A comparative study between the use of

*absolutely* and *positively*

in the light of grammaticalisation

Master paper submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

“Master in de Taal- en Letterkunde: Engels – Italiaans”

Mien Stoffels

Supervisor: Dr. Julie Van Bogaert
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1 Introduction

In the early nineteenth century, Meillet (1912: 131) defined grammaticalisation as “the attribution of grammatical character to an erstwhile autonomous word.” Since this preliminary definition, the theory of grammaticalisation gained the interest of a wide variety of scholars, especially since the 1980s (Givón 1979; Traugott 1982; Heine & Reh 1984; Lehmann 1985; Hopper 1991 amongst many others). While many of these scholars describe grammaticalisation as a process of loss, arguments against this point of view have also been put forward (Traugott 1988, 1995 amongst others).

Since the publication of Schiffrin’s book about ‘discourse markers’ in 1987, this class of words, which serve both textual and interpersonal functions, received great attention within the theory of grammaticalisation (Fraser 1988, 1990; Traugott & Dasher 2002; Brinton 2009 amongst others). In the literature, a plethora of synonyms, such as ‘hedges’, ‘initiators’ and ‘discourse particles’ are used to denote this category. In this study, we will adopt the term “pragmatic markers” proposed by Brinton (1996). Various studies have shown that the development of pragmatic markers supports the idea of grammaticalisation as a process which involves widening, instead of narrowing, of syntactic scope and pragmatic strengthening instead of pragmatic weakening. Indeed, many pragmatic markers originate in clause-internal adverbials such as manner adverbs. These later develop into adverbials with sentential scope and eventually into pragmatic markers with scope over discourse.

In this study, we will focus on the use of two adverbs in British English, namely absolutely and positively. These adverbs entered in British English as manner adverbs during the first half of the fifteenth century:

(1.1) An object that exists absolutely without any cause, certainly is not its own cause. (OED)

(1.2) The second way he glorified God, was positively, and he did this also two wayes. By his words, and by his works. (OED)

1 Oxford English Dictionary, consulted online.
Absolutely and positively share a number of functions in Present-Day English; they can both function as a premodifier of an adjective, as an emphasising subjunct, as a pragmatic marker expressing agreement, etc. The use of both adverbs as a marker of agreement was popularised by a 1920s vaudeville duet by Edward Gallagher and Al Shean:

(1.3)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shean</th>
<th>Oh, Mr. Gallagher! Oh, Mister Gallagher!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gallagher</td>
<td>Hello, what's on your mind this morning, Mr. Shean?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shean</td>
<td>Everybody's making fun of the way our country's run. All the papers say we'll soon live European.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallagher</td>
<td>Why, Mr. Shean. Why, Mr. Shean! On the day they took away our old canteen cost of living went so high that it's cheaper now to die.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shean</td>
<td>Positively, Mr. Gallagher!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallagher</td>
<td>Absolutely, Mr. Shean!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fact that both adverbs can be used with discursive meanings, as in this verse of the song, is interesting because it may confirm the hypothesis about the grammaticalisation of pragmatic markers as explained above.

In this paper, we will thus investigate if the present-day use of absolutely and positively confirms the hypothesis that pragmatic markers originate in clause-internal adverbials which then acquire sentence adverbial meanings and can finally function as pragmatic markers. In order to comprehend the present-day use of both adverbs, we will take into consideration the diachronic processes which underlie this situation. As such, we will investigate both diachronic and synchronic data. Finally, we will compare the use of both adverbs so as to indicate whether one of both reached a further stage of grammaticalisation.

This study is structured as follows. Chapter 2 establishes a classification of the various uses of both absolutely and positively at phrase level, clause level and discourse level. Chapter 3 focuses on the theory of grammaticalisation and its various dimensions at morphosyntactic, phonological and semantic-pragmatic level. In the next chapter this theory will be linked to the development of pragmatic markers. The methodology section focuses on the synchronic and diachronic corpora which have been used for this research and explains the criteria used for the data analysis. Chapter 6 offers the results of this analysis. Subsequently, chapter 7 links these results to the theory of
grammaticalisation and provides an answer to the main questions of this study. Finally, the last chapter offers a summary of the main aspects of this paper and indicates ideas for further research.
This research paper focuses on the contemporary use of the adverbs *absolutely* and *positively* in Present-Day English. Therefore, we will first discuss how these adverbs are theoretically classified within the general class of adverbs. As Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik (1985: 438) affirm, this word class is characterised by a great heterogeneity, because of which they describe it as “the most puzzling of the traditional word classes”. In this chapter, we will thus pay attention to the morphology, syntax and semantics of adverbs in general, and of *absolutely* and *positively* in particular.

### 2.1 Morphology

From a morphological point of view, adverbs can basically be divided into three categories: simple adverbs (e.g. *well*), compound adverbs (e.g. *hereby*) and derivational adverbs (e.g. *interestingly*) (Quirk *et al.* 1985: 438). The first two categories are closed classes; derivational adverbs form an open class. The majority of the adverbs belonging to this last category is formed by adding the suffix *-ly* to a (participial) adjective.² It is obvious that *absolutely* and *positively* are classified as derivational adverbs, the stem of both adverbs being *absolute* and *positive* respectively, as indicated by the Oxford English Dictionary (OED).

### 2.2 Semantics

In general, adverbs may belong to seven different semantic classes, viz. space, time, process, respect, contingency, modality and degree (Quirk *et al.* 1985: 479-488). Affinities between these classes exist, to the extent that there is considerable overlapping between them. It is therefore possible for the same adverb to express different semantic roles in different contexts. Regarding the use of *absolutely* and *positively*, the relevant categories are those of process, modality and degree. **PROCESS** adverbials are further subdivided into adverbs of means (2.1), instrument (2.2), agent (2.3) and manner, of which *absolutely* and *positively* are examples. Indeed, the OED gives reference to this use for both adverbs as their original function (2.4).

² Other suffixes which create adverbs out of adjectives are e.g. *-wise* (clockwise) and *-ways* (sideways).
(2.1) They went there by bus.
(2.2) He cuts the meat with a knife.
(2.3) The book was given to Mary by John.
(2.4) a. The piano is a ‘mechanical monster’ whose sound cannot be reproduced absolutely.
   (OED)
   b. The two positively charged hydrogen atoms repel each other. (OED)

Adverbials expressing **modality** give information about the force or truth value of a sentence. This group is divided according to three functions: emphasis, approximation and restriction. When expressing approximation, adverbials are used to indicate the middle ground between the positive and negative poles of the statement. Secondly, modality adverbials can express **restriction**, by which a particular part of a statement receives focus. Approximation is expressed by adverbs such as *probably* (2.5), whereas *only* is an adverb expressing restriction (2.6) (Quirk et al. 1985: 485):

(2.5) She has *probably* been enthusiastic about her work.
(2.6) She has been enthusiastic *only* about her work.

Finally, when used as emphasisers, modality adverbials either diminish or enhance the truth value or force of a sentence. Both *absolutely* and *positively* are emphasisers which enhance this truth value or force:

(2.7) “We did. It’s *absolutely* the worst type of business we ought to be.” (BNC)
(2.8) Antonio was *positively* bouncing with the honour of serving the big man himself. (BNC)

A third and last semantic category which can be expressed by *absolutely* and *positively* is that of **degree**. Degree adverbials are often considered semantically similar to adverbials expressing modality. Unlike modality adverbials, degree adverbials can only collocate with gradable items. As such, they indicate a certain degree on an imaginary scale. On that scale, the adverbial can indicate a high degree, in which case it functions as amplifier (2.9), or a low degree, in which case it functions as diminisher (2.10). When no specifically high or low degree is indicated, the adverbial is said to express measure (2.11). (Quirk et al. 1985: 485-486).
She is increasingly adding to her work load.
She helped him a little with his book.
She had worked sufficiently that day.

2.3 Syntax

After having discussed the morphology and semantics of adverbs, we now turn to the syntactic categorisation of absolutely and positively. Quirk et al. (1985: 478) state that adverbs can function outside a clause element, i.e. grammatically separate from it, or inside a clause element, i.e. as a grammatical constituent of that element. In this research, in line with Quirk et al. (1985), a distinction is made between adverbs operating on phrase level, i.e. as a modifier inside a clause element, and those operating on clause level, in which case they are denoted adverbials. Before discussing the syntax and semantics of adverbs at clause level, we first consider their use at phrase level.

2.3.1 Absolutely and positively at phrase level

As stated above, adverbs at phrase level function as modifiers, generally as premodifiers, i.e. preceding the constituent to which they add information (2.12). Some adverbs, such as enough (2.13), can only postmodify. Modifying adverbs most often modify adjectives and other adverbs, although modification of pronouns, predeterminers, numerals and noun phrases (2.14) is also possible:

(2.12) It was a remarkably good show.
(2.13) He is stupid enough to do it.
(2.14) They will be here for quite some time.

As a modifier, an adverb can semantically express both degree and modality. Most commonly it expresses degree, and functions as a scaling device labelled intensifier (Quirk et al. 1985: 445). As such, the adverb is a constituent indicating a certain degree of the gradable item with which it collocates. Intensifiers are divided in two types. Those that scale upwards from an assumed norm are termed amplifiers. Examples of amplifiers are very, awfully and terribly. Intensifiers with a generally lowering effect, such as fairly, somewhat and a little are called downtoners. A further subclassification of these two general categories will be presented in the discussion of adverbs at clause level.
Next to their use as intensifiers, adverbs at phrase level may also express modality. As such, they function as *emphasisers*. As stated above, emphasisers, as opposed to intensifiers, do not necessarily collocate with gradable constituents. Their effect is often similar to that of intensifiers, although emphasisers indicate the force, as distinct from the degree, of the statement (see examples (2.15) and (2.16)). Quirk *et al.* (1985: 447) further note that the function of many emphasisers resembles that of disjuncts (see examples (2.17) and (2.18)):

(2.15) You are *certainly* welcome.  
(2.16) You are *very* welcome.  
(2.17) I’m *frankly* surprised at your behaviour.  
(2.18) *Frankly*, I’m surprised at your behaviour.

2.3.2 *Absolutely and positively at clause level*

Concerning their use at clause level, Quirk *et al.* (1985: 440) define adverbials as elements which are “distinct from subject, verb, object and complement”. Syntactically, adverbials are divided into four groups with distinct grammatical functions. On the one hand are those adverbials which are relatively integrated into the structure of the clause, i.e. adjuncts and subjuncts. On the other hand we find disjuncts and conjuncts, which tend to be situated in the periphery of the clause. A schematic overview of adverbials is presented in Figure 1 (based on Quirk *et al.* 1985: 503, Fig. 8.24). Both adverbs of interest can function as adjunct, disjunct and subjunct.
Before turning to a detailed analysis of the syntactic functions of *absolutely* and *positively*, we will briefly present the relevant positions at which these adverbs can occur in clauses. The three main positions are labelled ‘initial’ (I), ‘medial’ (M) and ‘end’ (E) position. Adverbials in initial position precede any other clause element. In general, this is the position immediately before the subject (2.19). Medial position is that position immediately after the subject and, when there is one, the auxiliary. A further difference is made between ‘initial medial’ (iM) and ‘end medial’ (eM) position. iM refers to the position between the subject and the auxiliary (2.20), while eM refers to the position immediately before the main verb (2.21). Finally, end position is defined as the position in the clause following all obligatory elements (2.22). (Quirk et al. 1985: 500)

(2.19)  *Suddenly*, the driver started the engine.    [I]
(2.20)  *She really* had delighted her audience.    [iM]
(2.21)  *She had really* delighted her audience.    [eM]
(2.22)  *He put the vase in the cabinet without a word.*    [E]

**Adjuncts**

We now turn to the discussion of the different syntactic functions of *absolutely* and *positively*. The first relevant category of adverbials is that of adjuncts. Adjuncts “are similar in [...] weight and balance [...] to other sentence elements such as subject and object” (Quirk et al. 1985: 613). Semantically, they can express space, time and process. As stated before, the original function of
both absolutely and positively is that of process adjunct, and more specifically that of process adjunct of manner. As such, they serve as an answer to questions as How...? and In what way ...? As Quirk et al. (1985: 556) note, all process adjuncts are normally predicational.

Process adjuncts of manner can usually be paraphrased by in a ... manner or in a ... way, where the vacant position is filled by the adverb's adjective base, e.g. in a positive way. Regarding their syntactic position, process adjuncts usually take up end position (E) or end medial (eM) position (see above):

(2.23) The point was put well.                          end position
(2.24) The point was well put.                          end medial position

Process adjuncts can also occupy initial position (I). As such, they tend to become subject-oriented subjuncts (see below) and no longer express the way in which something is done (Quirk et al. 1985: 556):

(2.25) She replied to the listeners’ questions courteously.  
      ‘She replied in a courteous manner.’                    adjunct
(2.26) Courteously, she replied to the listeners’ questions.  
      ‘She was courteous enough to reply.’                   subjunct

Subjuncts

The second type of adverbials relatively integrated into the structure of the clause is that of subjuncts. These adverbials are termed subjuncts because, according to Quirk et al. (1985: 566), they have “to a greater or lesser degree, a subordinate role in comparison with other clause elements.” Subjuncts can either have wide or narrow orientation. This means that they can either apply to the clause as a whole (wide orientation), or may be subordinated to an individual clause element, or to a part of a clause element (narrow orientation):

(2.27) Weatherwise, we are going to have a bad time this winter.  wide orientation
(2.28) He may really have injured innocent people.          narrow orientation

---

3 This means that process adjuncts normally only relate to the clause in which they occur. As such, they modify the main verb of that clause. Their scope is thus restricted to the clause only.
Subjuncts with wide orientation are divided into viewpoint and courtesy subjuncts, narrow orientated subjuncts into item subjuncts, focusing subjuncts, emphasisers and intensifiers. With regard to absolutely and positively, we have already stated that they semantically express degree and modality. In other words, they function as narrowly orientated subjuncts, more specifically as intensifiers and emphasisers:

(2.29) He actually sat next to her.  
(2.30) They fully appreciate our problems.

**Emphasising subjuncts** have a reinforcing effect on the truth value of (that part of) the clause over which they have scope (Quirk et al. 1985: 583). As such, they do not require that the constituent involved is gradable. However, if so, the adverbial functions as an intensifier. Indeed, in the examples above, ‘sat’ is a nongradable and ‘appreciate’ a gradable verb (*appreciate something very much vs. appreciate something a little*). Emphasising subjuncts are divided in two groups:

(a) actually, certainly, definitely, indeed, of course, etc.  
(b) frankly, honestly, literally, simply, etc.

Adverbs belonging to group (a) mainly express that what is being said is true, and can also function as content disjuncts (see below). Items of group (b) on the other hand convey “the speaker’s assertion that his words are the unvarnished truth” (Quirk et al. 1985: 583) and can also function as style disjuncts. Considering their syntactic position, emphasisers mostly precede the element they emphasise, and thus occur at medial position (M).

When an emphasiser directly occurs next to a given part of an utterance, and is not separated from it by punctuation or intonation, it is often difficult to unambiguously indicate its scope. In such cases, the scope of the adverb might be restricted to the part to which it is adjacent, or it can emphasise the utterance as a whole (Quirk et al. 1985).

Next to emphasising subjuncts, absolutely and positively can also function as **Intensifying subjuncts**. As such, they semantically express degree. Intensifying subjuncts indicate a certain point, either high or low, on an abstract intensity scale, which applies “to a predicate or to some part of a predicate, such as the predication, the VP, or even an item within the VP” (Quirk et al. 1985: 589). The use of such scaling devices implies that the element over which the intensifier has scope is
gradable (see above). As stated before, intensifiers are divided into amplifiers, which scale upwards, and downtoners, which scale downwards.

Downtoners are subdivided into approximators, compromisers, diminishers and minimisers. We will not discuss these categories here, given their irrelevance regarding the use of absolutely and positively. Amplifiers are further divided into maximisers and boosters, respectively denoting the upper extreme of the scale (e.g. absolutely) and boosters, which merely indicate a high degree (e.g. terribly). Quirk et al. (1985: 590) indicate that it is not rare for new expressions to enter in both of these classes, sometimes replacing already existing forms, given that the trend of hyperbole rapidly grows ineffectual.

