An attempt to get access to a speaker’s mind

The expectation marker actually in spoken conversation

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Abstract
The use of the expectation marker actually in spoken conversation is an interesting topic. This study investigates the different functions of actually and the importance of context in eight spoken conversations from the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English. The chosen conversations are different when it comes to social factors like the participants’ age or gender.

The interactions are studied using Karin Aijmer’s suggested functions of actually. Aijmer divides the expectation marker into two major functions: contrastive and emphatic. Basically, the contrastive actually functions as an opposition between points of views, and the empathic actually is used to justify or explain an earlier statement.

The method used for the study is of a qualitative character as I study the interactions thoroughly both by listening to the conversations as well as studying the available transcript versions of the interactions.

Overall, the study shows that emphatic actually is most common in the data used, and it is mainly used to explain or justify something or as a marker of a participant’s style of speech. In other words, actually is more often used as a way to underline an utterance rather than to correct or make a contrast to another participant’s statement. Actually is often used as a marker of style, a way for a speaker to signal or mark a specific style of speech.

All of the conversations are taken from everyday life and should therefore be considered unprepared. When it comes to context it seems as if actually is more frequently used in conversations between participants close in age and who are involved in a closer sort of relationship, for example cousins or a couple in a love relationship. As for gender, actually is used by both women and by men.

Keywords: pragmatics, discourse particles, actually, context
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1. Introduction

Language is a process of free creation; its laws and principles are fixed, but the manner in which the principles of generation are used is free and infinitely varied. Even the interpretation and use of words involves a process of free creation (Chomsky 2013: 113).

All conversations include what is called discourse particles, which are important clues to understanding language. The quote above is made by the American professor in linguistics Noam Chomsky when discussing the nature of the human mind. Chomsky’s utterance about language is interesting not only as it relates to human nature but, also in connection to pragmatics, which is the study of the meaning of language in context. In order to understand what is being communicated through language one has to consider several factors like the words actually being spoken as well as the context in which an utterance is made. Especially interesting is the expectation marker actually, which belongs to the category of discourse particles. It should be noted that actually is used as a discourse marker as well as an adverb. Over the years, however, this marker of expectations has advanced into several different functions of use. As it is difficult to distinguish between the adverb usages of actually and its uses as a discourse particle, this study takes all uses of actually into account.

This study focuses on the use of the expectation marker actually in spoken conversations. The conversations have been studied using Professor Karin Aijmer’s definitions and suggested functions of actually. The study focuses on the communicative functions of actually in conversations from the Santa Barbara corpus of spoken American English and investigates the role of context in establishing the different functions.

2. Theoretical background

This section contains information on previous research concerning the topic of my essay, the main theoretical sources, as well as definitions and terminology used in this essay.

2.1 Theoretical sources and previous research

This study is mainly based on Karin Aijmer’s analysis of discourse particles presented in the book English Discourse Particles. Evidence from a corpus (2002) and her more recently
published book *Understanding Pragmatic Markers* (2013). Aijmer interprets her data by using a broad variety of analytical techniques of discourse analysis, instead of just approaching her material using, for example, speech act theory or relevance theory. Aijmer’s intention is to identify the core meanings of discourse particles and relate it to the functions of each discourse particle. She calls this a “modified minimalist description” (Aijmer 2002: 21). Influenced by Aijmer’s discourse analysis I have also used different techniques when studying the data. Aijmer restricts her study to include two levels, textual and interpersonal, as have I done in my study. Note that the method used in this essay is discussed in chapter 3 “Data and method”.

