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The use of *actually* in a non-native English parliamentary context: a corpus study

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This paper explores the syntactic and pragmatic uses of *actually* as a discourse marker in Ghanaian parliamentary debates. Employing a corpus methodological approach, the paper uses a 1.9 million-word corpus of Ghanaian parliamentary data in order to examine the patterns of the use of *actually* by Ghanaian parliamentarians in their parliamentary debates. In terms of the syntactic position, *actually* occurs more frequently at the medial position than the initial position and rarely at the final position. Pragmatically, *actually* mainly functions as an emphasizer. Other functions include correction, contradiction, epistemic retreat, apology, appeal, contemplation, pragmatic softener, certainty, shifting focus and suggestion. These functions reflect the nature of parliamentary debates as a contest of opinions and stance taking, where parliamentarians take positions and argue strongly to convince their fellow MPs to support a certain line of policy action.

Keywords: discourse markers; *actually*; syntactic function; pragmatic function; Ghanaian parliamentary discourse; corpus study

1. Introduction

As discourse markers are hardly part of second language learners' formal curriculum (de Klerk 2005) and are barely taught in the classroom (Hellermann & Vergun 2007), English as second language students are scarcely exposed to the concept of discourse markers. Therefore, "second language learners of English are left to the mercy of chance encounters with" discourse makers "in the fictional dialogue of prescribed literature that they might read, and in the spoken English around them, to work out the rules for using" discourse markers (de Klerk 2005: 275). Thus, studies on the use of discourse markers among second language speakers of English can offer interesting insights into not only second language acquisition processes, the significance of the socialization processes in the acquisition of second language, but also the appropriate use of these markers in non-native professional contexts. Notwithstanding the benefits that research on discourse markers in professional contexts can bring to bear, studies on discourse markers have largely concentrated on learner corpus and pedagogical and academic contexts (de Klerk 2005; Tadayyon & Farahani 2017). Because of the second language speakers' need for competence and fluency in the use of English for successful professional development and performance, there is the need for research on the

ability of second language professionals to understand and use the subtle discourse-pragmatic aspects of the English language (cf. Hellermann & Vergun 2007). Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore the use of the discourse marker *actually* in the debates of Ghanaian parliamentarians as legislators.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 discusses discourse markers in general. Section 3 situates the current study within the context of previous studies on *actually*, which will guide the analysis; while Section 4 discusses the institutional context of the study. Data and methods are explained in Section 5. Section 6 provides the results, while Section 7 looks at discussion and conclusion.

2. Discourse markers

Discourse markers are linguistic, paralinguistic and non-verbal elements that signal relations between units of talk by virtue of their syntactic relations and semantic properties and by virtue of their sequential relations as initial or terminal brackets demarcating discourse units (Schiffrin 1987: 40). Discourse markers are hetero-geneous (de Klerk 2013), lacking clear-cut definition and delineation (de Klerk 2005). This has led to them being labeled differently by different scholars for diverse purposes, especially based on the analytical perspectives from which they are studied (de Klerk 2005). They have been variously called discourse particles (Schourup 1985, 1998), discourse connectives (Blakemore 1987, 1992), discourse operators (Redeker 1990), phatic connectives (Bazzanella 1990), pragmatic connec-tives (Stubbs 1983; Van Dijk 1979), pragmatic expressions (Erman 1992), pragmatic formatives (Fraser 1987), pragmatic markers (Fraser 1988, 1990; Schiffrin 1987), pragmatic operators (Ariel 1994), pragmatic particles (Östman 1995), semantic con-juncts (Quirk et al. 1985), sentence connectives (Halliday & Hasan 1976) and cue phrases (Louwerse & Mitchell 2003). Brinton (1996: 29) lists more than twenty of such terminologies. In this study, we prefer using "discourse markers", since it is a more precisely specifiable reference than, for example, discourse particles, and it com-prises a functional class that draws on items belonging to various systematic classes (Schourup 1999) and it is the most suitable term for spoken discourse (Zarei 2013).

Syntactically, discourse markers are drawn from verbs (look, seem), adverbs (now, then), prepositional phrases (in fact, in particular), idioms (by and large), literal phrases (as a result), interjections (well, hey), coordinating conjunctions (and, but) and subordinating conjunctions (so, because), among others (de Klerk 2005). Regard-ing their meanings, Watts (1988) sees discourse markers as tending to encode prag-matic rather than content meaning. This means that discourse markers may not have independent lexical meanings in utterances in which they occur but are invested with pragmatic meanings. However, Blakemore (2002) argues that they do contribute a certain degree of meaning to the contextual content of utterances in that, while they are non-truth conditional, their meanings are deduced and determined by the context in which they occur. For her, these meanings are "linguistically encoded non-truth con-ditional meaning[s]" (Blakemore 2002: 33). Discourse markers undoubtedly do influ-ence meanings. As noted by De Klerk (2013), while the omission of discourse markers in utterances may not impair the meanings of those utterances (underscoring the optionality of discourse markers (Schourup 1999)), the presence of the discourse markers permit thorough and satisfactory interpretation of utterances. In fact, dis-course markers add "a powerful clue about what commitment the speaker makes

regarding the relationship between the current utterance" and the preceding or the following utterance (Fraser 1988: 22).

