse from the path it was following'. In this sense it is still related in function to 5.1.1, in that it still introduces a proposition that is contrary to expectations. Examples (14–16) show this function clearly.

- (14) <098:345:TN> So it's like a like a a new concept that is like okay, um it hasn't yet taken off but ja I think it's...  
<098:350:CM> Well I *actually* read in about I think in last week or about two weeks ago's Mail and Guardian that eh online eh media feels that they are threatened they are threatened because they haven't been making profit. I wonder if you read those articles?
- (15) <035:375:PJ> I could never eat a crab.  
<035:380:TM> But *actually* you told me nothing about yourself. What will you be doing during the holidays?
- (16) <109:120:SD> But it was so quiet here, because they are called Ciskei then and then the Eastern Cape  
<109:125:NN> Ja ja, we having a lot of problems that year. *Actually* I I got into some trouble at my school. There was this thing about third percent of of school fees uh the students fees...

5.1.3. *Actually as a signal of contemplation.* While not mentioned in current writing on the topic, another function of *actually* emerged from the data which is closely linked to one of the primary functions of the discourse marker *well*, namely to serve as a ‘quasi-linguistic “mental state”’ interjection, bringing with it the suggestion of continuation, prospecting something to follow. In this sense, some uses of *actually* are ‘evincive’ (Schourup, 1985), indicating that the speaker is mentally cogitating or consulting with him- or herself before proceeding. Several uses of *actually* in the corpus appeared to reflect this contemplative function: example (17) shows PJ weighing up two choices given by TM, and in example (18) the pause and ‘mm’ emphasise the act of cogitation taking place.

- (17) <035:665:TM> So which one did you prefer? Are you preferring um consuming your time or you are preferring to conserve your life to say . . .  
 <035:670:PJ> *Actually* I’m preferring to conserve my life.  
 <035:675:TM> Okay no that’s fair.
- (18) <174:860:IT> Okay (.) so if someone takes you to America would you go?  
 <174:865:SP> ( . . . ) mm *actually* yes but only to see Brian Mcnight.  
 <174:870:IT> Okay, nothing else?  
 <174:875:SP> Mm

Further evidence of the existence of this sub-category of usage comes from the number of times in which *actually* collocated with *I think*, *maybe*, and *perhaps*, all of which suggest a lack of certainty. The utterance in example (19) (035:880:TM) evinces many signs of uncertainty (um, I suppose, I don’t really know, I think). Example (20) is similar. Examples (21) and (22) show the use of *actually* alongside *think*.

- (19) <035:865:PJ> There is eh a train here a train station here?  
 <035:870:TM> Here in Grahamstown?  
 <035:875:PJ> Ja  
 <035:880:TM> Um *actually* I don’t really know, but there is I sup- I suppose I think  
 <035:885:PJ> You think?  
 <035:890:TM> Ja  
 <035:895:PJ> You don’t know?
- (20) <174:110:IT> The like the the actors are,, explain I I don’t understand it’s about  
 <174:115:SP> There are *actually* (..) they (..) they um (..) to me they are . . . the reason why I love that one is because because they are all familiar from from my friends.
- (21) <076:345:NM> He said they are the people who are involved  
 <076:350:KS> Okay  
 <076:355:NM> But I *actually* don’t think um (..) there I *actually* don’t think the way that they they have handled the matter, there might be a plot somewhere
- (22) <076:290:KS> Is there any truth from that or it’s just a weird thing that just to destabilise the government?  
 <076:295:NM> I *actually* think i don’t think um (.) I d- I don’t know if there is a plot or not, because it seem like they the media’s been attacking him . . .
- (23) <099:060:TN> Um IT and stuff like that  
 <099:065:CM> Mhm



<099:070:TN> So when I think okay now eh its time to go and spread the word back to my country I would ja *actually* ja

## 5.2. Actually as propositional modifier

In its other major sense, *actually* was typically not a sentential adjunct, but an immediate constituent of a VP, an integral element in sentence structure, acting typically as a propositional modifier. As Taglicht points out (2001: 5), any major phrasal category can host this word, and it is always the initial element of the structure of which it is a constituent (hence the ungrammaticality of ‘\*he didn’t have *actually* an accident’). In this function the word can often be rephrased as *really*, and has a ‘strengthening’ or intensifying effect (Aijmer, 1986: 122; Oh, 2000).

