

Vol. 5, N°17, pp. 154– 165, Mars 2026
Copy©right 2024 / licensed under CC BY 4.0
Author(s) retain the copyright of this article
ISSN : 1987-1465
DOI : <https://www.doi.org/10.62197/WJJP8373>

Indexation : Copernicus, CrossRef, Mir@bel, Sudoc,
ASCI, Zenodo
Email : RevueKurukanFuga2021@gmail.com
Site : <https://revue-kurukanfuga.net>

*La Revue Africaine des
Lettres, des Sciences
Humaines et Sociales
KURUKAN FUGA*

A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS OF ‘IN FACT’ AND ‘ACTUALLY’ IN BRITISH ENGLISH: A METAOPERATIONAL APPROACH

Kouakou Yannick KONDRÓ

Enseignant-Chercheur

Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny (Côte d’Ivoire)

yannickkondro@yahoo.fr / kondro.yannick91@ufhb.edu.ci

Abstract: This study challenges the assumption that ‘in fact’ and ‘actually’ are synonymous by analyzing the metalinguistic difference - the distinctive invariant value - that underpins them through the prism of metaoperational grammar analytical tools. The corpus is mainly composed of extracts from the British National Corpus (BNC). Previous studies have examined the two units; yet, their findings remain unsatisfactory because they generally confine themselves to pinpointing the different functions - contextual uses - such as unexpectedness, contrast or emphasis. Thus, they do not reach the invariant value underlying the speech effects. This analysis shows that ‘in fact’ operates as a phase 2 operator insofar as it allows the speaker to return to information already introduced in order to elaborate on it. On the other hand, the operator ‘actually’ allows the speaker to introduce new information in his communication intent. As such, it is a phase 1 operator. The different functions expressed in previous studies can therefore be explained through these findings.

Key words: actually, in fact, metalinguistic, metaoperational grammar, phase 1, phase 2

Résumé : Cette étude interroge l’idée selon laquelle ‘in fact’ et ‘actually’ seraient des synonymes afin de comprendre la différence métalinguistique - la valeur invariante distinctive - qui les caractérise à travers les outils d’analyse de la grammaire métaopérationnelle. Le corpus est essentiellement extrait du British National Corpus (BNC). Les analyses consacrées à ces deux unités se sont généralement limitées à la description de leurs effets de sens sans chercher à atteindre la valeur invariante qui justifie leur émergence dans le discours. L’analyse montre que ‘in fact’ relève de la phase 2 parce qu’il permet à l’énonciateur de revenir sur des données déjà introduites afin de les élaborer. Par contre, l’opérateur ‘actually’ est de phase 1, car il signale l’introduction de nouvelles données dans le processus de construction du sens. Ces conclusions permettent de rendre compte de tous les usages de ces opérateurs.

Mots-clés : actually, in fact, métalinguistique, grammaire métaopérationnelle, phase 1, phase 2

Introduction

English is one of the most taught languages in the world with diverse learning materials. These materials offer various ways for learners to develop effective communicative competence. Yet, the presentation of certain language facts sometimes appears unclear, especially when words are presented as synonymous and therefore interchangeable. Such descriptions make it difficult to grasp the underlying distinctive features of the linguistic units and more importantly blur their contribution to the construction of meaning. This problem emerges with “in fact” and “actually” treated as synonymous.

Previous studies have examined these operators comparatively or individually. In his seminal work, S.-Y. Oh (2000) comparatively analyses the two linguistic items. He observes that ‘unexpectedness’ is the core meaning shared by these units. Yet, this ‘unexpectedness’ is expressed in different ways as he concluded “*actually* is frequently found in the context of contradiction and disagreement, whereas *in fact* tends to mark an increase in the strength of the previous assertion.” (S.-Y. Oh, 2000, p.266). E. Keizeran and D. Kojadinovic (2025), more recently, analyze ‘actually’ and identify different contextual functions. In the same perspective, K. Ackerley and S. Gesuato (2023) identify four meanings of ‘in fact’ in its different occurrences, namely ‘contrast’, ‘specification’, ‘factuality’ and ‘support’ in their study. Despite these insightful contributions, they remain attached to the semantic interpretations, namely unexpectedness, contrast, specification, etc. leaving out the underlying functioning responsible for the generation of the diverse speech effects.