During recent years the study of discourse particles have avalanched, therefore, a great number of studies on discourse particles can be found. Some of the most current contributions to the research on discourse markers are Diane Blakemore’s *Relevance and linguistic meaning: The semantics and pragmatics of discourse markers* which was published in 2002. In contrast to Aijmer, Blakemore uses relevance theory when approaching her data. Furthermore, older studies on discourse particles can be found. In 1998, Uta Lenk published *Marking discourse coherence: Functions of discourse markers in spoken English*. The focus on Lenk’s study was to examine a set of discourse particles related to their global textual function. As mentioned above, many studies of the use of actually in different conversations have been carried out. However, a study of the usage of actually has not been made on the particular material and with the exact research questions which I intend to study.

2. 2 Terminology

In this essay I have mainly use the term *discourse particle* or *discourse marker*, phrases having a pragmatic function rather than a semantic meaning. Discourse particles helps structure conversations or deliver attitude in interactions between people. Blakemore (2006) defines the word *discourse* as a way to describe expressions at the level of discourse rather than at the level of sentence. She also suggests that the word *marker* could be used to show what an utterance mark or indicate rather than what it describes. Discourse markers should be considered a signal of how a message, for example an utterance, relates to the preceding discussion. (Blakemore 2006: 221-223).
3. Data and method

This section describes my research questions, the chosen data, as well as the method used for the study. The research questions for the study are as follows:

1. What communicative functions does the discourse particle actually serve in the spoken conversations used for this study?
2. What is the role of context in establishing these functions?

The data for this study consists of eight spoken and transcribed conversations from the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English. This corpus contains audio and transcriptions as well as timestamps of dialogues between couples, groups, and individuals. The corpus is based on a great number of recordings of everyday interactions between people with different social- and ethnic backgrounds, regional roots, ages and genders around the United States.

My selection of conversations is, in alphabetical order, as follows: Conceptual Pesticides, which is a conversation recorded in Southern California between three friends who are preparing dinner together. The participants are Marilyn and Roy who are a married couple and their friend Peter who is in town to visit his friends. They are all in their thirties. Cuz is an energetic interaction between two cousins, Lenore and Alina, which takes place in Los Angeles, California. Deadly Diseases is a recording in Los Angeles, California between three friends: Ken, Joanne and Lenore. Ken and Joanne is a couple and Lenore is their friend. Lambada is an after-dinner conversation between four friends in their late twenties and early thirties. The participants are: Harold and Jane, a married couple, and Peter who is a visiting friend. The discussion takes place in San Francisco, California. Letters of Concerns is a business dialogue in New Mexico between Brad and Phil who are board members of an art society. The conversation in Vet morning is between five participants taking place in a veterinarian office near Madison, Wisconsin. In Handshakes All Around, mainly three participants are involved in the dialogue. It is a face-to-face interaction in Santa Fe, New Mexico between three neighbours all named Tom who are at the age of 60 and upwards. The last conversation I have analysed is Swingin’ Kid, which is a conversation between Sheri who is a single mum in her mid-thirties and her eleven-year-old son Steven. The conversation takes place in a private home in Boise, Idaho while the mother and her son prepare dinner.

To be able to study discourse one has to look beyond specific structures and actual words. Above and beyond studying the words used, one also has to consider the expectations
and beliefs of the speech participants as well as their background knowledge when it is possible (Yule 1996:84). In other words, when studying the pragmatics of discourse one has to consider the intentions of the speaker/writer, the things people have in mind.

The method used in this essay is qualitative. As Dörnyei (2007) discusses, a qualitative study includes collected data analysed with non-statistical methods. Quantitative research, on the other hand, involves studies with primarily numerical data. However, the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research are not always clear. Many studies involve a mix between these two methods, which is called mixed methods research (Dörnyei 2007: 24). This has been the case in my study since I have analysed both my collected data as well as counted the times actually occurred in different conversations. However, note that in this study, focusing on the different functions of actually in spoken conversation, I mainly use a qualitative method. I have thoroughly analysed spoken conversations from the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English in order to investigate the different functions of the discourse particle actually. My hypothesis is that actually takes on different communicative functions depending on the context and the social- and ethnic backgrounds as well as age and gender of the people involved in the conversations.