While all uses of *actually* are non truth-conditional, when it acts as propositional modifier, *actually* has been described as ‘truth insistent . . . serving to contrast what is really so with what is only pretended or imagined’ (Taglicht, 2001: 2) (e.g. ‘what I *actually* did was . . .’). Bolinger (1977 in Taglicht, 2001: 11) describes these uses as ‘conducive’, with an implicit assertiveness value, suggesting that the proposition presented is true,<sup>4</sup> for example, ‘He was desperate, though *actually* he had no need to be.’ In this sense, *actually* could more often than not be replaced by *in fact*. This truth strengthening effect is evident in the range of examples that follow.

- (24) <008:190:NS> You should also eat healthy foods and go for exercise and stuff to help you get your body your body fit you know, and if you have aids I think you don’t *actually* see it when it starts. It can it can keep you up and come back and come out after ten years or so. I mean it’s a dangerous disease.
- (25) <020:500:KN> And at five past four they’ll come and say come on granny your water is cold now and the thing is this guy this detective *actually* didn’t didn’t s- see anything weird with this constantly coming to the grandparent and asking to change the hot water bottle.
- (26) <036:385:TM> Ja there is subject which I can say is difficult you know, only that I am not interested in the subject that I am doing and in that way I do not have any interest, uh it does not *actually* challenge me.
- (27) <029:1725:UM> And then I went back home this one vac and everybody was getting married every single one of my friends was getting married and I was *actually* jealous.
- (28) <043:720:SM> Ja but I what I’m saying(.) it’s a good department I’m happy that I am *actually* made it.
- (29) <117:020:KS> Is it? Okay that’s what you wanted to to follow nay way okay okay so can you tell me what does the job *actually* entails?
- (30) <210:315:SM> that somebody who’s who’s supervising that patient is *actually* observing the patient *actually* swallowing the tablet in so much that she’ll talk to the patient after she has drink it.
- (31) <099:035:CM> So how are you gonna decide now that your skills are enough and you can *actually* come back and give them back to the people that because you know that part of your fees are paid by the government so basically everybody in this country is paying for your fees?
- (32) <182:840:SS> So don’t you think that Yizo Yizo is the other way of showing the public and the community what is *actually* happening at our schools?
- (33) <204:025:MK> We need some skills that will make us to be independent because that’s the most thing but what *actually* happens right now pupils are qualified and they have qualifications but they are not having work you see.

- (34) <206:095:CD>Because of the ini- um every year initiators are getting younger and younger. I'm not *actually* blaming anyone. I don't know whether is the parents fault or what, but I don't think its safe anymore.
- (35) <040:1625:PP> Did you *actually* tell her that?
- (36) <186:410:LF>We saw Prince Edward in our eyes and he handed us these awards and we were ver- we were very excited because we even if we weren't we went there we wouldn't *actually* have got a chance to to meet Prince Edward.

Several times in the corpus, *actually* is used in quick succession with different functions. In example (37), the first use of *actually* acts as a modifier of the proposition, and in its second use it serves a softening function, preparing the hearer that something is going against expectations, and acting as a broader discourse modifier. In example (38) *actually* is used four times, first as propositional modifier, then as a discourse modifier, then a propositional modifier, and finally a discourse modifier again.

- (37) <213:265:KD>My mom is like surprised whenever she hears like a song by Park because before before she *actually* got to know more about Park she used to be like no Tupac is a gangster. Until I showed her the light that no no no Park was not a gangster. He was just a gangster rapper and that's like gangster rap is like the the term used by the media more often. *Actually* he was more like a reality rapper  
 <213:270:MV> Ja  
 <213:275:KD> And that's when my mom really saw the light.
- (38) <032:945:AN> No no no it *actually* happened you see.  
 <032:950:PS> Yo! the guy who collapsed?  
 <032:955:ZM> *Actually* most things that are supposed to have *actually* happened in the bible are like parables <laugh>  
 <032:960:AN> No no no no ja *actually* no no but no a parable is something else a story which illustrates something  
 <032:965:ZM> Ja.

