

# **‘Am I *really really* mature or something’:**

## ***Really* in teentalk**

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### **1 Introduction**

In the course of investigating informal conversation among teenagers, we have noticed that *really* is a very popular qualifier in utterances. This observation is corroborated by Stenström (2002), whose research shows that teenagers use *really* far more than adult speakers do. Teenagers seem to make abundant use of *really*, in particular for intensification of adjectives. Consider the following excerpt from COLT (The Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language):

actually no that was the night she was *really* pissed off because, erm, people were paying more attention to me than they were to her I don't know why it's because I decide that I'm gonna be *really* outgoing and I *really* do and I was *really* loud and *really* boisterous and she's quite resigned like that and she thought I sh= bit shagged off with me <sniff>, and then like I was doing, there was this *really* good looking bloke and he was like we, we'd given each other eyes over the bar in this pub and Lottie goes well if you don't hurry up with him I'm gonna go and have him, if you don't hurry up, you know, and just like marched over I said Charlotte give me a break

Research on the interpretation of scope-taking adverbs, such as *absolutely*, *only*, *quite*, *rather*, *just* and *really*, shows that they are contextually sensitive and flexible.<sup>1</sup> This characteristic makes them very useful in informal conversation. The purpose of this paper is to investigate how *really* is used in teentalk, to identify the various readings of *really* and to provide explanations for how they are invoked. For instance, in the

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, Bolinger 1972, Aijmer 1984, 1985, 1998, Stenström 1986, 2002, Ungerer 1988, Nevalainen 1991, Powell 1992, Sanders & Spooren 1996, Paradis 1997, 2000, Lorenz 2002, Schwenter & Traugott 2000.

excerpt above, *really* in ‘I *really* do’ is a marker of epistemic modality. *Really* provides evidence of truth through subjective emphasis. In ‘I was *really* loud’, *really* is primarily a degree modifier which reinforces a gradable property of *loud*.

We argue that the interpretation of *really* is pragmatically conditioned by the speaker’s wish to back up his or her expressions with judgements of truth. Such pragmatic conditions on how the speaker wants the utterance to be interpreted are motivating factors on the conceptual representations which *really* evokes. The central issues of this papers are as follows.

- How do the teenagers in COLT use *really* in informal face-to-face conversation?
- What type of evidence, on the cline from factual to subjective, is provided by *really*?
- What types of representations does *really* take scope over and how do they constrain the readings of *really*?

Section 2 of this paper provides information about the corpus from which the data have been extracted (COLT). Section 3 distinguishes three different readings of *really*. Section 4 outlines the semantics of *really* within the cognitive framework. In Section 5 the results of the semantic analysis of the various readings of *really* are discussed in more detail. The results and the analysis are summarized in Section 6.

## **2 The corpus**

The data used in this paper are based on COLT - The Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language - which forms part of the British National Corpus (BNC). COLT consists of approximately 500,000 words. The main body of the recordings contains spontaneous conversations of 13 to 17-year-old teenagers and their teachers and families. The recordings were made in 1993, and the material was sampled so as to cover different social groups in London (Haslerud & Stenström 1995; <http://www.hd.uib.no/colt/>). The total number of occurrences of *really* in the corpus is 1,521. For various reasons of unclarity, 173 occurrences were excluded.

## **3 Categorization**

The results of the categorization indicate that the type of representation which *really* takes scope over is responsible for its reading. The representations are (i) the whole proposition, (ii) a situation type, and (iii) a property. Where *really* takes scope over a proposition it qualifies a factual component of the proposition; where it takes scope over a situation type it qualifies an attitudinal component of the situation denoted by the verb meaning, and finally, where it takes scope over a property it qualifies a scalar component of the property denoted by the adjective meaning. Three different readings of *really* are distinguished in the first survey of the COLT data:

- |     |   |                                    |
|-----|---|------------------------------------|
| (1) | <i>really</i> , they are quite strange  | [truth-attesting of proposition]   |
| (2) | I <i>really</i> appreciate your support | [subjective emphasis of situation] |
| (3) | they are <i>really</i> nice             | [reinforcement of scalar property] |

The examples of *really* in (1), (2) and (3) are similar in that they are all epistemic markers. They all make metalinguistic comments in terms of speakers' judgements of the truth of the expressions they qualify. Epistemic modifiers presuppose that there is some kind of evidence on which an assertion is based. The evidence that is presupposed by *really* is that of 'reality' and by implication 'truth'. This actual evidence, however, may be factual or subjective, and more often than not it remains implicit.

