

‘You’re absolutely welcome, thanks for the ear’: The use of *absolutely* in American soap operas

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to discuss the syntax and uses of *absolutely* in recent American soap operas. It is shown that *absolutely* can be used both as an intensifier and with an emphasising meaning where it has scope over the entire clause. *Absolutely* was also found as a stand-alone marker with the function to respond to *yes-no* questions and to speech acts such as requests and thanking.

Keywords: *Absolutely*, soap opera, American English, intensification, emphasis, response marker

1. Introduction

Intensifiers are typically adverbs such as *very*, *really* and *so* which convey a degree of a property on a scale (e.g., Paradis 1997, 2001). They have received a great deal of attention because of their flexibility and tendency for rapid change associated with semantic and pragmatic developments (e.g., Ito and Tagliamonte 2003, Tagliamonte and Roberts 2005). Intensifiers do not only express degrees of a property but can also be used to indicate different degrees of what Labov calls ‘intensity’ (Labov 1984). According to Labov, ‘intensity operates on a scale centered about the zero, or unmarked expression with both positive (aggravated or intensified) and negative (mitigated or minimized) poles (Labov 1984: 44).

The aim of this study is to discuss the syntax and uses of *absolutely* in present-day spoken American English. *Absolutely* seems to be a typical intensifier expressing a high degree of emotion on a scale. However, *absolutely* can also modify the whole sentence with an emphasising function. Moreover, it can be a stand-alone marker, pointing backwards in the discourse, with the function of agreement:

J.R: Remember when you taught me how to use this?

Aijmer, Karin. 2016. “‘You’re absolutely welcome, thanks for the ear’: The use of *absolutely* in American soap operas” *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 15(2):78–94.

Tad: Absolutely. I had to pull your video game out of the wall to do it.
(*Corpus of American Soap Operas*)

The analysis of *absolutely* in this paper will be both quantitative and qualitative. The aim of the quantitative analysis is to investigate the frequencies of the different patterns with *absolutely*. The qualitative analysis will be concerned with the formal and functional properties of *absolutely* as a degree intensifier and an emphatic discourse marker.

The assumption is that uses where *absolutely* is associated with epistemic modality and discourse function have become more frequent as a result of an increase in subjectivity. Developments in the uses of intensifiers have generally been difficult to study because of the absence of up-to-date corpora of spoken language. For this study I have therefore used conversational data from American soap operas. Although initially scripted, the dialogue in the soap operas can be assumed to give a good representation of ‘relaxed informal style’ where changes are initiated and spread to new contexts.

The article is structured as follows. I will first discuss the intensifier *absolutely* on the basis of how it has been analysed in previous work (Section 2). This will be followed by a description of the material and a rationale for using soap operas to study spoken phenomena (Section 3). Section 4 contains the quantitative analysis on the basis of *The Corpus of American Soap Operas*. In the qualitative analysis (Sections 5–7), I will discuss the functions of *absolutely* both as an intensifier of adjectives (and other single elements) and as an emphasiser expressing the speaker’s subjective involvement and commitment. Section 8 contains the conclusion.

2. *The intensifier absolutely*

In its traditional use, *absolutely* is referred to as a maximizer operating on certain lexical elements ‘to express degrees of increasing intensification upwards from an assumed norm’ (Quirk et al 1985: 445). The intensifying use is illustrated in:

What it’s like when it’s just Liam and me, and it is absolutely amazing. (*Corpus of American Soap Operas*)

Elements having the effect of intensifying adjectives or other words are also subjective, that is they mark the speaker's attitudes, view-points and emotions (Claridge 2011: 74). Subjectivity is associated with the aims and goals of the interaction. The speaker can, for example, choose to 'become more subjective.' As a result, *absolutely* can lose its meaning as a degree-modifying adverb and be used from the speaker's perspective to express the extent of his/her involvement with what is said. The 'new' function depends on what it collocates with, its position in the clause or the larger discourse and the genre.

The relation between intensification and emphasis has also been studied by Carretero (2010). Carretero (2010) analysed developments of *absolutely* and its Spanish cognate *absolutamente* characterised by the widening of scope to the clause or 'parts of minor clauses' (*absolutely* as an independent or free-standing element). When *absolutely* (or *absolutamente*) modified the whole clause it had discourse functions associated with an increase in subjectivity and assertiveness. The discourse functions are similar to those of adverbs of certainty:

the meaning differences between 'absolutely' and adverbs of certainty are perceivable when the degree adverbs have smaller scope and modify (part of) the proposition, but tend to be blurred when "absolutely" is used, above all, to perform discourse functions associated with assertiveness. (Carretero 2010: 219)

Since Carretero has studied *absolutely* in the (spoken part) of the British National corpus it will be possible to compare *absolutely* in soap operas with its use in informal conversation.