4. Results and discussion

The following chapter is structured as follows: firstly a definition of actually as a discourse particle is presented together with its different functions. Secondly I have analysed the eight conversations systematically to see how the expectation marker is used. Finally, I will present a discussion of how the use of actually varies between the spoken conversations depending greatly on the context in which it has been used.

4.1 Functions of actually

The word actually has more than one function, for example, it could be considered an adverb or a discourse particle. Over time, this marker of expectations has developed more uses. As an expectation marker, actually conveys elements of surprise or unexpectedness. Furthermore, markers of expectation can belong to a range of different word classes. For example, verbs and adverbs as well as modals (Aijmer 2002: 251). I should also be noted that the adverb actually is quite difficult to distinguish from the discourse particle actually. The term discourse particles is used to describe several different words used to express or mark certain
things being stated, for example, interjections like oh and ah, topic-changers like now and expectation markers like actually and in fact.

When it comes to the study of conversations and more specifically the research of markers in discussions, the views differ. The traditional approach is that semantics equal the study of truth-conditional meaning, while pragmatics is concerned with how context contributes to meaning in language use. This means that the study of discussion markers is more a matter of pragmatics than of semantics (Horn & Ward 2006: 222). It should also be noted that when it comes to multifunctional discourse markers, like actually, the relationship between function, form and prosody is very complicated (Aijmer 2013: 16).

The position of actually in the sentence is important to its function. When considering the distinction between the different functions and meanings of the word actually, the differences between the positions are rather small. Structures of conversations could, for example, depend on the number of participants involved in the interaction as well as their turn taking in speaking. However, the position of actually is rather important. When it is placed medially, it hedges either a specific element or the proposition. However, when actually is placed initially or finally it becomes a discourse marker with interpersonal or textual functions. (Aijmer 2002: 253). For example, when actually is considered an emphasising adverb it is often positioned before or after the word is. Furthermore, when actually functions as a sentence modifier it occurs after the verb and, an intensifying VP modifier when it takes place directly before the verb. (Aijmer 2002: 257).

The important difference between the adverbial actually and the discourse particle of expectation is mainly its function/meaning. Its position is rather an indication of this meaning or function. The various uses of actually can be considered related and two main functions of the word are contrastive and emphatic. Contrastive actually marks an opposition between points of view and, the emphatic role of actually functions as a justification or an explanation of an unexpected utterance. (Aijmer 2002: 251-254).

4.1.1 Major functions – contrastive and emphatic

Discourse markers in general, and expectation markers in particular, serve to signal how an utterance fits into the evolving discourse. As mentioned above, the function of actually could be divided into two categories: contrastive and emphatic. The contrastive function marks contrast with a previous utterance, as in: He thought this was the case, but actually it was not. This use of actually permits the speaker to distance him- or herself from the factuality of an earlier statement and also to express a form of contrast to it. Moreover, actually as a
contrastive marker shows opposition between different points of view. It could be used, for example, to deny an implied belief or to signal a counterclaim or an objection to an utterance. Note, however, that the contrastive actually can also be used when contrast with an utterance is not entirely evident. Finally, contrastive actually is also used to mark a correction (Aijmer 2002: 266).

Collocations are important in understanding actually. When actually collocates with the word no, it is used to mark a counterclaim, correction or disagreement. This form is considered rather minor or mild and appeasing as the speaker is correcting another speaker (Aijmer 2002: 267-268). Perhaps it can be said that this form of actually is used in a face-saving act to show awareness of another person’s face as some kind of apology or politeness is evident. As Aijmer notes, when actually is used in a preface to a face-threatening act it functions in a way as apologetic or disarming. For example, it could be used as a self-correction to mark an utterance as more appropriate than an earlier one. (Aijmer 2002: 268).