Pragmatically, discourse markers perform several functions. Schiffrin (1987) identifies three main roles of discourse markers, namely: contextual coordinators; interpersonal connectives; and linking utterances to prior or subsequent utterances. This means that discourse markers perform cohesive functions. For Walrod (2006) discourse markers function as maximizers (that is, to place emphasis or intensify the meaning of the utterance); minimizers (that is, to mitigate or qualify the meaning of the utterance); and refuters (to disprove or discredit the meaning of the utterance). According to Aijmer (2002), discourse markers are highly context specific or indexed to attitudes of participants and texts. That is, discourse markers have discourse functions both at the textual and interpersonal levels. At the interpersonal level, discourse markers tend to excite certain feelings or actions from the participants, thereby enabling pragmatic interpretations of the discourse markers.

While there is "no absolute certainty about how many authentic discourse markers there are" (de Klerk 2005: 276), there is no argument about *actually* as a discourse marker, which has received quite a substantial amount of scholarly research and considered as one of the most multifunctional discourse markers (Karlsson 2015). Notwithstanding such a scholarly attention, the full range of the pragmatics of *actually* is yet to be explored, especially from professional contexts in non-native environments. We believe that further studies on the use and functions of actually in contexts such as Ghanaian parliamentary context will offer further insights into the scholarly and pragmatic information about *actually*.

3.   The discourse marker *actually*

The discourse marker a*ctually* is said to be frequent in spoken discourse (de Klerk 2005; Oh 2000), as it is useful for negotiating meaning in face-to-face interactions (Simon-Vandenbergen & Willems 2011). *Actually* has been found to be relatively more frequent in British than American English (Aijmer 1986; Oh 2000).

Actually is considered to be a stance adverbial, that is, an adverbial expression that shows "some aspect of speakers' attitudes towards their messages, as a frame of reference for the messages, an attitude towards or judgement of their content or an indication of the degree of commitment towards their truthfulness" (Biber & Finegan 1988: 2). Biber and Finegan (1988: 30) also argue that stance adverbials acquire different meanings when they function as discourse markers, and in British spoken and written corpora, *actually* indicates solidarity, shared familiarity, emphasis rather than actuality. As a discourse marker, *actually* has been found to perform several functions, including: contrast (Oh 2000); expression of mood, attitude and judgement (Aijmer 1986); attitudinal disjunct and intensifying disjunct; attitudinal commitment (Biber & Finegan 1988); going against expectations, topic shift, emphasizing or intensifying a proposition (de Klerk 2005). *Actually* is a truth strengthening marker and it is used "to emphasise that something unexpected is in fact correct, to mitigate a correction, rephrasing or contradiction, and to introduce a new topic" (de Klerk 2005: 286). According to De Klerk (2005: 283):

> While all uses of actually are non truth-conditional, when it acts as propositional modifier, actually has been described as 'truth insistent … serving to contrast what is really so

with what is only pretended or imagined' (Taglicht 2001: 2) (e.g. 'what I actually did was … '). Bolinger (1977 in Taglicht 2001: 11) describes these uses as 'conducive', with an implicit assertiveness value, suggesting that the proposition presented is true.

These uses of *actually* foretell its use in deliberative, argumentative and debating contexts such as parliament (cf. Karlsson 2015).

Given the nature of parliamentary debates as "argumentation and contestation of policy positions between government and opposition MPs" (Sarfo-Kantankah in press) vis-à-vis the functions of *actually* (expressing emphasis, certainty, contest, contradiction, correction, marking argumentation, truth insistence, etc.), it is envisaged that the use of *actually* will be a feature of the debates, since *actually* is highly frequent in face-to-face interactions (Biber & Finegan 1988). It is, therefore, surprising that *actually* has hardly been studied in the parliamentary context. Again, considering that most studies on the use of *actually* (and other discourse markers) in non-native contexts have concentrated more on learner corpus and from pedagogical perspectives (cf. Cheng & Warren 2000; Yang 2011), it is important to extend research on *actually* to other institutional contexts such as parliament. In this study, therefore, we explore the patterns of the use of *actually* in Ghanaian parliamentary debates in order to identify its functions and utterance positions in the debates of Ghanaian parliamentarians, who use English as a second language. It is said that "discourse markers are [usually] not explicitly taught in the classroom" (Hellermann & Vergun 2007: 158; cf. de Klerk 2005). Thus, the appropriate use of discourse markers by second language users like Ghanaian parliamentarians can offer insights into and a better understanding of second language speakers' use of English in their professional contexts, since "*actually* is associated with a meaning potential which can be differently exploited in different varieties" of English (Aijmer 2015: 105). For example, Aijmer (2015: 106) asserts that *actually* has primarily subjective meanings in Singaporean and Hong-Kong English, while it is primarily inter-subjective, with repair or corrective function, in British and New Zealand English.