3. Material

The spoken corpora we have are getting increasingly outdated for the study of linguistic phenomena such as intensifiers. In order to get a better view of today's linguistic reality I have chosen to use *The Corpus of American Soap Operas* (Davies 2012). The corpus consists of 100 million words from ten different soap operas collected between 2001 and 2012. Soap opera can be regarded as a genre of its own associated with specific situational characteristics. For example, the dialogues are scripted and the shows are directed to a broad audience who watch the soap because they want to be entertained. The genre is closely associated with high emotions and melodrama and speakers use an emotionally-

loaded language. However, the dialogues also share certain features with face-to-face conversation such as informality, topic, and face-to-face contact. Given the popularity of the genre, we can expect the dialogues to capture the style of speakers using using a conversational type of American English (cf. Tagliamonte and Roberts 2005, Quaglio 2009).

The three soap operas used in the present study are ‘All My Children’ (AMC), ‘Bold and Beautiful’ (BB), and ‘Days of our Lives’ (Days).

4. Frequency and distribution of *absolutely* in the corpus

In order to study the functions of *absolutely* I selected 300 examples for a quantitative and qualitative study (200 examples representing the two soap operas from 2011 (AMC and BB) and 100 examples from the soap opera from 2012 (Days)). The examples were collected from the beginning of the soaps. Table 1 shows the frequency of *absolutely* in the material (frequency per million words):

Table 1. Frequency of *absolutely* in three sub-corpora in The Corpus of American Soap Operas

Soap Opera	Corpus size	Freq per mil
All My Children, 2011	857,417	233
Bold and Beautiful, 2011	574,282	348
Days of Our Lives, 2012	600,322	166
Total	2,032,021	246

Absolutely is used with different frequencies in the three sub-corpora. It is, for example, more than twice as frequent in ‘Bold and Beautiful’ as in ‘Days of Our Lives’. However, we can assume that the differences would have been smaller if the situations described in the three corpora had been the same.

The examples of *absolutely* can be grouped according to whether *absolutely* modifies a lexical expression or a clause, or whether it is used as a stand-alone marker (see Table 2).

The prototypical use of *absolutely* as an intensifier is as a modifier of an adjective. This pattern constitutes nearly a third of the examples. However, *absolutely* can modify many other elements, in particular verbs, pronouns and determiners.

Table 2. The distribution of *absolutely* in different syntactic contexts, in absolute frequencies and as percentages

Syntactic context	N	%
<i>Modifier of lexical expression</i>		
Adjective	81	27.0
Verb	14	5.6
Modal auxiliary	6	2.0
Noun	4	1.3
Pronoun	24	8.0
Determiner	14	4.7
<i>Modifier of clause</i>		
Clause	6	2.0
Other ¹	5	4.3
<i>Sub-total</i>	162	54.0
<i>Stand-alone</i>	138	46.0
Total	300	100.0

As shown in the table, 46% of the examples of *absolutely* are independent items. This means that stand-alone *absolutely* is more frequent than has been shown in earlier studies. Carretero (2010: 204) found that *absolutely* was an independent item in 20% of the examples in the spoken component of the British National Corpus, while Tao (2007: 11) observed that ‘at 35 percent, the independent uses are substantial’ on the basis of data representing several corpora of spoken American English. The differences in frequency can be seen as evidence of the influence of the genre. For example, Quaglio (2009:92) found that intensifiers (with the exception of *very*) were more frequent in the American television show ‘Friends’ than in a comparable corpus of American face-to-face conversation.

5. The meanings of *absolutely* in American soaps

Absolutely is used in the data both as an intensifier and in emphasising functions to express stronger subjectivity.

¹ In these examples it was difficult to decide what *absolutely* modified.

5.1 *Absolutely modifying an adjective*

The adjectives collocating with *absolutely* generally signal an ‘extreme’ degree of a property on a scale (Paradis 1997: 54). *Stunning, breath-taking, insane, crazy* and *miserable* would be examples of extreme adjectives in my data. The adjectives are, for example, used to evaluate people with regard to physical looks (*beautiful, breath-taking*) or propensity (*insane, ridiculous*), and to make assessments as to whether things are good or bad (*amazing, despicable*). However, not all sets of adjectives expressed an extreme property. *Absolutely* also co-occurred with adjectives indicating certainty and necessity. *Right* (12 examples) and *sure* (9 examples) were, in fact, the most frequent adjectives.