However, there are also differences among them with respect to what type of reality and truth is in focus, i.e. implied evidence of factual truth and implied evidence of subjective belief. *Really* in (1) expresses epistemic modality in the sense that it expresses a judgement of the truth of the proposition based on what is known to be part of an 'objective' reality. *Really* in (2) has the function of emphasizing the subjective judgement of the importance of a situation involved in the proposition in question. It conveys both epistemic modality and subjective emphasis at the same time. In (3) *really* expresses reinforcement of the degree of 'niceness'. Similar to situations, properties themselves are only indirectly associated to truth via the proposition they occur in. The truth-attesting function is there, but it is placed in the background. The reason is that truth relates to propositions, not to situations and properties. For pragmatic reasons, the truth-attesting reading is a prerequisite for both emphasis and reinforcement.

Furthermore, the various applications of *really* in (1), (2) and (3) differ in interactive function. *Really* in (1) sets the scene for the utterance in terms of 'truth'

and ‘reality’. *Really* in (2) and *really* in (3) are mainly used to show involvement on the part of the speaker. The force behind the use of *really* is to specify the evidential basis for propositions, situations and properties respectively. The type of evidence is assumed to vary according to what *really* takes scope over. Two extremes on the dimension of evidentiality are assumed to correlate with the representations within the scope of *really*, i.e. factual evidence and subjective evidence.

#### **4 The semantics of *really***

The cognitive approach takes language to be an integral part of human cognition. There is a direct correspondence between linguistic expressions and conceptual structure. The meanings of linguistic expressions are perspectival in nature, and polysemy is a natural consequence of the human ability to think flexibly.

Linguistic items map on to various concepts in the cognitive network. This network is built up by *domains*, which represent any kind of complex cognitive structure that we store in memory. Two types of domains are distinguished, the *content domain* and the *schematic domain* (Cruse & Togia 1996: 113-114; Paradis 1997: 48f; 2001). Content domains involve knowledge of the world, while schematic domains provide the representations for configurative frames. Both these domains are conceptual and mirror our perception of the world. In addition to the two types of domains, there is an operating system, which governs the various modes of construals that are imposed on the domains when we use language. Unlike domains, construals are not conceptual in kind. Construals are cognitive abilities whose function is to structure the domains activated in production or interpretation of linguistic material. The modes of construal are the actual operators in the creation of specificity, background, perspective, scope and prominence (Langacker 1999: 5).<sup>2</sup>

Meanings in cognitive semantics arise by the activation of conceptual patterns, within both the content domain and the schematic domain. Linguistic items typically activate multiple concepts, both within the realm of content and schematicity. Semantic contrast is due to the actual domains evoked in particular expressions and to the ranking of dominance among the domains in terms of foregrounding and backgrounding. For instance, there is a difference in perspective and prominence in

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<sup>2</sup> Langacker’s dimensional domains as well as his locational and configurational domains are subsumed under our schematic domain (1987:150-154). We are using *construal* and *mode of construal* for the actual process of employing domains.

the expressions *half full* and *half empty*, although their referential status may be exactly the same.

All linguistic items are conceptualized against both a content domain and a schematic domain. Lexical items that belong to what we traditionally call open word classes foreground concepts from the content domain, while items that are traditionally regarded as function words foreground concepts from the schematic domain. The schematic domain holds concepts such as different configurations for gradability, modality, aspectuality, countability, etc. *Really* is considered a function word in the traditional sense. Therefore, it seems correct to assume that *really* is an item that foregrounds schematicity at the expense of content proper. Its main role is to open up a mental space against which the relevance of the proposition, the situation or the property is to be viewed.<sup>3</sup> The relevance of what is communicated may be either of a factual or a subjective nature. Even though the schematic domain predominates in *really* it also maps on to the content domain. The content proper of *really* is [REALITY] and by implication [TRUTH]. Presumably, there are differences as to the relative prominence of the content domain and the schematic domain in the various readings of *really*. Truth-attesting *really* is assumed to be heavier on content proper in its role as a marker of evidentiality than the emphasizer and degree-reinforcer. The predominant schemas then are factuality, subjectivity and scalarity. The prominence of either of these construals accounts for the perspectivization of the message.