As for the emphatic function of actually, it is used mainly as a justification or explanation, as in: He said that the sun was shining, and actually yesterday it was. It can be used to strengthen the speaker’s point of view in relation to the other speaker’s outlook. Another example of the emphatic actually is when an utterance is unexpected and therefore needs to be extra highlighted. It could also be used to mark that an amendment needs to be made before the conversation can be continued. (Aijmer 2002: 270-271).

Actually expresses disagreement between what seems to be the case and reality. One might say that it is a word used to adjust. In other words, it is used to adjust another word or utterance. It is also a useful word as it allows a speaker to change perspective and express a second thought (Aijmer 2002: 253).

4.1.2 Frequency
According to Aijmer, actually is most frequently used in speech. In editorial letters the adverbial actually tends to take the position as argumentative, expository and opinionated rather than as factual. The discourse particle is therefore often used to show supportive evidence. Aijmer has noticed that texts with a factual style lack use of actually, most likely because there is no need to further underscore factuality (Aijmer 2002: 259). An absence of actually as a discourse particle in prepared speech, for example public speech, is evident. Actually is one of the most multifunctional discourse particles and functionally it is related to in fact. The discourse particle in fact, is more frequently used in formal contexts like debates. Because of the high frequency of actually in informal conversations, it is interesting to
consider the possibility of the word as a style enhancer or style amplifier, perhaps as a way to mark a specific personal style in spoken language. (Aijmer 2002: 261) In addition, specific styles of conversation are often considered as personal qualities (Yule 1996: 76).

To make a distinction between actually as an adverb and a discourse particle, when it comes to meaning or use, is quite difficult since it is regarded as multifunctional, actually functions as interpersonal, metalinguistic or textual.

As mentioned in “Data and method”, the aim of my essay is to study the communicative functions of actually in specific spoken dialogues as well as the role of context in establishing the functions mentioned above. Because actually is multifunctional and difficult to uphold distinctions between its various uses, this essay deals with all its uses in the selected data. I have analysed all of different uses of actually, whether it has been a discourse maker or an adverb, in order to establish its communicative functions in the different discussions.

4.2 Analysis of primary data

As mentioned above, one has to consider the position as well as the context in which actually is used to determine its function in a conversation.

4.2.1 Conceptual Pesticides

In Conceptual Pesticides, a conversation which takes place during a dinner preparation, several examples of empathic as well as contrastive actually can be found. For example, a woman named Marilyn utters:

(1) Well actually I have Trader Joe’s, … (Conceptual Pesticides)

In (1) the couple is discussing garlic bread and Marilyn interjects the conversation by emphasising the fact that she is using a specific brand of garlic bread. The purpose with actually in the utterance is to explain that Trader Joe’s garlic bread is as good as any.

Later on in the conversation Roy utters:

(2) And actually when you see it…. (Conceptual Pesticides)

The utterance in (2) is a clear example of emphasising actually. The participants are discussing theories and art historical parallels when Roy is making the conversation change
direction with the help of a mild explanation. Actually is used as a justification and a way for Roy to strengthen his own point of view.

Earlier on, the participants are discussing how to compost. They discuss how to and also who are composting their stuff the right way. Marilyn utters:

(3) [But] --
   .. Yeah.
   .. (H) Actually,
   You know,
   … Zeke the sheik .. is a local. (Conceptual Pesticides)

In (3) Marilyn wants to make a mild contrast and signal a sort of objection on how to compost. The discussion about how to compost started with the participants discussion on dangerous substances going down the sink. The discussion goes on about composting when Marilyn mentions Zeke and how his compost pile blew up. The participants involved in the conversation then starts to gossip about this. As Yule (1996) points out, attention to the question of what is encoded by expressions like but needs to be taken into consideration to understand what is being communicated (Yule 1996: 231). Even though but is used together with actually in (3), this cannot be considered a typical or clear contrastive actually. In this case it seems as if Marilyn wants to give an example on what could happen when composting in a certain way. By using the word but Marilyn makes the discussion change from composting in general to composting in specific cases.