In addition to expressing a high degree of intensity, intensifiers may regularly occur with adjectives with positive or negative connotations. *Absolutely* co-occurs, for example, both with positive adjectives (*amazing*) and with negative ones (*crazy*). There were 27 instances with positive adjectives and 21 instances where the adjective was negative. In addition there were 32 examples where there was no preference for either positive or negative evaluation (cf. Partington 1989: 294 on semantic preference).

Another aspect of the intensifiers has to do with their ability to be used for hyperbole. *Absolutely* is used in the example below for exaggeration and for humorous effects:

1. Austin: You are—good.
 Brady: I’m going.
 Austin: Go for it. You kidding? Thanks for the beer.
 Brady: You’re absolutely welcome, thanks for the ear.
 (Days 2012)

The expected response to thanking is *you’re welcome*. Besides being hyperbolic *absolutely* is used in a context where it is unexpected. Such creative uses of hyperbole are exploited in order to entertain the audience and to make them laugh.

5.2 *Absolutely modifying a verb*

With verbs we find both ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’ examples. According to Quirk et al. (1985: 685), the verbs which admit *absolutely* ‘require some suggestion of exaggeration in their predication’ (cf. Carretero 2010:

212). Example (2) would represent a correct example of *absolutely* since *love* is hyperbolic:

2. Jane: Oh, I'd love that. Absolutely love that—right after the news conference.
(AMC 2011)

Absolutely pale heightens the emotional effect of the simple 'they'll pale':

3. Opal: So when is the fantabulous nuptial date?
Erica: May 14, at the Shorewood Gardens.
Opal: Perfect. That's perfect! The Gardens, May 14. The lilacs will be in their full glory. But they'll pale. They'll absolutely pale next to you, the gorgeous bride!
(AMC 2011)

In example (4), *absolutely* can be interpreted as maximizing the semantic features of the metaphoric expression *ripped your heart out* ('to make someone very sad'):

4. Liza: Jesse, saying good-bye to Lucy must have absolutely ripped your heart out.
Jesse: Well, the only thing harder was saying good-bye to Ellie. "And whose fault is that?" I'm sure you're thinking.
(AMC 2011)

However, in example (5), *absolutely* is used 'incorrectly' before a verb such as *promise* which is not part of a scale and therefore 'not eligible for' a hyperbolic interpretation (cf. Claridge 2011: 33). *Absolutely* has the function to emphasise the speaker's commitment.

5. Jake: I understand. I know. Everything's gonna be ok. I promise you.
Amanda: Promise?
Jake: I absolutely promise.
(AMC 2011)

The example illustrates what Carretero (2010: 219) refers to as the 'blurred' meaning of *absolutely*. *Absolutely* is used with assertive or emphatic meaning (just like *certainly* or *definitely*) rather than to express a degree of a property. It performs different discourse strategies in the interaction.

In (6), the speaker uses *absolutely* rhetorically in a concessive environment. *Certainly* or *definitely* would be a close synonym but they would be less strong and express less involvement. The speaker takes up a position agreeing to a view-point attributed to the hearer ('I absolutely understand') in order to contrast it with her personal opinion ('but let me just say that I think...'). The situation described is that Sami and Kate haven't got along in the past but now they want to put that behind them:

6. Sami: Okay. Look, it's fine. I mean, obviously we have a history. It's just that we're working together now and I sort of thought we were past all that, that we had trust between us.
- Kate: Totally. And I absolutely understand your suspicions, but let me just say that I think my actions should speak louder than my words here. I mean, I did hire you. And after I hired you, I continued to give you more and more important projects, and obviously, at the very least, I trust you, Sami.
(Days 2012)

In (7), the speaker brings up the idea that Katie and Bill should go to the therapist in order to reject it (they shouldn't go because the speaker's daughter has interfered in the proposed marriage between Bill and Katie). *Absolutely* emphasises the speaker's view-point (also expressed by 'I think'):

7. Nick: Katie, whatever Storm did had nothing to do with you.
- Katie: Well, I think we were all in denial about how serious the situation was, and I don't want that to happen again. That's why I think Bill and I need to work through this together with a therapist.
- Taylor: Oh, I agree. I-I absolutely think that you should. But ... it's just that my daughter has interfered in your marriage in the past, and I haven't exactly had the best relationship with your sister Brooke.
(BB 2011)

