

# *Really* in an English-Spanish parallel corpus<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

In language interaction the purpose is not only to communicate information, but also to express evaluative considerations towards the contents of the message or the addressee. Conveying experiential information falls within the ideational function of language, in Hallidayan terms, whereas the expression of evaluation represents the interpersonal function of language. Finally, the textual function of language refers to its power to communicate textual and pragmatic meanings linguistically. The boundaries between these three functions of language are not clear-cut and there are a number of linguistic items that are being used by speakers for more than one of these functions simultaneously. The English adverb *really* is one such multifunctional item.

This paper is a corpus-based contrastive study of the English particle *really* and its corresponding translations into Spanish as they were found in a large English-Spanish parallel corpus of contemporary texts. Parallel corpora have proved to be useful tools in identifying various functions of a source language unit, as they “provide answers to questions that cannot easily be answered on the basis of the analysis of a single language.” (Aijmer 2005: 86).

The aim of this study is to reveal any possible associations between the different functions of *really* in English source texts (ST) and the distribution of the translational options taken by professional translators. The results will be of use in the field of translation practice as well as in translator training.

## 2. Theoretical background

The English adverb *really* is one of the most common adverbials in the language, particularly in the spoken language. It has a variety of different functions, from those related to the expression of degree, to the expression of stance or uses as pragmatic and textual marker. *Really* is traditionally classified as an epistemic or stance adverb representing the interpersonal function of the language. Non-factual meanings are included under the broad cover term of evaluation, “the expression of the speaker or writer’s attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about.”

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<sup>1</sup> This study is part of the project HUM2005-01215/FILO funded by the Spanish Ministry of Education.

(Thompson & Hunston 2000: 5). This is a particularly complex field of study, since the degree of commitment of the author may vary a lot and may be represented linguistically in many different ways. The broad category of evaluation and the linguistic items that embody it have been referred to by various authors using different terms, such as *disjuncts* (Quirk et al. 1985), *evidentiality* (Chafe 1986), *stance* (Biber and Finegan 1989), *attitude* (Halliday 1994), *discourse markers* (Fraser 1999), and *pragmatic markers* (Aijmer 2005). These elements are not part of the propositional content of discourse, but rather comment on the proposition itself, and may express a variety of functions in addition to opinion, mainly the construction and maintenance of interpersonal relationships and the organization of discourse. Particles expressing pragmatic and textual meanings in any language are “very often highly idiosyncratic: ‘untranslatable’ in the sense that no exact equivalents can be found in other languages.” (Wierzbicka 1991: 341).

The English adverb *really* has received a lot of attention recently due to its multifunctionality and to the variations in the semantic and pragmatic nuances involved. Syntactic and positional factors have been proposed (Simon-Vandenberghe 1988, Stenström 1999) for distinguishing the various meanings of *really*, but more recent research highlights the importance of semantic, pragmatic and intonation factors instead (Paradis 2003). The shift in meaning from epistemic functions to develop pragmatic and textual functions has been described as a grammaticalization process that affects not only *really* but also other epistemic adverbs in English (Aijmer 2005). This flexibility in the use of *really* makes it particularly interesting from a translational perspective, since the translator must take into account a number of factors such as the context, text type and situation to provide pragmatically equivalent translations in each case.

I will distinguish four meaning groups for the adverb *really* in English, loosely based on previous work by Paradis (2003) and Aijmer (2005). I have ordered the various meanings from the experiential one (degree), to the interpersonal ones (truth & emphasis) and lastly the textual functions (pragmatic and textual marker).

## 2.1. Degree modifier

1. The English adverb *really* functions as a degree modifier when preceding an adjective. In this case, *really* will be considered as non-epistemic, but expressing an ideational type of meaning referring to the degree of a gradable quality as in example (1)<sup>2</sup>:

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<sup>2</sup> All the examples included in this paper have been taken from the P-ACTRES Corpus. The letters and number at the end of each example are the identifying code in the corpus.