4.   Parliamentary discourse studies

Parliamentary discourse studies are important for not only the understanding of the thought processes of MPs, their mindsets about policies, socio-political issues and their attitudes, but also the understanding of the institutional use of language, such as the "formal lexicon, elaborate syntax, and the usual structures of argumentation and persuasion characteristic of debates" (Van Dijk 2005: n.p.). Parliaments offer a unique context for the study of language structures because of MPs' unique roles as legislatures, policy makers, people's representatives and governors. Thus, parliamentary discourse has been studied variously and from different analytical and theoretical perspectives, including speech act theory (Ilie 2010), (im)politeness (Harris 2001: 451; Murphy 2012), gender (Bird 2005) cross-cultural (Bayley 2004) and nativization perspectives (Appartaim 2009). Studies have also explored the use of (un)parliamentary language (Ilie 2001), how MPs manage confrontation during debates, and argumentation strategies (Bull & Wells 2012; Ilie 2010) as well as concepts and topics in parliamentary debates (Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu 2013; Sarfo-Kantankah 2018a).

Parliamentary discourse studies are politically revealing, because, as noted by Bayley (2004: outside back cover):

> The activity of parliaments is largely linguistic activity: they produce talk and they produce texts. Broadly speaking, the objectives that this discourse aims to satisfy are similar all over the world: to legitimate or contest legislation, to represent diverse interests, to scrutinise the activity of government, to influence opinion and to recruit and promote political actors. But the discourse of different national parliaments is subject to variation, at all linguistic levels, on the basis of history, cultural specificity, and political culture in particular.

The studies help to reveal parliamentary structures, legislative processes, party discipline, loyalty and rebellion, MPs' legislative skills and knowledge as well as providing insights into the work and daily lives of parliaments (Rogers & Walters 2015) and parliamentarians the world over, including the ideological positioning of MPs during debates. Studies on parliamentary discourses have explored interaction and debating strategies, address terms, metadiscursive and argumentative lexis, direct and indirect quotations, explicit and implicit expressions of belief and opinion, epistemic modality tending towards certainty, and complex structures of subordination favoring conditionals and concessives (Bayley 2004). Per its deliberative nature, parliamentary discourse requires that MPs demonstrate the legitimation (and/or the legitimacy) of their arguments, that is, the acknowledgement that their opinions are correct (Tschentscher et al. 2010) in order to sound persuasive. To this end, the use of certain words and expressions such as *actually*, is likely to be key. However, studies have hardly concentrated on and explored the use of specific language items such as *actually* that provide insights into how MPs can manipulate individual linguistic items for particular and identifiable purposes. This makes the current study significant as it seeks to investigate how Ghanaian MPs use *actually* for the purposes of argumentation and debating.

5.   Data and methods

The data for this study come from electronic copies of parliamentary Hansards obtained from the Parliamentary Service Secretariat and the Ghanaian Parliamentary website (https://www.parliament.gh). Covering a period of 13 years (2005–2017), the data comprise a 1.9 million-word corpus. The study uses a corpus methodological approach, which involves a discourse analytical approach and corpus methods (Partington 2010).[1] Through the concordance application of Wordsmith Tools version 6 (a corpus analytical software), all occurrences of *actually* were identified and detailed analyses of all the instances of *actually* in context were carried out so as to ascertain the pragmatic uses and the placement of *actually* in the data, as exemplified in Figure 1.

In this Figure, the words to the left and right of *actually* in each line form the collocates of *actually* and indicate its co-text through which the meanings of *actually* can be examined. The concordance tool identified 467 instances of the use of *actually* as a discourse marker. All the 467 instances were examined and coded into 11 categories according to the various functions that *actually* performed in specific contexts, as indicated in Table 1 below.

6.   Results

This section of the paper examines the functional categories of *actually* as a discourse marker and its placement.
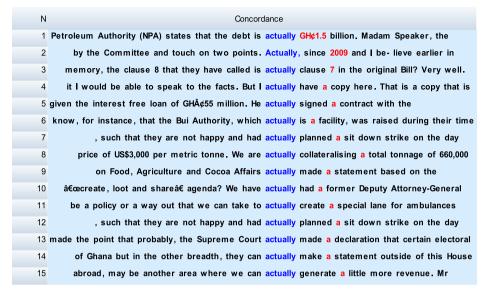
N	Concordance
1	Petroleum Authority (NPA) states that the debt is actually GH¢1.5 billion. Madam Speaker, the
2	by the Committee and touch on two points. Actually, since 2009 and I be- lieve earlier in
3	memory, the clause 8 that they have called is actually clause 7 in the original Bill? Very well.
4	it I would be able to speak to the facts. But I actually have a copy here. That is a copy that is
5	given the interest free loan of GHÂ¢55 million. He actually signed a contract with the
6	know, for instance, that the Bui Authority, which actually is a facility, was raised during their time
7	, such that they are not happy and had actually planned a sit down strike on the day
8	price of US$3,000 per metric tonne. We are actually collateralising a total tonnage of 660,000
9	on Food, Agriculture and Cocoa Affairs actually made a statement based on the
10	â€œcreate, loot and shareâ€ agenda? We have actually had a former Deputy Attorney-General
11	be a policy or a way out that we can take to actually create a special lane for ambulances
12	, such that they are not happy and had actually planned a sit down strike on the day
13	made the point that probably, the Supreme Court actually made a declaration that certain electoral
14	of Ghana but in the other breadth, they can actually make a statement outside of this House
15	abroad, may be another area where we can actually generate a little more revenue. Mr

Figure 1. Sample concordance lines of *actually*.