The main objective in this analysis is therefore to decipher the invariant value of ‘in fact’ and ‘actually’ through the lens of metaoperational grammar. This leads to the fundamental question: what is the metalinguistic difference between ‘in fact’ and ‘actually’? We hypothesize that the two units are different in their inner functioning and that this difference is at the level of the phase system as defined by H. Adamczewski (1982). In order to answer this fundamental question, we combine both quantitative and qualitative analyses based on utterances randomly selected from the British National Corpus (BNC).

Metaoperational grammar was devised to explain the functioning of human languages. Its objective is to make language intelligible by not only describing language facts but also, and primarily, explaining them. Its method is therefore both descriptive and explanatory (H. Adamczewski & J.-P. Gabilan, 1996, p. 10). In this perspective, the data are natural utterances because they incorporate the context and the situation in which the speaker is when speaking or writing (J.-P. Gabilan, 2006). This theory is based on the conviction that utterances are the result of underlying operations, and it is the duty of the linguist to uncover these operations in order to account for the functioning of language. In line with the idea that language is a system (F. de Saussure, 1916), metaoperational grammar maintains that absolute synonymy does not exist.

For this analysis, two key concepts are instrumental. On the one hand, the metalinguistic value is explained, and on the other hand, the system of phases is elaborated upon. A metalinguistic stance considers that language contains within itself the elements necessary to explain its own

functioning. The operations that account for linguistic functioning must therefore be sought within language itself, not in the extralinguistic world. In other words, even if the extralinguistic world may influence certain operational choices, the explanation of those operations lies in language. To explain the differential functioning between the microsystem “this” and “that,” two operations must be considered. These operations hinge on the way the speaker encodes the message while evaluating the context. When the speaker considers that the information to be conveyed is new to the co-speaker, the message is linguistically encoded as such. When the speaker assumes that the context is obvious and that the co-speaker shares knowledge of the information, the encoding reflects that shared knowledge. Thus, the theory of phases constitutes the foundation upon which the operational aspects of language are explained. Phase 1 occurs when the speaker introduces something new to the co-speaker, whereas phase 2 occurs when the speaker recalls shared knowledge.

This study is composed of two main parts. The first part presents the methodology and the corpus, while the second part addresses the results and discussion.

1-Methodology

The methodology examines the research design, the corpus selection and sampling procedure, and the quantitative and qualitative analysis.

1.1.Research Design

The theoretical framework grounding this work is metaoperational grammar. Its approach is primarily explanatory because it aims to explain language facts. More specifically, the objective of this analysis is to identify and explain the metalinguistic operations beneath the occurrences of linguistic units that can help spell out the functioning of ‘in fact’ and ‘actually’. This objective requires empirical data collection, hence a corpus-based approach. The corpus is composed of authentic, real-life communication data rather than sentences created by the analyst for his own analyses. In conducting the analysis, we have recourse to BNC, for it contains millions of authentic utterances gathered from diverse contexts of use.

1.2.Corpus Selection and Sampling Procedure

This analysis explores language facts from empirical data extracted from the British National Corpus (BNC) which contains millions of utterances. This shows that the units under study are not marginal either in everyday or formal uses, and their functioning deserves to be carefully examined. In this perspective, two main types of sources are identified, namely the spoken and the written sources. The spoken sources are composed of movies and interviews, while the written sources comprise academic texts, non-academic texts, newspapers, and magazines. These two main sources are important because spoken language and written language do not show the same dynamics. While the spoken sources is more intuitive, spontaneous and less formal, the written output is more polished because the speaker takes time to reflect on his own writing before validating the final form. This difference entails that the analysis adopts a comprehensive approach.

For this study, we randomly extracted 500 utterances, of which 250 contain “in fact” and 250 contain “actually.” This allows us to have a thorough analysis of their occurrences. Yet, due to space constraints, only a few of these utterances are used as instances in the different analyses.

1.3. Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis

The quantitative analysis aims to see how representative ‘in fact’ and ‘actually’ are in everyday conversation or in formal contexts. This gives legitimate grounds for conducting this analysis, since it appears that they are widely used. However, it should be noted that the quantitative approach does not account for the invariant value; rather, it only helps to identify the predominant uses of these units. It also provides a solid basis for the invariant values identified. The qualitative analysis, by contrast, reveals the underlying metalinguistic value that justifies the different contextual uses. In the analysis per se, we proceed through deletion, substitution, and displacement (C. Delmas, 1993) in order to understand the impact of each unit within the utterance.