Regarding their syntactic position, amplifiers in positive declarative sentences occur both in M and in E position (see examples (2.31) and (2.32)), the latter being favoured by maximisers that denote the absolute upper extreme of the scale. However, emphasisers occurring in this position show affinity with process adjuncts of manner:

(2.31) He completely denied it. [M]
(2.32) He denied it completely. [E]

The interpretation of example (2.32), in which the maximiser ‘completely’ occurs in end position, is indeed closer to ‘he denied it in every respect’. In negative declaratives, interrogatives and imperatives, E position is considered the default position:

(2.33) He did not deny it completely. [E]

It must be noted that neither the distinction between amplifiers and downtoners, nor that between their subcategories, is straightforward. In different contexts, some intensifiers can function differently. Additionally, much depends on the perspective of the speaker. An example of this ambiguity is found in example (2.31) above. In this sentence, the effect of the maximiser ‘completely’ is close to that of the booster strongly.
Disjuncts

After discussing both adjuncts and subjuncts, we now turn to the last relevant category for this research. As stated before, disjuncts tend to be situated in the periphery of the clause, i.e. they are “syntactically more detached and in some respects ‘superordinate’, in that they seem to have a scope that extends over the sentence as a whole” (Quirk et al. 1985: 613). Within the category of disjuncts, two main types are distinguished. To the first class, by far the smaller of the two, belong those adverbs which express the speaker’s comment on both style and form of what he is saying. These disjuncts are termed ‘style disjuncts’ (2.34). Next to these style disjuncts, Quirk et al. (1985: 615) distinguish ‘content’ or ‘attitudinal disjuncts’, which “make observations on the actual content of the utterance and its truth conditions” (2.35).

(2.34)  Frankly, I am tired.
(2.35)  Rightly, Mrs. Jensen consulted her lawyer.

In turn, content or attitudinal disjuncts are subdivided into disjuncts expressing degree of truth and those conveying evaluation or attitude towards a given utterance. Content disjuncts expressing degree of truth are split into three categories, either expressing conviction, some degree of doubt, or conveying the judgement of the speaker that what s/he says is true or false. Adverbs expressing conviction are, amongst others, certainly, incontestably, indeed, obviously, definitely, etc. Regarding absolutely and positively, the OED gives reference to this use for both adverbs. In colloquial speech, absolutely is used to express agreement, i.e. as a synonym for “yes, certainly, definitely; without a doubt”. The same is indicated concerning positively.

Syntactically, disjuncts mostly occupy initial (I) position (see examples (2.34) and (2.35) above). Some content disjuncts can be used as response to questions or as a comment on what was said by the previous speaker. In this case, they are typically accompanied by yes or no (2.36), or by an emphatic intonation:

(2.36)  “I have to be paid whether she passes her exams or not.” “Absolutely not.” Guido shook his head. (BNC)
In their chapter on sentence types and discourse functions, Quirk et al. (1985: 849) make notice of so-called ‘nonsentences’, which mostly occur in informal speech. To these belong interjections, such as mm, oops and wow, and ‘formulae’. According to Quirk et al. (1985: 852), formulae can “only in a very limited way [...] be analysed into clause elements”. They fulfil stereotypical functions in language such as greetings (e.g. good evening), warnings (e.g. watch it!) and apologies (e.g. my mistake). Next to these, they can also function as reaction signals expressing agreement or disagreement. Examples of disagreement are not at all and not likely. Agreement, on the other hand, is expressed by yes and OK, but in British English also by “[c]ertainly, [a]bsolutely, [r]ight, [e]xactly, [q]uite” (Quirk et al. 1985: 852, my emphasis).

Quirk et al. (1985) do not elaborate on this type of ‘formulae’, while it can be argued that they show close affinities with what researchers (Schiffrin 1987; Blakemore 1987; Fraser 1990, 1996; Brinton 1996; Aijmer & Simon-Vandenbergen 2011 amongst others) have defined as ‘discourse markers’. Schiffrin (1987: 31), who was one of the first linguists to bring this type of construction to attention, operationally defines them as “sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk”. She stresses to remain deliberately vague about these ‘units of talk’, which do not correspond to syntactic units, nor to propositions or speech acts.

Since Schiffrin defined these discourse markers, a great number of other terms have been suggested, as Brinton (1996: 29) rightfully points out:

“The plethora of other terms used include comment clause, connective, continuer, discourse connective, discourse-deictic item, discourse operator, discourse particle, discourse-shift marker, discourse word, filler, fumble, gambit, hedge, initiator, interjection, marker, marker of pragmatic structure, parenthetic phrase, (void) pragmatic connective, pragmatic expression, pragmatic particle, and reaction signal.”

However, Brinton once more suggests a new term to denote these structures, namely ‘pragmatic markers’, the reason for which is twofold. Firstly, ‘marker’ is preferred over terms as ‘word’ and ‘particle’, because the class of pragmatic markers includes both phrases and single-word elements.
Secondly, ‘pragmatic’ is chosen over ‘discourse’ because pragmatic markers not only fulfil textual functions (i.e. at discourse level), but also interpersonal functions (see below). It is for this reason that we will adopt the term ‘pragmatic marker’ in this study.

As already stated by Schiffrin (1987), Brinton (1996) confirms that, for the majority of scholars, the central function of pragmatic markers is that of expressing the relation between two consecutive utterances. Other scholars consider different functions eminent, e.g. the function of response signal or of maintaining the continuity of discourse.

It must be noted that no consensus has been reached about which elements do and which do not belong to the class of pragmatic markers. As stated by Keller (1979 in Brinton 1996), it is impossible to make an inventory of every single pragmatic marker, since relatively novel constructions can serve as pragmatic markers. Examples upon which most scholars agree are amongst others oh, I mean, therefore, actually and because. From these examples, it is clear that the group of pragmatic markers is a heterogeneous set “which [is] difficult to place within traditional word class[es]” (Brinton 1996: 35).

In her description of pragmatic markers, Brinton (1996: 33) points out that they are predominantly used in oral discourse, but are not restricted to it. However, in written language pragmatic markers often carry a stigma. From a phonological point of view, they tend to be reduced and unstressed, and often form a separate tone group. Syntactically, pragmatic markers mostly occur in sentence-initial position, i.e. before the subject or any other obligatory element, but both medial and final position are also possible.

The semantic features of pragmatic markers prove to be very important regarding this study. As Brinton (1996: 33) points out, pragmatic markers have little or no propositional meaning, and Erman (1987: 15, cf. Brinton 1996: 34) literally states that they are not completely void of meaning, but “admittedly, their original or literal meaning is only present to a certain degree”. Associated with that is the fact that they seem to be optional rather than obligatory, although some scholars indicate that removing them entails “removing a powerful clue” (Fraser 1988: 22, cf. Brinton 1996: 34). Indeed, even though pragmatic markers may be grammatically optional, they do serve a number of pragmatic functions, and if omitted, the discourse is often rendered unnatural, impolite or disjointed.
Brinton (1996: 35-40) indicates two types of pragmatic functions: textual functions on the one hand and interpersonal ones on the other. Textual functions range from initiating discourse and claiming the attention of the hearer to marking a boundary in discourse or marking 'sequential dependence'. Most pertinent to this research topic are the interpersonal functions, of which two are identified.

The first one is “to express a response or a reaction to the preceding discourse or attitude towards the following discourse, including also “back-channel” signals of understanding and continued attention spoken while another speaker is having his or her turn” (Brinton 1996: 37). This function is described as being subjective, in the sense that it relates to the attitude of the speaker. The second function, which operates on interpersonal level, is to accomplish the effect of cooperation or intimacy between the speaker and hearer. This includes the confirmation of shared assumption, the expression of understanding what has previously been uttered and ‘saving face’ or being polite (Brinton 1996: 38). Both of these functions can thus be related to Quirk et al.'s category of formulae, which are, amongst others, used to express understanding and agreement and as such establish a common ground of shared knowledge between the speaker and hearer.

Following Tao (2007: 7) pragmatic markers can be regarded as advanced forms of disjuncts. Some disjuncts can serve as a comment on a previous utterance, a function which they have in common with pragmatic markers. However, pragmatic markers, which are predominantly used in discourse, more prominently fulfil interpersonal and textual functions. As Carretero (2010: 215) affirms, absolutely can be independently used\(^5\) in various ways, e.g. as emphatic affirmative response or as marker of agreement about information or opinion. An example of this independent use is:

\begin{align}
(2.37) & \quad \text{“You kept so busy it seems a waste of time to ask you what your social life was like as a student nurse?”} \\
& \quad \text{“It was nil. Absolutely. There was never any time at all.” (BNC)}
\end{align}

\(^4\) In doing so, Brinton (1996) follows Halliday’s (1970) tripartition of the functions of language. He identifies the textual, interpersonal and ideational mode, the last of which refers to the expression of content. This mode is labelled ‘propositional’ by Traugott (1982).

\(^5\) i.e. without a head.
The OED indicates this independent, pragmatic use for both adverbs:

(2.38) **Positively**, it took away my breath. (OED)

(2.39) “I trust that we are still brothers-in-arms?”

“Absolutely. Pals.” (OED)

These examples show that both adverbs can be used as a response to questions (2.39) and as markers of agreement ((2.37) and (2.38)).

As a conclusion, it can be said that the adverbs *absolutely* and *positively* can be used either at phrase level, clause level or discourse level. At phrase level, they occur as premodifiers, and more specifically as emphasisers or intensifiers, expressing modality and degree respectively. Regarding their use at clause level, both adverbs can function as manner adjuncts, specifying a process, as intensifying or emphasising subjuncts, and finally as attitudinal disjuncts. Finally, at discourse level, both *absolutely* and *positively* can function as pragmatic markers.
3 Grammaticalisation

In this chapter we will discuss the theory of grammaticalisation. In a first part we will generally describe this concept, discussing a number of concepts generally related to it. Secondly, we will discuss how grammaticalisation operates on the various domains of language. At morphosyntactic level we will discuss various principles of grammaticalisation, the most important of which are divergence, layering, specialisation, persistence and decategorialisation. At phonological level we will explain the concept of phonological erosion. Finally, at semantic and pragmatic level, we will discuss the notions of metaphorical and metonymic processes, semantic bleaching and (inter)subjectification.

3.1 Grammaticalisation in general

The linguist who coined the term “grammaticalisation” was the Indo-Europeanist Antoine Meillet, who defined it as “the attribution of grammatical character to an erstwhile autonomous word” (Meillet 1912: 131, translated in Hopper & Traugott 2003: 19). Since Meillet proposed this term, various other terms such as “grammaticisation” and “grammatisation” have also been used. Since the majority of scholars use the term “grammaticalisation”, it is this term that will be used in this study. Hopper & Traugott (2003: xv) refine the definition of Meillet:

“We now define grammaticalization as the change whereby lexical items and constructions come in certain linguistic contexts to serve grammatical functions and, once grammaticalized, continue to develop new grammatical functions.”

It is this definition that will be used in this study. As a preliminary mark, it must be noted that grammaticalisation must not be seen as a force independent of language users (Hopper & Traugott 2003: xv). Rather, it must be seen as a type of language change which can only occur by virtue of language users. As Hopper (1987: 142), in his article about the concept of emergent grammar, states, “structure, or regularity, comes out of discourse and is shaped by discourse as much as it shapes
discourse in an on-going process.” Therefore, grammaticalisation, defined as a type of language change, results from form-meaning negotiation between speaker and hearer in face-to-face interaction. The importance of language use in a theory of grammaticalisation cannot be underestimated. This is confirmed, amongst others, by Bybee (2001: 16): “the result of innumerable communicative acts is to change language and to create and recreate grammar” and by Barlow & Kemmer (2000: ix):

“For one thing, units of language [...] are not fixed but dynamic, subject to creative extension and reshaping with use. [...] Usage events are crucial to the ongoing structuring and operation of the linguistic system. [...] Thus, usage events play a double role in the system: they both result from, and also shape, the linguistic system itself in a kind of feedback loop.”

3.1.1 Grammaticalisation: synchronic and diachronic dimension

Grammaticalisation can be studied both from a synchronic and a diachronic point of view. Where the work of early scholars focuses on grammaticalisation from a diachronic perspective, more recent work uses a synchronic point of view. Diachronically, grammaticalisation is studied from a “source and pathway” perspective (Traugott & Heine 1991: 1). It studies the sources of grammatical forms and the steps of change they undergo through time. On the other hand, from a synchronic viewpoint, grammaticalisation is considered a syntactic, discourse pragmatic phenomenon. From this point of view grammaticalisation is the study of the fluid patterns of language use. Indeed, ongoing (diachronic) processes are reflected in the synchronous language situation (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 2). As Ariel (2008: 112) affirms, “synchrony is much better understood by reference to diachrony, where structures are analyzed in relation to the processes that gave rise to them.”

The diachronic point of view thus focuses on how language changes through time. However, it must be noted that not all language change is a form of grammaticalisation (see Hopper 1991; Lehmann 1991). Instead, grammaticalisation needs to be considered as a certain kind of language change. This change is caused by mechanisms which are specific for grammaticalisation, namely reanalysis and analogy (see section 0 below). In general, grammatical change is characterised by an
increased syntacticisation in its early stages and by a loss of morphosyntactic independence in the later stages (Traugott & Heine 1991: 3).

3.1.2 Conditions for grammaticalisation

After having defined grammaticalisation, we now turn to its characterising conditions. In other words, how a distinction is made between language change in general and grammaticalisation. Traugott & Heine (1991: 7-9) indicate three prerequisites: semantic suitability, perceptual salience, and frequency.

Regarding **semantic suitability**, cross-linguistic research has shown that grammaticalisation does not randomly occur in any domain of language. Instead, we find that “for any given grammatical domain, there is only a restrictive set of lexical fields, and within them only a restricted set of lexical items, that are likely to be sources [of grammaticalisation]” (Traugott & Heine 1991: 8). Widely attested examples are modals which derive from terms of possession or desire, and case markers (including prepositions and postpositions) which derive from terms for body parts, e.g. *back* used as a lexical item referring to a body part can also be used as a preposition. In general, grammaticalisation affects forms whose “semantic content or the inferences one can draw from [them] serve the purpose of [...] producing discourse” (Traugott & Heine 1991: 8).

The second prerequisite identified by Traugott & Heine (1991: 8-9) is that of **perceptual salience**. Perceptual salience, or the *salient discourse pattern* (Ariel 2008), acts as a constraint on the first condition; it is “the last gate-keeper on the road to grammaticization” (Ariel 2008: 189). Ariel (2008: 189) states that any discourse pattern may bring about conventionalisation, but that grammaticalisation can only emerge out of salient discourse patterns. Salient discourse patterns are privileged patterns in language use. They may be salient because of their exceptional form-function correlations, because they are compact forms expressing complex messages and thus useful, or because they have a high predictability in specific contexts. The most important feature which makes discourse patterns salient, is their high accessibility, or the fact that they are “foremost on our minds” (Ariel 2008: 189) for us, language users. Perceptual salience explains the persistence of minor patterns in discourse, such as the relatively small class of irregular verbs in English (cf. Hare & Elman 1995) next to more general patterns, because of their privileged status.
A third and last condition is that of **frequency**. In general, it is assumed that the more frequently a form occurs, the more grammaticalised it is (Givón 1979; Bybee & Pagliuca 1985). Moreover, frequency is a matrix for grammaticalisation, given that “the more frequently a form is used, the more opportunities speakers have of applying the [grammatical change], and hence the more entrenched the change becomes for frequent words” (Ariel 2008: 186). Traugott & Heine (1991: 9) note that it is only frequency which actually leads to grammaticalisation.

Generally, a distinction is made between two types of frequency: ‘type frequency’ and ‘token frequency’. Type frequency refers to the number of members of a particular class of forms (e.g. nouns). An example of this kind of frequency is the number of nouns whose plural is formed by adding the suffix -s (e.g. *shoes*). This number is very high. Opposed to this is the low number of nouns that form their plural by adding -en (e.g. *children*). However, type frequency is not as important as token frequency. Token frequency refers to the number of times a particular form occurs in texts, or “the changes in frequency of forms or constructions over time” (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 127). An example of token frequency relevant for this research is the number of times *absolutely* (or *positively*) occurs as a manner adjunct as opposed to (more recent) uses such as emphasising subjunct.