Inevitably there were some instances in which classification was problematic, and usages were ambiguous (a problem also mentioned by Aijmer, 1986). Below are some examples which demonstrate such a difficulty: (39) was eventually classified as a propositional modifier, and (40) and (41) as pragmatic softeners (the first indicative of contemplation and the second seeking clarity).

- (39) <045:600:LG> and those for those for for and those for people who (..) study the arts and social sciences  
 <045:605:MG> Ja  
 <045:610:LG> So we don't know *actually* what  
 <045:615:MG> Ja I I think that it depends on on you because ja we we are we are in the same business so like ja maybe you are good at some at science or arts or whatever but you know if you your if your future and your career
- (40) <213:080:MV> They know they know all the story about=  
 <213:085:KD> =about this about Africa.  
 <213:090:MV> ja but I don't know what they believe in *actually*.

- <213:095:KD> They believe in this guy who was Salassie.  
 (41) <117:010:KS>So my friend tell me how did you started your career? Where did you start it  
*actually?*

### 5.3. The placement of *actually*

Because their semantic import is usually separate from the proposition which they accompany, in English discourse markers tend to occur outside the syntactic sentential structure, mostly as lefthand discourse brackets in sentence-initial position. Even in those cases where they can occur medially, they act parenthetically, and therefore remain ‘outside’ the syntactic structure. Granath (2002), who compared the placement of adverbs in British and American English, reports a very low number of modal adverbs in final position generally. According to Quirk *et al.* (1985: 79–81), in the presence of a finite auxiliary or tensed ‘be’ (the operator), modal adverbs such as *actually* are much more frequently found in pre-operator position in both written and spoken usage. Exceptions to this unmarked position usually involve a marked communicative function (Granath, 2002: 30).

The pragmatic function of *actually* has also been observed to vary depending on its position in the clause, with a greater tendency to serve a cohesive or linking function when clause initial (Aijmer, 1986), and a greater likelihood of commenting on propositional value when clause medial (Oh, 2000: 244). When clause initial, such adjuncts typically relate the clause to the preceding text, and they tend to be thematic.<sup>5</sup>

Analysis of distribution in the corpus (see Table 2) reveals that the majority of cases (49%) were medial, and final positioning was relatively rare (17%), except when used to clarify or provide additional detail. This is notably different from frequencies reported by Aijmer (1986) in the London-Lund corpus of spoken English, where only 32% of instances were medial. Closer analysis of distribution of *actually* in the medial position in the XE corpus revealed further, more subtle regularities: when acting as propositional modifier, 77% (47/61) of the cases were between the auxiliary verb and the main verb (e.g. *don’t actually know*; *can actually imagine*). In contrast, only 47% (14/30) of the medial cases amongst the discourse modifiers were immediately after the auxiliary. The remainder were placed between subject and verb (e.g. *I actually don’t know*; *I actually haven’t heard*, etc.). In this corpus, then, there was a close correlation between discursual function and syntactic placement, with propositional modifiers highly likely to be medial, and discourse

Table 2. Distribution of *actually*

	Initial	Medial	Final
Discourse modifiers			
1. Softeners	41	24	7
Corrections/clarifiers	5	6	20
2. Topic shift	12	1	0
3. Contemplatives	5	2	4
Propositional modifiers	1	61	2
	64 (34%)	94 (49%)	33 (17%)

modifiers strongly inclined to be initial or post-subject, unless serving a corrective function, in which case the likelihood of a final position increases dramatically. Topic shift was almost invariably heralded by a clause-initial *actually*.

## 6. FINAL COMMENTS

While results of this analysis reveal broad similarities in the function of *actually* compared with other analyses of MT speakers, there are two points of difference which deserve further comment. The first of these is its use as a contemplative. In some of these cases in the corpus it might be more accurate to say that *actually* was being used as a filler, when the speaker had nothing to say, or was seeking a word (i.e. the contemplation taking place was not ‘philosophical’, but linguistic). The frequency in the corpus of occurrence of *actually* in close proximity to *um/er/uh* (31 cases) and *well* (8 cases) further reinforces this interpretation of its use as a signal of uncertainty, providing the speaker with a little bit more time to think (cf. Aijmer, 1986: 129). Given that these speakers were all second language speakers, such a function is not unlikely, and has been commented on by Cheng and Warren (2000) in their analysis of the discourse functions of *actually* in the Hong Kong corpus of spoken English. Comparing MT and L2 usage, they found that *actually* was used three times more often by L2 speakers (2000: 137). While both groups used it to emphasise that something unexpected is in fact correct, to mitigate a correction, rephrasing or contradiction, and to introduce a new topic, L2 speakers used it more often to act as a filler and to initiate a turn as a connective, and MT speakers used it more to introduce a point of view and to imply solidarity or friendliness/intimacy.