2- Results

The findings of both the quantitative and qualitative analyses are presented in this section. It starts with the quantitative analysis, which aims to analyze the predominance of the two units through their distributions across different registers. After the quantitative approach, the qualitative analysis help uncover the invariant value.

2.1. Quantitative Analysis

The frequency proves why it is important to scrutinize their functioning, for they are not marginal units in English language. As a matter of fact, they deserve to be analyzed in order to establish a difference between them. Hereafter a breakdown of their use in diverse contexts.

Image 1: ‘in fact’ in BNC

British National Corpus (BNC)												
SEARCH		FREQUENCY		CONTEXT		OVERVIEW						
ON CLICK: CONTEXT TRANSLATE (??) ENTIRE PAGE GOOGLE IMAGE PRON/VIDEO BOOK THESAURUS (HELP) AI: CATEGORIZE SECTIONS		HELP	1	IN FACT	ALL	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	NON-ACAD	ACADEMIC	MISC
				16088	2994	2159	1144	827	2649	3167	3148	
1.250 seconds												

Image 2: ‘actually’ in BNC

The screenshot shows the British National Corpus (BNC) search interface. The word 'ACTUALLY' is entered in the search box. The results table shows the following data:

HELP	1	★	ALL	SPOKEN	FICTION	MAGAZINE	NEWSPAPER	NON-ACAD	ACADEMIC	MISC	
	1	★	ACTUALLY	25221	12767	2395	1421	935	2312	2521	2870

Additional interface elements include: 'ON CLICK: CONTEXT', 'TRANSLATE (??)', 'ENTIRE PAGE', 'GOOGLE', 'IMAGE', 'PRON/VIDEO', 'BOOK', 'THESAURUS', '(HELP)', 'AI', and 'SECTIONS'. A timer at the bottom right indicates '0.250 seconds'.

We can observe that “in fact” (16,088 occurrences) and “actually” (25,221 occurrences) are frequently used in the corpus. They appear in various contexts, such as spoken language, fiction, magazines, newspapers, non-academic texts, academic texts, and miscellaneous sources. These different contexts show that both items occur across the same registers; neither is avoided in any particular context.

In the qualitative analysis, the spoken and the academic sources are examined, because they represent two different processes of language use. The other sources, namely the fiction, magazines, newspapers, non-academic texts, and miscellaneous ones are not included in the analysis because they may incorporate both spoken and written features of language, which could obscure the register categorization of the extracted utterances. Spoken English is generally more spontaneous, and in interaction, speakers may reorient what they are saying if they realize that their reasoning needs to be reconsidered. Such reorientation is less likely to be observed in academic contexts, which represent a more polished and carefully structured form of expression.

Looking more closely at the register distribution, we can see that “in fact” occurs 3,167 times in academic English, whereas in spoken English it occurs 2,994 times. On the other hand, “actually” occurs more frequently in spoken English (12,767 occurrences) than in academic English. This quantitative analysis does not reveal their invariant value, but it provides useful indications for analysing their differential properties. Based on the data, we may ask why “in fact” is more frequent in written contexts while “actually” is more commonly used in spoken contexts in our corpus. This question will be answered in the subsequent analysis.

2.2. Invariant Value of ‘in fact’ and ‘actually’

This analysis presents the qualitative analysis. Specifically, it examines the invariant value of the operators through various analyses of utterances in which ‘in fact’ and ‘actually’ occur.

2.2.1 Invariant Value of ‘in fact’

In the analysis, we explore ‘in fact’ in three different positions in the sentence: The initial, the medial and the final position, in order to understand its functioning.

2.2.1.1. ‘In fact’ in Initial Position

Let us consider the following utterances:

3. I feel lost without my kids. I love to have them around me when I'm working.'
In fact I love to have them around me all the time! (BNC, The Daily Mirror.
London: Mirror Group Newspapers)

In this utterance, the speaker uses 'in fact' to confirm a fact. In the sentences preceding 'in fact' he presents his love for his children: "I feel lost without my kids. I love them...". This segment already establishes that he loves his children. Consequently, saying "I love to have them around me all the time" comes just to confirm that he loves his children. The speaker uses 'in fact' not to introduce new information but he rather uses it to consolidate a piece of information.