6.1. *Summary of the functions of actually*

Table 1 indicates the 467 of occurrences of a*ctually* in the data, which are classified into eleven categories. Category 1, emphatic uses of *actually*, has the highest frequency of 193 (41.3%) occurrences. This is followed by category 2, corrective function, with 96 (20.6) occurrences; and then category 3 with 46 (9.9%); category 4 with 27 (5.8%); and category 5 with 25 (5.4%) occurrences. The others range between 23 (4.9%) and 4 (0.9%). There was one instance of use whose function was *indeterminate*. These classifications were done by succinctly analyzing and interpreting the functions of *actually*

Table 1. Functions of *actually and their frequencies.*

Category	Function	Frequency	Percent
1	Emphasis	193	41.3
2	Correction	96	20.6
3	Contradiction/contrast	46	9.9
4	Pragmatic Softener	27	5.8
5	Apology	25	5.4
6	Appealing	23	4.9
7	Contemplation	21	4.5
8	Suggestion	16	3.4
9	Cognitive retreat	10	2.1
10	Certainty	5	1.0
11	Shifting focus	4	0.9
	Indeterminate[a]		
Total		467	100

[a]The function could not be determined from the context of use.

within the contexts of use. Some of these categories were adapted from the related literature. It is interesting to note that the categories with the highest occurrences (5% and above) are, in fact, the contestable ones, which reflect the challenging nature of parliamentary debates.

6.2.   *Analysis of the functions of actually in the data*

According to Aijmer (1986), the discourse marker *actually* is a multifunctional marker that can perform different functions in different contexts. The following are some of the functions that *actually* performed from the analysis of our parliamentary data.

6.2.1.   *As a tool for emphasis*

In this study, emphasis is the most predominant function of *actually* as indicated in Table 1 above. Below is an example.

(1)   **Mr Emmanuel Armah Kofi Buah (NDC, Ellembele)**: … Mr Speaker, it ties in with the vision we have. We have to move to a place where the National Oil Company is not being carried. That the National Oil Company is *actually* going and taking these blocks and developing them and discovering oil one hundred per cent for the State, that is the direction we are going. I believe that with the technical strength and financial wherewithal of this company, everything we have had in this Agreement ties in with the vision that we are trying to get the National Oil Company to make.

(17 Jul 2014/Col.1940/1941)

From the illustration above, Mr Buah uses *actually* to indicate emphasis by reinforcing the truth value of his utterance that "the National Oil Company is going and taking these blocks and developing them and discovering oil one hundred per cent for the State". Oh (2000: 253) argues that *actually* intensifies the meaning of the clause in which it occurs, and, in most cases, can be replaced with either *in fact* or *really.* In the example, *actually* can be replaced with *really* to indicate emphasis. As an emphasizer, *actually* acts as a propositional modifier and occurs as an integral part of the verb phrase (de Klerk 2005). Emphasis is the foremost function of *actually* in utterances, as, for example, in British English, New Zealand, Singaporean and Hong Kong English (cf. Aijmer 2015). In this regard, *actually* has a reinforcing effect on the truth value of the part of the utterance it reflects (Quirk et al. 1985). It is used to explain or justify a speaker's point of view in order to strengthen it. According to Biber and Finegan (1988), in spoken and written British English, *actually* performs the basic function of emphasis.

6.2.2.   *As a tool of correction*

The second most frequent function of *actually* as identified in the data is correction. This means that *actually* is used by the speaker to correct an earlier utterance that is deemed to be a mistake. To this effect, Oh (2000) asserts that *actually* develops a special function by signaling that the speaker is engaged in a face threatening act such as correction. Though Aijmer (2002) considers all corrective functions of *actually*

together as correction, we identify three forms of these corrections, namely, self-correction, interpersonal correction and general correction.

6.2.2.1.   *Self-correction*. In this case, *actually* is used by the same speaker to correct an earlier or preceding mistake he/she has made. This is mostly done immediately the speaker makes the mistake. Below is an example of the use of *actually* for self-correction by an MP.