## 5 The COLT data

The conversations in the teenage corpus were used for the semantic analysis of *really*. 1,521 occurrences of *really* were found in the whole material. 173 were excluded for reasons of unclarity. The three readings of *really* are distributed as follows:<sup>4</sup>

**Table 1.** The distribution of truth-attesting *really*, emphasizing *really* and degree-reinforcing *really* in COLT.

Categories	Number	%
Truth-attesting <i>really</i>	316	23
Emphasizing <i>really</i>	437	33

<sup>3</sup> A *mental space* is a temporal set-up for an utterance or sequence of utterances (Fauconnier 1997).

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that the figures in Table 1 are to be regarded as approximations, since there are no sound tracks available at the moment of writing, and it is assumed that intonation plays an important and sometimes crucial role in the interpretation of *really*. For an analysis of the intonational possibilities and preferences of *really* see Paradis (forthcoming), which is an extended version of the present paper.

Degree-reinforcing <i>really</i>	595	44
Total	1 348	100

The most common reading of *really* in informal conversation among teenagers is *really* as a degree-reinforcer (*‘they are really nice’*). It represents 44% of all the cases. The second most common reading is the emphaser reading (*‘I really appreciate your support’*), which accounts for 33% of the occurrences. It was found that the category of emphasers also involves its opposite, which we may call de-emphasizers. In fact, 189 out of the 437 emphasers have a de-emphasizing reading. De-emphasizing *really* is preceded by negation. The force of *really* becomes reversed and the effect is attenuation instead of emphasis (*‘I don’t really appreciate your support’*). The least common reading is of *really* as a truth-attester (*‘really they are quite strange’*). *Really*, as a truth-attester, may also have an attendant intensifying effect on some propositions. However, this is a consequence of the explicit attesting of the truth that *really* has on top of a proposition which by default relies on a communicative principle of truth. *Really* as a modifier of subjective emphasis directly strengthens the importance of a situation denoted by a verb or reinforces the degree of a gradable property denoted by an adjective. This difference will hopefully be made clearer as the analysis develops.

The dichotomy between the truth-attesting interpretation on the one hand and the emphasizing and degree-reinforcing interpretations on the other hand is comparable to Lyons’ (1977: 797ff) division of epistemic modality into objective epistemic modality and subjective epistemic modality. Objective epistemic modality expresses an objectively measurable parameter of the truth of an utterance. It is part of what he calls the ‘it-is-so’ component of an utterance. In contrast, subjective epistemic modality expresses a corresponding subjective statement, and it is part of the ‘I-say-so’ component which is superimposed on the ‘it is-so’ component.

### 5.1 Truth-attesting *really*

Truth-attesting *really* takes scope over a proposition whose function is to assert something that may be true or false. The role of *really* is to ensure the truth of the assertion that it takes in its scope, and, in addition, to provide implicit evidence based in ‘reality’. Truth-attesting *really* may occur in all adverbial positions in an utterance:

- (4) *Really* that's quite good
- (5) She loves me *really*
- (6) Sue and Bill *really* bought the farmhouse they had been dreaming of