4. McClair stressed: 'Funnily enough, I've never felt better after a game this season.'
In fact, it was about the only game in which I've not picked up a knock since the start of the season.' (BNC, The Daily Mirror. 7680 s-units.)

The sentence introduced by 'in fact' is not in contradiction with the preceding sentence. It is indeed an extension of that general statement. What the segment with 'in fact' does specifically is to justify the previous statement. The segment confirms what has already been said. In fact, this season made him feel better because he has never picked up a knock since the start of the season. The use of 'because' to link the two segments signal that in 'in fact' is used to come back on the previous segment in order to consolidate it.

5. It's unbelievable. **In fact**, it's very tearful (BNC, SPOK
Town council grants meeting. Rec. on 21 Feb 1993 with 7 partics, 902 utts)

As in the previous utterance, this one shows clearly how 'in fact' allows the speaker to be more specific. the speaker brings in specific clarification to explain what he means with the segment 'it's unbelievable'.

2.2.1.2. 'In fact' in Medial Position

Let us consider the following utterances:

6. At the moment, nuclear power contributes approximately three percent to our national consumption of fuels, a small figure and even if we multiplied it tenfold that would be thirty percent. That would, **in fact**, be a huge increase in the nuclear power programme. (BNC, nterviews with educationalists. 5 partics, 145 utts)

In this utterance, 'in fact' allows the speaker to draw a conclusion on what he previous mentioned. The segment introduced by 'in fact' does not introduce an argument that deviates from the previous segment. it is rather used to refer back to the consequences of the increase in the nuclear power programme already introduced through 'if we multiplied it tenfold that would be thirty percent'. The use of 'that' is to recall exactly that operation in order to draw an unavoidable conclusion, for from 3 percent to thirty percent, the increase is noticeably huge. It is obvious that a conclusion is not meant to add new information but to reintegrate what has previously been discussed in order to consolidate it.

7. If you look at the accounts, you will see that they record a deficit on the general fund of a hundred and twenty-three thousand, but if you deal, if you delve more

carefully in the accounts, more closely, you will find, **in fact**, that the money we raised on the appeal fund was greater than that deficit shown on the general fund. (BNC, Annual general meeting (Busn). Rec. on 22 Nov 1991 with 6 parts, 99 utts)

This utterance shows that the speaker comes in contradiction to what is already thought of about the deficit. But this contradiction is just a speech effect and does not represent the functioning of the operation. In this utterance, the deficit is primarily presented as a visible aspect on the general fund. But this appreciation is contradicted in the subsequent clause with the introduction of the adversative connector 'but' inviting to evaluate more closely the accounts presenting the previous evaluation as incoherent. The segment 'you will find' indicates that the finding is obvious and accessible to anyone due to the use of the modal 'will'. In fact, the modal 'will' indicates that the realization of the predication is highly likely to happen (H. Adamczewski, 1996). In other words, the use of 'will' gives legitimate ground to believe in the realization of what is announced to happen because they are plausible reasons in the discursive context or situation to prompt to believe so. Consequently, reconsidering the accounts more closely will naturally lead to the conclusion that 'the money we raised on the appeal fund was greater than that deficit shown on the general fund.' There is therefore a resurgence of what is potentially the results of anybody having a closer look into the accounts.

8. Fazila and Salima attended English classes but Ruksana was forbidden to by her father-in-law who thought she had too much to do in the house. She was **in fact** not only a housewife but a homemaker, sewing blouses at 35p a piece. (BNC, Finding a voice: Asian women in Britain. Wilson, Amrit.)

In this utterance, 'in fact' occurs as a justification operator to provide the reason why Ruksana was forbidden to attend English classes. The reason being that she is a housewife and homemaker make her unavailable for English classes. 'In fact' is therefore used to come back on what has already been said in order to extend it. This capacity to reflect back on what has been introduced is the feature that is constant in all the occurrences of 'in fact'.