> (2) **Mr. Pele Abuga (NDC, Chiana/Paga)**: … Mr. Speaker, I was fortunate to be able to point out to the new Minister for Education and Sports that he is about the fifth Minister in four years. *Actually* he is the sixth Minister for Youth and Sports to run the Sports Ministry in just four years. And if we have a turnover of Ministers at that rate, six Ministers in four years, it means for every year we have one and a half Minister – [Laughter.] Well, Mr. Speaker, you know the consequences.
>
> (8 Feb 2005/Col.316)

From the excerpt above, the honorable MP uses *actually* as a tool to correct himself after expressing uncertainty in his prior utterance. That is, he uses *actually* to quickly correct himself by mentioning that the Minister is in fact the sixth Minister in four years. Aijmer (2002) states that *actually* can be used as a self-correction to mark that an utterance is more appropriate than an earlier one. In this case, the honorable member uses the *actually* to mark that "the sixth minister" is more appropriate than "about the fifth minister".

6.2.2.2.   *Interpersonal correction*. Here, the speaker uses *actually* to correct a mistake committed by another speaker in an earlier or preceding utterance. Below is instance from the data where actually is used for interpersonal correction.

> (3) **Mr Isaac Osei (NPP Subin)**: Mr Speaker, on the point made by the Majority Chief Whip, I think if you look further down, there is also an amendment in relation to the Association of Ghana Industries, but the Majority Chief Whip mentioned Ghana Association of Industries, which is not correct. It is *actually* Association of Ghana Industries.
>
> (22 Jul 2015/Col. 3375)

In example (3), *actually* is used to correct a preceding or earlier mistake that was made by the Majority Chief Whip. Mr Osei tries to establish that the previous utterance by the Chief Whip was wrong and provides the right/correct information.

6.2.2.3.   *General correction/clarification*. In this form of correction, the speaker establishes that a particular event, idea or thought is wrong and tries to offer a correction. This form of correction is different from the interpersonal correction because it does not refer to any particular person but an idea or thought. Example (4) indicates the use of *actually* for general correction.

> (4) **Mr Clement K. Humado (Minister, Food and Agriculture)**: Mr Speaker, *actually*, I wrote to inform Parliament on the 24th October, 2013 and it was

received on 28th October, 2013. So, I did ask permission but I think there was some complication somewhere in the communication and I believe that, that was why Mr Speaker was not aware that I had asked permission. If there were any inconveniences, I would want to apologize for that.

(13 Nov 2013/Col.1134)

From example (4) above, the speaker uses *actually* as a tool of correction to clarify a wrong impression by the House that he did not ask permission before absenting himself from parliament. He establishes that he had sought permission from the House prior to his absence.

6.2.3.   *As a tool of contrast/contradiction*

Actually can also be used in an utterance to contrast/contradict an earlier proposition or utterance. Contradiction is an important feature of parliamentary discourse because it consists of members from opposing factions who mostly demonstrate one-upmanship. In this case, the speaker indicates an opposite point of view by introducing counterclaims to an earlier utterance. According to Oh (2000), *actually* occurs in written discourse primarily to contradict an expectation. This function of *actually* is also prevalent in spoken discourse as revealed in the data. The example below clearly explains this function:

(5) **Mrs Marietta Brew Appiah-Opong (Minister, Justice and Attorney-General)**: … Mr Speaker, so, when I pointed it out, the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice explained that it was the Government printer which could have made a mistake but what the President *actually* signed was Ministry of Petroleum and Ministry of Power.

(18 Dec 2014/Col 4379)

In example (5), the speaker uses *actually* to indicate contrast or contradiction against the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice's explanation that the Government printer made a mistake. Aijmer (2002) notes that the use of *actually* to indicate contradiction allows the speaker to distant himself from the factuality of an earlier utterance. In the example, the speaker counterclaims the Attorney-General's assertion that the Government printer made the mistake.

6.2.4.   *As a pragmatic softener*

Sometimes *actually* is used to soften the effect of an utterance on another utterance or expectation. That is, *actually* is used as a conciliatory and mild marker to gently or modestly contradict an utterance or an expectation, with a face-saving effect (Taglicht 2001). Example (6) is an instance of *actually* functioning as a pragmatic softener.

(6) **Alhaji Pelpuo (NDC, Wa Central)**: I *actually* hated to come [to] this matter but the Hon Member is misleading this House and he has made some very, very sweeping statements, which he needs to withdraw. It is *actually* incorrect to say that the biggest shame this country has gone through was between 1994 and 1999.

(25 Feb 2011/Col. 1662)

From the example above, Alhaji Pelpuo uses *actually* to soften the degree of severity of his expression of distaste and counterclaim that his Hon Colleague is *misleading* the house. It is face-threatening to say that a colleague MP is misleading the House and that what he has said is *incorrect*. Thus, Alhaji Pelpuo's two instances of the use of *actually* are an attempt to soften the severity of his comment against the opponent MP. This supports Taglicht's (2001) assertion that *actually* functions as a pragmatic softener when it is used to gently contradict in a non-offensive way.

6.2.5.   *As a prelude to an apology*

Actually is also used in certain contexts as a tool for apology. In this sense, the marker is used to show a sense of remorse, worry or regret for an earlier utterance or action. When *actually* is used to indicate apology in a context, it usually collocates with words such as "sorry", "regret", "apologies", "unintended", etc., as indicated in example (7).