A second point of possible difference relates to its regular use to mark disagreement. Oh (2000) suggests that *actually* is highly unlikely to co-occur with the verbs *think*, *feel* or *believe*, because of the possibility of some ambiguity in its function between emphatic strengthening or gentle contradiction. According to him, these verbs prefer to pattern with *really* to indicate emphasis unambiguously, and avoid any suggestion that disagreement is being signalled (Oh, 2000: 258). This finding was not strongly upheld in the XE data, which showed high frequencies of collocation with verbs of opinion/belief/feeling, underlining its important function as a mitigator and softener in XE. In contrast, its use with common verbs is negligible. Table 3 illustrates the comparative scores between frequencies in the American English (AE) and XE corpora.

Table 3. Frequency of collocation with verbs of opinion/feeling/belief

	With <i>actually</i>		With <i>really</i>	
	AE	XE	AE	XE
Verbs of opinion/feeling/belief				
think	4	25	108	31
feel	1	3	50	6
believe	0	1	19	5
Common verbs				
have	48	10	243	18
take	33	0	104	3
get	8	2	19	12

In terms of distribution, while these results differ from those reported by Aijmer (1986) (32% medial propositional modifiers), they are broadly similar to those reported by Oh (2000: 249) in the corpus of spoken AE. In that study 34% of all uses of *actually* were initial, 58% were medial and 8% were final. In the initial position, and in the final position, its primary function was to introduce something in the discourse which was unexpected in some way. In this use, it was either gently contradicting, correcting or disagreeing with the expectation set up by the prior utterance. (He does not report on frequency of occurrence when *actually* was used to signal a shift in the topic.) The medial position most typically functioned as a clause emphasiser, reinforcing and strengthening the truth value of the clause, although also occasionally acting as a discourse modifier.

These XE speakers appear to be following similar and fairly robust conformities as regards the use of *actually*: it is primarily used as a discourse modifier to gently prepare the listener that what is to come goes against expectations (54%). Its use as a marker of imminent topic shift (8%) and as contemplative filler (5%) are sub-categories of this modificatory function. The remaining 33% of uses modified propositions, strengthening them and adding to their assertiveness. The next step in research of this nature will be to ascertain the extent to which this conforms to the usage of MT speakers in South Africa.

## NOTES

1. The reason for the formal bias is that XE is likely to be fairly formal at all times, since truly private informal conversations between friends would be most likely to take place in Xhosa. Using a second language usually takes an extra effort, and there is usually a particular reason why it is used. This reason is commonly the fact that the person to whom one is speaking is English speaking, or the audience speaks a range of different languages, of which English is the most likely lingua franca. Such contexts are, by their very nature, likely to be more formal. However, this is not viewed as a problem, since the corpus aims to represent what is most typical, not what is unusual.
2. The following transcription conventions are used:
  - [but you see
  - [and I said indicates the start of overlapping utterances
  - (.) indicates a pause of one second
  - = indicates no silence between speaker turns.
3. In the framework of Systemic Functional Grammar, in which the relationship between clauses is seen as serving the functions of elaboration, extension or enhancement (Gerot and Wignell, 1995), *actually* serves the elaborative function. Elaboration can be of two kinds: appositive (expository: *in other words, that is to say, I mean, to put it another way*; or exemplifying: *for example, for instance*) or clarification. In the case of clarification, the elaborated element is not restated, but reinstated, summarised or made more precise or in some way clarified for the purpose of the discourse (Halliday, 1994: 324).
4. Compare these truth-insistent uses with *\*They demanded that actually he report to them*, where there is no underlying assertiveness implicit in *actually*, since it is superseded by the force of *demand*.
5. In a sense it is a natural theme (Halliday, 1994: 50), where the speaker includes within the message some element that presents his or her own angle on the matter or expressing a relationship to what has gone before.

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