2.2.1.3. 'in fact' in Final Position

Let us consider the following utterances:

9. So when they asked for my passport I just said 'Hotel', because Spanish hotels always kept visitors' passports, at any rate for the first night. (They still do, **in fact**.) (BNC, A poet could not but be gay)

The speaker mentions in the previous sentence a general fact: the practice that Spanish hotels keeps visitors' passports at the first night. The sentence in which 'in fact' occurs does not contradict that argument nor does it introduce new information. But, it rather confirms it. With the use of 'in fact', the speaker is saying that this practice in the hotels still applies.

10. The way in which this works is simply that the garlic deters the mosquito -- no mosquito will come near you **in fact**. I am not medical or a scientist, but can guess

that the garlic affects the whole of the blood stream as far as the insect is concerned. (BNC, The Belfast Telegraph. 10040 s-units.)

'In fact' occurs in this utterance to recall the statement: "garlic deters the mosquito" with the ultimate objective of specifying that statement. In fact, 'no mosquito will come near you' comes back on what he has already introduced in order to reinforce it in his explanation of the virtue of garlic on the mosquito.

11. Kelly had expected that Jack Butler would live up to the image she had painted of him in her mind. A wide boy on the make, a rake of the Silver Ring -- vulgar, randy, pleased with himself. But he wasn't like that at all, **in fact**. He appeared almost shy among the other party-goers, a little boy let loose in the big playground, nervously looking about him. (BNC, tone cold. Francome, John. London: Headline Book Pub. Plc)

In this utterance, two things are being opposed. And to explain why 'in fact' is phase 2, we need to understand what belong to the personal sphere of the speaker - subjectivity - and what is a fact - objectivity - which is will indeed be acknowledged like that in a given community.

In this utterance, Kelly has his own representation of Jack Butler as expressed in 'Kelly had expected that Jack Butler would live up to the image she had painted of him in her mind'. This belongs to her personal imagination. Unfortunately, 'he was not like that at all' and this stands as a fact in the sense that the subsequent sentence shows that "He appeared almost shy" where 'appears' proves that it is not a personal stance but everyone could observe. When the information is obvious, it amounts to saying that the partner in the conversation can acknowledge it as shared information. Consequently, this occurrence once more proves that 'in fact' is a phase 2 operator.

2.2.2. Invariant Value of 'Actually'

As 'in fact', 'Actually' can be analyzed over three positions in the linear order, namely the initial, the middle and the final position.

2.2.2.1 'Actually' in Initial Position

Let us consider the following utterances:

12. The bell rings at 8.45 and we all gather at the door to our tutor base. **Actually** it would be more accurate to call it a tutor' hut' since our class is based in one of those' temporary' classrooms that sprouted up around schools all over the country about twenty years ago. (BNC, The chocolate teapot. Lawrence, David. London: Scripture Union)

In this utterance, the speaker first introduces 'tutor base' as a place they gather. But this expression is substituted by another, as a way to bring in a correction of what he previously introduced. This reorientation is possible because of the use of 'actually'. In fact, 'actually' is used not to consolidate a previous argument or information, but it is rather used to introduce a

segment that aims to bring in new information. This is fundamentally the difference between the two units under study.

13. Workers backed up their claims with strike action. And they won, because employers could not find substitute labour and because, with demand for commodities high, they lost heavily from any interruptions of production. Capitalists were forced to concede the wage rises which for the system as a whole were needed to sustain accumulation. **Actually** the situation was more complicated. The money wage increases which workers won exceeded those required to generate enough scrapping to ease labour shortage. (BNC, Capitalism since 1945. Harrison, John; Glyn, Andrew)

In the segments preceding the introduction of ‘actually’, the speaker is explaining that the loss in production is due to the workers strike. But as if this explanation was limited and incomplete to prove his point, he uses ‘actually’ to show that that previous reasoning lacks tremendous information, hence the introduction of ‘the situation was more complicated’. This contradictory information is new as regards the construction of the previous arguments.

14. It will effectively clean paint roller sleeves, hammer in or extract nails or tacks, remove grout, putty, etc, and it can also be used as a filling knife, and as an emergency screwdriver. **Actually**, it is very effective as a screwdriver, as it is used at right angles to the screw, and therefore provided great leverage. (BNC, Do It Yourself. Croydon: Link House Magazines Ltd)

This type of utterance gives the impression that ‘actually’ is used to reinforce an argument; thus, it is equivalent with ‘really’ and ‘in fact’ in some contexts. But a closer look at it shows that in this context, the different uses of the tool are presented. Being considered as a screwdriver is not just a possibility among the different uses of the tool but it can be considered as a secondary function of it expressed in “an emergency screwdriver”. This means that this usage is not its primary function. As regard the previous argument, we would say that this function comes in when it is in emergency case not as its usual function. Yet, the occurrence of ‘actually’ reevaluates that previous appreciation in order to rectify it. This rectification reorients the function of the tool and place it as an ‘effective’ tool in the sense that it provides ‘great leverage’. From a function that can be considered marginal, the speaker presents the tool as to a central, thereby introducing new information in the discourse.