4.2.2 Cuz

In Cuz the use of actually differs a bit from the other analysed conversations since the cousins involved in the interaction use actually several times as a marker of conversational style. Also in Cuz, an interaction between two female cousins, the emphasising actually is evident. For example, Alina utters:

(4) (H) Well he couldn’t handle this.
      That I actually knew gay people. (Cuz)

In (4) Alina wants to emphasise or relate back to the topic of gay people. By doing this she aims to make her cousin Lenore involved in the conversation and at the same time be aware of
the fact that someone (he) could not believe that she (Alina) knew gay people. Several times in the ongoing conversation Alina utters *actually* as an emphasiser to her utterances. In another example Alina utters:

(5) … He was actually talkative tonight
    When I called him on the phone? (*Cuz*)

In many of the utterances, like in (5), Alina intends to emphasise specific statements by using *actually* in a “believe it or not” kind of way. Alina uses *actually* as a form of explanation to her own utterance, which differs from the way it is used in the other conversations.

However, later on in the conversation between the two cousins Alina uses *actually* in a contrastive way:

(6) … (H) It’s actually not Seppie’s fault, … (*Cuz*)

In (6) Alina tries to correct an earlier utterance by emphasising the fact that it is in fact not Seppie’s fault, and in this way she makes the discussion move forward. Lenore mainly just adds small comments, interjects politely or remains silent to Alina’s utterances. As Yule (1996) observes, silence is in some contexts an indication of a dispreferred response. When this happens, sometimes the speaker tries to revise an utterance in order to get some form of response from the other participant (Yule 1996: 79-80). Perhaps this is the case with the two cousins in *Cuz*. Alina often changes her utterances and emphasises her statements with the help of *actually*. Perhaps this is her way of trying to get Lenore more involved in their conversation.

Also, the context needs to be taken into consideration. It is a face-to-face interaction between two cousins in their mid-thirties who seem to know each other pretty well. The fact that the girls are about the same age and that they seem to have a close relation to one another could explain why *actually*, in all of the analysed conversation, appears the most frequently in *Cuz*. In this conversation *actually* appears at a total of twelve times. Once more, it should be noted that Alina is the one of the two cousins who uses *actually* most frequently in the conversation. In *Cuz*, *actually* appears to function as a marker of Alina’s conversational style.
4.2.3 Deadly Diseases

In *Deadly Diseases*, which is a conversation between two women and a man in Los Angeles, California, the information about the participants is rather limited, which makes the context rather difficult to establish.

In *Deadly Diseases* Ken utters:

(7) I [saw em actually] doing it. (*Deadly Diseases*)

In (7) Ken uses *actually* to emphasise the fact that he has seen a couple of turtles live in the middle of their mating ritual. Perhaps Ken uses *actually* to signal or mark the fact that he has more knowledge of turtles as he has seen their mating ritual first hand. In (7) the function of *actually* is emphatic.

Another example of the emphatic *actually* is as follows:

(8) that I would think that they would have,
   .. a –
   a thing on you,
   they would actually,
   .. possibly even keep an eye on you, (*Deadly Diseases*)

In the utterance in (8) Joanne wants to underline that the people in Nicaragua will probably take a closer look at Ken should he visit the country. In this way, she uses *actually* as an emphasiser.

In *Deadly Disease*, *actually* appears at a total of eleven times and it is mainly used as an emphasiser and functions as a way to underline that what people are say is a matter of fact. However, at least one example of the contrastive *actually* can be found. It is Ken who utters *actually* as a correction to his pervious utterance:

(9) [actually,
    probably during the Spanish period,
    and or =,
    … probably during the Mexican] period, (*Deadly Diseases*)
In (9) Ken is using *actually* to correct the fact that he earlier in the conversation said that Sonoma was built during the Mexican period. In this way he sort of distances himself from the utterances made. Perhaps it could be seen as a form of counterclaim to the fact that he at first said Sonoma was built during the Mexican period. Note, however, that he is a bit uncertain of his utterance as he once more utters that it might have been built during the Mexican period.