As stated above, it is frequency which actually leads to grammaticalisation. The reason for this is that the repetition of forms may lead to their “emancipation” (Haiman 1994 in Hopper & Traugott 2003: 127). In other words, the higher the frequency of a particular form, the more it occurs as separate from its earlier discourse contexts and the greater its syntactic freedom. This in turn enables it to occur with a wider variety of other forms in a wider variety of contexts. (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 127)

3.1.3 **Unidirectionality**

After having discussed the prerequisites of grammaticalisation, we now turn to the hypothesis of unidirectionality. Since the study of grammaticalisation is in fact the study of a certain type of language change, a preliminary notion is that of a ‘cline’ of change. This term was already used by Halliday (1961), and has also been denoted as ‘continuum’, ‘pathway’, ‘channel’, etc.
The ‘cline of grammaticalisation’ is defined by Traugott & Heine (1991: 4) as a “pathway that channels change through a limited number of structures that are minimally different from one another”. Change thus does not occur abruptly. Instead, a particular grammatical form goes “through a series of small transitions” (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 6). The cline of grammaticalisation can be represented as ‘A > A/B > B’, in which a particular form A occurs before a particular form B, and not the other way around. An important note regarding unidirectionality is that changes do not have to go to completion, i.e. “they do not have to move all the way along a cline” (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 131). Therefore, a better cline of unidirectionality is ‘A > A/B (→B)’.

The term cline can be used both at synchronic and at diachronic level. From a synchronic point of view, a cline must be conceptualised as a continuum. On the one side of the cline are fuller or ‘lexical’ forms, on the other ‘grammatical’ or reduced forms (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 6). Diachronically, a cline is conceptualised as a pathway, such as in the definition by Traugott & Heine given above. A cline of grammaticalisation that is generally agreed upon by linguists is the following (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 7):

content item > grammatical word > clitic > inflectional affix

This cline represents that a particular grammatical form, over time, can change from content item to grammatical word, to clitic and finally to inflectional affix. Unidirectionality means that “each item to the right is more clearly grammatical and less lexical than its partner to the left” (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 7). In other words, this means that a particular form moves in a unidirectional way from a point on the left of the cline to a point more on the right. Therefore, the cluster points on the cline cannot be arranged in a different order:

*inflectional affix > clitic > grammatical word > content item

Nonetheless, clear boundaries between the various cluster points do not exist. Instead, we must speak of zones of ambiguity in which forms show characteristics of adjacent cluster points. This ambiguity proves to be very interesting. Given that change is a gradual process and does not occur abruptly, ambiguous forms are a sign of undergoing change.
Relating unidirectionality to Hopper & Traugott’s definition of grammaticalisation in section 0 above, we present the following cline (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 100):

- lexical item used in specific linguistic contexts > syntax > morphology

This cline shows that a lexical item over time gradually comes to serve grammatical functions (i.e. belonging to the syntax of language) and may continue to develop into a morphological form. Traugott & Heine (1991: 4-6) state that clines of grammaticalisation typically involve three processes. The first is increase in abstractness (from concrete to abstract meaning), the second increase in bondedness (from autonomous element to affix) and the third is termed desemanticisation (from full to more empty semantic and pragmatic meaning). These concepts will be further elaborated in section 0 below.

As Traugott & Heine (1991: 6) rightfully indicate, “virtually nothing is exceptionless”. Some counterexamples to the hypothesis of unidirectionality do exist. A much-cited example is the development of the Estonian emphatic particle *ep* (Campbell 1991: 291 in Hopper & Traugott 2003: 59). This particle originally functioned as a bound clitic which, by phonological change, developed from *–pa/-pää* into *–p*. Later it was reinterpreted as an autonomous particle and as such precedes the word it emphasises. In this case, grammaticalisation follows the cline ‘clitic > grammatical word’, which is opposite to the general cline of grammaticalisation ‘content item > grammatical word > clitic > inflectional affix’.

Concluding, unidirectionality is a hypothesis indicating that a particular, more lexical, form A occurs before a particular, more grammatical form B, and not the other way around, without it being necessary for A to disappear. In general, this can be presented as $A > A/B > B$. Between these stages are zones of transition in which (functional, semantic, morphological, etc.) ambiguity exists. These zones reflect the gradualness of change. Clines of unidirectionality of this type are attested in various languages, although some counterexamples do exist.

3.1.4 Mechanisms involved in grammaticalization

Traugott & Heine (1991: 7) identify four different mechanisms involved in grammaticalisation. These are metaphorical transfer, metonymic transfer, reanalysis and analogy. The first two will be
presented in section 0, in which grammaticalisation will be discussed from a semantic and pragmatic point of view.

**Reanalysis**

Reanalysis is said to be the driving force of grammaticalisation. It refers to the fact that, in a given situation, ambiguity might arise, i.e. various interpretations of the same structure might be possible. This potential ambiguity can lead to the hearer interpreting what the speaker meant in a different way. In turn, this leads to the coexistence of two interpretations of a structurally identical surface string. Reanalysis is thus a process of abductive reasoning. It is said to be covert, i.e. indiscernible in the surface structure of the utterance, “until some recognizable modification in the [form] reveals it” (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 50). An example of reanalysis is found in French negation (see below).

Five types of change are directly involved in reanalysis: change in constituency (‘rebracketing’), in hierarchical structure, in category labels, in grammatical relations and in cohesion (Harris & Campbell 1995: 61 in Hopper & Traugott 2003: 51). Each case of reanalysis shows a number of these characteristics.

While all cases of grammaticalisation involve reanalysis, reanalysis does not always result in grammaticalisation. An example of this is the development of the Estonian emphatic particle *ep* (see section 0 above), which developed from a bound clitic. In this case, reanalysis has led to an increase in freedom instead of to an increase in bondedness.

**Analogy**

While reanalysis is a covert process in the sense that it only happens in the mind of a language user and not in the actual form of the linguistic expression, analogy refers to the overt process of “the attraction of extant forms to already existing constructions” (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 63-64). As such, it is immediately discernible in the surface structure of language. Both processes involve innovation, albeit along different axes. Reanalysis operates on linear constituent level, i.e. along the ‘syntagmatic’ axis. Analogy on the other hand operates along the ‘paradigmatic’ axis, in that it

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6 Abductive reasoning is defined by Andersen (1973: 55 in Hopper & Traugott 2003) as follows: “Abduction proceeds from an observed result, invokes a law, and infers that something may be the case.”

30
involves the choice between options at a given constituent node. (Jakobson & Halle 1956 in Hopper & Traugott 2003: 64)

At first, analogy had a rather narrow and local interpretation. As such, it was defined by Meillet as a mechanism of equation (or ‘proportion’) that regularises (especially morphological) irregularities in grammar. An example is (3.1):

\[
(3.1) \quad \text{stone: stones} = \text{shoe: } X \\
X = \text{shoes}
\]

In Old English, the plural of *stan* (*stone*) was *stanes*, whereas that of *shoe* was *shoen*. This was later analogised to the PDE-form *shoes*. (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 64)

Kiparsky (1968) later defines analogy as rule extension, the “generalization or optimization of a rule form a relatively limited domain to a far broader one” (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 64). It is thus often termed ‘generalisation’. This generalisation need not achieve completion; in PDE we still find *child-children* next to *stone-stones*. Since analogy, in contrast to reanalysis, is an overt mechanism and as such immediately discernible, it is often the prime evidence for scholars that a change has taken place. (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 64)

Next to considering analogy from the viewpoint of the generalisation of types of linguistic structures, it can also be considered as a generalisation via patterns of usage. This means that generalisation can also occur due to the frequent usage of a particular form. This type of generalisation involves high token frequency, in that token frequency reflects the number of times structures are used (see section 3.1.2 Conditions for grammaticalisation above).

Analogy can thus be described as the overt mechanism of rule generalisation, both via generalisation of types of linguistic structures and via patterns of usage. It is a paradigmatic mechanism which makes the covert, indiscernible cases of reanalysis visible in language. As such, its importance in the theory of grammaticalisation need not be underestimated.

Reanalysis and analogy often occur in cyclical interaction. A well-known example of this is the development of French negation (Schwegler 1988 in Hopper & Traugott 2003: 65-66; Hock 1991 (1986): 194). For reasons of continuity, the example sentences were re-numbered following the numbering of this paper.
I. “Negation was accomplished by placing the negative particle ne before the verb.”

II. “A verb of motion negated by ne could optionally be reinforced by the pseudo-object noun pas ‘step’ in the context of verbs of movement:

(3.2) Il ne va (pas).
he not goes (step)
‘He doesn’t go (a step).’”

III. “The word pas was reanalyzed as a negator particle in a structure of the type ne Vmovement (pas).”

IV. “Pas was extended analogically to new verbs having nothing to do with movement; i.e., the structure was now ne V (pas):

(3.3) Il ne sait pas.
he not knows not
‘He doesn’t know.’”

V. “The particle pas was reanalyzed as an obligatory concomitant of ne for general negation: ne V pas.”

VI. “In the spoken vernacular pas came to replace ne via two stages: (ne) V pas (reanalysis of ne as optional), V pas (reanalysis by loss of ne), resulting in

(3.4) Il sait pas.
he knows not
‘He doesn’t know.’”

(Schwegler 1988 in Hopper & Traugott 2003: 65-66, my emphasis)

In step III, reanalysis is the driving force of the grammaticalisation of pas, which then is spread by analogy in step IV. In step V, reanalysis occurs again, so that pas is further grammaticalised.

3.2 Various dimensions of grammaticalisation

In section 3.1 Grammaticalisation in general we focused on grammaticalisation in general, on unidirectionality and on the mechanisms of reanalysis and analogy. In this section, the specific parameters of grammaticalisation will be discussed. Heine & Reh (1984: 15 in Traugott & Heine 1991: 2) have stated that grammaticalisation is “an evolution whereby linguistic units lose in semantic complexity, pragmatic significance, syntactic freedom, and phonetic substance.” This definition points out that grammaticalisation can be described from various points of view. Therefore, in this section we will focus on the morphosyntactic, phonological, semantic and pragmatic dimensions of grammaticalisation.
Before we begin our discussion, it must be noted that all of these levels interact with each other. This is a logical result of the fact that “a lexical item by definition has semantic as well as syntactic, morphological, and phonological properties” (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 75) and of the nature of grammaticalisation. As a particular lexical form in certain linguistic contexts develops grammatical functions, it is clear that both semantic and grammatical mechanisms influence this process.

3.2.1 Morphosyntactic dimension

In this section, grammaticalisation will be treated from a morphosyntactic perspective. Hopper (1991: 20) questions if any ‘intra-language’ principles exist that identify cases of grammaticalisation; in other words, how grammaticalised constructions can be identified without comparative or historical data. He states that according to Lehmann (1985, in Hopper 1991: 20-21, see also Brinton 1996: 51-52) five such principles exist. The first is PARADIGMATICISATION, which is the tendency for grammaticalised forms to be arranged in paradigms. Secondly, OBLIGATORIFICATION is the tendency for optional forms to become obligatory. As a third principle, he identifies CONDENSATION, or the shortening of forms. Fourthly, COALESCENCE implies increase in bondedness, eventually resulting in the collapsing of adjacent forms. As a last principle, Lehmann talks about FIXATION, i.e. the fixation of free linear orders.

According to Hopper (1991), these principles prove to be very useful in the study of grammaticalisation. However, they reveal characteristics of grammaticalisation at a fairly advanced stage, at a point at which grammaticalisation is already unambiguously identifiable. Therefore, Hopper (1991: 21) adds five more principles which allow the recognition of grammaticalisation at its incipient stages, “where the question more cogently arises as to whether we might speak of grammaticization.” These five principles are termed divergence, layering, specialisation, persistence and decategorialisation.

Divergence

Divergence, also termed ‘split’, is defined by Hopper (1991: 24) as follows: “[...] when a lexical form undergoes grammaticalization, [...] the original form may remain as an autonomous lexical element and undergo the same changes as any other lexical items.” Thus, divergence does not necessarily
entail that older layers disappear. As such, it results in a coexistence of multiples of forms “having a common etymology, but diverging functionally” (Hopper 1991: 24). In some contexts, a particular form may take on new meanings and functions, while retaining older meanings and functions in other contexts (Hopper & Traugott 2002: 122). These forms might phonologically be similar or different from each other.

Divergence can be applied to French negation (see section 0), in which the originally autonomous word pas developed an extra function, that of negative particle. In this case, both forms are phonologically identical, but serve a different function in different domains. An example of divergence resulting in phonologically different forms is that of the word one into the definite article a(n).

Layering

Layering is said to be a synchronic result of unidirectionality (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 124-125). Hopper (1991: 23) describes it as “the prominent fact that very often more than one technique is available in a language to serve similar or even identical functions”. It results from the fact that “within a broad functional domain, new layers are continually emerging” (Hopper 1991: 22) without immediately replacing already existing sets of equivalent forms. As a result, similar or identical functions of language can be expressed by various techniques.

As opposed to divergence, which involves different degrees of grammaticalisation of the same form, layering is related to the existence of various forms with a similar function within the same functional domain. In turn, each of these various forms may have a different degree of grammaticalisation. An example of layering is found in the expression of the past in English. The periphrastic expression we have used it is more grammaticalised than we sang, in which the past is formed by an ablaut. However, both constructions similarly express the same function, i.e. they indicate that something happened in the past.

The distinction between layering and divergence is often difficult to be made, given that multiple divergences can result in multiple layers (Hopper 1991: 24-25). Additionally, it must be noted that the principles of layering and divergence have caused a lot of confusion within the theory of grammaticalisation.
Specialisation

The third principle identified by Hopper (1991) is termed ‘specialisation’. Specialisation is “the process of reducing the variety of formal choices available as the meanings assume greater grammatical generality” (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 116). In other words, grammaticalisation often involves a reduction of ways in which the same meaning or function can be expressed. As this reduction takes place, the grammatical meaning of the elements which remain become more general. Again, this can be applied to French negation (see section 0). In Old French, various forms were used to reinforce negation, among others pas (‘step, pace’), mie (‘crumb’), gote (‘drop’) and point (‘dot, point’). In the sixteenth century, two of them were predominantly used, and continue to be used in the modern period, namely pas and point. Through time, both forms became grammatically more general. (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 117)

Persistence

The principle of persistence implies that a lexical form which over time develops into a more grammatical form retains traces of its original meaning and function in that new form. Moreover, it is possible and often so that this original use poses constraints on the grammatical distribution of the new form. In the example of French negation, persistence is found in the present-day use of point. Whereas pas has developed into an unmarked complement of ne in negation, point cannot be used in this way. It can only be used when contradicting a previous assertion. (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 117)

Decategorialisation

The last principle of grammaticalisation identified by Hopper (1991) is that of decategorialisation. By decategorialisation we mean the tendency for relatively prototypical members of classes such as nouns and verbs to lose the syntactic privileges characteristic of those categories. Instead, they develop characteristics of secondary categories such as prepositions and adjectives. In general, decategorialisation can be represented by the following cline:

major category (> intermediate category) > minor category
An example of decategorialisation is the use of while. Historically, *hwil* was a noun indicating a length of time. This meaning is still preserved in PDE, e.g. *we stayed there for a while*. Nowadays, *while* is also used as a conjunction signalling temporal or concessive organisation in discourse, e.g. *while we were sleeping* and *while you like peaches, I like nectarines*. As such, it is also an example of divergence given that two phonologically identical forms serve another function. The transition from full lexical form (noun) to conjunction follows the cline from major to minor category. (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 90–92, 107 based on Traugott & König 1991)

### 3.2.2 Phonological dimension

Grammaticalisation not only operates at morphosyntactic level. Over time, generalisation of grammatical function often correlates with what is called ‘phonological “attrition” or “erosion”’ (Bybee & Pagliuca 1985: 60; Heine, Claudi & Hünnemeyer 1991: 214-215 in Brinton 1996: 52). This entails a “loss of phonological substance, from full to reduced form and eventually to zero” (Brinton 1996: 52). A high degree of phonological reduction thus mirrors a further stage of grammaticalisation. As such, “a morpheme with a highly generalized meaning will exhibit a greater phonological reduction and fusion than a morpheme with a more specific meaning” (Bybee & Pagliuca 1985: 60). An example of phonological reduction is found in the development of the word *one* into the definite article *a(n)* (which is also an example of divergence, see above).

### 3.2.3 Semantic and pragmatic dimension

In this section, we will focus on the effects of grammaticalisation at semantic and pragmatic levels of language. Semantics primarily focuses on (typically arbitrary) meanings “that are relatively stable out of context” (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 76). Pragmatics on the other hand is primarily concerned with “speakers’ indirect meaning, beyond what is said, and also hearers’ interpretation” (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 76). Pragmatics is an important domain in the study of grammaticalisation, given that it concerns “the role of speakers and hearers negotiating meaning in communicative situations” (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 71). As stated in section 3.1 Grammaticalisation in general, the importance of actual language use cannot be underestimated.