In (8), Madison is not sure if he should accept the top position he has been offered. *Absolutely* does not only mean emphasis but also suggests that the speaker is aware of other viewpoints. The hearer (Brady) rather than the speaker expresses a contradictory view-point in the *but*-clause:

8. Brady: So, are you any closer to accepting the top dog position at Titan, or what?

- Madison: Victor's really been pressing me about it, but—
 Brady: Of course he has.
 Madison: Look, part of me thinks I should absolutely take it, and I would be crazy not to.
 Brady: But... being the CEO of Titan means giving up day-to-day control of Mad World, and that's tough for you to do.
 Madison: Short of cloning myself, I can't think of anyone I would let run my company
 (Days 2012)

The modal auxiliaries which are emphasised by *absolutely* are *have to*, *must*, *will* and *would*. Example (9) illustrates the use of *absolutely* emphasising obligation:

9. Erica: Jack and I have agreed that we don't care about superstition. And we just don't want to be apart for any longer than we absolutely have to.
 (AMC 2011)

The examples given seem to suggest that *absolutely* can be used in two distinct ways. In the 'correct' use it is found with verbs signalling an 'extreme' quality. However it is also used in a different way where *absolutely* is more closely associated with the illocutionary force of the sentence. In concessive contexts it was typically used to take up a position (*I understand, I think, I take it*) which is turned down in a following *but*-clause. With a modal auxiliary the emphasising use is the only possible alternative.

5.3 Absolutely *modifying a noun*

Absolutely modifying a noun was used as a discourse strategy with concessive meaning in the soaps. In (10), *absolutely* emphasises that something is a (huge) surprise. *But* in the following clause is concessive, that is, it claims the opposite of what has been said in the first clause.

10. Ryan: OK, can you stop acting like this is horrible news for me, ok? It's a huge surprise, absolutely a surprise, but this is not something I need to be lied to about. It really isn't. You just gotta be honest with me, all right.
 (AMC 2011)

5.4 Absolutely *modifying a pronoun or determiner*

Absolutely modifying a pronoun or determiner is found mainly in negative contexts. The pronoun most frequently used with *absolutely* is *nothing* (16 instances). *Absolutely nothing* can be regarded as a rather conventional way of exaggerating. The same tendency to use *absolutely* in negative contexts has been noted by Carretero for Spanish *absolutamente* and for *absolutely* in the (spoken and written) BNC (Carretero 2010: 208). This is illustrated in example (11):

11. Marissa: Talk about what?
Annie: Me and J.R. There's absolutely nothing going on between us. I was devastated when my marriage to Scott ended.
(AMC 2011)

Compare also the following 'extreme formulation' with *absolutely* and a negative determiner:

12. Lexie: Every time I think you can't sink any lower, you find yet a deeper cesspool to swim in.
EJ: Alexandra, I have absolutely no idea what you're talking about.
(Days 2012)

5.5 Absolutely *modifying the whole clause*

In (13) and (14), initial position signals that *absolutely* modifies the whole clause. However, *absolutely* is still integrated in the proposition. *Absolutely* correlates with discourse strategies and an increase of subjectivity (cf. Carretero 2010: 213). In (13), *but* in the following clause has concessive or adversative meaning. The speaker first emphasises what she is going to do but then takes up an opposing point of view:

13. Krystal: Yeah, but what about Kathy? I mean, don't you want to spend every second of every day with her?
Dixie: I do. Absolutely I do. But I have to take this situation with Cara seriously. Her life is in danger.
(AMC 2011)

In (14), *actually* in the following clause introduces an opposing point of view:

14. Greenlee: So you're sticking around this time?
 Kendall: Yes. Absolutely I am, and I'm ready to go. Actually, I have a few new ideas for a campaign to offset the whole toxic blush and lipstick nightmare.
 (AMC 2011)

Absolutely is flexible with regard to its position. In (15), *absolutely* is followed by the verb phrase 'gonna keep this baby' which is difficult to interpret as intensifiable. *Absolutely*, like *of course*, emphasises the strength of the illocutionary act (a decision or intention by the speaker to do something). The second occurrence of *absolutely* is found in clause-initial position which indicates that it modifies the whole clause. *Absolutely* is used in a negative context to express refusal to do something:

15. Griffin: And David's the father. You're gonna keep it?
 Cara: Of course. I'm absolutely gonna keep this baby.
 Griffin: Cara, you need to think about this.
 Cara: I've been thinking about it. Since I was 8, I've been thinking about this. This is like a dream of mine, to become a mother. Griff, I didn't think this was gonna happen, and it has. I'm not giving this—absolutely, I am not gonna give this baby up. I can't.
 Griffin: Ok. Ok.
 (AMC 2011)

In (16), *absolutely* is used emphatically by Tad to convince Cara that 'the future bride' had to accept his proposal of marriage. The following clause ('I was irresistible back in those days') introduces an additional argument why she had to accept the proposal.