(1) I 'm feeling *really* hungry!" (FBT1E.s204)

With this kind of meaning, *really* may be repeated in context to indicate intensification, as in example (2):

(2) "Neville," she said, "I'm *really, really* sorry about this." (FRJK3E.s239)

## 2.2. Evaluative meaning: truth

This meaning of the English adverb *really* is of an epistemic and evidential nature and reflects a clear relationship with reality and truth. The clearest case of this use of *really* occurs in truth attesting interrogatives such as the ones in examples (3) and (4):

(3) Can Russia *really* grow economically when it is losing 750,000 people a year to death or migration? (PKP7E.s49)

(4) Is the world *really* getting more evil? (FIK1E.s283)

## 2.3. Evaluative meaning: emphasis

The adverb *really* is often used by speakers to express subjective emphasis with respect to the content of the proposition. This usually occurs in the vicinity of verbs expressing attitudinal values, as in examples (5) and (6):

(5) It would *really* make me weep. " (RMF1E.s112)

(6) "I *really* need to see you," she said after fifteen minutes of baring her soul. (FGJ3E.s631)

When *really* has this emphatic meaning it often co-occurs with emphatic *do* or in a pseudo-cleft construction, to intensify the emphatic effect, as in (7) and (8), respectively:

(7) The Fifth Column *really* does exist; every night blue, green and red lights appear everywhere. (EHJ1E.s280)

(8) Yet those who knew him agree that what *really* counted for him was the example of action rather than its effect. (EHE1E.s308)

## 2.4 Pragmatic & textual marker

Finally, I will distinguish here a separate type of meaning of the English adverb *really* that has been identified by Aijmer (2005) as a corrective meaning. In these cases, *really* functions as a hedge in context and has a deemphasising or corrective meaning with respect to the previous text or the situation. This type of meaning is illustrated in examples (9) and (10):

(9) He was *really* more of a big brother than an uncle. (FGJ1E.s277)

(10) Speaking on CNN the other day, he corrected himself, suggesting it was *really* a "third wave". (PATG10S.s57)

I have also included in this group all the cases of *really* where it appeared in sentence-marginal position and had a merely textual and pragmatic function, as in examples (11) and (12), where the corrective meaning is also evident:

(11) "I think my mum's quite proud of it *really*," Mr. Shaw said. (PBP1E.s50)

(12) *Really*, we should talk about second world wars, not the Second World War. (PATG10E.s10)

As mentioned above, this particular use of the adverb *really* is expected to cause the most important problems to translators due to its high idiomaticity and context-dependency, and it may be expected that translators choose to omit the adverb in these cases particularly often.

### 3. Method & data selection

The working procedure followed in this paper is based on the use of a parallel corpus that has been compiled and aligned containing original English texts and their corresponding Spanish translations. This translation corpus includes written material from a variety of different registers (fiction, non-fiction, press & miscellanea) published in English in the year 2000 or later, thus representing the contemporary stage of the English language. Together with the corresponding translations into peninsular Spanish, these texts form what is known as the P-ACTRES corpus (Parallel ACTRES). The P-ACTRES corpus is still under construction and is expected to reach a size of several million words. The data for this study have been extracted from a smaller sample of parallel texts that have been aligned at sentence level and can be searched with the Corpus Work Bench browser (CWB)<sup>3</sup>. This aligned version contains over one million three-hundred thousand words, distributed among fiction (45.88%), non-fiction (30.23%) and press (newspapers with 13.83% and magazines with 10.04%) as follows:

	English	Spanish	Total
Books – Fiction	295,207	302,818	598,025
Books – Non-Fiction	186,994	207,092	394,086
Newspapers	85,441	94,912	180,353
Magazines	61,721	69,218	130,939
Total	629,363	674,040	1,303,403

Table 1: Contents of the English-Spanish Parallel Corpus: number of words.

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<sup>3</sup> We are grateful to Knut Hofland for his co-operation in the setting up of the P-ACTRES parallel corpus.