Central in the early stages of grammaticalisation are changes in meaning and the cognitive strategies which underlie them (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 76). These cognitive strategies, which are
closely linked to (pragmatic) expressivity, are termed metaphorical and metonymic changes. They arise in the context of flow of speech. As such, conversational implicatures frequently become part of the semantic polysemy\(^7\) of a form (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 82). Later stages of grammaticalisation typically show meaning loss or ‘bleaching’ as a result of the ‘entrenchment’\(^8\) of forms (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 76). We will first discuss the pragmatic processes of metaphor and metonymy, and then continue to describe semantic bleaching. Finally, we will discuss subjectification and (inter)subjectification.

**Metaphorical and metonymic processes**

Metaphorical processes are among the most widely recognised processes in meaning change. They have been defined in various ways (Heine et al. 1991b amongst others). Two common aspects of these definitions include the understanding of one thing in terms of another, and the fact that meaning typically develops from a basic, usually concrete meaning to a more abstract one. Hopper & Traugott (2003: 84) define them as “processes of inference across conceptual boundaries”.

Traditionally, metaphorical change is regarded as a semantic process. Recent research however has shown that it is based in communicative use and it is therefore more appropriate to consider it as a pragmatic process. Given that a particular semantic construction belonging to a particular domain is transferred to another domain, metaphor is primarily analogical in character. An example of a metaphorical process is the development of temporal terms out of spatial ones. These metaphors include statements as *space is an object, time is space*, as in the development of *back* referring to the back of one’s body (object) into *back* referring to a place or time, e.g. *three years back*. (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 84-85)

As stated above, metaphor is considered an analogical process. However, it was argued above that the driving force of grammaticalisation at morphosyntactic level is reanalysis, and not analogy. Therefore, other semantic and pragmatic processes must be at work. These processes are

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\(^7\) Polysemy is opposed to homonymy and monosemy, and means that a particular form has different meanings which are conceptually related to each other. (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 77)

\(^8\) ‘Entrenchment’, also termed ‘habit formation’ refers to the fact that “psychological events [leave] some kind of trace that facilitates their re-occurrence” (Langacker 1999: 93).
termed ‘metonymic’ and “depend on contiguity and association in the flow of speech” (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 87).

Metonymic change is best described as a form of semantic reanalysis (Brinton 1996: 55). It is a cognitive process in which “one conceptual entity ... provides access to another conceptual entity ... within the same domain” (Kövecses & Radden 1998: 38 in Hopper & Traugott 2003: 88). An example of metonymic change is the use of the Latin word lingua, which originally only meant ‘tongue’ and by “association of activity with an enabling factor” (Traugott & König 1991: 210) acquired the extra meaning ‘language’.

Semantic bleaching

It has often been argued that grammaticalisation involves loss of meaning. Various scholars termed this ‘semantic bleaching’, ‘fading’, ‘weakening’ or even ‘desemanticisation’. Meillet (1958: 139 in Brinton 1996: 54), for example, speaks of the “loss of “concrete signification” in words undergoing grammaticalization”. Bybee & Pagliuca (1985: 74) consider semantic bleaching “a prerequisite to grammaticalization because grammatical functions in themselves are necessarily abstract.” An example of semantic bleaching is the development of French negation, in which the lexical item pas, originally meaning ‘step, pace’, in certain contexts gradually lost its meaning, simply expressing negation (see section 0).

Hopper & Traugott (2003: 94-98) argue that semantic bleaching can only be found in the very late stages of grammaticalisation. The first stages are characterised by pragmatic enrichment and semantic strengthening, due to the processes of metaphorical and metonymic changes. They do emphasise that “there is no doubt that, over time, meanings tend to become weakened during the process of grammaticalization” (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 94). Finally, it must be noted that due to persistence of earlier meanings, even the use of semantically weakened forms can be restricted to particular contexts.
Subjectification and intersubjectification

Two important pragmatic processes regarding grammaticalisation are subjectification and intersubjectification. These terms “denote processes whereby a linguistic element acquires increased (inter)subjective meaning” (Davidse, Vandelanotte & Cuyckens 2010: 1). These processes were already studied by Bréal ([1900] 1964) but it is only in the last two or three decades that they have received more attention (Benveniste 1966; Lyons 1977; Traugott 1989; Langacker 1990, 2002; Traugott & Dasher 2002 among many others). Traugott defines subjectification as follows:

“Subjectification is the semasiological process whereby linguistic expressions acquire subjective meaning. In particular, it refers to the tendency whereby lexical material “tend[s] to become increasingly based in the SP[eaker]/W[riter]’s subjective belief state or attitude to what is being said and how it is being said.” (Traugott 2003: 125)

Expressions of subjectivity are thus related to the speaker and the speaker’s attitude. Importantly, Traugott makes a difference between ‘pragmatic subjectivity’ and ‘semantic subjectivity’. Pragmatic subjectivity refers to the fact that, in a general sense, all language is marked by subjectivity “in that any selection from the lexical and/or grammatical repertoire passes through the speaker” (Davidse et al. 2010: 9). This type of subjectivity must be distinguished from ‘semantic subjectivity’, in which the attitude of the speaker is part of “the expression’s inherent meaning” (De Smet & Verstraete 2006: 385). Davidse et al. (2010: 5) note that subjectification becomes a form of grammaticalisation only when the newly acquired meaning “comes to be conventionally associated with the form” (cf. entrenchment, see above). Finally, according to Traugott (2010: 40), subjectification is associated with primary grammaticalisation, i.e. the change from lexical to grammatical constructions. The reason

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9 Traugott (2010: 30) makes “an important (though not rigid)” distinction between ‘-ity’ and ‘-ation’; the first refers to the synchronic state, the latter to the diachronic process.
10 Next to Traugott’s point of view, the second main research strain regarding the study of (inter)subjectification is that of Langacker (2006). In this study, we will adopt Traugott’s view on these processes.
11 Semasiology is “that branch of philology which deals with the meanings of words [and] sense-development”. It is the study of semantic change.
12 The notion of ‘subjectivity’ has several interpretations. In everyday language, it is considered as being influenced by personal opinion, while in scientific language it is considered as not based on empirical fact. In linguistics, however, it must be considered as broadly referring to the centrality of the speaker, i.e. the subject, in language. (Davidse et al. 2010: 1)
for this is that primary grammaticalisation “often requires prior strengthening of pragmatic inferences that arise in very specific linguistic contexts prior to their [...] reanalysis as grammatical elements” (Traugott 2010: 40).

Intersubjectification is described as “the semasiological process whereby meanings come over time to encode ... SP/W’s attention to the ‘self’ of AD[dressee]/R[reader] in both an epistemic and social sense” (Traugott 2003: 130). Expressions of intersubjectivity thus represent the speaker’s attention to “the addressee’s self-image” (Traugott 2010: 29) and are related to the addressee and the addressee’s face. As Davidse et al. (2010: 4) rightly indicate both subjectification and intersubjectification involve reanalysis. Both processes involve a change of (pragmatic) meaning which arises in “the context of speaker-hearer negotiation of meaning” (Traugott 2010: 60).

Traugott relates (inter)subjectification to the unidirectionality of grammaticalisation. In her early theorising, she proposes the following cline (Traugott 1982: 257):

propositional > (textual /) expressive

This cline is based on the three functional domains of language identified by Halliday & Hasan (1976). These domains are the textual, interpersonal and ideational domain. In Traugott’s cline, ‘propositional’ refers to the ideational domain and ‘expressive’ to the interpersonal domain. The textual domain comprises connectives (and, therefore), anaphoric and cataphoric pronouns, etc. Some of these serve contentful purposes at a local level, while others, e.g. pragmatic markers, “serve procedural purposes of expressing speaker’s attitude to the text under production” (Davidse et al. 2010: 31). The ideational domain refers to how our experience of the world is represented in language. Finally, the interpersonal or ‘expressive’ component expresses the attitude of the speaker in speaker-interlocutor interaction. Traugott proposes that, over time, lexical items belonging to the propositional domain develop textual and expressive meanings. The term ‘subjectivity’ was not mentioned in this early theorising. However, subjective meanings for a large part overlap with expressive meanings (Traugott & Dasher 2002: 94).

Traugott (2010: 34-35) considers intersubjectification a process which arises out of subjectification. She states that subjectified polysemyes of a particular item arise later than
propositional ones, and that intersubjectified polysemies arise later than subjectified ones. The cline above could thus be related to subjective and intersubjective expressions as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>non-/less subjective</th>
<th>&gt; subjective</th>
<th>&gt; intersubjective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>propositional/ideational</td>
<td>&gt; expressive/interpersonal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(based on Traugott 2010: 34)

Finally, the semantic-pragmatic processes of subjectification and intersubjectification also affect the syntactic level of language. Traugott (2010: 60) states that subjectified elements tend to be used in positions peripheral to the clause or constituent. In VO languages such as English, subjectified elements are mainly associated with the left periphery. Examples of this leftward shift can be found in the development of pragmatic markers (see Chapter 4 Grammaticalisation and pragmatic markers; Traugott & Dasher 2002 amongst others) and the development of adjectives from descriptive to affective meanings (see Adamson 2000).

### 3.3 Grammaticalisation and renewal

If all grammaticalisation ultimately leads to decategorialisation, semantic bleaching and phonological reduction, language would no longer be able to serve the purpose of communication. Obviously, this is not the case. The reason for this can be found in the mechanism of renewal. Renewal, as stated by Hopper & Traugott (2003: 122), “results primarily in alternate ways of saying approximately the same thing, or alternate ways of organizing linguistic material.” In other words, existing meanings may take on new forms. They further point out that these new ways are often phrasal expressions. These new structures in turn can be grammaticalised, again following a cline of unidirectionality.

However, renewal must not be seen as a cycle by which these newly innovated forms simply replace the grammatically and semantically weakened ones. Instead, these new forms compete with the older ones, since “they are felt to be more expressive than what was available before” (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 124). It is due to this competition that a reduction (or eventually a loss) of older forms takes place.

A well-known example of renewal is the use of intensifiers in PDE. Intensifiers very frequently undergo renewal, “presumably because of their markedly emotional function” (Hopper &
Traugott 2003: 122). Over time, various forms such as awfully, frightfully, terribly, incredibly and pretty have come to be a part of this group (Paradis 1997; Lorenz 2002; Athanasiadou 2007, amongst many others). Due to specialisation, the size of this group will probably be reduced over time.

In this section, we focused on how grammaticalisation operates at morphosyntactic, phonological, semantic and pragmatic level. We discussed five main morphosyntactic principles: layering, divergence, specialisation, persistence and decategorialisation. At phonological level we focused on phonological erosion or reduction. At semantic and pragmatic level, we dealt with metaphorical and metonymic processes, semantic bleaching and (inter)subjectification. As a last element, we discussed renewal. In the next section we will relate the theory of grammaticalisation to the use of pragmatic markers.
In Chapter 2, we focused on the classification of *absolutely* and *positively*. We described how both adverbs can function at phrase level, clause level and as pragmatic markers of agreement at discourse level. The next chapter then focused on grammaticalisation and its different dimensions. As we explained, Heine & Reh (1984: 15) define grammaticalisation as “an evolution whereby linguistic units lose in semantic complexity, pragmatic significance, syntactic freedom, and phonetic substance.” This definition, which is supported by many scholars (Lehmann 1985, 1995; Bybee 1985 among others), thus describes grammaticalisation as a process of loss, which affects the various dimensions of language and which ultimately leads to zero. Since 1985 however, arguments against this definition have been put forward.

In the first place, claims have been made that grammaticalisation, in its early stages, is characterised by pragmatic strengthening, as opposed to pragmatic weakening (Traugott 1988; Traugott & König 1991; Heine *et al.* and others). Secondly, it has been argued (see Hopper & Traugott 1993; Onodera 1995) that grammaticalisation in a large number of cases involves increase of syntactic freedom and scope widening instead of scope reduction. Finally, at semantic-pragmatic level, research has shown that grammaticalisation is characterised by increased subjectivity, in that meanings “become increasingly associated with speaker attitude” (Traugott 1995: 3).

Traugott (1995: 16) thus argues that the hypothesis of unidirectionality must not be limited to morphosyntax. Instead, it must consider “the relation between syntax and discourse pragmatics, between cognition and communication” (Traugott 1995: 16). As such, grammaticalisation theory must account for structural decategorialisation, semantic bleaching and phonological reduction, as well as for an increase in pragmatic force, syntactic scope and syntactic freedom. She thus maintains a hypothesis of unidirectionality, “albeit a richer and rather different one from the standard hypothesis” (Traugott 1995: 1).
Next to the unidirectional clines traditionally agreed upon, such as ‘main verb > tense, aspect, mood marker’ and ‘nominal adposition > case’, Traugott (1995: 1) proposes a new cline with regard to pragmatic markers:¹³

clause-internal adverbial > sentence adverbial > pragmatic marker

One the one hand, this cline involves characteristics which are normally associated with grammaticalisation, such as decategorialisation, phonological reduction and semantic bleaching. On the other hand, it also involves increase in syntactic freedom and scope, i.e. from predicate to proposition, and pragmatic strengthening. Fanego (2010), describing the development of the Spanish manner adverbial de hecho (‘in practice’), identifies the following stages in the development of pragmatic markers:

(a) Stage I: VP adverbials of respect of manner.
(b) Stage II: Epistemic adverbial with sentential scope often [...] expressing commitment to the truth of the proposition.
(c) Stage III: [Pragmatic markers] with an elaborative function. At this stage the prime function of the adverbials is to signal additivity: what follows is not only in agreement with what precedes, but is additional evidence being brought to bear on the argument.

(based on Fanego 2010: 203-204)

At the end of her article, Traugott (1995) proposes a refined definition of grammaticalisation, describing it as “the process whereby lexical material in highly constrained pragmatic and morphosyntactic contexts becomes grammatical, and already grammatical material become more grammatical” (Traugott 1995: 15). As such, it can be represented by the cline

syntax via pragmatic strengthening in discourse > syntax with different function


¹³ Traugott (1995) uses the term ‘discourse marker’ and ‘discourse particle’, in this study we use the term ‘pragmatic marker’.
Various studies about pragmatic markers confirm the hypothesis of a richer cline of grammaticalisation. In her own article, Traugott (1995) discusses the grammaticalisation of, amongst others, ‘indeed’. Originally, ‘deed’ was (and continues to be) a lexical noun. By the early Middle English period it is frequently used in prepositional phrases, meaning ‘in action’. In a second stage, it developed into an adverbial phrase with epistemic modal meanings, often used contrastively. By the beginning of the Early Modern English period this adverbial phrase is found in clause-initial position, in which it has sentential scope. It is in this third stage that ‘in deed’ also begins to be spelled as ‘indeed’. By the seventeenth century, the original lexical noun, which had already developed sentential meanings, is also used as pragmatic marker with scope over discourse. Its meaning in this stage is one involving elaboration and clarification of discourse intent. (Traugott 1995: 7-9)


Brinton (2009) elaborates on the grammaticalisation of pragmatic markers, following the idea of Traugott & Dasher (2002: 156) that pragmatic markers over time “not only acquire pragmatic meanings (which typically coexist for some time with earlier, less pragmatic meanings) but also come to have scope over propositions.” Indeed, the development of pragmatic markers is characterised by their relation to “larger stretches of discourse; that is, they come to function extra-sententially” (Brinton 2009: 308). As such, loss of syntactic freedom does not seem to be a necessary correlation of grammaticalisation.

Concluding, the grammaticalisation of pragmatic markers can be described by various clines of unidirectionality, which show mutual similarities. These clines are represented in Figure 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>content</th>
<th>content/procedural</th>
<th>procedural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>scope within proposition</td>
<td>scope over proposition</td>
<td>scope over discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nonsubjective</td>
<td>subjective</td>
<td>intersubjective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Correlated paths of semantic change. (Based on Traugott & Dasher 2002: 40)
This figure shows that “semantic-pragmatic change and syntactic change go hand-in-hand” (Brinton 2009: 311). As the scope of pragmatic markers enlarges (following “a trajectory from 'scope within proposition' [...] to 'scope over discourse'” (Traugott & Dasher 2002: 40)), so they acquire more subjective and intersubjective meanings. At the same time, they semantically bleach as they develop from content items to procedural (and more abstract) items. As such, pragmatic markers follow the cline 'propositional > textual > expressive', as explained in section 3.2.3 Semantic and pragmatic dimension.