2.2.2.2 ‘Actually’ in Medial Position

Let us consider the following utterances:

15. It was fun to read how many noticed an improvement in their temper as well as their waistline! Normally so many slimmers become irritable as they feel deprived and hungry. The majority on this diet, however, **actually** made a point of saying they never felt hungry, were able to eat similar foods to their family and never felt deprived. (BNC, Rosemary Conley's hip and thigh diet. Conley, Rosemary. London: Arrow Books Ltd)

‘Actually’ plays the exact same role in this utterance as in the previous ones. It is used to introduce new information. How does that operate here? In this utterance, the speaker presents a normal fact which is the slimmers become irritable as they feel deprived and hungry. He then introduces a count argument with the adversative connector ‘however’. This conjunctive adverb is in fact used to introduce a contradiction to what is set as the norm. ‘Actually’ occurs in the segment in order to reinforce that contradiction.

16. Change in classroom practice is often talked about as if it were easy to effect and impatience expressed towards teachers who are unable to accomplish it overnight. As these case studies show, even when the willingness to change is there, whether the initial impetus comes from within or without, **actually** bringing about change is hard for the individual. It requires teachers to look critically at their own present practice as well as being able to conceive of alternatives. (BNC, Mathematics, teachers and children: a reader. Pimm, David (ed.). Sevenoaks, Kent)

In this extract, the speaker makes the observation that in the public’s opinion, change is seen as something easy to bring. However, he indicates through the use of ‘actually’, that this public view is not correct based on the findings of case studies. This correction is not elaborative of the previous segment. It rather contradicts it adding new information.

17. BRIAN HALL: ‘At that particular moment in time we have a manager that has got himself into the semi-final of the FA Cup, he’s got the opportunity of reaching Wembley, he’s had a difficult time in the League, it’s been a traumatic season okay, then he’s told he needs triple by-pass surgery at the age of 39.’ There aren’t many people in the world that are **actually** going to make solid, rational decisions. I don’t think so under those sort of circumstances.’

The speaker presents the dramatic situation of the manager. And he says in the subsequent segment: ‘There aren’t many people in the world that are actually going to make solid, rational decisions. I don’t think so under those sorts of circumstances.’ In this utterance, the speaker assumes that the right composure for any individual would not be calmness and making right decisions. But this assumption is reoriented and contradicted with the occurrence of ‘actually’.

2.2.2.3 ‘Actually’ in Final Position

Let us consider the following utterances:

18. Well, they’ve sent us in an application er, very detailed, very go-- good letter, **actually**. (BNC, Town council grants meeting. Rec. on 21 Feb 1993 with 7 partics, 902 utts)

The use of ‘actually’ confirms the value assigned to it. It shows an evaluation of the application. First qualified as very detailed and after qualified as very good. The scope of ‘actually’ is on the qualification ‘very good letter’ as a way for the him to reevaluate his assessment of the letter as very good leaving out the first evaluation.

19. This is some of the stuff I did in the early days, it’s all medical and rather boring. Then there are these diary notes, but maybe you would like to read my story, well,

actually, it's a novel, you see, my first novel, **actually**. (BNC, Nonesuch: the Univ of Bristol magazine. Bristol: Univ of Bristol)

The occurrence of 'actually' signals a correction. It is used to replace 'story' to 'novel'. It has a corrective effect in this first occurrence. 'Actually' a phase 1 operator like the previous occurrences because the speaker brings in corrective information. What the speaker aims to show can be paraphrased in the sentence: It is surely my novel but more correctly, it is my first novel.