All the instances of the English adverb *really* were extracted, together with their corresponding translations. A total of 217 concordance lines were collected. Out of these 217 examples, 10 instances had to be left out of the analysis because they represented mistakes, titles of books that were kept in English, or because they were included in sentences or paragraphs that were totally omitted in the target text. Thus, the final analysis was done on 207 cases of *really*. Taking into account the contents of the corpus, it must be noted that the number of cases of this particular adverb was unevenly distributed across the different registers, with by far the largest number of instances in the fiction subcorpus (nearly 60% of the total number of occurrences). Table 2 shows the exact number of cases found in each subcorpus.

Fiction	124 cases	59.9% of the total
Non-Fiction	38 cases	18.35% of the total
Newspapers	32 cases	15.45% of the total
Magazines	13 cases	6.28% of the total

Table 2: Register distribution of *really* in the P-ACTRES corpus.

These 207 instances of the English adverb and their corresponding Spanish translations were analyzed and classified into groups according to the translation decisions taken by different professional translators, in order to obtain a view of the distribution of the various existing possibilities and their use.

#### 4. Analysis and results

##### 4.1. General analysis

First, the 207 instances of *really* were analysed and classified into groups according to the function identified in each context. The most common use found was the emphatic one, with 68 instances, 32% of the total, followed closely by the pragmatic and textual function of *really* with 66 instances and 31% of the total. The other two functions of *really* were less frequent: the truth attesting meaning was identified in 39 occurrences (18% of the total) and the meaning of degree in 34 instances (16% of the total).

The overall analysis of the 207 cases of the English adverb *really* in the parallel corpus P-ACTRES produced a wide range of different translational options taken by professional translators when translating this adverb into Spanish, as shown in Table 3:

Translation	Cases	Percentage
Omission	58	28.01%
Realmente	38	18.35%
De verdad	31	14.97%
En realidad	20	9.66%
Modulation	14	6.76%
Verdaderamente	12	5.79%
Muy/mucho	11	5.31%
La verdad es que ...	10	4.83%
De veras	4	1.93%
Con certeza	1	0.48%
Sin duda	1	0.48%
En verdad	1	0.48%
La verdad	1	0.48%
De hecho	1	0.48%
En serio	1	0.48%
Francamente	1	0.48%
Exactamente	1	0.48%
Detenidamente	1	0.48%
Total	207	100%

Table 3: Translations of *really* into Spanish.

Curiously, the most common translational option for *really* is in fact its omission (nearly 30% of cases), which seems to indicate that often this particular adverb expresses a type of meaning that tends to be left out in translations into Spanish. The next most common translation is the Spanish cognate adverb *realmente*, which occurs in the corpus in nearly 20% of cases. It is a well-known fact that Spanish *-mente* adverbs differ pragmatically from their cognate *-ly* adverbs in English, as they are considered to be long, cumbersome and formal, and therefore tend to be avoided by native speakers of Spanish, who prefer “periphrastic constructions, usually adjectival or prepositional phrases, which function adverbially.” (Hoye 1997: 253). In fact, the adverb *realmente* is overused in Spanish translations due to the influence of the source language English. I compared the number of instances in translated Spanish (P-ACTRES) with the number of cases in original Spanish texts from the same time

period and registers in a reference corpus of contemporary Spanish (CREA, Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual): in native Spanish texts *realmente* occurred 77 times per million words, and this figure soared to 140 cases per million words in translated texts. The difference is statistically significant (p-value = 0, using the chi-square test for statistical significance).

With nearly 15% of cases, the prepositional phrase (PP) *de verdad* comes next in frequency in Spanish translations, confirming the Spanish trend to use PPs for adverbial meanings. In fact, most of the remaining options are PPs. In addition, modulated ways of expressing the meanings conveyed by *really* occur in 6% of cases and there are also a few occurrences of other *-mente* adverbs.

#### 4.2. Translations of *really* meaning degree

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of the various translational options taken for the English adverb *really* when it expressed the meaning of degree in the source text (ST).