In this paper, we investigate the present-day use of the adverbs absolutely and positively in the light of grammaticalisation. Using data from three diachronic and one synchronic corpus, we will examine if both adverbs, originally manner adverbs, follow the clines of grammaticality as presented above. Finally, we will compare both adverbs to see whether the degree in which both adverbs have grammaticalised is comparable.
This section is divided in three parts. The first section focuses on the reason why *absolutely* and *positively* were taken together to be investigated in this study. Therefore, we will explain their origin and contemporary use, for which the Oxford English Dictionary serves as the basis. The second part describes how the data were collected, focusing both on the database which was used and the manner in which the samples were composed. Finally, the third part provides an overview of the criteria used for the data analysis.

### 5.1 Choice of adverbs

This study focuses on the contemporary use of the adverbs *absolutely* and *positively*. The reason these two adverbs were chosen to be studied together is twofold. In the first place, the adverbs share a common origin, i.e. they were first used as process adjuncts of manner and entered in British English around the same time. *Absolutely* is used in British English since 1425 and *positively* since 1443. Secondly, they share a number of functions in present-day English. Apart from their original use as process adjunct of manner, both can function as intensifying subjunct, emphasising subjunct, emphatic affirmative, etc.

The motivation to carry out a study about the grammaticalisation of these adverbs is found in a 1920s vaudeville song. This song, entitled ‘Absolutely, Mr. Gallagher? Positively, Mr. Shean.’, was introduced by Edward Gallagher and Al Shean, two vaudeville comics\(^{14}\) (Slide 2012: 203–205). They first performed the act in 1921. One year later, the song became a hit number of the Ziegfeld *Follies*.\(^{15}\) One of the verses of the song is the following:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Shean} & \quad \text{Oh, Mr. Gallagher! Oh, Mister Gallagher!} \\
\text{Gallagher} & \quad \text{Hello, what's on your mind this morning, Mr. Shean?} \\
\text{Shean} & \quad \text{Everybody's making fun of the way our country's run. All the papers say we'll soon live European.}
\end{align*}
\]

---

\(^{14}\) It is unclear who exactly should be considered the creator of this song. In fact, the ambiguity about its origins has led to legal disputes (Slide 2012: 203–205).

\(^{15}\) The Ziegfeld Follies, held between 1907 and 1932 on Broadway in New York City, were a series of theatrical productions (Van der Merwe 2009).
In this song, *absolutely* and *positively* are used as markers of agreement. Partridge (1957: 13) indicates that “[i]n slang their meaning is *yes*” and that this use was indeed popularised by the “famous vaudeville duet between 'Mr. Gallagher and Mr. Sheehan'”. Furthermore, Partridge (1957: 13) affirms that portmanteau words, or blends, are created for both words. Indeed, the OED confirms the existence of the words ‘posilutely’ and ‘absotively’\(^\text{16}\), two adverbs originating in American slang. They are emphatically used with the meaning ‘without a doubt, irrefutably’ and are also used as emphatic affirmatives, meaning ‘yes, certainly, definitely’. They frequently occur together:

\[(5.2)\] As long as he loses his money I’ll shake dice with him, but socially I wouldn’t have anything to do with him. **Absotively** and **postolutely** not!

*(The Syracuse Herald, 1914) (OED)*

\[(5.3)\] Am I jocoserious about that recommendation? Perhaps a little more serious than jocose. **Absotively. Posilutely.**


The fact that *absolutely* and *positively* are used in the vaudeville song by Gallagher and Shean as markers of agreement shows that, over time, both adverbs, to a certain extent, have been subject to grammaticalisation.\(^\text{17}\) This research will thus analyse whether the degree in which both adverbs have grammaticalised is comparable.

We will now turn to the way in which *absolutely* and *positively* are described in the Oxford English Dictionary. All examples used in sections 5.1.1 and 5.1.2 are thus taken from the OED\(^\text{18}\).

5.1.1 **Absolutely**

Morphologically, the adverb *absolutely* belongs to the class of derived adverbs, given that it is formed out of the adjective *absolute* and the suffix -\(\text{-ly}\). As such, it can be compared to the French adverb

\(^{16}\) Other spellings are ‘postolutely’ and ‘posolutely’ for posilutely; ‘absatively’ and ‘absitively’ for ‘absotively’ (OED).

\(^{17}\) See Chapter 4 on the development of pragmatic markers out of adverbs of manner.

\(^{18}\) Oxford English Dictionary, consulted online.
absolutely (and Middle French absolument), Spanish absolutamente and Italian assolutamente. The adverb has been attested in British English since the first half of the fifteenth century.

In general, the OED indicates two main uses of absolutely, that of adverb and that of interjection in colloquial contexts. Within the category of adverb, four different uses are identified. We will present these different uses following the order in which they appear in the OED.

The first is that of adverb of manner or degree, generally meaning ‘completely, perfectly’. Examples of this are:

(a) Many other expressions of his Favour, he honour'd me with, which I have now as absolutely forgotten, as I was then unworthy of them.
(Roger Boyle Orrery. Parthenissa, a romance in four parts. 1655)
‘to the fullest extent; entirely’

(b) That people should do absolutely nothing but copy one another.
(John Stuart Mill. On liberty. 1865)
‘at all, whatsoever’ (in negative constructions)

(c) Most elegantly and absolutely described by the Poët Virgill.
(Pliny. The historie of the world, commonly called the Naturall Historie of C. Plinius Secundus (translated by Philemon Holland). 1601)
‘with exact fidelity to detail; accurately’

(d) Why didst not thou the Head Command me absolutely not to go.
(John Milton. Paradise Lost: a poem in ten books. 1667)
‘decisively; categorically’

(e) Although not absolutely a range of mountains, there was a tract of elevated country.
(Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London. 1860)
‘completely, perfectly’ (modifying a noun or a NP), now rare

A second general meaning of the adverbial use of absolutely is the general meaning of ‘without doubt, condition, or mental reservation’:

(f) I haue determined to giue my selfe wholy to you, as quite abandoned from my selfe, and absolutely vowed to your seruices.
(Edmund Spenser. Complaints, containing sundrie small poemes of the worlds vanitie. 1591)
‘Unreservedly, wholeheartedly, unconditionally’
You fill me with Desire to see the Lady, and I will absolutely go along with you by and by when you go to see her.

(William King. P. de la Croix’s Persian & Turkish tales. 1714)

‘Actually, in truth; positively’ (modifying the statement as a whole)

Finally, absolutely can be used as an adverb with the meaning ‘independently, autonomously; not relatively’:

The Globe of the Earth may be considered two ways; either Absolutely in it selfe, or Comparatiuely in respect of the heauenly Bodies.

(Nathaniel Carpenter. Geography delineated forth in two bookes. 1625)

‘without comparison with others, with reference to a fixed standard, rather than to other things of the same kind’ (opposed to comparatively or relatively)

An object that exists absolutely without any cause, certainly is not its own cause.

(David Hume. A treatise of human nature: being an attempt to introduce the experimetal method of reasoning into moral subjects. 1739)

‘in a manner detached from other things’

If the preposition be absent, the noun is to be taken absolutely, as defining the verb simply by the expression of the idea.

(Transactions (and proceedings) of the American Philological Association. 1869)

‘without any logical qualification or syntactic dependent’ (used in grammars)

She ruled absolutely within the rectory, wisely giving her husband full liberty without.

(William Makepeace Thackeray. Vanity Fair. 1848)

‘with unrestricted or unlimited authority or ownership; despotically’

If one part of the Universal Church do separate itself from another part, not absolutely, or in Essentials, but respectively.

(John Bramhall. A just vindication of the church of England from the unjust aspersion of criminal schisme. 1654)

‘essentially, fundamentally’ (now obsolete)

This is not an allowable formula, for it is not absolutely convergent for any value of $z$, as may be readily shown.

(Annals of Mathematics. 1884)

‘with regard to the absolute values of component qualities’ (used in mathematics)

Next to these meanings, in which absolutely functions as an adverb, it can also be used as an interjection in colloquial contexts. In this case, its meaning is ‘yes, certainly, definitely, without a
doubt’ (n). When used as an interjection, absolutely is often used with an expletive infix for humorous emphasis (o):

(n) ‘Is it permitted me to ask your majesty whether the opinion of the queen is conformable to that of your majesty?’ ‘Yes, absolutely; she will tell you so herself.’

(A. Thiers and F. Bodin. Hist. French Revol. 1825)

(o) An Englishman who wishes to be very positive will exclaim, ‘Abso-bloody-lutely!’

(The American mercury. 1947)

5.1.2 Positively

We now turn to the description of positively. Similar to absolutely, positively is an adverb composed of the adjective positive to which the suffix -ly is added. As such, it can be compared with French positivement (‘definitely, with assurance’ or ‘with a positive charge or positive electricity’). Like absolutely, the adverb has been attested in British English since the first half of the fifteenth century.

Positively is generally used with the meaning ‘in a positive manner’, and can as such be used in six different ways:

(a) You would not so positively affirm this fact...without knowing the certain truth.

(Swift’s Letters. 1730)

‘definitely; explicitly; directly; for certain’

(b) The good or evil...may be esteemed good or evil comparatively and not positively or simply.

(Francis Bacon. Essays. 1597)

‘not comparatively or relatively; absolutely, intrinsically’ (now obsolete)

(c) The second way he glorified God, was positively, and he did this also two ways. By his words, and by his works.

(Vavasor Powell. God the Father Glorified. 1649)

‘in an affirmative, real, or actual manner; optimistically’ (opposed to negatively)

(d) The result was invariably the same...whether the jar was charged positively or negatively.

(Philosophical transactions of the Royal Society of London. 1771)

‘with a positive charge or a positive electricity’

(e) Positively, it took away my breath

(Jane Welsh Carlyle. Letters and memorials. 1859)

‘actually, really; indeed, in truth; also colloquially used as an emphatic affirmative: yes, indeed’
Both populations showed positively sloped biphasic curves. (British Journal of Psychiatry. 1963)

'in a manner or direction taken as positive'

The description of both adverbs thus shows a number of similarities. Both adverbs entered the language around the same time, and with the same function. Next to this function, i.e. process adjunct of manner, both can be used to express emphasis. It is for this reason that they are studied together. After having described their various uses, we now turn to the explanation of how the data used in this study were collected.

5.2 Data collection

5.2.1 Corpora

This research focuses on the use of absolutely and positively in present-day British English. Given that the synchronic situation of language is understood better by reference to the diachronic processes which underlie them, we used both synchronic and diachronic corpora.

The appropriate synchronic database for a study which focuses on PDE is the British National Corpus (BNC), which can be consulted online. This corpus was created by Oxford University Press in the 1980s and early 1990s, and is the most useful for this research because it contains synchronic data collected from 1960 onwards. Furthermore, it is a monolingual corpus, exclusively containing material from native speakers of British English. It comprises approximately 100 million words, containing samples from both spoken and written sources.

Due to constraints of time and budget, the spoken part of the corpus contains significantly less data than the written part. The spoken component constitutes approximately 10% of the corpus (10 million words), while the written part represents 90% (90 million words). The linguists who created the BNC believe this to be a sufficient amount of data to yield statistically representative empirical data of spoken English. Spoken data were retrieved from educational and informative speech (e.g. lectures, news commentaries), business speech (e.g. medical consultations, business meetings), public or institutional speech (e.g. sermons, political speeches) and speech taken from leisure contexts (e.g. sports commentaries, broadcast shows). A large quantity of the spoken data consists of spontaneous conversational English, the importance of which is incontestable in
linguistic study: conversational language is the dominant component of language both from the perspective of production and from that of reception. It is thus of a great value for the present study.

The written data were retrieved from academic and non-academic writing, from books, periodicals, and a group of miscellaneous texts such as publicity leaflets, advertisements, letters, memos, etc. Including written texts such as letters and memos results in a variety of texts that is representative of written language in general; a corpus merely containing written language for publication would not be representative of all written language that is produced. A quarter of the written data stems from fictional texts, the other 75% from informative texts. The informative texts further receive a label according to their subject field, e.g. social science, arts, commerce & finance, leisure, etc.

The BNC thus proves to be the most appropriate heuristic tool for this research for three reasons. First of all this study focuses on the present-day use of two adverbs, and the corpus contains present-day data. Secondly, this study focuses on British English, the only variety of English present in the BNC. Finally, the corpus contains a wide variety of data taken from both spoken and written sources, resulting in a reliable representation of language.

Regarding the diachronic data, three corpora were used: the Helsinki Corpus of English Texts, the Corpus of English Dialogues 1560-1760 and the Corpus of Early English Correspondence.

The Helsinki Corpus of English Texts (HC) was created between 1984 and 1991 at the University of Helsinki and counts 1,572,800 words. It contains historical data covering the period from ca. 750 to c. 1700. The texts included in the corpus are taken from a wide variety of topics and text types, such as law texts, handbooks, philosophical texts, religious treatises and fictional texts. Examples are Aelfric’s Lives of Saints, Layamon’s Brut and Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales. (Kytö 1996: 8-13)

The second corpus we used is the Corpus of English Dialogues 1560-1760 (CED). This corpus was created at the universities of Uppsala and Lancaster between 1995 and 2005. It contains Early Modern English (1560-1760) speech-related texts, and comprises 2 million words. The dialogues are divided in two categories. The first comprises transcriptions of authentic speech situations, such as trial proceedings and witness depositions. The second contains constructed dialogues, such as dialogues in drama comedy, didactic works and fictional prose. (Kytö & Walker 2006: 11-12)
Finally, we used the Corpus of Early English Correspondence (CEEC), which was created in 1993. CEEC is a cover term for a group of corpora, such as the Corpus of Early English Correspondence Sampler (CEECS) and the Corpus of Early English Correspondence Extension (CEECE). In this study, we used the CEECS, which contains a selection of letters from the bigger corpus. The CEECS covers the period from 1418 to 1680 and contains 450,000 words. The letters are especially taken from the highest ranks of society, due to widespread illiteracy in that time. (Nurmi 1998)

In these three corpora, we looked for all occurrences of absolutely and positively. In history, absolutely was often spelled as absolutely and positively as positively, positivly, possetivly and possitevely (OED). To ensure that all of these various spellings were included in our data, we used ‘absol*’ and ‘pos*t*v*’ as search terms. Out of these occurrences, we selected the useful data, excluding occurrences containing e.g. ‘absolute’, ‘absolution’ and ‘positive’. Given the relatively small amount of data which resulted from this search, no samples were created. Instead, all occurrences were selected for analysis. For each occurrence, we identified whether it belongs to spoken or written language, and in which period it occurs. We adopted the following stages of English:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Old English (OE)</td>
<td>850-1150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle English (ME)</td>
<td>1150-1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Modern English (EMdE)</td>
<td>1500-1750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern English (MdE)</td>
<td>1750-1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present-Day English (PDE)</td>
<td>1950-...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.2 Synchronic data: sample composition

Regarding the sample composition of the synchronic data, the same method was used for both adverbs. Two samples were created for each adverb: one sample containing written data, the other spoken data. The main reason for creating separate samples of spoken data is that both adverbs, according to the OED, are used as agreement markers in colloquial speech only. It was therefore obvious to include an equal amount of spoken data, so as to provide a representative sample of everyday language. It must however be noted that in a significant amount of the occurrences of written data direct or indirect speech is represented.
Each sample contains one hundred randomly selected occurrences, collected via the use of a sample tool provided by the BNC. The use of this computer-controlled tool avoids a biased composition of the samples and thus enhances objectivity. The samples contain data from all types of texts included in the corpus (academic, non-academic, fictional, informative, broadcast discussions, classroom conversations, etc.). As such, they represent language in a reliable way.

It must be noted that for the composition of the sample containing occurrences of *positively* in spoken language, only 62 occurrences could be found in the corpus. However, the BNC itself indicates that the corpus contains 63 such occurrences. The detailed analysis of the sample reveals that the same occurrence, due to a different transcription of the same text, features twice in the BNC:

5.3 Criteria used for the data analysis

After the composition, the samples were analysed both in a quantitative and in a qualitative manner. The qualitative analysis of the samples was performed at three levels: at phrase level, at clause level and at discourse level. At each level, the syntactic function of the adverb was identified. However, in some occurrences the function of the adverb was rather ambiguous. Various criteria were adopted to resolve this ambiguity, and will be explained in the following sections. After the
qualitative analysis, the quantitative analysis was performed. This analysis provides statistical
information about the relative occurrence of each possible function.