(7) **Dr Kunbuor (NDC, Nandom)**: Mr Speaker, he did not need to invite me, I was rising myself to *actually* withdraw that word and apologize profusely to the Hon Member. But when I talked about sanity, I was not referring to compos mentis. I was talking about the circumstances. It has no mental element whatsoever, but it is capable of being misinterpreted. So, I withdraw it.

(8 Nov 2013/Col. 1678)

In this example, *actually* is used by Dr Benjamin Kunbuor as a prelude to the apology by showing remorse for the previous utterance. He apologizes for using a particular unparliamentary word that offended his colleague. In example (7), *actually* collocates with words such as "withdraw" and "apology" to express the apology.

6.2.6.   *As a prelude to an appeal*

When *actually* is used by a speaker to attract the attention of the audience/listeners and to make a request, it is said to perform the function of appealing. An example of this function is given below:

(8) **Mr Ekow Eduamoah (NDC, Gomoa East)**: Mr Speaker I am very happy about that statement and I think that we should all support him to *actually* clear out the debt and then do the right thing. So far as Ghana is concerned, I think that we always have to support the President.

(2 Mar 2011/Col. 1903)

From the example above, Mr Eduamoah uses *actually* as a tool to appeal to the audience to support the President to clear the debt and then do the right thing. *Actually* in this sense collocates with words such as "help", "support", "assist", etc.

6.2.7.   *As a contemplative signal*

Here, the speaker mentally cogitates and negotiates with him/herself before continuing with the utterance. The speaker indicates a lack of certainty regarding a view point. When performing this function, it collocates with expressions such as "I think",

"maybe", "perhaps", etc. Below is an example of *actually* functioning as signal of contemplation:

(9) **Dr Matthew Prempeh (NPP, Manhyia South)**: … Mr Speaker, those four direc-torates should exist as a matter of, *actually*, we should establish those directo-rates before we give the discretion to the Board to establish other directorates.

(22 Dec. 2014/Col.5096)

From the example above, the speaker uses *actually* to signal his contemplation about what should be done in respect of the "four directorates". De Klerk (2005) argues that the contemplative function of *actually* is closely linked with the primary function of *well* as a signal of contemplation. In this case *actually* functions as a pause filler to allow the speaker to ponder what to say.

6.2.8. *To indicate suggestion*

Actually also performs other functions such as indicating suggestion, 16 of which were found in the data. This is illustrated in the example below:

(10) **Mrs. Osei-Opare**: Mr. Speaker, it is known that there are a number of research information gathering dust on the shelves of our learned researchers, and yet these researchers, if we have a good linkage, can *actually* impact positively on how we add value to our agricultural produce.

(8 Feb 05/Col.362)

From example (10) above, actually is used to suggest how to improve agricultural produce in the country. Mrs. Osei-Opare advocates the use of information from research for the improvement of cocoa yield in Ghana.

6.2.9. *As an indicator of epistemic/cognitive retreat*

Sometimes speakers try to reformulate their utterances in order to communicate effec-tively. The process by which a speaker reframes or restates an earlier utterance in a better way is called cognitive retreat. The speaker's intention is to drop an earlier verbal attempt in favor of a new one. Oh (2000) refers to this as "re-start", as in example (11).

(11) **Mr Hammond (NPP, Adansi-Asokwa)**: Mr Speaker, with respect, this is plain, clear grammar. "He is one of those I respect", which obviously means that clearly, there are others he respects within the category of the "those". But then, by the same analysis, and those who speak good English, *actually*, Mr Speaker, those who speak average English, it also means that there are those he does not respect in this House. It is English.

(21 Feb 2012/Col.1166/67)

From example (11) above, Mr Hammond uses *actually* to indicate a cognitive retreat where he tries to reframe or restate his earlier proposition in a relatively better way. He cognitively retreats from "good English" to "average English" which he sees as more appropriate in his utterance.

6.2.10. *To depict certainty*

Actually can be used to express certainty of an utterance. The speaker expresses his/her conviction of the truth or actuality of an utterance. Below is an example:

(12) **Dr Prempeh (NPP, Manhyia South)**: Mr Speaker, it does *actually* satisfy my concern. But I would pray that you would let the Committee on Education participate in that debate as well, since it is a matter to do with the University of Ghana. But I do agree with you.

(1 Mar 2011/Col. 1792)

From example (12), Dr Prempeh uses *actually* to express his certainty, satisfaction and conviction that he is in support of the motion. In the expression "it does *actually* satisfy my concern", "does" is an emphasizer and, therefore, *actually* reinforces that emphasis by making it certain.

6.2.11. *As a marker of topic shift*

Actually marks a shift or change of topic in an utterance. In this regard, the speaker diverts from the topic of discussion and introduces a new topic (cf. de Klerk 2005; Lenk 1998; Oh 2000). The following is an example of the use of *actually* to indicate a topic shift.