4.2.4 Handshakes All Around

In the face-to-face conversation *Handshakes All Around* the three neighbours, all named Tom, discuss the Second World War when Tom_2 utters:

(10) the current notion th=t’s going on,
    She was actually reading Jane Austin.
    Could you believe [that]? (*Handshakes All Around*)

This is the clearest and most interesting example on *actually* in the conversation. In (10) Tom_2 is using *actually* as a sort of emphasiser to his own utterance. The function of *actually* in this conversation is that of an explanation or justification to once own utterance. In this case it seems as if it is quite unbelievable that someone would be reading Jane Austin.

Like in many of the conversations in this essay, *Handshakes All Around* conveys a lot of the emphatic *actually*. There seems to be little opposition between points of views and, therefore, no contrastive functions of *actually* is needed.

4.2.5 Lambada

In the spoken corpus *Lambada, actually* occurs early in the conversation between four friends. Miles utters:

(11) … He was actually here two weeks ago… (*Lambada*)

In (11) *actually* is used to correct something mentioned by Harold and Jamie. As mentioned above, contrastive *actually* can be used to mark a correction as well as an opposition between viewpoints. (Aijmer 2002: 266) This seems to be the case in Miles utterance as he is trying to correct earlier statements.
Furthermore, later on in the conversation, Harold interrupts Jamie by uttering *actually* as a sort of correction. The four friends are taking about women and it seems as if Harold is trying to take control over the conversation. By the end of the discussion, Jamie utters:

(12) … actually [it’s] pretty much bed time for me soon. (*Lambada*)

In (12) Jamie uses *actually* as a correction or a polite way to end the conversation.

All of the uses of *actually* in *Lambada* have a tone of justification. However, they all show a mildness or politeness in their explanations and thus join the definition of the emphatic *actually*.

4.2.6 Letters of Concern

In *Letters of Concern*, *actually* does not occur until later in the conversation between the board members Bad and Phil. They are discussing a retreat and whether or not this should include staff as well as the board. It is Phil who utters the word *actually*:

(13) and maybe one other,

or two other board members would,

… actually spend that day and just say okay, … (*Letters of Concern*).

Phil is using *actually* (13) as a sort of emphasiser to the fact that there will only be specific members of the board who will be included. As have been pointed out, the emphasising function could be used as a justification or explanation (Aijmer 2002: 270). This seems to be the case in Phil’s utterance of *actually* as it functions as a sort of justification. If it had been a contrastive *actually*, Phil would have disagreed with Brad and perhaps used the expectation marker together with the word *but* to conclude the fact that he did not agree with Brad.

In *Letters of Concern*, *actually* only occurs one time. Perhaps this is because of the context surrounding the conversation. As Aijmer (2002) observes in her study, *actually* occurred more frequently in spontaneous spoken conversations while *in fact* is used more often in formal genres. (Aijmer 2002: 259-261). Even though the conversation between Phil and Bill can be considered an informal and unprepared interaction, it conveys elements of formality as it is a business conversation between two colleges from a local art society. Perhaps this could explain the low frequency of *actually*. However, it should be noted that *in fact*, which is closely related to *actually*, only occur once in the conversation as well.
4.2.7 Swingin’ Kid

In Swingin’ Kid the word actually appears rather early on in the conversation between a mother and her eleven-year-old son. The participants are discussing a film (The Invisible Man) and the mother, Sheri, utters:

(14) It was kind of a show kinda like The Shadow was.
You know it was a,
… (TSK) Actually though,
I think they made a remake of it,
with Chevy Chase, … (Swingin’ Kid)

In (14) Sheri is emphasising the fact that there has been a remake of the film, which sadly was not as good as the first made version.