5.3.1 Phrase level analysis

Various criteria were used to define the syntactic function of the adverb in its context. First of all,
we examined if the adverb occurred at phrase level, clause level or discourse level. At phrase level,
the adverbs collocate with words such as nightmarish, essential, incredible, Windows-like, miles etc. In
these contexts, we identified the adverbs as premodifiers of adjectives, adverbs and nouns.
Regarding the collocations with adjectives, we made a further distinction between the emphasising
and intensifying function. Therefore, we took into consideration the gradability of the adjective
with which absolutely and positively collocate. If this adjective is gradable, i.e. if a collocation with
very, as in for example very good, results in a grammatical phrase, the adverb was identified as
intensifier (5.6). If the adjective was nongradable, we identified the adverb as emphasiser (5.6).

(5.6) [...] to strive for more money than the other player, rather than for an absolutely large
quantity of the banker's money. (BNC)

(5.7) “[...] or whatever they call it,” she went on, becoming – for her – positively prolix. (BNC)

In some cases, absolutely and positively collocate with forms which can be interpreted either as
adjectives or as participles, e.g. banned, freezing. Quirk et al. (1985: 413-414) state that the verbal force
of -ing forms is explicit when a direct object is present, whereas the verbal force of -ed forms is
made explicit by the presence of a by-agent. In case no explicit indicators are present, the word class
of these forms can be determined by taking into consideration the semantic interpretation of the
form. If the form in question focuses on a process, it should be considered a participle. In case it
focuses on the state resulting from a process, it should be considered an adjective. Moreover, when
premodification by the intensifier very is possible for these forms, they should be interpreted as
adjectives. After applying those tests, forms interpreted as adjectives were discusses at phrase level,
whereas forms with verbal force were analysed at clause level.

During the analysis, we often noticed that absolutely and positively collocate with adjectives
such as right and true. From a strictly syntactic point of view, they thus function as premodifiers of
adjectives. However, in such cases the adverbs often mark a higher subjectivity, and their scope is thus not always limited to mere phrase level. Indeed, in such cases it stretches over a part of the clause or over the entire clause, in which case they are analysed as clause elements, and more specifically as emphasising subjuncts:

(5.8) Gentleman is absolutely right and I agree with every word he says. (BNC)
(5.9) “And until she's sure, you can't be absolutely sure yourself. Can you?” His voice had dropped lower and lower [...] (BNC)

It must be noted that the scope of the adverbs in such cases is not clear-cut. It is often not possible to unquestionably indicate whether the adverb has scope over the entire clause, a part of the clause, or a single phrase. This ambiguity however indicates the existence of a zone of transition between various uses, which indicates a change in the use of these adverbs.

5.3.2 Clause level analysis

At clause level, both adverbs can function either as process adjuncts of manner, as emphasising subjuncts or as intensifying subjuncts. In case of ambiguity, it was often helpful to take into account the position of the adverb in the clause. As Quirk et al. (1985) note, attitudinal disjuncts mostly occupy initial position and as such have scope over the entire clause. Manner adjuncts usually occupy end position, whereas emphasisers and intensifiers mostly occur at medial position.

However, the position of the adverbs does not always resolve this ambiguity. In cases where ambiguity remained, we considered the context of the adverb and the way in which the adverb could be paraphrased. Manner adjuncts can be paraphrased as “in a ... manner” or “in a ... way” and can also serve as responses to how-questions. Emphasising subjuncts on the other hand reinforce the truth value of a particular clause element. They occur with non-gradable verbs. If absolutely and positively occur as emphasising subjuncts, the utterance can often be paraphrased with the use of indeed or definitely. Intensifying subjuncts only occur with gradable verbs, which are identified by “their acceptance of lexical intensifiers” (Bolinger 1972: 160). This means that if the verb in question can occur in collocation with intensifiers such as quite, rather and so, it is gradable and as such can be modified by an intensifying subjunct.
(5.10) One male don in an interview said 'some people think that sexual harassment is positively desired, that there isn't a problem and that women quite enjoy it'.

In this example, the syntactic function of the adverb is ambiguous. Taking into consideration the syntactic position of the adverb, which is medial position, the adverb should be considered as a subjunct, either intensifying or emphasising. Regarding the context of the adverb and possible paraphrases, we must conclude that the interpretation as manner adjunct, i.e. ‘sexual harassment is desired in a positive way’, is most plausible.

5.3.3 Discourse level analysis

Finally, we focused on the use of both adverbs on discourse level. As discussed before, the OED indicates for both adverbs that they can be used in colloquial speech as emphatic affirmatives, with the meaning ‘yes, indeed, without a doubt’. As such, the adverbs are independently used as agreement markers, indicating a high level of intersubjectivity. These markers show close affinities with attitudinal disjunct markers, which can also serve as responses to questions or as comments on previous utterances. We made a distinction between attitudinal disjuncts (5.11), which have scope over an entire clause, and agreement markers, which are used independently of other clause elements (5.12):

(5.11) “I have to be paid whether she passes her exams or not.” “Absolutely not.” Guido shook his head. (BNC)

(5.12) “[...] it’s, it (pause) must be good to have somebody like that er” “Absolutely.” “o-- over there cos it [...]” (BNC)

The analysis thus focuses on the use of absolutely and positively at three levels: phrase level, clause level and discourse level. Table 1 summarises their various uses.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrase Level</th>
<th>Clause Level</th>
<th>Discourse Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intensifier</td>
<td>Process adjunct of manner</td>
<td>Advanced form of attitudinal disjunct; Pragmatic marker of agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- premodifier of adjective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- premodifier of adverb</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- premodifier of noun (phrase)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasiser</td>
<td>Intensifying subjunct</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- premodifier of adjective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- premodifier of adverb</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- premodifier of noun (phrase)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emphasising subjunct</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attitudinal disjunct</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: The various uses of absolutely and positively at phrase, clause and discourse level.
6 Results

In this section, the quantitative results of the analysis will be presented. In a first part we focus on the results from the diachronic analysis, in which we focus on two periods: the Early Modern English period (1500-1750) and the Modern English (1750-1950) period. The second part then focuses on Present-Day English (1950-...). In each period, we will first focus on the results gained from the analysis of the spoken data. Then, we will explain the results of the samples containing written language.

6.1 Results of the diachronic analysis

In this part, we will focus on how absolutely and positively were used in the past. As explained in the Chapter 5, we collected historical data out of three corpora: the Helsinki Corpus of English Texts (HC), the Corpus of English Dialogues 1560-1760 (CED) and the Corpus of Early English Correspondence Sampler (CEECS). Table 1 represents the absolute frequency of each adverb in the three corpora.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Absolutely</th>
<th>Positively</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HC</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEECS</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CED</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Absolute frequencies of absolutely and positively in the historical corpora

6.1.1 Early Modern English (1500-1750)

6.1.1.1 Spoken language

We will first discuss the use of both adverbs in spoken language during the Early Modern English period. Table 3 represents the absolute and relative frequencies of the various functions of both adverbs.
a) Absolutely

During the Early Modern English period, absolutely was only used at clause level and at phrase level. No occurrences were found in which it functions as a marker of agreement at discourse level. At phrase level absolutely only functions as a premodifier of an adjective. This function occurs 5 times:

(6.1.1) “Lord, we shall go to our Evidence to prove, that all this is absolutely false” (HC)

(6.1.2) “[...] S. Walter said that my Lord Cobham was absolutely cleer: and my Lord Cecill replyed [...]” (CED)

In all of these cases, absolutely functions as an emphasiser, i.e. it collocates with nongradable items.

At clause level, absolutely primarily functions as a process adjunct of manner (11 times) (6.1.3). Given that the OED indicates this as the original function of absolutely, this is an expected result. Secondly, it also functions as an emphasising subjunct (3 times) (6.1.4).

(6.1.3) Att. Gen. “In what part of Mr. Love’s house?”

Jaquel. “I conceive in his chamber, for I went up to severall that were there, whose names I can positively say, for two or three of them, though I cannot remember the other absolutely, though I conceive most I have named # in my examination were there [...]” (CED)

(6.1.4) “Let me see the Accusation: This is absolutely all the Evidence can be brought against me; poor [...]” (HC)
However, in 11 cases at clause level the function of *absolutely* is ambiguous. In these cases, *absolutely* shows characteristics of both manner adjuncts and emphasising subjunct. In some cases, the adverb tends more towards the function of an emphasising subjunct (6.1.5).

(6.1.5)  “Thou wouldst inforce me to beleeve so, but I neither can nor will, without particulars to confirm thy words more then a generall saying that it is so, therefore I *absolutely* deny the Argument to be good unlesse thou canst instance some pregnant prove to justifie thy assertion.” (CED)

In this example, *absolutely* can be interpreted either as an emphasising subjunct (‘I really deny the argument’) or as a manner adjunct (‘I deny it in an absolute/complete way’). The interpretation of the adverb as an emphasising subjunct is more likely than that of a manner adjunct, although the latter is not completely absent.

b) *Positively*

We now turn to the use of *positively* in spoken language during the Early Modern English period. As we can see in Table 3, no occurrences were found in which *positively* carries out a function at phrase level or discourse level. Similar to *absolutely*, the adverb primarily functions as a process adjunct of manner (28 times) (6.1.6). Again, this is not surprising considering that it is the adverb’s original function:

(6.1.6)  Mr. Attorn. Gen.  “Sir Robert, I desire to know, whether Mr. Praunce, when he shew’d these places, and made these Descriptions, did he do it with any hesitancy, or did he do it readily?”

Sir R. Southwell.  “Hitherto, my Lord, he went directly and *positively*, as if any body should walk to Westminster-Hall door.” (CED)

Next to its original function, *positively* also functions as an emphasising subjunct (6 times):

(6.1.7)  “But Mr. Bellamy, I saw a Servant, I hope no Engagement. For you two *positively* shall dine with me. I have the finest Macaroni in Life.” (CED)
6.1.1.2 Written language

After having discussed spoken language, we will now turn to the results of both adverbs in written language in EMdE. Table 4 · EMdE. Frequencies of absolutely and positively in written language represents the absolute and relative frequencies of the various functions of both adverbs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Absolutely</th>
<th></th>
<th>Positively</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Absolute</td>
<td>Relative</td>
<td>Absolute</td>
<td>Relative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PREMODIFIER OF ADJECTIVE</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROCESS ADJUNCT OF MANNER</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMBIGUOUS</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 · EMdE. Frequencies of absolutely and positively in written language

a) Absolutely

We will first consider the use of absolutely in written language. Again, no occurrences were found in which it carries out a function at discourse level. At phrase level, absolutely only functions as a premodifier of an adjective (2 times) (6.1.8). In both cases, it collocates with a nongradable constituent, thus functioning as an emphaser:

(6.1.8) That he (the deponent) did not once see captain Norris bob or shelter himself in the gang-way, which he (the deponent) thinks is absolutely impossible for captain Norris to have done [...]. (CED)

At clause level, the adverb primarily functions as a process adjunct of manner (15 times) (6.1.1). Again, five occurrences were found in which its function is ambiguous (6.1.10).

(6.1.9) [...] that for his part he had done nothing but sigh for her ever since she came; and that all the white beauties he had seen, never charm’d him so absolutely as this fine creature had done” (HC)
(6.1.10) I haue receaued yours of the 13, and am so farre from being vnsatisfied with the Cardinal's retrenching my pention, that I am sure I haue toould you before, if he had inclined to haue continued it, I would absolutely haue refused it. (CEECS)

In (6.1.10), absolutely shows characteristics of both process adjuncts of manner ('I would have refused it in an absolute way') and emphasising subjuncts ('I would definitely have refused it').

b) Positively

Comparable to its behaviour in spoken language, positively does not function at phrase and discourse level in written language either. It only functions at clause level, again primarily as a process adjunct of manner ((6.1.11) and (6.1.12)):

(6.1.11) The Scotts seeme as yet to favor King William, rejecting K James letter to them: yet declaring nothing positively. (HC)

(6.1.12) After all this can a body speak positively of our affairs. Men of sence never speak of those matters, but with great wariness and discretion. (CED)

Two cases were found in which the use of positively is ambiguous ((6.1.13) and (6.1.14)):

(6.1.13) [...] before they can be accounted members of the Church of Christ or of the house of God, and one side positively denying comunion in other ordinances as members of the Church of Christ [...] (CEECS)

(6.1.14) [...] to whom in three minutes the black-rod came to demand the Prisoners, but the Lieut. positively refused to deliver them. (HC)

Although in example (6.1.13), positively tends more towards the emphasising function, a reading in which it functions as a manner adjunct cannot be excluded. The same can be said of example (6.1.14).

6.1.2 Modern English (1750-1950)

6.1.2.1 Spoken language

After the discussion of the Early Modern English period, we now turn to the results of the Modern English period. It must be noted that only the Corpus of English Dialogues covers this period. As a
result, significantly less data were found in comparison with the EMdE period. Given this low amount of data, the two adverbs will be discussed together. Table 5 · MdE. FREQUENCIES of absolutely and positively in spoken language shows the results of spoken language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Absolutely</strong></th>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Positively</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Absolute frequency</td>
<td>Relative frequency</td>
<td>Absolute frequency</td>
<td>Relative frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Premodifier of Adjective</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Process Adjunct of Manner</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>ca. 68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emphasising Subjunct</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>ca. 16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ambiguous</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agreement Marker</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>ca. 16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 · MdE. Frequencies of absolutely and positively in spoken language

Absolutely only occurs two times in the CED. In the first occurrence it occurs at phrase level and functions as a premodifier of an adjective, modifying a nongradable participial adjective. As such, it functions as an emphasiser:

(6.1.15) Tukely “I can see, Madam, that your Mind is not dispos’d to wish, or make me happy.”
Sophia “Did not I bid you not to rely upon Looks; for do you know now that my Mind is at this Time most absolutely dispos’d -- to do every thing that you wou’d have me. (CED)

In the other case absolutely functions at clause level. Its function in the utterance is ambiguous, showing both features of a manner adverb and of an emphasising subjunct:

(6.1.16) Arabella “Astonishing! -- and what did you talk about?”
Sophia “Of various Things -- Women among the rest; and tho' I have not absolutely any open Acts of Rebellion against him, yet, I fear he is a Traytor at Heart -- and then such Vanity!” (CED)
Regarding **positively**, 6 occurrences were found in the CED. The adverb still mostly functions as a process adjunct of manner (4 times) (6.1.17). Once, it functions as an emphasising subjunct (6.1.18).

(6.1.17) “Mr Priddle was the Attorney; I think it was he repeated those words; but I cannot recollect **positively** who it was.” (CED)

(6.1.18) Sophia “Never fear me; you don't know what a mad, raking, wild young Devil I can be, if I set my Mind to it, Bell.

Arabella “You fright me! -- you shall **positively** be no Bedfellow of mine any longer.” (CED)

More interesting here is that one occurrence was found in which **positively** functions at discourse level, i.e. as a pragmatic marker of agreement:

(6.1.19) Lady Pewit Arabella “Then there is no Sincerity in Man.” “**Positively**, you shan't stir.” (CED)

6.1.2.2 Written language

Finally, we turn to the results of written language in Modern English. Only one occurrence for each adverb was found, as is shown in Table 6:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>ABSOLUTELY</strong></th>
<th><strong>POSITIVELY</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>ABSOLUTE</strong></td>
<td><strong>RELATIVE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>FREQUENCY</strong></td>
<td><strong>FREQUENCY</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PREMODIFIER OF ADJECTIVE</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PROCESS ADJUNCT OF MANNER</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 6: ModE. Frequencies of absolutely and positively in written language*
As shown in Table 6· MDE. FREQUENCIES of absolutely and positively in written language, **absolutely** functions as a premodifier of an adjective:

(6.1.20) Arabella received the Account of her Lover's Recovery as a Thing she was **absolutely** sure of before; and thinking she had now done all that could be expected [...] (CED)

In this case, **absolutely** collocates with a nongradable adjective and thus functions as an emphasiser. It must however be noted that in this case, despite the fact that the adverb occurs in written language, the sentence is a representation of direct speech.

**Positively** on the other hand carries out its original function of a process adjunct of manner:

(6.1.21) Here it was observed, that there was a material Difference in the Evidence of these two Witnesses, the swearing **positively** to the Day the Body was open'd, and the other that the Words were said after Miss Blandy was in Oxford Castle, which was not till after her Father's Remains were buried. (CED)

### 6.2 Results of the synchronic analysis

#### 6.2.1 Introduction

In this part we will focus on the results of how absolutely and positively are used in Present-Day English. As stated in the Chapter 5, each of the samples we used contains 100 occurrences. In the case of positively however, the BNC only contains 62 occurrences stemming from spoken language. Therefore, relative frequencies, i.e. percentages, are calculated so as to facilitate comparison between the various samples.