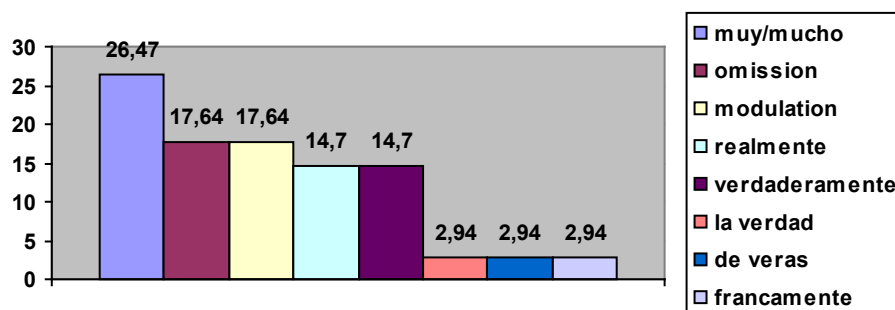


Figure 1: Spanish translations of *really* meaning degree.

Figure 1 shows that there are a number of different translational options available for translating the English adverb *really* meaning degree. The most common translation (26%) is the use of degree words such as *muy/mucho* in Spanish as in example (13):

(13) 'I'm *really* sorry about the key.' (FBD1E.s797)

Siento *mucho* lo de la llave. (FBD1S.s741)

However, in 17% of cases the English adverb was omitted as in example (14), and in another 17% of cases it was greatly modulated in the target text (TT), as in (15):

(14) Although we have left the bright lights behind, I know there are some *really* good places to eat around here. (FPT1E.s117)

Hemos dejado atrás los sitios elegantes, pero sé que por aquí hay buenos lugares para comer. (FPT1S.s79)

(15) I'll bet Percy's *really* pleased. (FRJK4E.s168)

Me imagino que Percy *estará en una nube*. (FRJK4S.s175)

In 14% of cases, *really* was translated by two *-mente* adverbs, the cognate *realmente* and *verdaderamente*, as in examples (16) and (17), respectively:

(16) Excellent flying yesterday, *really* excellent. (FRJK1E.s10)

Excelente jugada la de ayer, *realmente* excelente. (FRJK1S.s10)

(17) He was not *really* ill until a day or two before his death. (FCT1E.s1499)

No estuvo *verdaderamente* enfermo hasta un día o dos antes de morir. (FCT1S.s1465)

Finally, the remaining translational options were very infrequent, with just one occurrence each: *la verdad*, *de veras* and *francamente*.

#### 4.3. Translations of *really* meaning truth

Figure 2 summarises the distribution of the different translations found in Spanish for the English adverb *really* when the meaning conveyed in the context was of reality and truth.

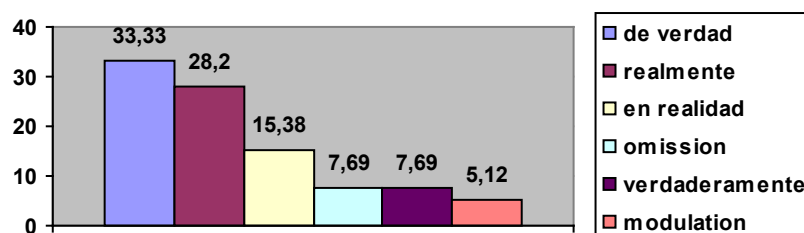


Figure 2: Spanish translations of *really* meaning 'truth'.

Figure 2 shows that there are two outstanding options available in Spanish for expressing this meaning of *really*, both with around 30% of the total, as exemplified in (18) and (19):

(18) Did you *really* make it all by yourself?" (FMEI1E.s293)

¿*De verdad* que lo has hecho todo tú sola? (FMEI1S.s296)



- (19) So searing *really* works? (RWD1E.s206) I ask. (RWD1E.s207)  
 "Entonces, ¿la cauterización *realmente* funciona?", pregunto. (RWD1S.s188)

With 15% of cases, the PP *en realidad* can also be used to express this meaning, as in (20):

- (20) We still don't know what *really* happened. (FDJ1E.s483)  
 Y todavía no sabemos qué ocurrió *en realidad*. (FDJ1S.s465)

Finally, the additional translational options found all account for under 10% of the total, including omission, which indicates that this type of meaning does not tend to be omitted in Spanish translations.