Later on in Swingin’ Kid, Steven is talking about a soccer game and that he felt as if someone came up behind him. At first he thought it was the wind, but when telling his mum about it Steven utters:

(14) It was actually Shred saying, … (Swingin’ Kid)

In this case, actually functions as an emphasiser. If it had been used to correct an earlier utterance it would have been considered a contrastive actually. But since it does not, it seems as if the mother and son in Swingin’ Kid both share viewpoints.

4.2.8 Vet Morning

In Vet Morning, actually occurs three times. The whole conversation starts with a sentence containing the word actually as Marcia says:

(15) They might not actually be, …
… be um,
… back in the barn- -- (Vet morning)
In this case (15) *actually* arguably functions as a way to tone down an utterance. When *actually* is used in this sentence it gives the expression a sort of politeness to it.

Later on in the conversation, *actually* is used to emphasise an utterance:

(16) LINDSEY: to put the cast on.
MARCIA: To actually put the cast on.
LINDSEY: Casting materials and then, … (*Vet Morning*)

It seems as if Marcia in (16) wants to emphasise taking action instead of just talking about it. Earlier on in the conversation, *actually* is used once more to emphasise that the bars they are talking about are more like granola bars than chocolate chip cookies.

In *Vet Morning*, *actually* is only used as emphasiser. The points of views do not differ. Instead the speakers use *actually* to underline or highlight their utterances. The conversation is not very lively and that could explain why no contrastive *actually* is needed since no one seems to feel the need to distance him- or herself from an earlier statement or make an objection.

4.3 The role of context

Context is of great importance to the situated meaning of *actually*. The different use of *actually* depends on aspects of background information (for example, age or gender) of the participants involved in a conversation as well as the nature of context. When studying pragmatic features of language one has to look beyond what is really being uttered. As Yule (1996) observes, in conversations often a lot more is communicated than what is being said. It is of importance to consider background knowledge, expectations, as well as beliefs, when this is possible (Yule 1996: 84). To fully understand what is being uttered one needs to determine what the speaker has in mind.

Determining the precise nature of context is not simple or straightforward. Sifianou (2012) states, context is not a simple or static thing to investigate and linguistic elements, for example, politeness or discourse particles cannot be studied without considering social context (Sifianou 2012: 1554-1564). The kind of conversation taking place is likely to differ depending on the context of the interaction (Yule 1996: 71). Also, discourse markers are used differently depending on factors like social situation and identity of the speaker. Ways of using, for example *actually*, also depends on the social activity taking place as well as the
type of text being studied (Aijmer 2013: 2). In addition, the definition of context can sometimes seem a bit broad and unclear. An explanation of context could be that it contains elements beyond an utterance, for example, a speaker’s identity or a speaker’s stance. Therefore, discourse particles involve a rich social meaning (Aijmer 2013: 13). All of the mentioned factors are evident in the analysis of the spoken conversations in this study.

All of the conversations studied in this essay are taken from everyday life. The dialogues are, as mentioned, face-to-face interactions which are unplanned and spontaneous. As my analysis above has shown, actually occurred most frequently in Cuz, the conversation between two female cousins in their mid-thirties. However, in Letters of Concern, which is a business interaction between two male colleagues, actually only occurred one time. Based on my study, it appears as if actually is more frequently used in interaction between relatives or very close friends where the age difference is rather small. Yule (1996) observes, that fewer elaborate dispreferred utterances are evident when participants in a conversation are close familiairs instead of with those still working on their social relationship (Yule 1996: 82).

Discourse markers in general do not have a fixed meaning, rather the meaning develops during an interaction depending on context. This means that actually functions in different ways depending on the context. A relationship between meaning of an utterance and context is evident. (Aijmer 2013: 12). To be able to fully understand the function of actually it is of importance to consider the interaction in context, and in this study it is apparent that the use of actually varies depending on the conversation taking place.