(13) **Ms Laadi Ayamba (NDC, Pusiga)**: Mr Speaker … Day in day out, we talk about senior high schools, our basic schools, our kindergartens, but then we forget, many a times, to think of those who would *actually* handle these children when they are in school – the teachers. The teachers are first and foremost. This is because without them, even if you put the children in school, you would be making no point and we would have more children who would fall out of school. So, these 10 teacher training colleges are *actually* going to help in producing more teachers to teach in these schools.

(26 Feb 2013/Col.989/990)

In example (13), Ms Ayamba begins by talking about senior high schools, basic schools and kindergartens, but shifts the focus to teachers, who teach the students/pupils. The shift is also signaled by *but*. This function is closely related to contrast/contradiction. The difference is that, while contrast/contradiction indicates a form of disagreement, the topic shift is not an expression of disagreement.

When examining the functions of *actually*, it is usually important to also look at its placement in utterances/sentences in order to measure the extent to which the positions of *actually* influence the functions it performs.

6.3. *The placement of actually*

As indicated in Table 2, we analyzed the position of *actually* in the utterances in which they occurred. The positions are classified into initial (pre-subject), medial (post-subject, pre-verb and post-verb but pre-predicate) and final (end-of-utterance) positions. This is represented in the table below:

Table 2 shows the frequency of occurrence of *actually* at utterance initial, medial and final positions. At the initial position, *actually* appears most frequently in the correction function with a frequency of 7, followed by the suggestion function, with a frequency of 3. The others are contrast, emphasis and focus shift, with each occurring twice. In categories 5, 6, 7 and 10, *actually* did not occur at the initial position. The total number of occurrences at the initial position is 18 out of 467. At the medial position, a total of 449 instances of *actually* was identified. *Emphasis* has the highest frequency of 191 occurrences, corroborating other studies such as Oh (2000) and Morales (2013). Oh (2000) asserts that *actually* mostly favors medial position in both spoken and written discourse, while Morales (2013) has noted that *actually* occurs more frequently in the medial position but very minimal in the final position. *Correction* has the second highest frequency with 89 instances. The least number of occurrence is *shifting focus* with a frequency of 2. In each category, *actually* appears at least once at the medial position. In the entire data, there is no occurrence of *actually* at the final position. Aijmer (1986) asserts that *actually* performs different functions according to its position in an utterance. However, Oh (2000) counterclaims that there is no one-to-one correspondence between the positions of *actually* and its functions. This study corresponds with Oh's (2000) argument, where the medial position appears to perform all the identified functions.

The placement of *actually* in our data is consistent with Aijmer's (2002: 257; cf. Karlsson 2015) assertion that, as an emphasizing adverb, *actually* can be placed either before or after *is* (see Table 3); including Taglicht's (2001) view that *actually* essentially occurs at the initial position of the structural element of which it forms part (Taglicht 2001).

Table 3 indicates that the most frequent position of *actually* is after forms of *be* (*is, am, was, are* – see numbers 1–17) and other auxiliaries such as *have, has, should, would, could not and did not* (see 18–22). Thus, per our data, we can generalize that *actually* occurs mostly after auxiliary verbs and before main verbs. In this case, *actually* occurs as "an immediate constituent of a VP [verb phrase], an integral element in sentence structure, acting typically as a propositional modifier" (de Klerk 2005: 283). The

Table 2.   Positions of *actually* and their frequencies.

Category	Function	Initial	Medial	Final	Total
1	Emphasis	2	191	0	193
2	Correction	7	89	0	96
3	Contradiction/contrast	2	44	0	46
4	Pragmatic Softener	1	26	0	27
5	Apology	0	25	0	25
6	Appeal	0	23	0	23
7	Contemplation	0	21	0	21
8	Suggestion	3	13	0	16
9	Cognitive retreat	1	9	0	10
10	Certainty	0	5	0	5
11	Shifting focus	2	2	0	4
	Indeterminate	0	1	0	1
Total		18	449	0	467

Table 3. Most frequent three-word clusters[a] of *actually*.

No.	Cluster	Frequency	No	Cluster	Frequency
1	it *is* actually	11	16	the nation address [is, was actually]	7
2	is actually a	8	17	mr speaker it [is, was actually]	5
3	he was actually	7	18	have actually been	6
4	mr speaker i [was, am]	7	19	he has actually	5
5	we are actually	6	20	we should actually	5
6	i was actually	6	21	did not actually	5
7	the economy *was*	6	22	could actually be	4
8	actually trying to	6	23	would actually be	4
9	actually going to	6	24	actually did not	4
10	that is actually	5	25	the president actually	6
11	what is actually	4	26	mr speaker actually	6
12	economy was actually	4	27	he actually said	5
13	it is actually a	4	28	what he actually	4
14	is actually the	4	29	they actually do	4
15	i am actually	4	30	avedzi mr speaker	4

[a]Also called lexical bundles, clusters are words which are found repeatedly together in each other's company, in sequence (Wordsmith Tool's definition).

distribution of *actually* as a propositional modifier in relation to placement – initial (2), medial (191), final (0) positions – in our data is similar to those of De Klerk's (2005: 285) who obtained 1, 61 and 2 respectively.