In (4), (5) and (6) the role of *really* can be paraphrased as 'in accordance with evidence from reality that's quite good', 'in accordance with evidence from reality she loves me' and 'in accordance with evidence from reality Sue and Bill bought the farmhouse they had been dreaming of'. *Really* occurs initially in (4), in final position in (5) and medially in (6). In all these examples, *really* takes scope over the whole assertion, and its role is to make the listener interpret the assertion in the light of reality. An assertion is either true or false. What *really* can do in terms of guiding the interpretation of the assertion is to explicitly point out the truth of it. Since what is said is based in reality it is by implication true. *Really* acts as a constraint on the understanding of the utterance. In many of the occurrences, truth-attesting *really* creates a contrastive reading ('in contrast to what you might think...'). The contrastivity is a consequence of the fact that assertive propositions come with assumptions of truth, and the explicit marking of truth by *really* tends to create a context where the opposite is presupposed. Moreover, this contrastiveness has an intensifying effect on the proposition (e.g. *really* he shouldn't be so outspoken). The underlying contrasting presupposition is particularly strong when *really* is in medial position. In (6), the most natural context would be that for various reasons, the listener did not expect Sue and Bill to buy the farmhouse they had been dreaming of.

In questions, *really* is normally a truth-attester. The speaker uses *really* to ask the previous speaker (i.e. the present listener) whether what he or she said (asserted) before is actually in line with reality and truth:<sup>5</sup>

- (7) A: she is fucked up mentally  
 B: *really*?  
 A: mm I think she is mm I think she is what happened was yeah she got divorced when she was fifty with my mum's dad and then she didn't she could have got married though she didn't she'll say she's a saint and she'll say hasn't got money either and she's really sad
- (8) A: no seriously do you *really* like 'em?  
 B: what d'ya mean *really* them?  
 A: well what d'ya think of them they're your friends  
 B: as friends? do I fancy them?

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<sup>5</sup> Capital letters have been used to indicate the various speaker contributions in the dialogues.

A: no no what d'ya think of them like do they get on your nerves at all?

B: no

Both in (7) and (8) the speakers who ask the questions are interested in the truth of a previous assertion.<sup>6</sup> As in the assertions in (4), (5) and (6), the compatibility of the proposition with reality is the evidence for truth. What constrains the interpretation of truth-attesting *really* in both affirmatives and questions is the fact that it takes scope over a proposition. The propositional scope can be assigned in all adverbial positions. Either *really* occurs in a slot within the actual proposition, or it may in fact be directed to a proposition previously uttered by somebody else.

## 5.2 Emphasizing *really*

Emphasizing *really* is positionally constrained in that it has to be placed in the immediate vicinity of a verb denoting either a situation type that is attitudinal in character or a situation type that is capable of undergoing subjective modulation in the context of a trigger element such as *really*. *Really* is most often placed before the first verb, but it is not necessarily so. Emphasizing *really* is semantically bound to attitudinal verb meanings. By way of its content, [REALITY], and the attendant implication of 'truth', the invited inference of *really* in combination with attitudinal verb meanings is one of subjective emphasis.<sup>7</sup> There is a valence relation between the attitudinal meaning in the verb and the epistemic meaning of *really*.<sup>8</sup> In expressions where *really* has an emphatic effect on a predicate, there is a harmonizing subjective substructure in both elements, which is interpreted as attitudinal emphasis. Naturally, there is no such valence relation between *really* as a truth-attester and some specific element in the proposition, since *really* takes scope over the whole proposition in order to attest to the truth of it. Consider the following examples of *really* as an emphasizer:

- (9) No, that's sad, that *really* is definitely
- (10) I'm meant to be going to choir tonight but I *really* can't be bothered
- (11) I do actually *really* like singing

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<sup>6</sup> *Really* may be used as an emphasizer in questions where the speaker expresses his or her own judgements and seeks support for his or her own opinions ('Don't you think these adverts for erm, The Vauxhall Corsa are *really* pointless?')

<sup>7</sup> Traugott's term 'invited inferencing' (1997, 1999) is used synonymously with 'implication'. Both are based on context-induced associative reasoning

<sup>8</sup> According to Langacker (1988: 102) 'a valence relation between two predications is possible just in case these predications overlap, in the sense that some substructure within the other one is construed as identical to it'.



On closer inspection of examples (9), (10) and (11), we observe that emphasizing *really* takes scope over a situation type that is typically a state: ‘is’, ‘can’t’ and ‘like’. The meaning of *really* itself is semantically bleached as compared to the foregrounded and distinct [REALITY] concept in truth-attesting *really*. The main task of *really* as an emphaser is to convey speaker meaning and the schematic function of subjective stance is in the foreground. The valence relation between *really* and the situation type expressed by the verb is primarily attitudinal. In (11) *actually* is the factual modifier of evidence. The juxtaposition of *actually* and *really* highlights their different roles, i.e. *actually* is a marker of evidentiality and *really* is a marker of epistemic subjectivity.