The essay has shown that studies of utterances are bound to include or take into consideration elements outside the actual language or words being spoken. As Aijmer (2013) concludes, discourse particles construct meaning based on the many different ways of usage (Aijmer 2013: 18). In many of the conversations the participants use actually as a marker of style but, in a used in an approach of “believe it or not”. This is especially evident in Cuz as Alina often uses actually in a way to emphasise that something in her own utterance is unexpected. As Aijmer (2013) states, one should never underestimate the problems involved in interpreting the function of a discourse marker and context. It is difficult to say that discourse markers have a fixed meaning as they differ depending on the context in which an utterance is made (Aijmer 2013: 15-18). The study has shown that you can never fully understand a speaker’s intention with an utterance since you cannot get fully access to a speakers mind. As Brunet et al. (2012) observes, human communication depends on several complex factors of social signals. In my study this is evident as the participants’ use of actually often is included in a long and complex utterance.
4.4 Summing up the discussion

Considering the frequency of actually in all of the conversations, it is evident that the context is of great importance. As actually occurs more frequently when the age difference between the participants are small and where the relationship between the participants is very close, for example, cousins’ close in age. Actually occurred three times total in Lambada as well as in Vet Morning, five times in Conceptual Pesticides, one time in Letter of Concerns, eleven times in Deadly Diseases, in Swingin’ Kid the word appeared three times, in Handshakes All Around it appeared four times and a total of twelve times in Cuz. However, the functions of actually differed a lot depending on the kind of conversation taking place.

In the studied conversations, the emphatic actually is most frequently used. As been mentioned, the emphatic actually is used mainly to justify or explain an utterance as well as to strengthen a statement. It is also used as an amendment before a conversation can continue as well as maker of style, it depends on the context in which actually is used. In the conversations analysed where the participants are about the same age the use of actually is more frequent. As noted, the use of expectation markers varies in different contexts. (Sifianou 2012: 1554-1564). Therefore, considering the context has been of great importance in my study.

This study could be concluded with a quote from Aijmer (2013): “The more one studies discourse particles, the more conventions one discovers with regard to their use.” (Aijmer 2013: 16).

5. Conclusion

To summarize the study above, discourse particles, especially expectation markers, are interesting as well as important clues to conversations. My study investigates the discourse marker actually in eight spoken conversations from the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English, namely: Conceptual Pesticides, Cuz, Deadly Diseases, Handshakes All Around, Lambada, Letters of Concern, Swingin’ Kid and Vet Morning. The conversations are studied using Karin Aijmer’s definitions and suggestions of the different functions of actually. The study is mainly qualitative, even though some elements of the quantitative method are included. The research questions which I investigate are concerned with the communicative
functions of *actually* in the spoken conversations as well as the role of context in establishing these functions.

The study shows that *actually* has multiple functions and meanings which, preferably, can be divided into two major functions: emphatic and contrastive. Through emphatic *actually* a speaker can distance himself/herself from an earlier utterance. Emphatic *actually* could also be used to signal opposition between points of views. Contrastive *actually*, on the other hand, can be useful when a speaker intend to change the hearer’s perspective. Moreover, the emphatic function of *actually* is used when a speaker wants to provide an explanation or a justification on an utterance. It is also used when the speaker wants to show that a statement is unexpected. The first function of *actually* could perhaps be seen as a bit more polite or interpersonal as the speaker is softening his or her utterance. In my study the emphatic function is the one mainly used.

In the chosen spoken conversations it is evident that the context has been of great importance in order to understand the different use of *actually*. When the age difference between the participants are small and where the participants seem to be in a close relationship, the use of *actually* is more frequent. The most frequent function of *actually* is the emphatic one, as the participants more often use the expectation marker as a way of explaining or justifying something. However, it seems as if *actually* often is used as a maker of style. In a way, when *actually* is used as style marker it becomes a part of a person’s identity or character.
References


The Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English:

http://www.linguistics.ucsb.edu/research/santa-barbara-corpus