20. A - And your print, I assume your printer doesn't do huge print, does it?

B - It does **actually**. (BNC, Weekly meeting (Busn). Rec. on 21 Mar 1993 with 5 parts, 1078 utts)

In this utterance, when the speaker asks the question to 'I assume your printer doesn't do huge print, does it?', he implicitly wants the co-speaker to confirm that statement. But, it is not the case. 'Actually' makes it possible for the speaker to make that correction in going against that expectation.

2.2.3 Analyzing the Functions through Invariant Value

In this part, we show how the invariant value integrates the different functions explained in the use of 'actually' and 'in fact'.

(21) A. How was the bus ride?

B: **Actually**, we went by train. (other-correction) (Taglicht 2001:1–2, extracted from Katherine Ackerley and Sara Gesuato. 2023, p.754)

As explained in this approach, 'actually' is used for correction. It can even be said that in this context, it is used to express contradiction or deny a presupposition. But these functions are speech effects. Our analysis indicates that 'actually' is a phase 1 operator. In this sense, it introduces new information. This invariant value is clearly expressed in this extract. Speaker A presupposes that speaker B used the bus. But speaker B reorients the speaker A. The information added does not align with the previous one in order to elaborate it. Speaker B added then new information. And in this very context, this new information happens to be in contradiction to the previous one.

22. SpeakerA37: Uh, it always, my, my favorite movie of all time has been, uh, uh, *The mission*. Did you ever see that?

SpeakerB38: No, **in fact**, I'm not even familiar with it, I don't think.

SpeakerA39: Uh, it's a, a, I think it's put out by Landmark Productions, the same people who put out *Chariots of fire*.

SpeakerB40: Uh-huh. (sw3464.txt, extracted from S. Y. Oh. 2000, p.258)

Our analysis proves that 'in fact' is a phase 2 operator. This utterance shows that 'in fact' is used to refer back to information already introduced in order to expand it. As opposed to 'actually'. It does not reorient the discourse logical trajectory. In this utterance, the speaker

refers back to movie in 'I'm not even familiar with it' on which he makes his comment. Actually would introduce new information without referring back to already introduced information.

Conclusion

The main objective of explaining the difference between “in fact” and “actually” has led us to adopt both an empirical and an explanatory approach. The British National Corpus (BNC) enabled us to examine the frequency of these operators, while metaoperational grammar helped decipher the fundamental reasons underlying their occurrence in discourse.

The analysis shows that, rather than considering them synonymous, it is scientifically appropriate to examine how they differ, since language is a system structured by internal oppositions. “In fact” functions as a phase 2 operator because it is used to expand or consolidate information that has already been introduced. “Actually,” by contrast, functions as a phase 1 operator, as the speaker uses it to introduce new information by deviating from what is implied or previously stated in discourse. All the speech effects derived from their contextual use can be explained through this distinction.

Bibliography

Ackerley, Katherine and Gesuato, Sara. (2023). “The Words of Facts: How British and Italian Students Use in Fact in Academic Writing” in *Contrastive Pragmatics* 4 (2023), pp. 274–288.

Adamczewski, Henri et Gabilan, Jean-Pierre. (1996). *Déchiffrer la grammaire anglaise*, Paris, Les Éditions Didier.

Adamczewski, Henri and Gabilan, Jean Pierre. (1993). *Les clés de la grammaire anglaise*. Paris, Armand Colin.

Adamczewski, Henri and Delmas, Claude. (1982). *Grammaire linguistique de l'anglais*, Paris, Armand Colin.

British National Corpus, <https://www.english-corpora.org/bnc/>

Delmas, Claude et al. (1993). *Faits de langue en anglais*. Paris : Dunod.

Gabilan Jean-Pierre. (2006). *Grammaire expliquée de l'anglais*. France, OPTIMUM, ellipses.

Keizer, Evelien and Kojadinovic, Zlatan. (2025). “Actually: function, position and prosody” in *English Language and Linguistics*, 29.4, pp. 752–780.

Kondro, Kouakou Yannick. (2023). “ Approche metaoperationnelle des stratégies discursives implicites ”, in *CALAO Revue Pluridisciplinaire En Sciences et Techniques*, Numéro 1 – Volume 3, pp. 346-357.

Oh, Sun-Young. (2000). “Actually and in fact in American English: a data-based analysis”, in *English Language and Linguistics*, 4.2, pp. 243-268.

Saussure, Ferdinand De. (1916) *Cours de linguistique générale*. Lausanne : Payot.