The closeness between the situation type and *really* can be observed in its preferred combinatorial links to certain attitudinal stative predicates. Out of the 248 occurrences of *really* as an emphaser (the 189 de-emphasizers are not included in this figure) the most common collocating verbs are:<sup>9</sup>

**Table 2.** The types and tokens of the most frequent verb collocates of emphasizing *really*.

Verb	Number	Example
do(n't)	38	I <i>really</i> don't mind/know/care/want to/think it <i>really really</i> does annoy me
like	19	I <i>really</i> like her
be	15	I mean he <i>really</i> is a cool guy
want	14	I <i>really</i> want my mum to hear that
hate	11	I <i>really</i> hate her
hurt	11	It <i>really</i> hurts
Total	108	

Table 2 illustrates that these lexical items account for nearly half of the number of emphasizing *really*. True, there are similarities between truth-attesters and emphasizers: both are used to supply evidence. The type of evidence, however, differs in the two readings. Truth-attesting *really* foregrounds the content-based notion of [REALITY] and supplies factual evidence. In emphaser *really*, on the other hand, the

<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, these utterances are more or less pre-fabricated constructions that are common in informal conversation. In their entirety, many of them are used as pragmatic devices: *I don't know*, *I don't think*, *I don't mind* (Tottie & Paradis 1982, Aijmer 1998).

basis for the evidence is clearly in the mind of the speaker and the meaning of ‘reality’ is backgrounded and bleached. Emphasizer *really* is mainly configurational, i.e. schematic.

All the verb meanings in the examples in Table 2 are attitudinal. *Really* latches on to the attitudinal facet and emphasizes it. The invited inference is that the truth of the proposition is thereby attested. The content proper of ‘reality’ in the ‘objective’ sense is weakened. However, the weakening is replaced by subjective strengthening. This difference between the two readings is a case of *subjectification* (Langacker 1990; Traugott 1995).<sup>10</sup>

Emphasizing *really* also combines with adjectival predications (states). These adjectives are non-scalar (*paranoid*) or represent an extreme point on a scale (*appalling*):

- (12) I always get *really* paranoid with people I get off with  
(13) It is *really* appalling

Adjectives such as *paranoid* and *appalling* may alternatively combine with totality modifiers such as *absolutely* or *totally* with a near-synonymous effect.<sup>11</sup> Thus, emphasizing *really* maps on to both situation types denoted by verbs and adjectivals, which have a semantic feature that can be emphasized. There is a matching of semantic substructures in *really* and what *really* has in its scope. In the whole material, nine lexical items are employed in 145 out of 248 cases (in 59% of the total uses of *really* as an emphasize). No such pattern was found for truth-attesting *really*, since there are no valence restrictions on the lexico-semantic level. It also deserves to be mentioned again that subjective emphasis is only possible in statements. In questions, *really* is a truth-attester and it takes propositional scope.

When *really* itself is in the scope of negation, i.e. preceded by a negative element, it has the function of attenuating or approximating the truth of the application of the situation talked about.<sup>12</sup> The result is a hedged statement.

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<sup>10</sup> Both Langacker (1990) and Traugott (1995) view subjectivity as a ubiquitous phenomenon based in the cognitive-communicative situation, but they use the term somewhat differently. Langacker focuses primarily on subjectivity as degrees of grounding in the situation construed by speakers, while Traugott makes use of the term to account for the diachronic shift from the physical world to the mental world. For instance, what is strengthened in *I really appreciate your support*, as compared to *Really, I appreciate your support*, is that the evidence is in the speaker’s mental world as opposed to the physical world and consequently the degree of grounding in the communicative situation is stronger.

<sup>11</sup> In fact, adjectives like *paranoid* and *appalling* may easily undergo coercion into a scalar reading taking scaling degree-reinforcers (Paradis 2001).