#### 6.2.2 Absolutely and positively in spoken language

We will first focus on the use of both adverbs in spoken language. Table 7 represents the relative frequencies with which the adverbs are used at phrase level, clause level and discourse level.
Phrase level

We will first focus on the occurrences of absolutely and positively at phrase level. As stated before, both adverbs can fulfil three different syntactic functions at this level. Both occur as a premodifier of an adjective, as a premodifier of an adverb and as a premodifier of a noun (phrase). From a semantic point of view, they either function as an intensifier, modifying gradable elements, or as an emphasiser, modifying non-gradable elements.

The following tables represent both the syntactic and the semantic functions of absolutely and positively at phrase level in spoken language.
a) Absolutely

Absolutely occurs at phrase level in 46% of the occurrences. From a syntactic point of view, it occurs as a premodifier of an adjective in 36% of the cases (6.2.1), as a premodifier of a noun (phrase) in 9% of the cases (6.2.2) and as a premodifier of an adverb in the remaining 1% (6.2.3):

(6.2.1) “[...] Lebanon, where you get these absolutely nightmarish cultures of violence that just go on generation after generation” (BNC)

(6.2.2) “the door that was near to there looks absolutely miles away, you're going through, going through a (unclear)” (BNC)

(6.2.3) “why did you do that and the silence is absolutely incredibly aggressive and you feel quite put on the spot” (BNC)

It must be noted that, when absolutely is used as premodifier of noun (phrase), it almost exclusively collocates with words denoting extremes. On the one hand with extreme time or place indications, as in (6.2.4), on the other hand with words such as ‘nothing’ and ‘none’ (6.2.4):

(6.2.4) “[...] killed me (pause) that dog! I haven’t (pause) erm (pause) taken him for absolutely ages!” (BNC)

(6.2.5) “Okay, isn't it interesting, isn't depressing, that absolutely none of these things was taught you at school, except possibly the sport?” (BNC)

From a semantic point of view, the adverb occurs as an intensifier in 8% of the cases (6.2.6) and as an emphasiser in 36% of the cases (6.2.7). In two occurrences, the adverb occurs in an unfinished sentence, in which case it cannot be defined whether it functions as an intensifier or as an emphasiser (6.2.8):

(6.2.6) “Oh I wish (unclear)"

“But it sounds absolutely beautiful so we're gonna have to go and visit.” (BNC)

(6.2.7) “I think that's an absolutely essential part of a higher education institution such as a university.” (BNC)

(6.2.8) “[...] objectively logical but (pause) wh-- wh-- what seems to me to be the absolutely (pause) overwhelming is to say he's not worried” (BNC)
b. *Positively*

In the spoken sample, *positively* occurs at phrase level in only 10% of the cases. It functions as a premodifier of an adjective in ca. 8% of the cases (6.2.9) and as a premodifier of an adverb in ca. 2% of the cases (6.2.10):

(6.2.9) “On the debit side biking can be **positively** dangerous, that is why in nineteen eighty nine Congress passed a motion calling for [...]” (BNC)

(6.2.10) “where we now have cross party consensus (pause) that we move **positively** forward and work towards these proposals” (BNC)

From a semantic point of view, *positively* functions as an intensifier in 5% of the cases (6.2.11). In another 5% of the cases, it functions as an emphasiser (6.2.12):

(6.2.11) “Good. (pause)”

“Well David’s mug is **positively** quiet compared to yo—[...]]” (BNC)

(6.2.12) “I’ve no doubt about that, it’ll be **positively** discriminatory for those in greatest need, I have no problem with that.” (BNC)

**Clause level**

After having discussed the results in spoken language at phrase level, we now turn to the results at clause level. At this level, both adverbs can function as a process adjunct of manner, as an intensifying subjunct, as an emphasising subjunct or as an attitudinal disjunct. The following table presents the relative frequencies of these four functions in spoken language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Absolutely</th>
<th>Positively</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Process Adjunct of Manner</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensifying Subjunct</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasising Subjunct</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudinal Disjunct</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total at Clause Level</strong></td>
<td><strong>32%</strong></td>
<td><strong>90%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 10: PDE. Relative frequencies of absolutely and positively at clause level in spoken language*
a) Absolutely

In spoken language, absolutely functions in only 1% of the cases as a process adjunct of manner (6.2.13) and in 3% of the cases as an attitudinal disjunct (6.2.14):

(6.2.13) “I too, do not want a sister, a sister might any day be taken from me. I want a wife, the sole helpmeet I can influence efficiently in life and retain absolutely till death.” (BNC)

(6.2.14) “(unclear)”

“Absolutely yes.” (BNC)

In 28% of the cases, absolutely functions as an emphasising subjunct (6.2.15). In this percentage, occurrences are included in which absolutely, from a strict point of view, functions as a premodifier, i.e. at phrase level, but where its scope is clause-oriented (6.2.16).

(6.2.15) “We absolutely have plans. And we are absolutely having conversations with carriers throughout the world.” (BNC)

(6.2.16) “He's goes and does it again! I know, that's (pause) absolutely true that!” (BNC)

b) Positively

In the sample containing spoken data, positively takes up only two different syntactic functions at clause level. It occurs 32 times as a process adjunct of manner, i.e. in ca. 51% of the cases, and 24 times as an emphasising subjunct, i.e. in 39% of the cases:

(6.2.17) “you'd pi-- be tempted into saying that they were probably not correlated, either positively or negatively” (BNC)

(6.2.18) “I think I'll make Mr (-----) positively the last one before lunch.”(BNC)

It must be noted that, in a large number of the cases in which positively occurs as a manner adverb, it collocates with verbs such as ‘respond’ or ‘reply’ (6/32 cases) (6.2.19). It is also often used in physical or mathematical contexts (6.2.20), with verbs as ‘correlate’ (8 times) and ‘charge’ (3 times).

(6.2.19) “Have done with him! Or will you respond positively, yes I will receive you, I will you accept you.” (BNC)
(6.2.20) “These are negative particles and the nucleus is made up of *positively* charged and neutral particles [...]” (BNC)

However, in a sample containing merely 62 occurrences, it is difficult to provide a reliable representation of language. *Positively* probably does not mainly feature in scientific contexts, although this context occurs very frequently in the sample used in this study.

**Discourse level**

Finally, we will focus on the use of *absolutely* and *positively* as markers of agreement at discourse level. Regarding *positively*, no occurrences of this use were found in the sample. On the other hand, *absolutely* functions as a marker of agreement in 22% of the cases:

(6.2.21) “I don't mind.”
“You do want it cross party?”
“*Absolutely*, absolutely.” (BNC)

(6.2.22) “I'll definitely buy it.”
“You should. It's absolutely brilliant! *Absolutely.*” (BNC)

**Conclusion**

The use of *absolutely* and *positively* in spoken language is represented in the following chart:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Agreement marker</th>
<th>Attitudinal disjunct</th>
<th>Emphasising subjunct</th>
<th>Process adjunct of manner</th>
<th>Premodifier of noun (phrase)</th>
<th>Premodifier of adverb</th>
<th>Premodifier of adjective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absolutely</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positively</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 11·PDE.** The various functions of *absolutely* and *positively* in spoken language
This chart clearly shows that the number of functions that absolutely fulfils in spoken language is greater than those fulfilled by positively. Two significant differences between the uses of these adverbs must be noted. The first regards the use of both adverbs as process adjuncts of manner, which is their original function. Whereas absolutely fulfils this function in only 1% of the cases, positively functions as a manner adjunct in ca. 51% of the cases. The second significant difference is found at phrase level. Absolutely carries out a function at this level in 46% of the cases, positively in only 10% of the cases. These significant differences will be discussed in Chapter 7.

6.2.3 Absolutely and positively in written language

After having discussed the use of absolutely and positively in spoken language, we now turn to their use in written language. As before, we will explain their use at phrase level, clause level and discourse level in detail. Table 12 represents the relative frequencies of the adverbs at each level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Absolutely</th>
<th>Positively</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phrase level</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clause level</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse level</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12 · PDE. Relative frequencies of both adverbs at phrase level, clause level and discourse level

Phrase level

Firstly, we will focus on the use of both adverbs at phrase level. The following table shows the relative frequencies of each function.
a) Absolutely

From a syntactic point of view, absolutely occurs as a premodifier of an adjective in 57% of the cases (6.2.23), as a premodifier of a noun (phrase) in 2% of the cases (6.2.24) and in the remaining 1% of the cases as a premodifier of an adverb (6.2.25):

(6.2.23) “the mysterious but absolutely unique 'image' and associations of the individual artwork” (BNC)
(6.2.24) “I have been driving Aunt Polly's Chevvy for absolutely ages in the States.” (BNC)
(6.2.25) “All the movements have to be done absolutely correctly, otherwise they make the patient's problems worse rather than better.” (BNC)

Similarities are found between the use of absolutely in spoken language and in written language, primarily in its use as a premodifier of a noun (phrase). When fulfilling this function, absolutely again mostly collocates with words denoting extremes, e.g. 'nothing', or words indicating an extreme duration of time, e.g. ‘ages’. As such, the adverb is used hyperbolically.

From a semantic point of view on the other hand, absolutely functions as an emphasiser, i.e. in collocation with non-gradable elements, in 49% of the cases (6.2.26), and as an intensifier in 11% of the cases (6.2.27):

(6.2.26) “He wouldn't keep her here any longer than was absolutely necessary, would he?” (BNC)
(6.2.27) “I was stunned and absolutely delighted when I heard Nigel had called.” (BNC)
b) Positively

Regarding the use of *positively* at phrase level, only two functions are found in the sample. In 19% of the cases it functions as a premodifier of an adjective (6.2.28); in only 1% of the cases the adverb occurs as a premodifier of a noun (6.2.29). No instances were found where *positively* modifies an adverb.

(6.2.28) “She was not **positively** hostile to criticism, indeed, she produced a book called The Business of Criticism [...]” (BNC)

(6.2.29) “'They do say,' said Caspar thrillingly, 'that she pursued him for **positively** centuries, until he gave in [...]” (BNC)

When used as a premodifier of a noun (phrase), the behaviour of *positively* is comparable to that of *absolutely*: the only time the adverb fulfils this function, it modifies a noun which indicates a long duration of time, here ‘centuries’ (see (6.2.29): ‘absolutely ages’).

Semantically, *positively* functions as an emphasiser in the majority of the cases (15%) (6.2.30) and as an intensifier in only 5% of the cases (6.2.31).

(6.2.30) “‘whatever they call it,’ she went on, becoming -- for her -- **positively** prolix.” (BNC)

(6.2.31) “Darlington Civic Theatre SCROOGE looks **positively** generous compared to Harpagon” (BNC)

**Clause level**

We now turn to the analysis of both adverbs at clause level. Table 14 represents the relative frequencies of the various functions at this level. From this table, it is already clear that *positively* is used at clause level twice as often as *absolutely*. We will now focus on both adverbs in detail.
As shown in Table 14, absolutely most frequently functions as an emphasising subjunct (28%) (6.2.32). It also functions as a process adjunct of manner (5%) (6.2.33), as an attitudinal disjunct (2%) (6.2.34) and in 1% of the cases as an intensifying subjunct (6.2.35):

(6.2.32) “[...] pleased to advise you how best to do this if you absolutely have to, but the best management is of course provided by LIFESPAN” (BNC)

(6.2.33) “and he’s had a tough time because of it. I trust him absolutely.” (BNC)

(6.2.34) “I have to be paid whether she passes her exams or not. ’Absolutely not.’ Guido shook his head.” (BNC)

(6.2.35) “I had it brought up and it was absolutely bursting at the seams with his own notes, all tucked in [...]” (BNC)

b) Positively

At clause level, positively is mostly used as a process adjunct of manner (56%) (6.2.36). The second most used function is that of emphasising subjunct (22%) (6.2.37). It is used as an intensifying subjunct in only 1% of the cases (6.2.38), and no occurrences were found in which it functions as an attitudinal disjunct.

(6.2.36) “impressive 30% drop in the number of homosexual men serotesting positively for HIV in late 1987 to early 1988” (BNC)

(6.2.37) Antonio was positively bouncing with the honour of serving the big man himself. (BNC)

(6.2.38) “[...] like Teesdale, the implications for a town of 35,000 people like Newton Aycliffe are positively terrifying.” (BNC)
Discourse level

After having discussed phrase level and clause level, we now turn to the results at discourse level. As in the analysis of spoken language, no occurrences were found in which \textit{positively} functions as a pragmatic marker of agreement. However, this does not mean that \textit{positively} cannot fulfil this function. As we explained in Chapter 5, this use is indeed attested in British English (see example (5.1)).

\textit{Absolutely} on the other hand functions as a pragmatic marker of agreement in 4\% of the cases, as in examples (6.2.39) and (6.2.40):

\begin{multicols}{2}
(6.2.39) His grin widened. 'Having fun?' \textbf{Absolutely}. Want to help?' He shook his head.
(6.2.40) 'You made it quite clear you were not interested in me.' \textbf{Absolutely}. I've always reserved the right to choose who I spend my time with.
\end{multicols}

All the occurrences of \textit{absolutely} as a marker of agreement in written language stem from fictional prose. It must however be noted that three out of four of these occurrences represent a fictional dialogue. Theoretically, this is thus a representation of spoken language. As such, it can be stated that the use of \textit{absolutely} as marker of agreement is still restricted to spoken language.

Conclusion

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
& & & & & & & & & \\
\textbf{Absolutely} & Agreement marker & Ambiguous & Attitudinal disjunct & Emphasising subjunct & Intensifying subjunct & Process adjunct of manner & Premodifier of noun (phrase) & Premodifier of adverb & Premodifier of adjective \\
\hline
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{The various functions of \textit{absolutely} and \textit{positively} in written language}
\end{table}
Table 15 · PDE. The various functions of absolutely and positively in written language represents the various functions of absolutely and positively in written language. Again, it is clear that absolutely fulfils a greater variety of functions than positively. The latter is mostly used as a process adjunct of manner, whereas absolutely fulfils this function in only 5% of the cases. A second great difference is found at phrase level. Whereas absolutely functions as a premodifier in 57% of the cases, positively only fulfils this function in 19% of the cases. In general, absolutely is predominantly used at phrase level, whereas positively mostly carries out a function at clause level. Finally, our analysis shows that absolutely is used as a pragmatic marker of agreement in 4% of the cases, whereas no occurrences of this function are found regarding positively. As we explained above, this does not entail that it is impossible for positively to function as a pragmatic marker of agreement.
7 Discussion

In this section, we will interpret the results of the diachronic and synchronic analysis, relating them to the various dimensions of grammaticalisation. Therefore, we will briefly recapitulate the findings of the analysis. Then, we will relate these results to the morphosyntactic, phonological and semantic-pragmatic aspects of grammaticalisation. We will also discuss the importance of token frequency. Finally, we will link these aspects to the various clines of grammaticality as proposed by Traugott & Dasher (2002, cf. Chapter 3).

7.1 The use of absolutely and positively in spoken language

7.1.1 Early Modern English and Modern English (1500-1950)

In the Early Modern English period (1500-1750), both adverbs are predominantly used as process adjuncts of manner, which is their original function. Next to this function, they are also used as emphasisers, both at clause level and at phrase level. Regarding absolutely, its function is ambiguous in about a quarter of the cases, showing characteristics of both manner adjuncts and emphasising subjuncts. In general, the use of absolutely is more diversified than that of positively, which still primarily functions as a manner adjunct.

In the Modern English period (1750-1950), of which few data are available, positively is still predominantly used as a manner adjunct. It is also used as an emphasiser at clause level, but most remarkable is that the adverb also occurs as a pragmatic marker of agreement at discourse level. Absolutely, on the other hand, only functions at phrase level and clause level. At phrase level, it occurs as an emphasising premodifier of an adjective; at clause level its function is ambiguous, showing both features of manner adjuncts and emphasising subjunct. We must however be cautious to consider this situation as representative for the situation in MdE, given the low amount of data.

7.1.2 Present-Day English (1950-...)

In Present-Day English, the use of both adverbs is more diversified than in the Early Modern and Modern English period. At phrase level, both adverbs modify adjectives as well as adverbs, and absolutely also modifies nouns. They still mostly function as emphasisers, but occur as intensifiers as
well. At clause level, the original function of a manner adjunct is still predominant for *positively*, but *absolutely* is more often used as an emphasising subjunct. Moreover, *absolutely* is also used as an attitudinal disjunct. Finally, *absolutely* functions as a pragmatic marker of agreement in about a fifth of the occurrences.