16. Cara: Ok, so you actually proposed to her in a chicken suit?
 Tad: Oh. You heard about that one, did you?
 Cara: I did.
 Tad: Eh, guilty as charged. But I was a lot younger then, so—
 Cara: And of course, she accepted?
 Tad: Oh, she had to. Absolutely. I was irresistible back in the day. But all our memories aren't that nice.
 (AMC 2011)

In example (17), *absolutely* in the answer to the judge's question emphasises that the couple are 'all set in heart and mind' to get married:

17. Judge: Are we all set?
 Tad: In heart and mind, absolutely. Unfortunately, my bride is running a little late.
 Krystal: Yeah, but she's gonna be here any second now.
 (AMC 2011)

In the rest of the article I will deal with examples where *absolutely* has developed discourse functions and is used as an independent discourse item.

6. Stand-alone *absolutely* with discourse functions

When *absolutely* occurs alone, it has lost its intensifying or degree-modifying meaning and is used with discourse functions. The free-standing *absolutely* is a 'response item' reacting in a positive way to the preceding utterance (McCarthy 2003: 36). Response items have in common with intensifiers that they are 'subject to fashion' (Peters 1994, Tagliamonte and Roberts 2005: 281). *Absolutely* is chosen rather than a different response item because it is 'new' and can express more of the speaker's attitude and emotion. Free-standing *absolutely* performs a number of discourse functions which are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. Discourse functions of the free-standing *absolutely* in the three sub-corpora, in absolute frequencies and as percentages

Discourse function	N	%
Responding to a request for agreement	51	37
Responding positively to an information question	43	31
Responding positively to a request	11	8
Emphatic disagreement or rejection (<i>absolutely not</i>)	25	18
Responding positively to an act of thanking	5	4
<i>Absolutely</i> as part of a ritual ending the conversation	3	2
Total	138	100

Let us look at some examples of how *absolutely* is used to point backwards in the context:

Responding to a request for agreement

A frequent meaning of stand-alone *absolutely* is agreement. Erica agrees with the previous speaker (Opal) that the last marriage is the one leading to ‘happily ever after’:

18. Opal: It has to be that kind of wedding! Are you kidding? This is the last one, the last marriage, the one that leads straight to happily ever after. Right?
Erica: Absolutely.
(AMC 2011)

Responding positively to an information question

In (19), *absolutely* marks the emphatic and enthusiastic positive answer to a *yes–no* question:

19. Angie: Does she have Jesse’s long, dark eyelashes?
Frankie: Oh, yes. Absolutely.
(AMC 2011)

The stand-alone *absolutely* combines with (other) discourse markers such as *oh, right, yeah, yes, no* and *of course* reinforcing the positive response. It also co-occurs with vocatives (*oh, honey, absolutely; absolutely, babe*) and it can be repeated for more emphasis (*absolutely, absolutely*).

Responding positively to a request

Absolutely is found in the answer to a request in which the speaker asks to talk to someone:

20. Stephanie: I am. I... well, I don’t want to be rude, but, Owen, could I just talk to Jackie for a moment alone?
Owen: Yeah, absolutely.
(BB 2011)

Oh absolutely (of course) expresses more emphasis than the simple *absolutely*:

21. Sami: EJ, I need to talk to my son. Can you please just give us a minute?
EJ: Oh, absolutely. Of course.
(Days 2012)

Emphatic disagreement or rejection

Speakers use *absolutely not* (*absolutely no way*) to signal rejection of a preceding request and to disagree with the hearer. In example (22), Bianca says that she can get a babysitter for the children and that Marissa therefore does not have to babysit. This offer is emphatically rejected by Marissa's *absolutely not*:

22. Bianca: You don't have to be the babysitter. If I was here by myself, I would get a sitter to watch them. I can still do that.
Marissa: Absolutely not. It's the least I can do after inviting myself along.
(AMC 2011)