#### 4.4. Translations of *really* meaning emphasis

Figure 3 summarises all the translational options found for the English adverb *really* when the meaning implied in the ST was that of expressing emphasis on the part of the speaker, i.e., when the adverb was followed by an attitudinal verb.

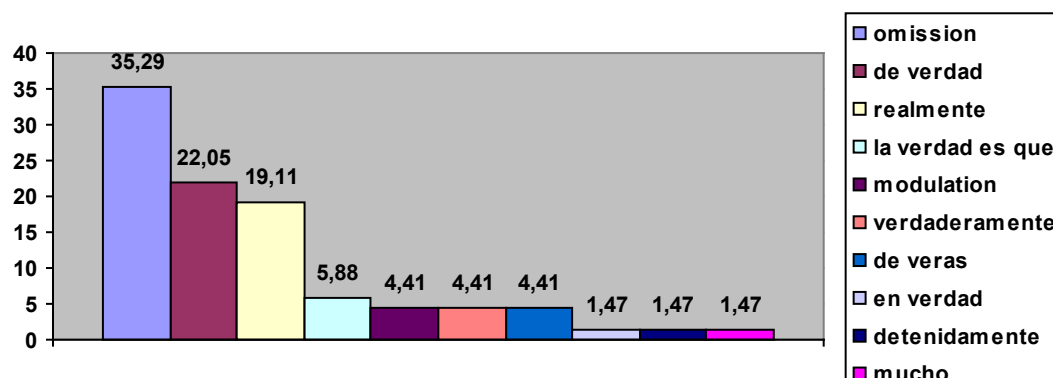


Figure 3: Spanish translations of *really* meaning emphasis.

Figure 3 illustrates that there are a wide range of possibilities available for the expression of emphasis in Spanish when it appears in the form of the English adverb *really* in the ST. However, the three most frequent options account for over 75% of the total, so this variety is only apparent. The most common option found (34% of the total) is in fact the omission of the meaning involved in *really*, as in example (21):

- (21) "I *really* need to see you," she said after fifteen minutes of baring her soul. (FGJ3E.s631)  
 - Necesito verlo - dijo tras haberse pasado un cuarto de hora haciéndole confidencias. (FGJ3S.s624)

The next two translations are the PP *de verdad* and the cognate adverb *realmente*, with 22% and 19% of cases, respectively, illustrated in examples (22) and (23):

(22) The only person I *really* look forward to seeing is Josh. (FPT1E.s34)

La única persona que me apetece ver *de verdad* es Josh. (FPT1S.s21)

(23) "I must *really* be sick," said Jay softly to himself. (FHJ1E.s103)

- Debo estar *realmente* enfermo - dijo Jay en voz muy baja-. (FHJ1S.s106)

#### 4.5. Translations of *really* as a pragmatic and textual marker

Finally, the largest number of different translations found occurred in the case of *really* used as a pragmatic and textual marker. This is due to the vagueness of this type of meaning, which is highly context-dependent and idiosyncratic. Figure 4 shows all the options.