7. Discussion and conclusion

The pragmatic functions obtained from the data included, principally, emphasis (41.3%), correction (20.6%) and contradiction/contrast (9.9%). Others, which range between 5.8% and 0.9%, were pragmatic softener, apology, appeal, contemplation, among others. On syntactic positioning, medial position was the most frequent (96.15%), with initial position taken 3.85%. There was no final position.

The pragmatic functions of *actually* as identified in this study support uses of *actually* adverbials as noted by Biber and Finegan (1988), who have stated that *actually* expresses actuality, emphasis, greater certainty/truth than expected. These functions are stance-taking functions, which are key to argumentative and debate discourses. Biber and Finegan (1988: 17) further note that "highly interactive conversation[s] exploit *actually* adverbials to emphasise strong feelings about certain propositions and to encourage a sense of solidarity between the speaker and the listener". Ghanaian parliamentarians use *actually* for these purposes, since parliamentary debates are highly interactive, involving judgements, opinions, commitment to truth insistent in forceful ways. Also, *actually* adverbials are said to be highly frequent in formal panel discussions that involve many participants (Biber & Finegan 1988) and play a crucial role in argumentative exchanges (Brezina 2012). And *actually* adverbials are known to perform specialized functions of marking contrast and emphasizing the individual speaker or author positions in opposition to other possible positions (Biber & Finegan 1988). In the sense that parliamentary debates are a specialized genre and

involve argumentation, the use of *actually* mainly as an emphasizer is crucial for the appropriate use of language by legislators in expressing their views. These uses appear to further corroborate the importance of *actually* "to the maintenance of a convincing or engaging dialogue in situations with little motivation and opportunity for careful argumentation" (Biber & Finegan 1988: 18). It must be noted that MPs usually have up to five minutes to make contributions to debates (Sagoe-Moses et al. 2016), which limits MPs' opportunity to critically examine issues on the floor of parliament, hence the deployment of *actually* in the language of MPs.

On the positioning of *actually*, the study confirms the findings of other research that, being the default position (Aijmer 2015), the medial position is the most frequent placement of *actually* (de Klerk 2005; Ngula 2015). In his study of disciplinary and native verses non-native variations in the use of epistemic modality in social science research articles, Ngula (2015) found that *actually* occurred mostly in medial (post-subject, but pre-verbal) positions for both the native and non-native varieties, but no occurrence at all in final positions. Thus, it appears that the final position is not a conventional feature of *actually*. Nugla's conclusion is quite significant considering that his data, expert academic writing, and our data, spoken parliamentary discourse data, evince different genre-based linguistic properties; even though there is some level of argumentation in research articles as well. The unconventional final position is supported by the fact that, even in studies that found *actually* appearing in the final position, the final position always had the least frequency of occurrence (cf. de Klerk 2005; Oh 2000). Again, the medial position of *actually* supports the fact that *actually* occurs "mainly in initial or mid position with 'the specialized function of emphasizing the individual position of the speaker or author in opposition to other possible positions'" (Aijmer 2002: 261). The distribution of the placement of *actually* differs from those reported by De Klerk (2005: 285), who found that, out of a total of 191 instances of the use of *actually*, 64 (34%), 94 (49%) and 33 (17%) occurred at the initial, medial and final positions respectively in spoken Xhosa English. De Klerk's data were about half a million-word corpus of transcribed spontaneous dialogue between Xhosa English speakers. The differences between our study and De Klerk's demonstrate the significance of genre-based variations in the study of language varieties. Given that emphasis is important in Ghanaian parliamentary debates vis-à-vis the position of *actually* mainly in the medial position, this study appears to offer a different perspective from Singaporean English, in which, according to Aijmer (2015: 105), "*actually* is specialized as a discourse marker in its initial position with the function of emphasizing the speaker's subjective position". However, it reinforces De Klerk's (2005) report that among Xhosa speakers of English, another English as second language speakers, the medially-positioned *actually* functioned as a clause emphasizer.

The emphatic uses of *actually* being the most frequent in the Ghanaian parliamentary debates reinforce parliamentary debates as deliberative, where government and opposition MPs take positions, strongly argue for those positions in forceful and emphatic ways so as to influence others to align themselves to those positions. In this sense, the forcefulness of expression, indicating the importance of one's position, becomes a key persuasive device. It reflects the fact that, in parliamentary debates, MPs attempt to legitimize their positions and views. The contrastive use of *actually* also indicates the oppositional nature of parliamentary discourse in which MPs contest each other's opinion and stance on legislation and policy issues. Being naturally occurring interactions, parliamentary debates involve mistakes and errors that

normally require rectification and amendments; hence, the presence of *actually* as a corrective marker. There are three types of correction performed by *actually*, namely, self-correction, interpersonal correction and general correction.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Note

1. For further information on the data processing and methods of analysis, see Sarfo-Kantankah (2018a, 2018b) and Sarfo-Kantankah (in press).

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