<sup>12</sup> The negative element does not necessarily have to be negation, it may be a non-assertive element such as *without*. (without *really* being involved, she sorted the problems out).

- (14) I can't *really* help it.  
 (15) it's not *really* expensive it's not that

The reasoning behind this argument is as follows. The opposite of 'I can't help it' is 'I can help it'. The two alternatives stand in a complementary relation to each other. There is a definite boundary between them; they represent an 'either-or' relation. The role of (*not really*) in (14) is to de-emphasize the boundary between 'can' and 'can't'. The same is true in (15); *really* is there to soften the fact that something is expensive. The scope of 'not really' is restricted to the situation denoted by the verb. It is the impact of the situation that is attenuated, not the truth of the whole proposition. The truth of the proposition is hedged by the combination of a negative element and *really*. *Really* is primarily used to attenuate the negative pole of *be*, *do*, *have* and modals as in examples (16) – (20) below:

- (16) she ain't *really* anti  
 (17) he doesn't *really* give a toss  
 (18) well they haven't *really* come better off have they?  
 (19) I can't *really* handle rum, that's why I didn't drink any last night  
 (20) it shouldn't *really* be any, it shouldn't *really* be much rugby

De-emphasizing *really* is relatively frequently used in the material. In total, 189 occurrences were found.

### 5.3 Degree-reinforcing *really*

Similar to emphasizing *really*, the interpretation of degree-reinforcing *really* is based on mappings between concepts within the proposition. Degree-reinforcing *really* takes scope over scalar property concepts denoted by adjectives:

- (21) Hugh is apparently *really* rude about everyone especially when he gets drunk  
 (22) They reckon that there will be one big nuclear war which will last *really* long and will finally end the world  
 (23) he thinks he is *really* cool

*Really* has the effect of reinforcing the degree of 'rudeness', 'length' and 'personality' in examples (21), (22) and (23). The adjectives *rude*, *long* and *cool* are based on a scale schema and it is this schema that makes it possible for *really* to develop a

degree-reinforcing function. The invited inference when *really* takes scope over a scalar property of an adjective is that what is real and true with respect to a scalar property implies boosting of this property, i.e. *really rude* is ruder than just *rude*. The most common scalar collocates in COLT are listed in Table 3. They make up 44% of all the combinations in the material.

**Table 3.** The types and tokens of the most frequent adjectival collocates of degree-reinforcing *really*.

Adjective	Number	Example
good	91	no Zed's a <i>really</i> good bloke when he's sober
nice	62	well my dad reckons he's <i>really</i> nice anyway
funny	29	I think she is like <i>really</i> funny like
bad	25	he had <i>really</i> bad dandruff just now as well
sad	14	Gran I thought your letter was <i>really</i> sad
cool	14	I've seen Demolition man cos I'm <i>really</i> cool
nasty	13	oh turn that off it's a <i>really</i> nasty noise
weird	13	she's got a <i>really</i> weird accent hasn't she
Total	261	

Degree-reinforcing *really* could in all these sentences be replaced by *very* with much the same effect. *Really* differs from *very* in that it is not a fully-fledged degree modifier, since it takes propositional truth-attesting scope in questions. *Very* is a degree-reinforcer both in affirmatives and in questions (Cf. 'Are you *very* sad' – 'Yes, *very*'; 'Are you *really* sad?' – 'Yes, I am', see also Paradis 1997: 19-21).<sup>13</sup> Degree-reinforcing *really* combines with inherently scalar adjectives. In some combinations with verbs that can be graded, *really* comes very close to being a degree-reinforcer. For instance, in 'I *really* love her' or 'They *really* enjoyed the party'. However, verbs differ from adjectives in that they can only be externally graded. 'Much' is an inherent property of a scalar adjective, while it has to be explicitly expressed with gradable verbs, e.g. 'How *good* was the book?' vs. 'How *much* did you say you *liked* it?'.<sup>14</sup> If we add a degree element, *really* remains the same in combination with verbs, e.g. 'I *really* love her *very* much' and 'They *really* enjoyed the party *very* much'.