Responding positively to an act of thanking

Absolutely (unlike *certainly* or *definitely*) can constitute the response part in a thanking exchange at the end of a conversation:

23. Carrie: Well, I hope everything works out for you, Abigail.
Abigail: Thanks. Me too. And thank you for letting me talk to you about it. It really helps.
Carrie: Absolutely. Sorry we have to run, but if you want to continue talking at some point, let me know.
Abigail: Yeah, I'll definitely take you up on that.
(Days 2012)

Thanking can be part of a ritual exchange where the interactants make preparations to leave the conversational floor. In (24), the two speakers work hard at closing the conversation ('thank you' – 'thanks for sharing that' – 'thanks for having me' – 'absolutely'):

24. Jack: Okay. Yeah.
Paco: I feel you. You'll be all right.
Jack: Oh, yeah. You too, Paco. Yeah. Yeah.
Rob: It'll be okay, brother.
Jack: Thank you. Yeah, yeah.
Pat: Good luck.
Jack: Thank you.
Leslie: Thanks for sharing that.
Jack: Thank you. Thanks for having me.
Leslie: Absolutely. I'm so proud of you. Hang in there. See you again.
(Days 2012)

In example (25), ‘Thank you for your time’ signals that the speaker wants to end the conversation. *Absolutely* is both a response to thanking and a closing signal:

25. Mrs Johnson: Well, we should get out of your way. Thank you for your time.
Hope: Okay. No, absolutely. I-it was my pleasure, seriously. I mean, talking to you really reinforces what this line is about.
(BB 2011)

Absolutely as part of a ritual to end the conversation

Absolutely can be part of a little farewell ritual at the end of the conversation. In example (26), Erica confirms that the speakers will be in touch (‘we’ll be in touch’ – ‘absolutely’). After this the conversation can end (‘bye’):

26. Liza: It doesn’t matter what I think. You obviously needed to express yourself.
Colby: Well, I have things to do, but, Erica, we’ll be in touch.
Erica: Absolutely. I’m looking forward to it.
Colby: Thank you. Bye.
Erica: Bye.
(AMC 2011)

Jack’s ‘if you’ll excuse us’ signals to the hearer that he wants to end the conversation:

27. Jack: If I have any questions, I’ll ask Erica. Now, if you’ll excuse us.
David: Absolutely. But before I go, I just want to assure you this partnership is a good thing. It’s a very good thing, hugely beneficial for everyone involved. Isn’t that right, Erica?
(AMC 2011)

In sum, *absolutely* as an independent item has lost the intensifying meaning and developed functions many of which are characteristic of epistemic adverbs. According to Tao (2007: 26), it is typical of many corpus-based studies ‘that *absolutely* is commonly compared with its so-called synonyms such as *completely* and *entirely*, ignoring other lexical items such as *definitely* and *certainly*’. The intensifier has developed

discourse-organizing functions such as agreement, emphasising an affirmative response to a question, responding to thanking (and apologising) and organizing the closing of the conversation.

8. Conclusion

Absolutely is semantically an intensifier typically collocating with a set of extreme or superlative adjectives and expressing a maximally high degree of property on a scale. This study has shown that *absolutely* can also be used in syntactic environments where it modifies the proposition rather than a single element. When it has the whole proposition as the target of intensification it has discourse functions associated with emphasis and the strengthening of illocutionary force. *Absolutely* is also used as an independent item with the function of pointing backwards in the context. When *absolutely* stands alone it performs functions in discourse such as responding to *yes-no* questions and to speech acts such as requests or thanking.

Absolutely is semantically an intensifier typically collocating with a set of extreme or superlative adjectives and expressing a maximally high degree of a property on a scale. The study has shown that *absolutely* can also be used in syntactic environments where it modifies the proposition rather than a single element. When it has the whole proposition as the target of intensification, it has discourse functions associated with emphasis and the strengthening of illocutionary force. *Absolutely* is also used as an independent item with a function pointing backwards in the context. When *absolutely* stands alone, it performs functions in discourse such as responding to *yes-no* questions and to speech acts such as requests or thanking.

Genres show distinctive patterns of use and frequency. The characters in the soap operas express feelings and attitudes to actions and events in an exaggerated way. This is reflected in the frequent use of emotionally loaded language such as the highly subjective uses of *absolutely*. The percentage of *absolutely* as an independent item was, for example, higher than the use of *absolutely* with adjectives. However, more research needs to be carried out on other data with a focus on the frequencies and uses of *absolutely* and how it changes over time.

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