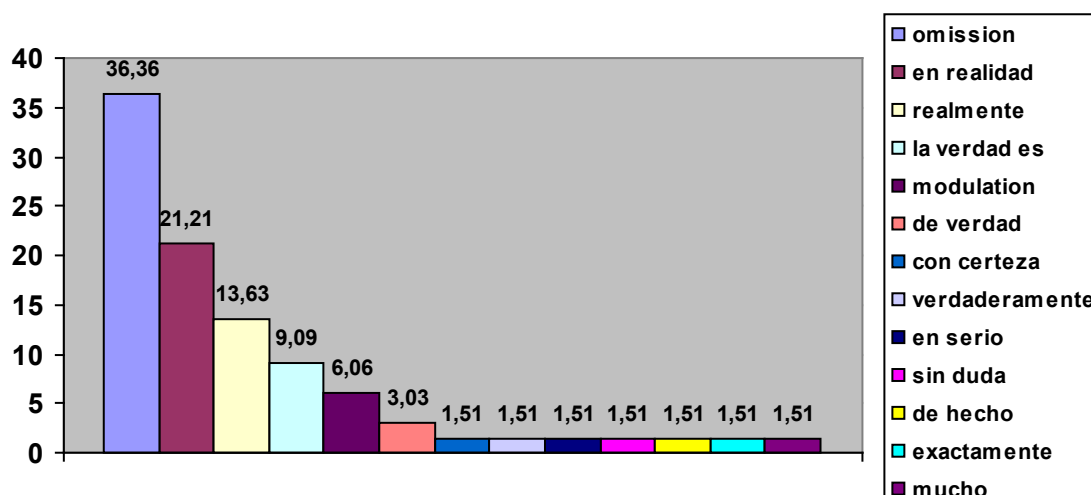


Figure 4: Spanish translations of *really* as a textual and pragmatic marker.

Even though there is a wide range of translational options available, only the first three occur with a frequency of over 10%, and together they account for over 70% of the total. This type of meaning is generally omitted in Spanish translations (36% of the total), as in example (24):

(24) "Lucky this plant thing's here, *really*," said Ron. (FRJK3E.s343)

- Me alegro de que esta planta esté aquí - dijo Ron. (FRJK3S.s350)

This ties in with the general assumption that pragmatic markers tend to be difficult to translate because they are highly culture-bound and do not add essential meaning to the propositional

content of the text. Consequently, pragmatic markers are particularly prone to be omitted in translations in general (Wierzbicka 1991: 341).

In 21% of cases we found the PP *en realidad* and in 13% of cases the cognate adverb *realmente*, which indicates the ability of these two adverbs to function as pragmatic markers too, thus being multifunctional in Spanish. Examples (25) and (26) illustrate these cases:

(25) There was *really* no point trying to arrange wild flowers. (FMEI1E.s69)

No tenía sentido, *en realidad*, tratar de ordenar flores silvestres. (FMEI1S.s69)

(26) "After all, it's the Germans who *really* rule us. (FFK2E.s815)

Después de todo, quienes *realmente* nos gobiernan son los alemanes. (FFK2S.s821)

## 5. Conclusions

This paper has combined an intralinguistic analysis of the various functions of *really* in English with an interlinguistic analysis of the different translational options of this adverb in Spanish texts as distributed across the functions of the adverb in the source texts.

According to the data extracted from the P-ACTRES corpus, *really* is mostly used in English to express emphasis (32%) and as a pragmatic and textual marker (31%). This adverb is also used, although less frequently, to refer to reality (18%) and to express degree (16%). These data suggest a gradual grammaticalization of *really* towards uses as a discourse marker, while it is less commonly used for expressing its original meanings.

As far as the translations are concerned, the results indicate that each meaning of *really* shows its own unique distribution of the translational options available. Meanings related to degree are mostly conveyed by degree words in Spanish; evidential meanings are mostly translated by *de verdad* and *realmente*; emphatic uses and pragmatic and textual uses, in contrast, are mostly omitted in Spanish translations. This progression follows a line from less to more interpersonal and textual functions of *really*, suggesting that the latter are more difficult to convey in a different language, because of their highly language-specific nature.

The PP *de verdad* is rarely used as a pragmatic or textual marker in Spanish, but is the most common option employed (33%) when the meaning implied was one referring to truth values and reality. In contrast, other equivalents of *really* in Spanish, such as *realmente* or *en realidad* seem to have developed a multifunctionality similar to the one observed in the English adverb *really*, as both are among the most common options for truth attesting meanings as well as for pragmatic and textual meanings. In consequence, I argue that Spanish adverbs and PPs such as *realmente* or *en realidad*, both derived from the same root, are

currently undergoing a grammaticalization process similar to the one detected in the English adverb *really*.

These results should be taken into account by professional translators and translator trainers, in order to improve their understanding of the multifunctionality of *really* and its potential Spanish equivalents.

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