<sup>13</sup> It is possible to obtain a degree reading for *really* in questions too. For instance, if a contrasting reading is made explicit, as in 'Was it *really* nice, not just *fairly* nice?', cf. footnote 6.

<sup>14</sup> Like verbs, comparative and superlative adjectives are externally gradable (Paradis 2001: 53-56).

Whereas, if another degree modifier is added to an utterance where *really* is a degree-reinforcer, *really* takes on an emphasizing reading, e.g. ‘*she is really very funny*’.

## 6 Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to explore how teenagers use *really* as well as to identify the various readings of *really* in different contexts and to provide an explanation for the polysemy. It is argued that the interpretation of *really* is pragmatically conditioned by the speaker’s wish to qualify an expression epistemically with judgements of truth. Such pragmatic conditions act as motivating forces on the conceptual representation evoked by *really*. In other words, the type of representation that *really* takes scope over is crucial for its interpretation. Thus, epistemic meaning has conceptual underpinnings in the first place. The readings identified are as follows ((1), (2) and (3) are here repeated as (24), (25) and (26)):

- |      |   |                                    |
|------|---|------------------------------------|
| (24) | <i>really</i> , they are quite strange  | [truth-attesting of proposition]   |
| (25) | I <i>really</i> appreciate your support | [subjective emphasis of situation] |
| (26) | they are <i>really</i> nice             | [reinforcement of scalar property] |

Our first issue is concerned with how teenagers in COLT use *really*. It is shown that the most common use of *really* in informal conversation is as a degree-reinforcer. Degree-reinforcing *really* is employed in 44% of all the cases in the material. The second most common use of *really* is as an emphaser. Emphasizing *really* accounts for 33% of the occurrences. The least common use of *really* is as a truth-attester, accounting for 23% of the occurrences. Linking this to our argument that the interpretation of *really* is pragmatically conditioned by the speaker’s wish to back up his or her expressions with evidence for judgements of truth, we see that the teenagers favour the interpretations where the truth-attesting function is backgrounded and where the main function of *really* is as a marker of involvement, through subjective emphasis and degree reinforcement.

Our second and third issues are concerned with the interpretation of *really* in terms of factual and subjective evidence, and how the interpretation is constrained by the type of representation that is within the scope of *really*. In the case of truth-attesting *really*, the evidence reflects the [REALITY] concept evoked by *really*. The evidence is factual in nature and *really* is primarily a carrier of a content-based message. Reality represents the truth and is assumed to be neutral and objective in

character. What is real is by implication true. *Really* takes scope over propositions in order to provide factual evidence for the truth of the proposition. The content proper of *really*, [REALITY], is foregrounded. Truth-attesters are free vis-à-vis the lexico-semantic structures within the proposition. *Really* may come with overlaid meanings such as certainty/uncertainty. It may have an intensifying effect or it may be a hedging device with additional implicational meanings. The main option for *really* in questions is to be truth-attesting, while all three readings may occur in statements.

In the case of emphasizing *really*, the evidence of truth is indirect via subjective emphasis made by the speaker. Contentwise, *really* is bleached and backgrounded; the schematic function of subjective stance is in the foreground. *Really* takes scope over situations denoted by stative verbs and adjectivals that may be attitudinally emphasized. In other words, emphasizees are bound by semantic valence relations within the proposition. Situation types as such are neither true nor false, but their application and relevance for the truth of the proposition may be emphasized or de-emphasized. Emphasizing *really* occurs in statements only, in which it is placed in the immediate vicinity of the element it takes scope over. It assumes a backgrounded position in relation to the propositional content which is natural for epistemic elements.

Finally, in the case of *really* as a degree-reinforcer, the evidence of truth conveyed is indirect through *really* as a degree operator. Truth is a prerequisite for the reinforcement of a scalar property. The application of scalar meanings are always subjective. Similar to the emphasizing reading, the content proper of *really* is bleached and backgrounded, and the schematic function of degree and subjective stance is in the foreground. Degree-reinforcing *really* takes scope over a scalar property denoted by an adjective; it has to be placed before the modified adjective on which it has a reinforcing effect. It is bound by lexico-semantic valence relations within the proposition. Degree-reinforcing *really* normally occurs in positive statements only.

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