7.2 The use of *absolutely* and *positively* in written language

7.2.1 Early Modern English and Modern English (1500-1950)

After having discussed spoken language, we now consider written language. In the Early Modern English period (1500-1750), both adverbs are most frequently used as manner adjuncts. Ambiguous cases, where both a reading as a manner adjunct and an emphasising subjunct is possible, are found for both adverbs, though slightly more for *positively*. *Absolutely* also occurs as an emphasiser at phrase level. Neither of the adverbs appears as a pragmatic marker of agreement at discourse level.

In Modern English, it must again be noted that only few data are available. As such, it is difficult to give a reliable representation of the language situation during this period. In our data, both adverbs occur only once; *positively* as a manner adjunct, and *absolutely* as an emphasiser at phrase level. Although in MdE no occurrences were found in which the adverbs function as pragmatic markers of agreement, it is probably not unlikely that this function did in fact occur. Evidence of this is found, for example, in the description of both adverbs in the OED.

7.2.2 Present-Day English (1950-…)

In written language, the use of *absolutely* and *positively* is comparable to their present-day use in spoken language. Again, both adverbs modify adjectives, adverbs and nouns, and although they also collocate with gradable items, they predominantly function as emphasisers. At clause level, process adjunct of manner is still the main function of *positively*, but *absolutely* first and foremost occurs as an emphasising subjunct. Moreover, this adverb also operates as an attitudinal disjunct. Both adverbs furthermore serve as intensifying subjuncts, although only in a small minority. As opposed to *positively*, *absolutely* can be both an attitudinal disjunct and a pragmatic marker of agreement at discourse level.
7.3 Morphosyntactic and phonological discussion

The present-day use of both adverbs is a clear example of the principles of persistence and divergence. The original function of both adverbs, i.e. process adjunct of manner, persists in contemporary language use. Importantly, both adverbs show a great deal of difference with regard to the degree of persistence. Whereas positively fulfils this function more than half of the time, absolutely fulfils this original function in only 3% of the cases. This means that both adverbs also fulfil other functions; in other words, divergence has affected these two adverbs. Nowadays, these adverbs may take a wide variety of functions such as premodifiers of adjective and emphasising subjuncts. Comparing both adverbs, it becomes clear that absolutely has diverged more than positively. According to our results, absolutely is used as an attitudinal disjunct (at clause level) and as a pragmatic marker of agreement (at discourse level), whereas positively is not. However, considering the description of positively in the OED, it must be noted that positively probably also fulfils this function.

Secondly, the contemporary use of absolutely and positively is in line with the principle of decategorialisation. This principle refers to the fact that, over time, words belonging to major categories such as nouns and verbs acquire characteristics or even develop into minor categories such as prepositions (Hopper 1991: 22). Relating this principle to absolutely and positively, we can state that, over time, absolutely has acquired the function of a pragmatic marker. This class of words, according to Quirk et al. (1985: 852), can “only in a very limited way [...] be analysed [as] clause [element]”. Moreover, Brinton (1996: 35) states that pragmatic markers form a heterogeneous set “which [is] difficult to place within traditional word class[es].” As such, the adverb originally only functioned as an adverb, which is a major category of grammar, and nowadays also functions as a pragmatic marker, which is a minor category of grammar.

Considering the phonological dimension of grammaticalisation, it has been argued that grammaticalised forms are often phonologically reduced in comparison with their original forms. Pragmatic markers such as indeed and in fact have indeed been phonologically reduced in their development. However, research has shown that phonological reduction rarely occurs in the development of pragmatic markers (Brinton 1996: 273). With regard to the data used in this paper, it is difficult to formulate any convincing judgements about this. The data were collected from the
BNC, a corpus which does not contain recordings of language. As such, no phonological information can be retrieved.

7.4 Semantic-pragmatic discussion

From a semantic-pragmatic point of view, grammaticalised forms are usually semantically bleached and pragmatically weakened in comparison with their original forms. Two other important processes are those of subjectification and intersubjectification.

**Semantic bleaching** refers to the loss of the form’s original meaning (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 94). Indeed, both adverbs have, to a certain extent, lost their original meaning, i.e. the semantic expression of manner. Over time, their meaning has become vaguer, which allows for the development of other, more general functions. Indeed, both adverbs have developed to adverbs expressing degree (as intensifier) and modality (as emphasiser). *Absolutely* in particular has also developed the syntactic function of an attitudinal disjunct. This category, in addition to expressing the degree of truth of an utterance, also conveys a certain attitude towards that utterance. Finally, *absolutely* has also acquired a general meaning of agreement (‘yes’) as a pragmatic marker. As such, the original meaning still persists to a certain extent for both adverbs, though more for *positively* than for *absolutely*. The latter is thus more semantically bleached.

Secondly, **subjectification** is described as “the process whereby linguistic expressions acquire subjective meaning” (Traugott 2003: 125). Subjectified expressions thus mirror the speaker’s attitude to what is being said. Both attitudinal disjuncts and pragmatic markers of agreement are subjective elements, the latter expressing “speaker attitude” while contemporarily organising “social exchange” (Brinton 2009: 310). As such, pragmatic markers serve both textual and interpersonal (‘expressive’, cf. Traugott 1982) functions. Given that both *absolutely* and *positively* have developed this function, they have subjectified over time.

**Intersubjectification** refers to the speaker’s attention to the addressee’s self-image (Traugott 2010: 29). Attitudinal disjuncts and pragmatic markers such as *absolutely* and *positively* confirm the content of the previous utterance. As such, they establish a common ground of shared knowledge between speaker (/writer) and hearer (/reader). They also function as face-saving devices expressing politeness. These functions can be seen as operating at the intersubjective level,
given that they regard the addressee's perception. Both adverbs can thus express intersubjective meanings.

Heine & Reh (1984: 15) describe grammaticalisation as an evolution which often involves loss of pragmatic significance. However, many, more recent studies have argued that grammaticalisation is characterised by pragmatic strengthening (Traugott 1988; Heine et al. 1991, Traugott 1995). As both adverbs have developed subjective and intersubjective meanings, it is clear that both are pragmatically strengthened. They thus follow the generally assumed pathways of development of pragmatic markers in English.

7.5 Frequency

In the light of grammaticalisation, frequency, and especially token frequency, is important for two reasons. Firstly, it is frequency which actually leads to grammaticalisation, as exemplified by Bybee:

“If we metaphorically suppose that a word can be written into the lexicon, then each time a word in processing is mapped onto its lexical representation it is as though the representation was traced over again, etching it with deeper and darker lines each time. Each time a word is heard and produced it leaves a slight trace on the lexicon, it increases in lexical strength.” (Bybee 1985: 177)

Although this metaphor deals with lexical strengthening, it can also easily be applied to grammaticalisation. Each time a particular form is used with a different function or meaning, this function or meaning is linked more closely to the original, and can ultimately result in a new form-meaning pair. This process is also referred to as ‘entrenchment’ (Langacker 1999: 93). Over time, the development and repeated use of new meanings and functions clearly influenced the contemporary use of both adverbs. The frequent use of the adverbs as an emphasiser, both at phrase and clause level, as an attitudinal disjunct and as a pragmatic marker of agreement has resulted in new form-meaning pairs. In other words, these new meanings are nowadays inherently coded in the function of both adverbs. In turn, this has increased the syntactic freedom of both absolutely and positively, and has enabled them to occur in a wider variety of contexts. However, it must be noted that the
interpersonal function of both adverbs, i.e. that of a pragmatic marker of agreement, is mostly limited to spoken language. In written language, this function primarily occurs in representations of direct or indirect speech.

Secondly, token frequency is a good indicator of grammaticalisation, especially from a synchronic point of view. The token frequencies of a form-meaning pair at a particular point in time mirror the degree of grammaticalisation of that pair. Regarding positively, it must be noted that the original form-meaning pair is predominant in Early Modern English, and still predominant, although slightly less, in the Modern English Period. Comparing these results with the situation in PDE, a significantly lower frequency of the original pair is observable. Since positively entered in English, its frequency as an emphasiser and as a marker of agreement has progressively increased.

On the other hand, the frequency of the original function of absolutely in EMdE was already lower than that of positively. Still, it was the adverb’s main function in that time. In MdE and PDE, the frequency of the adverb as an emphasiser enormously increased, becoming the adverb’s major function. The frequency of the original function is significantly low, even lower than the frequency of the adverb as a pragmatic marker.

7.6 Correlated clines of grammaticality

In Chapter 3, we referred to the various correlated clines of grammaticality as proposed by Traugott & Dasher (2002: 40). For reasons of convenience, these clines are repeated below in Figure 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>content</th>
<th>content / procedural</th>
<th>procedural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>scope within proposition</td>
<td>scope over proposition</td>
<td>scope over discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nonsubjective</td>
<td>subjective</td>
<td>intersubjective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3 - Correlated paths of semantic change. (Based on Traugott & Dasher 2002: 40)*

These various clines show that semantic-pragmatic and syntactic changes go hand-in-hand through the various stages of grammaticalisation. Traugott & Dasher (2002: 40) note that “individual horizontal trajectories are not necessarily vertically aligned”, i.e. ‘scope within proposition’ does
not necessarily correlate with nonsubjective expressions. This is obviously related to the fact that change does not happen overnight, and that zones of transition between the various stages exist.


The original function of both adverbs, i.e. a process adjunct of manner, is one as clause-internal adverbial. As such, the adverbs refer to the concrete manner in which the action expressed by the verb takes place. Their scope is thus limited to the clause only. From a semantic-pragmatic point of view, process adjuncts of manner are nonsubjective expressions, given that they do not express the speaker’s attitude towards the proposition. Both adverbs have also developed emphasising functions, both at phrase and at clause level. Carrying out this function, they are thus still clause-internal adverbials, modifying a phrase or a part of the “event structure” (Traugott & Dasher 2002: 40). However, they are already more subjective given that emphasisers stress the (degree of) truth of an entire utterance. As such, their syntactic scope and freedom has already slightly widened.

In Present-Day English, both adverbs can occur as attitudinal disjuncts, which have scope over the entire proposition, and express the speaker’s attitude more than emphasisers do. As such, they clearly belong to the second stage of grammaticalisation as presented above.

Finally, our analysis has shown that both absolutely and positively can be used as pragmatic markers of agreement, though absolutely to a larger extent than positively. Pragmatic markers, as Brinton (2009: 310) states, serve both the textual and interpersonal function of language. Textually, they serve as structuring devices of discourse, marking the beginning of an utterance. As such, they take a procedural function. At the interpersonal level, they establish a common ground of shared knowledge between speaker/writer and hearer/addressee. They thus clearly fulfil subjective, and even intersubjective, functions. As a conclusion, we can say that the present-day use of both adverbs confirms the cline of grammaticalisation ‘propositional > (textual >) expressive’.
7.7 Conclusion

The purpose of this research proposed at the beginning of this paper was to investigate whether the adverbs *absolutely* and *positively* are affected by grammaticalisation. We hypothesised that both adverbs have indeed grammaticalised, given the existence of the vaudeville song by Mr. Gallagher and Mr. Shean. The question then remained whether one of both can said to have reached a greater degree of grammaticalisation.

The discussion above related the results of the quantitative analysis to the various dimensions of grammaticalisation. It was argued that both adverbs have developed subjective and intersubjective meanings, and that their syntactic scope has widened. At the semantic-pragmatic level, both adverbs have semantically bleached and are pragmatically strengthened. Although their original function and meaning slightly persists, their contemporary use clearly shows divergence. Finally, it must be noted that the interpersonal function of a pragmatic marker of agreement is mainly related to spoken language. We can thus state that both adverbs have been grammaticalised. Although following our results *absolutely* can said to be more grammaticalised than *positively*, we must be cautious to posit this as unquestionable. Even though we have studied a relatively large amount of data, it must be noted that, especially for the Modern English period, data were scarce and that further study is desirable.
In this study, we discussed the use of two adverbs in British English: absolutely and positively. We chose to study these adverbs together for two reasons. Firstly, both adverbs entered in British English around the same time, i.e. in the first half of the fifteenth century, and with the same function, i.e. as manner adverbs. Secondly, they share a number of functions in Present-Day English. Remarkable is that, in PDE, both absolutely and positively can be used as pragmatic markers of agreement, a use which was popularised for both adverbs by the 1920s vaudeville duet “Absolutely, Mr. Gallagher? Positively, Mr. Shean!”:

(8.1) 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shean</td>
<td>Oh, Mr. Gallagher! Oh, Mister Gallagher!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallagher</td>
<td>Hello, what's on your mind this morning, Mr. Shean?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shean</td>
<td>Everybody's making fun of the way our country's run. All the papers say we'll soon live European.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallagher</td>
<td>Why, Mr. Shean. Why, Mr. Shean! On the day they took away our old canteen cost of living went so high that it's cheaper now to die.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shean</td>
<td>Positively, Mr. Gallagher!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallagher</td>
<td>Absolutely, Mr. Shean!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given the variety of functions of both adverbs in PDE, it is thus interesting to study these adverbs in the light of the theory of grammaticalisation. ‘Grammaticalisation’ as a term was first proposed by Antoine Meillet in 1912 and gained particular interest in the field of linguistics since the 1980s (Traugott 1982, 1988; Heine & Reh 1984; Hopper 1991 amongst others). It is defined as “the change whereby lexical items and constructions come in certain linguistic contexts to serve grammatical functions and, once grammaticalized, continue to develop new grammatical functions” (Hopper & Traugott 2003: xv).

While grammaticalisation was initially described as a process of loss – of semantic-pragmatic meaning, of syntactic freedom, etc. – arguments against this point of view have also been
put forward (Sweetser 1988; Traugott 1988; Traugott & König 1991). For example, Traugott (1988) proposed that grammaticalisation is characterised by pragmatic strengthening instead of by pragmatic weakening. Additionally, claims have been made that grammaticalisation involves a shift towards a greater subjectivity, in that meanings become increasingly associated with speaker attitude (Traugott 1995). Finally, various scholars have attacked the idea that grammaticalisation involves a loss of syntactic freedom (Campbell 1991).

In 1987, Schiffrin published a book about a class of words which she termed ‘discourse markers’. In the literature, these ‘discourse markers’ have a wide range of synonyms, such as ‘discourse particles’, ‘hedges’, ‘interjections’, ‘reaction signals’ and “pragmatic markers” (Brinton 1996). They serve a variety of textual and interpersonal functions in language, such as initiating discourse and establishing a common ground of shared knowledge. Given their various functions, pragmatic markers have received a lot of attention in the theory of grammaticalisation (Traugott 1995; Brinton 1996; Traugott & Dasher 2002; Fanego 2010; Defour 2010).

At the beginning of this research paper, we put forward the hypothesis that both adverbs have indeed been subject to grammaticalisation, given that they are nowadays used in a wide variety of contexts with a wide variety of functions, among which the function of pragmatic marker of agreement. We further questioned if, in case both adverbs are indeed affected by grammaticalisation, one of both adverbs reached a further stage of grammaticalisation.

The first chapter of this study thus presented a classification of the various functions of both adverbs at phrase level, clause level and discourse level. While the second chapter amply discussed the theory of grammaticalisation and its various dimensions, the third chapter linked this theory to the class of pragmatic markers. The fourth chapter then presented the methods adopted during the collection and analysis of the data. Chapter 5 and 6 were devoted to the results of the data-analysis, at diachronic and synchronic level respectively. Finally, chapter 7 offered a discussion of these results and provided an answer to the research question set about at the beginning of this paper.

In that chapter, we stated that both adverbs have indeed been subject to grammaticalisation. At semantic-pragmatic level, it was argued that both adverbs, in certain of their functions, have bleached semantically while strengthened pragmatically. At syntactic level, the freedom of both adverbs increased and their scope has widened from scope within proposition to
scope over discourse. The question then remained whether one of both adverbs has reached a further stage of grammaticalisation. Given that positively is still predominantly used as a manner adjunct, i.e. its original function to a large extent persists in contemporary language use, it can be argued that it has not reached the same degree of grammaticalisation than absolutely. This last adverb is more semantically bleached and is thus used in a wider variety of contexts.

It must however be noted that data of the Early Modern English period, and especially of the Modern English period were scarce. Moreover, in our sample of Present-Day English, a large number of occurrences in which positively functions as a process adjunct of manner is related to a mathematic-scientific contexts. However, the context in which this adverb can be used is probably wider than this. Therefore, further study of the use of this adverb is desirable. Additionally, a study which examines absolutely and positively from a phonological point of view would be interesting to link their phonological behaviour to the theory of grammaticalisation.


